

Chapter 3

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

In 1996 the EPR (Popular Revolutionary Army) intervention was perceived and treated as a threat not to the regime but against the political agreement valid since 1994 between the government and the EZLN. Whereas the latter had triggered the intensification of the internal security discourse and set a standard of tolerance available to other radical actors *and* to the government, the former led to a reactivation of institutional plans and tools directed against far-left projects. I will show in this chapter how the reactions to the EPR's emergence and its military operations, in 1996, are evidence of the constitution of the EZLN *as a standard of acceptability*. I will introduce the notions of differential and equivalential logics as mechanisms that engender political frontiers and are useful tools for understanding the different treatment given by the political class to different armed insurgencies.

My argument is that the EPR's emergence showed the normalisation of the EZLN as *an accepted radical difference within the system*. In 1996 the EPR's disruption affected the process of negotiation and the agreement between the government and the EZLN, and reactivated the securitisation of the political field. Consequently, the EPR was prosecuted and stigmatised. Sympathy from wider segments of the society was practically nullified because of a complex governmental move in which the standard set by the EZLN was mobilised and because of the apparent identity of the EPR as *different* from the EZLN. The EPR's aims and methods were exposed as being in contrast to the EZLN's. In the context of the general argument that the EZLN and the regime constituted a political frontier that set the standard of the acceptable, as part of the intensification of the internal security state, the EPR's emergence explicitly showed the existence of the mutually beneficial agreement around which such a political boundary was built in 1994.

In order to elaborate this argument, first I will discuss the notions of *equivalence* and *difference* associated with the concept of political frontiers; then, I will address the conditions under which the EPR acquired legitimacy within the social and armed left in Guerrero and became an insurgent actor. Next, I will show the standpoint from which other political actors

proclaimed their repudiation of the EPR. I will comment on how the EPR was disruptive to both the regime and the left. I will then address the “divide and rule” operations through which the regime dealt with the EPR’s presence and, finally, I will comment on the EZLN’s reaction to the EPR as part of its process of guarding its rebellious but non-revolutionary identity. The specific claim derived from an analysis of these stances is that the EPR’s emergence was construed by the regime as an opportunity to reinforce the political frontier that prevented any insurgent organisation from becoming more than a marginal menace to it. Otherwise, the internal security discourse would be reactivated and deployed in the traditional manner, this being the mobilisation of the army and political and military intelligence. On the other hand, the EPR’s emergence showed the always-present possibility for the iteration of insurgent discourses that saw the EZLN’s survival as the possibility for new insurgent endeavours. The EZLN was forced to simultaneously show its support for the dialogue and to momentarily deploy a clear but still subtle differentiation with respect to the new guerrilla organisation.

3.1 Logics of equivalence and difference (political frontiers)

Political frontiers are the result of the interaction of systems of *difference* and *equivalence*.¹ They are the outcome of the polarisation of forces that are aimed at preserving the status quo or radically modifying it.

If we accept the claim that any identity, particularly radical identities, and political boundaries are antagonistically constructed, the EPR’s emergence in 1996 would test and eventually confirm the identities of the regime and the EZLN. In contrast to the argument put forward by commentators such as Hiraes,² in the sense that the EPR lacked “social base”, the EPR can better be thought of as a guerrilla group unable to create a national myth (something

¹ Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist...* op. cit., 127-34. Also chapter 1, *Introducing discourse theory and political analysis*, in *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis, Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* by David Howarth, Aletta Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

² Gustavo Hiraes, *Radical Groups in Mexico Today*, Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Policy Papers on the Americas, Volume XIV, Study 9 (September 2003).

the EZLN did achieve) and as an organisation with which the state was not interested in articulate with. That is, it was not welcomed as an acceptable political space after the 1994 uprising partially because society at large had come to terms with the emergence and subsequent *deseuritisation* of the Chiapas conflict. Moreover, it is central that the EZLN was instrumentalised by the regime as *the threshold of acceptability* whilst still maintaining a space for the representation of other struggles. The EZLN became, for society, the signifier in which the idea of insurgency was to be embodied and to some extent resolvable; therefore, from the perspective of the political class and the media, there was no need for any other organisation to fulfil such a role. Simultaneously, beyond that seemingly instrumental role, the EZLN was space of convergence for the social and radical left. I claim that these are crucial differences between the EPR and the EZLN, not their allegedly different “vocation” - i.e., compromising against armed violence - or the EPR’s unworthy relation to its social base, as Hiraes puts it.

I have claimed that the security defiance posed by the EZLN’s uprising was limited to 1994. Through *a new political frontier* constituted in January 1994, the internal security state had a historic opportunity to re-launch itself. To this end the government deployed a set of disciplinary measures based upon a differential logic. Those were not operations realised only by the government and the *priista* regime. They were also demanded and expected by other segments of society that distanced themselves from the insurrectionary call, its demonstrations and its allies. Society estranged itself also from the institutional violence threatening to crush the revolt. Now I will discuss evidence in 1996 of the confirmation of such a divide.

I will briefly mention the nature of a dual logic that is useful to understand the content given to the interaction between insurgent and security actors. First, *a logic of equivalence* should be considered as a dynamic constructed between political actors to divide the political field into two opposite camps. For instance, the EZLN advocated the universal value of workers and peasants demands and, latter, in 1994, of indigenous rights. They did so by representing these demands as valid for a broader segment of society, attempting to

construct a *chain of equivalences* between those sectors by identifying Salinas and “the PRI’s dictatorship” as “the enemy” that prevented the armed group and its represented community from achieving their aims. The EZLN put forward its concrete demands, post-1994, and the myth of *Zapatismo* as a locus of resistance and contestation, available for other actors’ political enunciation. For example, through the invocation of indigenous rights as a valid imaginary space and a tool to resist and confront the regime, the EZLN cleared the way for the identification of the dominant elite as representative of a dominant bloc allegedly opposed to popular basic needs. The EPR also constructed the PRI as its enemy, and shared with the EZLN the espousal of an order with egalitarian values. Several groupings in the umbrella organisation FAC-MLN seemed to dispute the space of representation of all those radically opposed to the regime, and showed a strategic respect for the armed struggle reiterated by the EPR.

On the other hand, the similarities between the EZLN and the EPR were seemingly diluted by the societal perception of the EPR. The EPR’s uncompromising legitimisation of the armed path, its open recognition of a quasi-socialist project and the absence of a mythical space for the convergence of a plurality of political actors constituted the ground upon which the government’s differentiation between the EPR and the EZLN was construed. In short, the government also deployed a differential logic, in which the EZLN was *within* the orbit of the acceptable whereas the EPR supposedly embodied *the outside* of such a boundary, and was viewed as a barbaric form of politics in the post-1994 system.

Second, a *logic of difference* is a dynamic deployed by those political actors attempting to incorporate disarticulated elements into an expanding order dominated by them. A hegemonic order, a counter-insurgent *and* legitimate government, differentiates the “acceptable”, “post-modern”, “good” guerrilla from the one that should be prosecuted and wiped out because of an “irrational”, “bloody”, “pre-modern”, “anti-institutional” or “violent” justification of “particularistic” aims against the “well being of society”. That may be the case in the context of the Zedillo administration’s (1994-2000) response to the EPR, as opposed to the acceptance of allegedly universal demands found in the EZLN’s renewed identity. A

government that distinguishes its challengers in order to divide and rule them is in fact deploying a *differential logic*. The employment of the logic of difference “attempts to weaken and displace a sharp antagonistic polarity, endeavouring to relegate that division to the margins of society”.³ The polarity opened by the EZLN’s emergence had already been partially incorporated by the recognition of the armed group as a source of mediation, because of its construction as a legitimate space for the defence of indigenous rights. The EZLN was no longer the representation of a categorical antagonism to the regime, but a legitimate adversary.

A logic of difference nuanced by a distinctive - equivalential - treatment of the guerrilla groups was activated by the government’s response to the EPR defiance in 1996. A Janus-faced politics of repression and negotiation has always been at place, but that year its visibility became paramount. Practices of insurgent and security actors might shed light on this space of precarious, and sometimes darkened and continuously negotiated stability, which I call a political frontier between internal security and insurrectionary discourses. It is the political space within which the state’s sovereignty and people’s identity are cyclically put into question.

The EPR appeared to be marginalised and stigmatised between 1996 and 2001. Several conditions combined for its exclusion. Among those that stand out are its eruption as a contender to represent the guerrilla groups and social movements that backed them, and the renewal of the sense of threat to society that it represented in the eyes of the elite. With a few exceptions within the left (see Montemayor⁴) and, on the other side, among commentators and scholars who were close to the Salinas administration,⁵ most observers denied about the EPR what many had accepted about the EZLN. That is, a structural connection with social problems that might justify its existence. For instance, authors with sympathy for *Marcos* and

³ Howarth, David and Yannis Stavrakakis, “Introducing discourse theory and political analysis”, in Howarth, D., Norval and Stavrakakis, *Discourse Theory*, 11.

⁴ See Montemayor, *Chiapas*, 172-85.

⁵ Héctor Aguilar Camín, quoted by Salinas, *op.cit.*, 875-6, is mentioned by the former President as an example of “an independent opinion”. Aguilar argues that only “ideology and will” cause guerrilla

the romanticised image of the indigenous struggle, but not necessarily with the radical left, rebuffed the notion that the EPR had a social and popular movement behind it. They disregarded the idea that the sympathy for the EZLN could be related to its creative adaptation of its defeat and the societal rejection of political violence (for instance Hernández Navarro and most of *La Jornada*'s commentators). On the other hand, authors with sympathy for the PRI regime equally rejected the non-democratic and contestable features they found in both the EZLN and the EPR (Aguilar Camín and most of *Nexos* and *La Crónica*'s analysts).

The distinction was both a consequence of the EPR's perceived "real identity" - as a militaristic urban-peasant force - and a government move. It indicated the defence of the 1994 political frontier, as an uncomfortable mediation and as part of the process of unfinished societal assimilation of the ephemeral armed revolt in Chiapas. Despite the distinction, similar antecedents to the struggle against the authoritarianism associated with the most traditionalist segments of the PRI, as well as structural factors, were originary elements in the creation of the EPR.

3.1.1 Emergence of the EPR (*Aguas Blancas*) and its interpretation of the regime

The repression of the 1960s and 1970s⁶ and the history of the social and armed insurgencies had started to become part of the national agenda.⁷ A history of counter-insurgent moves of co-optation and repression of the armed left had usually been located, until 1994, on the periphery of politics. Similarly to the events of the 1970s in Guerrero, in 1995 a group of peasants posited socio-economic and political demands outside of the official political channels, characterised by inattentiveness, traditional authoritarian controls and federal hostility to the counter-PRI protests. Open repression was the response in *Aguas Blancas*, where local security forces killed seventeen peasants belonging to the OCSS (Peasant

movements, and equates the EZLN with the EPR: they are, respectively, a "masked ideology" and a "gaunt ideology". See his article in *La Jornada*, 9 September 1996.

⁶ Now under investigation in Mexico after the partisan left and the new ruling party, the PAN, encouraged, in 2002, the public acknowledgement of the existence of a "dirty war".

⁷ That is, beyond some specialised accounts. According to the EPR around 800 *desaparecidos* resulted from two decades of repression against the guerrilla in Guerrero. See www.pengo.it/PDPR-EPR

Organisation of the Southern Sierra, *Organización Campesina de la Sierra del Sur*) on 28 June 1995. Governor Rubén Figueroa was accused of having planned the attack.⁸

This massacre in *Aguas Blancas*, in the southern Mexican state of Guerrero, occurred when the peasants were on their way to a demonstration against the government headed by Ruben Figueroa Alcocer. As happened when the *Partido de los Pobres* emerged as a resistance organisation, shortly after Guerrero's local security forces murdered a group of peasants in the late 1960s, *Aguas Blancas'* crime become the justification for fourteen guerrilla cells⁹ to accelerate the constitution of the EPR in 1996. The project was originally conceived in the 1970s and sporadically reactivated, as in the FLN's case, during the 1980s. Whereas the EZLN was a fusion of peasant and indigenous issues, by 1996 the EPR was a mixture of rural and urban traditions of ultra-radical struggle.

In 1994, the EZLN's appearance gave more momentum to an already existing impulse generated by several cells of insurrectionary activists outside Chiapas. Alongside this factor, and the impetus within rebel cells to polarise the political scenario, the 1995 massacre was a definitive trigger for the EPR's emergence.¹⁰

During the 1970s, the authorities practically exterminated the guerrilla without massive opposition from society. The national public was widely unaware of the tragic

⁸ Figueroa is the notorious son of a former governor, Ruben Figueroa Figueroa who was kidnapped in 1974 by Lucio Cabaña's guerrilla, *El Partido de los Pobres* (The Party of the Poor), when he was a PRI senator. He was, like his father, perceived as a representative of the most traditional authoritarianism still existing in the PRI two decades later. In the early 1970s, Figueroa's father, as senator and then governor, supported the extermination of the insurgents. During those years, the annihilation of the guerrilla was interpreted by the hard core of the political elite as a sign of strength. In contrast, during the mid-1990s, Figueroa Alcocer, his son, was obliged to resign after being strongly opposed by the left and important segments of the media, who fiercely criticised his alleged involvement in the *Aguas Blancas'* massacre. An indispensable account of the political environment is given by Gutiérrez, Maribel, *Violencia en Guerrero* (Mexico: La Jornada Ediciones, 1997).

⁹ My interviews with EPR *comandantes Oscar, Vicente, Antonio* and *Aurora* in 1996 and EPR documents. The organisations out of which the EPR was constituted were: The Mexican Armed Command, Francisco Villa Command, Morelos Command, Genaro Vázquez Command, Vicente Guerrero Command, Self-defence Workers Brigade, 18 March Brigade, Peasant Brigade of Execution, Communists Cells, Revolutionary Organization Ricardo Flores Magon, People's Armed Revolutionary Organization, Revolutionary Command Union and, centrally, the Procup-Pdlp (Workers, Peasant, Revolutionary Party Union of the People-Party of the Pooors), some of whose members could have been in the Lucio Cabañas guerrilla organisation and escaped the killings that nearly ended after Cabañas himself "died in combat" in 1974. Procup-Pdlp had justified the EZLN rise in *its method* and aims. See *La Jornada*, 3 January and 8 January 1994.

crushing of the *Partido de los Pobres*. Isolation, its absence from the media and its portrayal as a criminal organisation contributed to this.¹¹ The repressive operations culminated, in December 1974, with the execution of the school teacher who had turned into a guerrilla leader, Lucio Cabañas, along with most of his comrades. This signalled the peak of the traditional security discourse, in which the primacy of military mobilisation was the result of treating any insurrectionary force as an absolute enemy of the state. Twenty years after that execution, the advent of the EZLN and the articulation with the government and society illustrated the totally different political environment after the painstaking achievement of political rights. The growing independence of the media in 1994 was illustrative of the new political culture.¹²

In 1996 repression against the EPR was facilitated by a process of stigmatisation¹³ and the differential and equivalential logics deployed by security actors. While the new political culture in 1994 enabled both an original response from the government and a similar move from the EZLN, its generalisation was far from set in place. Conversely, the outrageous episode in *Aguas Blancas*¹⁴ was still emblematic of a cycle followed in Guerrero and other Mexican states with extreme poverty, the presence of radical traditions and a prevalence of extreme rigidity or an entire lack of political channels of negotiation. Violent and sporadic

¹⁰ My interview with the EPR's *Comandantes Oscar* and *Vicente*, on 23 August 1996, published in *La Jornada* 25, 26 and 27 of that month.

¹¹ Conversely, in 1994 other conditions made possible other interpretations of insurrectionary politics - but still pending is the discussion of the guerrilla violence against members of security institutions. Among these factors were: a new political elite; electoral politics; political awareness in Mexico City and around the world. For instance: a non-traditional leadership in guerrilla organisations took advantage of the media's growing independence from the very beginning, which proved crucial in the early portrayal of the EZLN. It was represented as an organisation that might be seen as the symbol of a wider set of grievances than those originally advanced in its first manifesto.

¹² According to Montemayor, the media attention to the EZLN was one of its distinctive factors: "it was the first guerrilla movement in modern Mexico that conquered... permanent space in the media". See his *Chiapas, La rebelión indígena*, 169. Aguayo pointed out that the Army would deploy its first counter-insurgent campaign under the national and international spotlight. See *Las lecciones de Chiapas*, in *La Jornada*, 5 January 1994.

¹³ My own analysis of 1,800 press reports on the EZLN and EPR. During two years after the appearance of the latter, it is clear that while the first group had positive or neutral readings in more than 80 per cent of the cases, the second group did not surpass 38 percent. Results derived from content analysis. See Guerrero Chiprés, op. cit., *EPR: estigma y silencio* (México: Mphil Thesis, UIA, 2000). EPR *Comandante Oscar* said: "against us they - the regime actors - put a wall of silence", my interviews during 1997.

¹⁴ Its occurrence was not understood nationally until the main television network, *Televisa*, broadcast lengthy scenes of the event several weeks later. Only *La Jornada* followed the case closely.

repression had largely been regarded and practised by the regime as a valid and even legitimate tool for crushing social movements that would not accept the usual subordination established over decades of PRI control.

Unlike previous decades, the massacre in Guerrero led to three major consequences which were unthinkable in the 1970s. First, it accelerated several guerrilla regroupings and triggered their public appearance as a unified organisation a year later, on 28 June 1996. Second, it renewed the availability and, hence, the locally perceived legitimacy of insurrectionary discourses as self-defence interventions within the social and radical left. Finally, and more importantly in the context of this work, it made visible the political frontier set in early 1994 as a result of the interaction between the EZLN and the government, and regenerated the intensification of the internal security discourse.

3.1.2 Reactions vis-à-vis the EPR's emergence

According to the political standards accepted by the political elite, scholars and commentators, the EPR was virtually a “caveman guerrilla”. Consequently, the EPR's emergence was opportune only “for those who are pugnaciously in favour of the militarization in Mexico”.¹⁵ The EPR was unwelcome and so were organisations different from the EZLN when disputing the construction of “the people”.

That was the case, for instance, with the FAC-MLN (Wide Front for the Construction of the National Liberation Movement), an umbrella organisation at the limit of what is allowed by the Constitution (but within its legal framework) that organised the open-air meeting in where the EPR suddenly appeared. It refused to condemn the new organisation. The FAC-MLN highlighted that it respected “all forms of struggle”, including the seizure of arms. This statement was unacceptable to the PRD's hegemonic faction. Moreover, this defence of the EPR was interpreted as a provocation and an utterly incomplete explanation by sectors of the *cardenista* and partisan left. For them, “if the goals are democracy, justice,

¹⁵ Comment by Octavio Rodríguez Araujo. *La Jornada*, 5 September 1996.

freedom, not all forms of struggle deserve respect. Taking the tribune by using violence is not valid".¹⁶

Although the EPR advocated opposition to repressive politics by defending its logic of self-defence, and notwithstanding the levels of extreme poverty comparable to those found in Chiapas', it emerged as a heterogeneous factor. The notions of "dialogue" and "peace with dignity and justice" had gained prevalence and were shared by the government and the EZLN. Therefore, these elements constituted traits of differentiation that would be activated by both the regime and the EZLN in relation to, and against, the EPR.

In presenting itself as part of a wider effort to construct an opposition to the dominant elite, the EPR attempted to reiterate the EZLN's discourse of self-defence and emancipation. However, its timing and objectives seemed suspicious even to EZLN sympathisers and advisers already working close to the EZLN's hegemonic project. For them, the EPR "in fact calls for the creating of a new group focused around a distinct project, with substantially different political-military coordinates" and, accordingly, its immediate effect was "to dispute with the EZLN how to conduct the discontent of popular sectors and to disqualify, by use of the facts, the complex road of dialogue and events such as the Special Forum for the Reform of the State".¹⁷

To put it differently, the EPR seemed closer to the pre-uprising EZLN than to the post-dialogue EZLN. The former was "another" guerrilla grouping in a space of mediation with the government and the representation of rebellious identities hegemonised by the EZLN. Therefore, its presence was considered disruptive and menacing as well as defiant and unwanted attempt to dislocate the already sedimented political frontier that characterised the division between the established polity and all its armed "others" since 1994.

The political agreement consisted of containing the EZLN, without generalised repression, in exchange for the guerrilla group's rejection of the military side of its original insurrectionary discourse. It implied the covenant engendered by the constitution of a

¹⁶ Comment by one of Cárdenas' main advisers, Adolfo Gilly, *La Jornada*, 3 July 1996.

¹⁷ Comment by Luis Hernández Navarro, *La Jornada*, 2 July, 1996

standard of what would be the limit of acceptable behaviour in Mexican politics when dealing with insurgent actors. The content of the deal is partially based on the government's tolerance of the EZLN's control of some territorial areas in the Chiapas Highlands, basically grounded in the *Amnesty Law* decreed on 27 January 1994. Also it is supported as part of the opening of a broad process of interaction, embodied in the always-open possibility of the reactivation of a problematical dialogue. In this dialogue, the EZLN *is not* assumed as a dangerous threat to the regime but as a *potential factor of limited instability*.¹⁸

Both sides of the new *symbolic frontier*, construed by the government and the EZLN, have lived out its mutual limit in a contradictory fashion. First, there was no open military repression (but encirclement and operations of "low intensity warfare"¹⁹ for a low-intensity guerrilla group). Second, further use of weapons was excluded, but not the likelihood of underground connections with new radical groupings, as will be evident in chapter 5.

The dialogue and its constant interruptions were the optimum space for the government and insurgents to modify and reorganise their discourses, and to give attention to the "political and economic vices without conciliation with the democracy we want".²⁰ The dialogue was also a means of differentiation between insurgent organisations, and a feature that allowed society's marginalisation and the government's persecution of other insurgent groupings.

3.2 Similarity and difference

The first set of reactions to the EPR's emergence on 28 June 1996 made clear the way in which the main political actors understood themselves, mirrored the interaction between

¹⁸ In the period 1994-1996 the EZLN could have consolidated itself as a relevant interlocutor with the government and other forces. In 1999 the National Security and Investigation Centre (CISEN) considered, however, that the EZLN had been experiencing a situation of "progressive weathering and loss of ascendancy within the citizenry". CISEN report, beginning 1999, in Guerrero, *EPR: stigma*, Appendixes.

¹⁹ For a defence of this argument see Martha López, *La Guerra de Baja Intensidad en México* (México: UIA, 1996).

²⁰ Carlos Montemayor, Prologue to *Chiapas, el alzamiento* (México: *La Jornada Ediciones*, 1994).

insurgent and security actors and illustrated the stabilised settlement after the revolt have been militarily neutralised and politically framed.

The EPR's appearance also produced, particularly within the partisan left, the same reaction that the EZLN's revolt initially provoked in 1994. This was, the sudden fear that the improvement in the electoral position of the left would be severely damaged by the political polarisation associated with the activation of guerrillas and the unavoidable proximity, in the eyes of the public, between it and the radical left.²¹ One year before the elections - by which he himself would become the first elected governor of Mexico City in 1997 - the PRD's leader, Cuauhtémoc Cardenas, condemned the emergence of an organisation whose emergence could hardly be more unwelcome.

Cárdenas had been invited to *Aguas Blancas* as the main orator by the FAC-MLN.²² Just five minutes after he finished speaking, the EPR appeared while he was still being interviewed by the media just fifty metres from the podium.²³ The EPR's appearance first brought surprise, then sudden silence. After the attendants understood that they were guerrillas, it generated among the peasants and activists present a feeling of euphoria. There

²¹ In 1994 an analogous reaction was registered within the left. In its front-page editorial on 2 January 1994, *La Jornada*, the main tribune for the partisan left and the most important media for the EZLN during the first ten years of the conflict, presented a title and an editorial content that left no room for doubt. Even considering its attempt to balance the disapproval of political violence, its overall rejection was clear and blunt: "No a los violentos" - "No to the violent ones". Due to moral, political, ideological and financial reasons, the newspaper moved from its original repudiation to a diametrically different position. That initial political statement deserves attention as part of a reaction that would appear again at several relevant conjunctures involving the national security link, the regime's responses, the partisan left fate and the emerging insurgencies in Mexico. The *no a los violentos* at that seminal time, 2 January 1994, was accompanied by a visit to the President Salinas by the general director of this media in the immediate aftermath of the revolt. The well-respected media director and later senator for the PRD (the biggest centre-left party and the third national force), the centre-leftist Carlos Payán, according to journalistic accounts first, and later in Salinas' book, published in 2000, suggested - as had several other political forces - explicitly crushing the rebellion. In accordance with the journalistic source, the expression would have been "acabe usted con ellos Señor Presidente": "finish them off Mister President". This suggestion succinctly expressed desperation and the broader fear of a dangerously charged environment, and the partisan left's opinion in the face of a radical new organisation. Conditions for public opinion to move towards more traditional political options, namely, the PRI or the PAN, which could have benefited from it, as eventually they seemingly did, were being recreated in the PRD's eyes.

²² It must be remembered that the FAC-MLN was one of the two political initiatives that followed the EZLN's call to constitute civic umbrella organizations that gave continuity to the EZLN's claim of being interested in bridging the gap between civil society and the guerrilla in Chiapas. The other was the FZLN. The latter was connected with movements beyond the direct leadership of *Subcomandante Marcos* and *Comandante Germán*, but was still somehow connected and sympathetic to them, at least initially in 1994, and until momentary frictions separated them.

were even multiple voices shouting things like *Viva nuestro ejército* (Long Life our army).²⁴ This aspect, and the evidence of the presence of *other* peasant-indigenous people, was either ignored or omitted by the media and in the mainstream debate. Rebellious peasant-indigenous were valid only if associated with to the EZLN, or, more generally, with a “legitimate” radical actor.

The EPR’s *Manifiesto of Aguas Blancas* was closer than many would like to think to the *Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*: the enemy was the government that blindly followed international and national capitalist interests, and a new “legitimate” government was needed and demanded. There was also a claim in favour of popular sovereignty; the link between popular demands and armed struggle was also stated.

We fight against oppression, injustice, humiliation, and theft of our children, our women, our workers, peasants, indigenous peoples, and students.

1) We struggle to overthrow the anti-popular, anti-democratic, demagogic, illegitimate government, which works in the interests of national and international capital and those forces that sustain that capital. We struggle for the establishment of a new and distinct government from that which presently exists.

2) We struggle for the reinstatement of popular sovereignty and reinstatement of the fundamental rights of man. We will achieve this goal with the participation of the people and with the establishment of a popular and democratic republic upholding the legitimate right of the people to alter or modify their form of government.

3) We struggle for resolution and fulfilment of the immediate needs and demands of the people implementing the necessary social, economic, and political modifications to bring about these changes.

4) We struggle for the establishment of just international relations with the international community.

5) We struggle for the punishment of those responsible for political oppression, repression, corruption, misery, hunger, and crimes against humanity.²⁵

The textual similarities of the *Manifiesto* and the EZLN’s first *Declaration* and the social origin of most of their members, were overlooked in the operation of legitimising the EZLN/political class divide. Cárdenas, for instance, was quick to interpret the EPR’s

²³ Observational account.

²⁴ Observational account. Some videos can corroborate this reception of the EPR’s first public intervention. In 1994 the EZLN’s appearance was received in its very first day in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, with curiosity rather than rejection or enthusiasm by the locals and tourists. The EZLN was *out* of its territory of influence (these being *Las Cañadas* and not the towns), but the EPR seemed to be *in* it (Aguas Blancas and the surrounding area). Both interventions correspond to political decisions and the articulation of problems as being insoluble by unarmed means.

operation as a threatening event against the PRD. It could affect its image as a partisan force that held respect for social movements but was in ambiguous disagreement with the guerrilla's antagonistic construction of the Mexican dislocations as the "cause" of political violence.²⁶

His reaction, supported by the PRD's local and national committees, indicated the reproduction of the 1994 regime's attitude with respect to the EZLN. In 1996 the PRD seemed closer to the regime's core - the government - than it was in 1994.

We energetically disapprove of the presence at the memorial service of a group formed by several dozen people *disguised as guerrillas*, with a covered faces and strongly armed...[T]he ill-timed disruption of this group, the mounting of a *grotesque pantomime*, would lack relevance if it were not for the *heavy weaponry* that they carried; it represents thoughtlessness and a grievance against the victims and their families and against those of us who attended the act; it is an *action of great irresponsibility* and it is a *provocation* which does not contribute anything to the *region's tranquillity*.²⁷

This statement was widely shared by a plurality of actors from the political elite, but it had a controversial reception among the organisations on the social left. More importantly, it indicated that the PRD felt that a line beyond which it could not accept political violence had been drawn early, and had to be confirmed even though the PRD opposed institutional violence directed against radical communities.

Even the more inclusive partisan left reacted against those who were deemed as irresponsible and barbaric: i.e. the new guerrilla group.²⁸ The ostensible existence of a political terrain which leading actors pretended to close, because of electoral politics, was clear. There was room only for a militarily-neutralised guerrilla, as in Chiapas. By rejecting the EPR, the PRD momentarily pretended to defuse the meanings that the sporadic

²⁵ *Manifiesto de Aguas Blancas*; hard copies were widely distributed during the EPR's irruption.

²⁶ As I was present during the event I can attest that Cardenas team seemed very anxious even before the EPR's appearance. A very well-organised vigilance provided by peasants and the FAC-MLN itself, which grounded the further suspicion from the partisan left and the government of a link between the new guerrilla and the radical social umbrella organisation. The peasants killed on June 1995 belonged to the OCSS, part of the FAC-MLN.

²⁷ *La Jornada*, 29 June 1996. My emphasis.

²⁸ See, Guerrero-Chiprés, *EPR: Estigma*, 51, 90, 145.

appearance of insurrectionary movements had had in Mexican history, and specifically in the disturbance of the frontier set up in relation to the EZLN.

With a hasty critique, the PRD even speculated, in a dangerous way; what “the hand of the peasants’ executioners might be behind this act” (the EPR’s public disclosure in the *Agua Blanca*’ ceremony). Even the qualification “guerrilla group” had been denied in the PRD’s reading of the EPR’s irruption. Their military clothes were portrayed as “disguises”, and its weaponry regarded as suspiciously “heavy” - and “new”. Later on, these words were used by many commentators to suggest the indication of obscure funding and suspicious origins, and as a sign of links to internal forces of the regime.

Despite the alarm, the shock was much less relevant for the partisan left than the one caused by the EZLN in 1994; and less significant for the rest of society, which had already dealt with the process of coming to terms with the sudden appearance of an insurgent actor. The EZLN had broken the apparent homogeneity of *Salinismo* and, contradictorily, became the symbol of the new political frontier and a source of resistance. Its appearance was also partially welcomed and partly regretted by the left. For the rest of society, it seemed to symbolise the political violence that the citizens had rejected in the 1994 elections. It was, on the one hand, the accepted limit beyond which the practices of internal security might be applied, and, on the other, showed the openness and strength of the system. It recycled the fragility of the electoral left when dealing with insurgent projects.

3.2.1 Partisan distress and insurgent disruption

The PRD’s estrangement from the EPR facilitated the ignition of the process of legitimisation needed by the internal security discourse, and unwittingly provided the political elite with the main argument that was to be deployed throughout the following years. The government’s implementation of its own logic of difference, with respect to the EZLN; and the deployment of its logic of equivalence in relation to the EPR, depicted as an inadmissible threat, was naturalised by the vast majority of analysts and politicians. The EPR became a common enemy of the government and the partisan left, and was temporarily understood by the EZLN

as an adversary. The EPR represented an unbearable ultra-left that was originally depicted as “terrorist”.

Other actors posited themselves as being vigilant over the status quo of the political divide, although they had been, as in the aftermath of 1994, attacking it. For instance, the National Action Party (PAN) - which had been the second largest political party since 1994 - rejected any form of “institutional or insurrectionary violence” and, in so doing, located itself in the position of being simultaneously distant from the stances adopted by the insurgent groups and the regime. The PAN detached itself from both the elements that could give legitimacy to insurgents and to the repression against them.²⁹ According to the PAN’s leader, Felipe Calderón, Mexico “has to accelerate political changes if we do not want that uncertainty to translate into conditions of major insecurity”. His party rejected “the violence exerted by the groups”, as much as the violence “indirectly exerted by the government through conditions of injustice and marginalisation which propitiate the emergence of nonconformist groups”. From the PAN’s perspective, only negotiation could contain the temptation for reverting to arms.³⁰ The PRD reorganised its position in the same way.

In other cases, the idea that social injustice could be recognised as a cause of political turmoil was seemingly sedimented in 1996. From a traditional standpoint, for example, even conservative clergymen, such as Guadalajara’s cardinal, even attributed the EPR’s public birth solely to “an economic policy applied against the majorities”.³¹ In the aftermath of the EPR’s emergence almost no advocacy of repressive operations can be found in any of the three main political parties. The PRI, for instance, demanded a “timed intervention because violence does not resolve anything and just makes the differences deeper”.³² The EPR was considered to have emerged as “the consequence of a local problem”, and did not “put in

²⁹ *La Jornada*, 2 July 1996

³⁰ Statement by Juan Antonio García Villa, PAN’s general secretary, *La Jornada*, 30 June 1996.

³¹ Cardenal Juan Sandoval Iñiguez, *Ibid.*

³² Roberto Campa Cifrian, PRI’s leader in México City. *Ibid.*

danger the country's stability", but did suggest "the need to reset the economic model more directed towards exportations... and (contribute) to switching off the social fire".³³

For members of the cabinet, such as the minister of agriculture, Arturo Warman, "under no circumstance is there room for revolts in the country". He claimed that the only purpose that the EPR had, was "propaganda", and its presence "must be rejected for all Mexicans".³⁴

As had occurred in Chiapas in 1994, and in Guerrero in 1996, the clergy, political parties and entrepreneurial organisations expressed their strongest doubts about the "real origin" of the movement. Indicators of "truth", "legitimacy" or even "actual existence" were widely demanded. To the PRD "*if the group is real*, it's a group that would not bring advantages for the democratic struggle. *If it is artificial*, it would provoke the same process of polarisation that Chiapas did when the EZLN emerged and Cuauhtémoc Cardenas was (presidential) candidate and the PRI used the *Zapatistas* to link violence with the PRD and subtract its votes".³⁵ A PRD senator and future candidate for governor believed that the EPR had created "a repressive wave to intimidate social leaders". He regarded the group's "great ideological inconsistency" as its remarkable feature. He claimed that, besides the "witch hunt" the PRD was about to face as a consequence of the EPR's emergence, there was a likelihood of "the inhibition of the vote in the next electoral process".³⁶

On the PRI's side, impressions of this sort were illustrated by a multiplicity of statements. "It is extremely strange and suspicious that (the EPR) ... *does not correspond to any concept or guerrilla scheme*...it does not have a political definition, it shows an ambiguous political declaration...and must be considered alien to Guerrero's problems".³⁷ The sudden vindication of a guerrilla group model, the disputable meanings attached to

³³ PRI's Senator Gilebaldo Silva, *Ibid.*

³⁴ Arturo Warman's statements, *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.* Declarations of Martin Mora Aguirre, PRD's general secretary in Guerrero. The local elections were to be held on 6 October. My emphasis.

³⁶ Senator Félix Salgado Macedonio's statement, *Ibid.* The PRD was and still is the second political force in Guerrero.

³⁷ PRI's senator, Porfirio Camarena Castro, *La Jornada*, 3 July 1996. My emphasis.

“political definitions” and the separation between “us”, who represent a popular will, and “them” (perilous to us), were emphasised.

A core member of the president’s team, the Minister of Social Development - a position that had central relevance in the policy of transformism applied nationwide and stressed in Chiapas before and after the EZLN’s revolt - exemplified the perceived distance between the authorities and the EPR. He confirmed that the government lacked intentions to create a special program to deal with the new heterodoxy introduced by the new guerrilla: “it seems to me that they are breaching the law and their attitude does not contribute to overcoming social and economic backwardness”.³⁸

The advent of the EPR, intended to coincide with the first anniversary of the massacre of *Aguas Blancas*,³⁹ occurred just two days before the beginning of the EZLN’s meeting with “civil society”. Nationally, the EPR’s impact was probably less significant for the government than it was for the guerrillas in Chiapas, who were already in a troubled but still active process of dialogue with many actors, especially, the government. Immediately before the encounter, the National Commission of Intermediation (CONAI), a team led by Bishop Samuel Ruiz, stated that “there is no element that allows us to suppose even the most remote link” between the EZLN and the “armed group” that had just emerged in Guerrero. The EZLN was summoned to a *Special Forum for the State Reform*, in which context the CONAI insisted that the event in *Aguas Blancas* should be seen as a “contradiction to the effort that the EZLN is making”.⁴⁰

Even the language they are using shows *a very different tradition*, it shows a *non-assimilation of all that has been learnt in Chiapas*, hence I do not think that a link (between the EZLN and the EPR) could be legitimately established...The fact that the forum occurs now when the existence of the new armed group is known puts before the nation a reaffirmation from Chiapas that *dialogue is the proper path for transformations...the only way to follow...*The political negotiation must be

³⁸ Minister Carlos Rojas Gutiérrez’s declarations, after an interview with the president following the EPR’s appearance. Ibid.

³⁹ Interview with EPR’s *comandantes*, August 1996.

⁴⁰ *La Jornada*, 30 June 1996, declarations attributed to Gonzalo Ituarte, CONAI’s technical secretary and a collaborator with Bishop Ruiz García.

consolidated and will show to other Mexicans who yesterday firmly supported the armed way that this (dialogue) is feasible, valid and that we have to work for its fruits.⁴¹

Javier Elorriaga, *Subcomandante Marcos*' recently designated ideological officer and spokesman for the newborn Zapatista Front of National Liberation (FZLN) - constituted as an EZLN's initiative in 1996 -, basically shared CONAI's stance.⁴²

What happened in Guerrero or in other places is not going to take us from this table, because the EZLN's choice is very clear, with the forum and the table of San Andres, and it is demonstrated by the facts. The EZLN does not send double messages.⁴³

He feared that the EPR's appearance could have an effect on "the people", and warned that the EPR's appearance "might be a very bad move for the forum", which was the framework for the constitution of the FZLN, viewed by the EZLN as part of the process of transforming the EZLN into a "civic *Zapatismo*".⁴⁴

The blow experienced from the EPR's arrival was, for the PRD and for the EZLN, comparable to the effect that the EZLN's public birth had had in 1994 for the regime. The 1994 guerrilla group had been a heterogeneous sign in a landscape hegemonised by *Salinismo*. In 1996, the EPR was an equally heterogeneous challenge to the political frontier in which two stable antagonists had made the political scenario homogenous around the notion of a feasible dialogue.

The EZLN's blow to the rhetoric of stability, in 1994, was analogous in significance (but not in magnitude) to the EPR strike in 1996 against the naturalised political divide that was in place.

⁴¹ Ibid. My emphasis.

⁴² According to the PGR documents, publicly available literature, (La Grange, Tello), and the evidence of its relationship with the EZLN, he had been the EZLN's media liaison officer and responsible for "ideological" tasks. He was known as *Vicente*. He had just been released, on 6 June from incarceration when he was accused by the government of being a member of the EZLN's leadership and was being introduced in those days as a principal promoter of the insurgents' civil representation network, the FZLN.

⁴³ *La Jornada*, 30 June 1996.

3.2.2 EPR's stance toward the EZLN

The first clandestine encounter between the media and an EPR's spokesman was illustrative of the framework in which the EPR's emergence was given meaning. The press meeting with *Comandante José Arturo*, described in the main political magazine highlighted the components of an initial differentiation between the EZLN and the EPR. The representative was, in comparison with *Subcomandante Marcos*, "severe and direct". His comments were presented through an articulated but still traditional "Marxist analysis". Prosecuted by the government, affected by the electoral left's rejection and left without an available and *open* popular support, *José Arturo* hopelessly declared that the EPR actually was "*an existent organisation*".

*We are not a pantomime, no way; we are a reality. The EZLN and we are not the only armed groups in Mexico. There are many others, a result of nearly thirty years of clandestine experience.*⁴⁵

Comandante José Arturo acknowledged that the EZLN's appearance increased insurgent unity and made it feasible for the society to accept insurrectionary agency as a source of legitimate politics. He considered the communicability of the literature generated by *Marcos* to be relevant but considered, by paraphrasing the Leninist reading of Clausewitz, that the EZLN's recent rhetoric was closer to poetry than to politics. According to the EPR's *comandantes*, one difference from the EZLN was the maintenance of guerrilla tactics in the context of a supposedly broader project.

It may be true that language has given the EZLN a great attractiveness (but) *poetry cannot be the continuation of politics by other means* and neither resolves nor points in the direction in which the movement must be channelled...[T]hrough the word the building of a moral force has been achieved but if this is not backed up by more solid elements...it tends to wear off and disperse itself ...[T]he challenge is not just to have a moral force, but its materialization; to be capable of facing the social and historic tasks we have ahead.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Proceso*, 26 August 1996. My emphasis.

The EPR criticised the EZLN's prioritisation of dialogue and communiqués to the civil society, as opposed to the political engagement involved in military confrontation, according to the guerrilla canon, which the new organisation advocated. The EPR overlooked the fact that the predominance of the EZLN's rhetoric had resulted not just from its military and political limitations, and Guillén-Elorriaga's literary talents, but also as a condition and outcome of its mythical reconstruction of its own failure. The EPR's leader was thus unable to recognise that trait as revealing the mythical possibilities, that is, the probability of becoming the space of inscription and principle of reading for non-radical identities, and a space of identification for broader segments than those traditionally addressed by any insurgent discourse. The EPR would later qualify its language. Nevertheless, in 1996 it did not seem to recognise that radical politics were being covered up by the EZLN's rhetoric as a strategic tool to address several audiences willing to oppose the regime.⁴⁷ In short, the EPR's emergence exposed the implicit understanding within the political elite that government's articulation with the EZLN was just an obligatory political manoeuvre for defusing a danger that had been framed and contained since 1994.

3.3 The regime's posture toward the EPR (logic of equivalence and difference)

In the aftermath of the EPR's emergence, the government showed tensions when coping with the new group. For instance, the coordinator of the government's delegation for the peace dialogue, Marco Antonio Bernal, contradictorily claimed that he was unaware of the nature of the EPR, which did not prevent him from asserting that it was "a group of delinquents

⁴⁶ Ibid. My emphasis.

⁴⁷ It is interesting how Le Bot credits the EZLN for having softened its militaristic drive but discredits the EPR for trying to justify the armed path. The EPR's response to Le Bot's disqualification is also telling. The EPR insists that guerrilla groups emerge as a result of loss of "national sovereignty" and the financial dominance of national politics. Even though Le Bot seems captivated by the EZLN's charm, he is able to recognise the EZLN as a partial result of society's rejection of repressive politics and the hegemonically skilful framing of the conflict deployed by the Salinas administration. On the other hand, the EPR seemed incapable of addressing the broader questions posed by the symbolic EZLN success and the logic of stigmatisation to which it was subjected. See Le Bot, *op. cit.* and *El Insurgente*, Año 1 Número 12 August 1997 and Año 2 Número 15 November 1997, México, clandestine leaflet. <http://www.pengo.it/PDPR-EPR> downloaded November 2002. Abundant texts are available that show EPR's attempt to nuance its approach to insurrectionary politics, but only its 2001

disguised with some EZLN symbols and forms". In that reading, "symbols and forms" attributed to the EZLN seemed to signal the acceptance of a guerrilla group able to keep the proper image and behaviour required for a legitimate dialogue with two mutually legitimised actors.

By means of a seemingly simple statement, Bernal illustrated the complexity of the tools of displacement used by the government. He turned to elements provided by the PRD's initial reaction, but showed a negative qualification towards the EPR that was symmetrical to the one which the government briefly applied to the EZLN in January 1994. He equated the EZLN's image, and its alleged content, with the EPR's, even when officially the government's position was one in which the differentiation between both guerrilla groupings was being promoted. It could be said that the government's delegate was showing the government's internal tensions: 1) The government's silent contempt for political actors who otherwise would be regarded merely as criminals and with whom they had pragmatically set up a "dialogue"; and 2) a seemingly ambiguous approach to the insurrectionary question as a result of an apparent contradiction within the national security discourse. Bernal believed the government had made "all the effort for solving the problems within the law and the institutions and has provided the political spaces to avoid the justification of actions of this kind".⁴⁸ Consequently, because the place reserved to deal with such problems was already occupied, any other organisation was deemed irrelevant to that space.

(Guerrero will not have influence on Chiapas) *because* simply the *Zapatistas* have declared that they do not have anything to do with this group. *We believe them* and *we have a joint commitment for the dialogue* to continue and progress by peaceful means. Hence the federal delegation and the Zapatista representation (will) recommence formal negotiations...⁴⁹

President Zedillo eschewed mentioning the EPR and implied its existence as an unmentionable and despicable menace. He alluded to it on two occasions. First, three days

proximity to the EZLN seemed an acceptable argument to many intellectuals and the media. I will show this aspect in chapter 5.

⁴⁸ Marco Antonio Bernal's statements, *La Jornada*, 3 July 1996.

after the EPR's appearance, as part of a wider defence of the dominant but challenged liberal-democratic discourse; and, secondly, during the nationwide broadcast of the State of the Union Address, three days after the EPR's military operation.⁵⁰

In his first intervention, the president affirmed that “never as today” had the Mexican laws, democracy and freedom offered more ways to resolve differences. These peaceful means were regarded as evidence of the “non viable and condemnable stands that make some sense only within authoritarianism and intolerance”. Zedillo asked for a “confrontation of arguments, proposals and feasible solutions”, otherwise Mexico would face a “dogmatic and sterile confrontation”. He claimed that the unity of the nation and its plurality could be combined. According to him, it was the “false, naive, deceitful or misleading” position of those who find a contradiction between a market economy and a “good redistributive social policy”:

Historical international experience demonstrates that there is no such opposition and neither is there in Mexico today, where the market economy operates and there is a state that pays attention to the fundamental needs of society. There is no shortcut; the other options were built around the policies of inhibiting individuality and supplanting unproductive social energy.⁵¹

The EPR's military attack, launched on 28 August 1996⁵² against isolated security positions in seven states, reactivated the *intensification of the internal security discourse*. On the one hand, the government decided on *military mobilisation*. This involved the activation

⁴⁹ Ibid. My emphasis.

⁵⁰ This was probably the most *militarily* significant in the last 50 years, while the 1994 uprising was the most important *politically*. The boundaries between the two aspects will always be under discussion.

⁵¹ Ernesto Zedillo's statement, *La Jornada*, 2 July 1996.

⁵² The EPR attacked towns in minor localities in seven states in an unprecedented logistical action from insurrectionary forces. The EZLN had taken its forces to seven towns just in the state of Chiapas in the early morning of 1 January. Indeed, the symbolic impact of 1994 was enormously more relevant than the one granted to the 1996 event. The next day, after the EPR's military demonstration involving isolated but still significant operations, the President had one of the rare intelligent tactic moves attributable to its *sexenio*. From the logic of the hegemonic position, in relation to the guerrilla movement, he distinguished and emphatically separated the EZLN from the unexpected and - for political actors already legitimated by the political frontier - unwanted organisation. In the president's view, widely shared even by the partisan left, the EPR lacked a “social base” and its identity was defined basically by its turn to “terror”. Accordingly, the EPR's members “deserved” the corresponding treatment, namely the open prosecution and the military deployment of a traditional

of a fifth of the army and the deployment of 16,000 policemen in Mexico City,⁵³ in the highly unlikely case that the EPR decided to assault the capital, where the organization had recently claimed to have “forces”.⁵⁴ On the other hand, an *absolute distinction between the EZLN and the EPR* was established as part of the combined deployment of equivalential and differential logics.

By this differential-equivalential combination I mean that the Zedillo administration on the one hand regarded the EZLN, after the 1995 crisis,⁵⁵ as a net contributor to the regime, to the extent that it did not again break the 1994 covenant. That is, the EZLN was regarded as *one more of the legitimate differences* by which the plurality of the system was strengthened. On the other hand, the regime divided the insurgent field into two totally opposite camps. That is to say, from now on any other insurgent organisation advocating armed struggle would be construed as a threatening “other”, endangering the values embodied in the neoliberal discourse and the 1994 frontier. Beyond the appearances and *Marcos’* vociferous speeches and witty communiqués, and Zedillo administration’s exaggerated and awkward reaction to some of the EZLN’s manoeuvres, the 1994 agreement has been basically maintained and legitimised by the whole political class. Unwittingly, the EZLN’s acceptance and exploitation of the government’s hegemonic framing of the Chiapas conflict had made a considerable contribution to the general security of the system.

During the 1996 State of the Union address, two days after the EPR’s military operations, Zedillo stressed the differential treatment directed against the new insurgent challengers of the regime by re-adopting the core vocabulary of the current national security rhetoric, thus invoking a damaged principle of authority. Zedillo affirmed that “the threat” was ominously emerging “when Mexico is again standing up”. From what he called the democratic standpoint, he regarded the EZLN as part of the political scenario, as opposed to those who

strategy that had been suspended and constantly renegotiated with regard to the EZLN since January 1994.

⁵³ *La Jornada*, 1 September 1996.

⁵⁴ My Interview, 22 August, published in *La Jornada* on 25 August 1996.

were already perceived as “terrorists” outside the official polity. Political power was disputable only, he added, “by the rules of democracy and not with the irrationality of terrorism”. He warned that “the whole force of the state” would be used to wipe out “outdated and cruel attempts intending to close democracy and impose an intolerant will on the others”.⁵⁶

Whereas the EPR was named as an unwelcome threat, the EZLN was considered representative of a legitimate cause in a struggle allegedly shared by the government against the injustice suffered by the indigenous people. In Chiapas, for instance, Zedillo claimed that “the federal government will continue working for a solution to the conflict, resulting from dialogue and by means of attending to the misery and the abandonment that provoked it”.⁵⁷

Mexicans do not accept that when our country is again standing up, overcoming adversities and challenges, armed groups appear and utilize terrorism to murder, destroy and frighten. We do not admit that precisely when, with growing and free participation, we are having advancements towards a full democracy, outdated attempts emerged against democracy... *We will prosecute every single terrorist act with all our capacity and apply all the rigour of the law.* Invariably with the rule of the law, paying respect to individual guarantees and human rights, we will act *with the whole force of the state.*⁵⁸

The secretary of governance and the government’s representatives to the EZLN insisted that the dialogue was safe, political stability was assured, and that the main difference between the EZLN and other guerrilla groups was the existence of the EZLN’s “social base”, as opposed to the alleged absence of it in the EPR and because of the EZLN’s disposition to continue existing by peaceful means from the EPR and the Chiapas group.

The EZLN has alluded in its communiqués to a supposed (governmental) characterization of one bad guerrilla and one good guerrilla. We have never used those terms. *What we have done is distinguished what is different;* the EZLN opted for

⁵⁵ That is, on 9 February 1995, when the government announced, after discovering that the EZLN continued to engage in a clandestine reorganisation of guerrilla cells in two towns, the reactivation of a traditional and hasty interpretation of the national security discourse.

⁵⁶ Segundo Informe de Gobierno (*State of the Union Address*), Presidencia de la República, 1 September 1996.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. My emphasis.

political means in function of one law for the negotiation and if this is the option maintained by the EZLN for us it will continue working.⁵⁹

Moreover, the government animatedly announced its verbal disposition to attend to “all EZLN petitions” and offered “all the patience needed” to re-establish the dialogue while the EPR was prosecuted.⁶⁰

For the financial elite, what was at stake was not the presence of new guerrillas but the ability of the government to manage them,⁶¹ and the President presented the proper device to do it: he created, as representative of the dominant political pact among Mexican elites, the conditions to 1) legitimise the use of military, security means - use of intelligence and infiltration - and political instruments against the EPR, including public isolation and criminalization of all its acts; 2) avoid the possibility of any prestige being gained from an eventual public connection between the EZLN and the EPR causes of origin and political aims; 3) intensify the dialogue with partisan forces on the eve of the 1997 mid-term federal elections; and 4) to highlight the “ignoble origins” of the EPR by concentrating on the fact that the Procup-Pdlp’s (an organisation that survived as clandestine cells throughout the 1970s) ultra radicalism was at the core of its allegedly backward identity: hence the EPR’s members could not be more than sinister “terrorists”. Most of the media joined this campaign and shared this understanding.

The minister of governance exploited the PRD’s portrayal of the EPR as a “pantomime” until August 1996, when that notion ended in the face of the EPR’s highly coordinated military attack. The ideology of the *Mexican Revolution*, as an institutional reading of history, was constantly mentioned as grounds for the deployment of the “whole force of the state”, announced during the ceremony of the State of the Union address in 1996 against a force that defied all the previous agreements, particularly that of 1994.

⁵⁹ Declarations of Marco Antonio Bernal, supported by comments of the Secretary of Governance, Emilio Chuayffet Chemor, *La Jornada*, 4 September 1996. My emphasis.

⁶⁰ COCOPA’s and Chemor’s pronouncements, *La Jornada*, 4 September 1996.

⁶¹ Comments attributed to a *Standard and Poor*’s spokesman, *La Jornada*, 5 September 1996.

Alongside the reaffirmation of the elite's pact, the sovereignty of the state was reaffirmed in confronting the newborn enemy. In general, among the institutional reactions against the EPR what stood out was the reactivation of security measures.

What I can tell for sure is that the EPR's emergence did accelerate the constitution of the PFP. My own appointment as head of the CISEN was a consequence of the Chiapas revolt, but the reworking of the notion and the institutional reorganisation was already taking place.⁶²

Security actors had taken advantage of the EZLN uprising in 1994; in 1996 and in the following years the treatment given to the EZLN and other insurgent organisations would be dependent on the regime's ability to defuse the potential to make the association between social unrest and armed options legitimate despite the similarities between insurgencies.

3.4 The EZLN's position: strategic nuances towards the EPR

The government's attempt to differentiate the EZLN from the EPR was partially achieved, while the Chiapas organisation was momentarily put on the defensive. The EZLN emphasised its acceptance of the dialogue with the government. However, it did not refuse to offer a basic principle of solidarity with "the other" guerrilla that was threatening its position, not as the regime's interlocutor but as a representation of insurgent identities and as a competitor in the construction of the insurgent "people". The EZLN's ability to compromise and establish links with all actors opposed to the regime was as relevant as its net contribution to the political internal security frontier that was being threatened by the EPR's emergence.

The EZLN and the EPR invoked the same historical values. Historical references and the interpretation of heroes and social movements were literally waiting to be written by "the people". Insurgent actors situated themselves, as opposed to the state, as a continuation of the struggle for radically instituting these values and references. The government deployed its interpretation of history to embrace the sovereignty of the state and the intensification of the

⁶² My interview with former CISEN's director and under secretary of Governance, Tello Peón, 18 March 2003.

ideology embodied in the doctrine of national security, which was reactivated in 1996. To the government, the EZLN had a place, even though marginal, in filling those competing meanings through the legitimate incorporation of “indigenous people’s rights”. In contrast, the EPR was constructed as a total outsider.

The main entrepreneurial organisations echoed the rhetoric against the EPR and reproduced its distinction from the EZLN. They even publicly asked the Chiapas organisation “not contribute to the destruction of the country” by manifesting empathy with the EPR. These corporations understood that the EZLN was “in the disposition for dialogue”, whereas the new group was one of “bad Mexicans”⁶³ that certainly did not express the intention of having any dialogue with the government. The private sector and the political elite decided to divide and rule any probable coalition constitutive of a threat to the status quo, within which, for them, the EZLN already had a stabilising role to play.

The spokesman of the congressional National Commission of Concordance and Pacification (COCOPA) illustrated the explicit visibility of the ambiguous frontier previously mentioned. “Under no circumstance”, he maintained, was the Congress to allow the executive power and security forces the probability to extend the investigations of the EPR to the *Zapatista* movement. The COCOPA’s representative regarded the EPR as a group absolutely detached from the EZLN. Accordingly, he claimed that the negotiations between the EZLN and the government “will not be affected”.⁶⁴

Within this context, the congressional commission (COCOPA) considered the EPR to be evidence of the gravity of the challenge to the political elite in dealing with a potentially explosive social discontent. Society was then in “the need to demonstrate with facts that peace is a viable path only if we construct a country with justice and democracy”.⁶⁵

In 1996 no societal democratic impetus for dealing with the EPR was invoked, in contrast to the 1994 conjuncture. A crucial element for justifying the legitimacy of the differentiation

⁶³ Declarations of National Confederation of Industrial Chambers (Concamin), National Chambers of Commerce Confederation (Concanaco) and Entrepreneurial Coordinator Council (CCE), *La Jornada*, 4 September 1996.

⁶⁴ COCOPA’s official statement, *La Jornada*, 1 July 1996

applied to the two groups was *The Amnesty Law*, decreed by Salinas in January 1994 and unanimously supported by the political parties: “by legal mandate all judicial processes, apprehension orders and investigations concerning the EZLN are suspended”, the COCOPA reaffirmed. In contrast, with reference to the EPR:

The authorities must investigate everything related to this armed group (the EPR). They must keep respect for the full validity of the *Law for the Dialogue, reconciliation and Dignified Peace in Chiapas*...the COCOPA is guarantor of the law and will not permit *under any circumstance* the investigation to be extended to the Zapatista movement.⁶⁶

On 30 June, two days after the EPR’s public arrival, *Marcos* drew his line by expressing that the EZLN was disposed to fighting against the PRI government “by *political* means *until the last consequences*”. Since early 1996, the EZLN had not resorted to the active deployment of arms but to the construction of a “broad opposition front”, which, according to the *Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, would begin with the constitution of a “front of national liberation” (the FZLN).⁶⁷

Unsurprisingly, *Marcos* argued that guerrilla organisations were actually the result of the government’s use of “treason, threat, prison” against popular protests. Popular and armed responses, according to the EZLN’s interpretation, were the necessary outcome of what he had been branding an authoritarian regime, a “political system always closed”. Insurgencies were, in his view, the consequence of economic liberalism. Despite the analysis, the 1994 challenger became the centre for the stabilisation of the frontier and an indispensable mediator and interpreter of the political crisis in 1996. As evidence of the EZLN’s democratic impetus *Marcos* put forward the acceptance of the dialogue with the government.

We rose for democracy, freedom and justice. We have the will to get there by peaceful means. We are willing to do anything in order to get them, *to go to the last consequence*. How far is the government willing to go? When? What is the deadline to get a just and dignified peace? What is the calendar to which we have to adjust to be respected for fighting for being the best we can be? Are negotiators’ arrogance and plans for higher political posts the parameters to choose between peace and war? We

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., my emphasis.

⁶⁷ EZLN, *Cuarta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona*, 1 January 1996.

are willing to give everything for a better country, how much is the government willing to give to reach the same goal?⁶⁸

The EZLN's constant interruption of the dialogue had not eliminated the basic accord between both actors of not resorting to armed engagement, as part of the effects of having established the 1994 frontier. The dialogue was the expression of a mutual limit and a mark of the reciprocal potentialities to represent, with legitimacy, both the regime and the challenge to it. The EZLN was, so to speak, the maximum representation of the periphery of the system and the EPR seemed to dislocate that centrality as much as the agreement.

For the government, the EPR's emergence clarified the ambiguities of formally dealing with an insurgent organisation and rejecting any other. Up to 1996, the EZLN symbolised to the government all the imaginable *and* acceptable internal security "threats". To breach the frontier would imply an unacceptable risk to the EZLN of being repudiated by both the society at large and the communities on whose behalf it was speaking. A similar rejection would have faced the government if it were to promote a generalised attack against the EZLN by reactivating the internal security discourse, which henceforth would be viewed as evidence of political incapacity.

The government was defending the position through which it had been able to hold back repressive alternatives. It developed the differential logic involved in the increasing predominance of electoral politics and in the institutionalisation of any political divergence. At the same time, the regime showed its disposition to retaliate "with all the force of the state", against the EPR and all those similar to it, in what constitutes the main equivalential move of division, distinction and displacement. These operations took place in contrast to the treatment given to the EZLN, because the latter was seen as part of the general functioning of the system. The EZLN has not visibly engaged militarily with the Mexican army since 1994.

Thus, the EZLN defined its *public* medium-term reading of the EPR's emergence in late August 1996. It decided to temporarily abandon the dialogue with the government. One day after the EPR's military attacks and propaganda operations, the EZLN unveiled a formal

⁶⁸ *La Jornada*, 1 July 1996.

public demarcation from what could have resembled its own militaristic past. The EZLN expressed to the EPR, before the careful monitoring of broader audiences - the civil society and the regime's security actors - that

(...) we do not want your support. We do not need it, we do not seek it, and we do not want it. We have modest resources, true, but they are ours. Until now we are happy not to owe anything to any political organization, national or international. The support, which we seek and need, is that of national and international civil society, their *peaceful and civic mobilizations* is what we await.⁶⁹

The EZLN's initial call for a national armed insurrection, addressed to all those who felt aggrieved by the regime, was over. Soldiers, weapons and military capacity, claimed the EZLN, were no longer necessary for its post-rebellion purposes. These purposes were linked to the more acceptable idea of a non-military, non-insurrectionary *civic* and *moral* communitarian insurgency espousing indigenous rights, rather than to the originally stated purpose of defeating the government's military. The encompassing ambiguous mindset, called *neo-Zapatismo*, characterised such a space. Its call was then addressed to "those people without a party and organisation" who did not want "to take power but to exercise it", which sounded, they conceded, "utopian and unorthodox, but this is the way of the *Zapatistas*."⁷⁰

Through a double move, defending its gained status as an interlocutor of the regime and estranging itself from the EPR, the EZLN would be seen publicly until 2001 when repositioned its identity in relation to it. In 1996 and 2003 that seemed to be the *limit of the possible* for insurgent actors and the *limit of the acceptable* for security actors. Beyond this boundary, the EZLN would lose its symbolic capital and be targeted by the internal security discourse deployed against the EPR and 16 other armed organisations after 1996.

[To the EPR] Keep on with your path and let us follow ours. Do not save or rescue us. No matter our fate, we want it to be ours. Do not worry about us. We will not attack you. We have not fallen into the game of the dominant power, which promotes a

⁶⁹ EZLN, 29 August 1996. My emphasis.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

confrontation between the “good” and the “bad” guerrilla. You are not our enemy nor will we be yours.⁷¹

At this point the EZLN was already making efforts to appear as a guerrilla group whose goals were very much circumscribed by a universalistic struggle for indigenous dignity. The blunt military position, originally stated against the PRI regime, had been left behind. Without renouncing its critique of the regime, the EZLN was now interested in being considered a civilized, well-dressed, “post-modern” and not-really-violent guerrilla in order to widen its possibilities for being connected with a much broader segment of the Mexican society. Later this tactic would allow it to keep a credible commitment to a more defensible international anti-globalisation movement.

We also do not view you as “rivals in the direction of the struggle in Mexico,” among other things because we do not aspire to conduct any other struggle that is not fought for our dignity. We do not agree with any of the pejorative labels, which they have given you (and which yesterday they gave to us).⁷²

The EZLN’s communiqués reflect its effort to consolidate its legitimacy and public acceptance, beyond *Las Cañadas*, as interlocutor with both the government and other segments of the political and civil society, through which they had gained acceptance. That space, being more universalistic than its previous insurgent agency, was unavoidably representative of a quasi-democratic compromise. The EPR, on the other hand, could not get its message to be received by the public, and even if it did have a basic similarity to the EZLN, it was portrayed as a quasi-criminal organisation. Its “ignobility” - as an organisation within which executions and exclusionary politics had taken place - was widely exposed, while the EZLN’s original exclusionary military drive had been conveniently forgotten.

In 1996, the EZLN already had a status, a remarkable location in the domain of public opinion, and it had constituted itself as the main representation of anti-regime identities. It had political capital; above all, it was a central actor in the representation of the margins of society, and symbolically represented *the limit of the possible interlocution* with the regime

⁷¹ Ibid.

and the government, specifically with an insurgent force. In that context, the EPR's appearance was not exactly a welcome development, either for the government or the EZLN.

To make those labels useless and inapplicable (of being an unacceptable guerrilla) cost us a great deal. Besides death, it cost us a great deal of work and political patience. We did not win our legitimacy with our weapons; we won it with long years of political labour with those who are now our leaders: the indigenous communities, and with the dialogue (which we have sought even at the risk of our own security, autonomy and independence) with national and international civil society. This is what I meant when I said that the EPR had to win its legitimacy in the eyes of the Mexican people. I did not say this to deny it to you, but to point out that it is not the political leaders (even when they are guerrillas) who give legitimacy to a movement, or the declarations of bureaucrats (and it is laughable that yesterday they fell over each other to call us "terrorists" without a social base, and the product of a "foreign" implantation of elements of radical university groups with a 1970's ideology. Now these same people fall over themselves to say that you are the "terrorists" and the EZLN has an "authentic social base").⁷³

According to this argument, the moment of the EZLN's legitimacy presumably occurred *before* the 1994 uprising, and would have been supplemented *after* the EZLN's re-composition of its discourse and acceptance of the dialogue. That is, the constitution of its legitimacy had *a clandestine moment* and *a public one*.

In that reading, the EPR's clandestine source of radical popular sovereignty - and legitimacy - was ignored by the EZLN, which, in contrast, was invoking its post-1994 status as the source of its legitimacy. Nevertheless, the EPR can be seen as being more similar to than different from the EZLN's own foundational identity: that is, the radical defiance of the sovereignty of the state by their military insertion of an alternative popular sovereignty.

However, the difference between them, claimed *Marcos*, was not the fact that he was in dialogue with the government, nor that the EPR was explicitly struggling for "popular power" and *did not* declare war against the government, something that the EZLN certainly proclaimed without really been able to wage it. According to the EZLN, the "actual" differences with respect to the EPR were the following: first, as an insurgent force, it was not only in dialogue with the government but was constructing bridges "with national and international forces"; second, according to *Marcos'* rhetoric, the EZLN's members "do not

⁷² Ibid.

struggle for power”; and, third, that the group of *Las Cañadas* had certainly “declared a war” - *of positions*, insisted advisors and analysts, as opposed to a war *of movement* - against the state. With respect to these aspects, it must be said that they are more nuanced argumentation than facts. First, the EPR also hopelessly wanted to construct links with “the civil society”. Second, whereas after 1994 the EZLN had declared not to struggle for power, it was certainly exerting hegemonic regional power in a geographical area. Third, the EZLN’s “war” was a political and moral justification for a conflict, not a “war”, discarded even by *Marcos* if we are to believe his own statements in favour of keeping the dialogue “until the last consequences”, expressed *a propos* of the EPR’s emergence.

Centrally, the EZLN claimed, its purposes were “diametrically different [from the EPR’s] and this is evident in the discourse and practice of the two organisations”. This idea deserves qualification considering that the EZLN and the EPR set up underground connections that were acknowledged publicly in 2001, but probably existed as early as 1996.

Thanks to your appearance, now many people can understand that what makes us different from existing political organisations are not the weapons and the ski masks, but the political proposals. We have carved out a new and radical path. It is so new and radical that all the political currents have criticised us and look at us with boredom, including yourselves. We are uncomfortable. Too bad, this is the way of the Zapatistas.⁷⁴

The EZLN highlighted its self-proclaimed insurrectionary hegemony and territorial sovereignty, so to speak. The political frontier between the regime *and* other insurgent forces had produced a moral, political and geographical boundary.⁷⁵ In reference to the EPR’s propaganda blockades in Chiapas, as part of its military attacks in 1996, the EZLN deplored

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ As a matter of comparison it is interesting that the same argument in the *La Jornada*’s editorial “No a los violentos” on 2 January 1994 was recycled on 30 August 1996 in support of the established political frontier government/*regime/insurgencies/EZLN*: “Contra la violencia, el derecho (Against the violence, the law)”. See for instance this affirmation: “Mexicans have suffered excessively with the deep and prolonged general crisis of recent years, which added to the turmoil inherent to militarization and armed groups prosecution might multiply in some regions the social irritation”.

... [T]he propaganda action in Chiapas (which) appears useless and foolish to me in the best of circumstances, and provocative in the worst sense. These actions occurred during the end of our consultation and *jeopardized the lives* and liberty of the indigenous leaders who, during these days, were gathering the opinions of the communities. Did you know we were in the middle of this process? Why carry out propaganda in Chiapas if you had already demonstrated your capacity to move in on other parts of Mexico? Was this to prove that you also have sympathisers in the zones where the EZLN is found? Have you fallen into the trap of the “rivalries” promoted by the government? Meanwhile, the cost of that action will not be paid by you, but by the Zapatista indigenous communities (who, I will remind you, have undergone almost a thousand days resisting with their armed rebellion...and their poetry).⁷⁶

According to eyewitness and journalistic accounts, the security mobilisation had certainly increased its military pressure as a consequence of the EPR’s propaganda in Chiapas, as it did in Guerrero, Oaxaca and other states with a guerrilla presence. The EZLN seemed upset with the local initiative, deployed by an EPR cell in Chiapas, and suggested it caused an intensified presence of security forces. Interestingly, a similar critique had been addressed to the EZLN by other leftist organisations and non-*Zapatistas* segments of Chiapas’ society, and even the national PRD, when the appearance of the EZLN in 1994 might have negatively affected other projects by provoking similar military reaction and public estrangement from other left projects.

By addressing the EPR’s leadership, the EZLN was directing its speech to the other political forces that could give several readings of the EPR’s emergence, which had irritated the EZLN. Its leader argued: “you have declared that you do not wish to “interfere” with the dialogue of the EZLN. You have already done so and you know it. Why do you lie, saying you will ‘not interfere in the dialogue’? We do not deny your actions, we only ask you to be accountable and not to lie”.⁷⁷

Certainly, that was a sort of accountability alien to the EZLN itself - the famous communiqué *De qué nos van a perdonar* is just the first eloquent evidence of it.⁷⁸ Besides, the

⁷⁶ EZLN’s communiqué, 29 August 1996 in *La Jornada*, 3 September 1996. My emphasis.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ See, *EZLN*, *op.cit.*, first communiqués, 1994. It was at the same time the confirmation of the EZLN as a locus of identification for many other activists and opposition organisations, in one word, an early confirmation of EZLN’s incipient mythical status. The main rhetorical tool of the document suggests it is society and government that have to be accountable for having tolerated indigenous misery and repression, and as a consequence of historical oblivion the uprising is presented as legitimate.

reproach directed towards the EPR's action in Chiapas and the estrangement of the EZLN showed the aim of halting any possible link with what was rhetorically construed as an exclusive feature of the EZLN. That is to say, the ambiguous discourse of the EZLN potentially included "the armed option" but this was, *de facto*, neutralised, also, it was already covered by the notion of "legitimacy" gained from government's recognition and societal interventions admitting the EZLN to become part of the polity.

Specifically, the EZLN's criticised the jeopardising of indigenous lives, because of the EPR's alleged imprudence. The EZLN's critique was analogous to those criticisms against its own emergence and to the endangering of many lives in 1994 and 1995. This was especially the case for peasants who did not share the EZLN's project. Among them were indigenous people that felt represented by other anti-government organisations, and many of the 18,000 people fleeing from the armed confrontation in the first ten days of 1994, from *Las Cañadas* towards the main municipalities.

Surprisingly, the EZLN's critique did not omit from its discussion of the negative consequences that would stem from the EPR's actions, the issue of the security reinforcement of areas with an alleged insurgent presence, a judgement applicable to the EZLN's own intervention. Next to this critique was another move; softened by a tone combining a slight verbal element of solidarity, the EZLN judged that the effects of the EPR's military and propaganda "remained to be seen".

It is to be expected that they will launch a strong campaign accusing you of "terrorism", "delinquency" and the other etceteras which, I have heard, already fill the mouths of bureaucrats and corporate leaders; that the government will follow its line of "good guerrilla versus bad guerrilla" and that you will be compared to us (a comparison which will be used to favour us and to harm you).⁷⁹

Despite the EZLN's critique, based on its own self-assured centrality, acknowledged by the government, the political elite and a variety of segments of society, this organisation was the very name of what was seemingly tolerable. The EPR emerged in a context in which

⁷⁹ EZLN, 29 August 1996, in *La Jornada*, 3 September 1996.

it was more likely to be stigmatised, silenced, marginalized and militarily prosecuted. The EPR's extremism was interpreted as illustrative of the organisation's lack of an intellectual richness that was attributed to the EZLN's leadership and advisers. As a consequence of this, and the effective prosecution of *eperristas* -members of the EPR, in 1996 it was widely believed that the EPR did not even deserve any dialogue with the government or any attention from "the civil society". This situation would change, but in 1996 it confirmed the existence of the symbolic and unnamed arrangement over the stability of the conflict between the insurgency discourse and the effectiveness of the internal security system in dealing with it.

In other words, the EZLN already belonged to a political territoriality in which its participation was very much accepted, even though as a defiant insurgent group. In this context, the advent of another "orthodox" guerrilla, the EPR - as a metaphor for political violence - was totally unwelcome, especially when it could make visible communalities between guerrilla groups that would not be easily assimilated into public opinion. For the EZLN, the EPR's appearance could imply the excuse for the hardening of public opinion and a new cause for the postponing of any negotiation, besides greater militarization.⁸⁰

Already the cost of your action will be paid by the *Zapatista* indigenous communities (which, I remind you, have been resisting with its armed rebelliousness...and with their poetry). The federal army has increased the military pressure on the *Zapatista* peoples...the government gives the "argument" that it is not breaching the spirit of the law for the dialogue but is dealing with military operations "directed against the EPR". Sorry, that is the way it is, we are not making any drama.⁸¹

It is true that the EPR faced a less hardened environment than existed in the 1970's. Partially, and paradoxically, this was a consequence of a political space very recently opened⁸² and unwittingly consolidated by the EZLN to the benefit of security actors and conservative partisan forces, and seemingly closed to insurgent actors. However, the EPR also faced, as its predecessors in Guerrero had, the military investigation and incarceration of

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Between the constitution of the 1987 PRI splinter, the *Democratic Current* (Corriente Democrática) led by Porfirio Muñoz Ledo and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, from which the PRD emerged in 1989 and the 1994 conjuncture, more than 350 activists from the social left and around 57 journalists were killed.

around 500 alleged *eperristas* without warrants over the following three years. In other words, despite the fact that the internal security state was intensified as a result of the 1994 revolt, and was reactivated in 1996, it did not reach the level of impunity reached in the 1970s. In that decade, public opinion was unaware of the events. In contrast, during the first years of this century voices in the PRI government in Oaxaca, for instance, called for a negotiation with the EPR in 2000; and a similar, though marginal, attitude can be found in the post-PRI era.

The prerogatives alluded to had been won by the EZLN, which is tantamount to saying that they were granted by the regime under complex pressures. It can be argued that, contrary to many readings of the EZLN, the securitisation of the 1994 frontier is an unwilling contribution to the Mexican regime. This is the case because it acquired the meaning of being a specific point of demarcation for the unleashing of the intensification of the internal security state, as had occurred in 1994, 1995 and again in 1996, after the EPR's emergence.

The EZLN contributed to giving a name to the line beyond which any social or insurgent movement would be prosecuted: it set *the standard of the acceptable* in Mexican society in dealing with political violence from the ultra left. The EPR's appearance seemed to suggest that such a limit was not just a new political divide, but could be instrumentalised against far left organisations...by far left organisations, and, extensively, by the government.

You [the EPR] struggle for power. We struggle for democracy, liberty and justice. This is not the same thing. Though you may be successful and conquer power, we will continue struggling for democracy, liberty and justice. It does not matter who is in power, the Zapatistas are and have always struggled for democracy, liberty and justice...We repeat our request that you not carry out any military action in support of our case or the situation in which we find ourselves. We are sure you will know how to understand and respect the distance we ask from you.⁸³

What the EZLN was trying to do was take advantage of a position in which its own ideological moment, that is to say, its already forgotten and hidden origin, was concealed and

⁸³ Ibid.

silenced. By distancing itself from the EPR, the EZLN wanted to partially erase its resemblance to the EPR's declared armed struggle against the government and "big capital".

On 2 September 1996, the EZLN renewed its refusal to accept the government's distinction between a "good" and a "bad" guerrilla group. It was a differentiation initially triggered by the PRD, supported by the political class, militarily enforced by the government, and rhetorically enhanced by presidential discourse. In order to distance itself from the state's attitude towards the EPR, the EZLN insisted: "in the Southern Mexican mountains *there are no good guerrillas and bad guerrillas but armed rebellious citizens* without political and democratic space for peaceful political participation. They have a social base fed up with declarations of buoyancy and economic growth when the reality is misery."⁸⁴

The EPR had been able to state its demands and launch a highly organised attack. However, it was not able to elevate them to the mythical level achieved by the EZLN and, therefore, could not become an acceptable representation of "the other" and consequently could not be seen as an interlocutor of the state. This must be regarded as its basic difference from the EZLN in the context of our analysis. The EPR's status might be, for the time being, referred to as a threshold for the transition between an organisation constructed around specific demands that were minimally recognised, as a space of inscription, for some communities in Guerrero and Oaxaca, even for *campesinos* and urban radical activists alien to the guerrilla organisation. Still, as the EZLN did, the EPR contributed unwittingly to the reactivation of the internal security state and is directly associated with the creation of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP), considered by the EPR itself as a "counter-insurgent" institution *par excellence*.

Conclusion

The constitution of the internal security political frontier, which began to be established in 1994, was dramatically ratified in 1995 in *Aguas Blancas*; and, in 1996, with the EPR's

⁸⁴ *Breve cronología del EPR y del ERPI (1996-1998)* presumably reviewed by the EPR's leadership and signed by David Pavón. *Revolución*, # 19, August 1998.

prosecution in a set of security operations directed against a diversity of guerrilla cells. The EPR appeared, both in the government's and EZLN's initial *public* reading, as a differentiated actor. Moreover, and specifically to the EZLN, the EPR was an unexpected and unwelcome distant ally in the struggle against the regime's forces. The new organisation was repudiated by the whole political elite, as a heterogeneous factor in a context hegemonised and homogenised by the suspension of military engagements and by the dialogue through which the conflict in Chiapas had acquired stability. The EPR unsettled and threatened the boundary between security and insurgent actors and, more generally, between the discourses of order and emancipation embodied, respectively, by the regime and the EZLN.

To some commentators there was a contradiction in the government's aggressive actions against the EPR, compared to the containment operations related to the EZLN. However, I claim that this differentiation is not a contradiction, but a calculated mixture of tactics of differentiation and equivalence applied against insurgent groups. In this calculation, the regime resorted to the political frontier established in 1994 as a securitisation tool when the president announced that *eperristas* would be treated as "criminals" and "terrorists" as opposed to those in legitimate dialogue with the government. It might be said that it became a sort of disciplinary device, in the context of liberal democratic politics. Thus, the EPR appeared unwelcome in a relatively stable *national* environment that had been legitimised by the dialogue with the EZLN. Like the guerrillas in the 1970s, the EPR was an insurgent outcry after a wave of local repression and authoritarianism. As in the EZLN case in 1994, the EPR leaders decided that "the armed path" was the only option after the repression of *Agua Blanca*.

The EPR contributed to delineation of the *symbolic limit*, established between liberal democracy and political extremism and represented by the political frontier between insurgent and security actors. Such a frontier had become the parameter around which that articulation between a hegemonic discourse and a mythical one was taking place. On the one hand, the government had accepted the EZLN as an interlocutor that represented a plurality of radicalised and regional peasant-indigenous communities. On the other hand, the armed group

had promoted the reconstitution of its identity by inserting a mythical construction of itself as a space of inscription for a multiplicity of struggles. The main cost was that it had to drop the openly insurrectionary call, by which it entered into public life in 1994, and which was being reclaimed by the EPR.

The EPR was located beyond that line, as a result of the political calculations and the political correctness that already imbued the 1994 agreement. Reaction from dominant political actors (the EZLN's subtle one included); military prosecution and infiltration; its internal splits and its own political limitations in representing an appeal to wider audiences in post-EZLN times, were partly a consequence of the political pact between the PRI regime and the EZLN. These were also a consequence of what the society as a whole despised, in matters of political violence, especially when the link between insurgencies and its "causes" passed through a strong campaign of successful stigmatisation, as had occurred with the EPR.

In the conservative political environment, paradoxically strengthened by the EZLN in 1994, the EPR's insurrectionary endeavour was perceived as unjustified in 1996. The EPR lacked the ability to reproduce itself as an icon of controlled resistance. In this sense, the EZLN had become the only limited and legitimate locus of identification.

Partisan and armed segments of the left were clearly aware of the political frontier that had been formalised after the 1994 revolt and again in 1996. They had to maintain it, without attempting to dissolve the inconsistencies related to the "really existing" process of negotiation, compromise and, finally, contradictory articulation, with those actors that were originally constituted as enemies. This articulation had modified their respective identities, especially in the EZLN's case, when dealing with the EPR.

Having set the standard of the acceptable, the EZLN played the role of a barrier between the regime and other clandestine organisations such as the EPR. In other words, the EZLN's "exemplary" behaviour was taken advantage of by the regime in neutralising other radical challenges from other organisations. The hegemonic forces successfully separated the acceptable from the unacceptable insurrectionary left. Besides unleashing the intensification of the security discourse, the EZLN opened the liberal democratic space ahead of it; but at the

same time, it seemed to have closed this space by distancing itself, though temporarily, from the call to arms, in general, and from the EPR, in particular.

The securitisation of the frontier by governmental and partisan actors has not been widely perceived, due to the EZLN's ability to *look like* a "threat", and due to the government and internal security's implicit advantage in relying on an organisation which acts as a standard to be respected and followed. This frontier "operates" with contradictions. The EZLN's moral authority within the radical left became useful in the symbolisation of a resistance barrier against the regime. However, it was also helpful for the government, which by concentrating legitimisation on one radical interlocutor, nullified and outlawed any other insurgent actor. Paradoxically, such a moral ascendance, obtained in the context of democratic politics, could also be used as a cover for the EZLN's continuing underground engagements with clandestine organisations.

The student movement, which I will analyse in the next chapter, would provide the space for the representation of an insurgent reading of both the legitimised and the outlawed guerrilla organisation. By positing the movement as a general challenge to the regime, what would be shown were the precise limits and nature of the frontier between insurgent and security actors when replaced on the verge of mainstream politics.