Insurgencies and National Security in Mexico (1993 - 2003): Political Frontiers, Myth and Hegemony, the Role of the EZLN

José Salvador Guerrero-Chiprés

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Department of Government
University of Essex

March, 2004,
To my mother, Margarita Chiprés and my children, Aura Elvira and Pedro Salvador. To my son José Salvador and my brother Pedro Felipe

To the memory of Professor Manuel Buendia, assassinated on 30 May 1984

To all those who believe
Abstract

This thesis contributes to our understanding of Mexican political history from 1993 to 2003, arguing that a detailed account of the nature and evolution of security discourse during this period should form a key part of any such understanding. It relies on general discourse-theoretic tools and considerable first-hand participant-observation accounts and interviews conducted by the author himself, in order to suggest that the nature and evolution of Mexican security discourse is best understood as a function of the specific interaction between security and insurgency actors, rather than as a function merely of the vested interests or ideologies of these actors.

The thesis comprises five chapters, each of which will tackle an aspect of the central object of my research, namely, the evolving political frontier constructed through the interaction between insurgent and national security actors. After reviewing the main literature relevant to this topic and laying the theoretical foundations for the subsequent analysis (Chapter 1) I argue that, given the uniqueness of the Mexican context (specified in the Introduction), this political frontier was established in 1994 through the dynamic exchange between the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) and representatives of the regime (Chapter 2). Here I advance my main hypothesis, which questions an overly romanticized and positive rendition of the EZLN’s role since its emergence in 1994, widespread in the literature, qualifying significantly its supposedly progressive impact. I argue, instead, that the post 1994 political and social stability was largely a result of the Mexican regime’s successful adaptation to the new situation by mobilizing elements in the pre 1994 national security discourse in a novel way. In this view, the regime has effectively, though by no means always intentionally or through competence, outmanoeuvred the EZLN by setting up the latter as a standard against which to judge insurgency movements in general as legitimate or illegitimate. In support of this hypothesis, I examine in detail not simply the interaction between these central characters, but also their individual and collective response to, and interaction with, key movements and events: the emergence of the EPR (Popular Revolutionary Army) in 1996 (Chapter 3), the CGH (General Council of Strike) student movement in the context of the strike at UNAM (the National Autonomous University of Mexico) in 2000 (Chapter 4), and the Zapatista March of 2001 (Chapter 5).
Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the support of the British Council, the Public Education Secretariat (Secretaría de Educación Pública) and, particularly, of the National Council of Science and Technology (Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología).

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My emphasis on the importance of the frontiers between extremism and democracy owes to many people I have met in the last 20 years. They allowed me to generate the doubts and questions I am trying to address when dealing with ideology, social movements, insurgencies and national security in Mexico. They also represent part of a bigger group that believe that they contribute to the construction of a better country, many times equivocally. Mexico would be closer to the rule of law, to an increased sense of justice and morality if a wider understanding of the bigger commitment with institutions - as the embodiment of community’s values - and its interaction with society were present.

I very much appreciate the assistance of Jacqueline Pells from the administrative staff at the Department of Government at Essex University, the laborious proofreading of Jonathan Luckhurst and the helpful nearness of the best known Mexican at Essex, Edmundo Hernández.

I am especially grateful of the unconditional friendship and undeserved fondness of Aura María Vidales, the friendship I have fortunately maintained with Juan Antonio Zúñiga and the intelligent comment and affectionate support I have generously received in England from Rei Shigeno. I have also in my mind, as always, my sister, Margarita, my nephew Cuauhtémoc and nieces Andrea and Gabriela.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronyms</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epigraphs</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction to**

**Insurgencies and National Security in Mexico (1993 - 2003):**

**Political Frontiers, Myth and Hegemony, the Role of the EZLN** 1

**Organisation**

**Chapter 1**

*National Security and its Challengers*

1.1 Representing insurgent challenges. The literature on the EZLN 33  
1.1.1 Structural(ist) approaches to insurgencies and the case of the EZLN 39  
1.1.2 Political agency and the critique of the EZLN 49  
1.1.3 Dynamic structure-agency accounts 58  
1.2 Insurgency: post-modern or hegemonic? 60  
1.2.1 A post-modern approach for a “post-modern” insurgency 64  
1.3 A framework of analysis 67  
1.3.1 The Mexican (national) *internal security/insurgency frontier* 70  
1.3.2 Sovereignty and intensified “national” security discourse 72  
Conclusion 83

**Chapter 2**

*The Birth of the EZLN Myth and the Renewal of the Internal Security State* 87  

2.1 The EZLN: defiance or threat? 88  
2.1.1 The matrix: FLN and EZLN military drive 94  
2.2 Absence of indigenous, myth and sovereignty 106  
2.2.1 Truly popular sovereignty and the EZLN’s successful…failure 120  
2.3 The smartest fools’ *bridge to the outside* 129  
2.4 Contribution to the regime: a frontier with *an insurgent standard* 133  
Conclusion 142

**Chapter 3**

*The Emergence of the EPR: a Threat to the Insurgent/Security Frontier* 146  

3.1 Logics of equivalence and difference (political frontiers) 147  
3.1.1 Emergence of the EPR and its interpretation of the regime 151  
3.1.2 Reactions of main political actors vis-à-vis the EPR’s emergence 154  
3.2 Similarity and difference 156  
3.2.1 Partisan distress and insurgent disruption 160
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2 EPR’s stance toward the EZLN</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The regime’s posture toward the EPR (equivalence and difference)</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 The EZLN’s position: strategic nuances towards the EPR</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 4**

*Unpalatable Threat: Students unaware of the 1994 EZLN’s Lessons*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Stage one: dislocation and antagonism</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1 A massive minority full of cleavages</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 The strike’s midway: intransigence and resistance</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Emeritus Professors’ proposal: an excluded way out</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Stage two: the hour of internal security</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Civic and armed insurgencies in the student strike</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 The epilogue: security forces intervention</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 5**

*Zapatista March: Myth, Hegemony and the Refinement of an Internal Frontier*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Fox’s era: the displacement of the PRI and the Zapatista March</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.2 Fox and the indigenous proposal</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Strategic fighting for the meaning of the march</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1 Doubts and lack of strategic definitions</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2 EZLN as a flag for everybody</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Army and Federal Preventive Police (PFP): protecting a security frontier</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 The “ignoble past” and the march</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.1 Repositioning the EZLN</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.2 Mexico City: mythical climax and hegemonic epilogue</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions**                                                                 | 281  |

**Published Sources**                                                          | 297  |
List of acronyms

CCRI-CG: Revolutionary Clandestine Indigenous Committee -General Command (Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General)

CENEVAL: National Council of (EXAMS) Evaluation (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación)

CEU: University Student Council (Consejo Estudiantil Universitario)

CGH: National Council of Strike (Consejo Nacional de Huelga)

CISEN: National Security Investigation Centre (Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional)

CNTE: National Coordination of Education Workers (Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación)

COCOPA: Commission on Concordance and Pacification (Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación)

EPR: Popular revolutionary Army (Ejército Popular Revolucionario)

ERPI: Revolutionary Army of the Insurgent People (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo Insurgente)

EZLN: Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional)

FLN: National Liberation Forces (Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional)

FAC-MLN: Wide Front for the Construction of the National Liberation Movement (Frente Amplio para la Construcción del Movimiento de Liberación Nacional)

FZLN: Zapatista Front for National Liberation (Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional)

INAP: National Institute of Public Administration (instituto Nacional de Administración Pública)

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement (Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte)

OCSS: Southern Sierra Peasants Organisation (Organización Campesina de la Sierra del Sur)

PAN: National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional)

PFP: Federal Preventive Police (Policía Federal Preventiva)

PRI: Revolutionary Institutional Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional)

PRD: Revolutionary Democratic Party (Partido de la Revolución Democrática)

Procup-Pdlp: Clandestine Workers’ Revolutionary Party Union of the People-Party of the Poor (Partido Revolucionario Obrero Clandestino Unión del Pueblo-Partido de los Pobres)

RGP: General Regulations of Payments (Reglamento General de Pagos, UNAM)

SEDENA: Secretariat of National defence (Secretari de la Defensa Nacional)

Segob: Secretariat of Governance / Ministry of Interior (Secretaría de Gobernación)

UNAM: National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México)
Uprisings strengthen regimes that they do not overthrow.
Victor Hugo, father of the French Republic

Later, that man *that has a God inside and whose name is Marcos* handed the Mexican flag to Rosario Ibarra…

Elena Poniatowska in referring to the EZLN’s leader during the National Democratic Convention organized by the EZLN in August 1994

What is different about our movement, the Zapatista, is not the long-term process but the idea that the movement parts *from the consciousness*, not ours, but people’s.

Fernando Yáñez, *Comandante Germán* - founder of the FLN and the EZLN - the so called *hermano mayor* by Rafael Guillén, *Subcomandante Marcos*.

The EZLN did not cause the reorganisation of the security of the State but it certainly catalysed it after January 1994.

Jorge Tello Peón, former general director of the Investigation and National Security Centre (CISEN) and undersecretary of the Interior in 2000

Those who live are those who fight.

Victor Hugo, again, protector of those revolutionaries who failed

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1 *La Jornada*, 16 August 1994. Poniatowska is one of the most relevant writers in Mexico and Ibarra is a central organizer of the search for the desaparecidos linked to the repression against guerrillas during the 1970s. My emphasis. The favourable predisposition within segments of the liberal left in relation to the EZLN’s leader reached the point of total absence of the criticism characteristic of the left. Poniatowska’s comment is also revealing of the perception of Marcos as a political actor with whom it was worthwhile to unconditionally identify with.


3 My interview, 18 March 2003.