

Chapter 2

The Birth of the EZLN Myth and the Renewal of the Internal Security State

In the previous chapter I argued that insurgents' and security institutions' rhetoric and operations can be understood as *discourses*, and suggested that their conflictual interactions are more revealing about their character than the images they present of themselves. Now I will argue that after the 1994 uprising, and the EZLN's acceptance of dialogue with the government, a new political frontier was constituted through the construction of a boundary between insurgents and security actors. I claim also that the constitution of a space of mediation called "indigenous rights", based upon the recognition of the EZLN as a legitimate agent and interlocutor, permitted the unprecedented coexistence of two competing notions of popular sovereignty.¹ I claim that this line of demarcation could be seen as the frontier after which the discourse of *internal security* has been invoked and deployed against radical actors. It can also be conceived as a frontier between democracy and extremism, order and emancipation and, more specifically in this thesis, between internal security and insurgencies. I will focus on the EZLN's reconstitution of its discourse, through the reordering of the "indigenous people" as part of a new *myth* that enabled a variety of operations for insurgent actors. Alongside the seemingly non-violent insurgent discourse, resulting from an insurgent group's ability to adapt itself to the failure of the insurrectionary option, I will emphasise the EZLN's unwitting contribution to the regime's internal security.

More specifically, in this chapter I will firstly explore the challenge posed by the EZLN and how its origins as a form of violent exclusionary politics, and the primacy of its military identity, were deftly concealed and reconceptualised. I will then revisit the controversy surrounding the allegedly indigenous characterisation of the EZLN's struggle, emphasising that such a trait was not prioritised before the uprising, but would later become a central plank in the EZLN's discourse. I will argue that this allowed the EZLN to become the

¹ I understand *sovereignty* in the classical (Jean Bodin) sense, as the ultimate source of power. However, I work with the added post-Gramscian assumption that the negotiation of its meaning may be located in a variety of unexpected sources, including insurgent actors that may become *the sovereign* in

space of inscription and interpretation of Mexican politics for many other social and radical actors. Their commonality was that they shared the EZLN's competing notion of popular sovereignty, as opposed to the institutional one. Through this space of representation, the EZLN also reorganised its demands and inserted the notion of autonomy, which it used to defy the Executive branch's and Congress' idea of the "nation". Next, I will briefly consider the notion of *Zapatismo* as an ideology resulting from the reorganisation of indigenous rights as a space of antagonism and negotiation with the regime. It inserted an idea of radical autonomy via the notion of indigenous rights. Finally, I will address the unwitting contribution by the EZLN to the regime's security community in provoking the unleashing of plans, acquisition of resources, reorganisation of institutions and professionalisation of personnel. My central idea is that, in addition to this *material* intensification of the internal security discourse, the EZLN provided the regime with *an abstract standard*, that is, with a reference of acceptable behaviour for any insurgent-like organisation before reaching the point of invoking the security discourse.

2.1 The EZLN: defiance or threat?

On 1 January 1994, the attack launched by the EZLN on the Mexican State embodied a dispute over the source of popular sovereignty. This dispute took the form of breaking the state's monopoly of political violence and authority. It did not provoke a national rebellion, but it did raise the immediate attention of the internal security system. It also fractured the control of the official historiography, through the insertion of a renewed notion of radical *Zapatismo* as a space of identification for a variety of struggles, which also represented an iteration² of the communitarian expropriation of land as practised by the followers of Emiliano Zapata in the 1910s and 1920s.³

their eyes and in the opinion of their proxies, indeed, in order to challenge the *Sovereign* - the state - they have to engage in a hegemonic struggle, which they usually lose while the rank and file die.

² Here *iteration* is used as in Howarth's reading of this Derridean category. "In short, Derrida's concept of iteration implies neither pure repetition (as this would render us insensitive to the specificities of particular contexts), nor pure alteration (as this would undermine the recognition of the sign in the different situations in which it was articulated)." Thus, here the iteration of the EZLN's notions of

According to former President Carlos Salinas, the EZLN launched its attack in 1994 because it sought to ruin the presidential election, by “creating a constitutional crisis and with it popular protests that attacked the political system”.⁴ From the armed group’s point of view, a profound dispute about the source of popular sovereignty was actually the founding logic of its antagonism with the state. In its “declaration of war”, for instance, the EZLN resorted to the claim that “national sovereignty resides essentially in the people”; they accused President Salinas of being “illegitimate”, and called on the “other branches of the Nation’s government” to restore “legality and stability by deposing the dictator”.⁵

Although defused, this challenge to the dominant notion of popular sovereignty remained in 2004, at the core of the Chiapas conflict to the extent that two opposite sources of legitimate authority are in operation. In 1994 the EZLN was briefly construed by the State as a threat because of its military defiance of the government’s idea of a unitary constitutional sovereignty. Only during three days in January 1994, and one week in February 1995, was the EZLN considered a logistical “threat”, as they organised active and propaganda-fuelled military operations and seemed to be in a condition to launch a wider insurgency. Apart from those critical moments, the EZLN became militarily innocuous and politically constrained. It is in fact the first insurgency after the formation in 1929 of the PRI’s predecessor, the National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, PNR) to be recognised by the Mexican government as an interlocutor.

As early as 3 January 1994, the government suggested its disposition to engage in dialogue after the 1 January uprising.⁶ In the first three months, the Salinas administration, basically supported by all political parties, framed and contained the conflict without

indigenous people, civil society and power are regarded as central. See David Howarth, *Complexities of identity/difference: Black Consciousness ideology in South Africa*, in *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1997, 51-78.

³ See Felipe Avila, *Los Origenes del Zapatismo* (Mexico: Colmex-UNAM, 2001); Armando Bartra, *Los herederos de Zapata, movimientos campesinos posrevolucionarios en México, 1920-1980* (México: Era, 1985) and John Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1968).

⁴ Carlos Salinas, *México: un paso difícil a la modernidad* (Mexico: Plaza y Janés, 2000), chapter 28. See www.elbarzon.org/cotuntura/coyuntura_libro_csg.shtml.

⁵ EZLN, *Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*, 1 January 1994.

⁶ *La Jornada*, 4 and 5 January 1994.

engaging in the crushing of the EZLN or being able to dismantle its legitimacy, officially acknowledged as early as mid-January. The EZLN's original claim to be an alternative source of popular sovereignty, and therefore a source of actual authority, was recognised on the condition of it not using visible political violence. At the same time, by accepting the EZLN as an interlocutor, the government neutralised a major international involvement and neutralise the possibility of the EZLN becoming a major insurrectionary threat.⁷

Paradoxically, self-legitimation by the Mexican State in creating a space of political dialogue with the EZLN made possible the legitimacy not just of this group, but also a variety of insurrectionary organisations aspiring to a similar status to that of the military deactivated EZLN. An additional paradox was that the *line of confrontation* between the government and the EZLN was the main *line of defence* for the regime as a whole as well as the EZLN, after the guerrilla organisation became a representation of insurgent politics. Its insurgent but nevertheless domesticated threat has favoured the stabilisation of a political frontier, which is useful for the system since the EZLN allows the government to have a political referent of what an insurgent organisation must be like if it aspires to be recognised as an interlocutor or to survive without facing open repression. The articulation with the regime was also convenient for the EZLN: it allowed it to monopolise both the leading hand in radical politics in Chiapas and the insurgent threat of use of political violence up to 1996, when the EPR (Popular Revolutionary Army) appeared.

The revolt was the first open armed challenge to the predominant discourse put forward by the financial and bureaucratic elite that, in reality, had been governing Mexico since late 1982. Moreover, the birth of the EZLN coincided with the radicalisation of a liberal model, oriented towards a complete structural renovation in the face of perceived global tendencies.

My central thesis in this chapter is that after the 1994 Amnesty Law, the EZLN unwittingly contributed to the internal security discourse in Mexico by providing a crucial

⁷ See *La Jornada* 1 January to 30 March 1994 and also *Chiapas, El Alzamiento*, (Mexico: La Jornada, 1994).

political landmark. Beyond it, insurgent interventions could be branded as unacceptable and, consequently, could be openly repressed. Political parties, the government, the private sector and the EZLN all surprisingly share the basic recognition of that boundary.

The EZLN's emergence and evolution, in its interaction with the Mexican State, also made visible its limits as a political force and its capabilities as a symbolic point of identification and resistance. This interaction began at a low level in 1993 when the first EZLN camps were discovered, by PGR agents and later destroyed by the Army.⁸ Neither the government nor the EZLN disclosed information about these events until 1994. While the government wanted to pass the NAFTA agreement in Washington, the EZLN decided to emerge *after* that accord was approved by the US Congress, and on the first day of its coming into force.⁹

I do not deny that the EZLN has shown emancipatory intentions. What I claim is that they have not achieved more than dubious emancipatory results. In fact, its supposed contribution is highly ambiguous at the regional and national levels.¹⁰ Certainly, I think that

⁸ Conversation with the journalist Gabriela Coutiño on 24 January 1994. A PGR commander gave her the first information on the EZLN's camps by March 1993. In the report the policemen recognised a "guerrilla" presence. It was the last report in her TV work after being sacked. In the next six months only isolated journalistic versions (*La Jornada*, *Proceso*) on the military destruction of those camps were published. On 23 and 24 May 1993 a skirmish between the army and the EZLN took place in the Sierra de Corralchén. The Secretary of Governance (Minister of the Interior) and former governor of Chiapas, Patrocinio González Garrido, denied in an interview on August 1993 the presence of guerrillas, despite the evidence. Salinas may have received, since 1991, information on the EZLN from Guatemalan military intelligence sources and, from 1992, by the CIA, according to some security actors mentioned by anonymous government officials.

⁹ Some authors defend the idea that the EZLN emerged as opposition to NAFTA, however they are unable to explain why the EZLN did not emerge *before* the crucial discussion pertaining to the approval of NAFTA, in Washington, in order to provoke a vote against it. The assumption that the EZLN rebelled "just in time" is widely and uncritically shared. See, for instance, Ana Ceceña, and José Zaragoza, *Cronología del Conflicto*, at <http://www.ezln.org/revistachiapas/ch1cecena-zaragoza.html>

¹⁰ Even sympathetic positions have considered there to be a "lack of direction" during certain periods and regarded the outcomes of the revolt in *Las Cañadas* to be equivocal or lukewarm. For instance, in relation to the EZLN's contribution to women's struggles it has been said that "the danger of uncritically celebrating *Zapatista* discourse from the outside is that we end up effacing this gap - between experience and discourse - and choking off the promise of its own democracy to come". See Neil Harvey and Chris Halverson, *The secret and the promise: women's struggles in Chiapas* in Howarth's *Discourse Theory and political analysis, identities, hegemonies and social change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 163. Women in *Las Cañadas* do what other women outside the *Zapatista* area do: traditional roles of housekeeping in subordination to males, with sporadic participation in political mobilisation, which amounts to a triple task of working in the field, in the house and for the organisation's command structure. A detailed analysis can be found in the work of Xochitl Leyva, *Regional, Communal, and Organizational Transformations in las Cañadas*, in *Latin American Perspectives* Issue 111, (March 2001), Volume 28 Number 2. For instance, she shows how

its development in the last ten years, even after having exposed the limits of the Salinas modernising discourse, later turned out to be the exposing of the limits of a broad, political insurgent actor with considerable internal ideological contradictions. However, the EZLN has survived in its troubled engagement with the state, through the material defence of an arcane, radical *Zapatismo* (consisting centrally in the struggle for and consequent expropriation of its enemies' land in Chiapas) and, more importantly, by the mythical constitution of a resistance and "rebellious" identity of limited national appeal and local clout.

Crucially, to my argument, the EZLN made visible the vacuous dichotomy in the definition of "national security": neither the meaning and limits of "nation" in relation to internal insurgencies was defined nor the beneficiaries of the notion of "security", they seemed to be in fact sedimented arrangements valid, above all, to the political elite. Despite the fact that this concept has been determined as the point of convergence of an autonomous foreign policy and domestic stability, the actual pre-eminence of the internal dimension is historically visible. Until 1994 the state was able to manoeuvre with its idea of "national security", with an ambiguous "external other", and with the assumption of political "stability" inherited by the institutional administration of the *Mexican Revolution*, that is, the PRI. The rebellion in Chiapas destroyed the *image* of stability and the sense of relative peace achieved in society. Against the official historiography and propaganda, the main "other" of the security institutions had been the insurgent actors, to which the *Mexican Revolution's* regime

since 1994 "the common", that is, the communal assemblies, has been "increasingly weakened" because *Zapatismo* "as a new, homogenizing ideology has reinforced (some communities while) dissenters have left or been expelled." Contrary to the sense of unity given by the *Union de Uniones*, pluralism has suffered. Polarisation has provoked the effect that "Zapatista and non-Zapatista militancy has been superimposed upon religious affiliations", which to some extent was a source of unity in many communities already politicised by a variety of Liberation Theology. Reconciliation has also taken place "within communities and among organisations", as opposed to the media - and EZLN - representations of Chiapas as the site of a sort of regionalised civil war. Also interesting is Federico Anaya, *Revolución y Democracia: Disyuntivas y Oportunidades o Los Desencuentros Zapatistas*, (signed in "México-Tenochtitlán" on 23 June 2002). Anaya's sympathy towards the EZLN is shown by sharing the critique of the authors who have tried to demystify the EZLN (Tello, Legorreta), who regarded as "suspicious" when emphasising the EZLN's authoritarianism. However, he accepts that the EZLN has been "arbitrary and abusive" and has "victimised" non-Zapatista organisations. He also acknowledges the fact that the EZLN is "hegemonic". In his argument the "hegemon", as the most important political force, "determines the general line of the political culture". If we were to extend his idea to the national level, the "hegemon", that is, the Salinas administration and the whole political class might be able to legitimately frame the conflict as the "determiners of the general line".

had dedicated its main efforts since the 1920s in the generalised counter-insurgent politics against Catholic dissent and, later in the consistent policy of neutralisation deployed against the insurrectionary left since 1965, when an insurgent cell challenged the government in Madera, Chihuahua. The EZLN added to the insurgent tradition not the novelty of privileging an indigenous subjectivity - this occurred, strictly speaking, after the 1994 rebellion and it had been done in Guatemala and Peru for instance¹¹ - but the fact that its interlocution was quickly accepted by the state as legal through the political fixation of the notion of “indigenous” as a way of naming a new radical conflict.

In order to develop my argument, I will first address elements constitutive of the EZLN’s identity prior to the 1994 revolt; secondly, I will explore the post-1994 reorganisation of the EZLN’s indigenous question; and, finally, I will refer to the EZLN’s unnamed contribution to the security discourse. Later on I will briefly allude to the ideology of *Zapatismo*, before considering the evidence with which I claim that the EZLN has made a

¹¹ It is indispensable for this argument the fact that no twentieth century guerrilla located the indigenous as its *original centre* but as a post-revolt factor, not even in Guatemala, see Yvon Le Bot, *La Guerre en terre maya, Communauté, violence et modernité au Guatemala* (Paris: Karthala, 1992), especially “*La Guerrilla découvre les Mayas*”, 109-131. A summary of some of the indigenous related effects of the tragic and long lasting clash between armed forces and insurgents can be found in Rachel Sieder, *Guatemala after the Peace Accords* (London: ILAS, 1998), 63-96. According to the guerrilla Mario Payeras, no insurgent army can solely be the political tool of the indigenous “but, above all, of the poor peasants”, see his *Los Días de la Selva*, San Jose: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1983, 109. It seems that the indigenous rights had emerged from the insurgency and its final recognition as a limitedly legitimate voice. For a “third way” view of the extremes as expressed by security actors and insurgents and the structural context of the poor peasants and indigenous in Guatemala, see James Painter, *Guatemala, False Hope, False Freedom, the Rich, the Poor and the Christian Democrats* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1987), especially the section “The poor get poorer”, 8-22. Despite the economic misery of the indigenous peoples, all guerrillas, including the EZLN, began by constituting them as poor *peasants*. On the Guatemalan case see also Peter Calvert, *Guatemala, a Nation in Turmoil* (London: Westview Press, 1985), 129. For the Peruvian case and the way in which the *Shining Path* took advantage of the poor indigenous as political agent see Andreo Matías (Washington Huaracha Apaza) *Sendero Luminoso, Guerra Política* (Lima: El Universo Gráfico, 1988), 97-104. On how the “condition of being an intellectual” and Maoist as useful in the constitution of an insurgent agent see Dirk Krujtit, *Entre Sendero y los Militares* (Barcelona: Robles, 1991), 78-86. On the idea that “one must be a philosopher to make a war” - *ala Marcos* - in the context of Peruvian politics and insurgencies see Gustavo Gorriti, *The Shining Path, A History of the Millenarian War in Peru* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 183-187. On the attempts of different guerrilla groups (Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru-MRTA vs Sendero Luminoso) to locate themselves as more modern and/or more traditional in the competing definition of their aims, social base and vocabulary, see Yehude Simon Munoro, *Estado y Guerrilla en el Perú de los 80* (Lima: San Francisco, 1988), 125-8. Useful as a quantitative location of political violence is *Violencia Política en el Perú (1980-1988)* (Lima, DESCO, 1989).

considerable and unwitting contribution to the intensification and management of the national security discourse.

2.1.1 The matrix: FLN and EZLN military drive

The 1974 execution of the guerrilla leader Lucio Cabañas occurred during the year that marked the emergence of the *Indian Congress* in Chiapas, a peasant-indigenous assembly from which many ideas and future radical activists emerged. During 1974 other relevant events took place. Security forces raided a locality in the south of Mexico City called Nepantla where a group of the FLN (National Liberation Forces) insurgents were sheltered. This clandestine group was constituted on 6 August 1969 by a group of activists, among them César Germán Yáñez, who was the main advocate of the FLN; his brother Fernando Yáñez; and Alfredo Zárate.¹² The FLN is the matrix from which the EZLN emerged as an armed wing on 17 November 1983.

The military operation in Nepantla is considered a consequence of the detention and torture in Monterrey - Mexico's second largest financial centre - of two members of the FLN, Napoleon Glockner, a well known academic from Puebla, and his partner, Nora Rivera. The security forces took them to Nepantla on 14 February 1974 in order to identify the exact location of a safe house. Five FLN members died during the subsequent shoot-out. Gloria Benavides, a survivor, later known as the EZLN *Comandante Elisa*, remembered the voices of Glockner and Nora asking them to surrender as the operation was being waged.¹³ The recognition of their voices later served as evidence for the purpose of establishing their "responsibility" within the FLN. Branded as "traitors", they were later executed. In a 1976

¹² Communiqués and documents presented by the PGR (General Attorney's Office) February 1995. See John Womack, *Rebellion in Chiapas* (New York: The New York Press, 1999). Specially Chapter 14, *Revolutionaries from Monterrey to Chiapas: The FLN, 1980*, 190. Also De La Grange, B. and M. Rico, *Marcos, la genial impostura*, 117.

¹³ This is the version Tello presents in his book, op, cit, Chapters II and III. See Héctor Aguilar Camín, *La Guerra de Galio* (Mexico: Cal y Arena, 1989), based of the story as related to him by members of the Glockner family, especially 515 and 516.

internal communiqué the FLN assumed responsibility for the killing of their former comrades.¹⁴

In the vehicle from which Glockner was shot dead and in which Nora - then pregnant - was hanged, the police claimed to have found a driving licence used by *Leo*. This was the *nom de guerre* of Fernando Yáñez, who later became known as *Comandante Germán*, the main founder of the EZLN and a central influence on Rafael Guillén. Guillén would become known as *Subcomandante Marcos*.¹⁵ In other words, according to intelligence sources and specialised observers, *Germán* might have been the executioner of Glockner.¹⁶

The FLN created an insurgent nucleus in Chiapas as early as 1972. It was originally a Che Guevara-inspired clandestine movement, formed in 1969, the same year that the guerrillas in Guerrero started their organisation. According to its 1980 *Estatutos*, the FLN was “a political and military organisation whose purpose is the seizure of power by city and country workers, with the objective of establishing a popular republic and a socialist system”.¹⁷ In its declaration, three main axes stand out: politics, military operations and the

¹⁴ Ibid., 118 and Tello, *La rebelión de las Cañadas, México*, 81. Glockner’s son, Fritz, tried to argue that there is an enormous difference between a “traitor” and a man forced by torture to give information to the security forces. He claims that his father was killed by the police and not by the FLN. He falls short of presenting evidence but wants to be persuasive in his well-intentioned statements. See *Proceso*, 31 July 1995. See Glockner’s brother’s document in *Proceso*, 13 November 1995, in which he criticises the FLN and the idea that guerrilla organisations could create a democratic space through political violence. *Julio, hermano de Napoleón y Julieta Glockner, refuta a Yáñez Muñoz y a Tello Díaz*.

¹⁵ Ibid., De La Grange, 122. In relation to the “Glockner case”, *Marcos* preferred to omit this information when he was interviewed by Le Bot: “(about that) you should ask the FLN members because we arrived much later...I know little about that part of the history” but then, interestingly, he added: “well, the limit between what was a partner and what was an the enemy was not as important as in the political-military organisations”, as if the EZLN was not “a political-military organisation”. He had assured that he did not know the whole FLN’s story. It must be remembered that the EZLN developed out of the FLN and *Marcos*, as a consequence, had been a FLN member. See Le Bot, op. cit., 130-1 under the suggestive subheading *El rechazo del asesinato fundador* - The refusal of the foundational assassination. To Le Bot, *Marcos* was not a member of a purely politico-military organisation. However, in an interview with *L’Unita* the EZLN’s leader presented it as follows: “our organisation is *exclusively* clandestine and armed”. *L’Unita*, 4 January 1994, *Proceso* 10 January 1994 and Salinas, C., *México: un paso difícil...* op.cit., chapter 28 under the subheading *Fue un levantamiento espontáneo/ Por qué en enero de 1994?* My emphasis.

¹⁶ If we accept the idea that the moment of internal “adjustment” in armed organizations, Glockner’s execution might have well been a turning point in the FLN’s definition of “who are with us and who are against us” when dealing with “traitors” under the pressure of governmental repression in the 1970s. Payeras mentions that the first execution was experienced by a guerrilla cell in Guatemala as a moment of “maturity”. “Probably, from then on we all become better”. See Mario Payeras. *Los Días de la Selva*. San Jose: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1983, 46.

¹⁷ *La Jornada*, 6 February, 1994 and Womack, *Rebellion*, 190-7.

“ideological fight”. Its long-term aims were “to defeat the bourgeoisie politically and militarily”, “to establish a socialist system through social ownership of the means of production” and “to eliminate exploitation of workers” and, remarkably, “to integrate the urban proletarian fight with the peasant and indigenous fight in the more exploited zones of our country”. A consequence of these objectives, and one that was even more meaningful, was the plan “to form the *Zapatista Army of National Liberation*”.

Alongside the discovery of the safe house in Nepantla, the army found traces of the FLN in a ranch in Chiapas. The prosecution of the cell continued for several months and the FLN’s main commander, the law teacher César Yáñez, whose *nom de guerre* was *Pedro*, was killed in a place called *El Censo*.¹⁸ To his memory Fernando Yáñez, his brother, adopted his name as *nom de guerre* and would later be known as *Comandante Germán*.¹⁹

Alfredo Zárate, the FLN’s second-in-command during the incident in Nepantla, was also killed in 1974. His *nom de guerre* was *Marcos*. Interestingly, Zárate was 26 when he was killed, the same age as Guillén was when he joined the original Chiapas cell of the EZLN in 1983. In his memory, Rafael Guillén, a philosophy graduate from Mexico’s National Autonomous University (UNAM), born in 1957 and a teacher at the Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM), would adopt it as his own: *Subcomandante Marcos*.²⁰ He joined the FLN in *the Highlands* in 1984, probably in May.

¹⁸ A peasant’s version quoted by Legorreta, *Religión*, 180.

¹⁹ *Germán* had co-organized in 1969 a clandestine cell name *Guerrilla Nucleus Emiliano Zapata* in Monterrey. He had been militant in the *Ejército Insurgente Mexicano* (Mexican Insurgent Army). He was born in Monterrey and studied architecture in the University of Nuevo León; he visited the USSR and subsequently trained as a guerrilla in the northern part of Mexico. In la Huasteca, he was responsible for the FLN network held in Tabasco. This organization had cells in Nuevo León, Veracruz, Puebla, Tabasco, Estado de México and Chiapas. After 1993, the FLN-EZLN purported to be “national”. *Germán* renewed his centrality as a main figure in the organisation, as illustrated by the fact that he was simultaneously General Secretary and Interior Secretary. The FLN had cells in northern Mexico, in the deserted indigenous area of the Sierra Tarahumara, called *Frente Villista* - in memory of Francisco Villa, the popular hero of the Mexican Revolution - in the *Frente Central*, comprising places in Veracruz, Puebla and Oaxaca; and in the *Frente Suroriental*, as was referred within the FLN, mainly the zone of *Las Cañadas* in Chiapas.

²⁰ Some generous interpretations of the EZLN’s intervention still challenge the official identification of the civilian personality of *Marcos*. The best approach is to compare his writing in his thesis with the EZLN’s communiqués. The political and rhetorical similarities are clear evidence of his identity. On the other hand, the fact that Guillén *is not* the collective political and symbolical space, which would be occupied and embodied in *Marcos*, frequently escapes the pro-PRI critique of the EZLN. I will return to this point later in this chapter. See Rafael Guillén, *Filosofía y Eduación (prácticas*

Almost ten years after the EZLN's constitution, on 23 January 1993, the FLN decided to become the National Liberation Forces Party (PFLN), whose objectives reconfirmed the profile previously exhibited by the FLN. The new conceptualisation was not very successful. However, in its *Declaración de Principios* - Declaration of Principles - an important trait was demonstrated:

The Party's aims are to organise, lead and guide the workers' revolutionary fight in order to remove power from the bourgeoisie, free our fatherland from foreign domination and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, understood as a government of workers able to impede the counter-revolution and begin the construction of socialism in Mexico.²¹

Its main form of struggle would be "the political and military fight". In this scheme, the EZLN "would never give up weapons even after having triumphed because from then it would transform itself into the nucleus of the socialist fatherland's armed forces".²²

The EZLN was considered a decisive step in the formation of the National Liberation Forces' military arm. Its formation corresponded to the belief in a *telos* that characterised the FLN's and EZLN's conception of politics. The FLN identified the PRI as a repressive dominant party in an authoritarian presidential system, which existed to protect an unacceptable model of capital accumulation. The PRI regime was construed, since the early 1970s, as the FLN's enemy, and this antagonistic position was conveyed in the early 1980s by the EZLN. It was conceived as totally alien to the masses' interests, on whose behalf the FLN and the EZLN were claiming to speak. In their assessment, it was impossible to change the government and society without armed action. The genesis of an *insurrectionary* political subject in Chiapas was inherent to this *military* priority. The primacy of edifying a social base

discursivas y prácticas ideológicas, sujeto y cambio históricos en libros de texto oficiales para al educación primaria en México (México: UNAM, BA Philosophy thesis, 1980).

²¹ PFLN's *Declaración de Principios*, 1993, Tello, *La rebelión*, 157

²² *Ibid.*

in favour of the armed path resulted from the prioritisation of that standpoint, which was shared by other organisations over more than thirty years of Mexican guerrilla politics.²³

To FLN leaders, the formation of a military arm was an unavoidable condition for the construction of a new society where socialism might be possible.²⁴ The “war”, in the context of the FLN’s conception of politics, was an unavoidable step towards the creation of a new hegemonic force long before it had constructed the “indigenous people” as the centre of its strategy. It was conceived, since the very beginning of the organisation, as a means to an end and not as a desperate and final measure.²⁵ If the military *telos* of the EZLN was present since its foundation in 1983, it is difficult to view it as resulting from the De la Madrid (1982-1988) and the Salinas (1988-1994) “counter-revolutionary” administrations policies or as an initially pro-indigenous organisation. However, it was undoubtedly designed to challenge their attributed closeness to the project of the PRI modernising stage represented by them.

The FLN’s militaristic conception animated the cell installed in the Lacandon Jungle in 1972. This conception would become a nodal point in the constitution of the EZLN and in the concentration of political effort in the shaping of its identity. Through the process of giving centrality to its military drive, the FLN could finally be presented in 1983 *as one among other* radical options in Chiapas, it became an “army” for “national liberation”. The FLN’s military drive guided the creation of the EZLN and, as a result of various contingent conditions, allowed it to root itself in the problematic living conditions in *Las Cañadas*. A widely shared sense of dislocation in the face of old and new grievances related to land, as part of the structural changes that were taking place, and a radical intellectual climate have been generated in the thirty years prior to 1994. Socialist defeats, ecclesiastical interventions, Maoists and the Guevarist *estilos de trabajo* were interpreted and reworked by the EZLN.²⁶

²³ See Governance Secretariat (Secretaría de Gobernación) comunicués, January 2-7 1994; and Montemayor, *Chiapas*, 69

²⁴ Tello, *La rebelión*, 97.

²⁵ Legorreta, *Religión*, 211-318.

²⁶ John Womack, *Chiapas, el obispo de San Cristóbal y la revuelta zapatista* (México: Cal y Arena, 1998) and his *Rebellion in Chiapas*, specially, Part II.

The military option embodied in the EZLN provided the possibility for the FLN's identity to survive and for it to reinvent itself. In other words, the EZLN was conceived, designed and prepared as *an option*, precisely because it prioritised an *armed* option. Without this primacy of being the only available *armed action*, its political project would not have had such relevance in relation to the other organisations. Without the EZLN, the FLN, its matrix organisation and consequently its leadership, could not have survived politically and could not have inserted itself, as a competing discourse, in the constitution of "the people" in Chiapas during the decade 1983-1993. The EZLN's identity, since 1983, was meant to embody a military organisation, regardless of its capabilities or its weaponry. Therefore, to be *a military option* was at its core as a political option. The process of interaction with the indigenous communities, land struggles, intellectual discussion and ecclesiastical work modified this militaristic drive, but did not displace it.²⁷

In *Las Cañadas*, long before 1992, when the law changed and allowed the liberalisation of land ownership and legitimised the end of land distribution by the government, a new generation of peasant-indigenous activists had been facing explosive demographic growth, low productivity and growing political radicalisation. Their discomfort and radical activism was based upon the influence of thirty years of Liberation Theology's catechist work and Maoist and Guevarist politics in the face of political repression and alienation from the federal government in complicity with the local elite. The ongoing process of proletarianisation was presumably intensified by the 1992 reform and the loss of certainties available to the traditional peasant-indigenous communities that had increasingly emigrated to *Las Cañadas* since the 1950s. A segment of the population read their situation as an obstacle to their right to freedom and prosperity. Many of them joined a variety of popular organisations, among them the EZLN, which contributed to the elaboration of a resistance discourse with a military character. Activists who survived the 1970's prosecution and a new generation that identified with them joined efforts.

²⁷ See Le Bot, (*Subcomandante Marcos*) *El Sueño*, for a defence of the argument of the EZLN as unique because of the softening of its military characteristics, 75-78 and 142-152.

According to the evaluation conducted by ARIC (Rural Association of Collective Interest), at some point an EZLN unarmed rival with which, however, it had shared militants, the guerrilla group promoted the rebellion around these ideas: 1) most of the Mexican people, at the national level, are already armed and trained by the FLN and “we” are prepared for a national fight; 2) with the national insurrection “we are going to win” and change “the bad government”; 3) with the new “socialist government” we will resolve the poverty, injustice and inequity suffered by most of the people; and 4) there is no other way and arms “are the only path to liberation”.²⁸ ARIC opposed these premises and decided not to join the rebellion. Its argument can be summarised as follows: 1) a national insurrection is difficult; 2) even with a national rebellion there is no chance of triumph in the current global context - El Salvador and Guatemala were set as examples; 3) even if there were a total triumph, it was not possible to resolve national problems merely with such a victory, and the most probable outcome would have been a new set of even more grave difficulties and poverty, after a war and the following reconstruction tasks; 4) non-armed beneficial popular politics was still possible.²⁹ Only the EZLN decided to rebel *militarily*. In other words, the rebellion was the rebellion of the EZLN members and not the rebellion of the peasants or the indigenous people, representing a communitarian consensus.³⁰ Let me stop at this point to propose some elements that may be analytically useful, and illustrative of the pertinence of “erasing the ignoble origins” when analysing insurgent and security actors.

The categories of *myth* and *imaginary* are defined by Laclau as “principles of interpretation”, that is, political frameworks whereby practices acquire meaning. He affirms that any political identity and any organisation, in its aim to become hegemonic, attempts to

²⁸ Legorreta, *Subcomandante Marcos, La Genial*, 264. Although a critic of the EZLN, Legorreta recognises the EZLN’s contributions as: the end the federal support for the regional political class, the disposition to change “all that did not work” and the understanding of public negligence as effects of the conflict. *Ibid.*, 321.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 264-265. The ARIC publicly detached itself from the armed movement. See *La Jornada* 1st June 1993. The EZLN and many of its sympathisers have frequently addressed the ARIC and its splinters as “counter-insurgents”, pro-Regime, and “traitors”, and after the 1994 revolt, have treated them as “enemies”.

³⁰ Interestingly, *Marcos* paraphrases it in this way: the “war” was voted for by “a majority”. Probably, but “within the EZLN”, that is, the communities may have had another opinion but the definitive decision was taken *inside* the organisation. Le Bot, (*Subcomandante Marcos*) *El Sueño*, 192.

create a site for the representation of its own and others' demands. In the struggle to constitute itself as a new political centre of activity and reference, any force that wants to achieve political hegemony "must cultivate the myth of 'origins'; in order to establish itself as the source of all positivity, it must rub out the contingent traces of its 'ignoble' beginnings."³¹

What is understood here by "ignobility" is the moment of exclusionary politics enacted by any radical identity. Considering the argument of this text, the moment of exclusion takes place when other projects are rejected and when practices such as physical execution and displacement within and outside any organisation are regarded as indispensable. The use of political violence, specifically the legitimisation of *executions* deployed *on behalf of the people* against the *people's enemies* or *on behalf of the nation* against the *nation's enemies*, is not ontologically different. Their status varies only because of 1) the vindication of a source of sovereignty that has been institutionalised and is validated within a given community, as opposed to the source of legitimacy constructed by insurgent actors that posit themselves as "the people" and 2) the extent to which is accepted as valid for broader communities that those directed related to it.

In the understanding of any political decision taken for the purpose of constituting a source of representation, consideration must be given to how certain elements are shown to the public whilst other are hidden. It can be said that any process of constructing political subjectivity, when successful, has consciously put aside developments that could eventually be perceived as unacceptable blemishes, including any practices of symbolical and/or physical elimination wielded *in the name of the people* and certainly *on behalf of the nation*. That was very much the case in the EZLN's history, and certainly in any other radical political organisation or institution where, in the construction of its foundations, the same operation of erasing is deployed and mythologized. The notion of *ignobility* referred to and

³¹ Laclau, *New Reflections*, 68-9. The author mentions as typical of this ambition the drive of any revolutionary process to present itself as the place of all nobility, in order to accomplish such a mission it is obliged to erase any trace of its "ignobility". In other moments in Laclau's work, it is clear that "the erasing of the ignoble" is sought by any political entity.

developed by Laclau may well, then, be at the very core of the construction of any space of political representation by insurgent actors.

The EZLN needed to erase its connection to traces of political violence in 1974 and particularly its exclusionary politics in Chiapas between 1983 and 1993 after its military failure in the first week of 1994. In the face of the generous reading given to the event by the most literate segment of society in Mexico City, which mobilised to stop repression *and* radical political violence, that need increased.³² Therefore the EZLN did need to cancel its link with socialist ideas, to efface the internal relevance that traditional leaders and die-hard leaders such as *Comandante Germán*, and practices such as execution and physical displacement, might have had within the armed group in the ten years prior to the uprising. The subsequent exclusion of rivals after 1994 also had to be erased.

I will now introduce the idea of *articulation*. This is referred to by Laclau as the central characteristic of the process of mutual influence in defining political boundaries. He defines *articulation* as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice”.³³ This notion, as opposed to the Hegelian or Marxist concept of contradiction does not imply the nullification of opposite factors. I believe that the analysis of processes of synthesis, based upon the destruction of the previous components, is insufficient to account for the ongoing antagonistic interaction between security and insurgent actors in Mexico.

The core of this articulation began to take place in 1993, but was intensified after the government framed the conflict as a political one with a military component. From a disposition to prosecute the EZLN, the government moved to recognise it as a valid interlocutor. From pointing to the regime as an absolute enemy to the acceptance of the

³² See the centre-left position, dominant Mexico City’s left in 1994, as expressed by the Dominican priest Miguel Concha. In it the EZLN is asked to detach itself completely from any terrorist acts. See *Concha: paz verdadera y vida digna para todos*, in *La Jornada*, 13 January 1994 and *Chiapas, El Alzamiento*, op.cit., 358. Clearly the critique of political violence included institutional violence.

³³ Laclau, *Hegemony*, 105.

dialogue constituted, on the other hand, the transition registered by the guerrilla organisation as a result of such articulation.³⁴

In 1994 the interaction between government and insurgents was the result of a complex set of operations. On the one hand, under societal and political pressure, the government advocated negotiation with the armed group even before the early unilateral cease-fire - decreed on 12 January 1994.³⁵ The EZLN's leadership, on the other hand, creatively read a similar pressure put on the armed group to renounce the call to arms as a nonsensical military challenge and transformed into an opportunity to explicitly include a claim on behalf of the indigenous people,³⁶ as is clear in the dialogue initiated in February 1994:

To the people of Mexico
To the peoples and governments of the world
To the national and international press

Brothers:

The Clandestine Revolutionary *Indian* Committee- General Command of the EZLN respectfully and with honour addresses you all to let you know the statement of demands presented at the negotiating table during the Sessions for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas:

“We do not ask for charity of gifts, we ask for the right to live with dignity as human beings, with equality and justice like our *ancient fathers and grandfathers*.”

To the People of Mexico:

The *indigenous peoples* of the State of Chiapas, risen in arms in the Zapatista Army of National Liberation against poverty and bad government, present the reason for their struggle and their principal demands:³⁷

To this proclamation followed a list of 34 demands preceded by a critique to eight logics related to poverty, land, repression, injustices “and violations of our human rights *as indigenous peoples* and impoverished peasants”, exploitation, government's impositions and laws designed against “indigenous and peasants”. It was able to act and be seen as an

³⁴ See *Chiapas, El Alzamiento*. This volume presents a selection of the coverage done by *La Jornada* over the crucial January 1994.

³⁵ See *Gobierno: se tienden puentes para comenzar diálogo*, in *La Jornada*, 5 January 1994.

³⁶ EZLN communiqué, *Chiapas: el Sureste en dos vientos, una tormenta y una profecía*, 27 January 1994. Marcos appears to have signed this document in August 1992, but it is clear that the “indigenous” content was far from entirely transferred to the 1994 *Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*, where “workers” and “peasants” are the interpellated political subjects.

³⁷ CCRI-CG (EZLN) communiqué, 1 March 1994. My emphasis.

acceptable and “pro-civil society actor”.³⁸ The “dialogue” was going to be constantly subjected to the provisionally hegemonic logic consisting of dealing with insurrectionary forces with a combined use of repression, delays, tricks and elements of forced democratic openness.³⁹ In order to reconstitute its practices, the EZLN also took advantage of the constant interruptions and constitutional arrangements such as the *Amnesty Law* decreed in January 1994, the 1995 *Law for Dialogue and Reconciliation* and the 1996 *San Andres Accords*, all of which were supported by a majority of the political elite.

From another point of view, the government’s successful framing of the conflict resulted from the Salinas administration’s understanding of the revolt as a profound but still conjunctural crisis. The maintenance of the troublesome dialogue is evidence of the regime’s success as much as the political containment of the EZLN’s originally stated objectives. First, from 1 January to 12 January 1994 the Salinas administration, which was pressured *and* supported by the three main parties (PRI, PAN, and PRD) and society, created a space for dialogue with the EZLN. As convergent segments of the political class, partisan elites launched a political re-composition involving electoral, institutional and military measures by which the conditions for a frontier between the insurgencies and the government were publicly situated on the political scene. Second, armed forces were to administer an area next to the EZLN and “the nonconformist group” was to keep control of an area under the condition that it refrained from the open use of weapons against the regime. Third, the political constraints and reluctance inside and outside the government to crush the rebellion, which implied the probability of causing a civil war or risking the continuity of the *priísta* control of the presidency, precipitated the drawing of that political and symbolical frontier.⁴⁰ The latter factor seems to be far more difficult to identify than the first two. It included the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Raúl Benítez, *Dilemas del Ejército Mexicano a Fin de Siglo*, México: FASOC, Año 14, No. 1, (enero-marzo 1999), 14-15. The periodisation of the dialogue presented by the author could not obviously include the impact of the 2000 PAN victory and the reordering of the political and security field.

⁴⁰ Salinas, *México*, chapter 27 under the suggestive subheading *El dilema: reprimir o negociar*.

creation of an invisible line, beyond which the security actors might resort to arms as well as, very debatably, the insurrectionary groups.

As a consequence of this articulation, the option of resorting to arms was impeded for both governmental forces and insurgent combatants. Moreover, there was an always-available space of “dialogue”, which so far has never been ruled out, only “interrupted” or “paused”. The government relationship with the EZLN has only been destabilised by rhetorical exchange, occasional popular mobilisations and frictions between organisations in *Las Cañadas* searching to broaden their control of the area. In short, the understanding of the EZLN changed in the eyes of the society, the government and within its own leadership, rank and file after 1994.

In 1994 the EZLN’s emergence seemed attempting to become an overtly insurrectionary movement. It seemed to be the last opportunity for the EZLN to survive, as a “different” radical social movement, the collapse of armed insurgencies in Latin America. In 2004 it might still be characterised as a radical social movement with the exterior features of a guerrilla organisation. It had called upon the rebels to advance towards the Mexican capital by defeating the most institutionalised army in Latin America.⁴¹ However, ten years later it is demanding the constitutional control of natural resources.

The government was able to defuse the perils of an indiscriminate repression and the broadening of armed conflict, but had to open a political space to give political content to the dialogue. Thus, it bought time for the federal elections.⁴² The government was quick to *desecuritize* the EZLN through a set of operations symbolised by the re-naming of the insurgents as *el grupo inconforme* - the nonconformist group, as opposed to “transgressors of the law”, the expression originally used by the government. Both traditional approaches to

⁴¹ The meaning attributed here to “institutional” refers to the army’s subordination to the civil authorities since the consolidation of the relatively stable cohesion among revolutionary groups after the 1920s. As a consequence, the Mexican Army has been the only one in Latin America that has neither gained national power in a *coup d’etat* nor autonomously exercised political power over the last 70 years in the region. In comparison the perception of a generalised crisis has been present in Chile, Argentina and Brazil during the 1960s and 1970s, and in Central America in the 1970s and 1980s.

⁴² Salinas, *México*, chapter 27 specially under *El dilema: reprimir o negociar*.

national security, as full repression, and to the subversive guerrilla model were equally rejected. It seemed to be the case that the more such an organisation or security institutions publicly defended the use of arms, the further from legitimacy and public respect the government or insurgent found themselves. For the public at large, even the Chiapas conflict ceased to be perceived as a threat by 2000.⁴³

As soon as the *generalisation of armed confrontation* was defused and the existence of a point of convergence - namely, the legitimate rejection of the suffering of indigenous people - become visible, the EZLN attracted popular sympathy. That popular support stopped short of implying sympathy to overt armed action.

I will now develop the argument that the visibility of the notion of indigenous rights was the limit between “security” and “insurgency”. At the same time that a new political space was constituted around the mobilisation of this notion, the government intensified its national security discourse by displacing traditional approaches without totally nullifying them. It subjected them to the broader interests of the political class, which were presented as “the nation’s interests”. For example, the 1994 elections, six months after the revolt, enabled the reproduction of the prevailing model of accumulation and political representation. In fact, the centre and centre-right political forces accumulated almost 80 percent of the turnout while the left lost more than 40 percent of its 1988 share, and fell to third place. The EZLN was not the *cause* of this decline but was certainly a highly correlated event.

2.2 Absence of indigenous. Myth and sovereignty

In relation to the Chiapas conflict, some authors have argued that neither the EZLN nor the government have actually desired “to resume their negotiating positions (which) remain

⁴³ *Seguridad Nacional y Opinión Pública. Selección de encuestas de opinión pública sobre temas de las agendas estratégica y de riesgos para la seguridad nacional 1994-2000* (México: INAP, 2001), 26. In 1998 around 13.8 per cent of the population considered the conflict “a threat”. At the end of the analysed period the percentage was one.

incompatible”. Their basic assumption, for instance in the case of Wager and Schulz,⁴⁴ resulted from an incorrect premise: that the “negotiation” and its “resolution” into a “peace agreement” were desired by and convenient to both. My claim is that the “resolution” of the conflict would never mean the resolution of the confrontation between the ideologies and practices now represented by the main actors. In fact the conflict allowed security and insurgent actors to reinsert their projects into the national agenda. Therefore, they are more interested in keeping their articulation, as problematic as it is, before reaching any agreement that would end in the dissolution of the EZLN as an insurgent force and/or the fracture of the momentum acquired by the securitisation of the state. Thus, paradoxically, the dialogue has allowed the government and the EZLN to enhance the electoral and security institutions and allows the re-emergence of an insurgent discourse.

In the constitution of a particular space of articulation the EZLN’s *myth* is as crucial as the *desecuritisation* of the EZLN. I will focus in the following pages on the *myth* of the EZLN.

I have noted that, according to Laclau, a *myth* is “a principle of reading of a given situation”,⁴⁵ i.e. a space of political interpretation and representation. Its terms are external to what is representable within the dominant, constituted structure, contesting the latter and aspiring to displace it. It also constitutes a space of inscription for an alternative ideology. The *myth* is aimed at suturing the space of an identity challenged by dislocatory events, such as those experienced in *Las Cañadas* and politically articulated as reasons for the “war” against the regime. A myth is associated with a hegemonic operation, and is an attempt to give sense to the actor’s involvement in a wider struggle where that political subject is constituted and within which attempts to become a dominant reference - if not the core of a new structure - are deployed.

⁴⁴ Stephen J. Wager and Donald E. Schulz, *The awakening: The Zapatista Revolt and Its Implications for Civil Military Relations and the Future of Mexico* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1994).

⁴⁵ Laclau, *New Reflections*, 61.

In order to be re-presentable in the dominant stream of national politics, the EZLN had to form a new approach through which to establish itself as a new and acceptable actor. The EZLN no longer represented a “revolutionary” organisation advocating *peasants’* demands, namely, justice and land, but instead represented the possibility of a site of convergence for a set of broader democratic issues, in which indigenous rights, indigenous autonomy and dignity should be included, among many others.

Central to this operation was the EZLN’s need to present itself “as an alternative to the dominant form of the dominant structural discourse”.⁴⁶ This alternative space of representation was constituted “as a critique of the lack of structuration” within the system. It was an indispensable operation in the insurgent ideological dispute against the dominant order. In this case the critique of Salinas’s alleged lack of legitimacy, the attack on the dominant socio-economic model and open defiance of the regime, in a crucial year of political and economic changes, was the concrete form acquired by the EZLN’s critique. Its concrete content was the invasion and expropriation of several areas in *Las Cañadas* and situating themselves in a new hegemonic position in the region through the “administration” of up to 39 self-styled “autonomous municipalities” since middle 1990s and up to 2004.

Laclau regards myths as “essentially” incomplete: their content is “constantly reconstituted and displaced”. Because of this incompleteness, myths can open the way to the constitution of *social imaginaries*. He defines the latter as a consolidated and expanded myth,⁴⁷ for example is the case of the *Mexican Revolution*, and with the PRI regime as its central mediation.⁴⁸ If, in the construction of a myth, it is indispensable to “rub out the ignoble origins”, the centrality of the operation becomes *vital* to the formation of an imaginary space of a full representation of “the people”. So far the EZLN has been successful

⁴⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁸ Rosa Buenfil, *Revolución Mexicana, mística y educación* (Mexico: Torres Asociados, 1996).

in its “erasing of the ignoble origins” as was the PRI with the security system until the 1980s.⁴⁹

The central thesis here is that the EZLN’s definition of indigenous rights is a nodal conception that is accepted by insurgent and security actors, to the extent that it represents the neutralisation of a revolutionary programme. It is the symbol of an accepted space of negotiation and contestation. Hence, in the aftermath of the rebellion, because of the explicit prioritisation of *the indigenous*, as showed before, instead of dealing with the representatives of a quasi-socialist or overtly revolutionary programme, the Mexican government and the guerrillas created a contradictory, ambiguous but still useful political space. Their antagonistic views could then be enunciated, if not resolved, without resorting to open military confrontation.

The EZLN did not “invent” the indigenous aspect of its own struggle after its military failure and the national rejection of political violence - institutional or insurrectionary, but rather it reorganised and emphasised elements that were potentially available on the eve of the uprising. In aiming to establish a reconnection with its own political goals, and in relating itself to probable allies, the EZLN rebuilt its rhetoric around the prioritisation of the notion of *indigenous* and the exploitation of its leader’s ability to communicate that strategic objective. After the organisation assimilated the dominant nuanced perception that society and the political class had after the ephemeral military revolt, “the indigenous people” could be, for all the political actors, an acceptable way of framing the possible controversial interaction with an insurrectionary movement in the midst of Salinas’ politics of modernisation. It was a feasible option for an untainted and *desecuritised* political agent.

In the long and troublesome constitution of Mexico as a *mestizo* nation, after three centuries of Spanish colonisation, the indigenous roots had been portrayed as the very core of the nationality, as opposed to the Spanish influence. This was the case even though the

⁴⁹ On 30 May 1984 the main political columnist, Manuel Buendía, was killed by instructions of the chief of the Federal Directorate of Security (DFS). In 1985 an extension of the corruption between the political police and drugtraficcerks reached international dimension when the US agent Enrique Camarena was assassinated.

indigenous people have been systematically displaced as part of such a stated political objective. More in rhetoric and the written law than in actual fact, the country has been a political space in which there is always a place for all. Thus, the post-colonial regimes have been characterised by their authoritarianism and racism in relation to deprived segments of society, especially with regard to the indigenous communities that constitute between 8 and 10 per cent of the population. The three most relevant internal wars, the Independence War (1810-1821), the Reform War (1858-1861) and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), all represented attempts to marginally incorporate the indigenous in a process paradoxically dominated by the final marginalisation of them, even from their explicit identification as central political subjects. Even Emiliano Zapata, cherished by the EZLN in name and practice as a discourse whose active base is land expropriation, did not recognise the indigenous people but instead the peasants from the communities adjacent to the *hacienda* as the mobilising actors of the *Mexican Revolution*.

After 1994 the indigenous people become, in that historic context, the symbol of a social and political debt with historical resonance, even though the EZLN did not originally consider them as *the* central actor of the intended mobilisation initiated on 1 January. In the aftermath of the revolt civil society showed its disposition to stop both insurrectionary and institutional violence before a radical movement that was able to establish an association between its particular grievances and the notion of a widened citizenship.⁵⁰ The *indigenous* as a political space to deal with the political challenges posed by the insurgents was thinkable against the background of a variety of elements of Mexican politics. Among them were the reluctance to resort to open - and *public* in a media driven space - repression, electoral competition, national and international pressure and the need to deactivate the possibility of an escalating conflict.

⁵⁰ See Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, 199-210.

In the three decades prior to the 1994 event a diversity of political interventions in a local context - *Las Cañadas* - created a new radical dynamic pluralism.⁵¹ In the national context, particularly in the 1988-1994 administration, a seemingly stagnated partisan left had shown themselves to be unable to challenge effectively the buoyant propagandistic rhetoric and the modernising force of *Salinismo* which in the face of the rebellion proved unwilling to resort to generalised repression, because of the shadow projected by the 1968 repression, the international awareness of the main leaders, its domestic calculations and thanks also to the intervention of society and the partisan left.

After January 1994 the intervention of a multiplicity of organisations struggling against a traditionalistic society and the participation of mainstream of national forces in favour of an agreement, could not find better grounds than the association established between a renewed interest in an *indigenismo* - reactivated in the 1980s and during the Salinas administration⁵² - and the emergence of an organisation perceived as a legitimate political actor whose illegitimate means of engagement had to be neutralised not just militarily but *symbolically* through its inscription in a “soft” discursive terrain - indigenous peoples’ rights - as opposed to the “hard” insurrectionary discourse - revolutionary workers and peasants -and beyond the merely military counter-insurgent response.

It must be clear that the EZLN, and its constructed as much as attributed indigenous identity, was an intricate result of contingent interactions previous to the public emergence of the EZLN and presence in subsequent operations. Before 1994 there was “a new Babel with many original ethnic groups and the *campesinos ladinizados*”⁵³ in which Liberation Theology, religious exodus, economic migration, agrarian struggles, revolutionary groups *and* a mestizo

⁵¹ This pluralism became one of the extremes of what after 1994 became acute polarisation within the communities. See Xóchitl Leyva, “Regional Communal, and Organizational Transformation in Las Cañadas”, in *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 117, Volume 28, Number 2 (March 2001), 20-44.

⁵² Héctor Díaz Polanco, “El Estado y los indígenas”, in *El Nuevo Estado Mexicano*, Vol. I (1992) Mexico and Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and Planeta, 145-170, quoted by Harvey, *The Chiapas*, 201.

⁵³ See Antonio García de León “Prologue” to *EZLN, Documentos y Comunicados* (Mexico: ERA, 1994), 28.

leadership - traditional and/or with post-modern vocabulary - were all present.⁵⁴ The EZLN's leadership and rank and file were in fact vindicating its place in history by organising the "poorest of the poor", but not "the indigenous peoples". Its ideological success is precisely to have succeeded in conveying the sense that its particularistic attempt was naturally embodying a universal claim. After January a combination of an EZLN's strategic manoeuvre conflated with the rearticulation of the previous experiences gave rise to the indigenous people as the core addressee and main perceived characteristic of the EZLN. Besides, the signifiers available from the Mexican *indigenista* discourse - in which it is still unclear, however, whether an indigenous is the person who speaks an ancient local language, who identifies he/herself as "indigenous" and/or lives within the indigenous communities - and the democracy-under-pressure to which the political class was subjected to as much as the strategic valuations of the Salinas administration, are all the most relevant.

Peasant and indigenous organizational elements allowed the EZLN to take advantage of its immersion in *Las Cañadas*. Notions such as "the common" were deployed as an element of collective validity. From it the EZLN's rank and file and its leadership could borrow elements to cement the organisation and its survival - to constitute the people, in this case, *through armed means* - which also provoked a profound polarisation within peasants and indigenous.⁵⁵ Whereas *before* 1994 local committees achieved a more elaborated representation through the traditional mediating authorities - president and *ejido* commissioner, municipal agent, "tuhunel" (deacon), catechist and the envoy of the more representative organisation, the *Union of Unions* - *after* it, the EZLN emphasised its actual geographical control in the conflict zone.⁵⁶ It did so by iterating the notion of a radicalised version of municipal autonomy. Historically, the free municipality was vindicated by Hernán Cortés in the early XVI century, when he created its space of control, against the supervision of the Spanish crown. It also became a source of popular representation recovered and transformed again by the radical movements within the *Mexican Revolution*. In 1993-2004

⁵⁴ See, Womack, *Rebellion*, Documents 8-15, 119-208.

⁵⁵ Leyva, "Regional, Communal", 22.

“municipal autonomy” became a challenge to and negotiation of the federal pact by an accepted “rebellious” force. The main element of referentiality prior the revolt was the local context and the other organisations, after it the central elements became both the civil society and the government.

However, on the eve of the rebellion - December 1993 - and in the first crucial week of the conflict, when the EZLN as a military movement was defeated,⁵⁷ this organisation never spoke on the behalf of *the indigenous* people in its main political documents.

The EZLN rediscovered and reconstrued the indigenous people as an entirely renewed political subject. Even before the government unilaterally declared an early cease-fire, the insurgent group’s perceptions of its role in national politics - and in the eye of a media audience of which they have seemingly been alienated - changed quickly. The EZLN’s re-evaluations of the popular response to the rebellion had a profound impact on its discourse. The exchange experienced with a multiplicity of non-armed organisations and the understanding of alternative political subjects affected it. If the EZLN was “softened” in the jungle, as Le Bot 1997 put it,⁵⁸ it was also reconstituted by the political environment, the available public space and the constitution of the “indigenous people’s rights” as a space of contestation. It created and was recreated by a broader space of political manoeuvre, paradoxically allowed by a PRI regime whose characteristics were different from the reactionary elite that used to govern and literally own Chiapas, and different from the predominantly repressive politics of the 1960s and 1970s.

On 1 January 1994, the EZLN did not espouse an indigenous identity, even though it was formed mainly by indigenous people. In *Las Cañadas* and *Los Altos*, the main social agents of change had been conceived as “peasants” struggling for land (Harvey, 1999, Legorreta, 1998). Besides, the EZLN could not privilege an “indigenous subjectivity” because the insurrection was presented by its leadership to the indigenous people as a general “war” against the regime, where many other combatants were supposedly participating. Nonetheless,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 24-5.

⁵⁷ *La Jornada*, 1 to 18 January 1994.

despite the EZLN's claim of a national presence, only a relevant but absolutely minor segment of the local population was on its side.

Besides, the national insurrection offered by the EZLN could not be advocated with "indigenous flags" for attracting an already captive audience of peasant-indigenous. To wage a war against the Mexican state whilst lacking the structural strength necessary to do it, and admitting it to the peasant-indigenous *common* - assembly - would have been unconvincing and counter-productive for the EZLN's leaders. They have already faced desertion and frictions over this matter. The EZLN's leadership warped an isolated planned rebellion and presented it to the rank and file of the indigenous people as a "national" operation. *Germán* and *Marcos* preferred to hide their strategic weakness: the absence of national clandestine networks backing the Chiapas-EZLN. Consequently, its military initiative (its uniqueness as *an option*) had begun to crumble.⁵⁹ To cover that lack of national coordination the EZLN leaders falsely claimed to the indigenous communities a strength they never had. They offered to its social base a false image about the existence of other sections of the EZLN, supposedly working for a grand scale insurrection in other parts of Mexico.⁶⁰

If the indigenous were to wage a war against "the PRI dictatorship" and confront its army - that is 2,500 ill-prepared peasant-indigenous people against 10,000 soldiers deployed in Chiapas in 1994, before the rebellion, and more than 150,000 nationally - they hypothetically needed to count on an "already gained" support of other classes and sectors to make feasible the EZLN's "war". It is not unjustified to think that the knowledge of the rejection of the armed path by all the other organisations must have put pressure on the EZLN to hide its strategic weakness before its rank and file. What was certainly noticeable in the EZLN's leadership was the idea of thinking in the revolt as the "spark" to unleash a national insurrection and the EZLN's military unpreparedness, along with the regrettable outcome of

⁵⁸ The revolt, he maintains, was "an ethical and social insurrection". See his *El sueño Zapatista*. 73-94.

⁵⁹ According to Legorreta, at least 50 per cent of the peasants and indigenous that knew about the EZLN did not share the military initiative, in addition to that the church that had kept certain sympathy to the EZLN had begun to draw a line of refusal. See her *Religión*, 261-263.

the peasants, peasant and indigenous policemen and soldiers that were killed as a consequence of such understanding of politics.⁶¹ More important, the revolt was indispensable for the EZLN to survive as a credible organization, not for the peasants and indigenous peoples who had other options of radical and unarmed representation, but for its members and followers.

Likewise, if the EZLN only existed in a part of Chiapas the fight could not be “indigenous” for two reasons. First, there was no internal agreement in the EZLN concerning the portrayal of the indigenous people either as the main instigator or as the main addressee of the struggle. According to *Marcos* “this (lack of consensus) provoked the estrangement of some *compañeros* who said that we were leading the people to be slaughtered.”⁶²

It had to be very clear that it was *not an indigenous war* but a *national war*...to give it an ethnic character *it was tantamount to lead them to a past of defeats*...they told me ‘you have to open it’, If you are to take the indigenous question (better) *take the universal*, what includes everything.⁶³

And: “others said that there was not the proper organisation to wage a national war... (but) the indigenous took over (in 1993) and the real power became formal power (through *Marcos* himself, indeed supported by *Germán* and the EZLN’s peasant-indigenous leadership).⁶⁴

Second, the EZLN leadership had neither the capacity nor the cadres to launch a national insurrection. Therefore, its leaders had to gamble audaciously and, according to others, very irresponsibly. For example, in 1994, for each soldier that was killed five

⁶⁰ My interviews, January-February 1994, in Las Margaritas, Chiapas. Particularly, with peasants in the area in which the EZLN, without having majority, imposed the rule of the EZLN’s patrols. See also Legorreta, *Religión*, 275-84.

⁶¹ Legorreta, *Religión*, 277.

⁶² Le Bot, (*Subcomandante Marcos*) *El sueño*, 200.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 202-3. My emphasis. Paradoxically, the “ethnic character” became the *universal* value attributed to the revolt.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 200-1

indigenous people died.⁶⁵ This engendered a process of reckless endangerment of a non-committed population, something of which the EZLN would later accuse the EPR, in 1996. In addition to these shortcomings, the EZLN needed, on the eve of 1994, to present itself as a national insurrectionary coalition in which other political actors were expected to participate. Its advocacy of “workers” and “peasants” rights is the result of this, as shown in the first *Declaración de la Selva Lacandona* (Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle), its initial revolutionary-like manifesto.

In this, the EZLN’s first public statement, they addressed the constitution of a political subject representative of a new sovereignty and a renewed national ethos. In accompanying the temporary armed occupation of seven municipalities, the affirmation with which that document started, *Hoy decimos !Basta!*⁶⁶ - “Today we say Enough is Enough”-, addressed to “the people of Mexico” and to what the organisation called “Mexican brothers”, opened a new chapter in recent history. It implied an attempt to reclaim the Mexican popular sovereignty from *outside* the regime and *within* its nationalistic vocabulary.

The text *did not* explicitly refer to the indigenous as *the* political actor. Considering that such a declaration was necessarily the result of a careful evaluation, an end-product of the analysis of a strategic situation, and the portrayal of what the EZLN initially wished to appear to be in the eyes of political forces and international political actors, the absence alluded to can be viewed as a result of the aforementioned factors.

Its struggle was claimed to be directed against the group of politicians who they claimed were responsible for the allegedly “insatiable ambition of a dictatorship for more than 70 years led by a clique of traitors who represent the most conservative and sell-out groups in

⁶⁵ After the first ten days of skirmishes 15 soldiers, 71 members of the EZLN and 24 policemen were killed, according to the government. See Salinas, *México*, chapter 27. Interestingly, *Marcos* seemed to ignore the number of casualties. When referring to it, in relation to the skirmish in Ocosingo, he talks about “hundreds” in his interview with Le Bot and later mentions “40 or 50”; see Le Bot, *op. cit.*, 210-14. The EZLN waited ten years to be precise: there had been 46 EZLN members “killed in combat”, see *Reforma*, 13 February 2004. Interestingly, there is a telling discrepancy with the official data according to which there were 70. It is doubly suggestive if we think that, usually, governments’ information would have tended to be, let us say, dismissive.

⁶⁶ *Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*, Comandancia General del EZLN, December 1993.

the country”.⁶⁷ Even more generally, the blame for poverty and injustice, presented as the grounds for justification of the EZLN’s emergence, was to be placed on all those who acquired and exerted power *in the last 500 years*. The all-out simplification alluded even to figures such as Vicente Guerrero, the first guerrilla to become President; Benito Juárez, the first indigenous to reach the same position and Lázaro Cárdenas, the first post-revolutionary President to implement nationalistic and peasant promises for reform in a wide scale. That did not impede the EZLN from posing itself as the next historical chapter in a long line of frequent struggles to truly constitute “the people”.

By focusing on the general demands presented by the EZLN, it can also be said that there is no specific request for “the indigenous”: the struggle was “for work, land, housing, food, health, care, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace”,⁶⁸ which were banners directed at a rather general segment of the “dispossessed”. No trace of indigenous priorities can be found in the EZLN texts and its internal publications prior to January 1994.⁶⁹ *The Instructions for EZLN chiefs and officers; Tax War’s Law; Law Rights and Obligations of Peoples in Fight; Revolutionary Armed Forces’ Rights and Obligations Law; Revolutionary Agrarian Law; Women’s Revolutionary Law; Urban reform Law; Labour Law; Industry and Commerce Law; Social Security Law and Justice Law*, all of them mere sketches of general principles, *did not* even show the word “Indian” or “indigenous”. The new “laws” were to be not just imposed over the Chiapas Highlands or the state, but “over the entire territory of Mexico”.⁷⁰ In contrast with the absence of “indigenous” demands, the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *EZLN, Documentos y Comunicados* (México: Era, 1994), 36-48. In the prologue a defence of the EZLN’s contributions to a peaceful transition and as an innovatory political language is presented in the *Prologue* by García de León, A., 26-9.

⁷⁰ All those rights already appeared in the Constitution but, as happens in Mexico and elsewhere, they are unevenly applied according to political awareness, political and economic strength and contextual elements of a profoundly racist society. Those rights are generally recognised especially by the majority of the urban society that constitutes 70 percent of the national population. The documents and the EZLN “laws” allude to general principles and forms of organisation related to the agreed or forced town’s commitments to the EZLN. Specific amounts of taxation in the context of the war; the character of the links between the EZLN rights and obligations and the post-rebellion “elected authorities” were normatively described. Collective property, agricultural companies, forms of tenure, forestry exploitation, sanction of individual monopolisation of land and means of production, nullification of debts, more and cheaper credit, economic activity taxes, loans as well as women’s allegedly new rights,

notion of a general addressee, the “Mexican people” and “the nation”, as embodied by *peasants* and *workers*, are consistently mentioned. Indeed, I do not claim that the indigenous people were just pragmatically instrumentalised, as literature near to the Salinas administration has argued with partial but still feasible evidence. I do not claim either that the indigenous were the basic cause of the uprising, as the pro-EZLN literature has tried to demonstrate, even *contra* Marcos’ own recognition of the absence of the primacy of the indigenous peoples as central political subject. What I argue is that the indigenous people became *the* political subject *after* 1994. Moreover, I consider that indigenous rights cannot be defined out of the referential political space that was created as an articulation between society, the government and the EZLN. Indigenous people’s rights can be seen as a space of negotiation of the complex interaction between an insurgent actor and a government that, even in its last stage, kept remnants of its origins as a social revolutionary actor. In short, a political agreement on the content and issues of that expression must pass for the ideological accommodation and political agreements in which a new set of common vocabulary was constructed as a basic framework for any lasting understanding. The intensity of the dispute between the modernising and neoliberal program and the PRI’s social agenda both made reference to Emiliano Zapata - and former-President Salinas had his own interpretation of Zapata, this historic character was profusely referred to as an emblem of social justice in the programme of *Solidaridad*, central to his administration. The EZLN’s radical iteration of the revolutionary hero, through the invasion and expropriation of land in Chiapas, cannot either be separated from the pretension advocated by the armed group of creating an ideological space to challenge the government. Both the PRI and the EZLN have tried to present themselves as legitimate expressions of a popular will with revolutionary origins, where political violence was recognised as constitutive of “the nation” or advocated as part of the construction of “the people”.

minimal wages for peasants, communitarian commitment in the distribution of commerce and wealth, benefits for the elderly, a brief sketch of “urban reform”. All of these were just sketched in 12 pages. See *El Despertador Mexicano*, EZLN’s leaflet, 1 December 1993, or its reproduction in *EZLN, Documentos*, 36-48.

That lack of an original prioritisation of the indigenous people by the EZLN has already been mentioned. On the one hand, for instance, Salinas and commentators close to his intellectual circles have tried to dismiss the EZLN's political qualities, with regard to its claim of being essentially indigenous, but cannot escape the modernising and liberal *priista* origin of its argument. On the other hand, EZLN sympathisers have aimed to undermine the legitimacy of the government's rights, as the embodiment of the state, in shaping the framework of the revolt. The latter have tried to do so by indicating that "the indigenous question" is "essentially constitutive" of the EZLN's political identity. They omit that even *Marcos* recognised the centrality of the indigenous as a post-revolt result. Accordingly, they have insisted that the EZLN's indigenous characteristic is one of the basic qualities through which a complete set of other demands, related to national poverty, injustice and the socio-economic model's insufficiencies, must be addressed. Thus, after 1994 *indigenous rights* became the ideological battlefield between pro-regime and pro-insurgent actors.

If there is any doubt about the absolute primacy of the originally military thrust of the FLN and the EZLN, as a dominant preconception of politics that actually preceded the construction of the "indigenous people" discourse, a revealing comment from *Germán* in 2003 may serve as evidence:

Lately, I have been reading (Ernesto Guevara) *Che's* book, *De la lucha revolucionaria: Congo*. In one part he says: yes, there it is the cannon, the bazooka. But, *where are the men to fire them?* It is required to do political work in the long run. This book just fell in my hands, but I have found things that I have in my memory, there is identification with our experience. This kind of work was done for us as well.⁷¹

Therefore, the FLN and the EZLN construed the peasants in *Las Cañadas* as the men needed to fire an insurgent discourse that *preceded* them and, certainly, which had also recently been reorganised through their intervention. In the course of this rearticulation, they placed the popular source of authority, i.e. the peasant and after 1994 "indigenous"

⁷¹ See *Elegimos el camino más largo*, in *La Jornada*, 20 January 2003. My emphasis.

assemblies and the EZLN's clandestine meetings, as a foundational field of contestation of the concept of sovereignty advocated by the government.

2.2.1 Truly popular sovereignty and the EZLN's successful... failure

Besides the original absence of the primacy of the indigenous people, what is also remarkable is the explicit national drive and far-reaching intentions proclaimed in the EZLN's (first) *Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*, which laid claim to a truly national sovereignty. In its first decisive public statement, the EZLN decided to present a constitutional justification, taken from of the main idea implicit in Article 39 and 41 of the Mexican Political Constitution. In the national legislation, sovereignty is based on the popular will and its site is the Congress. By declaring that their "last hope" was to take up arms, the EZLN was exerting its radical interpretation of popular sovereignty as opposed to the understanding of the latter by the Congress and the Salinas administration.

However, the EZLN's defence of the Constitution, in particular in Article 39, was posed by them as a strategy for distancing itself from those political mechanisms in relation to which its own identity was being defined, *and* as a strategy which might also protect it, nationally, by claiming a legitimacy endowed by the Constitution. That essential political operation has been maintained for ten years: the EZLN defends its own sovereignty through the vindication of the national sovereignty that they seemed to be attacking.

In the *Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*, the EZLN quoted from the Constitution: "national sovereignty resides essentially and originally in the people. All public powers emanate from the people and are instituted for the people's benefit. The people have, at all times, the unalienable right to alter or modify the form of their government".⁷²

The reference to the link between sovereignty and popular will thus incorporated the other crucial part of the constitution: the fact that sovereignty is a notion whose specific content is to be constantly negotiated within the Congress. Parliamentary faculties are hence,

⁷² *Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*, 1 January 1994, as was published in some newspapers and posted on the walls in at least 7 out of 111 municipalities in Chiapas.

formally speaking, the final site of that national sovereignty. Since its appearance, the EZLN, by its insurgent interpretation of Article 39, attempted to be seen as a legitimate organisation that represented the “true” site of a distinctive national sovereignty.

In the same operation of defending and contesting the Constitution, the EZLN established the range of its future action in relation to, and beyond, the formal institutions maintained by the main political forces. It placed itself *inside* and *outside* of the regime. In its pretension to be capable of connecting with the very core of the collective will, without dismissing the institutions whose existence it criticised, the EZLN widened and, in a paradoxical way, limited its own past and future identity. The organisation wanted to become the representative of a popular sovereignty *outside* the formal institutions, but in order to do so it also placed its source of sovereignty *inside* them.

Through this refusal and acceptance of the institutions, the insurgents moved conceptually and politically *at the limit* of those political and social bodies, which its mere presence both questioned and, at the same time, made visible the possibility of doing so without being crushed. Society found “the causes” legitimate, in this case “indigenous people’s rights”, even whilst it rejected “the methods”. Thus, this move to the armed *outside* of the state made them a threat to the regime, while its military defeat and the creation of a struggle framed within the notion of indigenous rights, as a legitimate cause, made them part of the polity’s *inside*. In being perceived as an expression of a radical and alternative sovereign will, the EZLN creatively opened a space of political operation for the armed left, one which had been rapidly declining since the beginning of the 1990s.

Tactically and strategically, the EZLN was not able to create a national insurrection, but it had the capacity to transform its weakness into strength by claiming that its goals were “moral” and “civilian”. It ostensibly became uninterested in political power, since it could not achieve it without dissolving its identity in all the competing national parties or becoming a revolutionary actor. From 1994 on, national power could not appear on the EZLN’s agenda. This also created the possibility for the organisation to become, ambiguously, *a site of power* through its counter-power techniques and vocabulary 1) the power “of something new” - as a

location for the critique of power “as generally understood” within the political elite; 2) the power of having actual interlocution with federal institutions; and 3) the power to control the area of *Las Cañadas*, where its project of communitarian *Zapatismo* represents its material base of reproduction.

Since the eve of the revolt, the EZLN’s demands were reorganised around the core of a softened socialist discourse, one which had been subjected to a nationalistic revision since the EZLN’s birth in 1983. They were re-evaluated in the face of the failures of the communist bloc, the displacement of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the peace agreements in El Salvador. It was a discourse carefully separated from any explicit allusion to the EZLN’s ideological matrix, that is to say, the FLN (National Liberation Forces)⁷³ and Guevara’s interpretation of the insurrectionary way, redesigned through the Mexican guerrilla experiences of the 1960s and 1970s. Peasant and popular struggles for land and political rights in the preceding thirty years were present in a discourse where civil society is seen as a space of hegemonic struggles.

A complex operation involving military failure, interaction with other forces, the media, national and international groups and, centrally, the *creative understanding of its defeat*, enabled the EZLN to become *a myth*. That is a space of inscription and a principle of reading of a variety of limited struggles, as well as a principle of reading of political reality. Such was the case of members of the MPI (Independent Popular Movement), progressive teachers, of the CNTE (National Coordinator of Education Workers) or students in public universities, as would become clear during the student movement dealt with in chapter 4. Sectors of the lower middle classes, segments of the upper middle classes fed up with partisan politics, and even some entrepreneurs recognised some validity in the EZLN uprising, especially in the aims of displacing post-colonial structures still at place in Chiapas. Opposition parties that interpreted the uprising as an urgent call to modernise the electoral system, and even inside the PRI, the uprising opened space for centre-left groupings and

provided a critique of the technocratic arrogance attributed to Salinas. More importantly, in the context of the relation between the regime and insurgent actors, the use of the category of indigenous rights and the evocation of the outdated *Zapatismo* and its practical renovation in Chiapas allowed, for the first time after the Mexican Revolution, an insurrectionary organisation to defend social democratic and even liberal values in tension with its militaristic and insurgent core. The cost was to drop the *public* defence of the armed path, expressed in the cessation of military engagement with security forces. The EZLN's re-engagement with arms would have caused repudiation inside and outside the EZLN, leaving aside their likely containment by security forces.

The insurgent organisation also reorganised demands and introduced the notion of indigenous autonomy. A total of 34 petitions in the *List of Demands* were presented to the federal government on 1 March 1994, as a result of the first stage of the dialogue between the armed group and the government. In it, the CCRI-CG (Revolutionary Clandestine Indigenous Committee-General Command) appears as the signatory agent, in a document that summarised what the EZLN considered, at that point, its fundamental objectives. In that document, the indigenous people rose to the pinnacle of the EZLN's public grievances.

Presented now by the CCRI-CG, that is, from the locus of enunciation recently reconstituted as "the indigenous peoples of the State of Chiapas", and discussed in Cathedral's dialogues in February 1994, the EZLN's document asked for a response to thirty-four demands. Fifteen were explicitly indigenous-related grievances, and only six were linked to the state of Chiapas. The government accepted in full, or at least showed openness, to thirty-one of them.⁷⁴ The exception were demands for the President's and all state governors' resignations. Not surprisingly, in the government strategy of internationally *desecuritising* the conflict, the recognition of the EZLN as a "belligerent force" and its troops as "authentic soldiers", likewise the "application of all international treaties to regulate military conflicts",

⁷³ The FLN "is a political-military organisation whose aim is the seizure of political power by countryside and city workers of the Mexican Republic with the purpose of establishing a Popular Republic with a socialist system". FLN, 1980.

were rejected. This first reordering was basic to the subsequent constitution of the notion of “autonomy”, which has become the emblematic motto by which the effective sovereignty of the state, through the EZLN’s unsatisfied demand for control of natural resources, is still challenged.

Unlike the first FLN documents and the EZLN’s (first) *Declaración* and the *Revolutionary Laws* of December 1993, in the *List of Demands* of March 1994, the consistent reorganisation around the issue of indigenous grievances is clearly evident. Constructing the notion of indigenous people as the central feature of the EZLN’s renewed discourse, in the aftermath of its military failure, showed the leadership group’s ability to successfully interact with the national response and with the media. This allowed its main cadres to reconstitute its demands around that notion, evidently implicit in the earlier documents but under-developed and politically undervalued by the main leaders, according to what the evidence suggests.⁷⁵

Interestingly, in its petitions to the government, the EZLN broadly accepted the NAFTA agreement, around which the national and international leftwing critique and resistance, as well as the EZLN itself have been largely associated. The 7th demand of the *Pliego* reads: “Revision, of the Free Trade Agreement signed with Canada and the United States, since in its present form it does not consider the indigenous.”⁷⁶

The EZLN organised a series of political meetings in Chiapas and Mexico City. It called for the constitution of three key unarmed national conventions and organisations, ones which never really took off as national movements: the *National Democratic Convention* (1994); the *Movement for National Liberation* (1995); and the *Zapatista Front of National Liberation* (FZLN, 1996).

⁷⁴ *Commitments for a Worthy Peace in Chiapas*, Presidency of the Republic. Declaration submitted to the EZLN and to the media, 2 March 1994.

⁷⁵ According to *Marcos*, the expression “we are the product of 500 years of struggle” embodied the “indigenous” character of the uprising. Nevertheless, he also recognised that “it had to be clear that it was not an indigenous war but a national war”; see Le Bot, op.cit., 202. The first statement is highly questionable, if we believe his prior affirmation that the “indigenous” character of the EZLN *did not* appear clearly, because the first *Declaración* was basically and solely a “minimal accord”. Le Bot, (*Subcomandante Marcos*) *El sueño*, 201.

⁷⁶ EZLN communiqué, 1 January 1995. My emphasis.

On 1 January 1995, through the *Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, calling for the formation of a *Movement for National Liberation*,⁷⁷ the EZLN re-baptised the revolt as “the Chiapas Indigenous Rebellion” and formally introduced “the autonomy of the indigenous peoples” in their political project.

The indigenous question will not have a solution if there is not RADICAL transformation of the national pact. The only form of incorporating, with justice, and dignity, the indigenous into the Nation is by recognising their specific characteristics in social, political, and cultural organisation. Autonomy is not separation; it is the integration of the most humiliated and forgotten minorities in contemporary Mexico...

Today we repeat: OUR STRUGGLE IS NATIONAL...

Today we reaffirm: FOR EVERYONE, EVERYTHING; NOTHING FOR US!...

Today, after having called the people of Mexico first to arms and later to a civic and non-violent struggle, we call them to struggle BY ALL MEANS, AT ALL LEVELS, AND IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, for democracy, liberty, and justice...⁷⁸

On 16 February 1996, the federal government - without the approval of the Congress - and the EZLN reached an agreement in which *Indian Rights and Culture* were assumed by both as a temporary point of convergence. While Salinas had in 1994 to face a federal election and develop its international project, which acted as a persuasive element in his quick acceptance of a dialogue with an already militarily defeated insurgent group, Zedillo was, in 1996, determined to compromise with his predecessor's approach, pressured by the moderate political class' dominant stance at the eve of launching the reinsertion of Mexico as a valid commercial counterpart with Europe. On the old continent, political elites appeared to be interested in the validity of other identities, human rights, and, above all, they were apparently requesting democratic credentials of partners-to-be governments.

The agreement on the content of a reinvigorated interaction was at the core of *Los Acuerdos de San Andrés*. This can be seen as one of the most significant political spaces of negotiation and contestation of the limits of the state in the decade 1994-2004. In relation to it, Womack believes that

⁷⁷ Lázaro Cárdenas, the PRM (Party of the Mexican Revolution, renamed PRI in the 1940s) President who decided to nationalise oil in 1938, and who formed a *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (Movement of National Liberation) in the 1960s, which the EZLN unsuccessfully tried to emulate.

[T]he “Indigenous question” [was a priority] for different but overlapping reasons. The government would take this question first, because for all its symbolic importance it seemed at once the least important materially, involving only about eight percent of the country’s population, and the most principal, the easiest to confine to Chiapas. The Zapatista high command would take it first, because it seemed the most promising to then badly beleaguered and bitterly suspicious Zapatista forces and their families.⁷⁹

Two years later, when the EZLN issued its 1998 *Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, the armed group had consolidated its discourse around the primacy of the indigenous people. The point of simultaneous convergence and disagreement between the government, the Congress, the EZLN and other forces in subsequent years, these initial accords shaped the field of debate as an accepted centre of tension between radical popular sovereignty and institutional popular sovereignty.

To political actors and activists who felt marginalized by the regime,⁸⁰ the EZLN’s appearance became a space for alternative identification to the widely hegemonic mindset represented then by the Salinas and Zedillo administrations, and electoral politics in general. “The poorest of the poor” were read as an ideal space of contestation of the alleged technocratic authoritarianism, to the extent that they were deprived of danger and their demands were legitimised even by the official discourse. However, taking up arms was unacceptable for the majority of society. The exception was for leftist organisations such as the MPI⁸¹ (Proletarian Independent Movement) and other social movements or overtly pro-

⁷⁸ EZLN’s *Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, 1 January 1995.

⁷⁹ Womack, *Rebellion*, 304.

⁸⁰ Among these were small social movements located at the edge of public attention, leftist activists critical of the party politics and more identifiable with the social movements; for some non-governmental organisations whose reason of existence was the neo-liberal withdrawal of state obligations; for former militants of other frustrated or repressed guerrilla movements; for feminists in different segments of society; for a young generation critical of the regime but distant from electoral politics; for politicians inside the regime, weakened by and critical of the Salinas administration; for peasant movements outside the official corporations; for unions confronted with entrepreneurs or local and federal authorities and for impoverished segments of the urban society.

⁸¹ Most of the commentators do not even mention the demonstration organised by this *Movimiento Proletario Independiente* - Independent Proletarian Movement - which was constantly hit by government actions after that political rally, and later would be associated with other guerrilla movement’s actions.

insurgency cells,⁸² to which the EZLN's reasons *and methods* were acceptable. The indigenous question would also open the public space for the debate on how the government and the society would deal with the challenge presented by the EZLN, in particular, and by the unlikely possibility of insurrection in general.

The regime's logic of transformism, i.e. Gramsci's notion of the absorption of the other's demands, and the political deployment of a diversity of measures, allowed the administration to consolidate the political space, of which the military encirclement of the EZLN was part, after the government's unilateral cease-fire.⁸³ The armed organisation was forced to change, because of the military, its own weakness and the two-fold meaning of the popular reaction to the uprising. There was support for "the causes" but not for "the methods". In this change, the EZLN evolved to become a principle for the reading of Mexican politics in the long journey towards a more democratic space.

Through the inscription of indigenous rights, the EZLN could also achieve its *second moment* of concealment and skilful rearticulation of its far-left origin, in which exclusionary politics had been central both inside and outside the organisation.⁸⁴ The first moment of this operation (1983-1993) had taken place through its interaction with other leftist forces, peasant/indigenous issues, Liberation Theology as much as with the reinterpretation of Mexican insurgent traditions, all of which allowed the EZLN to appear as a "softened" guerrilla. The second (1994-2004) has been taking place as a result of the understanding of the public opinion, the media, the exploitation of *Marcos'* skills in renaming events and resorting to public relations and traditional propaganda techniques and new technology, the political interconnection with a multiplicity of actors - mostly within the left - and, above all, through the ability to present *Marcos* as the core of the identity of the EZLN as opposed to

⁸² In this case the Procup-Pdlp, a cell-based organisation from which, with 13 more groups, the Revolutionary Popular Army (EPR) would be formed. See chapter 3.

⁸³ See Salinas, *México*, chapters 27 and 28.

⁸⁴ According to security circles, whose information was quickly made public by the Secretariat of Governance, some connection between the new EZLN and the old FLN as a framework organisation, and the members of the PROCUP-Pdlp, existed. Former members of guerrilla organisations had constituted themselves as "an organised network of cells", and allegedly had 15 training centres. See particularly Secretaría de Gobernación's communiqué, 7 January 1994 in *La Jornada*, 8 January 1994.

the outdated Marxist and Guevarist rhetoric, still noticeable in all the other members of the EZLN, including *Comandante Germán* and, indeed, its dialogue with the government. The notion of “indigenous rights” was supported by the government and by society at large: in Chiapas there was no revolutionary insurgency, but a legitimate set of demands that deprived Mexicans had put forward.

I characterise the EZLN as a myth oscillating between the identification with an insurrectionary organisation and a non-armed radical movement whose identity, if we accept the idea of it as a referential interaction, has been engendered not just by its pre-1994 activities, or its post-1994 invocation of “civil society”, but by its actual and contradictory interaction with the government as the active representation of the Mexican state. By “oscillation” I mean the fluid process of identification, more than a fixed identity, by which this organisation has succeeded in surviving with political autonomy. The EZLN’s outer flexibility allowed its public interventions to be viewed as valid. The subsequent sympathy is justified by the alleged uniqueness of the EZLN as a “social movement” that put forward the question of indigenous rights as well as a universalistic discourse for a permanent “rebellious” identity, as opposed to a bloody “revolutionary” one.⁸⁵ The EZLN is perceived by some commentators as an attempt to avoid closing the field of democratic politics, a characteristic usually attributed to traditional insurgent actors.

In reconstituting *the indigenous* at the centre of its political discourse, the EZLN was able to maintain the possibility of recreating a space of identification for other segments of society, to which the EZLN wanted to appeal. It became a centre of reference without excluding the clandestine recommencement of the armed struggle.

Feasible elements of that information were mixed with the predictable pretension of discrediting the Chiapas event.

⁸⁵ An interesting discussion on this feature is developed in Juan Ramírez, *!Nunca más sin Rostros! Evolución histórica del proyecto del EZLN* (Mexico: El Cotidiano-UAM, 2002).

2.3 The smartest fools' *bridge to the outside*

In understanding the conditioned society's sympathy and its refusal to join the rebellion, a double move that contributed to the opening of a space for negotiation, the armed group was better positioned to reconsider the space granted to it and to the indigenous question. The armed group was able to reanimate the notion of civil society with which it wanted to be connected. The EZLN reorganised its notion of power in such a way that it made it appear as a secondary factor in its construction of the "future" and the "enemy".

The EZLN mobilised notions acceptable in a society that dismissed political violence and, not infrequently, also partisan politics. It revolved around the idea of indigenous rights, autonomy and with a renewed ideology of *Zapatismo* in which *power* - as political parties understand it - was also criticised.⁸⁶ *Zapatismo* can be seen as the articulation of ambiguous elements, by which the EZLN conveyed its hidden hegemonic ideology and repositioned itself as the dominant force in *Las Cañadas*. It also became a space of representation for a vague national project in which all those disappointed with the political system and electoral politics could have a say and an opportunity to challenge the regime from a range of political positions. Hence, the relevance of "civil society", not just as the Gramscian space for the dispute of hegemony, but as a competing notion opposed to the space in which hegemony was actually constituted by the political elite, was highlighted after 1994. The stated disinterest in political power was also a nodal concept that was "presentable" and "re-presentable" in that yearning to constitute "the people" against "the nation" and the state, as represented by the PRI regime.

When asked in 1996 by the anthropologist Yvon Le Bot, what the EZLN's opinion was on the absence of protest in 1994, after the PRI won the August federal elections, *Marcos* answered:

-There we fooled ourselves again. The same had occurred in January 94. And the same question came up again: now what? There was no massive protest, and the National

⁸⁶ Under the condition that such actors are construed as adversaries of the EZLN. For instance, in 1994 this organisation supported Amado Avendaño as candidate to Chiapas governor. He lost the election.

Convention, which was *our bridge to the outside*, entered a period of internal crisis after the electoral setback. There was nothing else to do but to wait for Salinas to leave...⁸⁷

The EZLN has tried to construct *the bridge to its outside* through a number of political mechanisms and discursive displacements, which have been enumerated. In particular, priority was given to “civil society” by inviting activists of all kind to events in the conflict zone; other emphasis was on “power from below” in its influence area through forced redistribution of land. This gave the EZLN the opportunity to hegemonically locate itself in relation to the multiplicity of other Chiapas actors. By 2003, the EZLN had gained control of around 1,500 plots of land that, in many cases, had been bought from the former owners by the government in order to avoid further complications. The EZLN’s *bridge to the outside* was based on the mobilisation of *Zapatismo*, whose void - an insurgency *without* military insurrection and social movement *deprived* of a feasible national project, but invested with the hope of an undefined democratic future space - was recognised even for the EZLN leader.

(*Le Bot*)-What then is *Zapatismo*? Neo-*Zapatismo*? My hypothesis is that there are three components, a military component, which inherits everything you talked about before January 1, a component that we call social, and a political component. Do you agree?

(*Marcos*)-In my opinion there’s a series of intersections. There’s the *Zapatismo* of the EZLN, with the communities and the combatants. I distinguish between the two because the communities establish relations with the outside through their army, the EZLN, which is a military structure. This is important. *Zapatista discourse and practice* are still marked by a certain military authoritarianism, by certain impatience, let’s say...*Zapatismo* is the *common point*, or the *pretext for converging*...*Zapatismo* has maybe only helped [to] remember that it is worthwhile to struggle, that it’s necessary. For us, it’s important to be very clear on this matter, not to look to create a universal doctrine, to take the direction of a new International or that kind of thing. Especially I believe that in general, that *lack of definition* of *Zapatismo*, it’s particularly important in this case, that we have to maintain it.⁸⁸

The use of concepts from post-Gramscian thought is here, to say the least, remarkable. The Foucauldian and Derridian notions of “practices and discourses” and the emptiness of the notion of *Zapatismo* as an articulatory device all bear an outstanding similarity to the post-

⁸⁷ Quoted by Womack, *Rebellion*, 323. My emphasis.

structuralist thought that allowed Guillén to recreate, along with multiple operations involving non-EZLN activists and a diversity of marginal organisations, both image and identity of the EZLN. The organisation was portrayed as a guerrilla insurgency provided with democratic and allegedly post-modern leanings. Its central empty signifier of it is precisely this understanding of the notion of *Zapatismo* as void of any fixed content. In explaining the category of *empty signifier*, Laclau has related it to the establishment of limits of signifying systems and political boundaries. The ambiguity and void of *Zapatismo* has given a diversity of actors the opportunity to use multiple interpretations as a rhetorical or practical political device.⁸⁹

The EZLN consolidated itself as a point of convergence for “the various excluded”. By creating a sense of inclusiveness, through the general notion of *Zapatismo* and the operations through which this ideology has been a mobilising discourse, the EZLN further elaborated the indigenous question as a nodal point of its interpretation of “civil society” and radical popular will. The indigenous question passed from being the space in which the military option that characterised the EZLN’s original drive was hidden, to becoming the main organising principle upon which that broader notion evolved as the most sophisticated contribution of the far-left in the 1990s. It reached the point of a mythological representation of a radical popular sovereignty. Whereas the issue of *indigenous rights* was the space for negotiation of the political enmity of actors that had become adversaries, *Zapatismo* grew as a “principle of reading” - that is, as a way of understanding and participating in - of Mexican politics for many organisations and individuals who were discontent and contested the dominant rules of the partisan system of political representation.

The EZLN represented, in the initial presidential reading of the conflict - 1 January to 3 January -, a sort of “absolute threat”. Afterwards, and despite the successful framing of the conflict, *Zapatismo* became a place of collapsed differences among those radically opposed to the regime, and gave them a variety of rhetorical tools to challenge the PRI and, later, the

⁸⁸ Laclau has insisted, for instance, that the notions of democracy or order acquire meaning only through political struggles and when a sense of lack is developed and articulated by political actors.

PAN. However, while accepting the *desecuritized* EZLN presence, the strengthening of the internal security system took place.

The mutual effects of the government/insurrectionary interaction engendered a new political frontier, in general, and an original *internal security limit* in particular. The norm posed by the post-1994 non-military behaviour of the EZLN and the low-counterinsurgent practices developed by the state was accompanied by a new standard. This was understood by the political class *and* society, which had been able to mobilise insurgents' interventions as reasons for the reorganisation of its security. The new "enemy within" was devoid of its "traditional" insurrectionary character and transformed into the radical difference acceptable to the system.

Within security institutions, the government and the political class at large, those who were unable to reorganise their vocabulary in the face of the government/EZLN dialogue and, more broadly, in relation to the interaction between the notions of order and emancipation, lost out in the political accommodations that developed in the 1993-2003 period. That happened with segments of the left forces, either partisan or armed groups, which did not relocate themselves in a post-1994 environment that requested a vocabulary of negotiated legality and a broader understanding of the nature of social movements and the formation of insurgent identities. Thus, paradoxically, the state strengthened itself by internalising its weaknesses - recognising the EZLN as interlocutor and signing agreements with it through the government -, these being the result of its inability to completely defuse the insurgent threat as a discourse available for new iterations. However, if it did not eliminate the conditions for its symbolic success and reproducibility, security actors and the state framed it as a difference acceptable within the system. At the same time, the EZLN provided long-term evidence of the government's need to continually empower the internal security state and evidence of the possibilities of radical struggles by empowering those activists and "peoples" always looking for a myth to believe in, more universal than its particular and daily life grievances.

⁸⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation (s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 38-9.

2.4 Contribution to the regime: a new frontier with *an insurgent standard*

The partisan left was negatively affected by the EZLN, according to the evaluations made by some of its leaders after the 1994 federal elections and polls.⁹⁰ Simultaneously, the security system was reorganised.

By the end of March 1994, a set of stabilising elements was established. It comprised:

1) The military advancement *at the edge* of the EZLN's area of influence - and in February 1995 *inside* it;

2) The displacement of the secretary of governance, the appointment of a presidential representative for dialogue with the insurgents and two days later, on 12 January 1994, a unilateral declaration of cease-fire;

3) An amnesty law that was approved by all parties and allowed the EZLN a peculiar status as a legal political actor, passed on 20 January 1994; a 1995 reconciliation law that mandated the dialogue; and the 1996 *San Andrés Accords* that gave political space to the government/insurgents interaction;

4) The strengthening of the electoral option, engendered within the political parties as a response to the uprising, and supported by the population at large;

5) A troublesome dialogue, framing the discussion on specific indigenous rights and demands constructed around the notions of justice and dignity. By it, the insurgent-government divide acquired institutionality and was contained.

In terms of the new security moves, of particular note was the immediate reorganisation within the army that was provoked by the uprising as much as those specific measures recommended, for instance, in the Defence Ministry's "Chiapas 94" programme and

⁹⁰ See, Leonardo Curzio, *La gobernabilidad en el México contemporáneo*, specially the sub-heading *Liberalización o transición?*, <http://www.cidob.es/castellano/Publicaciones/Afers/40-41curzio.html>, downloaded on October 2002. Also, Denise Dresser, *Mexico: The Decline of Dominant-Party Rule*, in *Constructing Democratic Governance*, by Jorge Domínguez et.al., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1996), 160-2. In commenting the 1994's electoral results, Pablo Gómez, a relevant figure within the PRD affirmed: "now they all voted...but against us (the partisan left)", August 1994.

in the *Mexican Army and Air Force Development Programme*.⁹¹ The latter involved proposals for unit reorganisation and creation, renovation of the military distribution system, review of military education and introduction of skills to understand contemporary civilian values, upgrading military capabilities when dealing with intelligence and counter-intelligence, a new geographic and strategic focus and a new public image, among other measures that entailed administrative reordering and a revamping of the promotion process. According to Camp (1999), “the importance of the military in national security has increased as the national security agenda has shifted from external to internal concerns”.

However, I consider indispensable to qualify this affirmation. First, I claim that this process of a prevailing internal dimension corresponds not just to the military, but to the whole apparatus of the state in matters of “national security”. Second, it did not begin in the 1980s, when the readjustment of the financial model and the rearrangement of the political elite within the PRI gave rise to a new generation of political technocrats, but is traceable to the foundations of the post *Mexican Revolution* regime.⁹² Finally, there is no “shift” that occurred as a response to the 1994 revolt, or the 1996 subsequent developments that will be commented on in the next chapter; but instead *a process of intensification of the existent internal security state*, made visible and unwittingly broadened by the EZLN’s revolt.

Historically, along with the army, civilian institutions have jointly participated in the evaluation, surveillance and operations in the neutralisation of insurgent actors. They have never acted against an external “threat” beyond the US identification of enemies, which is tantamount to saying that the internal dimension of the discourse of “national security” has been prevalent for eight decades.

⁹¹ Ignacio Rodríguez, *El Financiero*, 25 and 26 September 1995. See also Ai, Camp Roderic, *Militarizing Mexico, Where is The Officer Corps Going*, Washington, Policy papers on the Americas, Volume X, Study I, 15 (January 1999).

⁹² The “national security” institutions have antecedents in the Ministry of the Interior’s *Sección Primera* (1918); in the Confidential Department and Office of Political and Social Investigations (1925); the Confidential Department (1928); the Political and Social Investigations Department (1938); the Political and Social Investigations General Directorate, DGIPS (1948-1950); the Federal Directorate of Security, DFS (1947); the Investigation and National Security Directorate, joining the DFS and the DGIPS (1985); and the Investigation and National Security Centre, CISEN (1989). Domestic issues were always the core of their concerns.

Also, it is useful to consider the review and bolstering of the institutions in charge of national security, namely the CISEN (Investigation and National Security Centre), which changed the directorate and increased its budget by 13 per cent, between 1994 and 1995; and 85 per cent between 1994 and 2000.⁹³ The army and the navy increased, respectively, their budget in 1995 by 44.7 and 44.9 in comparison to 1994.⁹⁴

The EZLN's intervention stimulated the tasks undertaken within the Army *Sección Segunda*, in charge of political intelligence, and reinforced the Naval Intelligence.⁹⁵ It is prominent that during the last segment of the Salinas administration, and the first three years of the Zedillo administration, there was a) military interest in organising sectors of the civilian population critical of and actively opposed to the EZLN; b) initiatives for the training and support of self-defence forces and/or "paramilitary" organisations against the EZLN and other guerrilla groups; c) more authority granted to public safety forces, making them responsible for the containment of popular organisations; d) deployment of increasing PR operations, i.e. the labours of military counter-insurgency mixed with intensified provision of social services; and e) the attempt to limit the influence of non-governmental organisations generally sympathetic to the EZLN.⁹⁶

The official creation of a rapid reaction force exclusively for Chiapas, in 1994, was another indicator of the reorganisation unleashed by the EZLN's military intervention. A variety of low-profile counter-insurgency operations were visible through the reorganisation of the Special Forces, from 1 June 1995. The creation of the Military School of Special Forces on 16 April 1998 followed and, from 1 January 2002 onwards, the reorganisation of the Special Forces Air Transport Group (GAFE) into Brigades and Battalions of Special Forces occurred.⁹⁷ The Secretariat of Governance was reorganised in order to facilitate its broader co-ordination of the agenda of internal security. The presence of the army and

⁹³ Sergio Aguayo, *El Almanaque mexicano*, México, Proceso-Grijalbo, 2000, 147. From 515 million pesos in 1994 to 583 in 1995 and up to 954 in 2000.

⁹⁴ See Carlos Acosta, *Desde el levantamiento de Chiapas, febril modernización y equipamiento del ejército*, Proceso, 4 August 1996.

⁹⁵ Comments during the INAP *Diplomado sobre Seguridad Nacional* 1999.

⁹⁶ A version of this "plan" was published by Proceso, 4 January 1998.

political intelligence in the General Attorney's Office, the Navy Foreign Affairs and even local governments and secretariats from the social and economic sectors, was emphasised over the following ten years.

In December 1995, the Congress decreed a general law through which the Coordination of the National System of Public Safety was reorganised.⁹⁸ As a consequence, "public safety" was highlighted as a direct function of the state. It became a euphemism in referring to the general operation that formally intensified the internal security system. The EZLN, in 1994, and the EPR (Popular Revolutionary Army), in 1996, gave impetus to the creation of a diversity of institutions in charge of safety and security, such as the Preventive Federal Police (PFP), which was constituted in 1998 and formalised in 1999. The institutional emergence of the PFP - on 4 January 1999 - can be considered part of the framework within which functions previously regarded as "national security" and those of "public safety", frequently began to appear as overlapping operations. It is at this intersection that internal security becomes blurred, on a terrain within which openly counter-insurgent operations, and those related to the priorities of a merely public-safety system, are combined.⁹⁹

The enhancement of the co-ordination between army and civilian security actors also included, immediately after the 1994 revolt, intensification of the surveillance of radical groupings. For instance, at the end of the Salinas administration, the new president, Ernesto Zedillo, received a full report on what would become the nucleus of the EPR in 1996: the Procup-PDLP. This was the result of a combined investigation, in the context of that reorganisation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ http://www.sedena.gob.mx/ejto/adiestra/adto_fe.html#antec. Downloaded on 22 June 2003.

⁹⁸ A decree on 26 April 1994 has already established this framework. It was reformulated on 21 November 1995 and again modified to reorganise it as part of the new Secretariat of Public Safety on February 2001, during the Fox administration.

⁹⁹ See *Qué es la Policía Federal Preventiva*, in *La Revista Peninsular*, 17 September 1999. And the Official Decree, corresponding to the coming of the PFF on *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, 4 January 1999. "To guarantee, maintain and re-establish order and public peace" are at the core of the justification for the PFP.

¹⁰⁰ See Salinas, *México*, chapter 28, curiously under the sub-heading *Agosto de 1993, reforzamos el programa social*, (August 1993, it translates as "we enhanced the social programme").

At the end of his administration, Salinas boasted that he had impeded the EZLN from gaining the status of a belligerent force after *desecuritising* the conflict, that is, after dissolving the shared perception of danger by the elite and society at large.¹⁰¹

What must also be emphasised is the appointment of generals and more than 400 military chiefs and middle level personnel in public safety positions, even in Mexico City and federal institutions, since 1996.¹⁰² The reorganisation and widening of the National Security cabinet is also a related event.

Beyond these operations was the persistent broadening and refinement of a fundamentally military approach to internal security, with the nuances of a new generation of professionals in charge. For instance, security priorities used to be designed basically by the core of the political elite. In a limited way, but in contrast to previous practices, the internal security agenda began to be informally shared by the main political parties, as happened when the Congress supported the amnesty law on 20 January 1994. Although, it must be said, even in 2004 there still does not exist a legal framework similar to the American “National Security Act” of 1947, or a congressional commission in charge of supervising security institutions.

Additionally, at the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the United States’ reorganisation of its own security agenda, domestic cases of a clearly insurrectionary and/or extreme radical politics¹⁰³ were considered in a different context. This has influenced the conceptualisation of the Mexican security agenda. However, the internal intensification of the security state seems fundamentally to be a direct effect of the revolt only after 1994.

According to security authorities, neither the revolt in Chiapas nor the initially subversive character of the EZLN determined the CISEN priorities or the Mexican state’s

¹⁰¹ Ibid., chapters 27 and 28.

¹⁰² Alberto Nájjar, *Los riesgos de la batalla militarizada*, in *Masiosare, La Jornada*, 15 August 1999. After the creation of the PFP this tendency has seemingly diminished.

¹⁰³ Being the element of differentiation between the two, the direct appeal and use of political violence with open use of weapons against state institutions, in the case of insurrectionary identities, and the “respect for all forms of struggle including arms” in the latter, which may imply acceptance of the legitimacy of the guerrilla and the eventual but not necessarily underground connections with guerrilla movements.

general framework on security, but acted as a catalyst within a notion of national security that had been worked on for several years.¹⁰⁴

Despite the fact that these changes were in process since the late 1980s, and were not entirely related to the Chiapas conflict,¹⁰⁵ it was only the uprising that gave momentum to new conceptualisations and institutional projects related to security actors when dealing with internal “threats”.

In summary, the central elements of the intensification of the security state after the 1994 revolt have been: more visible deployment of troops; transfer of law enforcement functions to the army or the placement of military officers in police organisations; increase in equipment procurement and training budgets for the military, increased training of Mexican soldiers in foreign schools or by foreign military personnel; the deep reorganisation of the intelligence community and the insertion of an overlapping and ambiguous area of “public safety”; when the internal order affected by radical actors is addressed.¹⁰⁶ More than ever, the civilian elite focused on maintaining social order and overcoming local uprisings with the advantage of having a symbolic referent that is invoked just before the security discourse may be re-deployed: i.e. the EZLN.

The EZLN’s emergence provided the hard-liners of the regime with the argument to launch a whole reorganisation of the security system as the 11 September 2001 attack did within the US security community. If the military did not respond to the EZLN in a traditional form, as was the case in South and Central America over three decades, this was because of

¹⁰⁴ My interview with former CISEN director, Jorge Tello Peón, 18 March 2003. This declaration must be seen as an illustration of a trend rather than its confirmation. For managing interviews with security - and I suggest also with insurgent - actors, see Davies, Philip, *Spies as Informants: Triangulation and the Interpretation of Elite Interview Data in the Study of the Intelligence and Security Services*, in *Politics (Suverys, Debates and Controversies in Politics)*, Volume 21 Number 1, (February 2001).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See for instance Graham Turbiville, *Mexico’s Evolving Security Posture*, in *Military Review*, (May-June 2001) in <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/english/MayJun01/turb.asp> and, by the same commentator from the Foreign Military Studies Office in Kansas where Fort Leavenworth is, these pieces: *Mexico’s Other Insurgents*, in *Military Review* Volume LXXVII, (May-June 1997). *Mexico’s Multimission Force for Internal Security*, in *Military Review* (July-August 2000), in <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/english/JulAug00/turbiville.asp> and centrally, for an overview on the reshaping of federal and state police organisations, see *US Army on Law Enforcement and the Mexican Armed Forces* (April 1997), in http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/usa/army_on_mex_army_apr97.html. In Chapter 4 and 5 the role of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) will be addressed.

the combination of the modern character of the core of the political elite, the popular pressure, the 1994 electoral process, the interest in becoming part of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), the nationalistic nature of the army and the effective capacity of the elite to determine the frame from which the conflict would have to be seen and negotiated. I consider the EZLN's acceptance of the dialogue as its best option in a conflict whose boundaries were defined by the political elite in the first two months of 1994 and whose nature was also widely taken advantage of by *Marcos* and his advisers. The EZLN won the symbolic fight because it could creatively respond to its military and political defeat. Nonetheless, in the process, it provoked the intensification of the security state which, as a whole, as an embodiment of the interest of the plurality of forces of the political class, was uninterested in and impeded from responding by traditional means.

Drawing on the idea that every identity is referential and unavoidably related to that which it excludes, an alternative understanding of national security might be grounded in an analysis of radical actors claiming to be representative of "the people" in opposition to the notion of the government speaking on behalf of "the nation" or the state. Recognising the primacy of the "internal" core of the current notion of "national security", and how the Chiapas conflict made it more visible than ever, can contribute to explaining seemingly contradictory events which occurred in the last ten years. The internal security discourse can be understood, then, as the discourse uttered by a coalition of hegemonic forces with the power to shape the limits of what internal challengers can do. Insurrectionary discourse should also be perceived as a hegemonic attempt to universalise a concrete set of demands, initially, by armed means. *Zapatismo* has provided the EZLN with such a mythical space. The *Mexican Revolution* used to have a similar function for security institutions. However, unlike the PRI or even the PAN, the EZLN has been unable to become a *social imaginary*, which it claims to be uninterested in. Moreover, in the moment in which it decided to form part of a partisan coalition it lost its basic rebellious identity.

The EZLN did become a military contained organisation and a successful myth, seemingly self-contained, in the ten years subsequent to the 1994 revolt. In fact, the regime's

regained hegemony was reflected in those facts and in the reconstitution of sedimented practices embodied in security institutions. The political class mobilised these when speaking on behalf of the nation's security. The EZLN, even when able to engage in a democratic exchange, did not represent a feasible alternative to the national option. At best, it may be seen as a critique to the nation's negative to recognise its limits in addressing issues of misery and democratic representation. To the extent that an indigenous identity has been considered only as part of the nation and not as a competing identity, and because the methods of the EZLN have not gained widespread acceptance, the EZLN's fate seems rather limited, especially in the eventual absence of *Marcos*. Moreover, the EZLN's uncomfortable radicalism has been, in the end tolerable. Besides, the EZLN has ensured, through rhetoric and inability, that a national aspiration for power is erased from its non-partisan project. Nevertheless, in becoming a unique available space of inscription for other guerrilla groups, radical popular organisations and a variety of new identities, the EZLN is the most sophisticated, *desecuritized* and self-limited insurgent *myth* in recent Mexican history. Despite its relevance, it is most unlikely that it will transform itself into the *status quo* or the norm beyond *Las Cañadas*, or even within "indigenous politics". Even more so, it is useful to the regime as much as it is to its members.

Henceforth, insurgencies will be understood in this research as radical communities fighting to redefine popular sovereignty. They have usually been referred to as "efforts to obtain political goals by an organised and primarily indigenous group (or groups) using protracted, irregular warfare and allied techniques."¹⁰⁷ Both definitions can be enriched by the incorporation of recognising the primacy of the ideological technique called *propaganda* and media presence. These being the specific form and a concrete terrain of ideological struggle, they have become indispensable for inserting in the public imagination the existence of an

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Scott, et. al., *Insurgency* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1970). The definition given there excludes "sudden coups, short lived outbreaks of violence, or invasion by nonindigenous guerrilla forces". The second aspect would be interesting to look at in the Mexican experience. It may be said that the insurgent side of any seemingly inactive guerrillas (such as the EZLN or the EPR and its splinters and new generations of sympathisers) is kept in suspension while

available emancipatory centre of resistance and self-defence. In this conception, a *moral insurrection* can be fought against any regime. Insurgencies, hence, can be understood as a radical defence of a popular will, fighting for the institution of a new popular sovereignty by the *use*, or *threat of use*, of political violence, whose meaning is propagandistically negotiated in the public space: the insurgent strives to be accepted as a moral-political actor.¹⁰⁸

In the political space emblematised by the 1994 political frontier, unarmed operations, whatever their apparent radicalism, are accepted. This acceptance seems to entitle the state to incessantly strengthen its capabilities to respond to them, without having the obligation to be accountable to the people. The “people” - the contemporary *sovereign* represented by the Congress - is a space of engagement for all those speaking in their name in the battlefield of “civil society”, through ideological dispute that is fundamentally visible via the communities participating in it and the media.

The negotiated clash of political agents and institutions might symbolise, paradoxically, a limit in which a certain dichotomy of disruption and domestication is present. It represents an “acceptable limit” for any political organisation in relation to questions of internal security, insurrectionary movements and the tone and actual content of the tensions between antagonistic or adversarial forces facing the government. On the EZLN’s side this frontier was constructed as a result of a series of displacements and reorganisation of three crucial notions: “the indigenous”, “civil society” and “power”. I have focused on the first of

new coalitions, political environment, underground activities, tasks of survival, reorganisation of the project, etcetera, are taking place.

¹⁰⁸ Without such a perceived quality scholars could not possibly join the defence of the EZLN, see for instance, Adam Morton, *La Resurrección del Maíz; Some Aspects of Globalisation, Resistance and the Zapatista Question*, paper presented at the 42 Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Chicago, 20-4 (February, 2004), 4. “After all, one cannot speak for the subaltern but only with the subaltern”, this left aside the question of who, for example, would be the subaltern of the EZLN in the region. Interestingly, this being a sophisticated essay, it does not even consider the fact that the Salinas decision of modifying the article 27 of the Constitution - to end the redistribution of land and regarded as a central triggering factor of the uprising - was decided in accordance with most of the organisations integrated in what was called the *Congreso Agrario Permanente* (CAP) including the UNORCA, mentioned by him as a basically contestatarian organisation. He loses the opportunity to critically address the Salinas’ intervention, namely, the ideological valuation of his strategic decisions. He also makes an error when affirming that the FLN moved into Chiapas in 1983, when in fact was there since the early 1970s. Leaving aside other aspects, his defence of the extreme fluidity of the Chiapas conflict is important and in consequence, it becomes a key reading of his essay the following: that one can assume as central the extreme fluidity of identities.

these because of its relevance and alleged novelty. On the government's side, what was implied was the reorganisation of its security institutions and public policy. This limit may as well represent a limit of "democracy" as generally understood by the main liberal authors, and "extremism" as a radical challenge to a hegemonic political pact.

In short, the failed EZLN military uprising and the symbolically successful notion of a mythical *Zapatismo*, in which other popular struggles had their space of inscription represented, thanks to dropping the call to arms, *constituted a standard*. In a country whose elite is able to reorganise itself through an electoral redistribution of power, capable of institutionally framing military deployments and able to keep a stable relationship with the United States, any insurgent attempt will be confined to an ideological "war of positions" as opposed to the Gramscian war of movement. From that point on, no organisation would be allowed to exceed the frontier that was heralded by the EZLN marks of presence and absence within the system. This landmark, since 1994, has overlapped the limit of internal security and insurgencies after the intensification and refinement of the internal security state.

Conclusion

Since society made visible its utter estrangement from both insurgent violence and military repression, elements of insurgent and security actors' identities were reordered, concealed and displaced. *Zapatismo*, an ideological device around which the coexistence of a social movement in tension with an insurrectionary origin began its constitution, has allowed the EZLN to become a space of reading and advocacy for other struggles.

After military defeat, relative political failure, and a symbolic success, variously reinterpreted by an important, but nationally marginal, sympathetic segment of society, the EZLN became a long-standing *myth*. This is because it defended a perpetual *rebellious* identity: it was not able to seize power by insurrectionary means and, very much in consequence, became "uninterested" in it in the way that a *revolutionary* agent might be. This increased its acceptability. Notwithstanding this, it still exercises power in *Las Cañadas*. Its radical iteration of *Zapatismo* materially consists in the forced redistribution of land and the

administration of more than 30 “autonomous municipalities”. This represented a re-appropriation of the ideological dispute on the meaning of the social and plurality of the nation, usually monopolised by the regime around historical figures and radical projects such as that of Emiliano Zapata.

The troubled dialogue initiated in February 1994 and the fact that the EZLN has authority in an area of Chiapas is evidence of the unresolved tension between two competing notions of sovereignty and two de facto sources of authority *within* the state. As a result of the unusual interaction between the EZLN and the government a new relatively stable political frontier was built in 1994, through the creation of *indigenous people* as a space of political negotiation and contestation. The intensification of the internal security state was also legitimised by it. This political boundary is the temporary limit of what the political elite and society in Mexico seems to be able to put up with when dealing with insurgent actors. The crux of that frontier is the negotiated clash between discourses of national security and insurgency, in which the government and society constructed the EZLN as *an extreme standard of the acceptable* prior to the necessitation of invoking the operations of the internal security state.

The EZLN become a self-contained myth. That is, a space of inscription of radical struggles under the condition of being unarmed and able to persuade broader audiences that its “ignoble” origins, as a radical project that justified internal and external executions and the exclusion of alternative projects in Chiapas, had been displaced.

The EZLN is an oscillation between an insurrectionary agent and a radical popular movement that has obliged the political class to institute an ambiguous relation to it. It could be said that two logics showed its relevance in the aftermath of the revolt.

A) A *stabilising logic*, established around the new expectations for the electoral process and the ability of the dominant group to regain legitimacy and strength, backed by the intensification of the internal security system and improvement of the democratic system in the country with the most stable institutions in Latin America. It is a logic traceable to a re-fixing of the notion of stability and the partial association of threat, not to what the EZLN

represented by itself, but to what it could have represented if it had been successful in creating a generalised organic instability, in uniting opposition forces and in representing *at the national level* the conditions of possibility for an insurrection, which originally gave to the EZLN a local existence and guaranteed its hazardous political survival as a national and international reference.

B) A *democratising logic*, around which the initial popular response to the political definition of what should be done by the government and the constant re-fixing of notions such as civil society, democracy and justice, and dignity was made clear. The EZLN developed the mythical notion of *Zapatismo*, as a sophisticated empty place where all forms of popular struggles could have space, or a point of reference against the regime, as part of its project to get connected with “civil society”. In its military and political failures (the 1994 National Democratic Convention was not continued; the minimal effectiveness achieved by its civilian wing, the FZLN; and the limiting of its activity to the boundaries given by the 1994 agreement and the 1996 enforcement of the dialogue, for instance), the EZLN became a myth of resistance after reorganising the notion of *indigenous people* and *Zapatismo*. Its symbolic success as a principle of reading and space of an imagined popular project can paradoxically be seen as a *successful failure* in creating “the people” and “the democracy to come”.

As a result, the initially subverting presence of *an available insurrectionary discourse* is open for new interpretations or iterations, in the Derridean sense. The use of a frame in which a frontier of two antagonistic discourses has been constituted, those coming from internal security actors and insurgent organisations, might be put forward. The identity of the state and the character of the insurrectionary actors, seem to be in relentless modification without overstepping the defined mark. This has been useful for the regime to be able to signal at what point other groups might be prosecuted and repressed; it has enabled the EZLN to reorganise its long-term strategy.

The appearance of the EZLN in 1994 made visible and intensified the internal character of the national security discourse, by establishing a political frontier between radical

popular agency and governmental politics. In 1996 the emergence of the EPR would have to be the strongest evidence of the constitution of the accepted frontier between insurgent actors and government institutions. I will dedicate the next chapter to this theme.