

Chapter 4

Unpalatable Threat: Students Unaware of the 1994 EZLN's Lessons

Despite its best intentions the 1999-2000 student movement favoured the refinement of the internal security state by engendering the sense of “threat” followed by an accepted and expected security forces intervention. In the previous two chapters I have claimed that the interaction between the government and the EZLN created space for the reconstitution of the insurgent discourse as acceptable contestation and caused a dramatic intensification of the internal security discourse. I have also argued that the EPR's emergence in 1996 threatened the security/insurgency divide accepted then as an agreed interaction. It also contributed to the reactivation of the security institutions, particularly by catalysing the plans for the creation of the PFP. In this chapter I will put forward the claim that neutralised insurgent discourses may still be iterated and construed as “threats” to the political system. I consider that if the moment of concealment of the politics of exclusion is not achieved, conditions for public refusal of rebellious identities are created. As a consequence, when a sense of threat is shared by a community, security actors legitimise themselves and support the strengthening of the regime because of the mistakes of radical actors.

In this chapter the articulation of the student movement's discourse with an invoked insurrectionary logic is explored. This is relevant to the wider argument that since 1994 radical movements in Mexico have not transgressed, but rather confirmed the political frontier established in the aftermath of the Chiapas revolt. Moreover, they have been related with the intensification and reactivation of the internal security discourse. At the same time, as the student movement illustrates, some radical organisations iterated aspects of the available insurgent discourses as means of resistance. I will show that important to the link between the identity of the student movement and its *securitisation* was the sheer visibility of the politics of exclusion that the student movement resorted to. The movement's inability to understand the political environment of Mexico City and to learn from the EZLN's lessons - namely, how to conceal controversial elements

associated with political violence and to reorganise its discourse around acceptable attitudes - limited its potential as contributor to a legitimate discussion on the fracture of the public education as a social mobility tool accessible to lower strata. Its exacerbated antagonism would prevent the movement from better representing the broader struggle associated with socio-economic stagnation and marginalisation of the lower-middle strata. The student movement was rebellious and uncompromising as opposed to the EZLN's constrained rebelliousness, embodied in the fact of dropping the openly insurrectionary attitude of the first days of 1994. The particular demand from which the student movement emerged, that is the raising of fees, was promptly subordinated to the seemingly hidden aim of unleashing a national conflict as a space for radical antagonism with the regime. A singular element emerged in the process of the intensification of the internal security discourse: the final decision in relation to it was supported by a diversity of communities that felt threatened by it.

Unlike the EZLN, the student movement was reluctant to engage with the regime because it was thought to be damaging to the pretence of an illusory absolute transparency. I will stress the students' exclusionary techniques for defining its identity as the crux of the 1999-2000 crisis. As a consequence of their visibility society refused the movement and became an object of the national security agenda. I will argue that the disinclination of the UNAM's majority towards the movement, the administration's reluctance to hand over "the principle of authority", the proximity of the 2000 federal elections and the movement's intransigence were crucial factors in the intervention of security forces in February 2000.

I consider that *acceptance* and survival of any insurgent identity, contrary to what seems to be common sense, depends on its cautious relation to mainstream politics and the basic political frontiers through which the identities of the main actors are defined. In order to develop my argument, I will periodize the student movement according to what I regard as the General Council of Strike's (CGH, *Consejo General de Huelga*) two main phases. I start from the assumption that in confronting the authorities

the student movement identity was constituted. One phase starts with the strike on 20 April 1999 and finishes at the point when which the emeritus professors presented an alternative arrangement to break the impasse between the authorities and the student movement on 27 July. The second phase began with the movement's rejection of the proposed arrangement in August, and ends when the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) reclaimed the UNAM's campus on 6 February 2000.

The first stage posits the student movement as a new political subject. It includes the announcement of the proposal for the establishment of a new General Regulation of Fees (RGP) on 11 February 1999, its withdrawal by UNAM's authorities in June up to August's rejection of the *Emeritus Professors'* conciliatory proposal. The second stage ranges from the intransigence associated with this rejection and the visibility of the tension between the movement and the local and federal authorities in charge of public safety and the national security institutions, up to the intervention of the PFP. At this stage rhetorical displacements registered by the EZLN and the EPR in relation to the movement are considered part of the broader argument that the EZLN came to be regarded as a model for politically acceptable insurgent-like organisations but also became an available discourse liable to multiple iterations from self-styled resistance communities.

4.1 Stage one: dislocation and antagonism

In response to the initiative for increasing fees presented on 11 February 1999, the highest UNAM's formal highest authority, the University Council, passed the proposal to modify the General Regulations of Payments (RGP). The decision triggered UNAM's longest student strike since the consolidation of the PRI regime in the late 1920s.

As other rectors had also tried to do, Francisco Barnés addressed the thorny issue of restraining the breach between a massive university and the quality of the studies given in the UNAM by increasing the four-decades standing fees, among other measures.

He proposed that the almost free university would be so only for those lacking economic resources.¹ The new fees would allegedly contribute to “serve the university alumni”. They would be utterly directed “to support their formation and improve the educational services offered by the institution”.²

The plan was based on the argument that privileging economic disadvantages as admission criteria would endanger UNAM’s task to contribute to the social mobility associated with university education. According to Barnes, “the immolation of academic quality and the sacrifice of the capacity to compete would dissolve our institution without making any notch in the injustice gap”.³

UNAM’s attempt was interpreted as a dislocatory event by the leaders of a number of dispersed nuclei of activists. First, it was perceived as an attack on the quasi-gratuitous UNAM’s educative offer. Second, it was read as the hidden intention to privatise the 268-thousand-student university. Finally, it was construed by the leaders as a site for a confrontation with the local and the federal government. In that framework, the student reaction was an attempt to polarise a society whose elite segments, were blamed for social deprivation and the collapse of the student expectation of social mobility promised to public university students. Scientific, social and political expectations had

¹ The most economically favoured students would pay a fee equivalent to the current value of 136 dollars per year in the senior high school level and 204 dollars per year at the undergraduate level. By means of the taxes collected by the federal government, students would continue paying the semester fee of 0.02 cents of dollar. The criteria, which the new model was based on, was constructed around the idea of the maintenance of the budgetary commitment of the federal government, the insertion of a sense of co-responsibility of the graduates, the cooperation of the alumni currently enrolled, the new generations’ contribution and the general aim that any student should not be prevented from studying at university because of lack of financial resources.

² The rector’s speech *Universidad Responsable, Sociedad Solidaria*, was presented during the exposition of the modification proposal, 11 February 1999. The rector’s proposal thus vindicated both the principle of social mobility in a restricted financial environment and the federal obligation of the state to support of the higher education. The new scheme could have represented 4 per cent of the total budget of UNAM, around 40 million dollars of fresh resources and 100 per cent more than the regular budget utilized by colleges and schools (General Direction of Planning and Budget, UNAM, November 1998). The plan was initially presented on 8 May 1998 as a mechanism to improve the financial situation of the institution and to achieve the “dissolution of the dilemma between the modernity of knowledge and the poverty gap” characteristic of Mexican society.

³ Barnes’ comments during presentation of the *Development Plan* and of the *Work Programme of the UNAM*, 6 May 1998.

vanished and the relevance and prestige of private university increased.⁴ At the core of the students' antagonistic⁵ construction of the event was a dispute over the signifier "public education". The debate concerning its specificity became part of the struggle for the nature of the national project. More importantly in the context of my argument, the radical student discourse never excluded the armed groups' rhetoric. Conversely, it invoked them as part of the representation of its controversial struggle.

The social base of the 1999-2000 movement was provided by a generation of impoverished students, mostly alien to partisan politics⁶ that interpreted their social condition as part of a national deprivation. The leaders had been partly activists marginalised by the CEU (Student University Council) experience⁷ and its inheritors. Moreover, they were representative of radical projects ignored by the regime, set aside by UNAM's authorities and by broader internal communities in the university and despised or disregarded by the partisan left. Rank and file and leaders of the movement made the regime responsible for its political and social marginalisation and spoke on behalf of those lacking the cultural and social symbols of the more stable middle classes.

The discursive threads available to the movement and the rhetoric to be exploited by the more experienced activists⁸ consisted of residues from the liberal tradition and also elements closer to partisan leftist and radical leftist positions. In the second stage, the

⁴ Carlos Monsiváis, *1968-1999: La comparación inevitable, 1968: Ideología y sentido del porvenir in Deslinde, La UNAM a debate* by Nelia Tello, José Antonio de la Peña y Carlos Garza, (México, Cal y Arena-Escuela Nacional de Trabajo Social, 2000). See also *La Huelga sin Fin* in *Proceso* Edición Especial # 5, 1 December 1999.

⁵ The construction and experience of social antagonism is central to Discourse Theory as developed by the Essex School headed by Ernesto Laclau. In that framework, political identities are defined by articulatory practices through logics of difference and equivalence. Antagonism is the basic technique and the outcome of the process of constructing identities that feel "a blockage" as opposed to the interpretation that political conflict occurs between fully developed political subjects as in Gur's work in the 1970s. Unable to achieve their identities in their fullness political actors construct enemies who are deemed responsible for it. See, Howarth, David, *Discourse* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 105-109.

⁶ The core of the activists was composed of young students aged 15 to 18 years old, presumably unaware of partisan politics and full of schematic prejudices against it. They were part of the high school scheme administered by the UNAM. The rest of the students in the movement were a part of the most politicised schools of the undergraduate system.

⁷ In 1987 the CEU organised a relatively successful strike that lasted nineteen days and become a space for student activism over more than ten years.

student discourse articulated an ideology of resistance taken primarily from the available insurrectionary rhetoric.

With the approval of the University Congress, the sympathy of 65 per cent of the academic staff and only the opposition of the college of Sciences, the *Barnes Plan* was announced and immediately resented in a confused ambience with politicised discourses.

What had been seen by UNAM's authorities and its sympathisers as a proposal ostensibly "sensible", "balanced" and "flexible" was interpreted as an "attempt to privatise the university" and "get rid off of the public obligation to higher education". The *Barnes Plan* became the political site wherein they constructed their antagonistic stance against the authorities first, and later towards the political class and the regime in general. To the students the defence of "public education" became the vindication of "popular and gratuitous education" as an overarching demand intended to interpellate a diversity of communities inside and outside the university.

By seizing academic councils, meetings, and the access to an initially receptive media, the mobilised students began to reverse the ambiguous or scarcely sympathetic perception of the *Barnes Plan* in and outside the university campus.⁹

Schematically referred to as *moderates* and *ultras* within the student assembly, by the media and the political elite, the main polar currents in the movement struggled for its representation and leadership. Their identity was construed around the administration of a tension between those that limited the scope of the movement to the dismantling of *Barnes Plan* and those who wanted to take their antagonism towards a radical project that was reflected by the constant overflowing of the demands originally advocated and

⁸ This was an absolute minority but a very influential sector of them with ages around 30 years old or even more.

⁹ Two weeks after the approval of the new scheme one of the leading papers in Mexico City, *El Universal*, already showed that 38.6 per cent of the interviewees in a poll were in favour of it, 39.8 against it and 21.6 were neutral. It is relevant to observe that the polled sample of the upper segment of society was 63 percent in favour of the scheme while the marginalized sector shared that opinion in 51 percent of the cases. More remarkably, in the sample the middle classes were the most opposed, with 44 percent approval, see *El Universal*, 24 February 1999 and Yolanda de Garay, *Historia de un Movimiento Estudiantil 1999-2001* (Mexico: UNAM digital book, <http://www.biblioweb.dgsca.unam.mx/libros/>, 2002).

shared by the broad majority.¹⁰ The constant broadening of the students' demands, as a core articulatory technique in which intransigence seemed indispensable, and its initial proximity to insurgent discourses, were crucial factors in the public's portrayal of the movement. Early meetings counted with the presence of militants from the EZLN who presented themselves as supporters of the movement. They sang the *Zapatista Hymn* and read a communiqué sent by *Marcos* in which the EZLN's spokesman expressed its solidarity.

On March 8, the students agreed on several measures that portrayed the tone and intensity of its antagonistic attitude. For instance, they summoned the rector to a public dialogue on March 23, called for a stop to activities on March 11 and 24, decided to *impede* the University Congress session and to prepare the student strike.¹¹ In other words, the strike was from the start more a tool necessary to antagonise the authorities' decisions than leverage for creating a negotiating space. In that operation, the internal (student assembly's "minorities") and external (UNAM's authorities) "enemies" became indispensable as sites for deploying a vigilant and massive assertiveness of the students.

4.1.1 A massive minority full of cleavages

The main sources of organised discontent were student interventions from those close to the partisan left - the PRD - and those activists closer to the radical groupings from urban, social movements and, in the extreme and more marginally, inspired by and eventually connected with clandestine organisations.¹² A massive number of members of the

¹⁰ Its components were originally: elimination of the RGP and the annulment of the reforms to the rules on fees. In the first weeks a new demand was added: the separation of UNAM from the evaluation of CENEVAL (National Centre of Evaluation) provided since 1997. This is a centre for the evaluation of the quality of knowledge acquired by students, crucial in order to access higher level education after senior high school and used regularly for authorisation to study overseas.

¹¹ In addition to that, the Student Democratic Coalition (CDE) was formed with students from the old CEU and the RED. In it the CEM and the BUI were not integrated even when such a coalition was presented as an attempt of unity in a rapidly growing jungle of radical small groups.

¹² The pro-PRD students were closer to the remnants of the CEU, among them the Network of University Students (RED) to mention one group, which still invoked the 1987 strike. Those closer to social and radical left were part of a wider variety of activists in organisations such as the Metropolitan Student Council (CEM) and the University Block of the Left (BUI) among several others.

Sciences and Humanities Colleges (CCH) and preparatory schools were present in the movement.¹³ Alongside the intervention of this whole new generation of activists, the dispute over the representation of the assembly's majority, never fully sorted out, were central elements of the movement. On 8 March, the one-day "warm-up" strike called by the CGH in the massive installations of UNAM, deployed mainly in the Mexican Valley in and around Mexico City, counted on support from one third of the university's total population.¹⁴ Two weeks later, during the second shutdown, the main campus in Mexico City was closed and the main entrances barricaded with logs and stones. Out of 36 colleges, 15 worked normally, 15 experienced the *paro*¹⁵ with partial activity. The rest experienced harsh disputes between those who were in favour and those against the measure.¹⁶

The core of the movement decided to encircle the campus, where it lacked an absolute majority. Instead, it had the majority of the politically active students on its side. They did not win over the rest of the student body and they did not create a basic set of accessible ideas beyond the traditional leftist approach seemingly dominant within UNAM. The seeds for a process of internal differentiation, and the scenes that the TV and the press presented as visual evidence of intolerance and physical violence, were hence visible from the start. The authorities and the media negatively recreated the notion that *a minority* of the students had kidnapped a genuine cause for discontent. Despite the

¹³ CCH stands for Sciences and Humanities Colleges, that is, the senior high schools founded in the 1970's to attend the explosive demand of education and to show political commitment in a post-1968 Mexican politics. They were born with elements of a leftist mindset and its resultant politicisation in contrast with the more traditionalistic *preparatorias*. CCH's students comprised around 70 per cent of the students mobilised in favour of the strike and its daily tasks.

¹⁴ Out of 268 thousand students around 90 thousand did not have classes. Out of a total of 36 educative premises 22 worked normally, two partially and 12 stopped totally. Out of the 22 colleges in the undergraduate level, 14 worked normally, two partially and 6 closed completely. See *El Financiero*, 12 March 1999.

¹⁵ See *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, *Financiero*, *Milenio*, *Excelsior*, *El Universal*, and observational accounts of students and teachers, 19 to 22 April 1999.

¹⁶ *La Jornada*, 24 March 1999.

critique, this minority showed that it was massive and determined¹⁷ and took control of UNAM's premises.¹⁸

From the start the rector was unable to respond creatively to the reality presented by the incipient movement. His discourse seemed to mirror the CGH's. To him, those opposed to the changes were "professionals of protest, still inserted in the University, waiting for the slightest opportunity to fracture the institutional frame".¹⁹

The university published the results of its own survey, showing that more than 51 thousand students were opposed to the strike and calling for the CGH to avoid it. Other elements taken from the internal regulations in place since 1997 were introduced as demands making the agenda more complex.²⁰

Seizure of the different campuses occurred on the night of 19 April. There is no evidence of participation of more than one third of the students.²¹ However, the movement certainly did enjoy significant sympathy, even from a non-left segment of the

¹⁷ *La Jornada*, 25 March 1999.

¹⁸ When on 8 April the University Council confirmed its decision to modify the RGP, the rector's response was to expose the redundant defence of an argument that was already situated as the place of an antagonism. He insisted correctly that the gratuitous character of the university did not exist even when fees had been merely emblematic from the 1970s on. Since 1948 they had registered little change; in that year those fees were equivalent to 35 or 45 days of minimum wage and that those fees lacked updating. Nevertheless, the reiteration negated the new political character acquired by the demand.

¹⁹ Rector's speech during the University Council's meeting, 8 April 1999.

²⁰ The CGH asked for the renewal of the *automatic pass* (without exam to the next level as it is applicable when entering the public university) from the high school level to the colleges, the inclusion of the *Preparatoria Popular*, and the possibility to maintain student status indefinitely. They are academically dubious but socially passionate initiatives usually run for mature and highly politicised students and teachers generally on the social and extreme left, these are centres created out of the university's institutionality by some of those who were rejected by UNAM.

²¹ The student standard for initiating a "strike" is clearly below industrial action in Mexico. Usually, an industrial strike needs a clearly majoritarian membership. It is an internal decision, sometimes closely monitored by public auditors. It commonly requires more than a 50 percent favourable vote out of the total enrolment, and occasionally the internal rules in many unions demand a 75 percent supportive vote out of the total registered membership to begin a strike. In the case of the students movements in Mexico, strikes and shutdowns can be and are organized with the use of tools deployed by a determined political leadership, even against the will or without the participation of the actual majority of the student population. The gamble in such cases seems to be on subsequently gaining the sympathy of those who were undecided or else a neutralisation of the opposition. The fact that determined minorities can ignite the mobilizations, the expectation of growth as a national political actor and the construction of a favourable public opinion are factors that favour any mobilization in the short term. My notes and observations, 1980-2000.

university, at least until it was clear that neutralisation and change to the authority's proposal was not the only priority of the CGH's hegemonic faction.

The cluster of dominant groupings transformed its interpretation of radical politics into radical exclusion in relation to those opposed to the strike. It also disregarded the mediations offered by teachers and prominent figures in the university. Those who were perceived as part of a pro-dialogue community - those who belonged to a passive majority of students or who sympathised with the partisan left - were marginalised from the start. From the beginning the CGH's mainstream justified the tone of its alliance strategy by alluding to its glorified reading of the *Zapatista* movement, and more or less secretly stated its respect for other guerrillas such as the EPR and the ERPI, recently emerged in 1997. The CGH radically divided its internal political field in two camps, those supporting radical politics and the strike and all those who opposed to it in the same way that beyond the campus the paratactical division was extended: there were only those against public education or in its favour.

During the first stage of the mobilisations, thousands of students felt interpellated by the CGH's appeal against the *Plan Barnes* and by the antiauthoritarian discourse through which this demand was presented. However, CGH's authoritarian style of doing politics reinserted the great paradox of any insurgent-like movements: in order to create a beloved community, they first create hate-filled reactions and "acceptable exclusions" that allowed a new community to exist as the space of convergence by means of claiming a self-evident truth.²²

²² By April 23, in its march to the Mexican main square - *El Zócalo* - the CGH exhibited the diversity of sympathies and the limits of them. It was accompanied by detachments from other public universities and relevant movements. Among them there were students of the UAM (Metropolitan Autonomous University) and IPN (National Polytechnic Institute). Activists from the social movement *El Barzon* (whose existence was the only limit to the crisis generated by the bankruptcy of the banking system and the federal attempt of privileging the rescue of the bankers in middle 1990s) and from the CNTE (the struggling left in the biggest union in Latin America, the SNTE, for teachers and employees of the federal system) were present. There were as well the Electricians Union, the UNAM's union and a diversity of smaller social organisations and a nucleus of parents.

Today we are thousands. We have won every battle in any school, the force of the arguments, of the reason and of the dialogue among universitarians *it has imposed itself* on the clumsiness and the authoritarianism with which the rector has conducted the University.²³

Certainly, the CGH had not won all of its “battles” only with arguments. Observational accounts and journalistic reports of every sort showed that while in some departments and colleges there was agreement with the strike, in many others it was imposed.

As a result of the CGH’s disgust of the mainstream media coverage, and in a move illustrative of a careless multiplication of its enemies, the first mobilisation protest against a segment of the mainstream media, the network *TV Azteca*, was instigated just nine days after the beginning of the strike. It signalled one of the central problems of the movement. Unlike the EZLN’s media savvy strategy, the CGH’s suffered from a profound inability to construct a useful bridge with the press or to persuade it of the supposed transparency of its method and intentions. For instance, the protest against the allegedly biased coverage, by a four-hour blockage of traffic, caused an unwelcome traffic jam and alienated the particularly sensitive middle class citizens in Mexico City, which was exponentially exposed by the attacked media. Unsuccessfully, the CGH called for a national student strike, which turned out to be rather lukewarm, with support drawn from just a few higher education establishments.²⁴

Some individuals in Mexico City’s administration - controlled by the PRD since 1997 - proved to be connected with the movement as part of the forces influencing it and trying to impede its negative impact on the strategic project of the partisan left.²⁵ The PRD’s leader in the city maintained: “we are not behind the movement but at its side, with solidarity at its side”.²⁶ The hegemonic *ultra*, by polarising it, construed the PRD’s

²³ CGH, speech and communiqué, 23 April 1999.

²⁴ Those were National Pedagogic University (UPN), Anthropology and History National School (ENAH) and University of Sonora. *Marcos* selected ENAH as the place to rest and co-ordinate political activity during his staying in Mexico City during the *Zapatista March* in 2001.

²⁵ *La Jornada*, 28 April 1999.

²⁶ *El Financiero*, Carlos Imaz comment, 30 April 1999.

affair as a mark of distinction against partisan politics. Its disinclination to construct bridges with any authority increased and its disagreement with them as a source of identity was incessantly ratified.²⁷

In that equivalential logic of polarising the political field, the mediations and nuances were marginalised or frankly excluded. For instance, the demanded dialogue was actually rejected by the CGH. On 11 May, the movement prepared itself for “a long strike”. A new march was organised the next day to confirm the point and to show the connection of the movement with other struggles and other colleges, particularly a massive presence from the Colegio de Bachilleres - significantly, high schools outside UNAM’s system overcrowded by lower-income strata.²⁸

UNAM’s strikers constantly blocked the outdoor classes, symbolically closed the places in which these were taking place and over-emphasised the divide with the non-striking students. CGH’s activists impeded final exams in other premises outside UNAM. With the support of many social organisations from the social, urban and rural left, the CGH promoted the conditions of what could be a truly national movement, with the cost of alienating itself from other segments of the student population.²⁹ The link between the particular origin of the strike and its actual addressees outside the university exposed the hegemonic drive of the CGH, as a political space to redefine the relation of popular struggles in contradistinction with any institutional authority.

Unlike the EZLN, the CGH did not construct a space of convergence for non-radicals and was not just unable to hide its “exclusionary ignobility” but boasted about it.

²⁷ Even when the CGH had a “liaison commission” and a segment of the academia created a second “negotiator commission” the bridge was not achieved. The CGH rejected the attempt by insisting in the “direct dialogue” on echoing the tone and vindication of the 1968 movement and the direct dialogue achieved in 1987 by the movement led by the CEU. The very same day that UNAM’s authorities created an “encounter commission” it was rejected by the CGH. The argument was that in it there were only “teachers characterised by their anti-students stance and because they are strike-breakers”. The mechanical analogy to what, in their interpretation, had happened between the EZLN and the government, with a failed dialogue after 1996 and the possibility that it would happen again between UNAM’s authorities and the CGH, was presented as an argument. *La Jornada*, 5 May 1999.

²⁸ *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, 4-20 May 1999.

²⁹ *La Jornada*, 7-17 May 1999.

On May 29 the CGH expanded again the set of demands presented to the authority's Encounter Commission. These were: 1) nullification of the RGP; 2) recuperation of the automatic pass and elimination of the time limit on student's staying in the university; 3) creation of a space for a decisive dialogue; 4) withdrawal of sanctions against strikers and the dismantling of policing bodies in the university; 5) recovering of classes; and 6) suspension of the relation between UNAM and the external organism that evaluates knowledge acquired at UNAM, that is the CENEVAL. Furthermore, four days later the CGH defiantly conditioned the frame of the dialogue. Thus, the CGH should be seen as "the only interlocutor accepted" and the dialogue should "only" touch upon the six points mentioned. Additionally, authorities "must" derogate all the 1997 reforms - related to point 2 above mainly, disbandment of the University Tribunal in charge of imposing sanctions. Remarkably, the contradictory implication was that in the dialogue the negotiation was cancelled beforehand, because "the six points are non-negotiable and their solution does not entail the end of the strike".³⁰

The response given by the University was neither original nor unexpected: in its view the CGH's frame was tantamount to an ultimatum. The rector could not sign a document that entailed the surrender of the institution. Besides the authority's refusal to negotiate its authority, UNAM maintained its intention to continue the outdoor classes. The prestigious academic Ricardo Pozas summarised the authority's position: "the strikers talk about dialogue but its dialogue has the condition of its negation".³¹

In addition to the negative answer given by the rector to the expanded student demands he decided to call the University Council to make a definitive move. On 3 June, Barnes announced that the fees proposed in the RGP would be *voluntary* and the students themselves would determine if they could or could not cover the fees; the authorities in each department would be in the position to extend the semester and the central

³⁰ CGH's agenda, 2 June 1999.

³¹ Garay, C., *Historia de un...op.cit.*, chapter 5, section 5.

administration would accept any measure in that direction. Instead of having a dialogue with the CGH the rector withdrew his proposals: “a dialogue as proposed denies the possibility of agreements in which the different positions be included”.³²

On 7 June the University Council passed the modification proposed by the rector in an explicit retreat from the original position. It had the support of 99 votes, 22 abstentions and four votes against among the university councillors, in a move that was tantamount to a dismantling of the scheme. Henceforth, the CGH engaged in the explicit constitution of a rebellious identity after having achieved its original demand. The movement had acquired momentum through the maintenance of profound internal divisions, with a hegemonic core represented by the multiplicity of *ultras*, and by means of associating UNAM’s authorities, the local government, headed by the PRD, and the federal government, as the enemies of the movement. Notwithstanding its controversial success, the drive to increase the moment of antagonism, and the galloping isolation resulting from its inability to conceal its politics of exclusion, would lead the movement into a cul-de-sac.

4.2 The strike’s midway: intransigence and resistance

In the withdrawal from the original proposal, deployed as a move towards the distension of the student movement, UNAM had shown that it was inclined to give way on its proposal, but not on the source and the structure of its decision-making power. The principle of authority could be mediated but not handed over to the student movement.

The CGH, on the other hand, showed from that moment the limits within which it would operate in the following months: unlike the EZLN had done since February 1994, the movement engaged in the quasi-mechanical reiteration of a rebellious discourse, characterised by a permanent reluctance to effectively articulate itself in a negotiation process. I think that because the CGH imagined itself as an entity that could not survive without radicalising its stand before the multiple currents and groupings within the

³² Rector’s communiqué to the University Community, 3 June 1999.

assembly, it needed to extend the conflict for self-vindication by linking its demands to a broader context and by an extremism that seemed irrational to outsiders. The polarisation of the political scenario was absolutely indispensable to it and not achievement of the original demand. Therefore, the CGH had to create a broader site of confrontation: the national problems as seen from a radical outlook.

The CGH's necessity to constantly radicalise itself against an "enemy" within and outside the movement was combined with the constitution of a sense of victimisation and menace for those inside and outside UNAM who had stepped away from the movement and even took opposite positions, after having originally supported it.

UNAM's decision to withdraw the original proposal created a deep cleavage within the student assembly. Those who thought that the elimination of the scheme to modify fees would end the conflict and open the way to dialogue were not just disappointed but also attacked by the dominant factions in the CGH. By insults, exclusion from directing the assembly and from the movement, relegation or negative association with the "forces against the students", the pro-dialogue activists were marginalised. Incapable of overcoming the *ultra's* determination to link them with the PRD, they were additionally accused of being absent away from the strike's daily activities.

The rector repeatedly called upon the hegemonic *ultras* to return the university premises.

I think that the violent conditions and the use of force are absolutely unacceptable in the university. More so if it is against other students and faculty. And this is so not just against universitarians that are not in favour of the strike and who have continued its activities outdoors as has occurred once and once again, but recently against students originally sympathetic to the movement. Those who are persuaded that the solution is already given for the end of the strike are not just threatened but assaulted.³³

Organisations that originally sympathised with the strike, such as the Plural Researchers Commission (CPI), asked the CGH to end its "intransigent attitude",

³³ *La Jornada*, 23 April 1999, quoted in Garay, op.cit., chap 6.1

demanded dialogue and considered that the original causes of the strike had been resolved.³⁴ Other groups of academics regarded the decision in the University Council as proof to the students that the fees were henceforth voluntary and that negotiation about university problems was possible. In their view, social commitment and enhancing academic life, which were principles advocated by the student movement, might now be better pursued by attending the forums for analysis proposed by the authorities.³⁵ The estrangement from the movement had begun.

With the argument that there was not any guarantee that in the future the fees could not be imposed again, the CGH dismissed the authorities' retreat and reduced it to a conspiracy created to divide the CGH. "The proposal of voluntary fees from Mister Rector Francisco Barnes is a provocation to try to divide the student movement".³⁶

As a consequence of the displacement of the central demand the CGH advanced a more general claim corresponding to a broader confrontation with the state through the defence of "the public university". The tension between the particular and original demand and the universalistic impetus to confront the federal and local authorities shook the precarious and contested unity acquired by the movement and created the conditions for its further radicalisation and eventual defeat.³⁷

Consequently, they continued the struggle until "all fees" and any rules against that non-existent *gratuidad* - only token fees had existed since 1948 - were removed. In addition to that, the CGH demanded the rector's resignation and disavowed him as an

³⁴ *El Financiero*, 11 June 1999.

³⁵ On the other hand, in a "letter to the Nation in UNAM's defence", other universitarians accused the rector of mismanaging the situation and blamed him for the "disorder" - *río revuelto* - in which UNAM was caught. Besides, they criticised the presence of groups seeking "particularistic interests". At the same time they welcomed "the discrepancy" within the university, echoing a famous phrase from a founder of the university, Javier Barros Sierra.³⁵ The official representation of the academics considered it necessary to normalise the university activities, having concluded that the initial strike's motivation has been removed. A communiqué from the respected professors Luis Esteva Haraboto, Alfredo López Austin, Alejandro Rossi, Héctor Fix Zamudio, Manuel Peimbert, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, Miguel León Portilla, Ruy Pérez Tamayo and Luis Villoro. *La Jornada*, 23 June 1999. *La Jornada, Reforma*, 17-26 June 1999.

³⁶ *La Jornada*, 5 June 1999.

³⁷ CGH's communiqué, 4 June 1999. *La Jornada*, 5 June 1999. "The indefinite strike was not decided to bargain with the Rector about what things should be charged and what should not, and

interlocutor. From 9 June, UNAM's authority would be referred to by the CGH as "authorities in general".³⁸ As part of the general project of polarising the movement it had to conceal the space of convergence opened up by the decision to dismantle the scheme, and consequently needed to dissolve the rector's presence in the broader segment of all those institutional referents with which regarded indispensable to maintain an antagonistic relationship.

The heightened tensions within the student assembly were resolved by two operations. These were the radicalisation of tone and practices of the movement and the creation of a new internal frontier in which those considered *moderates* were intensively displaced by the dominant factions of *centre-ultras*, *ultras* or even *mega ultras*. If towards the outside the CGH vindicated an equivalential logic by which the field of the political was divided in two antagonistic camps. Internally, the hegemonic factions emphasised the multiplication of differences and legitimised them under the condition of sharing a primary logic against the authorities. By this combined operation the CGH distanced itself from the authorities' attempts to dissolve the movement.

In the context of the rector's report about the losses in the university - already representing 180 million dollars - Barnés regretted "the erosion of the social fabric" of UNAM. He called for caution with regard to the symbolic occupation of embassies called upon by the CGH. Members of the *moderate* CDE (pro-PRD) explicitly distanced themselves from the rhetoric and operations recently applied by the CGH's hegemonic segment.

The strike does not belong to somebody, or to a group...before the impressive crisis of the student movement strikers from different schools, colleges and departments

whether the university should charge more or less. We went to strike in defence of the *gratuidad* of the public education in our country".

³⁸ After one of the most problematic student assemblies, the students decided to call upon a congress to define the UNAM's transformation and its total "re-foundation". After the incident of a student being raped during the mobilisations, roughly manipulated in the assembly, the CGH forced the closure of three central avenues of Mexico City. The action, far from attracting sympathy to the movement, increased its alienation of it from the ordinary citizens and provoked the intervention of the police that forced the clearing of half of lines occupied by the students.

decide to constitute the Independent University Council (CUI) whose purpose is to establish a discussion space but recognise the CGH as the interlocutor to resolve the conflict.³⁹

On 14 June, the CGH assembly decided to constitute a “University Front” in defence of the “Public, Gratuitous, Democratic and Scientific University”. In pursuit of this, they would continue the strike and organise on 23 June a meeting in the Olympic Stadium to formalise the constitution of such a front. The pro-partisan CDE was widely criticised and some of its members were accused of being “strike sellers” and “traitors” while the CDE’s members believed that stances with the Guevarista principle and logic of *patria o muerte venceremos* (motherland or death, we shall overcome) were conducting the movement to a stagnant point.⁴⁰ The Academic University Assembly was called upon to support the six points in the CGH’s demands. A group of family parents organised a fast in the Independence Monument in the city’s main avenue, while a march “against the repression” was encouraged. Teachers from the senior high school system (CCHs) demonstrated against the director of the institution that was providing the movement with probably 70 per cent of its rank and file, alongside other mobilisations. Even when the CGH could not attract more than one third of the people needed to fill the stadium on 23 June, it was able to keep its basic, rather chaotic ‘cohesion’. It continued to be a centre of reference for certain segments of the left that considered its struggle the most significant of the end of the Mexican century. More importantly, the CGH seemed able to be presented as an alternative site of critique to the dominant societal dynamic. It was emphasising the incapacity of the system to provide enough opportunities to study, to guarantee quality in higher education institutions as well as a credible link to social mobility through education and subsequent employment. In short, the CGH briefly achieved a mythical dimension, in which it became a sign of the failure of the system and a representation of other grievances.

³⁹ *La Jornada*, 17 June 1999.

⁴⁰ *La Jornada*, 15 June 1999.

On the whole the initiatives to mobilise a counter-strike front were short-lived and never challenged the CGH's hegemony. Nor could they construct themselves as a serious interlocutor with respect to the authorities.⁴¹

The dominant logic in the relationship between the CGH and other students' positions had the appearance of a paradox: there was no way to influence the agenda of the movement outside of it and, internally, that possibility was excluded by the "democratic" assembly. Internally, the *moderate* "opposition" was conceived as a defeatist stance and therefore as an impediment of directing a movement for which keeping an antagonistic stand was imperative.

The CGH's internal opposition claimed hopelessly that the movement was not the property of the CGH's hegemonic faction. In a similar vein, president Zedillo argued that the UNAM as a whole could not belong "to somebody in particular...belongs to all the Mexicans and its fundamental patrimony of all inhabitants".⁴² For him, UNAM's authorities had shown enough openness and flexibility and certainly had opened the path to dialogue. Besides, he warned the actors involved of the limit the strike had reached.

Today [the University] is the victim of a brutish aggression by those who led a movement that in its origins not few regarded as fair.⁴³

Zedillo's words might be seen as evidence of the effect of the absence of dialogue. Members of UNAM's Government Board - *Junta de Gobierno* - echoed this dissatisfaction. In a key act near the ancient university premises, *the limit* was referred to thus: "many things are negotiable but we cannot negotiate the university. That is why it is

⁴¹ *Reforma*, *La Jornada* 5-25 June 1999, and Garay, op.cit., chapter 6 section 3. The Students Unity (UNETE) called for dialogue and blamed the Rector for his political insensitivity towards the Student Organisations Coalition in favour of Dialogue and Solution (COEDS), which claimed to represent 100 thousand students, and presented itself as the voice of those taking outdoor classes and against the University Congress. The Group of Women in White, with students from Medicine, Dentistry, Chemistry and some segments in the CCHs, mobilised in demand of the recommencement of classes but received more attention from the media than from the majority of the expectant students that did not support the CGH but lacked the cadres to directly confront it.

⁴² *La Jornada*, 25 June 1999.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

not possible to make more concessions. We have gone as far as we can”.⁴⁴ The authority unilaterally retreated from its proposals but did not yield the source of its authority: “it would be irresponsible to let the deterioration continue. Patience, prudence, good faith, appeal, dialogue, concord, all those, for the members of the University, are unbreakable virtues”.⁴⁵

On the CGH’s reading, Zedillo’s position was merely a reflection of the predictable attitudes of a repressive government, subjected to the dictates of international organisms influencing even academic plans.⁴⁶ Even a relevant segment of academics on the left made “an energetic call to the CGH to abandon its intransigent posture and to recognise that the initial authorities’ proposal had been withdrawn”.⁴⁷

4.2.1 Emeritus Professors’ proposal: an excluded way out

On 27 July 1999 a new potential exit from the conflict was dismissed after a group of distinguished professors presented a proposal. They had suggested ending the strike in exchange for the University Council’ openness to a series of discussion forums as a source of future resolution and re-structuring of UNAM. The initial intention of raising the fees was recognised in the proposal as already an invalidated initiative. They asked to rescue the semester and apply a general “amnesty” to all the strikers. The links between the UNAM and the CENEVAL were going to be reviewed and the professors offered

⁴⁴ Sergio García Ramírez speech, *La Jornada*, 25 June 1999, quoted in Garay, op.cit., chapter 6 section 5.

⁴⁵ Speech of Juliana González, UNAM’s Government Board member, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ The Education Development Plan 1995-2000 was considered by the CGH a simple copy “of the dictates” of the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Economical Development and Cooperation Organization (OCDE). “If he [the president] wants to help in something there is no better way to do it than giving the university and public education the required resources...his declarations [in relation to the student movement] were extremely serious and unveil a profound ignorance of the conflict’s causes”. *La Jornada*, 27 June 1999. The CGH was even unable to take advantage of the mediation offered by the Congress and transformed the event into a scenario in which non-left deputies and even the rector were insulted.

⁴⁷ *El Financiero*, 11 June 1999, members of the CPI, professors from areas of Social Sciences and Philosophy, Elvira Concheiro, Sergio Zermeño - himself an author of a book on the student movement - Francisco Fernández, Ana Esther Ceceña - herself very close to the analysis of Chiapas’ conflict - Fernández de Miguel among others. Quoted by Garay Castro, op.cit., chapter 7.

themselves as the foundation for a follow up commission to the eventual agreements. The forums should begin to work, at the latest, sixty days after the end of the conflict.⁴⁸

The proposal opened a path for negotiation. It was relevant as well because of its exemplary representative nature.⁴⁹ Astonishingly, the CGH's rejection of it was accompanied by its demand to assume authority within the university and become an interlocutor even after the strike finished.

From CGH's perspective, the professors' attitude was merely evidence of a "political disposition" but their proposal "did not satisfy the minimal demands".⁵⁰ The student movement had constructed its original identity by antagonising UNAM's authorities, it kept its dynamic by continuing to polarise the assembly and public opinion. It understood local and federal government as part of the same elite as UNAM's rector, and dangerously approached the limit of acceptable intransigence in Mexican politics, which were set after the 1994 revolt and confirmed in the 1996 re-emergence of the insurgent discourse.

4.3 Stage two: the hour of internal security

In refusing the proposal put forward by the *Emeritus Professors*, the CGH and the regime entered into a grey area concerning what the limits of the movement would be. In the context of my analysis these limits involved the point at which internal security discourse could be invoked. From the end of August to the occupation of the main campus by the federal police (PFP), the political frontier was redefined between forces of the political elite and the CGH. It was drawn around the transition from the evidence of problems of

⁴⁸ *La Jornada*, 28 July 1999. Proposal signed by Luis Esteva Maraboto, Miguel León Portilla, Manuel Peimbert., Héctor Fix Zamudio, Alfredo López Austin, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, Alejandro Rosi, Luis Villoro.

⁴⁹ According to Manuel Peimbert, the proposal had the support of more than two thousand teachers and 25 colleges of professors and academics. See, Garay Castro, Op. Cit. Chap 8. The CGH met the professors for seven hours in an assembly in the main university auditorium. The response given afterwards, which had been circulating since that day, is an illustration of the CGH's general inability to effectively recognise its relative success, and the process of articulation unavoidably present in any negotiation.

⁵⁰ CGH's Plenary Assembly, *La Jornada*, 4 August 1999.

public safety generated by the movement, to the increasing perception that the conflict had begun to be one of national security.

The CGH characterised itself at the outset as a resistance political subject against the university authority in particular, and the government in general. It included the critique of the PRD. Early on it was assumed and hoped the creation of conditions for “a national struggle” because “we can make bigger the movement at the national level”.⁵¹ Its initial dialogue with a vague iteration of the EZLN discourse appeared in the first communiqués with the inclusion of “indigenous rights”. Traditional associations with “workers” or “peasants” as vindications were also present. Even with a careless definition of frontiers, the CGH’s radical appeal had achieved a mythical positioning within the social and radical left.⁵²

The CGH’s accomplishment, according to some of its more articulate leaders, was the location of the strike as a point of reference for the general shortcomings of the overall political system. This implied a national thrust and a rebellious appeal. In our vocabulary, its condition of *myth* was shown to be a space of inscription for other struggles. In that space were a range of segments of society. From those that were excluded from entering into the education system, to segments of the middle classes originally sympathetic to the movement in which their own sons and daughters were involved and were having their primal political experience. There were also democratic unions, urban organisations and lower-middle class representatives which had experienced the dramatic perceived deprivation endured by some strata in Mexico City since the early 1980s.

⁵¹ CGH’s statement in May 1999, quoted by Garay Castro, op. cit., chapter 5 section 2.

⁵² The classification I am making use of is a merely pragmatic one in the context of Mexican vocabulary where the partisan left (or centre left) is at one ‘extreme’ right next to the centre (PRI?), the left that privileges popular mobilisations follows in such a scope, and the organisations that advocate the armed path are placed in the other ‘extreme’ (radical and ultra-radical left). For a typology that takes into account recent developments see Panizza, Francisco, *The resurgence of left of centre politics in Latin America*, paper presented at the Essex Sociology Conference, May 2003.

The first lesson from the strike is that we can fight and confront authorities' decisions that looked like a fact...They have not been able to break us and that is the proof of the possibility of resistance before the government. In the end we fight against a project which is not the Rector's but the State's...this fight demonstrates the urge for transformation from the root of the government organs - in UNAM - if we are to avoid new conflicts with the University. It is urgent that the community gives itself a different normative frame from which the power relationship can change and clear mechanisms for the community to take decisions be established.⁵³

The cathartic value of the movement and its collective construction as a moment of national antagonism, not just for rescuing public education but for the institution of a collective will, was at the centre of the CGH.

In this fight are reflected a series of problems, not just from the university but also from the whole country. In it, the neo-liberal scheme has yielded an increased social marginalization. The fight has let all this rejected feeling in the current situation escape, there is a social discontent that found its escape valve in this movement.⁵⁴

Three days before the president's affirmation that UNAM was suffering a "brutish aggression", the front page of the centrist paper *Reforma* read: "The Federal Government warns of the danger that the strike in the UNAM affects National Security".⁵⁵ The news headings were representative of the climate of opinion and the leaks promoted by security actors to begin the *securitisation* of the conflict. The distance from the movement's predominant faction was clearly shown as well by the centre-leftist *La Jornada*, then the favourite of public university students. Perceptions of an increasingly conflicted strike grew continually after June, and reached a climax on the eve of UNAM's occupation. The transition between a conflict that eventually affected public safety, to its portrayal and perception as a problem of national security, constituted the backdrop of the forthcoming PFP intervention.

⁵³ CEM's representative, Higinio Muñoz, *La Jornada*, 28 July 1999.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ The evaluation, according to the paper, was the result of "the analysis of the secretariats of Governance, Education, Defence and Intelligence areas". *Reforma*, 21 June 1999.

First, blocking roads in Mexico City as a tool of CGH's protest instigated confrontation with forces of public safety such as *los granaderos* - the grenadiers - and more importantly with the notion of order, on which the local and federal government were visibly challenged. It evolved into a national security concern. Sit-ins and the blockades, as well as open disputes with non-strikers, constituted a dilemma for the PRD's authorities in charge of the local administration of public safety. Secondly, it was a concern of the federal authorities aware of the rhetorical and material connections between tiny but significant segments of the CGH and the armed left. Thirdly, those mobilisations created a source of constant detachment of the movement away from many segments of society, namely working class people, employees of every sort and the middle strata population, let alone the financial elite.⁵⁶

On 4 August a brawl broke out between *granaderos* and strikers during an admissions process in an alternative venue. While the CGH's members denounced the "undue use of the public force" and declared themselves in an "emergency state", the local authority waited several hours to intervene.⁵⁷ Other temporary UNAM premises were blocked by strikers or with chains and locks.

The PRD's caution when dealing with the mobilisations was regretted by the rector as "an excess of prudence" and against "the rights of others, cancelling the rights of thousand of students, as well as the security of people". The rector recalled the negatives image held in the collective mind from the military occupation of the campus in 1968. Nevertheless, he added, "if we do not find a solution, eventually we will have to think of resorting to the authorities to re-establish the university's legality".⁵⁸ He asked

⁵⁶ The timing and tone of those mobilisations after June were a constant factor of internal division within the student movement. The media frequently stated the "public reaction" to some of those off-campus mobilisations as "repudiation". The refusal to return the university premises was considered a motive for moral "condemnation". Illustrations of it can be found in *El Universal*, *Financiero*, *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, and remarkably and abundantly on the main TV news programmes throughout the period June 1999- February 2000.

⁵⁷ Comments of Alejandro Gertz Manero, local minister of Public Security in Mexico City and later on, after the 2000 election, he became the first federal chief of Public Safety. See *La Jornada*, 5 August 1999.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Garay, *op.cit.*, Chap 8. From the UNAM's Information Bulletin August 1999.

for the “good faith students” to develop some capacity for “modifying the manner in which the true leaders try to impose their decisions”. Barnes called for an end to “the intransigence” and hoped to be in a condition to begin the next semester on time, since one semester had already been wasted.⁵⁹ In relation to other fights between strikers and public security personnel, Cárdenas offered the city police intervention.

I hope that the dialogue might restart, I feel that this is an opinion that is becoming broadly shared in all sectors of the University...If there is confrontation, the public force must intervene”.⁶⁰

On 16 August, in what should have been the beginning of the new semester, the rector insisted that “nobody can close the University, the University must go on for its significance for the country...The UNAM cannot be kept closed any longer that would mean a breakdown for the nation. The University community and the whole society know that it is at risk”.⁶¹

The CGH’s response confirmed the sedimentation of a resistance discourse awkwardly isolated from events around the movement. In this view, “if Barnes was predisposed to accept the transformation required by the university, he would satisfy our demands and then we would have a solution to the conflict”.⁶²

Unexpected scenarios yielded by the CGH’s intransigence were menacing within UNAM’s communities. One of the *Emeritus Professors*, who underwrote the proposal rejected by the student movement, voiced the possibility of increased danger for the community. He claimed that “everything seems to indicate that any denouement is possible...one is the public force intervention. There are members of the community that had manifested themselves in such a sense. Another scenario is the confrontation among university members in which we have already entered and the other one is the closure of

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., and *La Jornada*, 5 August 1999.

⁶¹ *La Jornada*, 17 August 1999.

⁶² Ibid.

the UNAM which appears distant, and we do not think is possible. But [if the conflict continues] anything could happen".⁶³

At the end of August, nearly a thousand students, teachers and researchers attempted to break into the campus controlled by the CGH. Even in the minority, the violent determination of nearly 350 strikers was enough to dissuade the non-strikers from continuing to breach the activists' control of the premises.⁶⁴ The presence of national prize-winners and a former rector, who was insulted and hit in the contingent of non-strikers, made the mobilisation even more dramatic. The opposition to the CGH was based on the argument that the principle of UNAM's autonomy did not mean "extraterritoriality" or entitlement to act outside the law.⁶⁵

According to the CGH division within the movement was engendered mainly by the regime. My claim is that this division, illustrative of radical behaviour, was indispensable for the survival of the movement after the original demand was solved and to keep the possibility of becoming a site of social polarisation. Thus, the moment of division within the assembly allowed the *ultra* hegemonic faction to dominate. Simultaneously, the inability of the *ultras* to conceal this division as something central to its identity was prejudicial to it in the face of public opinion and alienated the forces that had seen the movement as a legitimate struggle. Unlike the EZLN, in the CGH's case the unavoidable "ignobility" of radical movements, resulting from the combination of a positive vindication of a noble future with a negative internal exclusion of their moderate factions, illustrated the failure of the movement to learn from the media-savvy guerrilla. Besides, the CGH never had control of its media image.

Persistently, the CGH denied its own responsibility for its exclusionary practices. Now the enemy, in CGH's logic, was more transparent than ever: it was all those in

⁶³ *La Jornada*, 25 August 1999. Comments by Professor Alfredo López Austin.

⁶⁴ *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, 15-26 August 1999.

⁶⁵ *La Jornada*, 21 August 1999.

institutional authority. Aimed at them, the strike *was stronger than ever*, “and has the support of all the currents”.⁶⁶

Alejandro Echevarría, nicknamed *El Mosh*, spoke of the resentment and articulation of the great expectations of the movement:

We have an action plan and we are still in the force accumulation stage and we are not to be intimidated. The authorities must clearly listen to that. If the students in moderate positions are consistent with the strike, its principles and aims, they must join the defence of the struggle for a popular and *gratuita* university. We do not want them to be only peeping Toms. We want them to go to organise hurdles. They should come to the guard patrols to stop any authoritarian attempt to retake the premises.⁶⁷

By the beginning of September, the diversity of voices calling for an end to the strike had nullified the probability for UNAM’s authorities to even consider the CGH as the only interlocutor in the conflict.⁶⁸ The University Council’s suggestion of taking the *Emeritus*’ proposal as a basis for dialogue was rejected.⁶⁹ The authorities and the student assembly began to evaluate the possibility of the use of the security forces. To UNAM’s authorities, the message was phrased around the idea of the resettlement of the rule of law, whereas for the CGH it was not a strategic but merely a tactical question. Instead of opening a dialogue, the CGH focused on how to prepare itself for the security forces intervention.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Quoted by Garay, op. cit., chapter 8 section 5.

⁶⁷ *La Jornada*, 21 August 1999. In the National Auditorium a meeting called for those in favour of ending the strike could not attract more than a fragile response. Only the allegedly unexpected presence of the rector and a supposedly unforeseen subsequent interview between the rector and the president give to the event and its aftermath a special momentum. The president asked the rector and university members to give him - the very representative of the federal government and the Mexican State - a path for the legitimate combination of the rule of law with “no repression”. He declared himself in full disposition to wait for *a call* coming from “the university’s democracy” in order to intervene.

⁶⁸ University Council session, 1 September 1999.

⁶⁹ University Council session 6, 14 and 23 September 1999.

⁷⁰ In some schools the *moderate* position began to gain ground but the core of the movement stuck to the *ultra* leadership and rhetoric. The 2 October march - 31 years after the 1968 student massacre in Tlatelolco - provided confirmation of the *ultra* hegemony. Besides, the notion of “ultra” was re-assimilated and transformed in a source of pride, unity and resistance. Particularly so in the case of the youngest students in the CCH’s and the novices of the more politicised schools and departments, they were “not ultras but a vast sea of dreamers” in a fight, according to them, and were accompanied by unions and urban organisations. In the meeting the CGH blame

Three former rectors and more than one hundred distinguished academics supported the *Emeritus* proposal and clearly warned about the outcome if a negotiation were accepted under CGH's conditions: it would hurt UNAM's authority and prestige, it would preclude an exit to the conflict, considering the CGH refusal of an actual dialogue; and it would exclude the rest of the community from the decision process.⁷¹

In the first week of October, the authorities decided not to intervene when a group of students re-occupied the premises of UNAM's facilities in Acatlán, the second largest campus, located in the Estado de México. The CGH retook the place with unprecedented violence, considering the fact that they thought of themselves as advocates of dialogue.⁷² In this context, the secretary of governance and future PRI presidential candidate, Francisco Labastida, pointed out that guerrilla groups had an influence within the student movement, particularly from the EPR. The CGH denied this allegation.

On 5 November, for the first time on Mexican TV, an opposition demonstration was broadcast live for nearly two hours. It was widely presented by the two principal broadcasting companies as the site of a national political dislocation.⁷³ The mainstream media seemed inclined to make the rift within the left visible by pointing to the CGH's opposition to partisan politics and to the PRD in particular.

the media for under-emphasising the role of the movement, demonised the authorities and "the political right" for promoting the breaking of the strike and asked for the Rector's resignation. A segment of professors sympathetic to the movement joined this last demand and even accused the *Emeriti* of being *prestanombres* - those who lend their name to powerful persons - of the authorities and "intellectual servants", to their service. Quoted in Garay, op.cit., chapter 9.2. See *Excelsior*, 4 September 1999.

⁷¹ Guillermo Soberón, Jorge Carpizo and José Sarukhán, all of them former Rectors supported this position. 4 October 1999.

⁷² *Reforma, La Jornada, Excelsior, Financiero, El Universal*, 4-8 October 1999.

⁷³ The mainstream media attempted to show the one in which the CGH was or was not finally restrained by any authority, in this case, by that which the PRD was representing while in government of Mexico City. The mainstream TV seemed to be aiming to expose the internal split within the left as well as their supposed incapacity to govern. The event was presented as both a sample of the lack of authority and the rule of law. Moreover, it was an illustration that, against common knowledge, in the partisan left there was a "repressive" behaviour. Multiple cameras and aerial coverage were deployed to show the seemingly unavoidable physical confrontation between a strong line of *granaderos* and the column of the massive march called upon by the CGH, right at the centre of the widest boulevard in Mexico City. PRD's government had been alternatively portrayed as an accomplice of the ignition and continuity of the movement - at least for its relation to the *moderate* side - and as the representation of an opportunistic party in a pre-electoral manipulative game according to the CGH's hegemonic view. Nevertheless, the PRD and the

In the eve of the 2000 presidential elections, the moment for an explicit enunciation of the national security discourse in relation to the CGH appeared to be momentarily deferred. However, was in fact being legitimised for all partisan forces. The menace to the national community, according to the nationally-predominant view, still seemed to be containable without the deployment of security forces but was being evaluated.

Five days after the student demonstration on the main boulevard in Mexico City, the rector decided to present his resignation.⁷⁴ He was trapped in a logic of defending the dominant sense of authority, lacking non-authoritarian tools and deprived of the heterodox combination of freshness, openness and firmness that the CGH's uncompromising stance seemed to require. The presidential decision to review the treatment given to those already constituted as the main political problem, in both the *national security agenda* and national politics, was behind the decision to appoint a new rector. The struggle against the *Barnes Plan* sparked off by the CGH was a development attributable as much as to the CGH and to the set of circumstances unleashed by the national political struggle related to it, but actually defined at the core of the political elite.⁷⁵

The *ultra* leadership and the vast membership of the CGH gloated that this was a victory. The decision allowed them to bask in the resurrection of its original radicalism. However, it again missed the opportunity to reorganise its discourse to recover the eroded set of loyalties and sympathies it had had among the aforementioned segments of society. This was a move particularly necessary as the electoral process approached. On the other hand, evidence in intelligence circles showed the precise manner and the new lenses

CGH, before everybody's eyes, successfully negotiated the continuation of the march out of the boulevard.

⁷⁴ University Council Session, 10 November 1999. *La Jornada, Reforma, El Universal*, 11 November 1999.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, especially presentation of the rector's resignation: "Before the impotence in finding a path of solution in the university's scope by using the mechanisms at hand, these being dialogue and reason, due to the radical groups' intransigence which had taken control of the movement's

through which the movement was being seen. The director of the CISEN, Jorge Tello Peón, had already accepted that the CGH's behaviour was *the* priority in the *national security agenda*.⁷⁶

4.3.1 Civic and armed insurgencies in the student strike

A central element in the conceptualisation of the conflict as a national security issue was the alleged links between a few elements of the CGH leadership and the guerrilla movements, and the eventuality of organic convergence. There was evidence that a radical and determined minority could create a cohesive centre of antagonism⁷⁷ of national significance that could affect the centre of mainstream politics. More generally, the worst security nightmare seemed to be the articulation of armed insurgencies, student movements and the army of unemployed people.

Actual and imagined connections between some activists and the guerrilla have existed in every social movement, according to historical experience and academic literature. In fact, there is no guerrilla movement in Latin America without university students.⁷⁸ On 2 October 1996, for instance, in the context of the demonstration remembering the 1968 massacre, a student member of the CEM, a future core CGH

direction, due to the intervention of political groups alien to university life and to the climate of impunity that had dominated these months, I have decided to present my resignation”.

⁷⁶ The central analytical piece used by the security cabinet to decide political priorities as should be considered and addressed by the Presidency. Conversation on the concept of national security and comments presented on the question of the violence in UNAM's premises, particularly in relation to the momentary reoccupation of Acatlán by non-strikers. Diploma on National Security in the INAP (National Institute of Public Administration), 1999.

⁷⁷ It must be noted that “antagonism” is also a relevant category in the jargon of security actors, analysts and the government. In short, it means political conflicts that result from radically adversarial positions that by popular and clandestine mobilisation question the sovereignty of the representatives of the state, namely the governmental elite.

⁷⁸ There is no insurgent movement without university students or graduates. That is the case within insurrectionary movements. It was remarkably the case with Fidel Castro in the 1950s in Cuba. Just in the EZLN's central core, for instance, Rafael Guillén, *Marcos*, Javier Elorriaga, *Teniente Vicente* and Fernando Yáñez, known as *Comandante Germán*, were university alumni involved early in radical politics. The assumption by which that link existed in recent Mexican politics was not new in 1999, in respect to the idea that a new generation of radical students were somehow directly involved in social and armed groups. As assumption and as a matter of fact, this component was frequently repeated and exploited in the constitution of the CGH as a threat. For a comparative perspective see *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America*, op.cit. Especially 327-339.

faction, was kidnapped by security actors, not necessarily for her direct participation but because of the information she supposedly held. She was interrogated about the open invitation for a visit by some EZLN members to Mexico City and on the alleged connections with the EPR, the organisation that had just emerged in June 1996.⁷⁹ In June 1998, during an armed ambush, to what the army called “a guerrilla assembly” of former and current EPR’s members and elements of the ERPI, 11 peasants and a UNAM student were killed or detained.⁸⁰ Another UNAM student, Erika Zamora - from UNAM’s senior high school system -, was detained and released four years later with the support of Cárdenas, UNAM professors and social activists.⁸¹

This episode is relevant to the argument being put forward here. At some point, elements of the guerrilla movements may have converged with the student movement, adding their intervention to the process of justifying the *securitisation* of the CGH rather than generating popular mobilisation.

Within the CISEN, the PFP as well as in the Secretariat of Governance, the “widespread fear” that the student strike might provide “the opportunity for guerrillas” such as the EPR and ERPI “to establish a stronger urban presence in Mexico City” seemed to have grown.⁸²

⁷⁹ *La Jornada*, 5 October 1996.

⁸⁰ *La Jornada*, 8 and 9 June 1998.

⁸¹ Her capture was probably the result of infiltration and, more broadly, the differential treatment given by the government to guerrilla groups. It was considered by the specialised press a military ambush in an isolated hamlet of Guerrero state, an area with EPR activity, named *El Charco* that became a metaphor for “strategy of war” which critics of the government considered as part of the dominant political climate. It is relevant that the dissolution of the mediation in Chiapas represented by the CONAI (National Commission for Intermediation) and headed by the bishop Samuel Ruiz. Ruiz himself announced the CONAI’s dissolution in the context of a hardening of the positions in Chiapas and the events in *El Charco*. However, the commission was still active in 2000. *La Jornada*, 8 June 1998. The infiltration has been a constant tool used in recent times in all extremist organisations, included non-EZLN groupings. It represents direct army involvement according to some military sources. On 10 June 1998, a confrontation between EZLN sympathisers and policemen and soldiers resulted in eight peasants being killed in *El Bosque*, Chiapas, in the same context of polarization perceived by the CONAI, see *La Jornada*, 11 June 1998.

⁸² Turbiville, Graham, *Mexico’s Multimission Force for Internal Security*, in *Military Review* (July-August 2000) under the subheading “Social Unrest”. Based in Jose Cordoba’s note published in *The Wall Street Journal* (14 February 2000). The information referred to circulated since September in some security institutions, according to some of the 1999 Diplomado INAP’s attendants from security agencies.

The student movement was the most noteworthy attempt by an unarmed group to radically constitute “the people” in the Zedillo administration (1994-2000). It was constructed partly in defiance of the approaching 2000 federal election. It shared with insurgent movements a profound distance from electoral politics, whose benefits were not recognisable for a new generation of deprived students who, even after graduating might not find employment.

The EZLN devoted to it some of its most detailed pages. The EZLN’s defence of the CGH comprised several moves. Among them there were the acceptance of the student’s assertion that the process of “subjugation to capitalism” had reached the UNAM; the association of the intellectuals that sympathised with the Salinas administration with the rector Barnes, intended to illustrate the supposed process of becoming more rightist than any previous UNAM authority; as with prior attempts, the EZLN indicated that only popular struggles could frustrate the authorities’ plans; the intention to reverse the idea that radical opposition “to power” was useless and that the CGH was actually “something new”; and, centrally, the defence of the CGH as evidence of a new generation that could overcome scepticism, conformist attitudes, immobility and selfishness that even the EZLN, in its considerable success as a *myth*, had somehow suffered even within the left. Consequently, the CGH’s enemies were the EZLN’s too.⁸³ In short, the EZLN-CGH contact allowed both iteration of insurgent discourses and repositioning of the EZLN’s identity in a changing context.

In his messages the UNAM graduate, *Marcos*, resorted to the elements that permitted the EZLN to be a place of enunciation and identification among segments of the UNAM youth. It was made available mainly among those young students identified with centre-left or radical left positions, through playful rhetoric involving sexual references, the celebration of life, folk music and the sense of a certain poetry and utopia offered by Rafael Guillén.

⁸³ EZLN’s communiqué, *Paginas sueltas sobre el movimiento universitario*, 27 April 1999. *La Jornada*, 28 April 1999.

It is neither small nor only one enemy to which the students are opposed. But they are not alone. Even when far in the distance, we, the *Zapatistas*, do not hide the admiration we have for them, we endeavour to learn well the extracurricular lesson they teach us. We are proud to know that persons like them exist and we salute the fact that the Mexican soil is amazed after looking at them. Thanks to young students such as these, men and women can today be proudly called Mexican.

We feel them near, not only because the accusations and lies thrown at them are similar to those that have been thrown at us now and again. Also, and above all, the other Mexico, other politics and other humans are being perceived as possible; not perfect, but better...the University as the nation is for everybody or it is nothing.⁸⁴

The CGH, as a site of identification, was defended by the EZLN throughout the strike. Its communiqués were listened to with reverence and a sense of plenitude in the collective spaces in which they were read. In that reading the main campus was portrayed as a “rebel territory against stupidity”. In Chiapas there was, *Marcos* said, a “great banner” in which solidarity with the student movement was manifested by maintaining an “outdoors strike” that took place in the famous “mountains of Southern Mexico”. The students were even spiritually “living out *Che Guevara*”,⁸⁵ and to them were addressed messages in which a combination of mockery of the academic style itself were simultaneously defended and played with. The CGH students were pictured as part of a continuity of those opposed to the “repression, oblivion and lies”, “indigenous and students” were together against the PRI government, “students and indigenous” were jointly and heroically “uncomfortable” for the political class. The EZLN stated that it was “honoured” in “having established a dialogue with the students”.⁸⁶ The most outstanding place for the resistance against the neo-liberal government was, *Marcos* insisted, the student movement, and they could prove that “resignation and fatigue will be beaten” and that the “same history of defeat” will not be repeated. He claimed that they gave as much dignity to the process of struggle in 1999 and 2000 as the EZLN did in 1994 with its rebellion. In *Marcos*’ rhetoric, the site of enunciation constructed by the CGH was a

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ EZLN’ communiqué, *Al movimiento estudiantil de la UNAM*, 22 May 1999.

⁸⁶ EZLN’s communiqué, *Al pueblo de México y al movimiento estudiantil*, 10 June 1999.

demonstration that “the youth, women and men, today lift the flag of Mexican dignity”.⁸⁷

In June, however, cleavages within the movement and in particular with other political actors would shift the EZLN’s view towards the CGH.⁸⁸

Marcos criticised the *moderates*’ attitude as contributing to the moral lynching of the CGH. This was, he claimed, the result of some sort of political jealousy from the *moderates* who pretended to be part of an *intelligentsia* to which, as in 1994, the “political limitations” of radical forces, were evident and did not deserve attention. To “intellectualism”, *Marcos* claimed, there was never “time for radicalism”. In the EZLN’s understanding, the activists who had been hegemonic in the previous student conjunctures had been practically absorbed by the opportunities for becoming part of the government when the PRD won the 1997 election in Mexico City. The void in student leadership was then filled by the *ultras*. Their dominance entailed, he maintained, the emergence of a new generation that was not just renovating the student leadership but was proof of a totally new perspective. In it “even the conception of that leadership” was being redefined, as within the EZLN since 1994, *Marcos* claimed.⁸⁹ Above all, the *ultras* demonstrated the vitality of radical politics and allowed the EZLN to argue in favour of

⁸⁷ EZLN’s communiqué, *A la Coordinadora Nacional de Estudiantes (CNE)*, 12 June 1999.

⁸⁸ The EZLN began to nuance its discourse by the end of June. UNAM’s authorities had withdrawn their original proposal and the radicalism dominant in the movement had begun to be considered a result of the *ultra* prevalence. This current was portrayed as an obstacle to the solution of the conflict. EZLN’s practices were influenced by different attitudes toward the movement within the left. Specialized studies on global influences, showing the undermining of public education, quasi-academic and comical writing, were consistently used by the EZLN to construct a rapport from its privileged place of enunciation. Those rhetorical tools were utilised to defend the legitimacy of the CGH’s radicalism, as well as a renewed examination of the logics at play in Mexico City, with the PRD as dominant political force and the national expectations of the partisan left that showed its ramifications inside the movement. Against the tendency entailed by those logics, in which radicalism had to be subordinated to electoral politics and therefore the expectation of success in any EZLN-like radicalism tended to be marginalized, *Marcos* tried to highlight the value of the *ultra*. At the same time, he could not help but criticise the limitations of the exclusionary attitudes - overtly exposed to any audience - attributed to the dominant CGH faction and in such a way that *Marcos* entered into the process by being referred to as source of legitimacy within the student movement.

⁸⁹ EZLN’s communiqué, 24 June 1999.

the common enemy and their methods. The only difference, he affirmed, was the lack of humour in the students' attitudes, in *Marcos'* opinion.⁹⁰

We the *Zapatistas* support the CGH if it decides to continue the strike, and we support them if they decide to put an end to it. We support them because they legitimately represent the university movement. They have the respect and the legitimacy that they have won by working with their people. Hence they are representative.

On the other hand, if those who now keep the strike going are ultras that must be exorcized, where will tomorrow's *ultra* be? Will they be in the urban popular movement? Will they be among the democratic teachers? Will they be in the Mexican Electricians Union? Or will they be in the Southern Mexican mountains? These are questions that those aspiring to become government must answer.⁹¹

Both EZLN and CGH had created, *Marcos* argued, a voice that positioned the entire ultra-right against them. As evidence, he argued that the most right wing intellectuals were now asking for the army's intervention, as they asked once with respect to the EZLN. Both had suffered, he insisted, from being accused of intransigence and being interested in unacceptable aims and methods.

In the context of the effects unleashed by the *Emeritus'* proposal, these elements were the frame within which the EZLN launched its multidimensional critique against a diversity of actors, and opened a door through which he received a strong critique from those who he himself considered democratic intellectuals.⁹²

⁹⁰ The EZLN claimed that in the critique against *the ultra* the EZLN's adversaries were united. Accordingly, those criticisms were masking anti-democratic postures in joining the accusations against *the ultra*. In the group of EZLN-CGH adversaries there were former Maoists, governance ministers, Salinas' allies and former radical professors that became advisers to the ministry of the interior (Secretariat of Governance). These "enemies" were wrongly and unsuccessfully trying to hinder the CGH's convening power, according to the EZLN.

⁹¹ *Marcos* argued that a minority such as that portrayed by the media could not possibly keep a strike in UNAM's premises and simultaneously deploy such activities in Mexico City. He criticised those who were suggesting that the CGH might be connected with armed movements and claimed that the media had "forgotten" that the CGH had not been responsible for any violence, at least, he maintained, not until that moment. EZLN's leader could not help but underline how even in a meeting with members of the EZLN in Chiapas the student activists both *moderates* and *ultras*, complained about the difficulties for political discussion within the assemblies, frequently dominated by slowness, insults and exclusions. Ibid., EZLN, 24 June, 1999.

⁹² In his opinion the *Emeritus Professors* could have authority but such a moral standing was not enough to guarantee the fulfilling of any accords. That had been the case, he argued, when the EZLN and Zedillo's government signed basic indigenous rights accords in 1996. In that conjuncture even support from similar individuals of international prestige had not been guaranteed. He questioned the *Emeritus'* maintenance of their proposal, even after the president

Marcos considered that the major logic explaining the existence of both the EZLN and the CGH was that they were symptoms of the flaws of the regime. In his argument, by establishing his equivalential stand against the regime, “UNAM and Chiapas” had achieved “a shake-up of the Mexican political system”, by “exhibiting in it all its mediocrity”. The “X Generation”, as it was called, was not just legitimate but representative of a democratic attempt to question the politics of privatisation at work.⁹³

The EZLN’s leadership regretted the PRD’s intellectuals’ behaviour in pretending that the CGH’s activities hurt the EZLN’s struggle. Conversely, his argument was that the student movement and the EZLN’s struggle should be seen as two parts of the same struggle. He regretted the PRD’s attitude, preoccupied with the effect of the movement on “Cárdenas’ image”, and lamented the contempt with which the *ultras* were being held by the PRD. However, *Marcos* asked the CGH if it was still the “visible, representative and legitimate” corpus that it once was.⁹⁴

Behind the “silence of the intellectuals”, he rightly argued, was the antipathy generated by an insurrectionary-like community such as the CGH that was too close to their daily life as opposed to the sympathy they can concede to faraway insurgencies. The hard core of the movement had been regarded as a “barbaric” force - as the EPR was in 1996 - due to the rough tactics used in drawing frontiers, such as insulting and even hitting and humiliating teachers and non-CGH students.⁹⁵

had exhibited a disposition to resort to the public force. He criticised the attitudes within the CGH by which some moderates were vetoed. Guillén attacked the repressive activity, as he called it, of the Mexican police in the capital against students. *Marcos* also regretted the declarations of “Mr. Cárdenas” who “after the repression” declared that police actions were “an announcement to have consciousness of the need to reinitiate the dialogue”, similar to what had been done in Chiapas, in his view, and asked why leftist intellectuals were keeping silence.

⁹³ EZLN’s communiqué, 24 June 1999.

⁹⁴ EZLN’s communiqué, September 1999, *Dos acosos, dos rebeldías (y, claro algunas preguntas) Carta tres*.

⁹⁵ The strong reaction from the finest segment of professors demanding a clearer attitude from CGH with respect to the dialogue obliged the EZLN to offer a response. In synthesis, *Marcos* argued that in any case the proposal was being held under the circumstances of the menacing use of public force. It entailed, he maintained, the typical dilemma presented to governments, when facing “threats” to the security discourse: “I (Me) or the hell” to the extent that beyond it appeared as unavoidable the use of the public force. In the academics’ view such as the distinguished professor Sanchez Vazquez’s, - who mentioned that there still were “delirious academics” supporting the CGH - according to *Marcos*, there was an utter incomprehension of “the other”:

Any dialogue, as in Chiapas, defended the EZLN in its public articulation of empathy with the CGH's *ultra* attitude, associated the UNAM's rector with the regime as a whole, a equivalence that did not have much purchase in UNAM's communities outside the CGH proxies. Those communities had a multiplicity of links and aspirations attached to the institution and to non-violent politics. Consequently, they showed open rejection, silent disapproval or, at most, a nuanced sympathy towards the EZLN's and CGH's positions.⁹⁶

The EZLN was being consistent with the image it projected: their radicalism might be construed as a place of contestation, resistance and rebellion against a neo-liberal regime. On the other hand, it was not consistent if the EZLN's exclusionary attitude towards all the other voices that were being heard is considered, namely, the majority of students outside the CGH. If after June 1999 those students were opposed to the strike, they did not have the right to be considered the respectable "other" that the EZLN claimed to incorporate in its seemingly pluralistic rhetoric. To the EZLN, those "others" were merely allies against the CGH-EZLN's legitimate attempt to rebel. The students' enemies were portrayed by *Marcos* as the *ultra of the right*. Paradoxically, in constructing its enemy, the EZLN and CGH were in 1999 and 2000 contributing to its relative isolation outside the left and even within it and, as the EZLN did in 1994, they unwittingly contributed to the refinement of security techniques that would be operationalised in February 2000.

"See? For you, the "other" does not exist or is "delirious". EZLN's communiqués, 2 October 1999, *La "H" tiene la palabra (y, como es muda, la cede a la huelga)*.

⁹⁶ The EZLN's rhetorical bridging of the gap with students comprised an understanding of material realities and the referencing of elements expected by the activists. The students were, thanks to "the hope" embodied in the CGH, the last barricade against "unemployment, hypocrisy, cynicism and scepticism". "The political power will not rest until those students that defy it today will become part of it. They will not leave them in peace until they transform them into one of them. Until that moment they will not stop chasing them, calumniating against them and harassing them. This is the "all or nothing" aimed for by those power, be it in the name of the government or be it with the *Rectoria*'s". Ibid.

Marcos argued that “the political class’ crisis may reach the “parliamentarian” left” and criticised the idea that “all over the world the institutional left seems dragged into the fashion of being agreeable...to the right.”⁹⁷

However, the political class and the elite, from the right and the left, had learnt several lessons after 1994. They knew, for instance, that after a certain time any social and radical movement must face counter-resistance from within and from other segments of society that do not share its aims and methods - in this case the idea of an unrestricted equality or the use of outright exclusionary politics in order to insert a political identity. In that gap was the source of highly probable detachments, including critique, repudiation and even counter-insurgent attitudes, even from those that claimed to be on the left. The nearer the perception and visibility of “threat”, the greater the chance of alienating radical actors.

The EZLN was correct in signalling the hurdles imposed by the principle of authority; in highlighting the ambivalence of the *moderates*’ attitudes within the movement as an extension of the PRD’s electoral expectations and the void left by the activists who became government officers, as well as the controversy behind it; and in pointing out the students’ boredom and the surfeit of respect for politics in general. However, those “others”, whose absence *Marcos* criticised, were absent from the far leftist discourse as well. Added to this ideological exclusion was a new menace in the EZLN’s unlikely project of reconnecting with all those “others” allegedly rejected by the regime.

Chiapas was a symptom, the UNAM is another. More will come. And the movements and the effervescence will be more and more radical every time (or “ultras” to use the term in fashion in the political class and the opinion leaders), and watch, every time it will be more difficult to bridge a dialogue with them. We are not responsible for this, nor are the students of the movement. One and all are saying “here we are, do not forget”. One and all are answered by silence, mockery, contempt and oblivion.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

In *Marcos'* view there was a virtual world in which the political class had framed the conflict. The “reality”, he claimed, “will regularly pass the cheque” and the bill would be higher, “more brutish and catastrophic”.⁹⁹

In the context of the contact between the CGH and the EZLN and the critical momentum reached by the strike, this comment was subjected to enormous contestation. The depth of the crisis was such that the former UNAM rector, Pablo Gonzalez Casanova considered it “worse than in 1968”, since alternative projects to the liberal one were “in crisis”.¹⁰⁰ Relevant voices in the movement from the *moderate*, *ultra* and *mega-ultra* sides were reluctant to try the new call for dialogue issued by the new authorities.¹⁰¹ However, a sort of intercommunication was initiated at the start of December 1999. The new authorities accepted the proposed agenda and agreed to the suggested public negotiations. The detentions resulting from the 11 December student attack on the American embassy introduced not just the CGH demand for their release, but an additional element for the security actors to consider about the student movement.

Cárdenas, and the PRD's leader and future governor of Mexico City, Manuel López Obrador, asked for the liberation of the students, but other voices insisted that the limit of what could be acceptable in any public demonstration had already been reached. *El Barzón*, the social movement in defence of middle strata segments affected by the banking crisis in the late 1990s, called a demonstration in support of the CGH. The internal splits within the CGH, and the enormous pressure and inability to clearly discern

⁹⁹ Ibid and EZLN's communiqué, December 1999, *Chiapas: la Guerra IV. Chiapas-UNAM: El delito de ser “otro” (...the crime of being “other”)* Carta 5.4. The EZLN delineated its distance from Cardenas administration. Captured in his attributed incapacity to manage a consistent attitude towards the movement, the main PRD leader was criticised by the main CGH-sympathetic interpellation, that is to say, by the EZLN's. In a letter addressed to the parents whose sons and daughters were detained by the policemen on 11 December, after activists threw stones against the American embassy and destroyed some windows, *Marcos* asked them not to be ashamed. Their youngsters were not offenders or criminals: “there are many considered offenders (*delicuentes*) when they struggle, but afterwards they are recognised and they get the acknowledgement of those below. Of course, if they do not finish up being governors [of Mexico City]” (as Cárdenas).

¹⁰⁰ *Excelsior*, 14 November 1999, quoted by Garay, op. cit., chapter 11 section 4.

¹⁰¹ Reactions were from *centre-ultra* Higinio Muñoz's call to flexibility, passing for *moderate* Fernando Belaunzarán's reserves before the authorities to the *ultra* Alejandro Echavarría's warning of a hypothetical generalisation of self-government initiatives launched in colleges and

the context, appeared to impede the CGH from acting in a united manner to end the strike before the new and definitive rector's and state's strategy.

On 6 January 2000, the new rector Juan Ramón de la Fuente presented his "Institutional Proposal". In it the nullification of the RGP was announced, the University congress' determination on other payments was considered, the colleges' decision on the mechanisms to normalise the academic situation was accepted, the revision of the relationship with the CENEVAL was incorporated, and the legal process against detained students was to be withdrawn. In other words, practically all the CGH's demands were being answered. The proposal was subjected to a plebiscite on 20 January, where nearly 150 thousand students participated - an effective majority considering that 268 thousand students were registered at UNAM - and decided to accept the rector's proposal. This made available a negotiation legitimised by all those excluded by the CGH's practices and contributed to the legitimacy of the *securitisation* of the process.

To everyone's surprise, the CGH responded by considering the plebiscite "a fraud", and without engaging in negotiations blamed all the authorities and UNAM for intending to use it as justification for the use of security forces to end the strike. However, several assemblies decided to begin turning premises over to the authorities.¹⁰² Isolated and without arguments, the CGH hard-liners and its leaders were reanimated only by their opposition to the unfortunate attempt to recover the *Preparatory 3*, which was led by non-strike students and probably some pro-authorities teachers. The CGH violently reclaimed the building and provoked a federal police intervention and the detention of 162 students. The CGH asked for the resignation of the rector, the interior minister and the president because of the "act of provocation" and the "violence" attributed solely to the non-strikers.

It is worth mentioning the intervention of another relevant guerrilla group. For the EPR, whose messages, circumstances and identity were discussed, to a limited extent,

departments. See *Reforma, Excelsior, El Financiero, El Universal, la Jornada*, November 19-30 1999.

within the movement, the CGH constituted part of a broader attempt to construct within the university a site for insurgent politics. During the 1960s and 1970s, experiments such as the “democratic, critical, scientific and popular university”, “people’s university” and “university as popular tribune” exemplified, in EPR’s view, the legitimate aim to place student struggles in the context of national projects against the “capitalist” regime. Those intentions were “defeated by repression”, “opportunistic” interventions, “bureaucratisation” and “institutionalisation” of originally radical projects.¹⁰³ The 1999-2000 strike should not follow such a fate. Better student representation within public universities and resistance against intentions to close education opportunities for the ‘have-nots’ were still valid and sustained by the EPR. It insisted on positioning the student movement as part of the bigger insurgency directed toward the PRI regime.

The struggle for the university to which we aspire overflows the university campus and we are obliged to struggle within the factory, in the countryside, in the neighbourhood, in the school, in *el barrio*, with arms, not only against the repressive organic law but against the state and the government, which is mainly responsible for keeping a model of the university according, it is clear, to big national and foreign businessman.¹⁰⁴

The EPR summoned the radical students to organise self-defence groups against “the repression” in the context of the “beautiful - *hermosa* - opportunity to be part of the revolutionary process”.¹⁰⁵ In a similar move to the CGH and the EZLN, the EPR conceived the movement as the concentration of political efforts against an enemy comprised of the federal government and the “university elite”. It expressed doubts with regard to those inside the movement and within the left who “only shout when the repression prepared beforehand, with their help, is made evident in the dead, the beaten up, the incarcerated or the raped”.¹⁰⁶ In the EPR’s view, the moment of articulation implicit in dialogue should be excluded. Like the EZLN did, the EPR unconditionally

¹⁰² Around 20 colleges and departments did so.

¹⁰³ *El Insurgente*, EPR’s informative pamphlet number 23 December 1999.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

supported the hegemonic segment of the movement.¹⁰⁷ The EPR hinted that if an intervention were to take place, the security forces would face an armed response: “as an insurgent movement, we reserve for ourselves the right to act in consequence”.¹⁰⁸

The actual connection between insurgencies and the student movement is still unclear. However, the student invocation of insurgent discourses and attendance to meetings with some guerrilla leaders, in Chiapas and Mexico City and its surroundings, occurred and reflected interest of the parties involved. In any case, it was not the actual link between the CGH and the insurgents that reactivated the security discourse, but the perception of the possibility of a crisis in which institutional violence would have to be resorted to in the government’s reading. The climate of widespread opposition to the movement’s intransigence triggered the PFP intervention within the broader political contest for the presidency in 2000. In mainstream politics the frontier established in 1994 could not be surpassed or taken to the centre of the country and the core of mainstream electoral politics without reactivating security institutions.

In February 2000 this was *the last limit acceptable* for UNAM’s communities and the political class. What Apter has called the *threshold of intolerability* had been reached.¹⁰⁹ Whereas they had been unable to construct themselves as political options against the CGH’s exclusionary politics, they did not oppose the security forces’ intervention to contain the CGH’s intransigence. The CGH touched *the limit of the achievable*, as a radical student movement incapable of entering in a process of articulation, as the EZLN did in 1994. The universal impetus to confront the state had overflowed the CGH’s specific demands to such an extent that the CGH was vulnerable to becoming

¹⁰⁶ *El Insurgente*, number 24, January 2000.

¹⁰⁷ The telling difference may be the uneven weight and destination of a critique: while *Marcos* addressed both aspects of moderate behaviour and mainly the *mega ultras*, the EPR seemed keener to interrogate the moderate’s positions and associated them with the PRI’s. *Moderates* were in the EPR’s view “the spearhead against the movement”; EPR’s communiqué, 11 October 1999.

¹⁰⁸ Throughout the conflict this was the only EPR communiqué related to the movement referred by *La Jornada* by deploying a central page headline - an indication of the most open media’s attitude, as sceptical with the EPR as open to the EZLN. The guerrilla relevance granted to the student strike is also an indication of the eventual significance of the CGH as a site of radical contestation. EPR’s communiqué, 30 January 2000.

unacceptable because it had lost the particular ground from which it emerged and, therefore, the legitimacy of its antagonistic stance. It did not conceal its techniques of drawing internal and external frontiers, and was unable to reinvent itself as a space of acceptable representation to other struggles beyond the radical left. The presidential succession added to the increasing public rejection of the CGH, created the conditions for the reiteration of a nuanced internal security discourse. This was expressed by the intervention of an institution created as part of the consequences of the 1994 revolt, and allegedly triggered by the EPR emergence in 1996: the PFP.

4.3.2 The epilogue: security forces intervention

On Sunday morning, 6 February, at 06.15, about 2,400 unarmed PFP policemen occupied the main campus in *Ciudad Universitaria*, and imprisoned 737 students and activists who had been guarding the student assembly in UNAM's main political auditorium, the emblematic *Che Guevara*. The news of the operation caused the abandonment of all other premises by activists loyal to the CGH. The CGH's representatives were within the main campus, as well as most of their *ultra* and *mega-ultra* leaders. The operation took place with the presence of public notaries, representatives of the Human Rights National Commission, and was covered by the media. The *limit of the acceptable* and the PFP intervention were justified by all the political elite. The reactivation of the internal security state was also legitimised by the silence of UNAM's communities. To them the consciousness of their own rejection of the exclusionary politics of insurgent-like organisations had become apparent.

The president justified the PFP's intervention thus: "I understood with deep sadness that the efforts to achieve a solution only from the university have reached a limit". To the Interior Minister, Diódoro Carrasco, there was a social conviction that "before the reiterated intolerance is necessary to oppose reason, prudence and firmness"; in his

¹⁰⁹ David Apter, *The Legitimization of Violence* (London: UN Research Institute for Social Development, 1997), 25.

words, “the peace” brought about by the PFP was indispensable “for the complete exercise of the University’s autonomy”. To the PRI’s presidential candidate, Labastida Ochoa, the intervention showed that “when there is no dialogue there is no other way than to apply the law”. To Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, former leader of the PRI and the PRD, and presidential candidate for a secondary party, in the resolution there was “on the one hand a repeated clumsiness from the authorities”, and on the other “an overtaking by the more radicals”. The foremost negotiator with the EZLN, Manuel Camacho, regarded the PFP intervention as “the failure of politics”; to the PRD’s three-time candidate for the presidency, Cárdenas, the decision was regrettable but unavoidable: “we lament that the conflict did not reach a solution and that the eviction *had to be used* with the PFP”.¹¹⁰

The detention of the strikers and the intervention of the PFP signified the quasi-unanimous rejection of the radicalism exhibited by the hard core of the movement, but did not end it. The CGH survived, defeated, and demonstrations were deployed in the context of the demand for freedom for more than one thousand students. The CGH continued as a secondary reference in a bitterly divided UNAM.

In the imaginary of the late 1990s far-left, the cherished protracted war against the regime, embodied in the guerrilla discourses represented by the pre-1994 EZLN and the 1996 EPR, was iterated as a protracted conflict against the UNAM’s rector and the federal and local government. The strike lasted more than nine months as opposed to the nineteen days of the 1987 student movement headed by the CEU, whose three main leaders become PRD advisors, leaders and officers. The 1999-2000 student strike seems to have been understood by the *ultras* as an opportunity for a “general strike” against the institutions beyond UNAM and against electoral politics, and to that extend, they shared a common ground with insurgent discourses. Its radicalism also contributed to the refinement of the internal security state.

¹¹⁰ *La Jornada, Excelsior, El Universal, Financiero, Reforma*, 7 February 2000 and Garay, op.cit., chapter 15.

Conclusion

The EPR and the EZLN had an attentive audience in the hard core of the student movement. These organisations were not definitive in the decisions taken by the students, but they were respected referents to them and became part of the CGH's imaginary. Through its influence, its capacity for interpellation and specific underground connections, marginal in the whole process but relevant in the constitution of the image portrayed by the media and the political elite, the insurgent organisations impacted on the student movement in its appeal for an insurgent reading of politics.

The student movement iterated the available elements of insurgent discourses, such as the notion of rebelliousness that emerged in 1994 and re-emerged in 1996. In doing so uncritically, the CGH also showed its inability to conceal its exclusionary techniques, indispensable for insurgent actors. It provoked the invocation and deployment of a more refined stage in the internal security discourse. In this phase, broad segments of the society ended expecting the security intervention and sharing government's evaluation of the conflict, that is, they become part of the process of *securitisation*. The most politicised society shared the security concerns to the extent that a radical identity was not able to portray its demands as generalised demands and conceal its hegemonic drive and exclusionary methods. What had been incorporated as a difference into the system by means of a process of neutralisation and negotiation of the limits of the polity, as in Chiapas, or prosecuted and eventually mediated as in Guerrero or Oaxaca, in terms of the emergence of radical identities, was thought to be unbearable in the context of UNAM. Therefore, the limits of the regime were in 2000 construed as boundaries that had to be located as the outside of the system. Unavoidably, geographic aloofness of danger might be seen as crucial for its tolerance, as in the EZLN case...if armed.

The CGH was also addressing other system of exclusions by means of its own existence as a radical community: that which marginalises students from higher education and, later on, which excludes lower-middle strata sectors, which after finishing their degrees either are not able to find employment as professionals or are badly paid.

Opposition to the regime within the CGH contributed to the significant critique of the weakening of social policy, embodied in the apparent abandonment of education as a core element of public policy. Unlike the EZLN, the CGH did not maintain control over the portrayal of its image. It was exposed to media scrutiny, which affected it gravely. The invocation of a general strike greatly contributed to the political rejection of the movement, which triggered the PFP's intervention. The PFP operation, for the first time as a counter-insurgency measure in the last 35 years, counted on the open support of the political class, the presence of a respected human rights institution, the media and, significantly, the silent approval of several segments of the left.

The exclusionary tools, by which the dominant *ultra* segment with the CGH achieved the consolidation of the movement and, paradoxically, created the conditions for its final defeat, were simultaneous operations indispensable for the definition of its internal and external political frontiers. Considering that exclusionary techniques (use of physical violence, verbal harassment, marginalisation from the leadership of the movement, overemphasis of internal and external polarisation and an exaggerated simplification of the political) are not alien to any political force or movement, what was unbearable for the political elite, and for wide segments of society, including UNAM and other communities, was the *intensity* and *visibility* of these techniques and *the actuality and proximity of the threat* associated with them, namely the possible damage made to the electoral process and to the already harshly questioned centrality of the public university. More precisely, what became unacceptable within UNAM was the experience of being needlessly victimised by a segment of the student body that had menaced the university's communities, and the transition process within which the social and partisan left had gained a space. Besides, the sense of impotence in those segments of society for whom UNAM is still the only option for education and prosperity, was broadened. As in 1994 and 1996, the menace felt by the leftist organisations connected to the electoral process, which were aware of the probable effects of the polarisation of public opinion, was also a factor.

The CGH temporarily reached the level of being a space of inscription of other's struggles. It became later on, especially during the second stage described here, the site of the erosion of its own myth, and was transformed into the space for rejection of radical politics in general. It became a mark beyond which the security discourse may acquire legitimacy, when society shares the distance of the political class from any radical movement.

In the interaction between security and insurgent actors, the CGH offered additional confirmation of the stability of the political boundary instituted in 1994. No radical identities would be tolerated if they overstepped the mark represented by the EZLN's basic ambiguity of attempting to construct "the people" without engaging in radical operations, whose violence may become evident to society. The CGH was, in February 2000, at the *limit of the regime*, where the internal security discourse was reactivated and refined on the eve of the federal election that became the first one lost by the PRI. The new environment would make possible the *Zapatista March* to Mexico City, headed by *Marcos*, in 2001; and made evident two competing notions of democracy and popular sovereignty, as much as the PFP's intervention as governmental guarantor of the political frontier constituted in 1994. This is the theme of the next chapter.