

Chapter 5

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

In this chapter I claim that the displacement of the PRI by the National Action Party (PAN) in the 2000 presidential elections obliged the EZLN to resituate its discourse and confirm its rebellious identity. In doing so, the *Zapatista March* to Mexico City renewed its advocacy of an alternative interpretation of politics. However, the EZLN's repositioning did not stop it from contributing to a hegemonic refinement of the security institutions, whose reorganisation was provoked by the 1994 events. Additionally, the EZLN's mobilisation exposed the split between president Fox, sympathetic to the march, and the segments of the PAN opposed to the guerrillas' intervention in the Chamber of Deputies, and reluctant to support the indigenous rights bill put forth by the EZLN and advocated by the President. It also showed the limits and contradictions within, for instance, the PRI, whose vote ironically permitted the EZLN to address the Congress. President Vicente Fox and Rafael Guillén, as "builders of myths" - such as the transition to democracy by putting forward the appealing notion of "the useful vote"¹ to displace the PRI in 2000, and *Zapatismo* as an interpretation principle for resistance struggles - embodied competing notions of politics in 2001.

In previous chapters I have put forward the following arguments. First, after provoking the intensification of the internal security state the EZLN articulation with the regime allowed the recreation of *Zapatismo* as a principle of reading valid to other struggles, but also made the EZLN the boundary and standard for acceptable radical struggles and a valid difference into the system. Second, the EPR's emergence in 1996 strikingly exposed the existence of that divide by threatening it and menacing the EZLN/government frontier. It also showed the combined use of logics of equivalence and difference for the government to justify a different treatment of the new guerrilla. Third, the 1999-2000 student movement reflected the availability of insurgent discourses and the possibility for them to be iterated for new radical actors. Unfortunately for the radical left, unlike the EZLN, the CGH was unable to conceal

the moment and the means by which its political frontiers were drawn, that is, mainly through politics of exclusion. If in 1996 the EPR reactivated the internal security discourse - already intensified as a consequence of the EZLN's intervention in 1994 - to which it was also responding after the massacre in *Aguas Blancas*, in 2000 the CGH gave the system the opportunity to refine its tools. Society at large did not oppose, but even silently supported the security forces when they retook the university campus in 2000.

As a general conclusion to the previous chapters, it is clear that despite the stated and actual intentions of the Salinas administration and the EZLN, the 1994 conjuncture opened a democratic space in which political violence of an insurrectionary or institutional origin was equally repudiated but their dialogue was warranted.

Unlike the rest of Latin America, the Mexican political class incorporated a segment of the insurgencies to legitimise its discourse of security, and as evidence of a forced plurality that has actually legitimised the system at large. Conversely, in the well-known South American case, insurgencies were construed as a total "other" and generally crushed or negotiated with as part of an interpretation embodied by the far right National Security Doctrine.

In the context of this thesis, the building up to and the *Zapatista March* itself represented the space in which political actors fought to impose meaning on the mobilisation in the wider framework of a political battle involving discourses of security, emancipation and democracy. The two seemingly antagonistic understandings of what Mexican democracy should be, which were expressed during the march, may be seen as competing myths. However, the myth embodied by the PAN and other forces such as the PRI has reinforced its hegemonic character, while the EZLN's myth just managed to regain political control in *Las Cañadas*, among the social left and as centre of reconnection with other armed organisations, as a result of the mobilisation. An indigenous bill which was not of the EZLN's liking was approved by

¹ This was the main slogan by which the PAN presented itself as space for all those voters against the PRI, and with which it competed successfully against PRD to become *the* space of the opposition's electoral contestation.

the Congress and ratified by the majority of local legislatures and the Judiciary after the EZLN went back to *Las Cañadas* in April 2001.

The *Zapatista March* took place in a context wherein the negotiations with the EZLN had seemingly stagnated and the interaction between the main insurgent group and the regime was limited to the government's tolerance of the small *Zapatista State* built in the conflict zone.² In it, even encircled by the army, the EZLN had authority from which it openly had declared that indigenous "autonomy" had effectively been gained.³ Thus, paradoxically, even when the dominant segment of the political class temporarily succeeded through its broad deployment of the internal security state, the possibility for the insurgencies to strengthen their appeal and political position emerged as well.

I will consider the context prior to the march, the dispute over its meaning, the intervention of the Preventive Federal Police (PFP), the re-emergence of *Comandante Germán*, the repositioning of the EZLN in relation to the EPR, the EZLN's participation before the Chamber of Deputies and the subsequent dismissal of the insurgent proposal. From the start - 24 February - to the end of the mobilisation - 1 April - the EZLN was able to reconstitute itself as an antagonism *within the system*, whereas the latter legitimised the contested hegemonic pact by confirming its actual capacity to allow/protect the march leaving practically untouched the dominant position with respect to the EZLN's demands.

5.1 Fox's era: the displacement of the PRI and the *Zapatista March*

In 2000, a centre-right coalition *Alianza por el Cambio* - Alliance for Change - became a viable alternative to 71 years of PRI presidential control. Six months after the PFP's intervention in UNAM to end the CGH's occupation of the university campus, and six years

² To some qualified commentators, such as Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, the existence of this authority makes it possible to speak of *Las Cañadas Republic* in opposition to the Federal project. Conversation in Oxford during the Encounter of Mexican PhD Students, 14-15 June 2003. The comment alluded to the underling fact that the authority of the Mexican State is mediated and/or undermined by the EZLN's authority within the conflict zone, and refers to the agreement between the government and the EZLN, which I regard as basically unchanged in the period 1994-2004.

³ Rafael Guillén, *Marcos*, has recognised that the military encirclement has not prevented the EZLN from reaching some of its objectives and that "autonomy" is "a reality in *Zapatista* lands", see *La Jornada*, 27 July 2003.

and six months after the EZLN's emergence, a crucial opening for democracy took place in Mexico. Vicente Fox was able to mobilise and obtain 42.5 of the vote, above the PRI's 36.1 and the PRD's coalition with 16.1.⁴ The turnout was 63.9 percent,⁵ the second largest in competitive elections since 1994.

The PRI's absolut predominance in Chiapas had been dismantled over the last ten years. Having had a vote share, with frequently rigged numbers, close to 100 percent before 1994, it plunged to 50 percent in 2003. However, considered as single party - outside coalitions - the PRI continued to be a central partisan force. Interestingly enough, in municipalities with a strong EZLN presence, the PRI won the federal vote in 2000, followed by the PRD. In this region, the vote for PAN represented by far a minimal influence. *Ocosingo*, *Altamirano* and *Las Margaritas*, where the EZLN more strongly emerged and developed, each had one more than 50 per cent votes for the PRI. More generally, the three states with recent major insurrectionary antecedents occupied three out of the four places with the lowest voter turnout: Chiapas with 52.1, Guerrero 54.1 and Oaxaca with 58.7. In short, regionally speaking, areas with an insurgent tradition were far from influenced by Fox's campaign and, at the same time, the centre left vote did not predominate and electoral politics was far from being preponderant while the PRI kept a majoritarian presence.⁶

To the extent that the PAN and the EZLN have shared the PRI as an enemy the centre-right seemed to be unopposed to the insurgent challenge. The adversary to be defeated in the eyes of the electoral majority had been the PRI. Opposition forces shared such a conviction from different standpoints. However, only the coalition headed by Fox became the champion of the majority segment of civil society.

The results of the 2000 federal elections could be interpreted as the institution of a mythical space of representation of an alternative political order to seven decades of PRI's rule. In the sight of it the armed left had to re-position its stance.

⁴ Federal Electoral Institute, <http://www.ife.org.mx/> downloaded on 20 November 2000.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

After the electoral outcome, the EZLN shifted its emphasis. It insisted that it had risen in arms not because the PRI represented a lack of democracy, as stated in its 1994's *Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, but because it was against "the system that forgot and humiliated us".⁷ The EZLN understood that the new conditions of the legitimacy and popularity of the PAN government and, in particular, Fox, obliged it to reconstitute its discourse. It reorganised it around an updating of the central notion of indigenous rights and an unspecified radical reform. The organisation of the *Zapatista March* was designed to re-inscribe the EZLN into the political debate and as a challenge to the new hegemonic alliance. I will periodise the process as follows.

In a first stage, from the take-over of the presidency to the start of the march, from 1 December 2000 to 24 February 2001, the dispute around the legitimacy of two mythical discourses will be considered. The second phase comprises the period from the beginning of the march to the eve of the EZLN's intervention before the Chamber of Deputies, on 28 March 2001, followed by the Parliamentary rejection of the EZLN's proposal. In it I will address, as part of the confirmation of the internal security frontier, the disclosure of reconnections among insurgent actors and the revitalisation of the hegemonic discourse, by the mobilisation of the PFP, the vote in Congress and the Judiciary decision.

5.1.2 Fox and the indigenous proposal

In the alternative order offered by Vicente Fox, authoritarian presidentialism was now absent and the Chiapas conflict was referred to as a priority. During his inauguration speech, on 1 December 2000, President Fox highlighted the fact that his administration was disinclined to use the former authoritarian mechanisms of political power. He argued, "from now on the President proposes and the legislature decides". He added that "there will be a new awakening will for Chiapas", and ordered the withdrawal of several military roadblocks in the conflict

⁷ Voices of *Zapatistas* in Cuxuljá, one of the garrisons abandoned by the army, as evidence of the government disposition to look after the EZLN's demands. *La Jornada*, 11 January 2001.

zone.⁸ On the same day, the EZLN announced that it would march to Mexico City. *Marcos* would be accompanied by 23 of the EZLN's indigenous *comandantes*, with the aim of showing the Congress "the goodness" of the COCOPA proposal that synthesised the EZLN's demands.

An antecedent to the march announced on 2 December 2000 had been EZLN's 1997 mobilization designed with the goal of relocating the EZLN in the political field, after that year's midterm federal elections. Significantly, the 1997 election was won by the PRD in Mexico City, reactivating enthusiasm for electoral politics among the left. That year the march of 1,111 Zapatistas to Mexico City preceded the foundation of the FZLN, the EZLN's nationally unsuccessful "civil wing".

Unlike 1997, in 2001 the march would be led by *Marcos*. According to the 1994-2001 prevailing understanding of the process of articulation between the political elite and the insurgent organisations, the insurgents were to stay in the geographical area in which they were allowed to operate as a contesting political authority, especially the case with its paradigmatic symbol, *Marcos*. Thus the EZLN, was accepted if it remained only at the margins of Mexican society. Any attempt to overstep the conditions upon which its existence was grounded, was constructed as an insulting "threat" to those who had excluded it, particularly conservative and traditional security actors.

The EZLN's *insurgent myth*, in its reconstitution, however, required it to confront the new democratic imaginary as a means of differentiation and proclaim itself as the source of an alternative democratic reading of politics. To the EZLN, Fox's victory was the result of a "rebellion", but such a rebellion could not be finished until the Congress accepted the EZLN's version of indigenous rights.⁹ Otherwise, the EZLN stated, the PAN's liberal project would face "the resistance of millions" disposed to overcome the political immobility and conformism that the EZLN found behind Fox's rhetoric.¹⁰ Addressing the president and

⁸ *Reforma, La Jornada, El Universal*, 2 December 2000.

⁹ EZLN's letter to "Mr Vicente Fox". 2 December 2000.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

audiences for whom the EZLN's stance had become anachronistic, the organisation claimed that it was Fox who did not understand that the country had changed.¹¹

You are mistaken. We have fought for change, but for us "change" means "democracy, freedom and justice". The PRI's defeat was a necessary condition for the country to change, but not enough... There are many things lacking, and most importantly, this is known by millions of Mexicans. For instance, the indigenous are lacking.¹²

According to the EZLN's argument, Fox should differentiate himself from the former administration and if so he would be rewarded by restarting the dialogue and a subsequent "true peace".¹³ Along with the announcement of the mobilisation that would begin on 24 February, the EZLN asked for three signals. These were: fulfilling the *San Andrés Accords*, signed by Zedillo in 1996 and which had been the basis for the COCOPA's proposal of indigenous rights; the liberation of all *Zapatistas* incarcerated in Chiapas or in any other state; and the demilitarisation of seven specific points.¹⁴

The president responded to the guerrilla organisation by stating his "joy" at the resumption of the dialogue, called for a substitution of a "logic of war" and for an "openness in favour of peace". His spokeswoman declared that it accepted "in principle" the *Zapatista* proposals and would evaluate them "in depth".¹⁵ The EZLN accepted, that same day, the appointment of Luis H. Alvarez, a senior member of the PAN, as a "valid interlocutor".

On 5 December, the president sent the initiative to the Senate exactly as it was proposed by the COCOPA and accepted by the EZLN. The "right way" to begin the peace process in Chiapas, according to the president's presentation of the initiative, was to transform the COCOPA's proposal into a formal bill of constitutional reform. Inequality had caused, in his

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ EZLN's communiqué, 2 December 2000. According to the EZLN the Mexican Army was occupying 259 positions in Chiapas. They demanded the military withdrawal from Amador Hernández, Guadalupe Tepeyac, Río Euseba, Jolnachoj, Roberto Barrios, La Garrucha and Cuxulja, all of them central positions in the history of the EZLN. They had been sites of the foundation of the EZLN, its headquarters, and sites of the post-rebellion articulation with segments of the civil society and other radical organisations. They demanded seven positions as an emblematic symbolisation of the seven years of "resistance" against the PRI's regime.

¹⁵ *La Jornada*, 3 December 2000.

view, the EZLN's rise, and this organisation, he granted, "vindicated the aim of better conditions for the indigenous of Chiapas in particular and for the totality of the indigenous in the country in general".¹⁶ He believed that the government was obliged to comply with the *San Andrés Accords* and the resulting constitutional initiative. He dismissed criticisms against the idea of the *Zapatista* "autonomy" by highlighting that free-determination and indigenous people's autonomy did not endanger national cohesion. The proposal was not "detrimental to national sovereignty, always within the constitutional framework of the Mexican State and under the principle of national unity".¹⁷

Despite Fox's argument, the fact is that the proposal demanded *specific rights* and *autonomy* for a political actor now denominated "indigenous people". The President stuck to the insistence that the bill was not aimed at creating any special rights. Indigenous people were asking, he contended, to formalise the recognition of their culture and their rights as members of the nation.¹⁸ What was actually at stake now seemed to be the *political* and *economic* autonomy based on the control of natural resources. That is, a radical interpretation of "sovereignty" and the control of a new order of government based on the experience of the "Aguascalientes" and "free municipalities" under EZLN control was seemingly trying to explore the possibility to become institutionalised.¹⁹

However, despite the evidence of the significance of the EZLN's notion of "autonomy", and Fox's support of the EZLN's position, he insisted that property of "land and waters"

¹⁶ Prologue to the presidential proposal sent to the senate, Presidencia de la República, 5 December 2000.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Such a formality, however, already existed. Civic and cultural rights were granted in writing as part of the constitution. In terms of citizenship rights, this had been the case since 1917. Besides, since 1992, as part of the "cultural" inclusion of "the indigenous people", they were formally included as an illustration of the defence of the official plurality.

¹⁹ The *Aguascalientes* became *Caracoles* in August 2003. They were presented as *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*. Basically, it was a renaming operation, a typical EZLN resource when there is a significant date in the *Zapatista* mythology, an anniversary of its constitution and the FLN's. It corresponded to the attempt to present EZLN's articulation with democratic and communitarian discourses as a renewed platform for the "exercised autonomy" in a stable context in which the organisation seeks to be perceived as rebellious *and* competent administratively speaking. Interestingly, even in the generous interpretation of it there are traits that show the EZLN's cautious differentiation in a post September 11 framework: the EZLN also distanced from any "terrorist" tactic, see Pablo González Casanova, *Los caracoles zapatistas, redes de resistencia y autonomía*, in *La Jornada*, 26 September

would continue to be controlled by the nation and “sovereignty” would be defined within the parliamentary space. In Article 4 of the presidential proposal, it is asserted that

The indigenous peoples have the right to free determination and, as an expression of this, to autonomy, as part of the Mexican state, in order to decide internal forms of living together, and social organisation, as well as economic, political and cultural (issues)²⁰

The new government tried to address a central issue of the debate: the connection between the sovereignty of the people, with the Congress as representative of the whole nation, and the competing interpretations of this notion within radical groupings for whom sovereignty was determined by their own internal instruments of decision-making.

The PAN’s 1994 candidate for the presidency, and leader of the *panistas* in the Senate, Diego Fernández de Cevallos, suggested that the correlation of forces, as already expressed in Congress, should shape the debate and determine the outcome of the vote on the indigenous rights bill. The law could not benefit from an “automatic pass” as allegedly had happened under the PRI regime. In addition to that, he reiterated that he was not in favour of negotiating with *encapuchados*²¹ - masked people - the *Zapatistas*.

The democratic opening had continued after 2000. For instance, the new Chiapas governor, a former *priista* now supported by a coalition of victorious opposition forces, the PRD and the PAN included, had won the election. Consequently, the EZLN lost another antagonistic referent in Chiapas, where the PRI had governed practically unchallenged for decades. In Oaxaca, a predominantly indigenous state with a marginal guerrilla presence and governed by a *priista*, the local Congress unanimously passed an amnesty law where 311 indigenous Zapotecos were no longer prosecuted after being accused of belonging to the EPR.²² As a result, the EZLN was no longer the only relatively accepted insurgent referent, even when it must be said that in the Oaxaca case the agreement acquired only local relevance

2003. In November 2003 and January 2004 the EZLN only called for continuing its “resistance” struggle instead of deploying a relevant mobilisation as had occurred in less significant anniversaries.

²⁰ Presidencia de la República, Prologue to the Proposal...Ibid.

²¹ *La Jornada*, 6 December 2000.

and was not formalised with/by the EPR's leadership. The governor also suggested initiating a dialogue with armed groups. Oaxaca's partisan and social left demanded, hopelessly, that the guerrilla in that state would be treated as the EZLN had been in Chiapas.²³ Hence, the EZLN's enemy, federally and locally, the *priista regime*, seemed to recede into the background.

In the first stage of a constant campaign in favour of the indigenous rights' proposal, Fox declared that, putting aside the question of "paramilitaries" or active anti-EZLN indigenous communities, he would do anything within his reach to support the initiative. "I am not going to wash my hands of it...I will defend it and I will argue in its favour", he claimed.²⁴ The peace commissioner, Luis H. Alvarez, heralded the beginning of the liberation of a total of 103 indigenous with the freeing of the first group and the closing of the *Cerro Hueco* jail, where peasants, indigenous and *Zapatistas* had been incarcerated.²⁵

Fox insisted that the government's intention was serious and ordered the army to abandon its barracks in Jolnachoj - one of the seven positions demanded by the EZLN. The decision was part of the measures of *détente* that the government considered useful to create an atmosphere favourable to dialogue.²⁶ Fox vindicated the military presence as a necessary security factor to manage the frontier with Guatemala and the operations related to counter drug-trafficking.²⁷ The EZLN announced the creation of a *Centre of Zapatista Information* that was delineated as part of a carefully designed strategy to recycle the emblems of *Zapatismo*.²⁸

For the first time since the conflict emerged in 1994, a President publicly let know an approximate number of the soldiers in Chiapas,²⁹ and added that the average number of

²² *La Jornada*, 9 December 2000.

²³ *La Jornada*, 10 December 2000.

²⁴ *La Jornada*, 28 December 2000.

²⁵ *La Jornada*, 31 December 2000.

²⁶ National Defence Secretariat, communiqué, 1 January 2001.

²⁷ *Reforma, La Jornada*, 3 January 2001.

²⁸ EZLN's communiqué, 3 January 2001. For instance, in it the 12 January 1994 cease-fire was presented as the day on which "the other upheaval", the one from "the civil society", had "forced" the president to enter into a dialogue and negotiation process.

²⁹ Whereas pro-EZLN accounts had insisted that there were 70 thousand - an implausible number considering that the total amount of members of the armed forces, including conscripts was near to 186

soldiers in any other state was between five and eight thousand.³⁰ Making this information public was meant to coincide with his inclination to comply with the demilitarisation and offer the image of a politician willing to tackle the Chiapas conflict. Additionally, Fox assured that “the Mexican army has the precise instructions not to harass, not to annoy the population, and only to serve it.”³¹

Fox’s acknowledgement of the Chiapas question fell in line with the EZLN calculation that the new political space would permit it to contest partisan politics as a way of recreating itself as an optional democratic principle of reading. But, in order to do so, it had to contest the government’s attempt to dissolve the antagonistic stance indispensable for the EZLN in the logic of equivalence which was intended to regroup loyalties and sympathies against “the regime”, and divide the political scenario into two camps that acquired the name of the visible contenders, Fox and *Marcos*.

5.2 Strategic fighting for the meaning of the march

The presidency and the national security cabinet, the Congress as a whole and the political parties were obliged to redefine their own stances when confronted with the symbolic pressure exerted by the *Zapatista march*.

The EZLN’s critique of Fox’s use of the media was as persistent as the EZLN’s use of it. On the eve of the march, between December and January and 24 February, *Marcos* gave extensive interviews to those considered nationally and internationally influential and sympathetic to its struggle.³² It included a journalistic mobilisation of the images of the 23

thousand and that Mexico has many garrisons in thirty other states and Mexico City - Fox affirmed that they were around 10 thousand soldiers. When dealing with the evidence for putting forward this data, the corresponding *La Jornada* reporter, Juan Antonio Zúñiga, otherwise a very remarkable journalist, could not give more than a vague reference to an equally vague academic source with “an extended network” in the zone. Conversation, August 2000.

³⁰ *Reforma, La Jornada*, 6 January 2001. This data could also be misleading. My own information from primary level sources in the Secretariat of Defence is that at least 13 thousand soldiers were in Chiapas in 2000.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See the long interview with Carlos Monsivaís, *La Jornada*, 8 January 2001 and the interview with *The New York Times*, EZLN web page.

indigenous *comandantes*,³³ the promotion of the idea of a representation of the indigenous women in resistance, and the *Zapatista* children as the sample of the formation of a new generation of dignified Mexicans. The EZLN's political addressees were those voters "defeated" by the centre-right coalition, those wanting to resist the hegemonic appeal of Fox's discourse and all those who felt victimised by the daily practices of the model of accumulation. Insurgent actors and segments of the mobilised youth were also expecting the EZLN's renewal to be a crucial space of identification.³⁴

In January 2001 a survey revealed that more than 65 per cent of the population in Chiapas and in the whole country supported the general approach of Fox to the conflict and his treatment of the mobilisation, while many showed disapproval for the withdrawal of the military.³⁵ Fox was effectively playing "from the left" in order to maintain the EZLN as a non-*antagonistic* moment of the system. That is, the government attempted, somehow successfully, not to be constructed by the EZLN as the agent preventing the insurgents, whose

³³ See *La Jornada* 17 and 22 February 2001.

³⁴ As part of this strategy of showing an organism of which *Marcos* was "the one who obeys", and to present the EZLN as a more democratic group than in 1993, the organisation issued documents in which the *indigenous comandantes* highlighted the march's goals. For *Comandante Abraham*, the EZLN fought against the disdain to which the communities had been subjected. Being indigenous was to have a flag of resistance. The respect for the communities had to be formalised in law. For *Comandantes Alejandro* and *Eduardo*, the dialogue with the congress was part of the resistance, and a more general struggle shared with peasants, workers and, now, students. To *Comandantes Esther* and *Fidelia* resistance was the base for recovering women's rights, in a context in which women "had more hardships" than men. To *Comandantes Filemon*, *Gustavo* and *Ismael*, the indigenous had not actually been considered "part of this Mexican ground", and in the process ahead the legislators had to support the constitutional reform to consolidate the San Andres Accords of 16 February 1996. *Comandantes Moises*, *Omar* and *Zebedeo*'s opinions were that the memory previous to 1994 was one in which being indigenous was a mark of contempt and humiliation. The rebellion, they argued, opened the way for pride around the indigenous languages and more abstractly "the right to be different" and the reform may contribute to consolidate the struggle against the shame thrown by dominant sectors against being indigenous. For the remarkable *Comandante David*, the vindication of indigenous culture needed the approval of the COCOPA law in a long fight against the abandonment and economic plundering in Chiapas. To *Comandantes Javier*, *Susana* and *Yolanda* being indigenous was still "the place of no respect" and of "not being Mexican" for the state and federal governments and the constitution may be the location for its formalisation. To *Comandantes Abel*, *Bulmaro* and *Daniel*, mobilisations and legal reform were indispensable to advancing the rights of the excluded. To *Comandante Mister* and *Tacho* the demand for peace had to be shared by the society to be effective not just as an indigenous demand but as a general political mark of progress. See *La Jornada*, 17 February and <http://ezlnaldf.org/static/delegacion.htm> downloaded on 21 March 2001.

³⁵ See http://www.consulta.com.mx/interiores/99_pdfs/12_mexicanos_pdf/chiapas_2001.pdf the pool was paid by the Biggest TV network, *Televisa*. Its methodological features seem consistent with the standards.

allegedly democratic credentials were not discussed, from achieving the rights they were vindicating to fulfill its “full identity” as legitimately rebellious Mexicans.³⁶

In abstract terms, the issues of the mobilisation seemed to consolidate the political frontier that the dominant segment of society had placed at the very margins of the political system. In my view, for the government three issues were crucial and connected. 1) How to deal with the symbolic defiance of one of the most popular leaders of the anti-PRI struggle, even when he was the head of an insurrectionary movement; 2) how to keep an equilibrium between the pressure of conservative forces and the open promotion of the legitimacy of the constitutional proposal and openness towards the political operation of the EZLN’s leader; 3) how to show, by the use of available forces and diplomacy, that the conflict was not the result of an unsolvable internal cleavage, which could worry national and international capital. In sum, how could the government ensure its image of an open political system and guarantee safety and security for all. His global response was an uncritical and limitedly-effective openness to the EZLN, nuanced by his cabinet and the PAN.

From the point of view of the defence of the security/insurgent interaction as analytical central tool, I would consider that for the EZLN the issues in question were: 1) the reconstitution of its identity in a legitimate system in an election by which the PRI and the partisan left were refused by the electoral majority, that is, the redefinition of its enemies and aims; 2) the reorganisation and testing of its underground and public alliance with a variety of activists from the centre and social left, and with radical organisations that could contribute to maintaining the image of “a really existing” guerrilla organisation; 3) the crucial emphasis on the particular and universal value of its struggle in the new context, by distancing from the new government.

Considering that even within the centre-left PRD there was no consensus on the validity of the EZLN’s claim to achieve autonomy to the degree of controlling, in the name “of the indigenous peoples”, natural resources in the area of conflict - in the case of the PRI and the

³⁶ For an introduction of “antagonistic moments” as crucial to make sense of political disputes, see, David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval and Yannis Stavrakakis, *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis*

PAN there was a more radical negative -, there was no reason for expecting more than the mere *reactivation* of the dialogue towards and undefined formal peace process.³⁷ The approval of a law initiative necessarily required the support of the Congress. Therefore, is legitimate to think that the actual intention of the EZLN, judging by the voices of its representatives, was above all “to be heard”. In other words, the EZLN wanted to reinsert itself in the national agenda and reposition itself in the area of conflict. The means would be the demonstration of its hegemonic position as interlocutor of the government on behalf of radical organisations: it was about to recuperate a position that had become fainter. For instance, *Comandante David*, one of the most EZLN’s senior figures commented:

I am going to Mexico with the aim of *meeting* during the march with the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples from all over the country. I will *demand*, along with the 23 other *compañeros* from the *Zapatista* delegation, the recognition of culture and indigenous rights. We will *talk* on the COCOPA’s law initiative.³⁸

Marcos regarded the march’s objective to be “to *talk* with Congress, yes, but also to *talk* with civil society and the indigenous peoples from other parts”. For *Comandante Moisés* the march had the goal of “inviting our brothers and sisters to join the *peaceful* struggle to demand the accomplishment of the *Acuerdos de San Andrés*”. Certain differences in relation to the march’s goals are visible. While for *Comandante Filemón* the mobilisation was aimed at having “a dialogue” with senators and deputies, to *Comandante Ismael*, the objective was “to oblige” the congressmen to comply the agreements signed by President Zedillo - but not by the Congress - in 1996.³⁹ Therefore, either we accept that in a realistic analysis - in EZLN’s headquarters and from other positions - there was no chance to think of “obliging” the approval of the COCOPA’s initiative or we assume that the objective of the mobilisation was centrally to actualise the EZLN’s insertion in the post-2000 scene.

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 10.

³⁷ This position, as opposed to the expectation of the “culmination” of a peace process, was accepted by *La Jornada* in its central editorial “Distensión Saludable”, 1 February 2001.

³⁸ See “Por qué marchan los comandantes del EZLN”, tellingly presented as “El viaje de la palabra” (The journey of the word) in *La Jornada*, 1 February 2001. My emphasis.

³⁹ *La Jornada*, 1 February 2001.

In other words, the approval of the indigenous law was not *the* priority but the resituating of readings of democracy and sovereignty within a new national context in which the legitimacy of *electoral and democratic* politics was disputed. The limit of the 1994 political frontier between discourses of national security and insurgencies was also about to be tested. On that boundary the other issue was that if the state was sovereign through the Congress. The social mobilisation also was in representing a sovereign will which had been constructed around the specific and national question of the indigenous people, and as a concrete form of popular sovereignty “from below”.

Fox emphasised the seemingly contradictory fact that while asking for the possibility for dialogue with the *Zapatistas*, they were now taking control of those positions dismantled by the army. It seemed to escape him that the EZLN also saw in the 2000 openness the possibility to regain the political and geographical space lost in 1995. Signs of a military dismantling were evident in the initial abandonment of 53 roadblocks.⁴⁰

The President made clear that the military encirclement would continue because it “is marked by the constitution and by the obligations we have with all citizens. We cannot simply and plainly unprotect Chiapas and leave it to be abandoned like that.”⁴¹ Fox continually asked the EZLN to show a clear commitment to the solution of the conflict, in trying to advance the dispute over the meaning of the march before it began.⁴²

We are going to go to the limit of what we can contribute towards the peace process and resolution of the conflict. Now I insisted to the other, what is your proposal? What is your will that through the dialogue we can resolve this problem? ... I do not know what else can be asked to a government in Chiapas!⁴³

⁴⁰ *Reforma, La Jornada*, 10 January 2001. Fox reminded the country that, so far, 17 prisoners had been liberated and said that the military flights inspection had been suspended; permission for international observers had been granted - in contrast with some restrictions introduced by Zedillo's administration - in addition to the backing of the proposal for reform.

⁴¹ Fox' press conference 9 January 2001.

⁴² During the presidential campaign Fox stated that the conflict might be solved “*if Marcos agrees*, in 15 minutes”. The propaganda was relatively successful in separating the first part of the sentence and in exposing, in a position valid to a variety of segments of the political class and activists, the alleged incompetence of Fox for, accordingly, trying to reduce and simplify a political confrontation to its minimal expression. No generalized critique to Guillén matched this point of view.

The army stated that by mid-January 153 military posts had been de-activated.⁴⁴ After recognising that pressures to stop the openness towards the EZLN had begun to be felt, the President demanded that the insurgent organisation show its willingness to engage in the dialogue, and defended the institutionality of the Mexican Army.⁴⁵ The secretary of governance, Santiago Creel, considered the crucial difference in the democratic legitimacy between the PAN and the EZLN to be that “we *panistas* never gamble to arms or to masks (such as the EZLN’s balaclavas)”.⁴⁶

The PAN’s leader, Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, advanced that the concept of “autonomy” would be the source of the PAN’s disapproval in relation to the initiative. In his argument the EZLN’s intention, now unwontedly backed by the president, implied the institutionalisation of a new political space beyond the three considered valid by the constitution – these being the federal, the state and the municipal levels. “Our proposal is that the indigenous autonomy be sheltered by the municipal level”. He emphasised that even the *San Andrés Accords* established that the Congress was the proper constitutional space of sovereignty from which the concrete shape of the agreements, would come.⁴⁷

The fight to giving public meaning to the mobilisation was seemingly broadened by the lack of strategic thinking and the not-infrequent presidential frivolity and naivety materialised by the government’s reading of it. Fox took as true only the positive assumptions about the EZLN.

5.2.1 Doubts and lack of strategic definitions

According to the president’s team, the question concerning the EZLN’s actual intention to reach a formal peace accord was in doubt.⁴⁸ However, the government avoided challenging

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Inform presented by General Abraham Campos, commander of the Seventh Military Zone, *La Jornada*, 11 January 2001.

⁴⁵ *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, 12 January 2001.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ This impression cannot be found in the literature where the EZLN is a basically a sociological result of extreme conditions. In another extreme perspective the anti-EZLN literature insists only in the voluntaristic drive of the EZLN in general and in *Marcos*’ in particular.

assumptions in relation to the EZLN: the idea that misery was the “cause” triggering the outbreak, the effects of its intervention in *Las Cañadas*, the nature and status of its relationships with other organisations or its actual impact on democratic and security practices nationwide. Fox declined to analyse the identity of an actor whose political project had been contested even within the left. He went so far as to identify the EZLN as a clear contributor to the democratic project represented by him. Thus, there were “very legitimate causes for this insurgency”, claimed Rodolfo Elizondo, one of the president’s closest advisers, despite the fact that he himself had earlier considered that the EZLN would not make any concession because of its clandestine agenda, addressing not indigenous issues but still an insurrectionary project in which actual negotiation was excluded beforehand.

Hopefully it was not like that. This will be the great opportunity for a new stage in our country in which many aspirations proposed even by *Marcos* at the beginning of the insurgency such as the establishment of a democratic system, clean elections, the absolute legitimacy of president Fox and Pablo Salazar (Chiapas’ new governor) create new conditions...today the EZLN’s radical position are less justified.⁴⁹

The president ensured that peace in Chiapas was its most urgent project and dedicated constant public interventions on radio and TV to show its disposition towards it.⁵⁰ Alternative readings that might have been useful to collectively define the social consensus around the question were missed, and sometimes grossly neglected by Fox. For instance, the questioning of the assumption of a guerrilla that was “at war” with the government, a symbolic element whose value had dropped after the PRI *desecuritised* the conflict and mostly after the signing of agreements with the government had relocated the notion as a rhetorical device. He tended to address public opinion as a marketing space.⁵¹ To the government and the national security cabinet, the absence of formal dialogue and the coming of the EZLN to Mexico City created a

⁴⁹ *La Jornada*, 13 January 2001.

⁵⁰ Fox addressed “the nation” through TV networks on four occasions. This was without precedent. Diego Fernández criticised him, saying that Fox had become “the main publicist for *Marcos*”. See *Reforma* and *La Jornada*, 25 and 26 March 2001.

⁵¹ Weekly radio allocation by the president and press conference, see *La Jornada and Reforma*, 14 and 16 January 2001. My emphasis.

puzzle,⁵² involving symbolical, safety and security challenges. In it, the president leaned in favour of debating the value of his and *Marcos*' public image, rather than clearly establishing the mobilisation's strategic dimension.

Fox maintained that in Chiapas instead of an army there should be "employment, opportunities, education, health and credits". He recognised a "pending debt" with the "excluded". He also defended the army by presenting it as an "army that also wants peace", and demanded that the EZLN show clear signs of favouring peace and negotiation.⁵³

The army withdrew from *Roberto Barrios*, the fourth position demanded by the *Zapatistas*.⁵⁴ Three days later, Fox recognised that the critique against its approach had intensified; consequently he had to stop the military retreat until the EZLN gave a substantive sign of a willingness to engage in the dialogue. By then, the dispute for the meaning of the *Zapatista March* began in earnest. The more influential leaders of the private sector asked the president to be careful. The president restated its mediating role.⁵⁵

By the end of January, the EZLN had around 12 thousand "representatives of civil society" to support the procession to Mexico City.⁵⁶ Fox, and his commissioner, Luis H. Alvarez and also the COCOPA, shared the EZLN's claim that its struggle was not just representative of the Chiapas' Highlands, but of all 56 indigenous ethnic groups. In Zurich, during a meeting with the financial community, Fox called on the private sector to not be afraid of the *Zapatista march* and argued that it had universal validity. He asked for "total openness" to the peace process.⁵⁷ The unprecedented presidential position had to be reinterpreted by his party in order for the PAN to keep its own identity and autonomy. Fox's words, according to some *panistas*, were regarded as "not support for the march but a call for

⁵² The discussions within the national security cabinet and among the ministry of the interior, the presidency and the COCOPA were constantly dealing with this situation. See *La Jornada* and *Reforma*, 16 January 2001.

⁵³ *Ibid.* Fox announced the application of over 2.7 billion dollars to support social and productive projects. This was tantamount to more than one third of the federal money used in the previous administration.

⁵⁴ *La Jornada, Reforma*, 18 January 2001.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Reforma, La Jornada*, 27 and 28 January 2001.

⁵⁷ *La Jornada*, 26 January 2001.

financial sectors' serenity" in face of a radical organisation demonstrating in the political country's centre.⁵⁸

The EZLN responded to conservative pressure by reiterating that the EZLN would march unarmed, peacefully, and that it did not add any other demand to the original three. *Marcos* explicitly introduced what I claim is a central factor for understanding the hegemonic drive behind the discourses of national security and insurgency: the relevance of the tension between the sovereignty of the state as defined by the parliamentary activity and the sovereignty of insurgent actors. Public opinion as much as the institutional site of sovereignty were the spaces for the EZLN's dispute for hegemony.

The EZLN has insisted in its last communiqués that it would go to Mexico City to engage with the Congress of the Union, that during the journey will engage with the civil society, mainly with the indigenous peoples and the Indigenous National Congress (CNI) and that its objective is the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and indigenous culture.⁵⁹

To the president, what was at stake and in doubt was the EZLN's effective will to involve itself in an actual process of negotiation.

I think that today this theme will be seen as whether our democracy has the stability; if it is really the democratic sponge that can allow *Marcos* and the *Zapatismo* into the political debate and if this space can incorporate the businessman as well. If *Marcos* is going to enter into the political arena, he has to be tolerant and listen to the businessman. He does not have any other option.⁶⁰

Fox maintained his defence of *Marcos* by associating his own position with him, thus: "we want the same Mexico". The expression was thought to resist the insurgent rhetoric attempt to divide the political scenario in two antagonistic camps. On behalf of the government, Luis H. Alvarez "celebrated" and "gave welcome" to the march, but asked the

⁵⁸ *La Jornada*, 27 January 2001.

⁵⁹ EZLN's communiqué, 30 January 2001.

⁶⁰ *La Jornada*, 1 February 2001.

EZLN to stop denying access to institutional help to the indigenous communities,⁶¹ a practice of control used largely in the highlands by the EZLN since 1994. In the President's opinion, all critiques against the EZLN should be left aside. "What else would I want but a peaceful country": "the country should welcome *Marcos*, the *Zapatistas*, the procession, the English, the French, and the Americans that travel with him. I would be delighted if they are received in a good manner."⁶²

While a group of businessmen called the *Zapatistas* "masked madmen" - *locos encapuchados* - ironically the PRI and, predictably, the PRD, felt that the Congress should receive them.⁶³ Fox emphatically asked the legislators to support the constitutional reform to "incorporate" the 10 million indigenous people "into the nation".⁶⁴ The secretary of governance announced that the government would not just guarantee the free transit of the march, but had decided to support its security by using the PFP, the same organism employed to terminate the occupation of the university campus in February 2000.

Sympathisers of the EZLN, commentators and its hard core, insisted that Fox was merely developing "a propaganda campaign". They especially emphasised that the paramilitaries were, for the EZLN at least, a problem that the government did not want to address.⁶⁵

I claim that in fact that the presidency did not try to argue over the fundamental conditions within which the EZLN wanted to shape the terrain of the dispute in order to dissipate the antagonistic moment sought by the EZLN. The EZLN had demanded, as a condition to *begin the dialogue*, nothing less than the congressional approval of a law that lacked consensus, as part of a package that would represent itself as the unconditional acceptance by government of all EZLN's demands. Fox and *Marcos* disputed, on the eve of

⁶¹ *La Jornada*, 2 February 2001.

⁶² *La Jornada*, 1 February 2001.

⁶³ Enrique Jackson's stance. He was a leader of the senate claiming that tolerance was the key on the eve of the march, while Alberto Fernández Garza, leader of the employers association, *Confederación Patronal Mexicana* (Coparmex), showed open rejection towards the EZLN. *Reforma* and *La Jornada*, 1 February 2001.

⁶⁴ *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, 3 February 2001.

⁶⁵ Interview with *Comandante David*, probably the most prominent voice of the *indigenous comandantes* in the EZLN. *La Jornada*, 5 February 2001.

the mobilisation, the political legitimacy of their projects within a conjuncture in which a clear and prospective definition and analysis of the insurgent discourse seemed absent.

5.2.2 EZLN as a flag for everybody

The Senate, whose support is imperative in any reform, rejected the EZLN's position that the reform was indispensable for initiating any dialogue. In addition, the idea that the EZLN may force the outcome of Congress' activity was criticised as much as the claim that the whole indigenous problematic had to be subjected to the EZLN's point of view.⁶⁶

Fox carelessly spoke of an agreement that would be in place "in a few weeks". This move was criticised as discrediting even what the President had effectively done, in order to support the march and the constitutional reform.⁶⁷ Another six *Zapatistas* were liberated, to make a total of 29, the same day that the EZLN were to initiate the march, symbolically on the national "flag day" - *Día de la Bandera* -, 24 February, to signify the national scope of the EZLN's demands.⁶⁸

It begins a struggle for this linen - the flag - to cover all, including those that had been forgotten by it. In the march we will be as we have been since that day 1 January 1994, that is, demanding democracy, justice, freedom and justice for all Mexicans.⁶⁹

Fox asked the EZLN to act "without hesitations" in creating the conditions for an agreement and even offered to receive the EZLN in the presidential mansion.⁷⁰ In a meeting with the COCOPA, the president and the minister of the Interior committed themselves to supporting the reform. Even in that meeting the *panistas* expressed their reservations about the reform.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Interview with senator Jackson, *La Jornada*, 5 February 2001.

⁶⁷ *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, *El Universal*, especially 8 February but several articles and commentators felt unease about the presidential rhetorical outbursts. Similar criticism was broadcast from the main networks towards the EZLN's leader.

⁶⁸ *La Jornada*, 9 February 2001.

⁶⁹ EZLN's communiqué, 8 February 2001.

⁷⁰ *La Jornada*, *Reforma*, *El Universal*, 10 February 2001.

⁷¹ *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, 11 February 2001.

By then the political and symbolical confrontation between two competing notions of popular sovereignty had been made visible. Whereas the EZLN insisted that “the people” had pre-eminence in determining why “indigenous rights” and its definition of “autonomy” should be heard and approved by the Congress, the political class insisted that Congress was the site of popular sovereignty and the ultimate source of legitimacy for any agreement. Those competing concepts were embodied in the struggling myths represented by the invocation of the liberal democratic process and the insurgent-like movement. Now I will turn to the crucial significance of the security actors’ intervention, in the context of this expanded space of democracy that allowed both unarmed insurgent mobilisation and unarmed security intervention.

5.3 Army and Federal Preventive Police (PFP): protecting a security frontier

The most institutional branch of the Executive, crux of the national security cabinet and embodiment of the ideology of the *Mexican Revolution*, the army, had since 1994 been put into question and had been supported by a variety of political actors as well. In the first twelve days of the conflict, the army legitimately responded - and in a governmentally calculated slow manner according to security actors - to the military defiance launched by the EZLN. Later on, the military was mainly considered to be the primary instrument for the encirclement of the organisation and the centre of intelligence operations against it. After the dialogue initiated in 1994, army tasks included support of protective security operations when the EZLN attended negotiations in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Certainly, the army has also been accused - without convincing evidence - of supporting massacres.⁷² The army had also been subjected to the political class’ priorities imposed on the national - *internal* - security

⁷² This is a point of strong debate. All the pro-EZLN commentators and observers defend this claim to some extent. Most of the internationally supported observers have also something to say about it. See the EZLN web page, for instance. There is no national institutional actor that shares this claim. The meaning of “paramilitary” intervention is at the centre of this controversy. For the EZLN that is applicable to most of all those that oppose it, for others is a probable space of underground support between military and anti-EZLN actors, there are others that just do not think that paramilitary actors have any actual capacity to overstep the mark decided by the state in relation to the EZLN. The massacre of 45 peasants in Acteal in the late 1997 and the constant political confrontation of the military/EZLN divide have been at the centre of this discussion.

agenda by realising intelligence tasks - espionage and infiltration - of insurgent organisations. The army's integrity, however, has not been questioned by any of the three main political parties, including the PRD. Nevertheless, Fox addressed it on the eve of the *Zapatista March* in the main national garrison of the armed forces as a way of responding to rumours of military discrepancies with the President's approach.

There are some that have told me that I mistook the tactics with the *Zapatista* movement and that my peace proposal has strengthened it. In any case, nothing had been and would be more serious than closing ourselves in a pernicious conspiracy of silence. That epoch is finished! I know perfectly well that this is a complex problem, but I am stimulated by my conviction for finding a dignified and just solution as soon as possible. I believe in reconciliation and in the final triumph of good faith.⁷³

He asked for respect for the mobilisation, since the government "shared its objectives", and because after it the peace process had to continue. Fox stated that the army had behaved responsibly and even in an exemplary manner. According to him, the army, "with tolerance and generosity", had contributed to the peace process. It was thanks to this "loyalty, discipline, vocation and peace spirit" that the army has been demonstrating that it was "an army of peace, from peace, for peace".

Within the presidential rhetoric, the EZLN was not considered part of the national security agenda but the presidential stand did not necessarily reflect the opinion of other government institutions. According to some of them, the EZLN mobilisation was indeed an object for the national security discourse. Fox said that human rights might be the encompassing notion by which "our brothers" might be seen as part of the nation in the context of the mobilisation. Fox wanted to emphasise the actual probability of the insurgent identity being dissolved into his idea of "the nation after 2000".

Before media directors and journalistic commentators, Fox affirmed his disposition to risk "all my political capital" in favour of the constitutional reform. He asked for "an opportunity (that must be given) to *Marcos*" and even compared the mobilisation that would begin the next day as being as relevant as Martin Luther King's march for civil rights in the

1960s.⁷⁴ Up to that moment, the EZLN had even refused to meet with COCOPA as part of its attempt to frame the dispute and give it its own timing. The carefully designed procession would become the “rebellious” revival of dozens of places with a tradition of resistance in the 13 states - out of 32 in Mexico - in the South and Central regions. Fox revealed that he had tried to calm down hard-liners such as the *panista* leader in the senate and Querétaro’s governor, both radically opposed to subject the times and forms of political activity to the EZLN’s logistics and tactics. Fox claimed that even if he himself were to be perceived as “a clumsy” president, *Marcos* would not be hampered by his government. In return, he asked for flexibility from the EZLN’s leader and warned that *Marcos* could be losing his political capital if he changed the intentions stated in favour of a peace process.⁷⁵

In early February the government had decided to use the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) as the security force to protect the *Zapatista* mobilisation. The leftist concern with this institution made up of federal agents, intelligence personnel and former soldiers, abated after that. Suddenly, as a consequence of its role, the institution became a mark of neutrality and deserved authority for those sectors that had attacked it. The minister of governance claimed that the PFP’s presence “in its modality of federal routes patrol” was exclusively to provide safety during the march. However, the resort to the PFP, and the alert on which the national security cabinet was placed were at the core of the managing and understanding of the march.

More generally, the insurgent-led mobilisation can be located at the centre of two readings of national security. On the one hand, it was the restricted notion where primacy is given to the mobilisation of the army in the establishment of an agenda of “threats” and “vulnerabilities”. On the other hand, a much broader concept was being put forward. This entailed the subsumption of military operations to a wider democratic discourse that did not exclude the refinement of the internal security state. As illustration of these two emphases around the *Zapatista March*, the public knew, from the general Rafael Macedo de la Concha, head of the General Attorney’s Office (PGR) that the procession was “indeed a problem of

⁷³ *Reforma, El Universal, La Jornada*, 20 February 2001.

⁷⁴ It was a generous comparison considering that King always refused all forms of political violence.

national security”. Its contrast was the stand of the national security adviser, Adolfo Aguilar Zínzer, later on (2002) representative of Mexico in the UN Security Council.

To Zínzer, the march posited the EZLN not as a “problem of national security”, but a problem “of democratic governability and public order”.⁷⁶ Even when Zínzer advocated a broader approach, his comments involved either confusion or recognition of the blurred frontier between “national security” and “public safety”. In my view this ambiguity constitutes the space in which the internal security discourse has been intensified, reactivated and refined.

This is not an aggressive march; it is not a war march, it is a march of peace. That is the way we understand it, as has been said many times by president Fox, and hence it is not national security business.⁷⁷

The tension created by the overlapping notions of a narrower and a broader reading of “national” - *internal* - security was maintained all along during the dispute over the march’s implications. It was part of the broader issue of what were the limits of tolerance for an insurgent actor that was attempting to reposition itself in the democratic debate.

The broader and predominant reading on security, supported to its extreme by Fox, and the narrower one put forward by more conservative forces were both tested by the reinsertion into the system of the EZLN as a moment of antagonism. From this debate seemed to have emerged the idea the radical indigenous and rebellious identities might be part of the nation and not its enemy. In short, the broader notion of the internal security state as a legitimisation tool of the general workings of the system, and as an instrument to locate within the system all the differences as part of a democratic plurality, became predominant.

It may be said that in this context the PFP was not merely protecting the march. More specifically, it was not just physically protecting a mobilisation of an originally insurgent actor, but providing safety and security to the stabilised political frontier separating internal

⁷⁵ *La Jornada*, 24 February 2001.

⁷⁶ *La Jornada, Reforma, El Universal*, 20 February 2001.

security and insurgent discourses and being the instrument of a consolidated broadening of the national security discourse. It was as useful to the regime as to the EZLN. I claim, then, that the march had the prevalent meaning of reinforcing the consistency of the 1994 agreement by which both the identity of the state and the EZLN were reinserted in the political field and the two notions of democracy, “popular democracy” and “electoral democracy”, were reinserted as well as part of the security redefinition.

The presence of the PFP granted impetus to the safety/security overlapping elements upon which the PFP has been constituted as one of the main internal security tools since its origin. It granted it a respectability that had been denied by the radical left because of its intervention in UNAM and its characterisation as a “counter-insurgent” tool in the EPR and EZLN readings before 2001. The primacy of the PFP’s intervention resulted from the successful intervention of the government in displacing the participation of the International Red Cross to supervise the security of the march. That was a discussion that *Marcos* and his advisers tried to advance in order to position the march in the international context.⁷⁸

In short, the PFP’s intervention, conceived and organised by the CISEN, the army, the navy and other federal security institutions in charge of surveillance and prosecution of insurgents, may be seen as the reassurance of the refinement of the internal security state embodied by the 1994 political frontier. Between ultra-radical and security actors, acting respectively on behalf of “the people” or “the nation”, there was the PFP. In that space, however, the advancement of insurgent symbolic and political arguments and operations also took place.

5.4 The “ignoble past” and the march

In the opening speech of the march, the EZLN accused Fox of pretending to transform indigenous history into a commodity, regarded him as “a liar”, and assumed that, effectively, the meaning of the march was in dispute. It was “a march for the indigenous dignity” and not

⁷⁷ Ibid.

“the march of peace”.⁷⁹ According to pro-EZLN readings the mobilisation flooded the political scene: indifference or critique towards the EZLN could only be uttered by “the privileged classes”. In their view, the march expressed pre-revolt feelings against “old myths of order”.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, they omitted the fact that the EZLN had significantly changed its rhetoric since the first occupation of San Cristóbal de las Casas on 1 January 1994. The march to Mexico City, with *Marcos* as the leading character, was possible in a context in which the armed struggle had been widely disapproved and society had privileged electoral politics as the main space of national political representation, as opposed to rebellious politics. Besides, the EZLN had been *desecuritized* to such a degree that the march, even when contested, was a thinkable and an acceptable expression of radical politics, legitimising the general strength of the regime. The acceptance of the PFP emblematised the shared process of *desecuritisation* of the EZLN.

Marcos announced that Fernando Yáñez Muñoz, *Comandante Germán*, founder of the FLN and the EZLN and the main insurgent tutor of *Marcos*, was appointed as the EZLN’s interlocutor to the parties and the deputies. *Marcos* regarded him as the ideal person because of his history as a “social fighter” for “the Mexican poor”. According to *Marcos*, the designation of *Germán* was decided to generate acceptability for radical activists in the new context. Specifically, in the corresponding justification, in which *Germán* was presented as having the “personal disinterest and honesty” indispensable for representing the EZLN before the congressmen and the government, the salience of “social fighters” that have been involved in insurrectionary movements was vindicated.⁸¹ *Marcos* was defying - successfully, as become clear later - the ambiguous principle of rule of law when dealing with insurgencies: there was a tension between what was accepted because of the articulation embodied in the dialogue with the government and the concrete fact that his mentor had an apprehension order

⁷⁸ For the discussion see *Reforma*, *La Jornada* and *El Universal* as well as *Milenio*, 15-24 February 2001.

⁷⁹ EZLN’s communiqué and speech in San Cristóbal de las Casas, 24 February 2001.

⁸⁰ See Luis Hernández Navarro, *La Jornada*, 25 February 2001.

since 1995. *Germán*'s inclusion in the police's list in late 1994 and 1995 had been partly the result of the awkward Zedillo's reaction after knowing that the EZLN, despite having ongoing conversations with the government in late 1994 and at the beginning of 1995, persisted in organising guerrilla cells. Even after the *Law for the Dialogue and Reconciliation* was signed on 11 March 1995, *Germán* continued to be involved in armed-clandestine activities on behalf of the EZLN and was detained on 21 October 1995 by patrolmen that discovered him inside a car in possession of an Ak-47 and a 9 millimetres calibre pistol plus 64 useful bullets.⁸² Therefore, by appointing him, *Marcos* was addressing the issue of measuring the openness of the political space after the PAN took over.

The architect *Yañez*, notwithstanding that there is the threat of an apprehension order against him, under *the accusation* of being part of the EZLN's directorate, has decided to accept (our invitation) and run with us the risks associated with the struggle for the recognition of indigenous rights.⁸³

Marcos' intention of opening a space of acceptability for *Germán*, as a particular EZLN's guerrilla founder, was broadened when he widened the operation in favour of the EPR during the march.

Even the sympathetic press showed surprise at the designation.⁸⁴ As an illustration of *German*'s cautiously hidden presence, it is worth mentioning that some journalists confused

⁸¹ EZLN's communique, 24 February 2001, signed by *Marcos* and read by *Comandante Tacho*.

⁸² See 22-30 October, *La Jornada*. The detention on 21 October caused a "red alert" by the EZLN, then in the middle of a dialogue with the government, a similar situation of what happened in January-February 1995 when the EZLN was caught in preparing guerrilla cells. Even when the organisation had been denying any "organic connection" with *Germán* it flagged its vindication: EZLN communiqué, 25 October. Without having an "organic" connection is difficult to accept the EZLN's argument that they "knew" that the weapons "were planted" by the police, especially if we believe that the EZLN "knew" of his detention "by the radio" supposedly four days later. On 27 *Germán* was allowed to abandon the Reclusorio Oriente (a main detention centre) in Mexico City. A contradictory defence of *Germán* was presented in the Asamblea de Representantes del Distrito Federal on 25 October: on the one hand the police was accused of doing something incorrect – they were detaining somebody "more important" than a simple offender whose personality and active involvement with the EZLN was either "known" and "unknown" by its defenders - and on the other it was requested "coherence" from the police and the detention of those who were armed, see PRD's intervention through *asambleísta* Pedro Peñoloza, ARDF, Primera Legislatura. Diario de Debates Año II Número 14. The EZLN defended *Germán* and criticised its detention, see EZLN communiqué, 27 October 1995.

⁸³ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

⁸⁴ *La Jornada*, *ibid.* The televised interview of a senior and respected journalist such as Julio Scherer, in which he asks 'why *Germán*', is also illustrative of this apparent surprise and reservation, see *La entrevista insólita*, (Marcos-Scherer in Televisa-Proceso) in *Proceso*, 11 March 2001. See also

him with the famous Mexican intellectual Carlos Monsivaís, and so did the youngest activists who did not locate him as central character in the EZLN's history.⁸⁵ This was a sign of how much the EZLN's history had concentrated around *Marcos* and the ideological displacement and significance of *Germán*'s participation in the constitution of the EZLN's most treasured manoeuvre of deception, which was indispensable in the reorganisation of its identity after 1994.

Beyond the rather superficial and still controversial question of having two non-indigenous people as the main EZLN representatives, there were other relevant meanings of this move. For instance, *Germán* had been largely construed as a hard-liner of the traditional approach to the emancipatory discourses of the insurgent left. It was at least revealing that the identity of the EZLN, currently interpreted as a reformist and quasi "democratic" guerrilla, was delegating the most relevant role during the march, only second to *Marcos*, to a character who epitomised the 1970s traditional insurgent discourse. *Germán* seemed closer to the public representation of the EPR than to the EZLN's prevailing image. First, the nomination was a message for testing the eventual inclusion "into the nation" of insurgent politics. Second, *Marcos* wanted to persuade public opinion that the central members of the EZLN history were already democratically transformed by the modernising movement in which the EZLN had supposedly become a part. Thus, if *Marcos* in 2001 was not any more an insurrectionary actor, as he was in 1994, neither was *Germán*, his "elder brother" as he was called by the main EZLN leader, and in consequence the insurgents seemed to rehearse again a project that combined, as in the past, open and clandestine politics.

The reactions to *Comandante Germán*'s appointment are indicative of the image a wide segment of the society, including the more critical leftist press, had bought from the EZLN. It is also suggestive of the surprise of finding out that the schematic view of the EZLN as an "essentially" and "typically" democratic force may eventually be put into question. The EZLN's discourse had been construed as a reflection of a "totally new" organisation and

Astillero in *La Jornada* 26 February 2001. The author considered that *German*'s appointment might well be "one of the EZLN's first mistakes" in the new environment.

Germán's nomination seemed to contest such positive prejudices. However, he was unconditionally recognised by the government's representatives in the context of the democratic openness initiated in 2000. The minister of the interior placed the *Zapatista* mobilisation as part of a process of widening the democratic process and called for tolerance and national unity.⁸⁶

The *Zapatista March* was enthusiastically received by multitudes everywhere. However, early on the EZLN felt that not all the EZLN's negative comments about the president were supported by the people, and on some occasions were clearly contested.⁸⁷ If from the crowd a voice demanding peace was addressed not to the government but to *Marcos*, sympathetic commentators and journalists responded⁸⁸ through its chronicles by highlighting a convenient anonymous voice responding to him/her that what "we do not want is a *foxista* peace".⁸⁹ Those critical voices were, in those accounts, merely the *negrito en el arroz* - the black spot in the white rice.⁹⁰ The *Zapatista March* thus measured degrees of ideological and political identification and alignment. For some, the march was the most relevant locus of identification created for the left in the last five decades, and for others it was a portrait of the incongruities within the left and the *Zapatistas'* limited understanding of *civil society* as valid only under the condition to sympathise with this organisation.

⁸⁵ See *Milenio Semanal* #181 March 4 2001.

⁸⁶ *Reforma, El Universal, La Jornada*, 25 February 2001.

⁸⁷ For alternative accounts of the march, from the representation of the EZLN as "historical" and "unprecedented" to "questionable" and "politically correct", in which the EZLN appears under different light, see both *La Jornada* and *Milenio*, especially *Milenio Semanal* from issue 167, 20 November 2000 to issue 185, 31 March 2001. Whereas sympathetic accounts of the *Zapatista March* insisted on a quasi-homogenous and uncritical support for the EZLN, others considered relevant other traits evident in the meetings. Among them was the presence of mere curiosity, or the perception of *Marcos* as an innocuous "pop idol". The tension between the "political humility" attributed to the EZLN and the grandiloquence of the *Marcos* speeches regarding EZLN's historical tasks was also challenged.

⁸⁸ In some accounts, the transformation of Mexican culture and political hegemony by the EZLN's "smaller ones", for instance, was put into question. In contrast to the attention given to *Marcos*, the differential and uneven respect granted to the effectively indigenous leaders was also highlighted. The rather isolated but still meaningful appearance of banners and dialogues questioning directly the EZLN's leader and demanding from him a more than rhetorical commitment to the reactivation of the peace process also appeared. See specially *Milenio Semanal*, *Ibid*.

⁸⁹ *La Jornada*, 1 March 2001.

⁹⁰ Meeting in Valle del Mezquital, Hidalgo, see *La Jornada*, 28 February 2001.

Fox kept fighting for the public space hegemonised by the mobilisation. In an “unwonted” message, as was qualified by *La Jornada*’s front-page editors, the president recognised the legitimacy of the EZLN’s struggle before the world financial elite during the World Economic Forum, which was being held in Cancun. He claimed that thanks to the EZLN the indigenous voice had acquired political significance, he considered the demands just, and asked the EZLN for clear signs in favour of the reactivation of the peace process

Now we know more than ever that [the indigenous] should never be excluded or discriminated against, that their forms of organisation and culture are and must be respected, that their longings for health, education, justice, dignity, must have a response. Seven years later, with the democratic change the time for peace has also arrived...No more excuses and conditions. The only citizen mandate is the one of peace.⁹¹

In the context of that forum and against it, radical social organisations, including the CGH and independent militants, mobilised. The PFP supported the actions deployed by local forces to displace them. The same day, UNAM’s authorities announced the expulsion from UNAM of several ultra activists, among them the notorious *El Mosh*.⁹² These surrounding events, seemed to signify the crucial consolidation of the same political frontier to which the EZLN transformationist rhetoric was so valuable. In 1996, the Zedillo administration opened a combination of equivalential and differential techniques to justify the double treatment given to insurgent movements. Now, in 2001, that reactivated two-pronged security understanding of politics was again at the core of the workings of the general dynamic of the hegemonic discourse put forward by Fox, in a dispute for the meaning of the Chiapas conflict and its relevance for the national project. In his support, the powerful national networks *Televisa* and *TV Azteca* transmitted a spectacular event “for peace”.

From my point of view, the *Zapatista* mobilisation was the terrain for the repositioning of two mythical discourses around popular sovereignty, democracy and national identity. On the one hand, a discourse that had acquired electoral hegemony (PAN) and another that was

⁹¹ *La Jornada*, 28 February 2001.

⁹² *Reforma* and *La Jornada*, 28 February and 1 March 2001.

hegemonic in a militarily encircled geographic area of the Chiapas' Highlands (EZLN). Paradoxically, the EZLN's discourse was both relevant in the representation of a sense of resistance, embodied in the nodal notion of *indigenous rights*, and a mark of tolerance mobilised by the regime and the dominant segments of Mexican society. In that context, the *Zapatista* mobilisation and Fox's approach are part of wider operations of the dispute for political power and the legitimacy granted to partisan, institutional and insurgent identities.

In that context the idea of the renewal of the indigenous rhetoric fuelled the Indigenous Congress in Nurio, Michoacán, which ended early in March with a call to all indigenous people to defend the constitutional reform and support the EZLN. For them the COCOPA law "is not negotiable".⁹³ Besides, the CNI committed itself to a "national *peaceful uprising*"⁹⁴ in tune with the ambiguity of the EZLN's identity oscillating between an insurrectionary organisation and a popular movement that had reached the status of a *myth*.

In the reinsertion of its identity, the EZLN confronted the government's attempt to dissolve the basic political frontier by which the insurgent identity was to be defined in opposition to the government in the aftermath of the PRI defeat. While Fox challenged the guerrilla's purpose by insisting on the probabilities of convergence, the armed organisation restated the universal value of its general demand for indigenous rights as space in which the nation itself has negated space for "others". *Marcos* advanced the claim that insurgent actors ought to be included as a valuable democratic contribution. In the democratic space the EZLN had even the opportunity to reinsert what it had strategically negated in 1996: its connection with traditional insurgent actors as they were seen by security institutions *and* sympathetic commentators.

5.4.1 Repositioning the EZLN

The *Zapatista March* opened political spaces for other insurgent struggles. Following a large silence on the repressive politics deployed in the period 1996-2001 in the region of *Los*

⁹³ *La Jornada*, 4 March 2001.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 March 2001. My emphasis.

Loxicha, in Oaxaca, where the EPR had been active, it was said, for instance, that an amnesty law in that state permitted the liberation of 60 peasants presumably connected to the EPR.⁹⁵

A relevant trait related to the frontier constituted in relation to internal security and insurrectionary discourses was added in the city of Iguala a central stopping-place of the EZLN's mobilisation. Guerrero, public birth-place of the EPR and the Procup-Pdlp, was the site selected by the EZLN to enrich its endeavour of reinserting its identity with a remarkable public statement.

Back on 25 February, the CCRI-EZLN had addressed a communiqué "to the political-military revolutionary organisations in Mexico". Referring in general to "leadership, command groups and combatants" of insurgent organisations, it was informed of the route of the march and requested "that you take whatever measures you consider relevant so that this peaceful march can carry out its high and just aims". It added: "we are certain that, even though differences and dissent exist at various levels, you share in the struggle for the rights of the indigenous peoples, and you will attend, insofar as you are able, to the respectful request we are making of you".⁹⁶ Two days later, the EPR answered that everything would be ready to support the EZLN's "safety in order for you to comply with your high and just aim".⁹⁷ On 7 March, in high contrast with its drawing of boundaries in relation to the EPR in 1996, in general reference to insurgent local actors the EZLN saluted "the rebel and honourable state of Guerrero". *Marcos* alluded to "the prestige of a history of struggle" and highlighted the relevance of the figures of Lucio Cabañas⁹⁸ and Genáro Vázquez Rojas. *Marcos* conceded that there was a line of continuity with the more traditional clandestine insurrectionary left and with those figures. He affirmed that such contiguity with the EZLN was legitimate:

⁹⁵ *La Jornada, Reforma, El Universal*, 4 March 2001. Around 500 peasants-indigenous had been detained in the first two years after the 1996 EPR's emergence, after being accused of belonging to it.

⁹⁶ EZLN's communiqué, 25 January 2001.

⁹⁷ EPR's communiqué, 27 January 2001.

⁹⁸ Important in the history of the Procup-Pdlp, referred to as a fundamentalist insurrectionary organisation for several commentators within the left and as an EPR's forefather.

The presence and activities of several political-military organisations demonstrate that Mexico is far from having changed. The EZLN recognises these organisations, among them the Revolutionary Army of the Insurgent People (ERPI), the popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) and the Armed Revolutionary Forces of the People (FARP), to mention a few, to whom we are grateful for the conditions created to facilitate our travel through the lands in their areas of influence and interest.⁹⁹

The declaration not only renewed the internal security surveillance and the government's valuation of the march, but shook rather sedimented perceptions of the EZLN as a reformist guerrilla - or as a "post-modern" insurgent organisation - as opposed to its more accurate reading as a hegemonic one with a Post-Grasmcian *vocabulary*. The image of an organisation that had decided to detach itself from the armed struggle was put into question. It must be kept in mind that the march was essentially a process of relocation and reorganisation of identity in the public eye. Regarding the speech in Iguala, the EZLN tried to offer an image of itself as an insurrectionary organisation that bears the capacity to effectively engage with a co-ordination among other guerrillas, and more abstractly, *it represented the intention to escape its framing as an acceptable difference* contributive to the general working of the system.

However, if actual connections were taking root on the insurrectionary horizon, amidst a process of "force accumulation" in the name of "the people" against the state, the EZLN did not need to make that public. Unless it wanted to make evident its desired relocation as an entity very near to a variety of "truly" subversive organisations. Now, the EZLN seemed to need its "other" amongst the insurgencies with respect to which it had previously stated "we do not want any from you" in 1996. This repositioning with respect to the EPR and other groupings was a central item in EZLN's reconstitutive process. Considering the debate in which some analysts and political actors, especially within the military and national security institutions, regarded the EZLN as far from being capable of becoming a "threat" to the Mexican state, the symbolic acknowledgement of the EPR, ERPI and FARP, as available allies, had considerable purchase. That was so especially considering the public negotiation of the space that the EZLN needed to reopen in redefining its identity

⁹⁹ *Marcos'* speech and EZLN's communiqué, 7 March 2001, in Iguala.

and forcing a dialogue with the Congress without granting any concession to the government. The message was also that the EZLN was still managing to construct the government as enemy of the insurgent people, something explicitly avoided in 1996.

Another deeper thesis in that frame was being considered by the EZLN, namely, the correlation of political agency and social structure when dealing with insurrectionary subjects and the limits of a possible response from the state. *Marcos* emphasised that Guerrero was illustrative, against that background, of “the national drama”. He correctly affirmed that in that state, as in Chiapas, there was a “concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, scandalous social imbalance, lavish buildings next to neighbourhoods of cardboard, drug trafficking, government corruption, high levels of marginalisation and poverty, peaceful mobilisations, repression of all kind, armed rebellion, repression of all kind”.¹⁰⁰

The last three characteristics, (understood as a cycle of) repression-armed rebellion-repression, seem to be the government’s sole policy viewpoint. In intentionally forgetting the previous steps on the ladder of destabilisation, the government sets policies by trying to break the circle, forgetting that it is *a spiral*. If the reaction to repression is armed struggle, those who in the government think that what has to be done is to increase the level of repression, to the point of stifling the possibility of armed rebellion.¹⁰¹

The insurgent “silence” regarding insurgencies, he claimed, “is not a guarantee that everything is under control” and “the ferment of rebellion” could be in the background. He accused Fox of “simulation and postponement”. Even though, he added, the EZLN “has decided to insist in the path of dialogue”: indispensable ambiguity of a guerrilla subjected to the dominant logic of the regime but with independence to negotiate its *political* encirclement.

What is at stake with the three signals is not just the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and culture, and not just the door to real dialogue without militarization and political prisoners. It is also an important response to questions of equal magnitude: will they opt for the impossible futile rupture of the false circle of social conflicts? Or will the two-fold path be chosen. On the one hand, one of dialogue in order to halt the

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/2001/martch/igualala> downloaded on 20 November 2001.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. My emphasis.

spiral with political solutions and, on the other, of profoundly upsetting economic policy so that it will seriously examine easing the living conditions of the most poor?¹⁰²

The armed path or its blatant advocacy as an option, he maintained, was a result of discontent and the closeness to dialogue: “in order to make a war, one must challenge the government. In order to achieve peace with justice and dignity, one must also challenge the government too. We, thus, are challenging whoever objects. We are challenging them”.¹⁰³

The repositioning of the EZLN in relation to the government, political parties and other guerrilla organisations also affected the media. After the leader had deployed its authority several commentators changed their stances in relation to the other insurgent organisations. For instance, in *La Jornada*, a paper that despite being the most open-minded to insurgent movements had shared the governmental image of the EPR and its splinters in 1996 and 1997, a leading columnist showed the shift. Now she came to consider that “in these moments of summing, we greet the *eperristas*” (members of the EPR). In an uncustomary move, that paper transcribed five large paragraphs of the EPR’s communiqué.¹⁰⁴ In it the EPR stated its support for the EZLN, pointed out the irritation that the EZLN’s “firmness and clarity” had caused in the financial sector and the political elite. The EPR shared the EZLN’s view that Fox’s approach was actually representing and hiding a broader discourse in which the “actual” content was the hiding of practices causing the social discontent and political conflict that according to them “explained” insurrectionary movements.¹⁰⁵

Others estimated that such a convergence, result of the reciprocal repositioning of the EPR and the EZLN, showed the transition from an “armed insurrection in the jungle” to a “national political insurrection”.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ See *Página 9, Se suma EPR a lucha del EZLN por los derechos indígenas, La Jornada*, 11 March 2001. It is a common practice in this leading newspaper to publish the complete EZLN’s communiqués. This is the only paper that does that and the EZLN is the only organisation with such a privilege in that paper. This practice had received criticism as well as having guaranteed the loyalty of a pro-EZLN audience, besides signalling mostly uncritical editorial commitment.

¹⁰⁵ EPR’s communiqué, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ See *Astillero, La Jornada*, 8 March 2001.

Conversely, Alain Tourraine, one of the EZLN's favourite intellectuals, recognised that before the *Zapatista* mobilisation "there existed an actual risk of dissolution of the movement", with regard to the change of policy in the government and the 2000 federal election. Against the polarisation interpreted by many observers, and counterbalancing the EZLN's critique, Tourraine highlighted that Fox and the EZLN's objectives were "complementary".¹⁰⁷ A senior entrepreneur and founder representative of private sector organisations, Juan Sánchez Navarro, pointed out that the EZLN represented a sample of the politicisation of social inequalities. He emphasised the idea, in line with one of the theses sustained in this work, that the stability of the system might be enforced by the EZLN as representative of the limits of the possible for an insurgent discourse and its containment function, as addressed in chapter 3 and 4. Thus, "if *Marcos* does not control his people...the humble people in the limit of the misery could overcome [the limits of radical organisations] and would create a public order problem" with unknown consequences.¹⁰⁸ In other readings, the mobilisation was indicative of the lack of utopia within the parliamentarian left.¹⁰⁹

The president went also to Guerrero to contest the EZLN's attempt to attach him to the traditional right. "We are a government of rights, not of the right" he claimed. Fox called upon *Marcos* to acknowledge that the EZLN's leader "never imagined that he was going to enjoy such freedom", as was being experienced by the *Zapatista* mobilisation. He refused, however, to engage in the validity of the EZLN's suggestion that the probability of insurgent outshoots existed with or without the EZLN or a peace agreement.¹¹⁰

Summarising, the *Zapatista* mobilisation was not just the space for the confrontation of competing notions of democracy and sovereignty, but also the place for the advancement of EZLN positions associated with its strategic attempt to reinsert its political project in a newly legitimised system. The EZLN made visible its reconnection with insurgent actors previously despised and stigmatised by the regime and, within it, by the partisan left. The

¹⁰⁷ See *Encuentro zapatista con la nación, La Jornada*, 8 March 2001.

¹⁰⁸ *La Jornada*, 5 March 2001.

¹⁰⁹ See *Izquierda parlamentaria y proyecto de nación. La Jornada*, 8 March 2001.

¹¹⁰ *Reforma, La Jornada*, 9 March 2001. According to Fox the debate was only "for peace".

most publicised insurgent-led demonstration would open the latest episode in the dispute on what the place of popular sovereignty was: the Congress as representative of “the nation” or the insurgent mobilisation as an embodiment of “the people”.

5.4.2 Mexico City: mythical climax and hegemonic epilogue

Around the dispute for the meaning of the indigenous rights, the EZLN and the predominant partisan forces posed the question of the right to be heard and to decide, through Congress, what has to be done.

On the eve of the dispute over addressing the Congress, as demanded by the EZLN, the presidential defence of the *Zapatista* presence in Mexico City was received coldly by the private sector, which saw the EZLN as “utopian”, “demagogic”, “intransigent”, “threatening with violence”, “protagonist” and a populist demonstration of sheer “blackmail”. Before those who were considered, for some commentators, to be Fox’s natural allies, the president restated his welcoming of the mobilisation and even invited *Marcos*, again, to the presidential mansion. According to the EZLN’s leader, the invitation was “a trap” and, in the context of the purpose of reinserting the EZLN as a moment of antagonism into the system - as illustrated by the vindication of guerrilla organisations (EPR and others) that had been conceived of as “other” by the EZLN and the state - the invitation was refused.¹¹¹ Before a multitude of about 100 thousand, *Marcos* and *Comandante David* insisted in *El Zócalo* - the main square in Mexico City - on the supposed falsity of the presidential intention towards the peace process. They attempted to persuade several audiences that the EZLN was not a simulated “peace that longs for war”, according to *Marcos*’ expression.¹¹²

To Fox, in the process of positioning of the identities of a legitimate government and a legitimate insurgency “*Marcos* and I are winning”. The association of opposites was resorted to by the president in order to respond to his party’s reluctance to accept not just the

¹¹¹ *La Jornada* 10-11 March 2001.

¹¹² *Marcos*’ speech, main square of Mexico City, 11 March 2001.

constitutional reform but the use of the Congress's tribune by the *Zapatistas*.¹¹³ The secretary of governance considered those who opposed the reform "short of vision", in a move that coincided with the EZLN and CNI pressure to demand the use of the congressional tribune before not just parliamentary commissions but also the plenum.¹¹⁴

The dispute for the tribune became the centre of the fight for the meaning of allowing an insurgent actor, privileged by an amnesty law of 1994, by an agreement of "peace and concord" of 1995, and by a package of pending agreements in 1996, to formally address the institutional space of popular sovereignty. More importantly, it was the space for the discussion of the meaning of democracy and the space granted in it to the ambiguous rebellious project embodied by the EZLN. *Marcos* accused "some legislators" of racism and interpreted them as the enemy against which the popular movements and the media sympathetic to the EZLN should direct its critique. One delegate of the European Congress suggested that the failure of "the *Marcos* model" would cause the emergence of "radical guerrillas".¹¹⁵ On 19 March, the EZLN played its main card; to demonstrate that the "narrow-mindedness" attributed to the legislators may be seen as evidence of the inability of the institutions to deal with a legitimate demand. He announced that the EZLN would quickly return to Chiapas. Under this pressure and thanks to it, the president announced the military withdrawal from Guadalupe Tepeyac, Río Euseba and La Garrucha, where the EZLN had had its origins and its headquarters. Thus, the seven garrisons were dismantled in the interest of the EZLN, complying with one of the required signals. Fox also announced the liberation of more *Zapatistas*.¹¹⁶ Notwithstanding, *Marcos* denied credit to the presidential move in his speech to UNAM's students in which the convergence with the remains of the 1999-2000 student insurgency and other forces was confirmed and illustrated by the attendance of all the political currents represented by 50 thousand people. Fox considered the reform "imperative",

¹¹³ *Reforma, La Jornada*, 13 March 2001.

¹¹⁴ *Reforma, La Jornada*, 14 March 2001.

¹¹⁵ *La Jornada, Reforma*, 14-18 March 2001

¹¹⁶ *La Jornada*, 20 and 21 March 2001.

and in the same move, the COCOPA insisted on overcoming restraints to the dialogue in the Congress.¹¹⁷

The PAN and the PRI opposed the EZLN's intervention in the Senate. The *panistas* in the Chamber of Deputies backed that position. Ironically, the vote by the PRI, the same party against whom the EZLN rebelled in 1994, supported the petition in the Chamber. By refusing the EZLN's intervention, the *panistas* defended their identity as a centre-right force and also the institutional arrangements they advocated. The *panista* leader in the Chamber of Deputies, Felipe Calderón, defended the sovereignty of the parliament from pressures from the executive and from the armed organisations. He correctly claimed that the EZLN practised exclusionary politics in Chiapas against all those indigenous that were not *Zapatistas*.

Neither *Marcos* nor Fox rule in this Chamber of Deputies... We want a dignified peace and justice in Chiapas, mister legislators, we all want it. A dignified peace for the *Zapatistas*, yes, but, also, a dignified peace for all those indigenous that are not *Zapatistas*.¹¹⁸

Martí Batres, on behalf of the PRD, led the defence in favour of granting the EZLN the right to use the tribune, as had been the case with many other political actors. The law, he claimed, could be with the Congress, the institution by which the form of transition from the armed way to the peaceful one may be demonstrated.¹¹⁹ Beatriz Paredes, for the PRI, highlighted the fact that the symbolism of the *Zapatista* presence would not overcome the symbol of the Congress, whose only owner was "the people of Mexico".¹²⁰

With 220 votes in favour and 210 against, the Chamber of Deputies allowed the EZLN to address the deputies.¹²¹ The PRI's support, indispensable for the EZLN's use of the tribune before the plenum, is in most accounts reduced to a marginal event in analyses of the *Zapatista March*. So also is the presence of the PFP, the meaning of *Comandante Germán's*

¹¹⁷ *La Jornada, Reforma*, 22 March 2001.

¹¹⁸ Speech of Felipe Calderón, full version published by *La Jornada*, 23 March 2001.

¹¹⁹ Speech of Martí Batres. *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Speech of Beatriz Paredes, *Ibid.*

presence, and the decisive support given to the reform by Fox. The commentators favourable to the EZLN seem to share the belief in an authoritarian presidential regime by criticising Fox, who was accused of not having done enough when “enough” would have meant forcing a vote, which is beyond his political and constitutional capacities.

Even when the *panista* deputies refused to attend the plenary session and despite the Senate’s refusal to engage with the EZLN, the debate surrounding the EZLN’s intervention was the climactic point of the march. The confrontation of two understandings of popular sovereignty - radically popular and radically institutional - was at the core of the dispute. Unexpectedly, two opposite and competing notions seemed to converge, the site of the “true” sovereignty of “the people” was the Congress, guarded by the parliamentarians and paradoxically vindicated by the EZLN’s intervention which demanded being herd in it.

On 28 March, in a presentation without debate that lasted three hours and was unprecedentedly broadcast live by national TV, a political movement with an insurrectionary origin and indigenous claims assumed the tribune in the Chamber of Deputies and addressed the nation. As a fainting climax to a mobilisation that was not designed to effectively initiate the formalisation of the peace process but to reinsert the EZLN’s identity in a new political context, *Comandante Esther* announced that the EZLN would not occupy the positions abandoned by the army. She reassured that *Comandante Germán* would continue to be the main EZLN representative before the government, and asked for a new dialogue between him and the government’s representative. *Comandante David* demanded that racism be overcome in Mexico and the CNI spokesman asked for an interpretation of the EZLN’s position as a legitimate demand for autonomy allegedly alien to special interest or geographical fragmentation. “Being indigenous *and* Mexicans” was put forward as their core motto. The general exposition was presented with balance and respect, elements which had been absent in the EZLN’s positions, according to several commentators.¹²²

¹²¹ *La Jornada, Reforma, El Universal*, 23 March 2001.

¹²² See *La Jornada, Reforma, El Universal*, 29-30 March 2001.

On 25 April, the Senate modified the initiative backed by the president *and* the EZLN. That implied the rejection of the crucial issue of “autonomy” demanded by the EZLN, associated with the creation of a new level of authority and with the control of natural resources in the indigenous areas. “Autonomy” was recognised only in its cultural dimension and not in the sense of territorial, political and economic control. Even the PRD’s senators and the co-ordinator of the parliamentary fraction, Jesús Ortega, for instance, supported the modifications. The grandson of the most cherished president within the left (Lázaro Cárdenas) and son of the PRD’s moral leader (Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas), Lázaro Cárdenas Batel - future governor of Michoacán - did not oppose the dominant view. On 28 April, the modified reform was approved with the support of the PAN, the PRI and against the PRD vote in the Chamber of Deputies, with 386 votes against 60. At the end of the month, the EZLN decided that the reform was insufficient and declared, again, an interruption of the dialogue with the government.¹²³

On the same day as the approval of the modified constitutional reform, Fox insisted that the armed conflict was over and that “now is the hour of support for the communities”.¹²⁴ Significantly, Fox abstained from vetoing the new law. Congressional approval of the law was ratified by the majority of the local congresses and by the Judiciary in favour of overcoming the demands against it. The decision marked the temporary victory of the institutional understanding of democratic popular sovereignty, over and against the radical organisations and actors supporting the EZLN. It recreated the conditions under which, again, the EZLN and those organisations would have to reinsert themselves in the mainstream of national politics without subverting the ambiguous and relatively stable political frontier between the internal security discourse and insurgent actors.

To the pro-EZLN interpretation of the march, civic values and dignity were visible only on the EZLN side which gave society the opportunity to overcome the “wall” of indignity by

¹²³ In the Mexican context this interruption had meant mainly waves of EZLN silence followed by a multiplicity of communiqués and the open and underground continuation of its radical political project, as opposed to military engagement.

¹²⁴ *Reforma, La Jornada*, 25 to 30 April 2001.

which the nation as a whole had separated itself from the excluded. In that interpretation, the mobilisation opened a space of inscription for current and future struggles.¹²⁵ To the government and the PAN, such dignity and courage was lying also in other causes and historical developments that had become hegemonic in the context of the Mexican liberal democracy. Its more elaborated reading may be found in the redefinition of the national security cabinet's approach to "threats", apparently broader than those found in previous administrations and in the discourse around the seemingly conservative notions of "order and respect".¹²⁶ The regrettable accident where the agent of PFP, Carlos Martínez Pérez, lost his life was the only casualty during the march, despite the rumours of menaces and the politics of panic promoted by some commentators and politicians from both extremes of the political spectrum in relation to the mobilisation.

In short, the mainstream political forces could not avoid the EZLN's dominance of the public and security agenda during the days of the *Zapatista March* and could not prevent the presence of a masked guerrilla organisation addressing "the nation" from a locus of enunciation designed, originally, as an insurrectionary outcry of "the people". The armed group succeeded in reinserting itself as a political reference. It in fact reorganised its hegemony in *Las Cañadas* after the military readjustment ordered by Fox. Conversely, the EZLN had to face the fact that those forces, in relation to which it had repositioned its identity, had a *national* hegemonic character as opposed to the *local* hegemonic stance of the EZLN, and therefore could still institutionally frame the 1994 political frontier. The predominant forces accepted a marginal renegotiation of the latter. Despite the spectacular propagandistic deployment seemingly achieved by the EZLN, the Congress and the Judiciary re-established the limit between the representation of the insurgent discourse and the predominant stances against it.

¹²⁵ See Luis González Souza and Daniel Barrón *La Agenda Nacional Después de la Marcha Zapatista* (Mexico: Rizoma-Causa Ciudadana, 2001).

Conclusion

I would argue that the driving force behind the mobilisation in 2001 was the badly needed EZLN project to reinsert itself in the new stage of a democratic context, as the embodiment of the state, Fox's administration engaged in a similar operation. Whereas the insurgents actualised its radical advocacy of popular politics and reinserted its connection with insurgent organisation the government continued the refinement of security operations and regained legitimacy for the Preventive Federal Police (PFP). Since a radical social movement/guerrilla such as the EZLN, estranged from the military confrontation, could not exist without trying to be at least politically antagonistic to the system, the mobilisation highlighted its challenging distance from the government. Alongside the EZLN's repositioning, the PFP in particular, by protecting the march in the name of the government and the national agreement signed in favour of the EZLN in 1994, 1995 and 1996, overcame the critique that its intervention had engendered within the armed and social left, particularly when it retook the UNAM campus in 2000. Broadly understood as discourses of the status quo, readings of national security were lived out in a tension: still there is an overlapping between specifically security operations and public safety practices.

The internal security/insurgencies political frontier was reinserted in a more refined and naturalised stage in the midst of the political struggle among notions of democracy and security invoked over the *Zapatista March*. The presence of security institutions has become the norm for the EZLN as much as the EZLN has been transformed into the standard representation of ultimate acceptability.

The presence of *Comandante Germán* as the main EZLN representative, second only to *Marcos*, and the reconnection with other guerrilla organisations and many moderate activists, seemed to be part of the strategy of improving acceptability of other insurrectionary discourses, mainly through the EZLN's establishment of contiguity with them, especially the EPR, ERPI and FARP. It was aimed at being benefited by it: the EZLN would recreate itself

¹²⁶ See *La Jornada* 3 March 2001, specially *Concierto por el mañana* and *Imaginario público, subimágenes privados*. For the "order and respect" priorities see the *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*

as a feasible “enemy”. *Marcos* also repositioned himself in the post-2000 horizon and reiterated the availability of the mythical *Zapatismo*.

During the *Zapatista March* the meaning of national security was extended to its limits; this nearly involved extending the meaning of “the nation” to that espoused by the EZLN if the unusual convergence of president Fox and Guillén is considered.

Fox was not willing or able to reorganise the foundation for a new space of negotiation with insurgent actors. It may be said that he was playing for the legitimacy of his government and not for his party’s.

As with the 1994 uprising, the *Zapatista* mobilisation made visible, in a more substantive manner, two interpretations of popular sovereignty, *the people* as an electorate supportive of an institutional order, and *the insurgent people* as a collective challenging identity. One was lived out in the Congress, and the other in the mobilisation and the media.

The EZLN understood that what could effectively be gained from the mobilisation, that is, the recreation of the conditions for the eventful hegemonic position the organisation has had, despite the appearances of total control, in *Las Cañadas*. Its role was strengthened with the liberation of prisoners, the reconnection with political actors and the media, its level of interlocution with the federal government, and, above all, the availability of the *Zapatista* model that in its ambiguity as an empty place for the iteration of radical politics, makes accessible both the clandestine discourse and the unarmed radical and popular one.

The controversial sympathy expressed by the EZLN to ETA, and the open argument with judge Baltazar Garzón in late 2002, after he criticised *Marcos* for it, is not disconnected from the EZLN’s controversial attempts to survive within increasing cycles of deterioration-revival lived out by the EZLN. Through expressions of radicalism, contestable even to the Mexican left traditionally sympathetic to the EZLN, this organisation has painstakingly tried to survive as a hegemonic identity in the Highlands and as a symbol of resistance in Mexican society.

A central conclusion is that authentic democratic spaces involve possibilities for both the iteration of internal security and insurgent discourses without creating political instability if

they are kept within the established political frontiers. Even when the moment of antagonism is crucial, especially when referring to insurgent and security actors, the contingent intervention of the Mexican state has largely been able to neutralise any insurgent threat and has transformed the armed antagonism into an instrumental part of the legitimisation of the regime in general and the security institutions in particular. *Desecuritised*, the former “threat” becomes just *one more difference* - even when *a radical one* - within the system, and can also be exercised as an autonomous *indigenous* difference.

In the interaction between security and insurgent actors a major framework has been exposed in the last ten years. Mexican political space, with room for either electoral or radical politics, is a place in which the inscription of antagonistic projects can be constantly unsettled. As Connolly would put it if politics is to be the medium of constant ambiguities and contestation by enabling “the paradox of difference” - freedom and subjugation - to “find expression in public life”, the *Zapatista* mobilisation was such a space as it was the political class contradictory attitude towards it.

The ultimate beneficiaries in the decade 1993-2003 seem to have been the hegemonic forces and the pro-centre society, as opposed to the expectations that the partisan left has had of itself and, mostly, in detriment to any “revolutionary” project to which the EZLN has also become a limited *standard of the possible* and the ultimate *measurement of acceptability*.