

Strategic Translations: The Zapatistas from Silence to Dignity

by

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Abstract

This thesis demonstrates that the discursive strategies that characterise the political struggle of the Zapatista (EZLN) movement are produced in response to the political and economic realities of Mexico and the southeastern state of Chiapas. The EZLN's intentionally ambiguous discourse of dignity epitomises these strategies. By deploying various incarnations of dignity to counter the Mexican Government's strategic political manoeuvres, the EZLN destabilises the political, economic and social hegemonies of the nation. This destabilisation creates a space for the EZLN to suggest the possibility of an alternative political logic to the Mexican populace. However, the marginalised social location and ethnic diversity of the movement's indigenous constituents impedes their ability to effect significant political change. This impediment is overcome when they coalesce around the politically advantageous subjectivity of indigenous Zapatistas and engage with the *mestizo Subcomandante Marcos* to produce the EZLN. The movement enacts a progressive coalitional politics that articulates radical political alternatives for Mexico through the strategic practice of translation. Thus, translation is posited as a powerful political practice for marginalised groups engaged in resistance struggles in the contemporary global conditions.

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Introduction

At the outset of the final decade of the twentieth century, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall led many to conclude that communism, and therefore the potential to effect revolutionary political change, was dead. The decline of communist-inspired rebel groups in Latin America seemed to strengthen this observation. In the early 1990s, many of the Marxist, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist groups that had dominated politics in this region in the latter half of the twentieth century no longer constituted significant military or political threats. These movements had been defeated, either at the ballot box (the *Sandinistas* in Nicaragua), or on the battlefield (*Sendero Luminoso*, the Shining Path, in Peru). Others had entered into peace negotiations with their respective democratically elected national governments (the FMLN¹ in El Salvador and the URNG² in Guatemala). While Marxist “guerrillas” in Colombia, most notably the FARC³, continue to be active today, they did demonstrate a willingness to enter into peace negotiations with the government towards the end of the decade. Cuba remained committed to communism under the dictatorship of Fidel Castro, however the demise of its great ally the Soviet Union, and the continuation of blockades imposed by the USA, further weakened the nation economically and militarily. Many began to question the relevance and effectiveness of a communist-inspired revolution in what was being categorised as a post-Cold War, information-age, globalised world. This prompted a search for alternative theories of enacting effective resistance and progressive forms of politics attuned to the contemporary international political context. It was out of this particular political conjuncture, and from the most remote regions of the impoverished southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas, that the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN–The Zapatista National Liberation Army, or the Zapatistas) emerged in January 1994.

¹ FMLN stands for the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front.

² URNG stands for the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guaemalteca*, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity.

³ FARC stands for the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

Behind the balaclava-clad Zapatistas who seized control of a handful of Chiapan towns on New Year's Eve, 1993, initiating twelve days of military combat against the nation's army, lay a captivating and innovative social revolutionary movement—a movement that is primarily orchestrated by impoverished indigenous Chiapans from various ethno-linguistic Mayan groups⁴, and an urban, university educated *mestizo* known as *Subcomandante* Marcos. Word of the uprising rapidly appeared in the mass media and, most significantly, on the internet, enabling a vast national and international audience to become aware of it. The Zapatistas captured the imagination of many who sympathised with its advocacy of a “truly” democratic⁵ Mexico where the population's right to “work, land, housing, food, healthcare, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace” would be fulfilled (EZLN⁶, 1993). The movement's anti-neoliberalist stance and its overarching concern for the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights were embraced by a wide audience. While debate raged over the movement's ideological persuasions, it became apparent when the military battle ended and the struggle evolved into a war of information—prompting the EZLN to exchange its guns for the weapon of the word—that this was not a traditional Latin American guerrilla movement. The support this generated for the EZLN prompted Ruggiero to note that “[t]he Mexican government has not found anything powerful enough to counter the Zapatista Word, its vision, and the resistance and liberation it offers as a counterforce to the dehumanizing institutions of business and war” (Ruggiero in Ponce de León, 2001: xxiii). Indeed, those who sympathise with the EZLN, regardless of their ideological position, identify its struggle as affirming the possibility that those marginalised within the contemporary political climate can effect radical political, economic and social change, primarily through peaceful means.

⁴ The principal indigenous languages of Chiapas are Maya family languages that include Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol and Tojolabal. (Maya World: Mayan Languages, n.d.). It is people from these ethno-linguistic groups that constitute the Chiapan support base for the EZLN (Carr, 1997).

⁵ While Mexico is nominally a democratic country, dictatorship-like rule, electoral fraud and violence has been systematically used by the PRI to maintain power in the latter half of the twentieth century.

⁶ The EZLN is cited as the author for documents that are attributed to the *Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena—Comandancia General* (CCRI-CG), the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee—General Command, which is the authorised mouthpiece of the movement.

After almost a decade of struggle, the EZLN has not precipitated a radical reconstruction of the Mexican political system. Its first attempt at achieving change by entering into peace negotiations with the Mexican Government in 1994 failed, much to the disappointment of the many Mexicans and international supporters who had anticipated a quick resolution to the conflict. While a second round of negotiations led to the signing by both the EZLN and the government in February 1996 of the San Andrés peace accords, which pertained to the issues of indigenous rights, these were not ratified by the government of the day. The government's inaction prompted the formation of the *Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación* (COCOPA), the Commission of Harmony and Pacification, which included federal deputies and senators from all parties who had elected representatives in the government. This body was charged with the task of developing a legislative proposal from the San Andrés peace accords to put before the government and the EZLN. The resulting COCOPA Law was accepted by the Zapatistas, but rejected by the government. Consequently, passage of the law became a key demand of the EZLN. When Vicente Fox, the leader of the centre-right *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), the National Action Party, assumed the presidency in 2000—ending the 71-year-long democratic dictatorship of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), the Institutional Revolutionary Party—he immediately tabled the accords for debate in the Congress. This prompted the 2001 March for Indigenous Dignity, initiated by 23 *comandantes* and *Subcomandante* Marcos who travelled from Chiapas to Mexico City with the aim of addressing Congress to implore the ratification of the COCOPA Law. While an amended version of the law was passed in 2002, the document had been altered so significantly that it bore little resemblance to the one that the EZLN had originally agreed to in 1996. Consequently, the movement ceased its communication with the government, and has refused to reenter negotiations until the original law is approved. However, despite the EZLN's failure to attain concrete reforms, its decade-long struggle has challenged the political hegemony of Mexico by demonstrating that the existing political ideologies and structures cannot accommodate the movement's demands for "democracy, freedom and justice": demands that are supported by many Mexicans and people world-wide.

From the remote jungle to the world stage

The emergence of a movement advocating radical political and social change from one of the poorest states in Mexico—a country considered to be the most stable in Latin America—at a time when most of the region’s guerrilla movements had been subdued took many by surprise. The fact that the uprising coincided with the inauguration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) compounded the surprise for those who believed, in accordance with government rhetoric, that the trade agreement heralded Mexico’s entry into the first world. However, despite government rhetoric to the contrary, Mexico is a nation marked by sharp socio-economic divides between rich and poor, which often manifests as a divide between the nation’s *mestizo* and indigenous populations. This division is particularly apparent in the state of Chiapas, which has been aptly described as a “rich land” populated by a “poor people” (Benjamin, 1989). The state is rich in natural resources that provide wealth for a few *mestizo* elites, while the majority of its indigenous population lacks basic necessities such as food, clean water and housing. Even fewer have access to adequate healthcare, electricity and education. The constituents of the Zapatista army are primarily people who have experienced these conditions of deprivation produced by over 500 years of marginalisation during which they have been excluded from, and silenced within, the dominant political, economic and social discourses of the nation.

The purpose of this thesis is to highlight the unique form of radical political action developed by the EZLN. While the conditions from which the movement emerged, and its humanist ambitions, suggest that it has revitalised communism in the region, this observation does not account for the fact that the EZLN does not attempt to seize state power, refuses to form a vanguard, and eschews traditional revolutionary vernacular. Moreover, the importance of the internet and the rapid construction of an on-line Zapatista identity has prompted many to argue that the movement constitutes a radically new form of postmodern or information-age revolutionary movement. The glaring anomaly between the ascription of a “postmodern” label and the EZLN’s location in the most remote regions of an impoverished state, which has internet hubs in only two of its

towns and “no telephone or electricity at all in most of the rural areas”, raises questions about such claims (Froehling, 1997: 291). Indeed, the Zapatistas’ relationship with the internet is mediated via a support network that, most significantly, includes international Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). For the Zapatista word to reach a national and international audience the movement had to firstly rely on old-fashioned means of covert communication, such as that described by Ponce de León:

Segment by segment, it [the message] is passed secretly from hand to hand, galloped inside a saddle satchel, hidden in a cyclist’s bag, slipped into a backpack, or perhaps thrust inside a sack of beans, then propped in the back of an open truck, crammed with indigenous villagers who make the hours-long journey to the closest market, or doctor, and our messenger to a contact person with Internet access (2001: xxiii).

The journey of the EZLN’s communiqué from the remote Chiapan highlands to a world-wide audience via its internet-connected support network has created what Cleaver calls a “Zapatista effect” (Cleaver, 1998). This effect demonstrates that by establishing an international web of support, particularly between marginalised groups and NGOs, dominant political, economic and social policies can be effectively opposed and alternatives articulated. The seeming incongruity of an indigenous army from one of Mexico’s poorest states challenging dominant conceptions of politics through its construction of a movement that is attuned to the contemporary postmodern, global conditions enabled by new technologies, particularly the internet, presents the Zapatistas as innovative, unique and worthy of investigation. Indeed, many studies of the EZLN have focused on the internet’s role in its struggle. However, this thesis demonstrates that the uniqueness of the Zapatista movement extends beyond the technology used to publicise its struggle and circulate its communiqués.

The content and style of the Zapatistas’ discourse presents as radically divergent from the Marxist revolutionary jargon and the political rhetoric used by other Latin American insurgents and politicians alike. For the purposes of this thesis the term discourse is understood and employed in two ways, both of which are interconnected. Firstly, the term is used to refer to the actual language—written texts and speeches—released or presented

by the EZLN and the Mexican Government. The second meaning, which functions symbiotically with the first, is informed by the theoretical context of poststructuralism, particularly the work of Michel Foucault which highlights the interrelationships among language, subjectivity and power. Foucault explores these relationships, and thus defines discourse, in a number of different ways throughout his work, stating that:

instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meanings of the word 'discourse', I believe that I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements (Foucault, 1972: 80).

The particular interpretation employed by this thesis identifies discourse as a system of knowing or knowledge that governs thought, actions, and the formation of subjectivities. Within this frame of reference discourse is intimately linked to power and authority, as power only exists within discourse. However, it is important to point out that Foucault, and consequently this thesis, does not conceive of power as something that is purely repressive, negative and enforced on the populace by powerful institutions or governments. Instead, power is viewed as also being creative and generative. Indeed, Foucault writes that "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (1979: 93). Indeed, discourse is the power to be had. It is in accordance with this theoretical contextualisation that the term discourse is used throughout this thesis

An important element of the Zapatista's discourse is the movement's communiqués, which are principally penned by *Subcomandante* Marcos, the "poet-guerrilla", and which employ a simplistic vernacular that draws on the literary tradition of magical realism (Bruhn, 1999: 42). These writings are rich with poetic imagery, humour, symbols of Mayan mythology, imaginary characters and references to Latin American and Spanish literary figures. Marcos' innovative and engaging discursive style is perhaps most evident in the stories of *Don Durito de la Lacandona* and *el viejo Antonio*. In these narratives, the boundaries between reality and fiction, past and present, indigenous and *mestizo* are

blurred in a self-reflexive manner that relates to the ambiguous, unique characteristics evident in the EZLN.

In the stories involving these characters, the urban, university educated *mestizo* Marcos is identified as ignorant, weak and cowardly—characteristics that throughout the nation’s history have been commonly associated with indigenous Mexicans. *El viejo Antonio*, an indigenous Maya elder⁷, narrates to Marcos stories from Mayan mythology, many of which are from the *Popul Vuh* (a book of Mayan myths) and are shown to greatly influence the life practices of the Maya today. Marcos assumes the role of the student who must listen to and learn from the stories that tell of the Mayan creationist myths: how the world was born and how the Mayan people were created from corn. Thus, he is required to contemplate Mayan views on the world. Marcos’s role in these texts represents a reversal of the traditional power relations that have historically dominated life in Mexico. As in colonised nations throughout the world, within Mexico the Western “invaders” and later their *mestizo* descendants—from the Spanish conquistadors to the Catholic Church catechists, and from the communist-inspired revolutionary groups to the *mestizo* led PRI Governments—have talked and preached at, or sought to “educate” and “civilise”, the “backward” indigenous population. The stories of *el viejo Antonio* serve to subvert these traditional relationships by positioning Marcos as ignorant and “uneducated”. They also suggest that within the movement itself, the Maya and their world views assume the dominant role.

This role reversal is also evident in the stories that describe the daring feats of *Don Durito de la Lacandona*—a beetle named Nebucodonosor who has assumed the *nom de guerre* of *Durito*, which literally means the little strong or hard one, in reference to his hard shell, fighting spirit and his status as a ladies’ man (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 1999: 9; my translation). *Don Durito* has made the floor of the Lacandón jungle his home but in Marcos’s stories he often travels the world as a *caballero andante*, a knight-errant,

⁷ The character of *el viejo Antonio* is reportedly based on a real Mayan elder who was one of the founding members of the EZLN (Harvey, 2001: 166).

reminiscent of Cervante's delusional do-gooder Don Quijote, attempting to "right wrongs, to assist damsels in distress, alleviate sickness, help the weak, teach the ignorant, humiliate the powerful, [and] uplift the humble" (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 1999: 9; my translation). In Cervante's novel, Don Quijote cannot fulfil his ambitions without Sancho Panza, his side-kick, and the same is true in the tales of *Durito*, necessitating Marcos to fulfil this role. As such, the *Subcomandante*'s character is pragmatic and careful, somewhat enticed by the morally righteous hopes and dreams of the brave, naïve *Durito*, but only offering assistance in lieu of the treasure he is promised. *Don Durito*'s role of knight errant can be understood as Marcos's attempt to highlight the difficulties the movement has encountered in its efforts to balance radical, idealist aims with the practical realities and constraints within which it operates. The character of *Don Durito* also serves as the vehicle for elucidating other aspects of the EZLN.

In consonance with the broader ambiguity that characterises the movement, *Durito*'s character is multidimensional. As well as being a knight-errant, *Durito* intermittently assumes the role of a political analyst and that of a detective scouring the streets of Mexico City attired in a tiny trench coat with a hat "angled like Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*" (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 2001d: 294; *Subcomandante Marcos*, 1999: 9; my translation). It is as an analyst of politics that Marcos first meets *Durito*. This occurs when Marcos, unable to find tobacco to fill the pipe he is never seen without, notices a trail of the dried black leaves weaving away from his hammock. After following the trail for a few metres Marcos sees, behind a stone, a bespectacled beetle clenching a tiny pipe, sitting at a tiny desk studying, as we soon discover, neoliberalism "and its strategy of domination for Latin America" (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 1999: 12). Marcos, unfazed by the discovery of a literate, smoking beetle is taken aback by his investigation of neoliberalism. *Durito* explains that his scholarly interest is quite pragmatic for it stems from a desire to know how long and how successful the Zapatista struggle will be so as to ascertain "how long us beetles are going to have to be careful that you [Marcos and the other members of the Zapatista army] aren't going to squash us with your big boots" (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 1999: 12; my translation). In these encounters with *Durito* the political analyst, Marcos is again represented as the ignorant and careless *mestizo* who

lacks knowledge of political and military strategies and does not watch where he places his feet on the floor of the jungle. The university educated, urban *mestizo* is given lessons in politics and economics from an inhabitant of the jungle floor: from a beetle who recognises that the danger of being squashed by “big boots” in his small patch of land is intimately linked to the global issue of neoliberalism and its much bigger boots. Through these stories, Marcos highlights the detrimental impact that global economic policies have had on the Maya of Chiapas. The character of *Durito* also enables him to demonstrate the potential for small, seemingly insignificant individuals or groups to radically challenge these policies so as to facilitate the creation of a better world.

While the significance of internet technology to the relative success of the Zapatista struggle and Marcos’s entertaining and lyrical prose both suggest that the EZLN represents a new style of social revolutionary movement, this thesis argues that the EZLN’s most unique characteristic is the relationship between its diverse ethnic Mayan constituents and the *mestizo Subcomandante* Marcos. Although it was the description of the EZLN as the world’s first postmodern revolutionary movement, primarily a reference to the internet’s role in the struggle, that originally excited my interest in its social revolutionary action, my research soon indicated that it is the innovative relationship among its various constituents that enabled the movement to develop a radically progressive politics. The marginalised Maya had not been co-opted into Marcos’s ideological agenda, rather, it became apparent that they had chosen to work with him to articulate a political program that proved advantageous to them. This choice was consonant with their history of resistance against the persecution and marginalisation imposed on them, firstly by the Spanish conquistadors and most recently by successive national governments. Through this relationship, the EZLN came to represent a coalitional movement that draws its strength from both its indigenous and *mestizo* constituents. My efforts to ascertain how this interaction is constructed pointed to the importance of translation in the movement’s formation. Indeed, the Mayan constituents of the EZLN speak several different languages and Marcos is a native Spanish speaker—interaction among them clearly necessitated translations. Furthermore, translation was also integral to the articulation of the movement’s ideas to a Mexican and international

audience. However, it became evident that this process of translation was not enacted simply in an attempt to render words and ideas comprehensible in another language. I came to understand translation as dialogic and generative in nature and, thus, as useful for the political resistance struggles of marginalised groups because it facilitates the articulation of new ideas and concepts from multiple voices and languages. This thesis argues that the effectiveness of the EZLN has been produced through a strategic practice of translation.

As the process of translation is integral to the arguments elaborated in this thesis, it is important to consider my role as a translator, from Spanish to English, of the EZLN's communiqués and other materials that appear throughout this work. Indeed, because this thesis problematises the notion that one language can be directly translated into another, instead emphasising the influence of context and language in the creation of meaning, it is important to acknowledge that the translations presented in this document have been created in accordance with the specific political, economic and social context in which this thesis was written. A significant component of this context is the fact that it is a thesis about a Mexican revolutionary movement which was written in Australia by a native English speaking Australian. Moreover, it is a document primarily written for an Australian, English speaking audience. While the translations provided should not be understood as the only or most correct interpretations of the originals, it is the words of these translations that have informed and shaped the arguments that appear in this thesis. This is one of the reasons why I have chosen not to include the Spanish originals. The conscious decision not to incorporate the originals along with my English translations was taken because this thesis contends that the act of translation is generative and productive—it always produces something new which is divorced from the original. By not including the originals I seek to illustrate this difference. Furthermore, for those people who speak Spanish and wish to read the untranslated versions, these are readily accessible on the internet via the references provided.

While many analyses of the EZLN focus on the role of *Subcomandante* Marcos, the charismatic, pipe-smoking, large-nosed spokesperson and military commander, this thesis

argues that he forms only one half, albeit a vital component, of the coalition that is the EZLN. This interpretation is supported particularly by the happenings of the 2001 March for Indigenous Dignity. During the march the indigenous *comandantes* often took centre stage, and once they had arrived in Mexico City it was they, not Marcos, who assumed the task of addressing the national Congress—an event that was broadcast live throughout the nation. While this could be understood as a well orchestrated publicity stunt on behalf of Marcos, it is also possible that his importance in the movement has been overly emphasised. The Marcos that I saw speak to the crowded Pueblan zócalo during the march was not the ruggedly handsome, powerful, charismatic individual I had read he was. As he delivered a speech which was scrawled in a tattered, rain-smudged notebook there was nothing particularly remarkable about him. He was tall, skinny and spoke so softly that the crowd had to strain to hear him. While it was Marcos who spoke of “dignity”—a term this thesis identifies as central to the EZLN—it was the indigenous *comandantes* and *comandantas*, dressed in their bright traditional dress and the black balaclavas of the EZLN, who were jocular and inspiring as they spoke of their hopes for the future. Regardless of where the Zapatistas should be positioned in regards to its ideological framework, I came to understand that this was not a movement of co-opted, “docile” indigenous people.

This understanding was one that I developed both through my readings about the movement from afar (my Australian research context), and from my fieldwork in Mexico⁸. I was in Mexico for a period of four months beginning in January 2001—a period that coincided with the Zapatistas March for Indigenous Dignity from Chiapas to Mexico City. As this thesis is principally a theoretical analysis of the EZLN’s discourse, and does not constitute ethnographic or anthropological research, the most important research conducted during this period was the gathering of newspaper articles concerning the EZLN at such a significant point in their 10-year struggle. During the four weeks of the March, and the month on either side of its initiation and end, I read all articles about,

⁸ This trip was partially funded by a scholarship attained from the Mexican Government which enabled me to develop my PhD research in collaboration with academics from *La Universidad Iberoamericana*, Puebla.

and all material written by, the EZLN that were published in *La Jornada*, and every alternate day read those published in *El Sol de Puebla* or *La Reforma*⁹. This material, and that from the key communiqués and declarations released by the EZLN since 1994, was then subjected to a hermeneutic textual analysis principally using the methodology of close reading in an attempt to identify the terms and concepts most commonly used by, and those most significant to, the movement. The documents selected for the most detailed analysis are those that received the widest circulation, namely the five *Declarations from the Lacandón Jungle*, the two *Declarations from La Realidad* and the speeches delivered during the March for Indigenous Dignity. At times these are supplemented by other EZLN messages when I consider these to contain significant political and/or ideological concepts or shifts. This textual analysis forms the basis of the examination elaborated in this thesis of the representational and discursive strategies employed by the Zapatistas. Therefore, this thesis does not attempt to provide an in-depth, intimate, ethnographic analysis of the EZLN and its members. Instead, it identifies the key role that the movement's public discourse has had on its political success. Thus, it is an outsiders perspective that argues, based on the movement's public representations of its identity and the identities of its constituents, that the EZLN can be best understood as constituting a coalitional movement incorporating both its indigenous Mayan members and the *mestizo Subcomandante Marcos*.

To elucidate the unique coalitional structure of the EZLN and the subsequent centrality of a strategic practice of translation to its formation, this thesis begins by discussing the national political, economic and social context of Mexico within which the EZLN's mode of political action has been produced. An analysis of the political economy of Mexico, with a particular focus on the state of Chiapas, demonstrates that the discursive strategies

⁹ Traditionally the Mexican press has been tightly controlled by successive PRI governments since 1929 in the Party's efforts to avoid opposition and scandal so as to maintain political power. The success of this control, particularly up until the 1990s, prompted Lawson to note that the PRI had been "remarkably effective in producing a relatively docile and domesticated press" (2002: 48). The newspapers used in this thesis include *El Universal*—a newspaper born during the days of the Mexican Revolution and ever since strongly influenced by the PRI; *El Sol de Puebla*—part of the *El Sol* newspaper chain that is considered to be pro-PRI; and *La Jornada*—an independent newspaper described as the "main voice of Mexico's left" (2002: 57). The latter newspaper has published all of the EZLN's communiqués since its 1994 uprising and has been one of the newspapers favoured by the EZLN for interviews and public declarations.

that characterise the political struggle of the Zapatista movement are produced in response to the political and economic realities of the nation. More specifically, the EZLN's mode of political action, and the movement itself, is produced primarily in response to the experiences of marginalisation its diverse indigenous constituents claim to identify with. Thus, notions of experience and theories of identity, particularly in the context of political contestation, are shown to be central to the production of an informed analysis of the movement: concepts that have not been adequately attended to in existing interpretations of the EZLN.

After elucidating the key discourses of the Zapatistas and illustrating the inadequacies apparent in existing representations of the movement, with the resulting identification of the need to address issues of identity, representation and agency, theories from divergent theoretical frameworks that postulate potential modes of oppositional politics available to marginalised groups are analysed. Theories from the fields of postcoloniality (the Marxist-informed Subaltern Studies group), postmodernity (Sandoval's notion of differential consciousness), and the postpositivist realists (Moya and Mohanty) are examined. These are all shown to be useful in establishing marginalised people as significant political actors. While the notion of differential consciousness and the ideas of the postpositivist realists also acknowledge the limitations of the agency of those marginalised within the dominant discourses of power, they do not provide strategies or tactics to overcome these restrictions. This thesis identifies this as a limitation and attends to it by identifying the means through which the indigenous constituents of the EZLN have overcome the restrictions on their political efficacy. This is shown to be achieved through its formation of a coalitional movement constructed through the practice of translation. It is this characteristic that most clearly positions the EZLN as a radically new form of politically progressive social revolutionary movement.

Structure of the thesis

The analysis of the radical and unique political character of the EZLN elaborated in this thesis begins with chapter one's exploration of the economic, political and social history

of Mexico and Chiapas, from the 1800s until the 1990s. This chapter establishes the extreme marginalisation experienced by the indigenous Chiapans throughout this period, and their concurrent efforts to challenge this. By identifying the gradual emergence of an indigenous subjectivity, and a growing awareness of the political import of collective action to bring about radical social change, particularly in the latter decades of the twentieth century, the genesis of the EZLN is shown to be in accordance with the indigenous Chiapans increasingly coordinated political action and growing political consciousness.

Chapter two identifies the key discourses of the EZLN and examines how these have informed its political strategies. The EZLN's discursive practice attempts to distance the movement from other Latin American Marxist, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist-informed revolutionary groups by emphasising its focus on indigenous issues and its efforts to facilitate the development of Mexico's civil society—wherein resides the social actors the EZLN identify as the architects of a new Mexican democracy predicated on equality and social justice for all citizens. The various ways in which the movement has been represented by the Mexican Government and academics from divergent theoretical perspectives are then analysed. Many of these analyses are shown to contradict the EZLN's self-representation by identifying the central role played by *Subcomandante Marcos* in the movement as evidence of his co-option of the indigenous people into a socialist inspired revolution. Issues of identity, representation and agency are therefore central to existing readings of the EZLN, although they are rarely overtly discussed. However, I argue that these analyses unsatisfactorily attend to the issue of the agency displayed by the indigenous constituents of the movement and, thus, misrepresent it.

Chapter three argues that the marginalised indigenous constituents occupy a subaltern subjectivity. It analyses theories of identity and issues of representation that pertain to marginalised oppositional struggle, from essentialising modernist conceptions to temporal postmodern notions. The existing theories prove useful insofar as they identify the subaltern as an active political agent. While some of the approaches discussed suggest that the subaltern's political efficacy is delimited due its marginalised subjectivity, a

notion this thesis agrees with, they do not suggest a means through which this can be overcome.

Chapter four identifies this means as the strategic practice of translation through which a coalitional politics is enacted. It demonstrates that the role of the *mestizo* Marcos in the practice of translation that characterises the EZLN does not impede the agency and political aims of the Maya. Instead, I argue that Marcos actually assists the rearticulation of an indigenous Mayan identity in order to present these people as active political agents able to challenge the hegemonies of the Mexican nation. Moreover, Marcos's willingness to commit to the EZLN's coalitional political project and his identification as a legitimate actor within the dominant relations of power that construct Mexico are argued to be the very conditions that position him as an effective translator for the marginalised Maya and, thus, the EZLN.

Chapter five details the political efficacy of the practice of translation that produced the coalitional EZLN by examining how the movement's key political strategy, the ambiguous discourse of dignity, has challenged the nation's existing hegemonies and suggested the possibility of political alternatives to the nation's population. The practice of translation is shown to be integral to the successful articulation of the discourse of dignity, and its usefulness as a political strategy in the oppositional struggle waged by the EZLN is reaffirmed.

Finally, the conclusion reinforces the significance of the practice of translation to the EZLN and suggests that it may also prove useful for other oppositional groups outside of the specific historical conjuncture from which the Zapatistas emerged. While a thorough examination of this is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is highlighted as a productive area of future research.

Chapter One

Historical Overview: Contextualising the 1994 Zapatista Uprising

This chapter contextualises the Zapatista movement within the political and economic history of Mexico. It looks specifically at the state of Chiapas, in order to elucidate the grievances and events that prompted and enabled the movement's formation and the subsequent 1994 uprising. Both the national and state-level contexts are considered because the EZLN identifies the policies of the Mexican Government as the cause of the extreme impoverishment and repression experienced in Chiapas by the indigenous people—the principal constituents of the movement. Furthermore, the EZLN claims that amelioration of these conditions can only be achieved through national political and legal reform.

The analysis of the political and economic history of Chiapas demonstrates that the state has traditionally been characterised by a marked socio-economic divide between the large land-holding, *mestizo*¹⁰, wealthy elite and the impoverished, small-scale farmers (or peasants, known in Spanish as *campesinos*¹¹)—the vast majority of whom are indigenous¹² (Benjamin, 1989: xiii-xiv). It is a division that worsened throughout the twentieth century as the state's fertile western plains and central valley, primarily owned and populated by the wealthy elite, were integrated into the national economy and the region's businesses were provided with infrastructure and economic support to encourage

¹⁰ The term *mestizo* refers to Mexicans of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage who generally express a greater sense of identification with their Spanish roots. In Chiapas the term *ladino* is used more frequently, however, this term indicates an even stronger identification with Spanish ancestry. As this refers to the political, economic and social structures of the entire nation, the term *mestizo* is used.

¹¹ This thesis uses the definition of peasant or *campesino* provided by Collier and Lowery Quaratiello. This states that those who constitute the peasantry are “rural people who produce their own food or who are closely connected to others who produce for subsistence, as contrasted with those who farm commercial crops primarily for sale and profit” (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 7-8). Moreover, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello note that in southern Mexico “many peasants, but not all, are *indigenous people*, descendants of those who were conquered and subordinated by the Spanish during the period of colonial rule” (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 7-8; emphasis in original). However, while not all peasants are indigenous, the majority of indigenous Mexicans are constituents of the peasantry.

¹² While the term Indian is used by many to refer to the original inhabitants of Mexico, this thesis employs the more widely accepted term, indigenous.

their modernisation. In comparison, the central highlands and the eastern lowlands—home to the majority of the state’s indigenous *campesino* population—remained isolated and undeveloped. While throughout the twentieth century the indigenous *campesinos* initiated a number of uprisings to challenge their impoverishment, most of the incidents remained small and isolated due to the divisions within the indigenous population caused by linguistic, geographical and religious differences. Moreover, the national PRI Government had managed to gain the support of the majority of the agrarian indigenous population by tightly controlling the allocation of land and the implementation of agrarian subsidies and support programs, so as to reward those who professed support for the party. It also ran the national *campesino* organisation that purported to advocate for their rights (Harvey, 1998: 1). However, the 1974 Catholic Church-sponsored Indigenous Congress prompted indigenous Chiapans to pursue collective action and to advocate for recognition and fulfilment of their legal right to land. This led to the formation of numerous non-PRI aligned collective indigenous agrarian organisations which threatened the PRI’s control over its traditional agrarian support base. The PRI’s control of the agricultural sector further weakened after it adopted a neoliberal economic agenda in the early 1980s, thus signaling an end to the nation’s social protectionist economic policies. This led to an increase in support for the independent indigenous agrarian organisations. These organisations attempted to redress the marginalisation and repression experienced by their indigenous *campesino* constituents by working within existing political channels to demand realisation of their legal entitlement to land, and by advocating for regional self-government. However, after a decade of relatively unsuccessful agitation, many *campesinos* began to seek more radical means of improving their living conditions. These people were primarily the ethnic Maya of Chiapas who lived in the state’s most isolated, under-resourced and impoverished regions of the central highlands and the eastern Lacandón Jungle. It was these regions that gave rise to the armed revolutionary movement known as the EZLN. On the first of January 1994 this movement initiated an insurgency that focused extensive national and international attention on the impoverished conditions of indigenous Chiapans and signaled the EZLN’s challenge to the existing political, economic and social structures of Mexico.

The national context

In order to construct a framework to analyse the challenge the EZLN represents to Mexico's political system, this section explores the national political situation in Mexico from the late 1800s to the 1980s. This incorporates a particular focus on the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent formation of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR), the National Revolutionary Party—a forerunner to the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), the Institutional Revolutionary Party. This demonstrates that the party established and maintained until the 1980s hegemonic rule throughout Mexico by three principal means, firstly, by constructing an ideology that aligned the party with the concessions won during the Mexican Revolution; secondly, by implementing social protectionist economic policies designed to foster party support from the agrarian and low-waged urban sectors; and lastly, by controlling the national bodies that purported to protect and advocate for the rights of these socio-economic groups. However, while these measures produced a consensus of support for the PRI, they did not significantly improve the living conditions of the indigenous agrarian population. Moreover, throughout the twentieth century the PRI's hegemony was undermined by the party's moves to concentrate power in the office of the president. This created a more autocratic and repressive style of leadership that led to the violent prevention of the rise of any opposition. The party's hegemonic rule was challenged further after its adoption of a neoliberal economic agenda in the early 1980s, which ended its policies of economic protectionism and, consequently, greatly weakened its agrarian support base. The PRI's loss of hegemony prompted it to engage in electoral fraud in order to maintain rule, further undermining the legitimacy of the party and the Mexican political system—the structure and culture of which the PRI had been instrumental in shaping (Contesting Mexico, 1997: 13).

In 1910 the first revolution of the twentieth century erupted in Mexico. The turmoil of the revolutionary decade which ensued presented a stark contrast to the 33-year period of national political stability that had preceded it. However, Hart argues that the reasons for the rebellion were not new but, rather, were “derived from internal stresses rooted in the

caste like inequalities established by the Spanish conquest of the sixteenth century” (1987: 2). Indeed, the preceding stability, presided over by Porfirio Díaz during a period commonly known as the *Porfiriato*, seemed to be something of an anomaly in a nation consistently subject to revolutionary struggle. Even Spanish acceptance of Mexican independence in 1821 had been unable to induce political stability and quell revolutionary action. Between 1833 and 1855 the presidency changed hands thirty-six times. Furthermore, in the 1840s, the Maya of the Yucatán Peninsula were only narrowly defeated in their attempts to secede from Mexico (Meyer and Sherman, 1987: 324; Reina, 1980: 363-379). The nation’s political volatility was exacerbated in 1861 when the government’s inability to pay foreign debt prompted a joint invasion from the nations of Britain, Spain and France. The French, under the orders of Napoleon III, captured Mexico City, ousting the liberal Government of Benito Juárez and installing in his place the Austrian archduke, Maximilian of Hapsburg. Maximilian became Emperor of Mexico in 1864 only to be executed three years later by forces loyal to Juárez, after Napoleon withdrew the French troops that had ensured acquiescence to Maximilian’s rule. Following the execution, Juárez was returned to power and ruled until his death in 1872 (Meyer and Sherman, 1987: 387-401; San Juan Victoria and Velázquez Ramírez, 1981: 82). Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, Juárez’s successor, ruled relatively uneventfully throughout his term until his reelection in 1876 was deemed illegal by Chief Justice José María Iglesias. This incited a national rebellion orchestrated by Porfirio Díaz, who claimed that the president should be permitted to serve only one-term in office (Hale, 1989: 21, 86-87). The rebellion successfully challenged the existing rules related to presidential terms and Díaz amassed such popularity that he was elected unopposed to the presidency in 1877. While he stepped down from office in 1881, in accordance with his own no-reelection rule, he remained influential in the interceding Government of President Manuel González, eventually resuming the presidency in 1884 (Meyer and Sherman, 1987: 436-438).

The *Porfiriato* was a time of rapid change for Mexico. Influenced by the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte, Porfirio Díaz proclaimed scientific progress and industrialisation as essential to the establishment and continued growth of the nation’s

economy (Padgett, 1966: 18-19). While the economy did indeed strengthen during this period, it was based on an influx of foreign capital “and not produced by dynamic internal processes” which, according to Hart, meant that “the increasing number of centers of commercial, agriculture and industrial activity were superimposed on an otherwise peasant population in the countryside” (1987: 7).

This inability to fully incorporate all sectors of the Mexican population into the processes of industrial modernisation, and the failure to adequately address issues related to the nation’s rural population, led to increasing poverty and unrest in the countryside.

Concurrently, the growth of industrialisation created a new discontented social class in the cities—the overworked and underpaid urban proletariat (Padgett, 1966: 20).

Furthermore, Hart claims that after 1900 the *pequeña burguesía*, the *petite bourgeoisie* or members of the lower middle class—small-scale entrepreneurs, civil servants and large land-holding ranchers and plantation owners—became increasingly dissatisfied with the Díaz Government. This was because they believed its acquiescence to, and cooperation with, foreign capitalists was curtailing their ability to improve their own economic position and, consequently, their social standing. Moreover, the *pequeña burguesía* became increasingly frustrated with Díaz’s dictatorship-like rule and the increasing centralisation of the nation’s political power which, according to Hart, challenged their “federalist-democratic principles” (1987: 10).

At the end of 1910 revolution broke out in Mexico. Superficially, this occurred in response to confusion over presidential succession after Díaz stated in 1908 that he would not seek reelection and the “high politicians of the country” could not agree on a suitable successor (Womack, 1972: 30). However, opposition to Díaz’s increasingly dictatorial rule had been growing since 1900. The confusion over presidential succession coupled with the government’s violent suppression of strikes that had erupted throughout Mexico opened the way for an uprising which united the discontent of the *pequeña burguesía* with the grievances of the rural and urban population (Chevalier and Buckles, 1995: 27).

The decade-long Mexican Revolution was characterised by a sense of division and

disunity which resulted from the disparate and competing aims of the various participants, who Hart describes as the “[e]conomically and politically estranged *pequeña burguesía*, provincial and local elites, urban and industrial workers, and peasants” (Hart, 1987: 348). Benjamin highlights this diversity when he claims that the Mexican Revolution is best described as a plurality of “revolutions”. He writes that these revolutions included “popular struggles against privilege here, intra-elite struggles for power there, and varied combinations of both in most regions” (Benjamin, 1989: 95). Hart further elaborates on the diversity of the revolutionary struggles when he refers to the distinct grievances expressed by the various revolutionary factions, stating that the provincial elites and *pequeña burguesía* wanted to:

overthrow a dictatorial polity. Urban and industrial workers fought to end the labour-repressive productive system. [While] [c]ampesinos rebelled to regain municipal autonomy and lost property, their means of production (1987: 348).

Despite the diversity of these socio-economic groups, they were initially brought together by the nationalist desire to terminate foreign control and dominance of the nation’s resources and economic infrastructure (Hart, 1987: 348). However, throughout the decade the various groups remained divided over how this could be best achieved. They eventually split into two principal factions which became known as the Constitutionalists, led by Venustiano Carranza and Álvaro Obregón, and supported by the *pequeña burguesía*; and the Radicals, represented by Pancho Villa in the north and Emiliano Zapata in the south, and supported by the urban proletariat and the nation’s rural poor or *campesinos*—who were primarily the indigenous Mexicans.

At the end of the revolutionary decade the *pequeña burguesía* emerged as the principal victor of the revolutionary struggle (Hart, 1987: 373). Its specific concerns over the degree of foreign economic control and Díaz’s undemocratic rule were addressed by the installation of the conservative constitutionalist president, Álvaro Obregón. However, both the radical agrarian and labour factions had also won considerable social reforms which were enshrined in the 1917 Constitution (Hart, 1987: 373). The most significant success for the primarily indigenous, agrarian population, as detailed in Article 27,

provided legal protection of indigenous rights to communal agricultural lands or *ejidos*, which could not be bought or sold. Article 27 also restricted foreign ownership of property and declared that subsoil minerals were inalienable national resources (Rossi and Plano, 1980: 156). The rights of the nation's labour force were addressed in Article 123, which granted to the workers the right to strike and unionise, wage protection, maximum hour limitations, special protection for women and child labourers and social welfare programs (Rossi and Plano, 1980: 156). However, the ability to ensure that these rights were fully implemented, and that further rights could be procured, was severely undermined when Emiliano Zapata was assassinated in 1919, thus removing the key advocate for agrarian reform in the southern states. This loss of a key patron of the southern agrarian organisations was compounded by the 1923 assassination of the northern agrarian advocate, Pancho Villa, which Hart claims “ended the threat of a lower-class-led countryside insurgency in the far north”¹³ (1987: 342).

The assassination of Zapata and Villa created a power vacuum in the agrarian and low-waged social sector. While this scenario led to a “brief post-revolutionary period of independent political and paramilitary activism”, it was quickly subsumed by the government's creation of national agrarian and labour parties—the *Partido Agrarista*, the Agrarian Party, and the *Confederación Regional del Obrero Mexicano* (CROM), the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers, and its official political party, the *Partido Laborista*, the Labour Party (Chevalier and Buckles, 1995: 29; Hart, 1987: 17-18). However, the conservative Government's initial attempts to unify and gain the support of the competing post-revolutionary social factions was unsuccessful. Padgett argues that “[t]he varying orientations within the normative framework espoused by the victors of the 1910 Revolution produced thirteen years of post-revolutionary strife often marked by violence among divergent groups and their leaders” (1966: 48). After the assassination of

¹³ The assassination of Emiliano Zapata was arranged by President Carranza (Hellman, 1978: 24; Hart, 1987: 334). The assassination of Pancho Villa four years later has been linked to orders issued by the then president, Álvaro Obregón, and his successor Plutarco Elías Calles (Tuck, 1984: 191-194).

Álvaro Obregón in 1928¹⁴, President Plutarco Elías Calles refocused attempts to establish post-revolutionary stability by formalising the integration of the disparate revolutionary factions into a new political party, the PNR (Padgett, 1966: 32-33). Padgett notes that, “[n]early all organised ‘revolutionaries’ swore loyalty to the new party, its program, and procedural rules”, consequently formulating what Hart argues was “a unifying ‘revolutionary’ ideology that explains events and allegiance to the regime of formerly antagonistic groups defeated during the struggle” (Padgett, 1966: 33; Hart, 1987: 17). The formation of the PNR marked the beginning of the second period of prolonged political stability experienced in Mexico which was to last throughout most of the PRI’s 71-years of national government.

The PRI and its forerunners (known until 1937 as the PNR, and then until 1946 as the *Partido Revolucionario Mexicano* (PRM), Mexican Revolutionary Party) have consistently employed political rhetoric that presents itself as the only party able to adequately implement the revolutionary reforms detailed in the 1917 Constitution. The party’s constant reference to this ideology, coupled with its selective implementation—such as the enactment of wide-scale land reform in the 1930s and 1970s, and the establishment of national labour, agrarian and indigenous bodies that were to protect, and advocate for, the rights of their respective constituents—resulted in the PRI’s establishment of the consensus necessary for the construction of political and economic hegemony¹⁵. Indeed, the PRI seemed to act in accordance with what Gramsci identifies as a hegemonic party insofar as it elaborates the ideas and concepts that inform and mould Mexican society. As Gramsci states:

¹⁴ While Calles had succeeded Obregón to the office of President in 1924, Obregón was about to begin a second presidential term in 1928 when he was assassinated by a *cristero*—a radical supporter of the Catholic Church. Throughout Calles’s term he had enacted legal measures, supported by Obregón, to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church on the nation’s cultural and political development. However, these moves were resisted by many aligned with the Church leading to the *Cristero* Rebellion of the 1920s and the subsequent assassination of Obregón (Meyer, 1976: 63).

¹⁵ Nicholls writes that “[a] hegemonic project can be seen as the implementation of a particular social vision that links cultural beliefs and practices with the real experiences of mass society in the economic, social and political spheres” (1999:133). She continues, “[t]hus, ideology and cultural manipulation are central components of successful political projects, but must bear some relation to the real experiences of mass society” (Nicholls, 1999: 133).

One should highlight the importance and significance which, in the modern world, political parties have in the elaboration and diffusion of conceptions of the world, because what they do, essentially, is to work out the ethics and the politics corresponding to these conceptions; that is, they function almost as historical ‘laboratories’ of these conceptions (Gramsci in Femia, 1981: 130).

To legitimate the PRI’s role as an historical laboratory, as envisaged by Gramsci, which is concerned with creating or conceptualising the accepted rules of Mexican society, the party maintained an official national discourse which presented it as representative of the revolutionary aims and concessions secured by the various protagonists of the Mexican Revolution.

The agrarian reforms implemented during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) explicitly linked the PRI with the revolutionary concessions fought for during the Mexican Revolution (Hart, 1987: 376). Consequently, the PRI came to represent, as its name suggests, the enactors of an institutional revolution, able to implement the revolutionary reforms while working within the structure of the Mexican political system. During his *sexenio*, the six-year presidential term, Cárdenas redistributed 200,000 square kilometres of land to nearly one-third of the population, expropriated foreign oil company operations¹⁶ in 1938, and established the *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos* (CTM), the Confederation of Mexican Workers, and the PRI-affiliated *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (CNC), National Peasant Confederation¹⁷. These actions strengthened the relationship between the PRI and the revolutionary concessions won for the exploited agrarian and urban low-waged Mexicans—consequently winning the party

¹⁶ The ownership of valuable subsoil resources has proven to be particularly important to the Mexican populace. Indeed, Shields notes that the state-owned petroleum company, Pemex, “has been a source of national pride and a key to Mexico’s identity, embodying Mexicans’ widespread belief that it enables them to have sovereign control over their destiny and to achieve progress and development with little or no outside help” (2001: 31). While this seems to be an over-emphatic statement, the significance of state-ownership of oil was demonstrated when Vicente Fox’s plans to privatise Pemex at the beginning of his 2000 Presidential election campaign had to be retracted following public outcry. In his maiden speech to Congress, after winning the election, Fox stated three times that Pemex would remain in government hands (Shields, 2001: 31-32).

¹⁷ The CTM is an organisation within the PRI that functions as a labour union and whose members automatically became members of the PRI political party. The CNC was an organisation established by the PRI to unify and centralise control of the nation’s independent peasant groups. According to Blake, the CNC’s creation effectively halted the establishment of independent peasant organisations in Chiapas for over thirty years (1996: 101).

the support of this socio-economic sector. However, Cárdenas also managed to strengthen the PRI's *pequeña burguesía* support base, particularly in relation to the large land-holding ranchers. This was achieved through the government's introduction of *certificados de inafectabilidad*, protection of properties from expropriation under agrarian reform laws, which were ostensibly granted to ranchers due to concerns that the conversion of private ranchers into *ejidos* would worsen the cattle sector's existing under-production problems (Chevalier and Buckles, 1995: 33). However, in more significant political terms, it demonstrated the government's interest in assisting the wealthy, private land-owners in an effort to gain their support.

Cárdenas's realisation of land reform also proved essential to the national economy (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 32). The depression of 1929 ended demand for Mexican exports forcing the government to terminate its reliance on foreign capital to support the nation's industrial development. Consequently, as Collier and Lowery Quaratiello note, the government was forced to encourage and support the *campesinos'* small-scale production of food so that the cost of basic necessities could be kept to a minimum, therefore allowing the wages of urban workers to be kept low so as to ensure the continuation of industrial growth:

The huge scale of peasant production kept down prices of foodstuff, which allowed urban-sector wages to be kept low enough for new industry start-up. At the same time, peasants' income from crop sales financed their consumption of manufactured goods, securing a domestic market for new industries (1999: 32-33).

At the end of the 1930s, and with the start of World War II, the USA decided to import large quantities of food and fibres from Mexico. This brought about an abrupt end to the agrarian land reform which had created small parcels of land unable to produce sufficient quantities of food to meet export demand, and resulted in increased governmental support for large land-holders. The large land-holders' capacity to produce export quantities quickly and cheaply was increased further by the state's use of the new influx of US foreign capital to finance the development of a large-scale agricultural infrastructure (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 34). While these economic factors greatly

curtailed the government's enactment of agrarian reform, the PRI managed for decades to maintain a discourse that presented its policies and practices as supportive of the smaller-scale agrarian sector. This was despite the fact that there was no more significant land redistribution until the 1970s. The government was able to maintain this pretense of support and, consequently, the support of the nation's agrarian population by monopolising¹⁸ the supply and distribution of basic and essential resources, including *ejido* land, through the PRI-affiliated national agrarian body, the CNC:

Peasant organizations such as the CNC functioned within a power structure that made state-provided goods indispensable for community development and, in turn, made communities dependent on the state for their provision. The strength of the CNC rested not on its capacity to organize and represent the demands of its members, but rather on its position in the centralized allocation of resources (Harvey, 1998: 55-56).

The closer the ties between agrarian communities and the CNC, the better resourced the *campesinos* were and, because the CNC was a PRI organisation, the tighter the agrarian communities' relationship with the national government (Chevalier and Buckles, 1995: 30). Moreover, all *campesinos* to whom the government granted *ejido* lands automatically became members of the CNC and were consequently affiliated with the PRI (Chevalier and Buckles: 1995: 30). Indeed, Benjamin notes that:

The formation of ejidos created communities that were, and remain in the 1980s, closely tied to the state; 'a gift always compromises the recipient,' writes Jean Meyer. They had received their land from the state and were dependent on the state for credit, material assistance, and amplification of their original land grants. Ejidatorios [members of ejidos] became loyal, conservative, and self-interested citizens (1989: 210).

Government presence in the communities of the primarily indigenous agrarian population of Chiapas became more overt in the early 1950s when it introduced a number of

¹⁸ This argument is further developed by Nicholls who observes that "[i]n Mexico, a legacy of populist resource distribution ... throughout the twentieth century appears to have resulted in continuing high levels of support, if not 'spontaneous consent,' for the ruling party, despite the fact that recent government policies have reduced the standard of living in both urban and rural areas" (1999: 146).

indigenous development projects. These were orchestrated by the PRI-run *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI), the National Indian Institute. While the INI had similar goals to the CNC, according to Collier and Lowery Quaratiello it operated in accordance with the notion “that the special characteristics of Indians in regions such as central Chiapas required distinctive efforts to integrate Indian communities into the national agrarian sector” (1999: 35-36). In order to construct distribution networks for development aid, the INI selected and trained local indigenous leaders who acted as brokers between the national government and the local indigenous communities. Through these INI agents, “the state sustained its control over local-level politics” and managed to infiltrate many of the hitherto closed and remote indigenous communities of central Chiapas (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 36; Harvey, 1998: 56-57).

While the PRI regime established a social and political hegemony in Mexico predicated on its revolutionary ideology, its dominance of national politics was also secured by the party’s prevention of the rise of political opposition. The lack of significant, unified opposition was assured by the PRI’s implementation between 1946 and 1977 of a number of laws that impeded the official formation of new political parties. This resulted in Mexico’s political regime becoming “a modified one-party system legitimized by the presence of weak opposition parties¹⁹” (Chevalier and Buckles, 1995: 30). Despite the PRI’s purported adherence to a hegemonic logic, and contra Gramsci’s conception of hegemony, the party consolidated its monopoly on power through the employment of violent, repressive tactics against public protesters, including railway workers in 1958 and teachers in 1959. These actions culminated in the 1968 killing by government sanctioned forces reportedly under the instructions of the Interior Secretary and presidential successor, Luis Echeverría, of hundreds of pro-democracy students at a

¹⁹ However, as will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, while this analysis may have been correct from the 1940s to the 1970s, by the last two decades of the twentieth century the PRI’s all powerful rule was under threat both from the a leftist breakaway faction from the party, the *Frente Democrático Nacional* (FDN), the National Democratic Front (later the *Partido Revolucionario Democrático* (PRD), the Democratic Revolutionary Party) and from the conservative, right-wing PAN. The PAN eventually won national government, under the leadership of Vicente Fox, in the year 2000.

peaceful rally held in Mexico City just prior to the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 42-43).

During the early half of the 1970s the PRI Government exhibited a return to its hegemonic ideology through a renewed emphasis on enacting the revolutionary reforms enshrined in the 1917 Constitution. Collier and Lowery Quaratiello argue that Echeverría, who became president at the beginning of the decade, embraced “populist programs” and implemented land reform in order “[t]o help polish his image” after the 1968 student massacre (1999: 43). However, the program of land reform was also enacted in response to the growing number of land disputes occurring throughout Mexico. These disputes resulted from two main areas of concern: the continual encroachment of large land-holders—such as cattle ranchers and owners of coffee plantations—onto the land of small-scale farmers; and the growing number of *campesino* protests against the lengthy time frame required for resolution of agrarian reform that involved expropriation of privately owned land (Benjamin, 1989: 223-227). Echeverría’s solution was to move people from all over Mexico into the rainforested region of eastern Chiapas which, while not privately owned nor officially recognised as *ejido* land, was already home to numerous indigenous communities. Consequently, while Echeverría avoided confrontation with the wealthy private land-owners, his policies physically dislocated both the new arrivals and the existing inhabitants in eastern Chiapas, thus greatly changing the region’s demographics and increasing demands on its natural resources.

In the mid 1970s, extensive hydrocarbon deposits were discovered in Chiapas. This transformed Mexico, hitherto an importer of oil, into the fourth largest repository of oil and gas in the world (Grayson, 1988: 26). The discovery occurred at the same time as the Arab oil boycott and consequently the income generated by these resources, coupled with the projected earnings, created a massive boom in the Mexican economy. Foreign banks, speculating against these projections, began lending billions of dollars to the Mexican Government which then spent the money on long-term investments such as industrial and agricultural infrastructure. However, the bust arrived when an “international oil glut appeared in the spring of 1981” (Grayson, 1988: 40). By 1982 Mexico, unable to pay its

foreign debt, was forced to negotiate a bail-out package with the USA and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In this year Miguel de la Madrid assumed the presidency and set about reversing the interventionist social protectionist economic practices that had hitherto been a hallmark of the nation's economy. These interventionist practices, according to Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen, had been comprised of four key components:

a high degree of state participation in the economy; a strategy of 'stable development' which attempted to keep prices, interest rates and the exchange rate under control; the protection of domestic industry with high tariff and non-tariff barriers to international trade and investment; and an attempt to provide a relatively high degree of social security to Mexican citizens (1997: 20).

These four components had, since 1929, provided the nation's poor with a limited safety net that was constructed in such a way as to encourage them to support the PRI. However, the free-market, neoliberal economic agenda adopted by Madrid was soon to become the dominant economic ideology in Mexico. This brought about "a period of reform that privatized and deregulated the economy, opened it to international investment and trade, and cut loose the workforce—especially the peasantry—from its traditional protections and supports" (Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen, 1997: 20).

Juxtaposed with these moves to liberalise the nation's economy was the PRI's increasing concentration of political power in the office of the president. This phenomenon of centralised, clientelistic²⁰ and autocratic rule, known as *presidencialismo* became a trademark of the Mexican political system. Historian Luis Javier Garrido argues that the entrenchment of the "extensive appointive powers of the president" resulted in the "political unaccountability of higher functionaries, which in turn [led] to inefficiency and corruption" (Garrido in Brachet-Márquez, 1992: 108). Writer and former Peruvian presidential candidate, Mario Vargas Llosa, concurs with this assessment claiming that

²⁰ Clientelism is defined by Rossi and Plano as "[p]ersonal relationships that link patrons and clients together in a system in which jobs, favours, and protection are exchanged for labor, support, and loyalty ... In these mutually reinforcing systems, one seeks to expand his network of well-placed friends, relatives, *compadres*, and patrons in order to maximize opportunities, maintain economic security, and defend one's position" (1980: 60).

the Mexican political system “is not democratic—let’s not kid ourselves. It is a unique system that has no equivalents in the world” (Vargas Llosa in Blake, 1996: 47).

The culture of centralised power—which disallowed opposition and enabled the PRI to achieve the dubious honour of becoming the world’s longest ruling party in an “officially” recognised democratic system—was entrenched at all levels of the Mexican political system. Indeed, Domínguez notes that “[t]he PRI’s distinctness from the state was often difficult to discern” (1999: 3). The PRI’s link to the state was maintained as the Mexican people’s representatives at the national, state and *municipio*, or regional, levels won their seats in elections increasingly subject to vote tampering. The former Mexican Foreign Minister in Fox’s *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), the *National Action Party* Government, Jorge G. Castañeda²¹, claimed in a 1994 interview with the left-leaning weekly news magazine *Proceso* that:

The problem is that not even once in this country’s recent history—not since 1911—has power been transferred by means of elections. Never. There is no tradition of that here whatsoever. None. None. None at all! (Castañeda in Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 147).

Despite this lack of democratic principles, by the end of the 1980s Mexico was lauded by many, particularly in the international financial sector, as the model Latin American nation. This was primarily because the government had enthusiastically exchanged its traditional policies of protectionism and intervention for a free-market, neoliberal economic agenda that opened the market up to transnational companies and international portfolio investors, subsequently facilitating rapid repayment of international debt (Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen, 1997: 20). International support for Mexico was also strengthened by the fact that the nation was not seriously threatened by the Marxist, Marxist-Leninist or Maoist-inspired revolutionary movements that were challenging the governments of many Central and South American countries. However, the illegitimacy

²¹ Jorge G. Castañeda is an eminent leftist intellectual who has taught throughout the US, held a Professorship at New York University, published a number of books and was foreign minister in Fox’s PAN Government until his resignation in January 2003.

afforded to the Mexican electoral process as a result of political corruption was well documented by transnational NGOs. One such organisation, the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD), has referred to the PRI's frequent resort to electoral fraud as "common knowledge". Indeed, they claim that:

To attain their goals the PRI and its supporters use all their imagination and initiative, coupled with total disregard for legality: stuffing boxes with previously marked ballots; stealing and destroying ballot boxes, having individuals vote many times; buying votes; and altering results at every turn, from local polls to the national level (ICHRDD in Blake, 1996: 109).

The formation of a leftist PRI breakaway faction into a new political party in 1988, the *Frente Democrático Nacional* (FDN²²), the National Democratic Front (the forerunner to the PRD) changed the dynamics of that year's presidential election, forcing the PRI to engage "in its most obvious vote tampering in decades" (Contesting Mexico, 1997: 13). The election night announcement from Interior Minister Manuel Bartlet that computers tallying the presidential votes had crashed just as the FDN was in the lead, only to show the PRI in front once connections were reestablished, resulted in widespread claims of corruption throughout the nation and internationally, prompting the incoming president, Carlos Salinas, to reform the nation's electoral rules.

By the end of the 1980s the PRI's increasingly autocratic style of government, its participation in electoral fraud, and the exchange of social protectionist economic practices for neoliberal policies were challenging the party's legitimacy and threatening its hegemonic rule. Indeed, the end to economic protectionism, heralded by the move to a free-market approach, "created an agricultural crisis for the peasants" which, during the 1980s, resulted in an 83 per cent growth in the number of the adult working population that received less than the minimum wage, creating an increasingly disaffected agrarian sector (Ronfeldt, Arquilla, Fuller and Fuller, 1998: 28-29). Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen argue that "[t]he move from social protection to a market-driven globalization has torn the

²² The FDN, the forerunner to the PRD, was led by Cuautémoc Cárdenas, the son of Lázaro Cárdenas, the PRI president famous for his 1930s agrarian reform.

fabric of Mexican society, leaving it to the radicals—of one sort or another—to remake the country from below” (1997: 20).

The political economy of Mexico from the late 1980s

Following claims of electoral corruption in 1988, the PRI Government attempted to legitimate its rule by consolidating the nation’s economy in order to pursue acceptance into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). However, the government’s economic reform failed to establish sufficient infrastructure for sustained growth leading to the 1994 economic collapse. Moreover, participation in NAFTA required an alteration to the nation’s Constitution that removed the legal guarantee of the indigenous *campesinos*’ rights to communal lands—a move that exacerbated their impoverishment and strengthened support for the armed uprising advocated by the EZLN. Furthermore, throughout the 1990s the PRI became increasingly destabilised by evidence of internal corruption. In the year 2000, all of these factors contributed to ending the PRI’s 71-year monopoly of Mexican national government, when PAN leader Vicente Fox was elected to the office of president.

Under the leadership of Harvard educated economist Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the dubious winner of the 1988 presidential election, the nation fervently pursued economic “modernisation” under the auspices of facilitating Mexico’s transformation into a first world nation. According to government rhetoric, such a transition was to be signaled by acceptance into NAFTA alongside Canada and the USA. To secure the passage of this accord the Mexican economy, still recovering from the 1982 economic collapse, had to present as a stable entity able to withstand the abolition of protectionism, which had been a primary feature of the economic policies of the PRI since 1929. In order to construct and promote the image of a strong Mexican economy and to establish his credentials as a presidential candidate for the World Trade Organisation (WTO), President Salinas embarked on a massive privatisation scheme that opened the floodgates to foreign investment. He also hired transnational Public Relations firm, Burston-Marsteller, at a cost of eight million dollars, to implore the Mexican Government to pursue entry into

NAFTA (Knudson, 1998: 512).

In the early 1990s about 70 billion dollars in foreign money flowed into Mexico, making the nation Latin America's "largest importer of northern capital [primarily from the US]" which, according to Cockburn and Silverstein, transformed it into "the foster child of foreign investors" (1995: 18). This influx of foreign capital produced a bullish stock market, inflating the value of the state's existing assets²³, but doing little to improve the nation's economic infrastructure. Cockburn and Silverstein claim that only between five and fifteen per cent of the foreign capital "went on direct investment in Mexican plants and equipment", while "[s]ackfuls found their way into the pockets of the Mexican elite" (1995: 19). Moreover, the government insisted on maintaining the peso at the artificially high rate of 3.5 to 1 US dollar, ensuring a favourable exchange rate for foreign investors converting pesos won in the Mexican market to dollars, and maintaining foreign debt at an acceptable level. As the cost of exports became uncompetitive and imports inundated the market, the nation was left, by 1994, with a 30 billion dollar trade deficit (Cockburn and Silverstein, 1995: 19).

While Salinas ostensibly achieved stability in the Mexican economy, acceptance into NAFTA also required alterations to the 1917 Mexican Constitution to make all land and property open to commercial sale (Castells, 1997: 74-75). This necessitated a retraction of the legal protection of indigenous rights to *ejidos*, or communal lands, hitherto enshrined in Article 27, which according to Carrigan, "embodied the Mexican State's most sacred pact with the indigenous population" (Carrigan in Pelaez, n.d.). This "sacred pact" was the government's concession to the rights of Mexico's *campesinos* secured through Emiliano Zapata's fight for "land and liberty", or agrarian reform, and the restitution of indigenous rights to communal lands during the Mexican Revolution. Cleaver contends that it was the dissolution of these rights in 1992 which provided the last straw for the impoverished, indigenous people of the south, thus prompting the

²³ This was exemplified in the case of the Mexican telecommunications company, Telmex. When the company was privatised in 1991 its shares traded at \$27.25 each, however, by early 1994 their value had increased to \$75. This had settled somewhat by February 1995 when they traded at \$34 per share (Cockburn and Silverstein, 1995: 18).

Zapatistas “to take action as a last ditch effort to stave off what seemed like imminent annihilation” (Cleaver, 1998: 625).

In 1993, the American and Canadian Governments ratified Mexico’s passage into NAFTA, much to the surprise of the EZLN²⁴, and the accord came into effect on 1 January 1994. However, in 1994 the EZLN insurgency began and the nation’s façade of economic prosperity and political stability was shattered. In December, Salinas’s successor President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, was forced to devalue the peso by 40 per cent initiating an economic collapse that prompted the IMF to provide an eight billion dollar loan, its largest ever bail-out package. Thus was signaled the curtailment of Mexico’s economic independence as the government was forced to adhere to the strict repayment plans determined by the IMF (Castells, 1997: 284-285).

Internal tension and instability within the PRI had become evident throughout the 1980s and 1990s as the party was repeatedly required to contend with assassinations, evidence of drug connections and breakaway factions. The growth of this instability was marked by the deaths of over 300 PRI members between 1994 and 1997. Significantly, these deaths included the unsolved murder of the 1994 PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, and the assassination of the PRI’s Secretary General, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, committed by the brother of the then Mexican president, Carlos Salinas (who is now in self-imposed exile in Ireland). The seriousness of this incident was compounded when the special investigator into the Secretary General’s murder, Mario Ruiz Massieu, the victim’s brother, was arrested in the United States en route to Europe with a large sum of cash. He was later found to have several US bank accounts and links to drug trafficking (García de León, 1995: 10). The murder of several witnesses to these crimes has, according to García de León, “showcased the deep corruption of Mexico’s political system and the close relations between the government and organized crime” (1995: 11).

By 1997, the disarray of the PRI's internal structure had contributed to the loss, for the first time since 1929, of their absolute majority in the Federal Congress's Chamber of Deputies. In the same year the founder of the leftist-PRD, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, became the first person elected to the strategically important position of mayor of the nation's capital, Mexico City, a position that had previously been appointed by the national president²⁵. This election, according to Lawson, "signaled the revitalization of Mexico's left and the political renaissance of its leader" (1999: 148). These political challenges to the PRI provided the window of opportunity for new national political leadership, which was attained in the 2000 elections. While the elections of this year were to be the cleanest ever, concerns were still voiced in their lead up, with Jacquelline Peschard of the Federal Electoral Institute noting prior to the vote that "[i]t's not blatant ballot-tampering, but rather voter manipulation that's a threat to free and fair elections this time around" (Peschard in Greste, 2000). The loss of the PRI candidate, Francisco Labastida Ochoa, to Vicente Fox, the centre-right PAN leader, indicates that if the PRI had attempted to manipulate the election's outcome, its efforts were unsuccessful at a national level. However, the party's years of implementing and enacting an ideological program of hegemony, and perhaps its alleged efforts of voter manipulation, still affected the results in many of the nation's states. In Chiapas, which is governed by a PRD/PAN alliance, state elections held in October 2001 resulted in the PRI remaining the majority party, winning 24 seats in the state assembly, with the PRD taking seven and Fox's PAN running a distant third with five seats. However, while the PRI won control of 71 of the state's municipal governments (also a majority), the strategically important *municipio* of

²⁴ Marcos has stated that "we [the Zapatistas] thought that the problems in passing NAFTA were going to come more from the American people than from the Mexican people. We really didn't think that NAFTA was going to pass in the United States" (*Subcomandante Marcos in Benjamin, 1995: 68*).

²⁵ During the presidential terms of Salinas and Zedillo the electoral laws of Mexico were reformed in response to claims of widespread corruption and fraud after the 1988 Presidential election; the EZLN's challenge to the existing political structures; and the PRI's wish to improve its image and address its internal divisions. While the changes ratified during the Salinas Government attempted to guarantee greater representation of minority parties, tighten security at polling booths and restructure the Federal Electoral Institute (the body charged with overseeing the electoral process), the Zedillo administration identified the need for further reforms (Domínguez, 1999: 5-8). These were passed in 1996 and included further changes to the IFE so that it was comprised of "nonpartisan members nominated by a consensual procedure in Congress, and the minister of government would no longer serve on it" (Domínguez, 1999: 8). The changes also included limiting the amount of private funding of electoral campaigns, greater access for all parties to the PRI-aligned mass media, and the appointment of the governor of Mexico City by election (Domínguez, 1999: 8).

San Cristóbal de Las Casas²⁶ was won by a previously unknown party, the *Partido Alianza Social* (PAS), the Social Alliance Party. Still, the elections were not without their anomalies, particularly in the municipalities that support the EZLN:

The statewide abstention rate was more than 60%, with an even lower turnout in the areas where the ... EZLN is based. Only 35 of 67 voting booths opened in Ocosingo municipality, in the center of an EZLN-dominated area. (Weekly News Update on the Americas, 2001).

Chiapas: a state on the periphery

Chiapas is a state rich in natural resources, from the fertile soils that support productive coffee plantations and large cattle ranches on the state's coastal plains, the Sierra Madre mountain range, and the central Grijalva River valley, to the extensive oil fields of the state's northwest. However, historically, the surface resources have been controlled by a few wealthy land-owning families who accumulate wealth by exporting their products out of the state and exploiting the state's primarily indigenous labour force. The landholders control of the state's economic resources was transformed into political power after 1824 when the state elected to leave Guatemala and join the nation of Mexico, which had recently gained independence from Spain. This occurred because the geographical separation of the state of Chiapas from the seat of national government in Mexico City meant that it was not easily integrated into the national political structure, leaving a significant degree of political control to be assumed by the existing elites (Harvey, 1998: 43). While these leaders, or *caciques*—the political bosses who assumed control of various regional areas throughout Mexico, were regularly in dispute over control of the indigenous labour force, they were united in the pursuit of economic integration into the national system to facilitate their personal accumulation of wealth and power. The large land-owners' economic growth necessitated the prevention of broad-based social development that would grant legal rights to the state's exploited labour force. Consequently, the struggle for agrarian and indigenous rights during the Mexican

²⁶ San Cristóbal de Las Casas is the former capital of the state of Chiapas and the largest town seized by the EZLN in 1994.

Revolution was strongly resisted by the economically and politically powerful *caciques* of Chiapas. Moreover, while the state has one of the largest indigenous populations in Mexico, they were divided at this time by ethnic, geographical and linguistic differences and, therefore, did not constitute a unified force.

After 1824, the social, economic and political development of Chiapas was directed by the region's wealthy land-owning elite. Due to the "virtual absence of a central authority", these elites divided the state into various regional spheres of influence that regularly came into conflict over issues of political control and access to the indigenous labour force (Harvey, 1998: 43). Benjamin claims that these wealthy land-owners manipulated both state and national government in order to "modernize and reform Chiapas" in such a manner that could "have had no other result but narrow economic growth without broad-based social development" (1989: xv). This economic growth was narrow insofar as it was restricted to the state's elite and their specific interests, such as improved infrastructure and technology for cattle ranching and coffee plantations. The modernisation and reform sought by the elites principally involved greater economic integration into the nation of Mexico to be facilitated by the construction of roads, railway lines, telegraph and telephone cables, in order to open up more lucrative markets for their products. Moreover, this process of modernisation and economic growth was predicated on the elite's ability to extend their land-holdings, consequently increasing their productivity, by appropriating the land of the indigenous inhabitants and controlling them as a source of labour. While competition over control of indigenous labour caused conflict among the regional elite leaders, they were united in their attempts to prevent broad-based social development which would deliver greater rights to the indigenous people and reduce the elite's capacity to exploit their labour. Consequently, Chiapas is characterised by division and inequality among all socio-economic groupings—among the elite, among the diverse indigenous people and, most significantly, between these two adversarial socio-economic sectors (Benjamin, 1989).

The PNR's construction of strong, centralised national rule in the late 1920s facilitated greater integration of Chiapas into the national political system, though the state's

wealthy elites maintained a large degree of influence in the region. The agrarian reforms enacted by Cárdenas in the 1930s (representing the first legal recognition of the rights of many of the indigenous Chiapans) encouraged the indigenous people to support and identify with the PNR, even though the reforms did not adequately address their grievances. The PRI, a successor of the PNR, sought to consolidate this support throughout the following decades by intermittently implementing social protectionist economic policies that rewarded those who professed support for the party. However, the indigenous Chiapans continued to suffer at the hands of the state's elite, particularly the cattle ranchers, who regularly appropriated and seized their communal lands forcing them to farm ever dwindling pockets of land. This pressure on land resources increased throughout the 1970s due to an influx of migrants from other Mexican states, and in the 1980s as a result of the arrival of thousands of refugees from Guatemala. By the end of the 1980s there was a crisis in the state caused by a lack of arable land and the subsequent inability to produce adequate amounts of food to meet the basic needs of the population. The PRI's agrarian reforms did not adequately address and, in fact, exacerbated the socio-economic problems experienced by the majority of the population of Chiapas.

The peripheral geographical location of Chiapas, being Mexico's most southern state, ensured that it remained on the margins of the national Mexican political agenda, particularly until the establishment of the post-revolutionary national party—the PRN. Even prior to the incorporation of Chiapas into the Mexican nation, the lack of a strong, unified central Mexican Government until the *Porfiriato* period began in 1876, and again from its termination in 1910 until 1930, facilitated the entrenchment of the power of local *caciques*. Padgett notes that the power of these “political entrepreneur[s]” increased in accordance with the remoteness of the region in question (1966: 83). In line with this observation, the geographical location of Chiapas—coupled with its early lack of infrastructure such as roads, telegraph wires and telephone lines—made it particularly vulnerable to the rule of these self-imposed political leaders. This vulnerability was, according to Benjamin, seized upon in the 1870s and 1890s by “powerful men” who divided the state into “spheres of influence and control” known as *cacicazgos*. The formation of these *cacicazgos* reinforced preexisting divisions between the wealthy elite

and the state's primarily indigenous *campesinos*—a separation that Benjamin claims is a political artifact of the Spanish conquistadors' colonial intent to divide and conquer (1989: 22).

As mentioned above, the divisions amongst the Chiapan population permeated every socio-economic group, with conflict among the economic elite dominating the state in the 1800s. This socio-economic sector was divided into the *Cristobalenses*—the merchants and civil servants or the “grandees of the Central Highlands”, who represented the surviving colonial oligarchy—and the large-scale ranchers from the central Grijalva River valley and the Soconusco coastal plains, who were becoming increasingly politically powerful as they contributed to the economic growth of the state and the nation (Benjamin, 1989: 13). Benjamin argues that a key motivation behind this period of high contestation was the struggle for control of the one essential natural resource which was limited in Chiapas: labour (1989: 14). This problem eased somewhat in the late 1800s as increasing numbers of indigenous people sought work in coffee plantations, timber industries and on large cattle ranches after their communal lands in the highlands had been converted into private ranches²⁷ (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 26). Furthermore, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello contend that the cost of taxes imposed by the state government was so great that, in order to meet their obligations, the state's primarily indigenous *campesinos* were forced to “sell their labour to *enganchadores*—professional agents who advanced debtors loans and sent them to work off their debts on plantations or on urban construction projects” (1999: 27). Consequently, the state's indigenous people became involved in a system of debt peonage, a form of virtual slavery, which was considered necessary for the economic development of the region. The editor of the Chiapas State Government's official newspaper, writing in 1885,

²⁷ This situation resulted from the attempts of Emilio Rabasa, the then Chiapan Governor, to implement his own agrarian reform known as *el reparto* and *el fraccionamiento* (Benjamin, 1989: 49). According to Benjamin, Rabasa “strongly believed that the division of communal village lands and the creation of a new class of yeoman farmers would promote productive capitalist agriculture and the integration of the Indian (and traditional *campesino*) into Mexican civilisation” (1989: 48).

lamented this system but nonetheless considered it “justified by the existence of a labour scarcity and the ‘natural laziness’ of the Indians” (Benjamin, 1989: 28).

While conflict over labour divided the elite of the central highlands from the wealthy land-owners of the Grijalva River valley and western coastal plains, they were in fact united by a common long-term goal: the quest for modernisation and the full economic integration of Chiapas into the nation of Mexico (Benjamin, 1989: 33-34, 37-39). This quest was to be set in motion by the replacement of *caciquismo*—the division of the state into spheres of influence ruled by self-imposed political leaders interested in expanding their personal wealth and maintaining their political control—with an active regional government that would pursue greater economic growth and political integration into the nation (Benjamin, 1989: 39). Under the patronage of the Díaz Government, Emilio Rabasa, the Chiapan governor from 1891–1894, began to construct transport routes and develop lines of communication to enable the export of greater amounts of local products to wider markets in a cheaper and more efficient manner (Benjamin, 1989: 39-54). Collier and Lowery Quaratiello argue that the construction of a railway line along the Pacific coast of Chiapas was a deliberate move on behalf of the Mexican Government “to integrate the region into the national economy”—a move prompted by fears that the plantation owners of the fertile coffee producing Soconusco region would rejoin Guatemala after its government built a railway from the west coast to the Atlantic Ocean to reduce costs associated with transporting the coffee harvest by sea (1999: 27). The program of economic growth pursued by Rabasa “marked the birth of an export economy in Chiapas and its rapid integration into the world market” (Harvey, 1998: 48).

The Chiapan Government’s efforts to improve the state’s infrastructure in order to encourage economic growth, particularly by opening up export markets, was welcomed by the wealthy land-owners of the western plains and central Grijalva River valley. While these regions became integrated into the economic infrastructure of the Mexican nation, eastern Chiapas remained isolated and undeveloped because it did not have extensive tracts of arable or productive land suitable for large-scale farming. The primary economic industry of eastern Chiapas was logging. This business, however, was owned and

controlled by Europeans and, subsequently, did not contribute significantly to the economic growth of Chiapas or Mexico. Moreover, the industry was based on the removal of old-growth mahogany and cedar, and was therefore unsustainable, and did not establish infrastructure that would facilitate future economic growth in the region. Consequently, eastern Chiapas became increasingly impoverished and isolated, a situation Collier and Lowery Quaratiello claim “persisted until the Zapatista rebels called attention to the plight of the region in 1994” (1999: 27). Furthermore, Benjamin notes that the modernisation and economic advancement pursued by the state’s elite worsened the impoverishment of the poor as the large land-owners continued to appropriate large tracts of land belonging to the indigenous people and to exploit them as a labour force. He notes that what the Chiapan elites “viewed as progressive change and modernisation ... in fact reinforced and aggravated the long standing social reality of Chiapas as a rich land for a few but home to a poor people” (Benjamin, 1989: 34).

In 1910, as the Mexican Revolution began in the northern and central regions of the nation, Chiapas was still experiencing strong economic growth fueled by a productive export market which built on what Benjamin considers to be almost 20 years of unprecedented economic growth in the state (1989: 84). The indigenous and *campesino* populations were largely displaced from their traditional communities and, thus, land. They were forced to work as *peons*, to work off the debt acquired when paying taxes and buying food and other necessities. Yet, despite the presence and government sponsorship of the inequalities between the state’s elite and the impoverished agrarian workers and the lack of social development that inspired revolution in other parts of the country, the ethnic, geographic and linguistic divisions among the indigenous and *campesino* populations of Chiapas played an important part in preventing the rise of a united, wide-scale regional revolt (Benjamin, 1989: 96). Furthermore, Benjamin contends that:

Tight systems of social and economic control of labourers and villages ... and the absence of progressive elite leadership for a peasant uprising precluded popular agrarian revolution in Chiapas and elsewhere in southeastern Mexico (1989: 96).

When the Revolution did arrive in 1914—led by General Augustín Castro, Venustiano

Carranza's emissary—it led to the legal abolition of peonage (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 28). However, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello argue that the reforms were only enacted in the nationally integrated, “modernized” western and central valley regions of the state²⁸. Implementation of the reforms was restricted geographically because the revolutionary fervour was largely unable to infiltrate the communities of the most impoverished eastern and central highlands. These regions remained isolated from the centralised rule of the national government and, therefore, the political, economic and legal infrastructure of the nation. This lack of integration into the national political and economic infrastructure meant that *caciques* remained in control of most of these areas. Consequently, the implementation of revolutionary reform was not uniform throughout Chiapas. Indeed, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello note that:

on the isolated plantations and ranches of the south and east ... Indians continued to labour in debt peonage for more than a decade after the practice was outlawed and ... reformers faced entrenched and recalcitrant ranchers (1999: 29).

The revolutionary reforms were also resisted in the central and western regions of the state through a united counter-revolutionary force known as *Los Mapaches*, The Racoons, who struggled against Carranza's forces until they left in 1920 (Harvey, 1998: 52). Despite this, the revolution in Chiapas and nationally led to significant advances in the legal recognition of agrarian and indigenous rights. However, amelioration of the circumstances of the most impoverished and isolated Chiapans did not arrive until the 1930s with the wide-scale agrarian reforms enacted by President Lázaro Cárdenas. Still, while Benjamin notes that “[p]aternalistic reform, not popular mobilisation, characterized the official Mexican Revolution in Chiapas”, he does argue that despite the Chiapans' lack of participation, “[t]he people' accidentally had become politicized” (1989: 119, 96). This politicisation was demonstrated by the widespread post-revolutionary formation of, and participation in, local and regional labour unions and agrarian leagues. These organisations, however, disbanded almost as quickly as they formed when the Chiapan

²⁸ Indeed, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello claim that in these regions “social interactions between landowners and workers underwent a metamorphosis as the master-servant relationship evolved into more of a patron-client relationship” (1999: 31).

Socialist Party, which had spawned their creation, was co-opted by the state's economic elite—a move that confirmed the large land-owners continued influence and pervasive role in the social, economic and political development of Chiapas (Benjamin, 1989: 148). After the revolution ended, a conservative government was established in Chiapas, led by a *Mapache* leader Fernando Borraz. The newly formed government aligned itself with the nation's president, Álvaro Obregón, and their loyalty was rewarded with the freedom to rule Chiapas with little federal intervention (Harvey, 1998: 54). However, this degree of political independence was somewhat curtailed by the newly established PNR in the early 1930s.

The PNR's attempt to consolidate centralised national rule was strengthened in Chiapas in 1932 with the unopposed election of its candidate, Victórico Grajales, to state governor. Grajales sanctioned the establishment in the state of the PNR-sponsored indigenous labour unions which negotiated collective contracts for indigenous workers. Benjamin asserts that the creation of these unions was politically useful for both the state and national government because “the unionized Indians automatically became ‘supporters’ [members] of the state PNR” (1989: 185). The 1930s was a decade marked by an unprecedented level of land reform enacted by President Cárdenas in Chiapas and throughout Mexico. Yet, Benjamin claims that the *ejidos* established through this reform did not provide sufficient arable land for the communities of the central highlands of Chiapas and, consequently, did not significantly improve their standard of living (1989: 227-229). However, regardless of the size or quality of the *ejidos*, they were politically significant insofar as the communities tied to them became “incorporated into the state Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos [The League of Agrarian Communities and Peasant Syndicates], and thus into the official party” (Benjamin, 1989: 203). The impoverished indigenous inhabitants of Chiapas were thus integrated into the political machinery of the nation to become PNR, and later PRI, supporters. Moreover, the government strengthened their role in the region by preventing the rise of a unified indigenous opposition movement. This was achieved through the implementation of a system of agrarian reform that placed the various indigenous communities in competition

with one another. Indeed, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello claim that:

By co-opting one group after another with land redistribution, the government ensured that the peasants' primary loyalty would be to the state and not to their class. The factionalism that developed as each community struggled for its own land helped to contain the potential for organised dissidence because it meant that each village or *municipio* (township) concentrated more on maintaining strong ties with the national government than with other native communities that might well compete for the same land (1999: 32; emphasis in original).

The national government's creation in 1949 of the *Comisión Nacional del Café*, the National Coffee Commission, the forerunner to the *Instituto Mexicano del Café*, Mexican Coffee Institute, established in 1958, sought to improve credit provision to farmers of small-scale coffee crops; to further develop agricultural techniques; and to regulate national coffee prices. Benjamin claims that the presence of such interventionist, social protectionist economic policies provided another incentive for the Chiapans to support the state and federal PRI Governments (1989: 227-228). However, this process of co-optation into the ruling party was uneven. The most remote regions of Chiapas, primarily the eastern lowlands, experienced significantly less state intervention than those in the more accessible western regions of the state. Even the central highlands became an area targeted by national government in the 1950s for "modernisation" under the auspices of the INI. This modernisation initiative heralded the first of many government-funded programs aimed at alleviating poverty in Chiapas and gaining the support of the primarily indigenous agrarian population, which increased in number and size during the 1970s. However, Benjamin claims it was simply "a case of too little, too late" and, thus, these programs were unable to appease the growing number of impoverished, disaffected Chiapans (1989: 230). Furthermore, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello contend that the programs were inadequate and inherently racist. They claim that one such program, the Socioeconomic Development Program for the Highlands of Chiapas, sponsored by the UN in cooperation with the national and state governments, operated in accordance with an understanding that ethnic identity impeded progress or "development". This understanding was used to justify an end to campaigning for bilingual education and to legitimise the agency's right to "make decisions for Indians, for example by imposing its

own candidates for municipal office on Indian townships” (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 62). Increased competition for land produced by a steady influx of migrants and the large-landholders’ appropriation of indigenous land characterised Chiapas in the 1970s. This, coupled with government’s inability to alleviate the region’s impoverishment and its limited realisation of land reform, sparked numerous spontaneous indigenous uprisings (Benjamin, 1989: 229-230).

In the middle of the twentieth century eastern Chiapas was largely uninhabited. However, by 1970 around 100,000 migrants from other areas within Chiapas and throughout Mexico had settled in the region—particularly in the Lacandón Jungle (Harvey, 1998: 62). Large numbers of *campesinos* from outside of Chiapas began arriving in 1970 after the government granted them land in eastern Chiapas to resolve agrarian disputes in their home states (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 42-43). Throughout the following decade indigenous Chiapans living in the state’s central highlands relocated to the east after ranchers occupied their land in a process known as *ganaderización*, defined by Benjamin as “the expansion of pastures for cattle at the expense of cropland” (1989: 232). It was a process that Benjamin claims “apparently went too far”. Indeed, he writes that:

Cattlemen converted lands formerly rented or share-cropped by corn farmers into pastures, rented or simply invaded ejido lands, and expanded into wooded or jungle areas causing destructive deforestation and soil erosion (1989: 232).

Persecution of indigenous Chiapans who had converted to Protestantism in the syncretically Catholic central highlands also contributed to the migration of people into the eastern region of the state (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 56). Furthermore, indigenous Chiapans dislocated from the central Grijalva River valley after large tracts of their land were flooded by the construction of dams for the government’s hydroelectricity program, also migrated to the state’s east. The existing communities of eastern Chiapas were forced to absorb these displaced people, putting greater pressure on their already stretched natural resources.

As previously mentioned, when Luis Echeverría assumed the presidency in 1970 he immediately embraced populist programs in an attempt to distance himself from the 1968 student massacre, for which many people held him accountable. A key feature of these programs was the implementation of land reform at a level not seen since the 1930s. However, Echeverría's land redistribution exacerbated the problems of eastern Chiapas by granting land in the Lacandón Jungle to people from states as far away as the nation's northwest (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 43). This attempt to alleviate agrarian grievances throughout many Mexican states simply transferred the existing problems onto Chiapas. The huge influx of *campesinos* into the region forced people desperate for land to move further into the tropical Lacandón Jungle. The transposition of their traditional *milpa*, slash and burn, and cash-crop style of cultivation onto the thin, fertile top soil typical of tropical rainforests, resulted in the rapid leaching of the soil's nutrients, leaving the land arid and unproductive.

International outrage at the wide-scale environmental damage occurring in the Lacandón Jungle prompted Echeverría to address the issue in 1972 by assigning title of the region's 614,321 hectares of land to the 66 Lacandón Mayan families indigenous to that location. However, this move, while supported by environmentalists, denied the 26 indigenous communities from other ethnic groups already living in the region any rights to the land (Hernández, 1994: 9). The creation of the Montes Azules bioserve in the Lacandón Jungle in 1978, and the consequent limitations imposed on its natural resources, forced a further 8,000 people into nearby Chiapan *municipios* to farm the already overcrowded land (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 50).

Migration to eastern Chiapas continued in the early 1980s. Natural causes added to the region's problems of overcrowding and impoverishment when the 1982 eruption of the western Chiapan Chichonal volcano displaced about 14,000 of the indigenous Zoque people, many of whom moved into the Lacandón Jungle (Benjamin, 1989: 238). Also compounding the problem in the early 1980s was the arrival of between 50,000 and 100,000 Guatemalan Maya fleeing, what Benjamin describes as, the "murderous counterinsurgency campaign of the new [Guatemalan] military government of General

Efraín Ríos Montt” (Benjamin, 1989: 237). In an attempt to discourage Guatemalans from entering Chiapas, the Mexican Government actively encouraged the displaced agrarian people in the state to settle along the Chiapas-Guatemala border to fill the perceived “vacuum of settlement” (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 43). Benjamin argues that the Mexican Government identified and publicised the possibility that “Central American guerrillas could take advantage of the mass exodus [of Guatemalan refugees] to establish themselves in Chiapas and spread the germ of social revolution”, and that measures needed to be taken to prevent such an outcome (1989: 238). As such, the region was kept in check by an increased Mexican military presence (Benjamin, 1989: 238; Harvey, 1998: 148-150).

President Salinas’s 1989 decision to approve the land-title claims of the 26 indigenous communities that President Echeverría had expelled from their settlements in the Lacandón Jungle in 1972 was marginally successful in temporarily quelling the discontent of some impoverished people in the region. However, more significantly, Salinas’s attention to the issues of the Lacandón Jungle in the first few days of his presidency signaled the government’s appreciation of the volatility of the region. Yet, this act of agrarian reform was one of the last uses of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which had protected the rights of indigenous people to *ejidos*. Indeed, in 1992, Salinas altered the Article as a precondition of acceptance into NAFTA. The Zapatistas have identified entry into NAFTA and, thus the amendment of the Article, as a motivating factor for the 1994 Zapatista uprising²⁹ (Benjamin, 1995: 67-68; Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 88-89).

Chiapas is therefore a state historically marked by a distinct divide between the wealthy land-owning elite and the small-scale indigenous farmers. This divide has widened throughout the twentieth century due to the state and national PRI Government’s sponsorship of uneven economic development that produced a modernised, nationally

²⁹ Collier and Lowery Quaratiello claim that the EZLN’s assertion that NAFTA had a significant influence on the movement’s decision to stage an uprising is disingenuous (1999: 89).

integrated economy in the west, and an undeveloped, marginalised east—the region home to the majority of the state’s indigenous *campesinos*. Moreover, the PRI’s implementation, starting in the 1930s, of agrarian reform and social protectionist economic policies was largely successful in winning the support of the state’s indigenous population. However, these measures failed to address adequately the state’s underlying political and economic problems, enabling the entrenchment of the power of the wealthy land-owners and *caciques* who exercised a great degree of political power. They also regularly, often violently, seized the land of the indigenous inhabitants. Pressure on land resources in the state’s east increased dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the government’s agrarian reform, the mass arrivals of refugees from Guatemala and the migration of indigenous Chiapans from other parts of the state. Consequently, in the early 1980s when the PRI’s pursuit of a neoliberal economic agenda that ended financial support for the agrarian workers of Chiapas coincided with a severe lack of arable land in the state, there was a decline in support for the PRI. This situation also prompted the disaffected members of the population to seek alternative means of improving their socio-economic conditions, primarily by joining the nascent, independent, indigenous agrarian organisations.

The rise of collective action: rethinking indigeneity

Ultimately, Salinas’s attention in 1989 to the Lacandón region was minimal and belied the wide-scale threat to national stability and PRI hegemony that had been gradually growing and coordinating in eastern Chiapas. In the 1970s a number of largely spontaneous and relatively small-scale agrarian uprisings occurred in the state orchestrated by the local indigenous people in response to the lack of state-wide agrarian reform. Benjamin argues that the disorganised and uncoordinated nature of these uprisings, which principally consisted of *campesinos* seizing land from ranchers and plantation owners, enabled state and federal authorities “to employ the most brutal kind of repression to preserve peace and order and protect private property” (1989: 229). However, throughout the 1970s and 1980s a number of events occurred, including the 1974 Indigenous Congress and the government’s move from a social-protectionist to a

neoliberal economic agenda, that prompted the growth of collective, coordinated agrarian and indigenous organisations which advocated agrarian reform and self-government. While there remained a degree of diversity and competition among these groups, they provided the foundation for the establishment and growth of the collective and coordinated resistance represented by the EZLN.

It is generally considered that the key impetus for the development of coordinated and collective indigenous action in Chiapas was the 1974 Indigenous Congress organised by Bishop Samuel Ruiz³⁰ from the San Cristóbal diocese at the request of the Chiapan Government (Benjamin, 1989: 235; Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 61; Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 29). The Congress, organised to commemorate the birth of the sixteenth century Catholic Indian rights campaigner, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, had, according to Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, a two-fold purpose:

On one hand, the Catholic Church, exercising what it called its ‘preferential option for the poor,’ wanted to give voice to the sufferings of Indians; the government, on the other hand, wanted to create a more populist image after brutally repressing the student movement of the late 1960s (1999: 61).

The notion of the “preferential option for the poor” has overtly shaped the Catholic Church’s interaction with the indigenous people of eastern Chiapas since the 1968 Latin American Bishops Conference in Colombia. At the “epoch-making” meeting in Colombia the Catholic hierarchy confirmed its commitment to the growing movement of Latin American liberation theology—a movement based on the premise that the gospel “has a predilection for the poor, and therefore makes its proclamation from a position of solidarity with the oppressed” (Rowland, 1999: 5; Gutiérrez, 1986: 54). Indeed, Rowland comments that liberation theologians enact their faith within the prevailing socio-economic reality of Latin America:

³⁰ Bishop Samuel Ruiz joined the San Cristóbal diocese in 1960 and, particularly after 1968, became an advocate of the indigenous Chiapans. Following the 1994 EZLN uprising he became an important negotiator between the Zapatistas and the government (Harvey, 1998: 62-63).

exponents of the theology of liberation respond to the 'reality' which confronts millions: poverty, appalling living conditions, malnutrition, inadequate health care, contrasting with the affluence not only of the 'North,' but, even more glaring still, the wealth and affluence of the wealthy elites of Latin American cities (1999: 5).

The divisions in Chiapas between the impoverished indigenous agrarian workers and the wealthy elites rendered this area ripe for the attention of liberation theologians.

Surprisingly, however, the Catholic Church is weaker in Chiapas, particularly the eastern regions, than in most other states. While Mexico is an overwhelmingly Catholic nation, eastern Chiapas is known for its diversity of religious affiliations (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 55). One of the principal influences in the area is Protestantism which was introduced in the 1940s by missionaries associated with the US-based Summer Institute of Linguists. These missionaries focused on winning converts by engaging with the indigenous inhabitants in their native languages. Thus, they promoted education and literacy by translating the bible into the various indigenous languages. Indeed, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello claim that:

Protestantism has helped to legitimize literacy, which, in the minds of many Indians, has had negative associations with the repressive laws and policies of the *ladino* government and, as such, has been viewed historically as a threat to the conventions and *costumbre* [traditions] that organize the traditional Maya community (1999: 59)

These efforts were encouraged and supported by the Mexican Government who viewed the Protestants' presence in eastern Chiapas as a substitute for official state intervention to modernise and educate the indigenous inhabitants. However, because the government relied on the Protestants to perform this duty, the PRI did not form solid relationships with the indigenous communities in the remote regions of eastern Chiapas and, consequently, these communities remained isolated from the national political, economic and social structures.

The level of religious diversity in eastern Chiapas was evident in the 1990 census, which showed that between twenty and fifty-one per cent of the population of towns in the

region was either Protestant or Evangelical (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 57-58). Collier and Lowery Quaratiello note that:

About half of these are Seventh-Day Adventists or Presbyterians; Pentacostals, Evangelicals, and Baptists make up another quarter; there are also Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and half a dozen other churches or sects (1999: 58).

Ronald Wright, a journalist with a scholarly interest in the Maya, writes that this diversity of religious affiliation is "the old Maya strategy of strength in diversity: no matter what happens next, some of them will be prepared" (1989: 322). However, throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s, in spite of their religious, linguistic and cultural difference, many of the Chiapan Maya began to advocate collective action to ameliorate their impoverished living conditions.

A fundamental shift occurred in the way the indigenous people of Mexico were viewed following the 1974 Indigenous Congress (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 62-63). Historically, to identify as indigenous within the policies and legal framework of the nation of Mexico was, according to Rosset, equivalent to declaring membership of a race of "noble savages" holding out against the ravages of capitalism or of 'backward Indians' holding back economic development" (1999: vii). Benjamin's work supports this interpretation when he writes that in Chiapas there was a great emphasis on "civilizing" the indigenous inhabitants, which included modifying their traditional dress through action such as the 1930s "pants campaign"³¹ to facilitate their transformation into "productive citizens" (Benjamin, 1989: 184-185). Benjamin diverges somewhat from Rosset in believing that these policies embodied a new attitude towards the nation's indigenous people, represented by the concept of *indigenismo* which replaced "the racist notion that native ethnicity was uncivilized and therefore prevented Mexico from becoming a great nation" (1989: 202). Indeed, Benjamin claims that, for the government

³¹ In 1934, Chiapan Governor, Victórico Grajales, established the Department of Social Action, Culture, and Indigenous Protection charged with the task of "civilising" the Indigenous Chiapans. One of the Department's key programs was the "pants campaign" that unsuccessfully attempted to encourage the indigenous Chiapans to wear trousers in place of their traditional dress (Benjamin, 1989: 184-85).

in the 1930s, *indigenismo* translated into policies that sought to incorporate “the Indian into national society without total cultural obliteration; and the improvement of Indian life through education, political and economic organization, and the reform of the larger surrounding society” (1989: 202). However, Wright claims that racism continued to inform the perception of indigenous people within Mexican society, arguing that while the indigenous past was extolled, the indigenous present was consistently seen as problematic throughout Latin America:

There is always this ambiguity toward Indians in Latin America. The ancient Indians—the Incas, Aztecs, and Mayas—are extolled and raised to the status of national icons. But the modern Indian—the barefoot, uneducated, potentially rebellious peasant—is deemed an obstacle to progress, a source of embarrassment, even (if he is numerous enough) an object of racist loathing (1989: 37).

In order to address the issue of indigeneity, Poynton argues that the national government embraced the notion of *mestizaje*, or mixed race, as representative of the ethnic identity of Mexicans, claiming that “the Mexican bourgeoisie and its state have elevated the racial homogenization principle of *mestizo* identity to a state ideology that forms part of Mexican nationalism” (1997: 65). Poynton further contends that “Mexican nationalism has historically posed Mexican as a *mestizo* identity, adversarial to the identity ‘Indian’” (1997: 66). Indeed, the Mexican Government’s attempts to discourage the nation’s people from identifying as indigenous were reinforced through its programs of agricultural support—which, in spite of the fact that the majority of the indigenous population were *campesinos*, were specifically directed to the nation’s peasants. Consequently, the indigenous population was encouraged to identify as part of the peasantry in order to benefit from the government’s rural support. However, as the government began to embrace neoliberalism in the early 1980s, ending the traditional safety net of agricultural subsidies, “indigenous people found little basis for continuing to represent themselves as peasants”, and instead began “to protagonize themselves as distinct and worthy in their own right” (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 158).

The subjectivity of “indigenous” became a legitimate and politically viable option as a

direct result of the affirmation afforded to the nation's indigenous people at the 1974 Indigenous Congress. The Congress demanded a national rethinking of the policy of *mestizaje* and its inherent racism by facilitating the indigenous population's articulation of their grievances and possible ways of addressing these. In fact Collier and Lowery Quaratiello write that "[t]he Indigenous Congress was unprecedented in the history of Chiapas, for it was the first official meeting of Indians not convened for the government to tell Indians what to do" (1999: 62-63). This affirmation of the indigenous peoples' agency represented the "beginning of the radical movement in Chiapas" inspiring, according to Ronfeldt et al., the emergence of "[a] vibrant set of indigenous organisations" (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 61; Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 29).

Hoping to emulate the success of the Catholic Church sponsored Congress, and in order to reinvigorate support from the peasantry and indigenous Mexicans, the national PRI Government convened the National Indigenous Congress in 1975 (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 71). This Congress led to the formation of the PRI-controlled National Council of Indian *Pueblos* which was charged with the task of developing means of addressing the issues of indigenous rights discussed at the Congress. However, when the Council's PRI-aligned leadership was deposed by independent agrarian-reform agitators in 1979, the increasingly tenuous nature of the PRI Government's hegemonic rule became apparent. Soon after, these independent groups established themselves as the *Plan de Ayala* National Coordinating Committee (known by its Spanish acronym, CNPA), thereby strengthening the development of independent peasant groups and challenging the PRI's 40-year control of the nation's agrarian organisations (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 71). The structure of these new organisations, according to Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, was modeled on the Congress's "bottom-up organizing" which was distinct from the "top down" organisation which had been employed by government sponsored peasant and indigenous agencies (1999: 63). However, linguistic, geographical and political differences ensured that divisions remained among the various indigenous and agrarian groups. Consequently, while they aligned themselves with the CNPA, "the different political positions brought each group to create its own organisation at the regional level" (Castro in Benjamin, 1989: 235). Moreover, the religious pluralism

that characterised eastern Chiapas was instrumental in the lack of success experienced by the Catholic catechists' attempts to guide and coordinate the peasant and indigenous groups that formed after the original Congress. Indeed, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello assert that “[o]nly a truly secular movement appealing broadly to pluralism and democracy could hope to galvanize the indigenous and peasant community across its religious diversity” (1999: 65).

The secular organisations that developed in Chiapas in the 1970s and 1980s coalesced around three distinct concerns: land, labour and credit (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 70-74). The agrarian movement, concerned principally with the implementation of land reform, was represented by the *Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata* (OCEZ), the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organisation, formed to “unify all of the ejidal struggles in Chiapas” and to be the regional arm of the nation-wide CNPA (Benjamin, 1989: 236). The second group, represented by the *Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos* (CIOAC), the Independent Confederation of Agricultural Workers and Peasants, operated as a labour union charged with the responsibility of improving work and pay conditions for the rural proletariat (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 72-74). The third movement, which concentrated on enabling peasant and indigenous workers to access credits to increase land-holdings and productivity levels, was, according to Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, the “most powerful current of independent organizing in eastern Chiapas” (1999: 74). This movement was implemented and supported by *Política Popular* (PP), Popular or People’s Politics³², a northern-based student movement which “appeared on the scene both during and in the wake of the 1974 Indigenous Congress in San Cristóbal to offer assistance to catechists organising and educating peasants and Indians in eastern Chiapas” (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 75). Popular Politics was one of many student-based revolutionary groups, formed in response to the 1968 student massacre. Its members believed that there existed the

³² The PP was lead by Adolfo Orive Berlinguer, an economics professor at the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM), the National Autonomous University of Mexico, who “criticized the traditional Left in Mexico for its lack of insertion among the masses” and encouraged a Maoist grassroots approach to developing a “nonviolent struggle for socialism” (Harvey, 1998: 81).

latent potential for mass mobilisation and revolution among the impoverished, dislocated and disaffected peasantry. Collier and Lowery Quaratiello note that by the middle of the 1980s:

the three movements—land-based, labour-based, and credit-based—had spread through the historically undeveloped [eastern] half of Chiapas ... The movements crossed over one another's original bases of power, sometimes in competition and sometimes in alliance, and established networks of communication across a vast landscape (1999: 77).

Berlanga³³, a veteran of “the radical struggles of the 1960s” and later an “advisor” to the EZLN, contends that these movements, coupled with the implementation of other non-aggressive social action, paved the way for the EZLN:

the possibility of this armed group [the EZLN]—this new discourse—only appeared after years of working from below with local organizations who gave no thought to armed struggle. Marcos couldn't have existed if we hadn't existed. And all of our forces were strengthened when the armed struggle [the Zapatista uprising] broke out ... The work is very slow ... but we have all been preparing the ground for each other (Berlanga in Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen, 1997: 18).

By the 1980s independent, collective indigenous organisations had become a dominant feature of the political landscape of Chiapas. The ability to coalesce around the subjectivity of indigenous, rather than agrarian or peasant, was facilitated largely by the 1974 Indigenous Congress, which challenged the traditional lack of agency ascribed to these people. Moreover, the PRI's embrace in the early 1980s of a neoliberal economic agenda resulted in an end to the social protectionist economic policies that had previously provided financial incentives for the indigenous agrarian workers to identify themselves as *campesinos*. Consequently, the newly developed indigenous and agrarian organisations challenged the PRI's half-century long monopoly and control of these socio-economic

³³ Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen write that “[i]n 1982, Berlanga, along with several colleagues—many from a feminist umbrella group that works with poor women in the countryside—founded a school called the Center for Rural Training and Development (Cesdar)” (1997:16). The school aimed to teach local *campesinos* techniques which would enable them to establish an independent economy and community. However, “[s]uccessive local governments, who see the modest endeavors of Cesdar graduates as threatening, have tried to shut the center down” (Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen, 1997: 16).

and ethnic groups. However, while these nascent organisations laid the groundwork for unified and collective peasantry and indigenous resistance, they failed to implement the massive political, economic and social reforms many of their constituents were looking for. This prompted some to seek more radical means of securing social change. The EZLN's program of armed revolution came to represent this radical alternative.

The rise of the Zapatistas

Throughout the 1980s the indigenous Chiapans became increasingly marginalised and impoverished. The national government's embrace of neoliberalism, prompted by the 1982 debt crisis, led to the abolition of agrarian subsidies and price guarantees that had been a hallmark of the interventionist and social protectionist economic policies pursued by successive PRI governments since 1929. This consequently heightened the already acute poverty of many of the agrarian indigenous workers in the state. Moreover, the migration of Guatemalans into eastern Chiapas, Mexicans from other regions, and displaced Chiapans, greatly increased pressure on the region's land and local resources, resulting in inadequate amounts of arable land for the growing population and, therefore, insufficient food production. While the indigenous and peasant organisations that formed after the 1974 Indigenous Congress attempted to redress the worsening socio-economic conditions of the region's peoples by advocating for agrarian reform and self-government, these moves were strongly resisted by the state's wealthy elite. The lack of success of these movements prompted some people to seek change through armed uprising.

Throughout the early 1980s members of the independent peasant and indigenous organisations of Chiapas were subject to extreme physical violence, vandalism and kidnappings perpetrated by ranchers, their private paramilitary armies and the judicial and security police of the state or federal government (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 80-81). To illustrate the strength of the resistance faced by the indigenous organisations, Collier and Lowery Quaratiello point out that:

During a six month period between July and December 1982, independent organizers and the groups they represented in Chiapas experienced five assassinations, violent evictions from two ranches, the destruction of an entire peasant town, and fifty-nine kidnappings (1999: 80).

This repression worsened when General Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, a former army general from a wealthy cattle-ranching family, assumed the position of State Governor of Chiapas in 1982 (Harvey, 1998: 148). Under Castellanos Domínguez the military presence in Chiapas was significantly increased, particularly in areas where ownership of land was in dispute (between indigenous *campesinos* and ranchers) and where independent indigenous organisations had strong support. The official explanation for the increase in military presence was the need to strengthen the border against incursions by Central American revolutionaries. Yet, the violence perpetrated against the indigenous peasants was exacerbated by the 1987 signing of the Joint Accord for the Protection of the Lacandón Jungle, which opened the way for the granting of land title to the 26 indigenous communities expelled from the Jungle in 1972 . This process agitated the ranchers for it legally limited their possibilities of expansion. However, regardless of this they continued “expanding into the jungle, violently expelling people from their lands, and accusing them of promoting land takeovers” (Hernández, 1994: 9). The ranchers’ attacks on the *campesinos*, according to Hernández, “not only united the peasants of the jungle but fed their sense of collective identity as victims of abuse by the wealthy” (1994: 9). Ronfeldt et al. argue that the 1970s and 1980s represented “decades of desperation, politicization, and organization among the *indigenas*” which, they contend, “led to an increasing pool of people ready to opt for armed struggle” (1998: 30).

In 1983, the EZLN movement, which was to become the most forceful advocate of armed rebellion in the region, began to take shape in the mountains of eastern Chiapas (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 83; Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 32; EZLN in Lorenzano, 1998: 126). Collier and Lowery Quaratiello contend that disillusionment with the independent peasant organisations’ attempts to improve socio-economic conditions by operating within the framework of the nation’s legal system, and the occasional appearance of their collusion with the PRI, were the fundamental factors that prompted local indigenous

people to join the radical EZLN (1999: 78-81). However, Hernández tempers these observations of a move towards radicalism by noting that the EZLN's intention to stage an armed uprising was not well supported until the early 1990s, after more than a decade of the indigenous people's participation in relatively unsuccessful democratic resistance. Indeed, he writes in 1994 that:

For years the path of peasant self-government was considered primary [by the indigenous Chiapans], despite the closed attitude of local and state officials. Only in the past three years has this position lost influence among the region's inhabitants (Hernández, 1994: 9).

Hernández argues that the resulting resort to arms was prompted by three key factors: the continuation of violence against peasants; an increasing economic crisis³⁴; and the government's inability to introduce political reform into the state of Chiapas (1994: 9-10). Hernández explains that throughout the 1980s and early 1990s the ranchers continued to initiate violent attacks against the peasants and expel them from land in retaliation for the peasant's pursuit of land reform. The state's particularly harsh penal code led to the 1990 jailing of a local parish priest and the leaders of the *Xi' Nich* movement, an independent indigenous peasant organisation in the state's eastern lowlands, in retaliation for their support for land claims in the region. They were eventually freed, but only after nation-wide protests and intervention by the Catholic Church. Hernández contends that this event was considered to be a "watershed" experience because the local activists realised, for the first time, that for regional struggles to be successful, they had to be waged at a national level (1994: 10). Moreover, it prompted many to identify radical means as necessary to achieve socio-economic change. Hernández notes that:

Given these material conditions, it's not surprising that the disciplined and tenacious efforts of political-military organisations [such as the EZLN] to

³⁴ The region's economic crisis worsened due to the decreasing profitability of cattle ranching, a fall in corn production as a result of overpopulation, and a dramatic fall in international coffee prices. The impact of the falling coffee prices was compounded by the government's abolition of the federal coffee company, INMECAF, which "deprived peasants of marketing mechanisms and a source of technical assistance" (Hernández, 1994: 9).

promote the option of armed struggle found fertile ground. Their cadre are not foreigners or outsiders, but local people familiar with the culture and rhythms of indigenous communities and well-known by broad sectors of the population (1994: 10).

On 17 November 1983 a movement comprised of three indigenous Chiapans and three *mestizos* was formed to advocate armed struggle to improve the social, economic and political conditions of the indigenous Chiapans (Harvey, 1998: 164). The movement's *mestizo* contingent, including the individual who became known as *Subcomandante Marcos*, are believed to have been members of the *Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional* (FLN), the Forces of National Liberation, described by John Ross as “one of the last surviving guerrilla *focos* ... dating from the 1970s when 15 such groups roamed the land, holding up banks and kidnapping governors and US consuls” (2000: 6). These three *mestizos* were educated in Marxist, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist revolutionary theory, with Ronfeldt et al. contending that there was a strong emphasis on the latter approach (1998: 32). Lorenzano claims that the *mestizos*, who he refers to as the movement's “Guerrilla Nucleus”, were not only influenced by these revolutionary ideologies, but also by Guevarism:

Without a doubt, and it would be foolish to try to hide it, in its earliest days, this initial Guerrilla Nucleus had a strong Leninist/Maoist orientation. It understood itself to be the ‘revolutionary vanguard’ which was to initiate and lead the ‘prolonged popular war’. And according to testimony from Marcos himself ... they understood their task in terms of the ‘implantation’ of an armed *foco* (nucleus of guerrilla fighters) using practices and tactics analogous to those promoted by Ernesto Che Guevara (1998: 127).

However, *Subcomandante Marcos* claims that soon after arriving in Chiapas, the *mestizos* realised that the indigenous people of the region “had a way of explaining the struggle with their own traditional symbols”, which forced the *mestizo* revolutionaries to alter their “orthodox way of seeing the world in terms of ‘bourgeois and proletarians’ to the communities’ collective democratic conceptions and *their* world view” (Guillermoprieto in Bruhn, 1999: 42-43; emphasis added). Moreover, Marcos claims that the collision between the ideologies of the *mestizos* and the ‘realities’ of the indigenous people worked

to obfuscate the movement's, and his own, political origins:

We had a very fixed notion of reality, but when we ran up against it, our ideas were turned over. It is like that wheel over there, which rolls over the ground and becomes smoother as it goes, as it comes into contact with the people in the villages. It no longer has any connection to its origins. So, when they ask me: 'What are you people? Marxists, Leninists, Castroites, Maoists, or what?' I answer that I don't know. I really do not know. We are the product of a hybrid, of a confrontation, of a collision in which, luckily I believe, we [the *mestizos*] lost (*Subcomandante Marcos* in Harvey, 1998: 167).

While Harvey notes that the movement developed slowly in its first few years, having only twelve members: Marcos and eleven indigenous comrades, at the beginning of 1986 he claims that the *mestizos* bequest of control and direction of the movement to the indigenous communities, or the eventual "loss" Marcos refers to above, "proved to be decisive, and the EZLN grew rapidly as a result" (Harvey, 1998: 166-167). By the end of 1986, the EZLN had amassed such a degree of support that they "could freely enter their first village, at the invitation of one of the indigenous founders of the EZLN, *el viejo Antonio*" (Harvey, 1998: 166; emphasis in original). Harvey emphasises that an important element in the growth of support for the movement was that the indigenous communities considered it to be both local and indigenous in nature:

Instead of arriving directly from the city or the university, the EZLN emerged out of *la montaña* [the mountains], that magical world inhabited by the whole of Mayan history, by the spirits of ancestors, and by Zapata himself (1998: 166).

The movement continued to grow exponentially throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, and on New Year's Day 1994 this army of ski-masked "guerrillas" exploded onto the scene when they seized control of a handful³⁵ of towns in Chiapas, initiating 12 days of military combat against the Mexican army, and challenging the legitimacy of the nation's social, economic and political hegemonies.

³⁵ There are conflicting reports as to the exact number of towns seized with some suggestions being: four (Castells, 1997: 73; Bob, 1997: 170); five (Carroll, 1997: 1); six (Hernández, 1994: 6; Carr, 1997); or seven (Harvey, 1998: 6). These were symbolically seized through the EZLN's occupation of the Municipal Government offices.

Conclusion

Chiapas is characterised by a history of inequality between the state's wealthy elites and its impoverished, exploited and, thus, marginalised indigenous population. While the indigenous peoples have endeavoured to resist this marginalisation these efforts, until the end of the 1970s, were largely sporadic, uncoordinated and, thus, relatively unsuccessful as the indigenous population was divided by linguistic, cultural, political and religious differences. However, following the 1974 Indigenous Congress, the indigenous population began to recognise that it shared many of the same grievances which were principally centred around a desire for further land reform. This marked the beginning of the formation of politically independent, collective indigenous and agrarian resistance groups in Chiapas that attempted to further their political agenda by working within Mexico's existing legal and political systems. However, after over a decade of unsuccessful democratic agitation, many began to seek more radical means of effecting political, economic and social change. The EZLN's advocacy of armed struggle and its incorporation of indigenous and *mestizo* elements appealed to many, enabling the movement to gain enough support to stage the 1994 uprising.

Chapter Two

Understanding the EZLN: Examining the Zapatista Discourse

The principal discursive practices of the EZLN and their centrality to the movement's political aims are discussed in this chapter through an analysis of the key public documents the movement released between the first day of the uprising in 1994 and the end of its March for Indigenous Dignity in March 2001. These documents demonstrate that the EZLN's discourses are produced in response to the political context of indigenous marginalisation, a lack of democracy, and the omnipresence of the PRI in the political and social life of Mexico, as detailed in chapter one. The latter half of this chapter critiques existing analyses of the movement and demonstrates the centrality of questions of identity, representation and agency to these interpretations. By identifying central elements of the movement's discourse, it is shown that the Zapatista struggle can be understood as an attempt to construct new modes of representation for indigenous Mexicans, specifically the Maya of Chiapas. The EZLN achieves this by challenging the dominant government representations of indigenous people as "lazy", "uncivilised" and "pusillanimous", and instead presenting them as active, politically conscious agents. However, the EZLN's claims to be an advocate for the Chiapan Maya and its assertion that the movement is principally concerned with indigenous rights have been challenged by the Mexican Government and many academics. These critics justify their position by highlighting the importance of non-indigenous influences on the movement's discursive and military strategies such as the history of Mexican peasant struggles; Marxist, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist revolutionary theory; Guevarism; and the work of Gramsci. Furthermore, most of these analyses focus on the central role played in the movement by its *mestizo* spokesperson, *Subcomandante* Marcos. Some suggest that Marcos's presence problematises the movement's claims to indigeneity, and others argue that he has in fact co-opted the movement's indigenous constituents into a socialist uprising that attends to issues of class rather than ethnicity. Consequently, *who* the EZLN represents, *who* it is constituted by, and *by whom* it is led present as issues central to how the movement is

analysed and understood. This chapter shows that the complexity of these issues is not adequately addressed in the interpretations of the EZLN that are discussed.

The struggle for indigenous rights

From the first day of the 1994 uprising the EZLN has presented as an army constituted in response to the long standing maltreatment and oppression experienced by Mexican peoples, particularly the Maya of Chiapas, since the arrival of the Spanish in 1492. Moreover, the movement has presented its uprising as part of the indigenous Chiapans' equally long history of resistance against these Spanish colonisers and their *mestizo* descendants. This history of struggle, according to the Zapatista discourse, constitutes a collective memory which informs its strategies and tactics. This section argues that by locating the movement within this history of indigenous resistance, the EZLN attempts to legitimate its claims to be concerned principally with issues of indigeneity. Moreover, the movement asserts that the indigenous peoples have a history of political agency which contradicts popular representations of them as a conquered and divided people.

The EZLN situates itself within a national history of resistance in its first communiqué, the *Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*, by claiming that its constituents, primarily the indigenous Maya of Chiapas, are the “product of 500 years of struggle” (EZLN, 1993; my translation). Indeed, the document suggests that the EZLN identifies with a history constituted through a collective memory of rebellion, resistance and struggle which was:

first against slavery in the War of Independence against Spain led by the insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our Constitution and expel the French Empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (EZLN, 1993; my translation).

The constituents of the EZLN, who identify themselves as indigenous by claiming to be “the inheritors of the true builders of our nation”—the descendants of the nation’s first people—simultaneously locate themselves within a collective history of impoverishment and marginalisation produced as a result of national government policies (EZLN, 1993; my translation). Indeed, the EZLN asserts that, despite their historical efforts of

resistance, its indigenous constituents:

have been denied the most elementary preparation so that the powerful [the Mexican Government] can use us [indigenous Chiapans] as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country with no concern that we are dying of hunger and curable diseases, without caring that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a dignified roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food, no education (1993; my translation).

The EZLN claims that the marginalisation of indigenous peoples within the political, economic and social structures of Mexican society has ensured the continuation, and ever worsening, of their intolerable living conditions. The movement argues that this impoverishment was exacerbated by the government's adoption of a neoliberal economic approach in the early 1980s. As argued in the previous chapter, neoliberalism marked a move away from the PRI's implementation of a social protectionist economic agenda which had been a feature of its policies since the 1930s. The EZLN locates the neoliberal economic agenda that led to the amendment of Article 27 of the Constitution—thus removing indigenous rights to *ejidos*—and the signing of NAFTA, as significant factors which contributed to the movement's 1994 uprising, stating that:

An unjust and criminal economic system, the Mexican political system, forced a group of citizens, for the most part indigenous peoples, to take up arms to make themselves heard and to call attention to the serious problems of the indigenous peoples in Mexico (EZLN in Hernández Navarro, 1999: 297).

The movement claims that because the Mexican Government positions indigenous people in the margins of the nation's political and economic structures, isolated from and unrepresented in national level decision making processes, they effectively represent a silent or voiceless sector—a silence which the EZLN alleges masks their impoverished circumstances. Consequently, the EZLN intended the uprising as a way of gaining a voice and being heard in order to improve the living standards of its constituents. The movement asserts that:

Silence is what Power [the Mexican Government] offers our pain in order to make us small. When we are silenced, we remain very much alone. Speaking, we heal the pain. Speaking, we accompany one another. Power uses the word to impose

his empire of silence. We use the word to renew ourselves. Power uses silence to hide his crimes. We use silence to listen to one another, to touch one another, to know one another (EZLN, 2001b: 83-85).

This statement identifies silence imposed by those in power as detrimental to marginalised individuals. However, it also suggests that silence can represent a constructive and progressive strategy when it is actively and consciously pursued by marginalised groups. Thus, while the EZLN claims that its constituents have been economically and politically marginalised within Mexico, the movement also identifies this marginality and their subsequent silence within the state's dominant discourses as the means through which they are able to constitute and enact an effective resistance movement. Indeed, this attitude came to dominate the EZLN's articulation of the notion of silence after the government failed to convert into law the 1996 San Andrés peace accords. This situation demonstrated that "speaking", or gaining a voice with a degree of political capital which enabled the EZLN to engage in seemingly productive peace negotiations with the Mexican Government, did not necessarily ensure that the movement would be able to achieve the dramatic restructuring of Mexican society that it sought. As a result of this, by 1998, the movement had refocused its discursive strategy to position silence as a central component of its resistance tactics. In the *Fifth Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*, the EZLN states that:

While the government piles up hollow words and hastens to argue with a rival that constantly slips away, the Zapatistas make a weapon of struggle out of silence, which they do not understand and against which they can do nothing, and they counter our silence time and again with sharp lies, bullets, bombs, blows. In this way, just as we discovered the weapon of words after the combat in January of 1994, now we do it with silence (1998; my translation).

While the EZLN presents its constituents as impoverished due to their marginalisation within the Mexican political and economic structures, it concurrently argues that the silence this engendered ensured that they were not wholly co-opted into the nation's dominant structures and discourses. That is to say, they are not what Miller terms "well-tempered" citizens, or "manageable cultural subjects formed and governed through [the]

institutions and discourses” of the cultural-capitalist state³⁶ (1993: ix). Rather, the EZLN conceived of the strategy of silence as a means of challenging the legitimacy of these very discourses and their attendant institutions. Moreover, the EZLN claims that its constituents’ peripheral social location within the state enabled them to maintain much of their indigenous culture, including the Mayan communities’ traditional decision-making processes. Thus, the strategy of silence can be understood as the means through which the indigenous *campesinos* are able to maintain their difference and diversity by refusing to assimilate into and accept the dominant Mexican ideology of *mestizaje*—a concept which, as elaborated in the previous chapter, effectively denies the existence of the nation’s indigenous people.

The EZLN’s prominent positioning in the movement’s public statements of its claims to indigeneity can be read as an attempt to deny links between the movement and Marxist, Marxist-Leninist or Maoist ideology insofar as it emphasises issues of ethnicity rather than class. Indeed, the EZLN has consistently claimed that the movement’s struggle is grounded in the experiences of indigenous Chiapans. This is highlighted in *Subcomandante Marcos*’s proclamation that the EZLN:

is not a classic guerrilla army that robs, kidnaps or does spectacular strikes to later get the masses. We don’t strike and retreat, but rather strike and advance. And our soldiers are prepared politically, and conscious that this is an ethnic movement (*Subcomandante Marcos* in Editorial Collective, 1994).

In order to legitimate the EZLN’s claims to be an ethnic movement composed by, and representative of, indigenous Chiapans, it has portrayed itself as commanded by its indigenous Maya constituents and structured in accordance with their traditional political or decision-making systems. Indeed, the EZLN’s *mestizo* spokesperson, Marcos, has always emphasised his rank within the army as a *subcomandante* or a subcommander, in

³⁶ Toby Miller’s analysis of citizenship and the cultural-capitalist state’s efforts to form well-tempered subjects highlights the importance of these issues within contemporary political conditions. However, his most significant insight for the purposes of this thesis is the identification of the possibilities “for political action under the rubric of citizenship”, whereby marginalised groups are able to produce *différends de soi* which enable them to enter into the state’s dominant relations of power and, potentially radically restructure them (1993: 218).

an effort to publicly present himself as subordinate to the movement's indigenous commanders. This means that he is also subordinate to the *Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena—Comandancia General (CCRI-CG)*, the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee—General Command, which controls the army and is responsible for day to day decisions that affect those who live in the Zapatista-controlled regions (Flood, n.d.). Furthermore, even though the CCRI-CG includes elected representatives from all of the major Mayan ethnicities that form the Zapatista movement, Marcos claims that it is in fact subordinate to the population of the indigenous communities that constitute the EZLN's support base—the very people the movement claims to be fighting for. To illustrate this point *Subcomandante Marcos* writes that:

strategic decisions, important decisions have to be made democratically, from below, not from above. If there is going to be action or a series of actions that are going to implicate the entire organization, the authority has to come from below. In this sense, even the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee isn't able to make every decision. You could say that the EZLN is different because in most political-military organizations there is only one commander, and in the EZLN the Clandestine Committees are composed of 80 people, 100 people, 120 people or however many. But this is not the difference. The difference is that even the Clandestine Committees cannot make certain decisions, the most important decisions. They are limited to such a degree that the Clandestine Committees cannot decide which path the organization is going to follow until every *companero* [sic] is consulted (*Subcomandante Marcos* in Flood, n.d.; original is in italics).

The EZLN identifies its inverted, bottom-up power structure as evidence of its adherence to traditional indigenous practices. This, it argues, demonstrates the movement's uniqueness and its departure from the organisational structure and ideology of traditional “political-military”, revolutionary movements present in Latin America. Evidence of the EZLN's incorporation of these traditional practices is provided by the extensive and time-consuming consultation process that the movement has engaged in after each round of peace negotiations. Each offer made by the government in the 1994 and 1995 to 1996 peace talks has had to be taken to the communities and discussed until a consensus was reached. As Harvey notes “[t]here is never a 60-40 vote in indigenous communities ... they keep discussing it [an issue] until everybody is in agreement”—a process which can

take “from several days to several months” (Harvey in Pelaez, n.d.).

The EZLN’s attempts to validate its claims of being produced by, and grounded in, the collective history of the indigenous peoples’ struggles is complicated by some elements of its discourse which seem not to reflect indigenous practice. For example, in the Mayan communities of Chiapas women have been traditionally less educated and excluded from decision-making processes. However, the EZLN identifies equality for women as a facet of its struggle, as evidenced by its development of the Revolutionary Women’s Law³⁷. While this law appears somewhat contradictory to the movement’s claims of being constructed for, and directed by, a collective indigenous history, the EZLN asserts that the issue of gender equity was raised by the indigenous women themselves. This sparked what Marcos refers to as the first EZLN uprising—an internal battle resulting from the women’s challenge to the traditional indigenous Mayan customs and beliefs. Marcos claims that a female Tzotzil Zapatista, *Comandanta Susana*, was assigned in 1993 the task of visiting indigenous women in the Chiapan highlands to learn of their experiences of repression (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 60). The responses she gathered informed the EZLN’s Revolutionary Women’s Law which declares, most importantly, that women are free to choose their partners; decide the number of children they will have; participate in community affairs; and hold positions of power (Millánn, 1998: 75). Within the structure of the EZLN army, the female soldiers and *comandantas* are reportedly treated as equals. Female commanders are responsible for military units such as the one that captured the strategic town of San Cristóbal during the 1994 uprising, and are able to choose their partners and control their fertility through access to the pill³⁸. This small feminist revolution suggests that the EZLN is more than an ethnic movement based in the collective memory of the indigenous Chiapans’ historical traditions. It

³⁷ In 1994 the Zapatistas issued a number of Revolutionary Laws dealing with what the movement perceived to be shortcomings in the 1917 Constitution. These included the Women’s Revolutionary Law, the Urban Reform Law, the Labour Law and Industry and Commerce Law, the Social Security Law, the Justice Law, the Revolutionary Agrarian Law, and the Law of Rights and Obligations of Peoples in Struggle (EZLN, n.d.).

³⁸ While women’s access to contraception was proclaimed a right in the 1994 Revolutionary Women’s Law, this was later amended so that contraception became available only to married couples (Harvey, 1998: 225).

evinces a will to reconstruct certain practices to ensure their relevance to the elaboration of a progressive politics in the twentieth century.

The EZLN's identification as an ethnic movement has been questioned by Castells. He claims that the ethnic diversity of eastern Chiapas, which was created by the migration and forced resettlement in the Lacandón Jungle of Mexicans from other states and Chiapans from other regions, militates against the possibility of a unified indigenous identity constituting the basis for the mobilisation of the EZLN (Castells, 1997: 77). Collier and Lowery Quaratiello tacitly support this assessment, asserting that the movement was initially a peasant rebellion not outrightly concerned with indigenous or ethnic issues. Indeed, while they acknowledge that indigeneity became a key feature of the movement's discourse, they write that the EZLN was "first and foremost calling attention to the plight of Mexico's rural poor and peasants both indigenous and non-indigenous and their movement built on two decades of peasant organizing in Chiapas" (1999: 7). Despite these claims, I demonstrate throughout this thesis that the movement has always presented itself as, and has in actuality been, concerned centrally with the rights of the indigenous people of Mexico, specifically those of Chiapas. Indeed, the movement has heavily drawn on and advanced an ever growing national and international movement³⁹ which highlights the importance of recognising the specific rights of indigenous peoples. This is particularly evident in the EZLN's pursuit of autonomy.

A central element in the EZLN's attempts to facilitate the creation of a new Mexican state, within which new notions of indigenous identity are developed, is the establishment of autonomous zones for indigenous communities. Indeed, throughout 1994 autonomy became a significant feature of the EZLN's struggle for constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and its fight for the realisation of "freedom, democracy, and justice" for all Mexicans. The EZLN claims that to achieve these aims there needs to be a

³⁹ The most obvious evidence of a growing international movement of support for the realisation of indigenous rights is demonstrated by the International Labour Organisation's 1989 approval of Convention No. 169. This document represents an important step in the struggle for indigenous rights as it identifies indigenous peoples as unique, and therefore acknowledges that they have specific rights and needs (Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez, 2000: 83-84). The growing strength of the national indigenous movement will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

restructuring of the national economic, social and political systems. An important feature of this radical restructuring is the establishment of indigenous, democratic, autonomous communities. Indeed, the movement declares that:

The indigenous question will not have a solution if there is not a RADICAL transformation of the national pact. The only way to incorporate, with justice and dignity, the indigenous of the nation, is to recognise the unique characteristics of their social, cultural and political organisation. Autonomy is not separation, it is the integration of the most humiliated and forgotten minorities of contemporary Mexico (EZLN, 1995; emphasis in original; my translation).

The Mexican Government's unwillingness to engage with the issue of autonomy proved to be a major obstacle in the March 1994 peace talks during which the EZLN negotiators consistently maintained that peace would not be achieved without attending to this issue. These talks failed and, when dialogue resumed in 1995, the new Mexican Government under President Zedillo had not significantly altered this position. During the 1995 to 1996 negotiations the EZLN articulated its conception of autonomy as the creation of a fourth level of regional government whereby the indigenous communities would be granted self-government and judicial authority. The government negotiators rejected outright the proposed creation of a new level of government, but gave tacit, non-legally binding support to the notion of autonomy at a community level⁴⁰ (Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez, 2000: 92). Consequently, the resulting San Andrés peace accords did not attend to the legal or territorial implications of the EZLN's demands for autonomy.

Margarito Ruiz Hernández asserts that the process of dialogue during the San Andrés peace negotiations simply reaffirmed the government's perpetuation of a discourse which represented the nation's indigenous population as incapable of presenting a unified,

⁴⁰ Prior to the EZLN uprising the government unofficially allowed indigenous communities in Chiapas a degree of autonomy with respect to their methods of social organisation within the political divisions of the municipalities. Indeed, Lomelí González notes that "the municipal councils have been pervaded by the content of Indian culture. Municipal presidents and other authorities must be guardians of this material and spiritual good" (2000: 226). However, he goes on to point out that "[a]lthough these forms have existed from time immemorial, national society has refused to understand them, tolerate them or accept them. On the contrary, it denies them" (2000: 26). Thus, since these issues were brought to the fore by the 1994 Zapatista uprising the government has consistently refused to officially recognise the political and legal implications of the Zapatistas' demands for codification of indigenous rights, such as autonomy (2000: 226).

coherent position; incapable of negotiating for their own rights; and, *ipso facto*, incapable of governing autonomous zones. However, he also points out that the government's position was incongruous with the actual realities of the Mexican indigenous movement. Indeed, this movement had been growing in strength through the development of consensus-building processes since the issue of autonomy was raised at a national level in the early 1990s. At this time Ruiz Hernández, a Tojolabal Maya and PRD politician, presented a proposal⁴¹ to the Mexican Congress to amend the national Constitution so as to establish pluriethnic regions “as politico-administrative forms of organisation which would be invested with legal status and their own resources” (2000: 24). While this initial action did not prompt radical change, the PRD reinvigorated the process after the EZLN uprising by calling on the eminent Mexican sociologist and anthropologist Héctor Díaz-Polanco to formulate a “national legislative proposal” for constitutional reform which attended to indigenous rights (Ruiz Hernández, 2000: 24, 46). This led to the creation of the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (known by its Spanish acronym, ANIPA) which held seven national assemblies between April 1995 and 1998, all of which “were characteristic in that they were moulded by the hand of Indian peoples”, to examine, debate and rework the propositions so as to develop a national legislative proposal for autonomy (Ruiz Hernández, 2000: 32). Ruiz Hernández claims that this process encouraged the development of the nascent Mexican indigenous movement. Indeed, he asserts that between 1992 and 1995 it grew rapidly, due largely to the EZLN uprising, as various groups worked towards obtaining “legal recognition of the right to self-determination and the establishment of a system of regional autonomy” during the 1995 to 1996 peace dialogues between the Zapatistas and the Mexican Government (2000: 43). While the indigenous movement had largely consolidated itself by the time these negotiations began, some divisions still existed among the various groups. However these were, according to Ruiz Hernández, “differences in form but not in content” (2000: 43). Indeed, he asserts that through the ANIPA gatherings, the multifarious indigenous

⁴¹ Ruiz Hernández states that the proposal was written with the support of Héctor Díaz-Polanco, Gilberto López y Rivas, Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo, Pablo Gómez, Aracely Burguete and Mario Zepeda (2000: 46).

Mexican groups had arrived at a consensus of goals and aims, namely the right to self-determination and the construction of an integrated system of regional autonomy, which they articulated in early January 1996 during the EZLN convened National Indigenous Forum (Ruiz Hernández, 2000: 43). At this gathering the EZLN command “agreed to negotiate in strict compliance with the Forum’s agreements” (Ruiz Hernández, 2000: 44). However, the EZLN’s negotiators were unable to do this due to strong governmental opposition. The subsequent results of the peace negotiations were disappointing for the EZLN and its supporters insofar as the right to self-determination and autonomy was only to be accepted at a community level that had to be accommodated within the existing political structures. Thus, the EZLN was unsuccessful in its efforts to attain radical changes to the nation’s political structures (Ruiz Hernández, 2000: 44).

Ruiz Hernández claims that after the National Indigenous Forum, the majority of indigenous people who had participated as EZLN advisors and negotiators in the peace dialogue since October 1995 were excluded from the final stages of negotiations in which the peace accords were formulated. While the forum had enabled the indigenous people to articulate their concerns and goals to the EZLN, they were subsequently “pushed out of the negotiation process and relegated to a secondary role of observers” (Ruiz Hernández, 2000: 44). Indeed, Ruiz Hernández writes that “[h]aving given our opinion, it was no longer for Indians to make the decisions” (2000: 44). This claim is supported by the fact that, of the EZLN’s twenty-strong negotiating team, only six were indigenous delegates: five from Oaxaca and one from Michoacán (2000: 44):

That is to say, of a total of 40 negotiators [government and EZLN] who were going to decide on the future of the rights of the Indian peoples of the country, only six were indigenous of which, clearly, none were from Chiapas (Ruiz Hernández, 2000: 44).

While this somewhat weakens the EZLN’s claims to indigeneity, it can also be read as an expression of the indigenous people’s willingness to forge alliances with *mestizo* Mexicans. Moreover, the disappointing result perhaps better reflects the difficulties the negotiators encountered in their dealings with the inflexible government representatives,

rather than the EZLN's lack of commitment to codify indigenous rights. In consonance with this, Ruiz Hernández notes that "[t]he EZLN command was also in disagreement with the results negotiated by its own negotiators" (2000: 44-45). They agreed to sign them only after noting that they were "*minimal agreements*" which failed to satisfactorily attend to the central demands of both the EZLN and the wider movement of indigenous organisations in Mexico—namely the right to self-determination and autonomy (Ruiz Hernández, 2000: 45). While this does not adequately explain the lack of indigenous negotiators, particularly Chiapan Maya, it must be noted that in the only face-to-face encounter between the EZLN and the government since 1996—the EZLN's address to the national Congress at the end of its March for Indigenous Dignity in 2001—the EZLN representatives were all indigenous. This suggests that the EZLN have become more aware of the importance of the indigenous peoples publicly negotiating for their own rights. Though, it could be argued that this apparent change was simply a public relations spectacle and is not indicative of an ideological change within the EZLN. However, this thesis endeavours to demonstrate that, despite such occurrences, the EZLN is not a movement constituted by indigenous Maya who are co-opted by an "educated", "civilised" *mestizo*.

The EZLN's inability to initiate a productive dialogue with the government on issues of autonomy resulted not only from the Mexican Government's unwillingness, but also from changes occurring in international indigenous rights legislation. Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez locate the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) approval of Convention No. 169, which came into effect in 1991, as particularly relevant to the lack of progress in the struggle for indigenous autonomy in Mexico. At first consideration, this Convention appears to represent a positive development in international human rights as it is:

the first international instrument that explicitly rejects the integrationalist approach which has sustained government policies towards indigenous peoples for decades ... As is known, the fundamental premise of the old approach was that indigenous people had to renounce their own cultural forms and identities and, in effect, to disappear as such, through their 'integration' into the nation (Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez, 2000, 83-84).

While Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez point out the significance Convention No. 169 has for indigenous groups in “developing an indigenous conscience regarding the value of their own identity”, they also highlight its significant political limitations—namely its failure to provide an adequate structure or framework for the full realisation of self-determination and, thus, autonomy (2000: 84). They point out that, while the Convention is the first “[i]nternational instrument” to recognise “the indigenous as people”, the political and legal implications of this are qualified by the statement in Article 1.3 of the Convention that, “[t]he use of the term ‘peoples’ in this Convention shall not be construed as having any implications as regards the rights which may attach to the term under international law” (Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez, 2000: 83-84, 95). Consequently, this document does not codify the indigenous peoples rights to self-determination (Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez, 2000: 86). Díaz-Polanco and Sánchez argue that the Mexican Government has utilised the ILO’s Convention No. 169 to justify its continued denial of rights to the nation’s indigenous population, stating that:

In relation to the category of indigenous peoples, for example, the Mexican government has tried—as part of its strategy of non-fulfillment of the agreements signed [the San Andrés peace accords]—to interpret it by restricting itself to the limitations examined above, that is, it has endeavoured to make prevalent the idea of ‘peoples’ as dispersed villages or communities with certain socio-cultural characteristics but without the possibility of constituting themselves as political subjects or a form of government. This is a way of denying, in practice, the right to autonomy which is accepted in discourse (2000: 89).

While the government has complied with international laws which demand the acknowledgment of the special characteristics and rights of indigenous peoples, it has utilised this to highlight the diversity of the nation’s indigenous population in an attempt to limit to the state of Chiapas any political changes it concedes to the EZLN. It is a strategy used to deny the ability of the nation’s indigenous peoples to constitute themselves as active political subjects who can form cohesive, politically motivated movements capable of autonomy.

Despite the government’s refusal to recognise the indigenous people as political subjects, the EZLN has challenged this by establishing a number of self-governed autonomous

zones in Chiapas. Following the 1994 elections the Zapatistas proposed the creation of 29 rebel indigenous municipalities. Lomelí González states that by the end of that year the EZLN had assumed “territorial domination of almost 40% of the state, with great ideological and political influence in more than 80% of indigenous localities” (2000: 229). In response to these encroachments into its spheres of influence, the Chiapan State Government employed a variety of techniques to co-opt the councils of indigenous towns into their political program of support for the state and federal PRI Governments. These strategies involved “investment support” and the creation of the Secretariat for the Care of Indigenous Peoples which controlled the state indigenous policy and, along with the State Congress, “came to agreements to ensure the municipal authorities remained in line with the government” (Lomelí González, 2000: 228). Lomelí González claims that these actions caused conflict between the town councils and the indigenous population, creating an ever larger number of disaffected citizens who came to support the EZLN’s establishment of rebel municipalities. By 1997, the Zapatistas had “some sort of presence in 70 constitutional municipalities of the 111 that make up the political division of the state” (Lomelí González, 2000: 230). These “rebel” municipalities have become the targets of numerous military offensives aimed at reinstating PRI control. Thousands of members of these autonomous regions have been displaced—forced off their land—by the Mexican army and paramilitary groups, which many believe are sanctioned and supported by both the state and national branches of the PRI (Lomelí González, 2000: 231-235). Despite these incidences, Lomelí González asserts that the EZLN has reinvigorated the struggle for indigenous rights and autonomy in Mexico, claiming that:

From 1994 onwards, the process of autonomy and rebellion have been accelerated by the politico-ideological ingredient of Zapatismo, which has given new strength to it. During the four years of this process, military attacks, paramilitary offensives and smear campaigns in the media have not prevented the Indian towns from joining the rebellion, declaring themselves autonomous rebel municipalities in resistance (2000: 236).

The EZLN contends that its contemporary struggle draws on the indigenous Chiapans’ collective memory of resistance against repression. While the movement has reinterpreted and contemporised some indigenous practices, it presents this as evidence of

the indigenous peoples' ability and willingness to construct a politically progressive platform able to engender support for their overarching demands for the radical restructuring of Mexico's political, economic and social institutions and their concomitant discourses. Within this broad context of struggle, the EZLN's claim to indigeneity remains a predominant feature as demonstrated by the importance the movement assigns to the development of autonomous indigenous regions.

A new form of revolutionary movement

While the Zapatista movement is principally orchestrated by indigenous Chiapans and informed by their history of repression and impoverishment, it identifies itself as a national movement by locating the Mexican Government as the primary cause of its constituents' marginalisation. As such, the EZLN has called for the resignation of the government and a restructuring of the national political system. Despite the movement's advocacy of a radical politics, which in the Latin American region is traditionally associated with Marxist, Marxist-Leninist or Maoist ideology, the movement eschews traditional socialist vocabulary and agendas. Rather, the EZLN attempts to present itself as an alternative form of radical movement which is able to elaborate a politically progressive discourse attuned to its contemporary political context. To illustrate this point, Marcos declared at the end of 1994 that:

Something was broken in this year, not just the false image of modernity which neoliberalism was selling to us, not just the falsity of governmental projects, of institutional alms, not just the unjust neglect by the country of its original inhabitants, but also the rigid schemes of a left dedicated to living from and of the past. In the midst of this navigating from pain to hope, the political struggle finds itself bereft of the worn-out clothes bequeathed to it by pain; it is hope which obliges it to seek new forms of struggle, new ways of being political, of doing politics. A new politics, a new political ethic is not just a wish, it is the only way to advance, to jump to the other side (*Subcomandante Marcos in Holloway and Peláez, 1998: 15*).

The use of such highly emotive language is indicative of the purported humanitarian aspirations of a movement that claims to be intent on procuring improved living conditions for indigenous Chiapans and, more broadly, an egalitarian, democratic

Mexico. This objective appears somewhat contentious in light of the military uprising and the subsequent death of at least 196 Zapatista insurgents, Mexican soldiers and civilians⁴² (Knudson, 1998: 507). However, despite official government propaganda labelling the Zapatistas Marxist-Leninist sympathisers and linking the movement to the bloody atrocities allegedly inflicted by revolutionary groups in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua—ideas rapidly adopted in many initial media reports—it quickly became apparent that these poorly armed indigenous peasants represented a marked step away from the traditional guerrilla warfare movements of Latin America insofar as they were “an armed civil resistance” force which “never attempted to seize power” (García de León, 1995:12). Rather, the movement has been described as having “a radical democratic rather than a Marxist-Leninist discourse” (García de León, 1995: 12). While the EZLN originally seemed intent on pursuing a military struggle, their discourse quickly changed to focus on the pursuit of dialogue and the procurement of a peaceful solution. Indeed, after conducting an analysis of the communiqués and declarations produced by the EZLN between 1 January 1994 and 31 August 1995, Carroll concluded that “the Zapatistas sought dialogue over war ... The message contained in these Declarations was consistently directed toward dialogue and negotiation” (1997: 172).

The extent to which the EZLN distances itself from the more traditional Marxist, Marxist-Leninist or Maoist movements of the region is highlighted by its engagement with language. The EZLN argues that it does not rely on socialist terminology because the “old words [revolutionary vernacular] had become so worn out that they had become harmful for those that used them” (EZLN in Holloway, 1998: 180). This comment indicates that the EZLN believes that traditional revolutionary vocabulary has lost its potency and relevance and, thus, is not useful for a movement that attempts to produce a progressive conception of politics. Carr highlights the distinct and unique nature of the EZLN’s use of language when he notes that:

⁴² The number of casualties has been reported as up to “several hundred” (García de León, 1995: 10).

Much of the language of the Zapatista speeches and communiqués reveals traces of the encounter between urban Spanish and the rich metaphoric, symbolic and image-loaded language of the *indigenas* that often surfaces in their halting Spanish (1997).

The hybridity of the Zapatistas' language suggests that the movement is characterised by a unique relationship between its indigenous and *mestizo* members. This indicates, as I argue in the remainder of this thesis, that the EZLN can be understood as a cooperational or coalitional movement. However, the development of such a coalition was not a premeditated feature of the movement. Indeed, the urban, *mestizo Subcomandante Marcos* claims that he did not foresee the influence that the indigenous people, their language, and their traditional practices would have on the EZLN. When he first arrived in the jungles of Mexico's far southeast, reportedly as a member of the Maoist-influenced FLN movement, he saw the indigenous as "exploited people whom he had to organize and show the way" (Le Bot in Bruhn, 1999: 42). However, this task proved to be particularly difficult because his Western revolutionary discourse presented as alien and incomprehensible to the indigenous Maya of Chiapas. Consequently, he sought to incorporate their languages and traditional symbols into the discourse, which "allowed us [Marcos and the other *mestizo* members of the nascent EZLN] to find the subterranean frequency that so many Tzeltals, Tzotzils, [and] Choles are tuned in to" (*Subcomandante Marcos* in Bruhn, 1999: 42). Rather than this enabling the *mestizos* to more readily co-opt the Maya, Marcos claims it prompted him and his *mestizo* comrades to rethink their ideological perspectives. Such an ideological shift, according to Marcos, completely altered the intended nature of the movement because the adoption of indigenous words, concepts and organisational and decision-making practices firmly located it within the indigenous history and culture and, thus, within the collective memory of the Maya. Marcos claims that after this transformation occurred he became a "translator" of indigenous conceptions and ideas into a form comprehensible to the Spanish-speaking Mexican public (Le Bot in Bruhn, 1999: 43). While this may not be a completely faithful account of the movement's genesis, it does accord with the EZLN's political rhetoric which is not readily categorised within preexisting revolutionary

discourses.

Forging a political “space”

The struggle for the formation of a new democratic political “space” in Mexico is a key feature of the EZLN’s discourse. This “space”, the movement claims, is unable to be created within the confines of the existing political system. Rather, as the EZLN claimed in 1994, its struggle:

will not end in a new class, faction of a class, or group in power, but in a free and democratic ‘space’ for political struggle. This free and democratic ‘space’ will be born from the putrid cadaver of the State party system and presidentialism. A new political relation will be born (EZLN, 1994; my translation).

This statement clearly indicates the EZLN’s complete rejection of the existing political system. The necessity of creating a space within which an alternative politics could be constructed can be understood as the movement’s response to the pervasive presence of the PRI in political and civilian life in Mexico, as detailed in chapter one. Indeed, prior to the EZLN uprising, potential sites for successful national oppositional struggle free from PRI influence were very limited⁴³ because the party had infiltrated and gained control of the most fecund areas of potential resistance, namely labour unions and agrarian and indigenous organisations. It is in response to the practical reality of the omnipresence of the PRI in the political culture of Mexico that the EZLN has elaborated a concept of “space” within which an alternative politics can be constructed.

The EZLN’s attempts to facilitate the creation of a “space” where the nation’s people can debate and decide on the design of a future Mexican democracy reinforces the movement’s assertion that it is not seeking political power. Marcos articulates this position when he states that:

⁴³ This was beginning to change in the late 1980s with the rise of political opposition, namely the PRD, and the creation and consolidation of independent indigenous and agrarian movements, particularly in Chiapas.

The war should only be to open up space in the political arena so that people can really have a choice. It doesn't matter who wins, it doesn't matter if it's the extreme Right or the extreme Left, as long as they earn the confidence of the people ... We want to create the political space, and we want the people to have the education and the political maturity to make good choices (*Subcomandante Marcos in Benjamin, 1995: 61*).

The realisation of this space would only become possible, the EZLN argues, by operating outside the existing political system, claiming that to do otherwise would result in what they call a transition within a corrupt system that “simulates change in order for everything to remain the same” (EZLN, 1996a; my translation). Rather, they advocate:

the transition to democracy as reconstruction project for the nation; the defense of national sovereignty; justice and hope as desires; truth and the concept of *mandar obedeciendo*, to lead by obeying, as a guide for leadership; the stability and security given by democracy and freedom; dialogue, tolerance and inclusion as a new way of making politics (EZLN, 1996a; my translation).

As previously mentioned, the EZLN identifies the existing political systems of Mexico as the cause of the marginalisation and impoverishment of indigenous Mexicans and was forthright in calling for the government's overthrow in its declaration of war. In this communiqué, the *Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*, the government was termed a dictatorship and the EZLN called for the formation of a “government of our country that is free and democratic” (EZLN, 1993; my translation). The EZLN indicates that a principal facet of the new democratic political structure would be the election of a government that ruled “through obedience as a guide for leadership”: a concept which the EZLN most frequently refers to as *mandar obedeciendo*—to lead by obeying the people or constituents they represent. For the EZLN, *mandar obedeciendo* constitutes the core of democracy and the principal according to which the movement itself purports to operate. Thus, the EZLN envisages this concept as an essential component of the “new way of making politics” to be realised in the political “space” its struggle attempts to create.

The EZLN's calls for the creation of a new political system and its struggle for a space within which this can be constructed has directly challenged the political hegemony of the PRI by indicating the potential for alternative sites of political action in Mexico.

However, the space envisaged by the EZLN evades concrete definition for it operates outside existing modes of political thought. It is this very indefinability that constructs the concept of “space” as a useful tactic in the EZLN’s struggle to facilitate the restructuring of the Mexican political system.

A new political actor: civil society

The EZLN seeks to reinforce a humanist reading of its actions by repeatedly claiming that it is struggling for *todos por todo, nada por nosotros*—everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves. Consequently, while the movement states that “the EZLN has its conception of what [political] system and direction is best for the country”, it claims it does not intend to impose this on the nation (1994; my translation). Rather, the EZLN ascribes the task of determining Mexico’s political future to “civil society⁴⁴”—the social sector it contends should occupy and operationalise the democratic “space” the movement aims to realise. The EZLN defines civil society as those who participate in political action through community organisations; those who do not aspire to public office; and those who are not aligned with a particular political party (EZLN, 2001a: 128). Therefore, civil society is presented as a community rather than a political structure. However, Blake contends that “[i]n Chiapas, the separation between civil society and the political sphere has not proven to be as clear-cut and simple as theory or Zapatista rhetoric would have it appear” (1996: 129). To illustrate her point, she notes that some members of organisations that claim to be, and are accepted to be by the EZLN, representatives of civil society are also closely linked to institutionalised political parties

⁴⁴ Cleaver claims that, “[w]hile it has become commonplace to discuss social movements and their activities” using terms such as civil society, “such vocabulary is highly problematic and vague” (1998: 622). I agree with this assessment, and the following section attempts to elucidate the meanings that the EZLN assigns to its notion of civil society, rather than reify the concept.

and structures⁴⁵. However, the EZLN's discourse does not attend to the conflation of the political and civil realms. Indeed, it positions civil society as a separate sphere that first emerged in Mexico City in the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake which destroyed a significant amount of the city's infrastructure and killed at least 10,000 people (Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen, 1997: 19). Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen claim that in the aftermath of the earthquake "[n]either the government nor the community organizations of the ruling PRI proved capable of organizing rescue actions, post-earthquake relief or housing reconstruction" (1997: 19). In response to government inaction, it is widely recognised that numerous grassroots community and church groups formed, and then forged alliances with international NGOs, in an effort to assist those affected (Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen, 1997: 19). The EZLN identifies these groups as the beginnings of what they call Mexican civil society—a social sector which they claim has further consolidated its strength since the EZLN uprising. To illustrate this, in 1996 the movement wrote:

Today, eleven years later [after the earthquake], the political forces with the most moral authority, legitimacy, and efficacy aren't the political parties or the government. The community organisations in today's Mexico are the only credible forces (EZLN, 2001a: 129).

The EZLN's call to civil society did not present as an initial facet of the movement's discourse it only became a feature when the movement publicly credited this group for initiating an end to the military battle and for prompting the EZLN's consequent pursuit of peaceful dialogue. At this time, the EZLN claimed that:

another force superior to any political or military power, imposed its will on the parties involved in conflict. Civil society assumed the duty of preserving our country [ending the military battle], it showed its disapproval of the massacre and

⁴⁵ Blake states that after the EZLN uprising three main Chiapan bodies formed that claimed to be representative of state-wide civil society. These were the *Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas Campesino* (CEOIC), the State Council of Indigenous Peasant Organisations, the *Asemblea Estatal Democrática del Pueblo Chiapaneco* (AEDPCH), the State Democratic Assembly of the Chiapan People, and the Government of Resistance in Rebellion—a parallel Chiapan Government established in response to what many Chiapans identified as the illegitimacy of the "elected" PRI State Government (Blake, 1996: 124-125). Blake then points out direct links between key figures in these groups and institutionalised political parties. One such example is that of Jorge Arturo Luna who had been a central figure in the AEDPCH and the parallel Government, as well as being the interim leader of the state PRD in early 1996 (1996: 129).

it obliged the parties to dialogue [the EZLN and the government] (EZLN, 1994; my translation).

From this point on, the EZLN began to position outright civil society as both the main facilitator and beneficiary of political and social change within the nation. This indicates that the movement had recognised that its pursuit of armed struggle would lack the support of the general populace and, therefore, was highly unlikely to succeed. This required the EZLN to enact a strategic shift resulting in the elaboration of a morally advantageous and popular discourse that emphasised the role of civil society and peaceful dialogue as the means through which its envisaged social, economic and political changes would be effected. This discourse claims that civil society would fill the political “space” the EZLN was struggling to create. Within this new political “space” the EZLN envisaged that the various constituents of civil society would engage in dialogue with the aim of reaching a consensus concerning the design of the future democratic structures of Mexico.

The EZLN alleges that it attempts to distance itself from the decision-making processes of the bodies that claim to represent civil society in accordance with the notion of *mandar obedeciendo*. However, the movement did initiate the construction of an organisational framework within which civil society could interact. In the *Second Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*, the EZLN called “on all honest sectors of civil society to attend a National Dialogue for Democracy, Freedom and Justice for all Mexicans” (EZLN, 1994; my translation)—a dialogue it envisaged would result in the participants’ formulation of a consensus in regards to the future action they wished to be undertaken by the EZLN and the shape of a new Mexican democracy. This dialogue materialised as the *Convención Nacional Democrática* (CND), the National Democratic Convention, held from 8 to 10 August 1994—a week before the national presidential elections—in an amphitheatre constructed by the EZLN in the jungle of the Chiapan highlands. Around 6000 people traveled to the CND and, despite the convention’s failure to produce consensus, Blake claims that “[t]he outcome nevertheless, left delegates and the country with a sense of optimism about the strength of popular movements’ potential to mobilize peacefully against the state-party system, and the EZLN’s commitment to search for a peaceful

resolution to the conflict” (1996: 35). However, Bruhn offers a different reading, noting that the divisions among the CND participants widened and deepened and it eventually “fell apart amid bitter internal disputes over ideology, tactics, and control” (1999: 35).

The EZLN’s call to civil society appears to be an attempt to broaden the movement’s constituency and appeal beyond that provided by a sole focus on indigeneity. While the EZLN recognised the CND’s failure to realise the radical political restructuring of the nation which the movement had hoped for, it continued to elaborate a discourse which positioned the members of civil society as the nation’s key political actors. This enabled the EZLN to maintain the moral authority engendered by its refusal to present as a vanguard movement intent on imposing its own political ideas on the nation’s populace. However, in order to reinvigorate civil society’s role in the development of a new Mexican politics, and to reinforce the EZLN’s commitment to this community sector, the movement established the *Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (FZLN), The Zapatista Front of National Liberation, in January 1996. The FZLN was intended to provide a “space for citizen political action where other political forces of the independent opposition come together to discern a popular will and coordinate united actions” (EZLN, 1996a; my translation). It can, thus, be identified as the political arm, though not an institutional political party, of the EZLN. At the same time the EZLN also reoriented its discourse of civil society, shifting from its national focus to a discourse that incorporated international politically independent community groups and NGOs—what the movement identifies as international civil society. By harnessing the support of groups that the EZLN claim are part of international civil society, the movement attempted to advance its political struggle by demonstrating the strength and potential political influence of civil movements world-wide. It can also be read as an attempt to increase pressure on the Mexican Government to attend to the EZLN’s demands, something national civil society had hitherto been unable to achieve. Therefore, while the EZLN locates its struggle within a national framework, it has sought to advance its national political aims by engaging with international non governmental and grassroots organisations.

The EZLN claims that its relationship with international civil society has had a significant global impact. This has resulted from the movement's construction of a network of support for people throughout the world who have been marginalised and repressed by the implementation of neoliberal economic policies. While the EZLN's discourse does suggest that many people around the world are victims of the same monolithic force of neoliberalism, it acknowledges that the manner in which this exploitation manifests itself cannot be generalised across different environments, cultures, times, spaces and histories (EZLN, 1994; my translation). Thus, the Zapatistas' discourse simultaneously universalises the fight of humanity worldwide as one against neoliberalism, claiming that this economic doctrine constitutes the "new world war against humanity", while acknowledging that these struggles are formed and waged by distinct means in response to divergent experiences of repression (EZLN, 1996c; my translation). To encourage dialogue among the groups the EZLN claims constitute international civil society, the movement invited "all who struggle for the human values of democracy, freedom and justice" to join the First Intercontinental *Encuentro* for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism to be held in 1996. These people were invited to articulate their experiences of life under neoliberalism, how they resist repression, and the possibility of future united actions to support each other's struggles. The *Encuentro* concluded with the resolve to develop an "intercontinental network of resistance" that would "be the medium in which distinct resistances may support one another" (EZLN, 1996c; my translation). This was not to be an organised group with a hierarchical power structure, but a loosely defined support network made up of those who resisted, or supported others who resisted, marginalisation and repression. In a demonstration of international support for the Zapatistas, a second intercontinental encounter was held in Spain in 1997. Moreover, in 1999, the EZLN held the second of its international *consultas* (referendums) to discern how the movement's supporters judged its performance, with an overwhelmingly positive response.

The Zapatistas look beyond their national borders, thus challenging modernist conceptions of the power of nation-states, to effect political change within their own site of struggle—the nation of Mexico. The EZLN's strategies of gaining international support are also

evident in the movement's construction of an intercontinental network of resistance fuelled by communication tactics, principally the internet, which "will search to weave the channels so that the word [of those marginalised by neoliberalism] may travel all the roads that resist" (EZLN, 1996c; my translation). The EZLN, and most importantly, those who sympathise with and support the movement, have already utilised the internet to great effect to garner world-wide attention—as will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Indeed, the rapid dissemination of information on the internet about the Zapatista uprising captured the attention of national and international media and, importantly, many NGOs, resulting in over 140 such organisations arriving in Chiapas during the first week of the armed struggle (Bob, 1997: 170). These NGOs rallied further international support for the Zapatista movement via the construction of their own websites and their dissemination of information world-wide.

The struggle for dignity

The key discourses elaborated by the EZLN are produced in response to the political context that both led to, and resulted from, the 1994 uprising. The EZLN's focus on indigeneity and the pursuit of autonomy can be understood as attempts to construct a new subjectivity for the indigenous peoples of Mexico—specifically its ethnic Maya constituents from eastern Chiapas. This new subjectivity positions the indigenous peoples as active political agents fighting against what the EZLN claims are the marginalising and repressive neoliberal economic policies of the Mexican Government. The movement's attempts to construct a "free and democratic space" which would facilitate the creation of an alternative site of politics is a reaction against the pervasive presence of the PRI in all areas of Mexican political and civilian life. The importance the EZLN ascribes to its conception of civil society, both nationally and internationally, further articulates the EZLN's rejection of the existing Mexican political structures and its attempts to support the creation of a new political subject. The strategic deployment of these discourses—that is, the EZLN's selective engagement with them in accordance with political salience—has significantly contributed to furthering the EZLN's struggle. This has been achieved through the elaboration of a discourse of dignity which

selectively draws on each facet of the EZLN's discursive agenda in a transitory, reactive manner, primarily in response to the political strategies employed by the Mexican Government. This enables the EZLN to constantly and consciously renegotiate its discursive strategies so as to confound the government, and to highlight the inability of the nation's existing political structures to attend to the EZLN's demands. This section serves to illustrate the centrality of a fluid, amorphous conception of dignity to the EZLN's discursive and, therefore, political struggle. This also lays the foundation for the analysis, elaborated in chapter five, of the ability of the discourse of dignity to destabilise and disrupt the dominant Mexican political structures to such an extent that a new discursive space is opened up within which radical, politically progressive ideas can be articulated.

The following analysis of how the EZLN has employed the term "dignity" in its key declarations, communiqués, and speeches from the declaration of war on New year's Eve, 1993 to the March for Indigenous Dignity in 2001, demonstrates that the movement's notion of dignity evades a concrete definition. This characteristic enables it to be used strategically in order to increase the points of resistance against the Mexican political hegemony and, thus, maximise its effectiveness. Indeed, the EZLN's employment of the term can be understood as strategic insofar as there is a direct correlation between the various meanings the movement assigns to the term and the contextual vicissitudes of the broader political situation of the Chiapan conflict. This became first evident in *Subcomandante Marcos's* use of the term in an essay released on 27 January 1994 (a document he claims to have written in August 1992)—a few weeks prior to the first peace negotiations (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 2001a). At this time, the EZLN needed to increase its support base to maximise its political force. The movement attempted to gain sympathisers for its cause by illustrating the impoverished, repressed conditions of the indigenous Chiapans and emphasising the government's role in creating and sustaining these. The EZLN also needed to present as having both the legitimacy and ability to negotiate with the government. To increase its support and establish its legitimacy, the EZLN employed a discourse of dignity linked to the indigenous Maya's

history of struggle against repression. In his essay Marcos writes:

THESE PEOPLE [the Chiapan Maya] WERE BORN dignified and rebellious, brothers and sisters to the rest of Mexico's exploited people. They are not just the product of the Annexation Act of 1824⁴⁶, but of a long chain of ignominious acts and rebellions. From the time when cassocks and armor conquered this land, dignity and defiance have lived and spread under these rains (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 2001a: 33; emphasis in original).

The EZLN emphasised the importance of the concept of dignity in the peace negotiations of early 1994, presenting it as a necessary component of any resulting peace accord. Indeed, the government's peace proposals were deemed "undignified" by the EZLN and, as such, were rejected (EZLN, 1994; my translation). A key factor that contributed to the failure of these negotiations was the national government's insistence on limiting any potential political reform to the state of Chiapas. The government's attempts to present the movement as solely a localised phenomenon were at odds with the EZLN's demands for national political, economic and social reform. Following the failed peace negotiations, the EZLN reoriented its discourse of dignity. It moved away from a singular focus on the Chiapan Maya's historical links to the concept, to a more general, national notion. Thus, signalling a shift away from an overt regional, localised conception to one which presented dignity as a characteristic of all Mexican people who do not hold political office. This shift can be understood as an attempt by the EZLN to establish its credentials as a national movement in response to the government's efforts to prevent it from advocating for national-level political reforms.

The EZLN's *Second Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*, released in June 1994, reinforces the movement's national political focus. In this document the EZLN emphasises a conception of dignity that is antithetical to the ideologies that produce the existing political and judicial systems of Mexico. The movement asserts that the inadequacies of the existing political and judicial structures have prevented the creation

⁴⁶ In 1824, the people of the "Free State of Chiapas" voted in favour of joining Mexico. Thus, on 14 September 1824, Chiapas was formally annexed by Mexico (Benjamin, 1989: 11).

of a suitable peace proposal stating that “[i]f the legislature and the judges have no dignity, then others who do understand that they should serve the people, and not an individual [the president], will step forward” (EZLN, 1994; my translation). Furthermore, the EZLN suggests that those who operate within the existing systems and their concomitant discourses not only lack dignity, but are unable to comprehend the concept. The EZLN claims that the government demonstrated this lack of understanding when it attempted to appease the EZLN and silence its demands for a peace with justice and dignity by implementing an program of extensive financial aid in the state of Chiapas in response to the uprising. Indeed, this prompted the EZLN to declare that its constituents “will not accept the handouts offered by the government in exchange for their dignity” (1994; my translation).

Once again, a more inclusive notion of dignity is evident when the EZLN calls on national civil society in the *Second Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*, not just the nation’s indigenous inhabitants or the population of Chiapas, to assume the role of constructing new political relations in Mexico. In this document the movement claims that it is the Mexican people—through their participation in the community organisations that the EZLN claims constitute Mexican civil society—that possess the characteristic of dignity which implores them to resist the undemocratic rule of the hegemonic PRI. As such, the EZLN asks:

What good are the riches of the powerful if they aren’t able to buy the most valuable thing in these lands? If the dignity of all Mexicans has no price, then what good is the power of the powerful? (1994; my translation).

In this declaration the EZLN employs its nationalised discourse of dignity to directly challenge government efforts to confine the political implications of the uprising to the state of Chiapas. While this document also alludes to a privileged link between dignity and indigenous Chiapans, it does not present the concept of dignity as the exclusive domain of indigenous peoples. The EZLN’s shift to a more general notion of dignity can be understood as a change in tactic prompted by the failure of the peace negotiations.

Ernesto Zedillo's accession in December 1994 to the office of the presidency did not stimulate any change to the stalemate that had existed between the national government and the EZLN since the failure of the early 1994 peace negotiations. Under Zedillo, the government continued to present the EZLN as intransigent rebels who refused to negotiate, while the EZLN sought to legitimate its refusal to participate in dialogue by highlighting the government's unwillingness to provide a suitable framework for negotiations. This deadlocked situation led to a battle for moral authority—a battle within which the discourse of dignity (which the EZLN utilised synonymously with a struggle for basic human rights such as freedom) came to be the movement's key weapon. Within this discourse the EZLN established a binary between the undignified government on the one hand, and the EZLN's possession of the moral authority of dignity on the other. *Subcomandante* Marcos articulates this position in a letter written to President Zedillo, following his inaugural Presidential speech:

'we' [the EZLN and its supporters] are thousands of Mexicans scattered throughout our national territory. We are men and women, children and old people, who have recuperated, together with the word *dignity*, the conviction that human beings should struggle to be free if they are slaves, and once free, should struggle so that other human beings also can be free. We know that our refusal to a dialogue under the conditions that you propose will make a military solution your first choice in future decisions. We do not fear death nor history's judgment (*Subcomandante* Marcos, 2001c: 77).

This battle for moral authority, and consequently for the support of the Mexican populace, presents as key to understanding the respective discursive strategies pursued by the EZLN and the government as the conflict moved into its second year. In January 1995, the EZLN released its *Third Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle* in which the concept of dignity was not only presented as something which the government lacked and could not comprehend, but also as a basic human right which they actively denied to indigenous Chiapans. The document asserts that this situation had worsened since the January 1994 uprising because, despite the cease-fire, the government had ordered the Mexican army to engage in military action against the Zapatistas, encircle the Zapatista communities, and restrict the Zapatistas' movements. The movement states that:

Waiting for signs of the government's willingness to accept a political, just and dignified solution to the conflict, the EZLN watched, powerlessly, as the best children of Chiapan dignity were assassinated, jailed and threatened (1995; my translation).

The use of a variation of dignity twice in this sentence—as an adjective for the EZLN's envisaged peace agreement and to refer to the indigenous Chiapans' history of struggle—signals the way the EZLN uses the term to represent its moral authority. It also indicates the EZLN's recognition of the usefulness of its discourse of dignity as a means of intervening in the political rhetoric espoused by the Mexican Government. This is reinforced by the movement's claims that:

While the supreme government demonstrated its falseness and arrogance, we, by one gesture after another, dedicated ourselves to showing the Mexican people our social support base, the justness of our demands and the dignity that motivates our struggle (EZLN, 1995; my translation).

The EZLN asserts that the government's refusal to establish a framework for peace negotiations which would enable the pursuit of national political reforms is the principal obstacle preventing the constitutional recognition and Constitutional codification of the dignity of the nation's indigenous people. The continued militarisation which occurred in the EZLN-controlled zones in Chiapas, despite the cease-fire, is provided as further evidence of the government's lack of dignity. On the contrary, the EZLN's refusal to engage militarily is presented as evidence of their position of moral authority. This position was strengthened in February 1995 when President Zedillo ordered raids on suspected EZLN strongholds, “unmasked” *Subcomandante* Marcos as Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, and issued arrest warrants for him and other suspected EZLN leaders. Indeed, Ruiz Hernández notes in relation to these incidents that “[s]uch was the indignation of the people and the civil response that the government had to put a halt to its belligerent actions and agree to a legal framework for the peace negotiation process” (2000: 43).

At the end of 1995 the EZLN's discourse of dignity experienced a significant shift away from its more general conception towards a renewed emphasis on the specific

relationship between dignity and indigenous Chiapans. This shift occurred during the planning stages for the second round of peace negotiations which began in 1995. At this point in the conflict the EZLN's attempts to establish a national framework for civil society through the National Democratic Convention (as called for in the *Second Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*), and efforts to establish a National Liberation Movement to unite the diverse resistance groups throughout the nation (as called for in the *Third Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*), had failed to advance the struggle. This necessitated a new round of peace dialogues between the EZLN and the Mexican Government. The perceived failure of civil society to establish a radically new politics in Mexico, and the EZLN's subsequent resumption of the key negotiating role, meant that it was no longer as important for the movement to emphasise a relationship between dignity and all Mexican people. Rather, the theme of indigeneity became central once again. This discursive alteration was highlighted in October 1995 when the EZLN wrote that "the color of the skin does not define the indigenous person: dignity and the constant struggle to be better define him" (2001b: 84). This statement positions dignity as an attribute of indigenous Mexicans, seemingly to the exclusion of all others.

The importance of indigeneity to the EZLN and its elaboration through the discourse of dignity was again evident in December 1995 in a communiqué written by *Subcomandante Marcos*. In this document, Marcos employs the character of *el viejo Antonio*, old Antonio—a Maya elder—to engage with Mayan mythology in order to elucidate a contemporary situation faced by the EZLN. This particular story recounts the importance of dreams to the Mayan people. It tells of how the first Mayan gods inhabited a world created through their dreams which was "very big, and [where] everyone [was] free as a bird" (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 2001e: 381). The Maya believe that the human world should be a mirror of the gods' world of dreams. However, Old Antonio asserts that "[r]ight now, the world is flawed. It doesn't reflect the dream world where the first gods live" (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 2001e: 381). He continues:

That's why the gods gave the men of corn⁴⁷ a mirror called dignity. In it, men are equal and rebel if they are not equal. That's why our first grandparents rebelled, and that's why they die inside us today so that we may live. The mirror of dignity destroys the demons who deal in darkness. Seen in the mirror, the lord of darkness reflects the nothingness from which He's made. Being nothing, he melts into nothingness before the mirror of dignity, the lord of darkness, the divider of the world (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 2001e: 381).

Here, dignity is intimately linked to the Mayan people, their mythology and their ancestors. It is presented as a gift of the gods which enables the Maya to fight against those who marginalise and repress them, namely the demons, or their modern day incarnate, the Mexican Government. Dignity is established as the attribute which enables the Maya to struggle for equality. The EZLN's refocus on dignity's significance to the indigenous Maya corresponds with the broader political discourse elaborated by the movement at this time. Indeed, this discursive shift coincided with negotiations between the EZLN and the Mexican Government to develop national political reforms that dealt specifically with indigenous rights and culture—the principal focus of the 1995 to 1996 peace negotiations.

In January 1996, after the first round of these peace dialogues had finished and just prior to the EZLN-convened National Indigenous Forum, the movement released its *Fourth Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*. In this document there is an increasingly strong focus on indigenous issues. Indeed, dignity is used most frequently to refer directly to indigeneity, as demonstrated in the movement's claim that “when the homeland speaks its Indigenous heart, it will have dignity and memory” (EZLN, 1996a; my translation). Outwardly confident after what seemed to have been productive dialogues with the government, the EZLN claimed that:

The image of the ignorant Indian, pusillanimous and ridiculous, the image which the powerful had decreed for national consumption, was shattered, and pride and indigenous dignity returned to history in order to take the place it deserves: that of complete and capable citizens (1996s; my translation).

⁴⁷ According to the Mayan creation myth, the gods made the Maya from corn. Corn is also the staple food of the Chiapan Maya and, thus, the sustenance of life in the region.

This statement indicates that the primarily indigenous constituents of the EZLN were presenting themselves as effective negotiators who had managed to successfully challenge the ideological positions of, and gain concessions from, the government by establishing indigenous people as “complete and capable citizens”. The EZLN’s focus on its recuperation of dignity can be seen as a strategic manoeuvre, for the document was released just prior to the National Indigenous Forum—a time when it was imperative that the EZLN justify to the nation’s indigenous representatives its role as the key indigenous negotiating body. The EZLN also needed to maintain the moral authority so as to legitimate its attempts to seek further concessions from the Mexican Government in the next round of negotiations. As part of its concerted efforts to achieve this, the movement stated:

Today, as tens of thousands of federal soldiers attack and harass a people [the Maya] armed with wooden guns and the word of dignity, the high officials of the government finish selling off the wealth of the great Mexican nation and destroy the little which was left (1996a; my translation).

This declaration further acknowledges the hitherto lack of political success of civil society by attempting to reinvigorate its importance through the creation of the FZLN—an organisation of politically independent people and groups aligned with the Zapatistas.

While the EZLN did pursue a third attempt to create a national body of civil society in establishing the FZLN, the *Fourth Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle’s* focus on indigeneity and the role of the EZLN in the peace negotiations, indicates that the movement was no longer relying solely on national civil society to assume the role of central protagonist in the struggle. This shift away from the overt link between civil society and dignity in the EZLN’s discourse became more evident in another document released later in the same month of January 1996, entitled the *First Declaration from La Realidad*. This declaration called for the convening of the First Intercontinental *Encuentro* for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism. As mentioned earlier, this document constitutes an invitation to members of international civil society to travel to Chiapas in order to discuss the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of “how one lives

under neoliberalism, how one resists it, how one struggles and proposes struggles against it and for humanity” (EZLN, 1996b; my translation). This represents another significant shift in the EZLN’s discourse of dignity, whereby the term came to refer not to an indigenous attribute or to a characteristic of Mexican civil society, but rather to a universal human attribute. This is illustrated by the EZLN’s claim that “[d]ignity is that nation without nationality, that rainbow that is also a bridge, the murmur of the heart no matter what blood lives in it, that rebel irreverence that mocks borders, customs and wars” (1996b; my translation).

The *First Declaration from La Realidad* generalises a loss of dignity to all those throughout the world who recognise themselves as repressed and impoverished as a result of the economic logic of neoliberalism. Indeed, the declaration states that:

Above borders, no matter race or colour, the Power of money humiliates dignities, insults honesties and assassinates hopes. Re-named as ‘Neoliberalism,’ the historic crime of the concentration of privileges, riches and impunities, democratises misery and despair (1996, First dec)

By claiming that neoliberalism is a universal threat, the EZLN is also able to universalise the notion of dignity as both that which is attacked by neoliberalism, and that which enables resistance against this economic and political logic so as to struggle for the realisation of basic human rights. The universalisation of the term dignity can be understood within the context of the EZLN conflict as a move to reinvigorate and broaden support for the movement in order to strengthen its ability to force the Mexican Government to firstly, sign the San Andrés peace accords; and secondly, to convert them into law. National civil society had proven unable to achieve dramatic social, economic and political change, subsequently forcing the EZLN to look beyond Mexico’s borders in order to fulfil its nationally focused objectives. Therefore, in order to gain the support of, and engage with, the groups the EZLN identifies as constituting international civil society, the movement presents dignity as a universal human attribute.

The government's continued failure to convert the peace accords into law⁴⁸ prompted the EZLN to cease all communication with it at the end of 1996. Consequently, the EZLN's next major document, the *Fifth Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*, was not released until July 1998. Significantly, this document was released after the political landscape of Mexico had undergone its most important changes since the PRI's creation in 1929—the PRI's loss in 1997 of its majority in the nation's Congress. This change in congressional make-up prompted the EZLN to suggest the possibility that the existing political system may be able to be reshaped so as to become a legitimate, productive, and dignified institution. This attitude is evident when the EZLN notes that “[t]he new political composition of the lower and upper chambers presents the challenge of dignifying legislative work” (1998; my translation). While this declaration also mentions the links between dignity and indigeneity, and those evident between dignity and all “honest Mexicans”, which seems to correlate with the group the EZLN identifies as civil society, the suggestion that the existing political structure could produce dignified acts contradicts the movements' insistence since 1994 on establishing a clear dichotomy between those who have dignity and the undignified government and its political, judicial and economic structures. However, while this seems to indicate a significant ideological shift, it can also be understood as part of the EZLN's elaboration of a discursive strategy in which dignity is a fluid, changeable concept that alters in response to the strategies and tactics employed by the movement's principal adversary, the Mexican Government. Indeed, it came at a time when the EZLN seemed to have lost some of its political momentum, following its period of self-imposed silence in response to the government's failure to ratify the San Andrés peace accords. The movement may have been attempting to demonstrate its continued commitment to achieving the codification of indigenous rights through whatever means necessary. Thus, it could be explained as a strategic rather than an ideological shift.

⁴⁸ The COCOPA Law was eventually ratified by the Mexican Congress in 2001, however, the document had been subjected to so many amendments that it bore little resemblance to the 1996 document to which the EZLN and the government of the day had agreed. This prompted the EZLN to once again cease communicating with the government.

The government's failure to convert the San Andrés peace accords into law and thus, the Congress's failure to "dignify" its work, resulted in the movement principally pursuing a strategy of silence until the year 2000. Even the defeat of the PRI in the elections of that year, and in spite of Fox's proclamation that he could resolve the Chiapas conflict in 15 minutes did not illicit a hopeful response from the EZLN. Indeed, the EZLN publicised its suspicion of the PAN in 1996, stating that the party had already demonstrated its "repressive, intolerant and reactionary" nature, and noting that "[t]hose who see hope in the rise of neo-PANism forget that a substitution in a dictatorship is not democracy" (1996a; my translation). However, following Vicente Fox's Presidential inauguration in December 2000, and his introduction of the COCOPA Law, developed from the San Andrés peace accords, the EZLN announced that in February 2001 the movement would embark on the March for Indigenous Dignity—a march of 23 *comandantes* and *Subcomandante* Marcos through the states of southern and central Mexico with the aim of addressing Congress in order to implore the ratification of the COCOPA Law. By declaring that the march was concerned overtly with the dignity of the nation's indigenous people, the EZLN again positioned the concept as something which the national government lacked. Moreover, the title of the march and its subsequent agenda can be understood as an outright rebuke of Fox, who had issued numerous public statements inviting *Subcomandante* Marcos to talk with him in order to swiftly resolve the conflict. The idea of two *mestizos* resolving the issues of indigenous dignity seems quite farcical in light of the EZLN's attempts to position the nation's indigenous people as politically conscious social actors.

The march reinforced the centrality of dignity to the EZLN's political program and presented it as a concept which had to be legally recognised by the government, to be demonstrated by the passage of the COCOPA Law, before a framework for peace negotiations could be discussed. Thus, no longer was the EZLN calling for a peace with dignity—a concept the Salinas, Zedillo and Fox Governments had all appropriated in their respective discourses—but they were demanding to be treated with dignity before any peace negotiations would be held. Once again, the EZLN utilised the term in a manner which highlighted the government's, and the existing political system's, inability

to adequately understand and attend to the complexity of the concept.

While the term dignity was used throughout the EZLN's 2001 march, it was at the movement's appearance in the city of Puebla that it was most extensively employed. In the *zocálo* of one of nation's largest cities, *Subcomandante* Marcos delivered a speech in which the imprecision of the concept and the EZLN's ability to use the term to continuously confound the Mexican Government was highlighted. This became evident when Marcos, claiming that "[t]hrough my voice speaks the voice of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation", stated that dignity is "[a] word perhaps for which you will not find its true meaning straight away. A word which needs time and wind in order to find its place in the heart of all of us" (*Subcomandante* Marcos, 2001f; my translation). This speech emphasised the centrality of the discourse of dignity to the EZLN's political agenda, while also maintaining the ambiguity of the concept by referring to it as a bridge, a gaze, a house and a world. Marcos stated that, "dignity is a bridge" that "needs two sides which, being different, distinct and distant, make one in the bridge without ceasing to be different and distinct, but ceasing to be distant". And also that "[d]ignity is therefore a gaze. A gaze at ourselves that also gazes at the other gazing at themselves and gazing at us." To conclude, he asserted that:

Dignity is, therefore, a house which includes the other and ourselves. Dignity is, therefore, a house with only one floor, where we and the other have our own places—that this, and nothing else, is life—but the same house. Therefore dignity should be the world, a world where many worlds fit (*Subcomandante* Marcos, 2001f; my translation).

By describing the term dignity with such poetic license, it seems that the concept not only evades a specific definition, but that the EZLN consciously refuses to prescribe it one. This thesis argues that dignity is effective for the EZLN precisely because it lacks a specific meaning, therefore enabling the movement to use the term as part of its strategy to confound the Mexican Government. This demonstrates the inadequacies of the existing political, economic and social structures and legitimates the movement's demands for these structures to be radically overhauled. The effectiveness of the EZLN's elaboration

of a discourse of dignity is explored in detail in chapter five.

Conceptualising the EZLN: views from the outside

The movement which embarked on an armed uprising on 1 January 1994—only to sign a cease-fire twelve days later and, from then on, claim to be seeking to address its grievances through peaceful dialogue—has been defined and classified in numerous ways by politicians, journalists, social activists, NGOs and academics. However, central to all analyses of the movement are debates concerning issues of identity, representation and agency. Indeed, a theme common to interpretations of the EZLN is the negation of its claims to be constructed and directed by its indigenous constituents. Instead, many argue that the movement is informed by Marxist, Marxist-Leninist or Maoist ideology and, consequently, represents a struggle based on issues of class—in this case the peasantry—rather than ethnicity or race. Moreover, such interpretations focus on the role of the EZLN's *mestizo* spokesperson, *Subcomandante* Marcos, in dictating the revolutionary ideologies that shape the EZLN. Neo-Marxist Gramscian interpretations of the movement also focus on Marcos—identifying him as a charismatic, intellectual spokesperson capable of initiating and directing a program of ideological warfare. Both the Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses tend to ascribe the EZLN's strategies to Marcos, consequently presenting the movement's indigenous constituents as lacking in political agency. Other analysts, wary of assigning the movement wholly to existing revolutionary traditions due to concerns that this would fail to attend to the influence of internet technology, claim that the EZLN represents a new form of movement. These analysts have defined the EZLN as the world's "first postmodern revolutionary movement" (Burbach, 2001: 116), the "*first informational guerrilla movement*" (Castells, 1997: 79; emphasis in original), and the "first social netwar" (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 1). The aim of this section is to elucidate the many varied ways in which the EZLN has been understood and, in so doing, to demonstrate the significance of issues of identity, representation and agency to analyses of the movement. Moreover, the existing interpretations of the EZLN are shown to inadequately attend to these issues.

From regional dispute to national disaster: the Mexican Government and the EZLN

As the EZLN's principal adversary, it is not surprising that the Mexican Government has defined the movement in ways which contradict the EZLN's self-definition. Indeed, when the scale of the uprising was determined, the Mexican Government under the presidency of Carlos Salinas, refuted the movement's claims to indigeneity, asserting that it was principally orchestrated by foreigners and urban Mexican Marxist insurgents who had co-opted the local indigenous Chiapans. This argument was consonant with the government's attitude towards the nation's indigenous people, serving to reinforce their ostensible lack of agency. However, the collapse of the 1994 peace negotiations and Ernesto Zedillo's accession to the presidency at the end of the year produced new government rhetoric which publicly accepted the movement's claims to indigeneity. Indeed, Zedillo's Government argued that the EZLN's demand for autonomy was evidence of the indigenous people's desire to secede from Mexico. This position was at odds with the PRI's prior attitude to indigenous Mexicans insofar as it presented them as active, politically conscious agents capable of constructing an autonomous state. Moreover, it was a position incongruous with the government's continued attempts to dismantle the EZLN by removing the *mestizo* contingent—a strategy evident in their 1995 “unmasking” of *Subcomandante* Marcos, the subsequent warrant for his arrest, and the resulting raids on his suspected headquarters.

When the Mexican Government's combined 1993 New Year's Eve and NAFTA inauguration celebrations were interrupted by news of the uprising in Chiapas, the immediate response was to publicly dismiss the insurgency as a minor indigenous dispute, the likes of which were common in the region. However, a military solution was pursued privately, with President Salinas immediately deploying 12,000 troops to the state (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 133). Despite this covert military action, the government's initial public statements responding to the uprising were, according to Russell, “surprisingly conciliatory” (1995: 25). Indeed, on the first day of the uprising Ricardo García Villalobos, Subsecretary of the Interior, stated:

The Mexican government calls on these groups [enacting the uprising] to be prudent, to change their attitude, and to began [sic] a dialogue within legal channels. Government officials have been willing and are still willing to begin such a dialogue (García Villalobos in Russell, 1995: 25).

Russell claims that a conciliatory attitude formed “the cornerstone of Salinas’ strategy” (1995: 27). However, while conciliation and dialogue were pursued publicly in the first days of the uprising, the government’s discursive strategies changed dramatically over the course of the twelve days of combat. The change occurred in response to the government’s need to legitimate the violence and the ferocity of the Mexican army’s attack on the EZLN. This was achieved by the elaboration of a discourse which presented the EZLN uprising as an event orchestrated by foreign subversives and “professional” Mexican revolutionaries who had co-opted the local indigenous people into a struggle based on traditional Marxist, Marxist-Leninist or Maoist ideological beliefs. By 3 January the government was rejecting outright the movement’s claims that it was an indigenous uprising, with President Salinas issuing a statement on 5 January asserting that the uprising was inspired by “those who make a profession of violence, Mexicans and a group of foreigners”, and also stating that “[t]his is not an Indian uprising, but the action of a violent, armed group, directed against public peace and government institutions” (President Salinas in Russell, 1995: 26). This attempt to delegitimize the EZLN’s claims to indigeneity dominated official government comment on the situation for the next week, with claims from the Interior Ministry and the Attorney General’s office that foreigners and revolutionary trained Mexicans had co-opted, manipulated and duped the region’s indigenous people into joining the movement (Russell, 1995: 26). Russell writes that “[s]ome members of the government took an even harder line”, citing labour leader Fidel Velázquez’s demands for the rebels to be “exterminated” and his declaration that they had “no justifiable complaints against the government”, instead blaming the uprising on Peruvians, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans (1995: 26-27).

As many Guatemalans and other Central Americans entered Mexico during the 1980s, fleeing civil war and strife in their own countries, the possibility of revolutionaries crossing the border into Mexico and rallying support from their ethnic Maya *compañeros*

was considered by the Mexican Government to constitute a significant threat to Mexico's political stability (Harvey, 1998: 148-150). The government's rhetoric throughout the 1980s with regards to the threat of revolutionary upheaval from the south ensured most Mexicans were well versed in the dangers. Indeed, when the EZLN seized local radio stations in eastern Chiapas on the first day of the uprising and began broadcasting its declaration of war and Revolutionary Laws, people in the area reported that the movement's representatives spoke with Central American accents—fuelling speculation that, despite the movement's proclamations, this was not a local indigenous movement (Bartolomé, 1995: 5). Efraín Bartolomé was in Ocosingo at the time, the scene of some of the fiercest battles during the twelve-day uprising. His account of a conversation overheard between two local *mestizos* on the first day indicates that there was disbelief that the insurgency could have been orchestrated solely by the local indigenous people:

'It's an invasion.'

'There's a lot of Central Americans.'

'A lot of them don't speak.'

'They look like Salvadoreños.'

'No, they're like Guatemalans.'

'They're Nicaraguans.'

'But there are a lot of Indios from around here' (Bartolomé, 1995: 14).

While first hand accounts such as this suggest that there may have been Central American participants in the movement, the government soon retracted its assertion that the EZLN was directed by Mexican and foreign Marxist insurgents and once again publicly pursued a process of conciliation. This change was signaled by its acceptance of the EZLN's claims to be an indigenous movement. Russell contends that the resumption of a conciliatory approach resulted from a combination of four factors: fears fueled by bombing attacks in Mexico City and the states of Puebla and Michoacán, "presumably by sympathizers of the rebels in Chiapas", which "raised the specter of the Chiapas revolt spreading into other areas of the country"; the level of national and international press and electronic media coverage of the situation; the need for the government to maintain a suitable level of public support to legitimate its actions in accordance with its ideology of hegemonic rule; and finally, the EZLN's public expression of its willingness to pursue

peaceful negotiations in a communiqué released on 6 January (Russell, 1995: 27).

While the Mexican Government decided to negotiate with the EZLN it continued its attempts to undermine and delegitimize the movement. This was most obvious in its efforts to promote the idea that the EZLN's demand for the creation of autonomous indigenous communities—while perhaps legitimizing the movement's indigenous character—demonstrated, more importantly, the danger the movement represented to the political integrity of the nation-state. To further dramatize the threat that the EZLN posed to the nation, President Zedillo claimed that the movement's efforts to establish autonomous regions would lead to the balkanization of Mexico—the destruction of a unified nation to be replaced with numerous competing autonomous “states”, leading to civil war. Cleaver summarizes this tactic when he writes that:

the government attempted to portray the Zapatista movement as a danger to the political integrity of the Mexican nation by conjuring the threat of a pan-Mayan movement embracing both Southern Mexico and much of Central America. Evoking the horrors of the Balkans, the Mexican government equated indigenous autonomy with political secession and the implosion of the country (1998: 625).

In a matter of months the government's rhetoric managed to transform what had at first been described as a minor dispute into a catastrophic event which threatened the stability and integrity of the Mexican nation. This contradiction means that it was of little surprise when the government's initial attempts to legitimize its position and justify the ferocity of its military action in Chiapas ultimately failed. The government then found itself in a position with which it had no familiarity—forced to negotiate with a rebel force.

Holloway and Peláez write that:

The reaction in Mexico, in nearly all sectors of the population, was one of revulsion at the violence and sympathy for the cause, if not necessarily for the methods, of the Zapatistas. A massive demonstration in Mexico City led to a declaration of cease-fire by the government on 10 January, which was accepted by the rebels (1998: 6).

Similarly, Harvey notes that “[d]omestic opposition, combined with international pressure from the U.S. Government, obliged President Salinas to accept the need for a

political solution” (1999: 132). Consequently, the party that had prevented the rise of all opposition for over 60 years was forced to negotiate with the masked rebels of the EZLN in order to maintain the façade of its consensus-based hegemonic rule.

By March 1994 peace negotiations were underway in San Cristóbal de las Casas. As detailed earlier, these negotiations failed largely due to the government’s efforts to confine the impact of the EZLN uprising to Chiapas. Harvey comments that “[t]he government’s attempt to separate local from national reforms led the EZLN to reject the official response and instead turn its attention to building networks of grass-roots support within civil society” (1999: 136). However, while the EZLN did attempt to strengthen its relationship with groups it conceived of as representing civil society, as discussed previously, it remained open to further negotiations with the government. Thus, peace talks resumed in 1995. While the government representatives in the first round of these negotiations were members of the INI (National Indigenous Institute) who seemed quite open to discussions concerning indigenous autonomy, they were replaced in the second round of dialogue with representatives from the Chiapas State Government, “most of whom had not participated in the earlier round and were less knowledgeable regarding indigenous issues” (Harvey, 1999: 138). Moreover, the Chiapas Government, under the leadership of Patrocinio González Garrido, had proved itself to be adversarial towards indigenous peoples’ demands for agrarian reform. Harvey notes that, while the González Garrido Government had previously enacted agrarian reform—targeting seven cases in 1989 for “negotiated solutions” which were partially reached—“there were another 547 cases still awaiting resolution in 1989, representing 22,598 land claimants” (1998: 171). Moreover, despite the governor’s “call for the modernization of state-peasant relations”, the growth of land conflicts in the state during his time of leadership, 1988-1992, saw him revert “to the traditionally repressive tactics of his predecessors”, namely intimidation and acts of violence (Harvey, 1998: 171). While the 1995 to 96 negotiations resulted in the 16 February 1996 signing of peace accords by both the Mexican Government and the EZLN, the document was not converted into constitutional reform. Consequently, the EZLN temporarily ceased all communication with the government in

September 1996.

The latest Latin American revolution

Those who contend that the EZLN is a traditional socialist revolutionary movement argue their case by focusing on the influence of *Subcomandante Marcos* who, according to the Mexican Government, is Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente—a former academic and member of the Maoist-inspired FLN. While most of these analyses acknowledge that the movement's organisational structure changed in response to its contact with the indigenous communities, they contend that this did not alter the EZLN's ideological framework and, consequently, did not contribute significantly to the development of its strategies and tactics. These arguments suggest that, contrary to the EZLN's claims, the indigenous communities have played a relatively passive role in the movement's development and its elaboration of a politically advantageous discourse.

While the public statements released by the Mexican Government after 1994 stopped linking the EZLN directly with the revolutionary traditions of Marxism, Marxist-Leninism and Maoism, many analysts continued to situate the Zapatista struggle firmly within these traditions. Indeed, one such critic, Nugent, insists that the movement is quite traditional in nature and far-removed from what he conceives of as the alternative: a postmodern movement. He states that:

It is difficult to see how a rebel army of peasants, aware of itself as the product of five hundred years of struggle, that quotes from the Mexican constitution to legitimate its demand that the president of Mexico immediately leave office, that additionally demands work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice, and peace for the people of Mexico, can be called a 'postmodern political movement.' How can the EZLN move beyond the politics of modernity when their vocabulary is so patently modernist and their practical organization so emphatically pre-modern? Their democratic command structure is a slow-moving form of organization—requiring as it does direct consultation and discussion with the base communities in five or six different languages—which is difficult to reconcile with postmodernist digital simultaneity. Do their demands include a modem and VCR in every jacale or adobe hut in Mexico? No. Is their chosen name 'The Postmodern Army of Multinational Emancipation' or 'Cyber-

warriors of the South’? No. (Nugent in Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 113).

A 1998 US army study asserts that the EZLN initially intended to stage a traditional Maoist inspired insurgency which employed military tactics learnt from the guerrilla warfare practiced in the Latin American region, such as Che Guevara’s “*foco*” strategy (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 32). While the study acknowledges that the movement’s organisational structure was reshaped by its interaction with the local indigenous peoples, it claims that this did not alter the EZLN’s military tactics or ideological framework. Rather, it asserts that a guerrilla *foco* strategy was not pursued because of the unexpected role played by NGOs and the internet in alerting people, both nationally and internationally, to the uprising occurring in Chiapas and the consequent pressure this placed on the government to participate in peace negotiations. The study concludes that the establishment by NGOs of a world-wide network of information enabled the rise of what it terms a “social netwar” which replaced the EZLN’s intended military offensive:

The physical—and electronic—swarming of activist NGOs into Mexico rapidly transformed the context and conduct of the Zapatista conflict. Within days, a traditional guerrilla insurgency changed into an information-age social netwar. The principal participants already had, or had shifted in the direction of, networked organizational structures—a point that is much truer for the EZLN and its NGO cohorts than for the Mexican government and army, but applies to the latter as well (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 61).

As discussed earlier, *Subcomandante* Marcos has acknowledged that the original intention behind his move to the Lacandón Jungle in the early 1980s was to develop a traditional revolutionary struggle which incorporated an organised vanguard intent on showing the uneducated, “backward” Maya the way forward by seizing political control of the nation. However, Marcos claims that the Marxist, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist influences on the movement’s organisational structure and its military strategies were diluted early on in the movement’s development when the *mestizos* came into contact with the Maya. This, he claims, led to the creation of a movement markedly different from the *mestizos*’ original ideological framework. Indeed, Marcos notes that:

I think that our only virtue as theorists was to have the humility to recognise that our theoretical scheme did not work, that it was very limited, that we had to

adapt ourselves to the reality that was being imposed on us (*Subcomandante Marcos* in Holloway, 1998: 165).

Russell supports this by claiming that the EZLN was forced to diverge from traditional revolutionary ideology as a result of the extreme scepticism expressed by the local indigenous population in relation to the Maoist ideas and its concomitant hierarchical organisational structures which Marcos and his comrades sought to impose. Russell writes that:

The EZLN, like other Latin American rebel groups, began as a vanguard organization; that is, its members simply declared rebel authority. However, local Indians, despite agreeing with the rebels' critique of Mexican society, were unwilling to put their fate in the hands of a group of ragtag newcomers. The rebels soon realized that wholehearted support by the local population would require giving that population the final say as to what the rebels would do (1995: 42).

Consequently, the rebels “accepted community control—making the Chiapas rebellion unique” (Russell, 1995: 42). Therefore, Russell claims that the EZLN had its genesis in a retheorisation of Maoist ideology produced in response to contact with the indigenous Chiapans, their mythologies, and their historical tactics of resistance. What makes the EZLN unique is not, for Russell, its enactment of a social netwar, but rather its construction of a movement and strategy that developed directly in response to the ideological clash between the indigenous Chiapans and the *mestizo* revolutionaries. Prominent Mexican author, Carlos Fuentes has described the uprising produced by this clash as “the first post-communist rebellion in Latin America”, noting that:

Many people with cloudy minds in Mexico responded to what happened in Chiapas by saying, ‘Here we go again, these rebels are part of the old Sandinista-Castronite-Marxist-Leninist legacy. Is this what we want for Mexico?’ The rebels proved [to be] exactly the contrary (Fuentes in Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 23).

Other commentators agree that the EZLN portends a new era in revolutionary struggle. For example, Rodolfo Stavenhagen states that the EZLN “is not a 1970s-style movement, a movement of a handful of visionaries” (Stavenhagen in Russell, 1995: 43), while Burbach insists that the Zapatista’s theoretical trajectory must be seen within the “context

of the collapse of socialism and the emergence of alternative movements in Latin America” (2001: 105). Burbach explains that:

The socialist project and socialist ideals largely disintegrated in Latin America with the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, the general impasse of the Central American revolutionary movements, and the crisis of Cuban communism following the fall of the Soviet Union. Radical grassroots movements have by no means ended in the Americas, but those that enunciate socialist goals are few and far between (2001: 105).

Those who understand the EZLN as a traditional Marxist, Marxist-Leninist, Maoist or Guevarist revolutionary movement tend to position *Subcomandante* Marcos as the orchestrator and leader of a vanguard constituted by indigenous participants who have had minimal influence on the movement’s strategies and tactics. Others who identify the EZLN as the first post-socialist movement claim it signals the possibility of alternative modes of struggle facilitated by the emergence of new social actors capable of developing radically different means of effecting revolutionary change in the contemporary world.

Selective identification: peasants or indigenous

Challenges to the EZLN’s claims to be principally focused on indigenous rights are also articulated by those who argue that the EZLN should be understood within the trajectory of Mexican peasant struggles. These analyses highlight the fact that many of the grievances expressed by the EZLN relate to agrarian issues common to the national *campesino* or peasant population, and are not restricted to those who identify as indigenous. Thus, they emphasise a classist approach by suggesting that the EZLN should be understood as a large-scale peasant uprising, rather than as a new style of movement grounded in issues of ethnicity or indigeneity.

The indigenous peoples of Mexico have historically constituted the peasantry of the nation—located at the bottom of the class structure and principally engaged in small-scale, often subsistence, agrarian work. Consequently, the grievances of the nation’s

indigenous people are produced, in part, by their social location as the nation's peasantry. As a result, many of the EZLN's demands directly relate to the indigenous peoples' experiences as peasants. Furthermore, part of the historical tradition, or collective memory, within which the EZLN positions itself is a history of the peasantry's struggle for land. The greatest indication of this is the movement's decision to utilise Emiliano Zapata to symbolise its struggle. Zapata fought during the 1910 Mexican Revolution to acquire "land and liberty" for the peasantry, successfully struggling for the legal recognition of indigenous rights to communal lands which were codified in Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. Moreover, as detailed in chapter one, the agrarian indigenous workers who make up the EZLN have been encouraged by successive PRI Governments to identify as *campesinos* through its policy of providing more financial support to small-scale agrarian workers, regardless of ethnicity, rather than to those who identified as indigenous peoples (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello, 1999: 158-159).

The EZLN's focus on concerns traditionally associated with peasants, such as land and freedom, has led many people to understand the movement as motivated by issues pertaining to class rather than indigeneity. Indeed, as mentioned previously, analysts such as Castells believe that the diversity of ethnic people in eastern Chiapas militates against a unified indigenous identity being able to constitute the basis of a social revolutionary movement. To support these claims he cites Collier's ethnographic work which notes that:

Ethnic identity once *divided* indigenous communities from one another in the Chiapas central highlands. Recent events underscore a transformation: now, in the wake of the Zapatista rebellion, peoples of diverse indigenous background are emphasizing what they share with one another in revindication of economic, social, and political exploitation (Collier in Castells, 1997: 77-78; emphasis in original).

Therefore, Castells seems to be suggesting that the identity the constituents of the EZLN claim to coalesce around is, in fact, a newly developed construction which effectively rearticulates the notion of ethnicity by using it to focus on commonality rather than difference. He contends that the ethnic label is inaccurate for it does not reflect the actual

“realities” of the diversity of indigenous groups that make-up the EZLN. Instead, Castells claims that the common Zapatista identity is produced through the EZLN’s constituents’ construction of a “new Indian identity” that incorporates people from various ethnic groups (1997: 78). He supports this position by citing the EZLN’s statement that “[w]hat is common to us [the movement’s constituents] is the land that gave us life and struggle” (EZLN in Castells, 1997: 78). Here Castells seems to be implying that it is the identification with the social class of the peasantry which confers a degree of commonality on the Zapatista constituents. However, such a common peasant identity is as problematic as the notion of a unified ethnic identity. Not all Chiapan peasants, just as not all Chiapan Maya, are members of, or support the actions of, the EZLN. Moreover, there are claims that the constituents of the EZLN do not represent the region’s poorest peasants who are “those tied to exhausted hillside farms by tradition and passivity” (Russell, 1995: 41). Journalist Alma Guillermoprieto believes that the constituents of the EZLN movement are “the innovators: adventurous frontiersmen and women who were convinced that they could make a new world” (Guillermoprieto in Russell, 1995: 41). The historian Antonio García de León also notes that “the Zapatista army is made up principally of marginal ‘modern’ young people, who are multilingual and who have experience performing wage labour. They have very little in common with the isolated Indian that we here [Spanish-speaking *mestizos*] in Mexico City imagine” (García de León in Russell, 1995: 41). So, the experiences of those who assume a peasant identity in Chiapas are not homogenous and, as with ethnic identity, do not necessarily evoke a sense of commonality.

While the indigenous identity around which the members of the EZLN coalesce is far from coherent, it has provided the basis for the development of a social revolutionary movement which challenges the existing political structures of Mexico. Moreover, I argue in chapters four and five that the indigenous constituents wilfully construct and adhere to this common ethnic identity because they recognise its political utility and effectiveness. In line with Castell’s claims, I contend that this subjectivity is not a reflection of the similarity of experience engendered by common ethnicity. Rather, it is best interpreted as a constructed subjectivity which is formed precisely because it furthers

the political aims of the Mayan constituents of the EZLN.

Internet savvy postmodern guerrillas

When the *New York Times* declared that the world's first "Postmodern Revolutionary Movement" had appeared in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, the story seemed discordant with the proclamations of extreme marginalisation and poverty with which the armed insurgents justified their uprising (Burbach, 2001: 116). It was a description prompted by the Zapatistas' rapid acquirement of an internet presence. However, it soon transpired that the EZLN's relationship with the internet was mediated by NGOs and other grassroots organisations. Consequently, analyses that focus on this aspect of the EZLN are concerned primarily with factors external to the actual movement itself, rather than its internal dynamics. Still, the unlikelihood of the first wide-scale use of the internet in a warlike scenario emanating from one of Mexico's most impoverished states meant that the Mexican Government was unprepared for it and, therefore, unable to initiate a successful counterattack. For many, the EZLN uprising represents a new era in social movements attuned to the information-age, a concept some analyses conflate with postmodernism.

Following the ascription of the term "postmodern" to the EZLN, an image of Zapatista rebels typing e-mails on laptops in remote mountain hideaways featured in many initial media reports. These ideas were still dominating much of the media in 1995 when Zedillo ordered a raid on suspected EZLN hideouts in an attempt to capture the movement's *mestizo* leaders, particularly *Subcomandante Marcos*:

When federal police raided alleged Zapatista hiding places in Mexico City and the state of Veracruz in January 1995, they found as many computer disks as bullets. At that time it was reported, 'If Marcos is equipped with a telephone modem and a cellular phone [he could] hook into the Internet [directly] even while on the run, as he is now' (Knudson, 1998: 509).

However, while the internet contributed significantly to the advance of the EZLN struggle, this romanticised and mythologised imagery is far removed from the material

impoverishment that led to the movement's uprising. Rather, it was the EZLN's establishment of contact with media outlets and NGOs that had been amassing in Chiapas since the early 1990s and *their* network of international supporters, which enabled stories of the EZLN and their communiqués to reach a national and international audience. The importance of this support network is highlighted by Cleaver when he writes that:

the EZLN has played no direct role in the proliferation of the use of the Internet. Rather, these efforts were initiated by others to weave a network of support for the Zapatista movement ... the EZLN and its communities have had a mediated relationship to the Internet. The Zapatista communities are indigenous, poor and often cut-off not only from computer communications but also from the necessary electricity and telephone systems. Under these conditions, EZLN materials were initially prepared as written communiqués for the mass media and were handed to reporters or to friends to give to reporters. Such material then had to be typed or scanned into electronic format for distribution on the Internet (1998: 628).

The EZLN's relationship with the internet was mediated by their support network which included people affiliated with media outlets who passed information on to NGOs, the majority of which were affiliated with international human rights groups. Most of these organisations had established bases in the state prior to the 1992 quincentenary celebrations of Columbus's discovery of the "New World", and had stayed in Mexico to assist the indigenous peasants to struggle against the alterations to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution and, therefore, against the implementation of NAFTA. However, in response to the EZLN uprising, Ronfeldt et al. note that more NGOs swarmed "out of the United States, Canada, and Europe and into Mexico City and Chiapas. There they linked with Mexican NGOs to voice sympathy and support for the EZLN's demands" (1998: 3). Thus, the most significant contribution the NGOs made to the struggle for indigenous rights in Chiapas, and more broadly throughout Mexico, was their cultivation of substantial international support and communication networks through which information about the struggles of the Chiapans was able to reach a wide audience. Many who received the information reacted with sympathy for the cause and added pressure to calls for the Mexican Government to negotiate with the Zapatistas (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 3).

The postmodern nomenclature sometimes assigned to the EZLN in response to its

internet presence and media savvy is rejected by Castells. Instead, he argues that, in spite of the movement's communication practices, its aims are quite traditional in nature. He writes that:

Chiapas Indians fighting against NAFTA by means of their alliance with ex-Maoist militants and liberation theologians are a distinctive expression of the old search for social justice under new historical conditions (Castells, 1997: 83).

This new historical context is, for Castells, marked by the growth of information technologies and a “restructuring of capitalism” which has caused a significant shift in the way information and, consequently, power operates in the contemporary world (1997: 2-3). For Castells, these changes to the nature of power do not necessarily portend a postmodern era. Thus, he interprets the significant role played by information technology in the EZLN struggle as evidence that it constitutes the “*first informational guerrilla movement*” as distinct from a postmodern movement (1997: 79; emphasis in original).

A similar argument is developed in a 1998 US army study by Ronfeldt et al., which, as previously mentioned, contends that the EZLN is enacting a “netwar”—a concept developed by Ronfeldt in collaboration with Arquilla, “for the purpose of understanding the nature of conflict in the information age” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt in Ronfeldt et al., 1998: iii). The social netwar mode of information-age warfare is enabled by:

The rise of networks—especially “all channel” networks, in which every node is connected to every other node, [which] means that power is migrating to non-state actors, who are able to organize into sprawling multiorganizational networks more readily than traditional, hierarchical, state actors can (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 7).

The authors contend that, as a result of what they claim is the increasing dependency of contemporary society on information, “[m]ore than ever before, conflicts are about ‘knowledge’—about who knows (or can be kept from knowing) what, when, where, and why” (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 7-8). Thus, they contend that in contemporary conflicts “[p]sychosocial disruption may become more important than physical destruction”

(Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 7-8).

The study concludes that the EZLN's development of an NGO support network which could rapidly disseminate reports on human rights abuses, information about the intolerable living conditions endured by indigenous Chiapans, and the EZLN's communiqués—that is, its ability to cause psychosocial disruption by circulating information—is what established the EZLN as significantly different from the traditional forms of revolutionary movement common to the Latin American region. Thus, the authors assert that “[t]ransnational NGO activism attuned to the information age, not the nature of the EZLN insurgency per se, is what changed the framework” (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 23). Had the movement not been able to cultivate the links with the national and international NGOs, it “would probably have settled into a mode of organization and behavior more like a classic insurgency or ethnic conflict” (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 26). Consequently, Ronfeldt et al. claim that the EZLN's theoretical and strategic flexibility coupled with its ability to attract and maintain NGO and media attention, and the significant contribution of the multilingual and media savvy *Subcomandante* Marcos, created a politically progressive movement. It also ensured that “no matter how small a territory the EZLN held in Chiapas, it quickly occupied more space in the media than had any other insurgent group in Mexico's if not the world's history” (Ronfeldt et al., 1998: 45). This argument is in consonance with the position presented by Castells insofar as both argue that the EZLN is a traditional modernist revolutionary movement that only presents as politically progressive because of its usage of global communication networks. That is, the movement gained support from international NGOs which used *their* vast information networks to subvert the autonomy of the nation-state. However, arguments which focus on the information technology used by the EZLN do not satisfactorily attend to the movement's self-proclaimed attempts to elaborate a politically progressive discourse. A discourse which aspires towards the creation of an alternative political space in Mexico in which radically new political, economic and social power structures can be envisaged and created.

The importance of the EZLN's uprising to the development of electronic NGO support

networks to assist resistance movements and to portend new modes of twenty-first century warfare, as previously mentioned, is also examined by Cleaver. Indeed, he claims that “[n]o catalyst for growth in electronic NGO networks has been more important than the 1994 indigenous Zapatista rebellion” because:

Computer networks supporting the rebellion have evolved from providing channels for the familiar, traditional work of solidarity—material aid and the defense of human rights against the policies of the Salinas and Zedillo administrations—into an electronic fabric of opposition to much wider policies (Cleaver, 1998: 622).

Cleaver writes of a “Zapatista effect” which he claims has the potential to permeate and inform social struggles throughout the world and reweave “the fabric of politics” by demonstrating the ability of grassroots movements to form national and international collectives to challenge the power of the nation-state (1998: 637). This concept is similar to that of the “new social movements approach”, as explicated by Escobar and Alvarez, insofar as groups with a national focus are increasingly required to look beyond the weakening borders of nation-states to garner support to bring about economic, political and social change within their own site of struggle. Indeed, they write that:

the time has come for greater communication and coalition-building transnationally and transculturally, as a necessary strategy to oppose the consolidation of a ‘new world order’ according to the dictates of capital and of the global cultural, economic, and military powers. Only peoples’ *collective* resistance and creativity can fulfill this role (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992: 13-14; emphasis in original).

However, while the “Zapatista effect” presents as a significant political advance for marginalised groups, Cleaver warns that such groups will continue to encounter strong resistance from those with a vested interest in maintaining the supremacy of the nation-state, namely governments. Therefore, he asserts that imagination or organisational ability will not be enable these groups to maintain their autonomy and achieve radical change (Cleaver, 1998: 640). Rather, Cleaver concludes that “the scope for the positive elaboration of grassroots initiatives at the local and global levels will depend entirely on their power to challenge existing policies and force concessions” (1998: 640). The use of

information-age technology to stimulate the creation of collective transnational support networks presents as a useful strategy for contemporary social struggles, but it does not guarantee the procurement of significant political, economic and social change.

According to Burbach, the only viable means of procuring significant political change is through what he terms a “postmodern Marxism”. Indeed, he claims that existing political ideologies—the three main ones being liberalism, conservatism and socialism—“are in disarray or no longer functional”, as “[t]hey are unable to explain or incorporate the tremendous complexity and diverse realities of the contemporary world” (Burbach, 2001: 71). For Burbach, we live in a “postmodern political age” which is most adequately understood within the framework of a temporal postmodern Marxism which enables the location of “diverse new social actors for change and ... postulate[s] how they can interact and confront the dominant political and economic classes” (2001: 91). He posits the EZLN as a salient example of these new social actors, claiming that they “have the capacity to create new narratives that are capable of challenging globalization and replacing the state socialism of the twentieth century with new emancipatory projects” (Burbach, 2001: 91). However, Burbach’s attempt to elaborate a framework for the elaboration of a progressive politics is highly problematic, for it asserts that the contemporary world is definitively postmodern and suggests that all vestiges of politics developed under modernism are no longer relevant to the current political context. This framework prompts Burbach to identify the Zapatistas as the “first postmodern revolutionary movement” which “consciously sought to move beyond the politics of modernity” (2001: 116). However, by presenting the EZLN as a salient example of a new postmodern political movement, Burbach fails to sufficiently attend to aspects of the movement that seem to fit rather neatly into a modernist paradigm, such as its focus on a collective historical memory of indigenous resistance, its appeal to the nation’s Constitution to legitimate its uprising, and its principal focus on achieving change within the confines of the Mexican nation-state.

Moreover, the issue of the political efficacy of postmodernism has been raised by many authors, most recently Hardt and Negri. For Hardt and Negri, a postmodern politics is of

no use for liberatory projects within the contemporary political and economic context because the nation-state has been replaced with a geographically and temporally boundless sovereign power which they term Empire (2000). Indeed, they argue that postmodern politics is compliant to this new form of power. Thus, the only means of effecting radical social transformation within Empire, they argue, is through collective resistance initiated by a new worldwide proletariat or, what they term “the multitudes” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: xv). Hardt and Negri posit a neo-Marxist theoretical approach as the only basis from which an effective politics of resistance in contemporary global conditions can be realised. The utility of a postmodern politics will be further explored in chapter three, but for now I suggest that the EZLN cannot be easily or readily categorised within existing theoretical frameworks that pertain to political struggle.

Gramsci and the EZLN

Due to perceived parallels between the EZLN’s recognition of the power of language, its attempts to construct counter-hegemonic representations of the nation’s indigenous people, and its identification of the political import of civil society, many analysts contend that the movement is best understood within a Gramscian framework. These interpretations focus on the role of *Subcomandante* Marcos and suggest that through him a neo-Marxist political agenda has informed the EZLN’s strategies and tactics. However, Gramscian approaches to the movement do not sufficiently address the influence exerted by the indigenous Chiapans on the strategies and tactics the EZLN pursues. Thus, such approaches operate in consonance with the government’s representation of indigenous peoples as considerably lacking in political agency. Moreover, Gramscian analyses of the EZLN attribute a primary role to civil society, a body which, in Gramsci’s conception, is constituted within the prevailing institutional structures of the state—the very structures within which the EZLN claims indigenous Mexicans are marginalised and silenced.

Contrary to analyses that claim that the EZLN represents a postmodern movement, those adopting a Gramscian approach contend that while the movement deviates from traditional revolutionary practices, it is still located within a socialist theoretical

trajectory. Indeed one such analyst, Bruhn, acknowledges that the EZLN represents a radical departure from the traditional guerrilla movements of the region, but argues nonetheless the relevance of a Gramscian approach—in relation particularly to the notion of ideological warfare. To substantiate her argument, Bruhn points out that Gramscian theory was widely disseminated among leftist intellectuals in Mexico during the 1970s, and claims that “[a]n urban leftist intellectual educated during precisely these years [mid to late 1970s] as a man of Marcos’s age must have been, could hardly have failed to absorb this legacy” (1999: 44). This legacy is, she claims, evident in the EZLN’s enactment of a Gramscian “war of position” which is based on “struggles over cultural hegemony” (Bruhn, 1999: 30). Bruhn’s argument is elaborated through a focus on the EZLN’s proclaimed reliance on the power of the word rather than military action, to gain the sympathy and support of what they refer to as national and international civil society.

In the early stages of the uprising, Bruhn claims that the EZLN developed a strategic approach that indicated its departure from other Latin American guerrilla movements. While she does note that “[t]he EZLN may or may not have planned its shift toward ideological warfare in advance”, she contends that “it clearly understood the media from the beginning” (Bruhn, 1999: 33). This suggests that at least some members of the EZLN were aware of the importance of presenting their movement in a manner that would evoke the sympathy and support of the public—indicated, Bruhn suggests, by the EZLN’s rejection of a violent military strategy in favour of a struggle for the consensus necessary to attain cultural hegemony. Indeed, she points out that “[t]he EZLN’s attempts to construct a pro-Zapatista coalition have absorbed far more time and money than the acquisition of military weapons to drive the Mexican army out of Chiapas” (Bruhn, 1999: 35).

Bruhn contends that the EZLN’s key political strategies are embodied in its discursive struggle. These strategies, she claims, reflect Gramsci’s notion of the hegemonic power of language which contends that language is able to “reinforce the values of common sense or potentially transmit new ones” (Adamson in Bruhn, 1999: 31). Indeed, Bruhn emphasises the importance of the word, or what Street has termed the *palabra verdadera*,

to Zapatista identity when she writes that:

The *palabra verdadera* is ... the key to Zapatista revolutionary strategy: a unifying consciousness and ultimately a weapon. The word, like class consciousness, expresses the identity of a social subject, though in the Zapatista lexicon, indigenous identity replaces class. Without the word, the indigenous (*los indigenos*) did not exist in a political sense (Bruhn, 1999: 33).

Therefore, by constructing and naming themselves as indigenous political subjects, the EZLN invaded the hegemonic language of the national government which had hitherto presented Mexico as a nation of *mestizos*—an idea reinforced by its official enactment of the policy of *mestizaje*. The EZLN uprising challenged these representations of indigenous Mexicans, demanding that the government radically rethink its policies and actions. Moreover, by gaining the support of civil society, the EZLN was able to enact a somewhat successful and sustained ideological attack on the discourses and ideologies which underpinned modern Mexican society. Bruhn observes that for the EZLN:

Although ideological warfare has not won resolution of all its demands or even protected it completely from repression, it has avoided military annihilation, kept the government's attention on indigenous issues, and drawn funding for many local projects through outside donations (1999: 35).

Furthermore, Bruhn contends that Marcos's self-imposed description as a translator for the indigenous people, coupled with his linguistic and media literacies, identifies him as "the very model of a Gramscian intellectual" (1999: 42). Employing Adamson's work on Gramsci, Bruhn writes that the ability for a movement to challenge the hegemonic ideas of the society in which they operate requires people "specialized in the conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas" (1999: 42). Consequently for Bruhn, Marcos provides the primary channel through which the grievances of the indigenous people of eastern Chiapas can be heard both in Mexico and internationally. As will be discussed in chapter four, this thesis concurs that Marcos's role as a translator for the Chiapan Maya, and his literacy in the contemporary "conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas", has enabled the movement to present the possibility of alternative political hegemonies to the Mexican people. However, this argument is not developed within a Gramscian

framework, for such a perspective does not adequately explain Marcos's role within the EZLN. For Gramsci, the intellectual's "social function is to serve as a transmitter of ideas within civil society, and between government and civil society" (Adamson in Bruhn, 1999: 42). However, this concept does not adequately consider the transmitter's potential mediation of the ideas, and does not sufficiently problematise the power differentials which exist between the "intellectual" and the subaltern producers of the concepts being transmitted and, often, translated. Therefore, a Gramscian approach is unable to satisfactorily address the relationship that exists between the indigenous Maya constituents of the EZLN and *Subcomandante* Marcos. Moreover, Gramsci's work is predicated on the pre-existence of a realm of civil society that is part of the existing formal institutional structure of society and constitutes an ideological battleground for consensus. However, as discussed previously, the PRI's infiltration of the institutions that, within a Gramscian framework, generally constitute civil society ensured that there was not a clear delineation between the civil and political spheres of Mexico. Indeed, the EZLN claims that within these institutional spheres, indigenous Mexicans have been repressed and persecuted. Thus, the potential of Mexican civil society to produce a new ideological hegemony that attends to indigenous rights is severely constrained.

Despite the limitations of a Gramscian analysis of the EZLN, others also argue the relevance of such an approach. In keeping with Bruhn, Schneider identifies parallels between what he sees as the EZLN's focus on the power of the word and ideological warfare, and Gramsci's conception of a strategic war of position. He supports his argument by mobilising the concept of social netwar which he argues constitutes "a contemporary operational and tactical updating to Gramsci's war of position" insofar as the technology of the information age has broadened the potential scope of contemporary subversive ideological attacks (Schneider, n.d.). He writes that:

Integral to the [EZLN's] struggle was the development of netwar operations and tactics. This horizontally organized, interconnected structure of civil activism can also be viewed as being compatible with the Gramscian doctrine (Schneider, n.d.).

As discussed previously, social netwar relies on decentralised networks of

communication that can provide information from a multitude of sites in order to counter the hegemonic ideas of dominant powers—the aim of a Gramscian ideological war of position. Indeed, the ability for information to be rapidly disseminated to counter that which is provided by the Mexican Government contributed to the relative success of the EZLN because it facilitated the production of alternative ideologies. However, while the internet and other information-age technologies enabled the EZLN to widely publicise its aims and objectives, this did not necessarily ensure the movement’s ideological success. Nor is it evidence of its politically progressive nature. Such evidence must surely also rest with the nature of the discourses that it propagated; not merely their channel of dissemination.

The Gramscian elements of the EZLN movement are also pointed to by Blake who highlights the movement’s focus on the institutions of civil society as the most fruitful sites of ideological struggle. Indeed, Blake contends that the EZLN has inspired the formation and strengthening of a multitude of oppositional movements in the nation, noting that “[s]ocial movements throughout Mexico have become more highly visible and stronger since the uprising indicated the beginnings of a democratic culture and the vitalization of civil society” (1996: 139). Moreover, she argues that the EZLN is helping to establish clearly defined institutions of civil society by elaborating a discourse which delegitimizes the institutional political parties and, instead, privileges “other sectors of civil society as vanguards of political transformation, in particular local and regional *campesino* and indigenous organizations, civic associations, the women’s movement, the Popular Church and NGOs” (Blake, 1996: 142).

This indicates that the movement has had some success in proffering a counter-hegemonic ideology that redefines the nation’s political actors. However, relying on these nascent institutions of Mexican civil society to effect radical political, economic and social change may be pre-emptory. Indeed, such groups face continuous battles against the pervasive presence of the national government in all sectors of public life and they have not yet consolidated their strength (Blake, 1996: 137). Blake asserts that these obstacles will be overcome, maintaining that the wave of political, economic, and

political crises which have engulfed Mexico, particularly since the early 1980s, has taken its toll on the nation's people and inspired them to seek alternatives:

with each new crisis, political, social or economic, disenchantment grows and more importantly consciousness of the root causes of unequal development is heightened. Civil society is also more prepared each time to occupy the vacuums of power or political spaces that such crises tend to create (1996: 145).

The Gramscian analyses of the EZLN provide useful readings of the importance of employing language to construct counter-hegemonic representations of the EZLN's indigenous constituents, the movement's conception of civil society, and the significance to the movement's aims and strategies of its charismatic spokesperson *Subcomandante Marcos*. However, Bruhn concedes that a Gramscian analysis does not provide a wholly consistent or adequate framework through which to examine the EZLN. For, as she notes, the movement is not struggling for the realisation of a socialist state and it refuses to constitute a revolutionary party (Bruhn, 1999: 48-50). Moreover, the EZLN's efforts to consciously distance itself from traditional revolutionary vernacular, as well as its eschewal of vanguardism, and the objective of seizing state power clearly signify the limitations to analysing the movement within a Gramscian framework⁴⁹.

Conclusion

Through a process of textual analysis, this chapter has identified the key discursive practices of the EZLN and has demonstrated that these, and subsequently the Zapatista movement, have been analysed and defined within a variety of ideological frameworks. Despite the divergent nature of these approaches I have shown that the issues of identity, representation and agency are central to all of these analyses. Thus, in order to understand the EZLN, questions of *who* the movement represents, *who* it is constituted by, and *by whom* it is led must be addressed. However, none of the interpretations discussed

⁴⁹ While this section has shown that the utility of a Gramscian analysis of the EZLN is limited, it has also demonstrated that some aspects of the Zapatista movement can be explained within such a framework. The following chapter demonstrates the significance of the Gramscian notion of the subaltern to producing an informed reading of the EZLN.

adequately attend to these issues, suggesting that the EZLN is not easily defined within existing ideological frameworks. In an effort to produce a more rigorous analysis of the movement that attends to the centrality of issues relating to identity, the following chapter explores various theories that address notions of identity politics in the context of political struggle.

Chapter Three

Theories of Identity in the Context of Political Struggle

This chapter further explores the importance of issues of identity and representation to understanding the unique social revolutionary movement produced by the EZLN. By presenting and discussing divergent theoretical perspectives that address how marginalised or subaltern individuals may be able to challenge and transform their social location, this chapter concludes that existing theories are unable to adequately conceptualise the discursive practices enacted by the Zapatistas. To contextualise the exploration of these issues, the Maya constituents of the EZLN are identified as occupying a subaltern subject position. Theories of social change that pertain to subalterneity are then addressed. These are theories that rely both on essentialist identities, as elaborated in modernist thought, and those that are based on a postmodernist critique of unified, unitary identity categories such as race, gender and class. After discussing competing theories of identity and how they are produced and employed in the context of political struggle—with a particular focus on the South Asian Subaltern Studies group, Sandoval’s postmodern notion of “differential consciousness”, and the postpositivist realist ideas elaborated by Moya and Mohanty—I argue that these theories do not provide the most efficient or effective means of selecting or mobilising identities which are politically useful and empowering for subaltern individuals. However, the theories discussed are established as useful insofar as they position the subaltern as a subject able to act with agency. Once this agency is established, however, it is shown that some of these perspectives do not sufficiently attend to the limitations that continue to restrict the subaltern’s access to power and, thus, its ability to directly effect political change. Others address these limitations but fail to propose strategies whereby the subaltern can overcome them. Chapter five argues that the EZLN has surmounted these limitations through the discursive practice of translation and, consequently, the movement cannot be categorised within these existing modes of political action.

Discussing the subaltern

The historical contextualisation of the 1994 EZLN uprising elaborated in chapter one presents the indigenous Maya of Chiapas as marginalised within the dominant political, economic and social discourses of Mexico. Indeed, the Chiapan Maya constitute an historically repressed and impoverished people who have had, and continue to have, extremely limited access to state-controlled public services. Indeed, they have been denied any benefits of capitalist development in the state, prompting the *Consejo Nacional de Población* (the National Population Bureau), to describe them as marginalised communities excluded from regional development processes (Ceceña and Barreda, 1998: 50). The marginalisation of these indigenous peoples suggests that they constitute a subaltern group. In order to substantiate this claim and explore its implications, this section analyses definitions of the subaltern, how these can be related to the indigenous constituents of the EZLN, and the implications of employing this concept in the context of political struggle.

The term subaltern has its roots in the work of Gramsci and has been enthusiastically seized upon by the South Asian Subaltern Studies group. The group began as a Marxist historical collective which aimed to reposition the subaltern of South Asia as an active historical subject or agent of history—rather than an absence, a symbol of negation or a necessarily silent “other”. A key figure in the collective, Ranajit Guha, writes that the word subaltern “stands for the meaning as given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, that is, ‘of inferior rank’”, and is used by the group “as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way” (1982: Preface, vii). Importantly, Guha points out that the Subaltern Studies group recognises, “that subordination cannot be understood except as one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship of which the other is dominance, for subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up” (1982: Preface, vii).

The above definitions prompt the observation that even if the subaltern is able to effect an

act of resistance against its marginalisation and disempowerment, it remains subject to the rule of those in power. In fact, Dipesh Chakrabarty, also a member of the Subaltern Studies group, claims that the subjectivity of the subaltern is inherently contradictory for it is comprised of:

the composite culture of resistance to and acceptance of domination and hierarchy—[which] is a characteristic of class relations in our society, where the veneer of bourgeois equality barely masks the violent, feudal nature of much of our systems of power and authority (Chakrabarty, 1985: 376).

The South Asian collective attends to this contradiction by privileging the subaltern subjects' resistance to its disempowered social location. Their aim is to highlight the subaltern's ability to influence the historical development of the region, primarily through interrupting the development projects implemented by the dominant powers. Thus, the group presents the subaltern as able to act with political agency. This is achieved by highlighting its historical enactment of rebellious incidents which have destabilised the narratives produced by the dominant members of these societies. Indeed, Beverley writes that Guha's project:

is to recover or re-present the subaltern as a subject of history—'an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion'—from the welter of documentary and historiographic discourses that deny the subaltern that power of agency (1999: 27).

The Subaltern Studies group attempts to construct an alternative interpretation of history that presents the subaltern as an agent of change rather than constituting a passive subjectivity that is acted upon by the ruling group. This rethinking of history necessitates a rearticulation of the subjectivity of subalterneity as Chakrabarty's "composite culture", for it identifies the subaltern's ability to resist as more significant than its ability to be dominated. However, this emphasis on resistance proves problematic because the subaltern's ability and need to resist is predicated on its occupation of a dominated and repressed social location. Consequently, by assigning the subaltern such a degree of agency, there is the danger that the relations of power which constructed the subaltern as marginalised in the first instance, thus imbuing it with the ability and need to resist,

would be obscured. Moreover, the ability to successfully resist and rebel against a disempowered social location contradicts the notion of subalterneity. Therefore, through the Subaltern Studies group's focus on the subaltern's capacity to resist marginalisation and act in a politically wilful manner—that is to act with agency—the political limitations on the subaltern's resistance are rendered virtually invisible. By not addressing the limitations on the subaltern's agency, the specific conditions of its social location which, according to the Subaltern Studies group, imbues it with such revolutionary potential are unable to be adequately addressed. Alternatively, if these limitations were acknowledged, then the subaltern could be presented as having a restricted level of agency, which enables it to advocate for and obtain limited, but politically significant, advances, while simultaneously not obscuring the social location that impels it to rebel.

Such a rethinking of the subaltern's agency does not attempt outrightly to subvert the historical power relations of societies, as the Subaltern Studies group aims to achieve. Rather it provides the basis for acknowledging the ability of the subaltern to accurately read and negotiate the power relations which construct its social location, while also recognising its limited political agency. It presents the subaltern as literate in the dominant political, economic and social relations within which those who occupy this subject position are marginalised and against which they resist. Consequently, the subaltern is rearticulated as having limited agency, which presents the people interpolated into this subjectivity as active actors able to manoeuvre within their state of marginality to effect a restricted degree of political change. The subaltern is not able to act completely autonomously or with free will, nor is it solely a silent, passive social subject.

As the Subaltern Studies group highlights, within the dominant narratives of history the subaltern typically represents an inactive, silenced "other" who does not, and is in fact unable to, affect the development of society. Indeed, the subaltern's position of marginality, and its subsequent silence within the dominant political, economic and social discourses, are represented as evidence of its very lack of political agency. The Subaltern Studies group challenges this notion by rearticulating the subaltern subjectivity so as to

grant the subaltern a “voice”, and by positioning those who occupy this social location as agents of social change. However, as discussed above, this is problematic for it obfuscates the conditions of marginality that produce the subject as subaltern. Alternatively, the subaltern could be presented as possessing agency, while simultaneously making transparent its marginalised social location, if we rethink its position of silence throughout history as a consciously selected political strategy, rather than as an imposed state. As argued in chapter two, the EZLN has shown this is possible by strategically employing silence throughout the Chiapan conflict in order to demonstrate the inadequacies of, and divorce itself from, the nation’s institutionalised political relations. This demonstrates that it is possible for the subaltern, a subject position which I argue that the indigenous constituents of the EZLN fulfil, to actively resist and challenge the relations of power that marginalise it without, as the Subaltern Studies group tends to do, obscuring its subjugated social location. By understanding silence within the dominant discourses as a potential strategy available to subaltern individuals within their marginalised subject position, we are able to recognise them as political agents able to actively affect the structures of their society. This limited degree of agency does not appear to hold the same liberationist potential as proposed by the work of the Subaltern Studies group, but it does suggest the subaltern’s potential to create societal and political change. Indeed, I argue that it is only once these limitations are identified that potential strategies of resistance can be constructed and articulated. The next chapter explores how the subaltern indigenous Mayan constituents of the EZLN have achieved this.

Issues of representation related to the subaltern are complicated due to the unequal power relations present between subaltern and dominant subjectivities. Indeed, the South Asian Subaltern Studies group, and consequently subaltern studies itself, has been accused of contributing to the further marginalisation of the very groups it claims to support. John Beverley, a professor of Spanish and Latin American Literature and Cultural Studies at

the University of Pittsburgh and a founding member of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group⁵⁰, acknowledges this when he writes that the subaltern:

cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that actively *produces* subalterneity (it produces subalterneity in the act of representing it). How can one claim to represent the subaltern from the standpoint of academic knowledge, then, when that knowledge is itself involved in the ‘othering’ of the subaltern? (1999: 2; emphasis in original).

This position fits quite neatly into a postmodern framework which claims that the “other” must be allowed to speak for itself to prevent dominant members of society imposing a marginalising subjectivity or representation upon them. However, when dealing with the subaltern all attempts at representation, be they self-imposed or not, are fraught with even greater problems. For, as Spivak claims, the subaltern cannot speak in a meaningful way within the dominant discourses, because if it could, it would no longer be excluded from the relations of power which marginalise it and construct its subaltern subjectivity; thus, it would no longer be subaltern (1994: 66-111). This is because, according to Spivak, the subaltern’s oppositional practice is “non-narrativisable”, meaning that its practices are incomprehensible within the dominant political, economic and social discourses of society (Spivak, 1990: 144). Instead the subaltern presents as a silence or an absence. Consequently, the subaltern is not able to produce any meaningful self-representations within the dominant relations of power, for this presupposes that it has been accorded agency in the very discourses within which its subjectivity identifies it as marginalised

⁵⁰ The Latin American Subaltern Studies group had its first meeting at the George Mason University in April 1992. Most of its key members, such as Ileana Rodriguez, John Beverley, Walter D. Mignolo, Maria Milagros Lopez and Marc Zimmerman, were academics who had been working in the field of literary theory, but, at this time, they were impelled to seek out new theoretical frameworks and modes of political action due to what Beverley describes as “a collective sense that the project of the Latin American Left that had defined our previous work had reached some kind of limit” (1999: 5). The group’s formation was heavily influenced by the work of the South Asian Subaltern Studies group, and the similar experiences that had inspired its creation. However it also moved beyond the framework of the South Asian group by producing work that was not only historiographic but also overtly concerned with the present (Beverley, 1999: 7). The Latin American Subaltern Studies group has encountered a great deal of criticism in America and abroad (as has the South Asian group), resulting from the group’s Leftist origins and the privileged academic positions of its members which has prompted many people to question the ability and right of its members to speak about and, thus, represent the subaltern.

and without such agency. However, nor can the subaltern be adequately represented by others who occupy a dominant location within the relations of power, for as postmodernism teaches us, such representations reproduce and reinforce, both intentionally and unintentionally, the marginality of the subaltern.

In an attempt to negotiate a way out of this impasse, Spivak suggests a rethinking of representation. The rethinking she advocates is informed by her identification of the epistemological inadequacies of the notion that only the subaltern can speak for itself. For Spivak, representations of marginalised people produced by those who occupy a non-marginalised social location are not necessarily any more or less adequate, accurate or repressive than representations these people would produce of themselves. While Spivak demonstrates an awareness that non-marginalised people often reinforce the marginality of the subaltern, she contends that this behaviour can be unlearned. Indeed, she states that:

There is an impulse among literary critics and other kinds of intellectuals to save the masses, speak for the masses, describe the masses. On the other hand, how about attempting to learn to speak in such a way that the masses will not regard as bullshit (Spivak, 1990: 56).

Here Spivak locates a crucial problematic in the notion of “not speaking for others”, for this notion seeks to privilege a certain perspective—that “from the inside”; that of a person who has had a direct experience of repression and who identifies with, or is represented as, the disempowered victim. To argue that only the “other” can represent itself implies that the representations she or he would produce would be accurate, authentic and non-marginalising. However, as Mary-Louise Pratt writes, autoethnographic texts are in fact texts “in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways which engage with representations others have made of them” (1994: 28). She surmises that:

Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as autochthonous or ‘authentic’ forms of self-representation ... Rather they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conquerer. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous

idioms to create self-representations intended to *intervene* in metropolitan modes of understanding (Pratt, 1994: 28; emphasis in original).

As such, the subaltern's identity is inextricably linked to the ideas and vocabulary of the metropolis—constituted by individuals who occupy a dominant social location—which constructs the very marginality of the subaltern. This raises the question of whether the subaltern is able to construct an empowering discourse capable of altering the power structures that construct and sustain its very subjectivity. It could be argued that it is the “tools” of the normative subject, namely *their* words, that relegate “the other” to the realm of the subaltern. Therefore if “the other” speaks of its victimhood or its powerlessness it simply reaffirms its epistemic status as the subaltern and helps maintain the legitimacy of the normative subject, and as such, the tools and theories of the oppressor are maintained as the “truth” of society and power relations remain unchanged and unchallenged. However, Pratt contests the validity of such an argument by emphasising the ability of marginalised groups to disrupt or intervene in the dominant narratives, thus enabling them to articulate alternative representations of themselves. These representations cannot be dismissed as purely imposed and repressive, *or* solely authentic and liberationist. Indeed, Pratt argues that the subaltern is able to consciously act to disrupt or intervene in the dominant discourses of power within which it is marginalised by appropriating and rearticulating the “tools” of the dominant power. This forms the basis of Pratt's notion of autoethnography which she defines as “expression aimed specifically at *intervening* in the discursive economy of a dominant group” (1994: 43; emphasis in original). This occurs, she continues, when “a subordinate group asserts an alternative to the dominant group's representations of them, in part by transculturating the latter's own discourses” (Pratt, 1994: 42-43). Indeed Pratt goes on to point out that “[a]utoethnography selectively appropriates some tools of objectification both to counter eradication (‘We are still here despite your/their efforts’) and to counter objectification (‘We are not as you/they see us’) (1994: 44).

Pratt presents an image of an active marginalised subject able to access and reappropriate the tools that oppress it in order to consciously select and enact practices which promote self-representations that challenge the subaltern subjectivity produced by dominant

groups. However, Pratt argues that such strategies of resistance, what she terms “autoethnographic interventions”, probably do not work in “any direct or systematic sense”, prompting her to question the reliability of such tactics to change dominant social, political and economic discourses (1994: 45). Such questioning, however, does not detract from the significance of such interventions and, as Pratt notes in relation to autoethnographic art, “[p]erhaps its [autoethnographic interventions] most profound effects are on the consciousness of the community that produced it” (1994: 45). This suggests that the subaltern community’s recognition of its own self-consciousness and ability to actively appropriate tools of the dominant group enables it to maintain its resistance against eradication or appropriation. The continued survival of the Mayan cultures could be understood as testament to their self-conscious recognition of their ability to resist. However, interestingly, Pratt notes that identification of the marginalised culture’s capacity for sustained resistance against, and intervention in, the dominant relations of power to ensure their survival is “a fact with which metropolitan social theory has yet to come to grips” (1994: 45).

The inability to conceptualise autoethnographic intervention as a form of systematic resistance attests to the so-called non-narrativisability of the subaltern’s tactics and strategies of resistance. Indeed, Spivak claims that the strength of oppressed people’s strategies of resistance lies in their very non-narrativisability, suggesting that exclusion from dominant narratives, and the systematic practices therein, enables them to articulate alternatives (Spivak, 1990: 144). By presenting the subaltern’s struggle as having caused significant interruptions in the historical development of society, and by understanding these interruptions as consciously enacted or performed, it is possible to identify these people as actively pursuing strategies of resistance whether systematic or not. Indeed, the notion that a strategy must be systematic in order to be successful can be understood as a product of dominant discourses of logic. Perhaps by not adhering to such prescriptions, subaltern groups increase the number of possible sites and tactics of resistance from which to challenge the dominant power relations of their societies.

By presenting the indigenous Mayan constituents of the EZLN as subaltern, the

significance of issues of identity and representation to producing an informed reading of the movement is highlighted. These issues are vital because, as Butler notes, “[t]he First World intellectual cannot refrain from ‘representing’ the subaltern, but the task of representation will not be easy” (2000a: 36). This is the case principally because of the power differential that exists between the first world intellectual and the subaltern, and the consequent danger of reproducing and reinforcing the subaltern’s marginalisation. The work of the South Asian Subaltern Studies group to completely rearticulate the subaltern of South Asia as an agent of historical change attempts to overcome this issue by presenting the subaltern as a conscious and active political agent. However, in so doing, the group does not sufficiently attend to the limited methods and opportunities available to the subaltern to effect radical political change. By arguing this, I do not attempt to present the subaltern as lacking in political agency, nor do I suggest that subaltern groups cannot radically alter their social location. I do, however, contend that the subaltern’s level of political agency is restricted within the existing dominant political, economic and social discourses, and that this circumstance cannot be immediately altered by pointing to historical evidence of the agency of those who identify with this subjectivity.

Shifting conceptions of identity: from modernism to postmodernism

The problematic issues of identity and representation associated with the subaltern subjectivity of the indigenous Mayan constituents of the EZLN are further complicated by the postmodern recasting of identity. The move away from a modernist, essentialist and unified identity to the fluid, multiple and changing conception espoused in postmodernist and poststructuralist work portends a change in what constitutes effective political action and how, and by whom, it can be enacted. Postmodernism’s insistence that identity is a discursive construct leads many theorists, such as Sandoval, to argue that this theoretical framework provides greater liberationist potential for marginalised individuals than do modernist theories because it denaturalises their subjugated social location (Sandoval, 2000). However, there are those, such as Moya and Mohanty, who argue that the postmodernist conception of identity is unable to provide a suitable basis

for effective political action precisely because it outrightly rejects the ontological validity of identities and their relationships to extra-discursive realities (Moya and Hames-García, 2000). These opposing positions are presented in this section in order to lay the foundation for analyses in chapters four and five of the political practices employed by the EZLN.

Modernist metanarratives present a rather unproblematised view of identity. Within such theories, identity is essentialised, unified and inherently “true”, making it a viable basis upon which to construct theories of liberation. Indeed, Marxism is based on the premise that the “true” identities of the proletariat have been masked by bourgeois ideology which naturalises the subordination and alienation of the working class. According to Marx the division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat increases over time, heightening the working classes’ sense of alienation, even though there may be an improvement in their socio-economic standing. He writes that:

Even the *most favourable situation* for the working class, the most *rapid possible growth of capital*, however much it may improve the material existence of the worker, does not remove the antagonism between his interests and the interests of the capitalists ... To say that the most favourable condition for wage labour is the most rapid possible growth of productive capital is only to say that the more rapidly the working class increases and enlarges the power that is hostile to it, the wealth that does not belong to it and that rules over it, the more favourable will be the conditions under which it is allowed to labour anew at increasing bourgeois wealth, at enlarging the power of capital, content with forging for itself the golden chains by which the bourgeoisie drags it in its train (Marx in Swingewood, 1975: 141; emphasis in original).

By subscribing to a ruling-class ideology—by identifying this as the natural way of the world—the proletariat actively reproduces and reinforces its own subjugation. Marx claims that if the proletariat breaks away from this ideological stranglehold and frees itself and society from the imposed hierarchy of classes, its authentic, essential identity will be uncovered and it will no longer be subject to this repressive ideology (Rogers, 1994: 107-108).

Postmodernist and poststructuralist theories problematise the essentialist conception of

identity present in the metanarratives of modernist theories such as Marxism. Instead they advocate the deconstruction of such notions of identity in order to recast it as a multiple, open and changeable discursive construct which is never complete or finalised. Hall articulates this position when he writes:

The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it 'lacks' (1996: 5).

The pervasiveness of these ideas within postmodernist and poststructuralist thought has brought political action based on identity into disrepute. Categories of identification such as race, gender and class have been demonstrated by many theorists, including Judith Butler, to have lost their ontological status. They are presented as constructions whose unifying capacity is an aberration. Worse, these unified identities are claimed to enact a "silent violence" on those people they seek to describe by forcing them to identify with categories that naturalise a state of subordination. Indeed, Butler writes that:

the identity categories often presumed to be foundational to feminist politics, that is, deemed necessary in order to mobilize feminism as an identity politics, simultaneously work to limit and constrain in advance the very cultural possibilities that feminism is supposed to open up. The tacit constraints that produce culturally intelligible 'sex' ought to be understood as generative political structures rather than naturalized foundations (1990: 147).

Denaturalising and deconstructing identities and the power relations attached to them demonstrates that these relationships are not based on any "real", incontrovertible foundation, suggesting that subaltern individuals are not marginalised due to innate characteristics. Foucault's work on sexuality, madness and criminality can be credited for strengthening this position. Christopher Norris, writing of Foucault's poststructuralist endeavour, notes that his work:

manifests a constant desire to strip the subject of its unearned powers and prerogatives, to treat it as merely an epiphenomenon of language, and thus to put the truth-claims of Enlightenment reason very firmly in their place. This it will achieve ... by revealing their radically *contingent* character, their provenance in a certain period-specific discourse, a localized ensemble of knowledge-constitutive

interests that once produced ‘man’ as the transcendental locus of meaning, morality and truth (1993: 31; emphasis in original).

However, others dispute the liberationist potential of postmodern and poststructural theories, claiming that they are as repressive as the modernist metanarratives they purport to critique. Moya, for example, claims that the “so-called ‘others’... are as silenced by postmodernist theory as they have been by an abstract individualist ideology that judges their views as ‘subjective’ and therefore epistemically unreliable” (2002: 17). Moreover, Moya argues that postmodernist perspectives, such as those she identifies in Butler’s work, simply reproduce the repression and subalterneity of the marginalised subjects by dismissing and deriding their claims to identity. This, according to Moya, presents marginalised peoples as unable to challenge their subjugated social location because they so often call upon “experience” and “identity” as the “primary organizing principles around which they theorize and mobilize” (2002: 25). In a summary of Butler’s postmodernist argument, Moya writes that:

Because the subject has been exposed as an effect of discourse or a mask for social practices, gender and racial identities are no longer taken to be essential or foundational, but are now revealed to be ‘arbitrary,’ ‘fictive,’ and even politically ‘dangerous’. As a result, identity has been denaturalized, put under erasure, or—as the subtitle of Butler’s book⁵¹ announces—subverted (2002: 10-11).

While postmodernist and poststructuralist perspectives may deny the ontological status of an “essentialising” identity and warn of the dangers of such reductive categories they do not necessarily dispute the “strategic” value of employing such identities to advance a political struggle. Spivak argues this point through her concept of “strategic essentialism”.

Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism” asserts that the implementation of a unified subject position can be employed in the short term as a political tactic emanating from the margins of society. Spivak, speaking from her multiple subject position as both a member

⁵¹ The book to which Moya is referring is Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, which was published in 1990.

and critic of the South Asian Subaltern Studies group, asserts that the group enacts the same form of “positivistic essentialism” it purports to challenge. She writes that:

Although the group does not wittingly engage with the poststructuralist understanding of ‘consciousness,’ our own transactional reading of them is enhanced if we see them as strategically adhering to the essentialist notion of consciousness, that would fall prey to an anti-humanist critique, within a historiographic practice that draws many of its strengths from that very critique If in translating bits and pieces of discourse theory and the critique of humanism back into essentialist historiography the historian of subalterneity aligns himself to the pattern of conduct of the subaltern himself, it is only a progressivist view, that diagnoses the subaltern as necessarily inferior, that will see such an alignment to be without interventionist value. Indeed it is in their very insistence upon the subaltern as the subject of history that the group acts out such a translating back, an interventionist strategy that is only partially unwitting (Spivak in Fuss, 1994: 107; original is in italics except for the word “strategically”).

However, Spivak does not believe that the group’s recourse to essentialism reduces the significance of its project. In fact, she claims that the employment of essentialism only becomes dangerous, or alternatively acceptable, based on who is exercising discursive and strategic control. As such, she identifies the group’s humanist efforts to locate a subaltern consciousness as “a *strategic* use of positivistic essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak in Fuss, 1994: 107). Fuss elaborates on this point by noting that:

the determining factor in deciding essentialism’s political or strategic value is dependent upon who practices it: in the hands of a hegemonic group, essentialism can be employed as a powerful tool of ideological domination; in the hands of the subaltern, the use of humanism to mime . . . humanism can represent a powerful displacing repetition. The question of the permissibility, if you will, of engaging in essentialism is therefore framed and determined by the subject-positions from which one speaks (1994: 108).

However, while Spivak recognises the political utility of essentialism, she remains sceptical of marginalised members of society appropriating the very strategies and tactics that are employed to repress them. Such strategies, she argues, perpetuate the political reliance on a monolithic, unified subject position allowing the “dominant power” to

homogenise the subordinate members of society and negate the multiplicity of subject positions from which they speak, listening to them only as a form of “benevolent imperialism” (Spivak and Gunew, 1993: 194). The notion of strategic essentialism is also problematic within some areas of postmodernism because it assigns a great deal of agency to the marginalised subject. It suggests that some subjects, namely those who are politically aware and active, will be able to attach themselves to a particular identity, while being conscious that this is simply a strategic, temporal and politically useful attachment. Others, however, remain duped by a belief that their identity is unitary, stable and grounded in an extra-discursive reality.

Sandoval pursues a similar argument in her development of a “methodology of the oppressed”. She claims her analysis of the social movement enacted by “U.S. third world feminists⁵²” from the 1960s to the 1980s identifies a hitherto unrecognised form of postmodern consciousness capable of producing a new mode of social movement developed and enacted by multiply marginalised peoples. This new consciousness, according to Sandoval, enables oppressed people to be aware that the subjectivities to which they adhere are not founded on fundamental, innate “truths”. In so doing, this form of consciousness enables them to recognise the political utility of various identifications and they can employ this knowledge to assume certain subjectivities with a view to furthering their particular political agenda (2000: 43). Indeed, Sandoval suggests that marginalised people, referring in particular to US third world feminists, develop a survival skill which enables them to pick and choose when to employ or ascribe to particular identities and ideologies based on political and temporal saliency. They are able to do this by accessing the realm Sandoval refers to as “differential consciousness”. This form of consciousness and the social movement it produces invest oppressed people with a great deal of agency, self-consciousness and reflexivity. It identifies them not simply as interpolated into particular subject positions, as dictated by the discourses in which they participate, but as able to identify and assume whichever subjectivity will be

⁵² This category refers principally to politically active, feminist, Chicana and Black, female citizens of the US.

of most use to them at various points in their struggle against the dominant ideologies which subordinate them. The level of agency with which Sandoval imbues these subjects would be considered to be contentious within some postmodernist and poststructuralist perspectives. However, others concur that such a level of politically conscious action can be identified within marginalised groups. For example Miller, in his analysis of the political activities of a gay-rights group, writes that “[t]hey seek their own *différends de soi*”, and continues thus:

To identify *différends de soi* is to assert the existence of agency. It assumes that people can organize their own emancipation from definition and enclosure, in search of selves that are not transactions with the deeply secreted truth, but rather rejections or appropriations of surface categories. Such a move takes us away from queries as to the identity of the subject and toward tactics for utilizing it (1993: 224; emphasis in original).

It is this notion of reading across the surface and investigating a tactical notion of subjectivity that Sandoval develops through her analysis of the social movement enacted by US third world feminists; a group which she claims accessed the realm of differential consciousness to produce a radical liberationist social movement. By elucidating the strategies and technologies of this form of social movement, Sandoval’s intention is to “consolidate and extend what we might call manifestos for liberation in order to better identify and specify a mode of emancipation that is effective within first world neocolonizing global conditions during the twenty-first century” (2000: 2).

In the development of her thesis, Sandoval adheres to the postmodern notion that identity is only dangerous if it is seen as fixed, unitary and essentialising—that is, if it is considered to be an expected or necessary consequence of particular “real” world experiences and socio-economic conditions. In consonance with this position she argues that US third world feminists are conscious of their multiplicity of identity attachments and are able to move freely among them without emotional sentiment. While the identities to which individuals attach may reflect certain limitations, as dictated by the discourses which enable their constitution, Sandoval argues that their movement among

them is otherwise relatively unconstrained.

Sandoval contends that some oppressed people occupy a social location from which they are able to accurately identify the relations of power which construct their marginalised subject position. It is an ability born of necessity because oppressed people must struggle against marginalising representations of themselves every day in order to present themselves as active human subjects who constitute a significant component of their societies. In response to this, Sandoval argues, they have developed a new form of oppositional consciousness which produces alternative modes of resistance struggles that incorporate and move beyond existing strategies. To demonstrate the unique nature of this new consciousness, Sandoval maps a cultural topography⁵³ of oppositional consciousness. Through this she identifies the key sites of oppositional struggle as the modes of “equal rights”, “revolutionary”, “supremacist”, and “separatist” (Sandoval, 2000: 56-57). Those who employ the equal rights form of “consciousness-in-opposition” argue that all “humans are created equally” and, thus, agitate for legal recognition of their civil rights (Sandoval, 2000: 56). The revolutionary form of consciousness operates in accordance with the belief that there are profound differences among existing social, cultural, racial, sexual and gender identities which cannot be accommodated within the existing social order, thus necessitating radical social transformation (Sandoval, 2000: 56-57). Within the mode of resistance that Sandoval identifies as the supremacist form, “the oppressed not only *claim* their differences, but they also assert that their differences have provided them access to a higher evolutionary level than that attained by those who hold social power” (Sandoval, 2000: 57; emphasis in original). This belief leads practitioners of this form of consciousness on a mission to “provide the social order a higher ethical and moral vision, and consequently, more effective leadership” (Sandoval, 2000: 57). The fourth resistance tactic of the methodology of the oppressed is the

⁵³ Sandoval describes this delineation of oppositional consciousness as a topography rather than a typology because it “represents the charting of psychic and material realities that occupy a particular cultural region” (2000: 54). This suggests that Sandoval understands the modes of oppositional consciousness as grounded within a particular location or context that is best represented as a site on a map, rather than as a word in a hierarchical list. Moreover, she identifies the modes of political action as possessing equal potential for effectiveness and, therefore, she does not assign them a rank. This notion heavily draws on Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping.

separatist form within which the practitioners seek to protect their differences to the dominant social order by refusing to engage with it (Sandoval, 2000: 57). While these four modes represent the most commonly mobilised tactics of resistance “under previous modes of capitalist production”, Sandoval claims that US third world feminists have developed a new mode of consciousness which engages with these strategies, while also moving beyond them (2000: 57). While the US third world feminists utilise these traditional oppositional tactics, Sandoval claims that it is “rarely for long, and rarely adopting the kind of fervid belief systems and identity politics that tend to accompany their construction” (Sandoval, 2000: 58). This led Sandoval to understand their temporal attachments to various strategies of resistance as differential—meaning that they moved between and among the various ideological positions available in the existing topography of resistance. To further explicate this she writes that “the differential mode of consciousness functions like the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power” (Sandoval, 2000: 58). The practitioners of the differential mode of oppositional consciousness are denoted by their ability to move amongst the four sites of oppositional consciousness referred to above, selecting the strategies, ideologies and subjectivities most useful to them at the particular conjuncture of their resistance struggle. However, Sandoval cautions that:

The differential mode of social movement and consciousness depends on the practitioner’s ability to read the current situation of power and self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological stand best suited to push against its configurations; a survival skill well known to oppressed peoples (2000: 60).

Sandoval further emphasises the self-reflexivity and political consciousness of marginalised groups by claiming that they can, and have learned to, “identify, develop, and control the means of ideology, that is, marshal the knowledge necessary to ‘break with ideology’ while at the same time *also* speaking in, and from within, ideology”(2000: 44; emphasis in original). That is to say, these individuals call up ideology to fit their own current political needs rather than being subject to the identity prescribed by the

particular discourses in which they participate. To explain this Sandoval writes that:

[the] practitioners of the differential mode of social movement develop and mobilize identity as political tactic in order to renegotiate power: identity is thus both disguised and not disguised in a form of differential consciousness that thrives on oscillation. The positional subject is not living a lie, then, but rather in disguise, but a real disguise ... a disguise that enables survival (2000: 145).

US third world feminists have developed this degree of agency, and the consequent mobility among subjectivities and ideologies, to avoid being pinned down to a specific location that could be targeted for a sustained ideological attack perpetrated by ruling groups which aimed to further marginalise them. By constantly renegotiating their identities they avoid this scenario. Moya summarises Sandoval's argument thus:

As a result of having to continually privilege or de-emphasise different aspects of themselves in different situations, Sandoval says, U.S. third world feminists have become practiced at shifting their ideologies and identities in response to different configurations of power (Moya, 2002: 79-80).

Consequently, Sandoval presents third world feminists as extremely active human subjects able to wilfully select identities and ideologies that further their political agenda in order to enact an effective social movement in contemporary neocolonising global conditions.

Postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives generally assert that the particular identities individuals are able to assume at certain points in time are not based on active choices but are a result of the subject positions created by the discourses in which they participate—that is, individuals are interpolated into or called up to fulfil particular identities as are dictated by the dominant discourses. However, while Sandoval claims to be adhering to a postmodernist program and states that the political strategies employed by US third world feminists should also be classified as postmodern, what makes Sandoval's thought potentially liberationist and revolutionary is her bestowal of agency on this marginalised group; it is also an element of her thesis which is quite contentious within the work of many in postmodernism and poststructuralism. It must be

acknowledged that Sandoval does address some of the limitations that restrict the oppressed people's level of agency, however, as will be discussed in the latter half of the chapter, she does not theorise the potential development of ways of overcoming these.

Sandoval's theory operates in accordance with the postmodernist critique of identity as a singular, unified and essentialist concept and its elaboration of a notion of identity as fluid and multiple. However, Sandoval argues that to be effective political actors these individuals assume only one specific identity at particular points in time, thus necessitating that certain identity attachments be discarded or, in the very least, masked so another can be presented as their "true" identity. This position suggests a belief that identities must be seen as whole and unified to be politically useful by offering an argument akin to Spivak's strategic essentialism, which presents marginalised people as able to temporarily embody an essentialised, unified identity in order to further their resistance struggle. Furthermore, these theories rest on the premise that identities that are politically salient within the dominant discourses are actually available to marginalised individuals, and that they can choose to assume them. While postmodernism has enabled a rethinking of identity and power relations, freeing us from the "truths" of metanarratives, the issue of agency remains contentious. Sandoval's work betrays a great deal of agency on marginalised groups which somewhat problematises her adherence to a postmodern framework. Thus, I read her work as an attempt to move beyond the confines of postmodernism, suggesting the need for the development of a new theoretical perspective within which liberationist struggles in the contemporary neocolonising context can be conceived of and understood. Sandoval's work incorporates, but also moves beyond, the postmodern notions that identities are necessarily fractured and fragmented by the intersection of the various discourses within which they are constructed, and that people are then interpolated into these subjectivities. Indeed, Sandoval argues for a conception of identity that locates it as multiple and changing but also as self-reflexive and able to be consciously mobilised by subjects to further their political projects. Sandoval's attempt to provide a framework for resistance struggles in the contemporary global conditions is restricted by her adherence to postmodernism.

New theories of identity: beyond postmodernism

The insights of postmodernism, which critique modernist, essentialist conceptions of truth and power, had a great impact on theoretical endeavours in the final decades of the twentieth century and this continues into the twenty-first. However, a number of theorists such as Moya and Mohanty believe that to understand identity solely as a discursively constructed entity is to severely limit and curtail the potential for effective political action in the contemporary political, economic and social climate. Moya cites the postmodern and poststructuralist rejection and negation of the legitimacy of traditional grounds from which political action is mounted—namely an essentialised identity which is inextricably linked to extra-discursive “realities”—as a key factor preventing the realisation of postmodernist liberationist political struggles. While Moya and Mohanty do not wish to reinstate the ontological validity of essential identities, they propose the development of a theory of identity which presents it as a discursive construct which is directly shaped by extra-discursive material conditions. It is a position that they call “postpositivist realist”.

Postpositivist realism represents a departure from both modernist and postmodernist conceptions of identity and suggests a new theoretical trajectory. Indeed, working in accordance with the assumption that the inadequacies of modernist conceptions of identity have been addressed by postmodernism, Moya attempts to critique postmodernist and poststructuralist notions. Moya questions the ability of theorists adhering to these perspectives, speaking specifically in relation to feminist theorists, to develop a potentially liberationist framework (2002: 17). Indeed, she asserts that the refusal to make objective metaphysical claims about the world prevents postmodernist theorists from being able to adequately represent the influences which construct identities and how those who assume certain identities mediate their experiences of the world. Moya sets out to develop a “rigorous theory of identity” which she and Mohanty claim existing theories lack. This theory, Moya writes, is predicated on Mohanty’s assertion that:

we can adjudicate the validity and usefulness of different identities by viewing them as theoretical claims that attempt to account for causal features of the social world. In the process, he [Mohanty] demonstrates that a good theory of identity

does more than simply celebrate or dismiss the various uses of identity—rather, it enables cultural critics to explain where and why identities are problematic and where and why they are empowering (Moya, 2000a: 17).

For Moya, the development of “a good theory of identity” that moves beyond the scope of poststructuralism and postmodernism is necessary because of the inability of these theories to accurately capture the “realities” of the oppression suffered by marginalised people, and thus their inability to offer the means to resist it. For the postpositivist realists, identities and the experiences from which they derive are not simply natural and inherent, as modernist theory suggests. Nor are they completely contingent and discursively constructed as postmodernism claims. Rather, Moya contends that the influences on the development of identity are not so clearly delineated, writing that “they are neither self-evident, immutable, and essential nor radically unstable or arbitrary. Rather, they are socially significant constructs that become intelligible from within specific historical and material contexts” (2002: 86). That is to say that the postpositivist realists contend that identities are discursively constructed as well as being produced within certain objective material realities. The elaboration of this theory relies on notions of objective social location and epistemic privilege which are grounded in a belief that some identities produce a more accurate reading of the power relations that construct their societies than others. Those well situated to assume an identity that enables an accurate reading of power relations find themselves in a social location from which they are able to effectively challenge these relations. It is a concept encapsulated in what the postpositivists realists term “epistemic privilege”.

Epistemic privilege arguably represents the most contentious element of the theoretical project of postpositivist realism. This concept suggests that the people who occupy the most marginalised positions within society are also those most able to clearly and “objectively” see, identify or isolate the manner in which power functions within that society (Mohanty, 2000: 58). The postpositivist realists assert that because marginalised people have to consistently challenge the prevailing doctrines or dominant ideologies proffered by the dominant members of their society simply to survive, they have a vested interest in accurately identifying the trajectories of power that construct that society. By

doing so they maximise their chances of successfully challenging them and constructing a discursive space for their existence. Moya contends that bestowing epistemic privilege on these marginalised individuals constitutes more than a noble and benevolent, imperialist gesture, because it is an accurate representation of their literacy in the power relations of society and their ability to actively negotiate through, around, between and among these relations. While Sandoval seems to position the oppressed in a similar position of epistemic privilege, for her the ability of the oppressed to accurately read and negotiate the relations of power is not available to all those who occupy this social location. It is not an inherent characteristic, rather it is an ability learnt by some, but not by others.

Moya contends that the epistemic privilege of marginalised individuals opens up the possibility for them to produce the most objective reading of the discourses which construct their society. The “objective” view Moya refers to does not equate to being bias-free. Instead, she elaborates a postpositivist realist notion of objectivity that recognises that all experiences are mediated by theory and, consequently, produce a variety of views and interpretations. This notion of objectivity highlights a distinct difference between the postpositivist realist perspective and that developed within positivism, modernism and postmodernism which all conceive of objectivity as meaning free from bias. Moya writes that such a notion of objectivity prompts the postmodernists to conclude that “there is no such thing as a context-transcendent, subject-independent, and theoretically unmediated knowledge, they therefore conclude that there can be no such thing as objective knowledge” (2000a: 12-13). The postpositivists agree with the first clause in this statement, but Moya warns that, by contrast, the postpositivist realists’:

conception of objectivity ... stake[s] out a less absolutist and more theoretically productive position. They [the postpositivist realists] suggest that objective knowledge can be built on an analysis of the different kinds of subjective or theoretical bias or interest (2000a: 13).

The postpositivist realists argue that by analysing identities, we are able to draw out the power relations and ideologies of the society that enables their construction. Indeed, they claim that identities relate in meaningful ways to the actual experiences—such as socio-

economic, gender, racial—of individuals. Identities may relate truthfully and accurately to the individual's conditions, or they may obfuscate her or his real experiences. Either way, the postpositivist realists contend that this relationship is productive for developing an understanding of the power relations of societies. As Moya writes:

To the extent that identities do not work well as explanations of the world—to the extent that they fail to 'refer' adequately to the societies from which they emerge—they can help to reveal the contradictions and mystifications within which the members of those societies live (2002: 87).

Indeed, for Moya, identities are significant for they mediate people's experiences of the world and are relational to real-world conditions. While claiming to theoretically agree that "boundaries are infinitely permeable and power may be amorphous", Moya points out that:

The difficulty is that people do not live in an entirely abstract or discursive realm. They live as biologically and temporally limited, as well as socially situated, human beings ... A politics of discourse that does not provide for some sort of bodily or concrete action outside the realm of the academic text will forever be inadequate to change the difficult 'reality' of our lives. Only by acknowledging the specificity and 'simultaneity of oppression,' and the fact that some people are more oppressed than others, can we begin to understand the systems and structures that perpetuate oppression and thereby place ourselves in a position to contest and change them (2000b: 79)

For Moya this means that identities are "not simply products of structures of power; they are often assumed or chosen for complex subjective reasons"(2000a: 9). This claim positions individuals as able to act with agency to assume certain identities and contends that some identities to which they have access will relate more truthfully to their actual social, historical and economic position than others. Moya argues that the more accurate an identity is, the better able an individual is to recognise the power systems of her or his society and consequently the better equipped she or he is to negotiate and, potentially, challenge them. Indeed, postpositivist realism hinges on the existence of an extra-discursive realm. Therefore the validity and subsequent utility of this theoretical perspective is contingent on the existence of fundamental, concrete realities with which experiences and identities can be compared in order to evaluate their accuracy or

legitimacy. The more accurate the interpretation or understanding, the more likely it is that epistemic privilege will become available. As Moya writes:

By demonstrating the cognitive component of cultural identity, I underscore the possibility that some identities can be more politically progressive than others *not* because they are ‘transgressive’ or ‘indeterminate’ but because they provide us with a critical perspective from which we can disclose the complicated workings of ideology and oppression (2000b: 71).

In summary Moya’s postpositivist realist framework prompts her to argue that it is dangerous and damaging to adhere to a theory which suggests that identities mystify the matrices of power. Instead, she contends that some identities provide access to a more objective reading of power relations than others. That is, some identities will always produce mystification while others produce a form of enlightenment. For Moya it is dangerous to remove or distance identity from a basis in “real” concrete conditions. The relationship between identities and real-world conditions, she argues, are vital to understanding the systems and structures that perpetuate oppression because “a person’s interpretation of an event will be at least partially dependent for its meaning on her self-conception—her understanding of her particular relation to the people and happenings surrounding that event” (Moya, 2002: 87). Therefore, Moya suggests that effective political action able to resist oppression needs to be based on an acknowledgment of real-world experiences of oppression. Indeed, referring specifically to the development of a liberationist feminism she writes that:

theorists need to acknowledge that some of our ethical and political goals might indeed be based on reliable, objective knowledge of ourselves and our world. Rather than refusing to ground our politics, then, we need to ask what grounds might, in fact, be worth defending (2002: 60).

Moya utilises this postpositivist realist perspective to critique Sandoval’s work, arguing that her most significant insights are hindered by her attachment to postmodernism (2002: 60-61). Instead, she claims that they are better explained and more effective when

understood within a postpositivist realist framework⁵⁴. Sandoval's postmodern insistence that identities are fragmented and multiple, according to Moya, causes her to mistake the shifting political assertions of identity made by US third world feminists for complete changes in their identities and ideologies. In contrast to this, Moya's postpositivist realist reading understands the shifts in identification as a change in emphasis on certain facets of a relatively stable US third world feminist identity:

A realist theory of identity ... would acknowledge that different aspects of the woman's social identity become more and less visible in different situations, but would see that identity as remaining more or less constant over the course of her movements (2002: 82).

Moreover, Sandoval's claims that US third world feminists are able to easily pick and choose among identities on the basis of political saliency are viewed with contempt by Moya. Contra Sandoval, Moya argues that identities have two components, as previously discussed. In accord with Sandoval's postmodernist perspective, Moya agrees that identities are discursively constructed. However, postpositivist realism contends that identities also contain a non-arbitrary reference to elements of an extra-discursive realm. That is to say that colour of skin, race and socio-economic status directly influence the range of identities people are able to assume and, therefore, limit the ways in which they are able to engage in political action. Indeed, Moya contends that the level of self-conscious agency which Sandoval bestows on US third world feminists further mystifies the relations of power and ideologies which relegate them to a marginalised and subjugated social location, arguing that the identification options available to US third world feminists are more limited than Sandoval's bestowal of agency suggests. Recognition of the extra-discursive limitations on identities, for Moya, provides a more accurate and objective reading of the power relations of society (2002: 78-85). Consequently, the postpositivist realists argue that this enables the development of a

⁵⁴ Earlier I suggested that Sandoval's work may be restricted by her adherence to postmodernism. However, contra Moya, I do not argue that a postpositivist realist perspective is a more suitable framework. Rather, this chapter argues that the utility of a postpositivist theoretical framework is also limited and does not provide the most effective means of conceptualising the political activities of the EZLN.

more effective basis for a politics intent on challenging the structures of power that maintain the marginalisation of many for the benefit of a few.

Sandoval's notion of differential consciousness, according to Moya, is inconsistent with her postmodern framework. Moya contends that the identity shifts which Sandoval claims are undertaken by US third world feminists position them as lacking a specific, overarching identity attachment. Thus, she claims that they do not, in fact, represent US third world feminists because they are able to easily and readily shift identities and ideologies. Moya writes that:

If, as she [Sandoval] intimates, U.S. third world feminists are perfectly self-conscious about what they are doing—if they know that their alliance with any one group is strategic and temporary—then they are working from within an ideology of flux and cannot be said to be shifting ideologies (2002: 83).

Therefore Moya claims that Sandoval's framework does not enable the production of accurate representations of US third world feminists because it is unable to address the real-world biological and temporal limitations on the identities available to these multiply marginalised women. Indeed, Moya claims that Sandoval's identification of the multiple, changing identity of US third world feminists belies the very marginalisation and limited representations that prompted and necessitated the development of their oppositional struggle in the first place⁵⁵. Rather, Moya contends that Sandoval's observations would be more accurate, politically progressive, and productive if understood within a realist perspective that understands identities as:

constructed because they are based on interpreted experience and on theories that explain the social and natural world, but they are also real because they refer outward to causally significant features of the world. Identities are thus context-specific ideological constructs, even though they may refer in non-arbitrary ways

⁵⁵ This is an argument similar to that developed in relation to the Subaltern Studies group at the beginning of the chapter. However, my argument that addressed the Subaltern Studies group differs from that elaborated by the postpositivist realists principally because it was not developed within a theoretical framework that suggests the existence of an extra-discursive realm.

to verifiable aspects of the world such as skin colour, physiognomy, anatomical sex, and socioeconomic status (2002: 86).

In order to understand identities and how they are constructed, Moya contends that it is necessary to understand the context in which they are produced because identities refer to real-world, material conditions in a manner which either mystifies or elucidates the social location of those who assume them. It is this relationship which enables the power relations of the society to be understood. By adhering to a postmodern program, Moya asserts that Sandoval weakens the connections among identity, experience and social location. She claims this is particularly evident in Sandoval's suggestion that the strategy of differential consciousness employed by US third world feminists is increasingly required by "all first world citizens" who have to resist the neocolonising globalising economic forces that increasingly shape their lives today (Moya, 2002: 90). The legitimacy of Sandoval's extrapolation of the tactics developed by the multiply repressed US third world feminists to individuals lacking these experiences is outrightly rejected by Moya. She asserts that these tactics cannot "be arrived at, in any sort of willful way, by people who do not share their same social locations" (Moya, 2002: 90). However, for Sandoval, those who share the same social location do not automatically have access to the same strategies, such as differential consciousness.

While Sandoval contends that differential consciousness is a tactic that can be employed by those who occupy a marginalised social location as a means of enacting an effective differential social movement to resist oppression, not all oppressed individuals have access to this realm. Indeed, the means of actually accessing and utilising this realm of consciousness are not self-evident or prescriptive. Sandoval writes that:

Differential consciousness is linked to whatever is not expressible through words. It is accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds, words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void—some no-place—to claim their due. This mode of consciousness both inspires and depends on differential social movement and the methodology of the oppressed and its differential technologies, yet it functions outside speech, outside academic criticism, in spite of all attempts to pursue and identify its place and origin (2000: 140).

The revolutionary potential of the notion of differential consciousness is produced by its ability to evade an exact definition and specific location for it exists outside of the dominant narratives, representing an uncolonised realm untouched by the ideologies of the ruling-groups and the relations of power that position them as dominant.

The means of accessing this realm and its liberationist potential become available when one recognises inadequacies in existing systems of meaning. Sandoval writes that:

Every time meaning cannot find a solid signifier, escapes from that which is tamed and known, is defiant in the face of any binary opposition, undergoes trauma in relation to the 'real', then consciousness is 'lapsed' and passage permitted to the realm of differential consciousness (2000: 147).

Sandoval argues that the most effective site of resistance for non-marginalised people exists in this non-narrativisable realm that she terms differential consciousness. It is a realm that she claims is similar to Barthes's notion of the "zero degree of language"—the site which enables the production of the speech of the oppressed because it "occurs at the 'zero degree' of expression, and is thus exiled from the thick, ideological portions of the rich" (Sandoval, 2000: 106-107). Therefore, this consciousness enables the production of ways of conceiving of and understanding the world that function outside of dominant ideologies and discourses. It offers the possibility of challenging the dominant group's hegemonic control of language and meaning production—a realm which facilitates the creation of new concepts and systems of signification. It is a site where meaning must be produced precisely because it exists outside of ideology. Barthes writes that:

The oppressed is nothing, he has only one language, that of his emancipation; the oppressor is everything, his language is rich, multiform, supple, with all the possible degrees of dignity at its disposal: he has an exclusive right to meta-language. The oppressed *makes* the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is Myth. The language of the former aims at transforming, of the latter at eternalizing (Barthes, 1972: 149; emphasis in original).

However, Barthes asserts that the language of the oppressed is unable to intervene in or

disrupt the ideologically produced metalanguage for its functions outside of ideology, except in the case of the “language of the revolution” (Barthes in Sandoval, 2000: 108). If the aim of revolution is understood as an attempt to challenge the ideological constructs of the world and to produce a new form of society, then it effectively functions outside existing ideologies and represents the manifestation of the language of the oppressed produced at the zero degree of language—outside of myth (Barthes, 1972: 146). Indeed Barthes writes that “[i]t is because it generates speech which is *fully*, that is to say initially and finally, political, and not, like myth, speech which is initially political and finally natural, that Revolution excludes myth” (1972: 146; emphasis in original). However, while Barthes points to the possibility of the oppressed producing a revolutionary language able to challenge their social location, it remains unrealised because “it is allied to the ‘speech of the oppressed,’ and thus outside ‘cynical,’ ‘semiological,’ or ‘dominant’ forms of speech” (Sandoval, 2000: 108). For Barthes, attempts to challenge oppression or the myths of the bourgeoisie, by operating outside of dominant ideologies and meanings, are unable to radically deconstruct and remake the world.

A number of parallels between differential consciousness and Derrida’s notion of *différance* are also identified by Sandoval. While she points out that both Barthes and Derrida recognise their particular theoretical projects as existing outside of dominant ideologies and are therefore unable to be meaningfully heard or seen within the dominant relations of power, she claims that Derrida sets out to develop “‘a new practice of perception’ [that] can permit citizen-subjects to identify this form of consciousness and activity” (Sandoval, 2000: 148). For Derrida, *différance* represents that which escapes definition, or more specifically “delays” meaning, within existing sign or language systems, thus demonstrating the need for the development of a new practice of signification, thus language, which operates outside of existing ideological constructions. Sandoval writes that for Derrida this language is to be “generated through a fresh sign system constructed through “play”, which constitutes “modes of proceeding that are “foreign” to the western dialectic” (Sandoval, 2000: 148). This new language presupposes the demise of the existing social order and the ideologies that produce it, for

différance cannot “be exposed without collapsing the system”, precisely because it represents meanings that the present system is unable to define and explain (2000: 151). This prompts Sandoval to note that “there is much in common between the grammatical position of *différance* within dominant culture and the ‘grammatical position’ assigned to particular subordinated constituencies within the U.S. social order” (2000: 151; emphasis in original). Here she points out that just as *différance* can only be expressed if a new system of signification is constructed which deconstructs and demolishes the existing meaning systems, certain individuals within the US social order cannot challenge their social location within the framework of the existing structures. They must remain subordinated in order to maintain the ruling-group’s position of dominance. The subordinated groups form the necessary “others” in the binary relationship between dominant and dominated. However, if the existing meaning systems do not enable them to challenge their subordination then they can only do this when a new system of signification, which requires the production of a new social order, is created. *Différance* therefore represents, or “recalls”, something similar to the archaic verb form known as the middle voice—a verb form that is “neither active nor passive” but which “is capable of transforming both the speaker and its object of speech at the moment it is uttered” (Derrida, 1973: 130; Sandoval, 2000: 149). Indeed, Sandoval writes that:

as subjugated peoples rise from this grammatically enslaved position as the third, repressed presence that facilitates and rationalizes binary oppositions in the West, then the third, middle voice also finds its release in, among other ways, the oppositional form of consciousness I call the differential. This is the form of consciousness that asks the oppositional actor to *think modally* (e.g. from oppositional ideology to oppositional ideology ... in the way in which native indigenous peoples have been arguing for since the beginning of conquest and colonization (Sandoval, 2000: 155; emphasis in original).

The release of this middle voice, or access to *différance*, or differential consciousness, enables the oppressed to produce a new form of social movement. Indeed, Sandoval notes that *différance* “unsettles every rule; once politicized as differential social movement it can mobilize and transform any tactic, and it is always in the process of transformation” (2000: 153). Meaning is not fixed but always actively being produced and transformed. Sandoval claims that the US third world feminists’ practice of differential

consciousness can be considered to be “an instance of politicized *différance* when we read differential U.S. third world feminism as ‘hazardous’” (2000: 152; emphasis in original). For, as Derrida writes, this:

strategy is not simply one in the sense that we say that strategy orients the tactics according to a final aim ... the theme of a domination, a mastery or an ultimate reappropriation of movement and field. In the end, it is a strategy without finality (Derrida in Sandoval, 2000: 152-153).

Imagining politically powerful identities

The conception of differential consciousness as a “strategy without finality” is illustrated by the US third world feminists’ constant renegotiation of their subjectivities in relation to changing political objectives. The flexible nature of these strategies is elaborated by Sandoval when she writes that:

Differential consciousness requires grace, flexibility, and strength: enough strength to confidently commit to a well-defined structure of identity for one hour, day, week, month, year; enough flexibility to self-consciously transform that identity according to the requisites of another oppositional ideological tactic if readings of power’s formation require it; enough grace to recognize alliance with others committed to egalitarian social relations and race, gender, sex, class, and social justice, when these other readings of power call for alternative oppositional stands. Within the realm of differential social movement, ideological differences and their oppositional forms of consciousness, unlike their incarnations under hegemonic feminist comprehension, are understood as tactics—not as strategies (2000: 60).

Moreover, Sandoval contends that because oppressed people have endured so much material hardship and physical pain as a result of their marginalisation, they occupy a social location within which to survive it is necessary to imagine themselves occupying alternative, liberated spaces. Indeed, she states that “to call upon *différance*, then one must engage with the unsettling pleasures of faith, of ‘hope,’ of utopian possibility” (Sandoval, 2000: 148-149). This engagement is necessary according to Paula Gunn Allen because US third world feminists have lost so much (in terms of rights, freedom, socio-economic security) that “the place we live now is an idea” (Gunn Allen in Sandoval,

2000: 60). Sandoval claims that “in this place new forms of identity, theory, practice, and community became imaginable” (2000: 60). Thus, she suggests that imagination and notions of hope are significant tactics in struggles against repression.

The identification of imagination as a potentially effective resistance tactic available to people who experience oppressive material realities is also examined by Moya. After analysing how the *Chicana* activists and writers Anázaldua and Moraga utilise the imagination in their work to envisage a future in which they are not oppressed, Moya notes that:

While I do not claim that such imaginative exercises are, in themselves, sufficient to ‘change the world,’ I do argue that such affirmative imaginings are a necessary complement to engaging in direct political action designed to do just that. At a very basic level, efforts to imagine a better world help us to chart the paths down which we, as Chicana feminists, are going: they help us to decide what actions we should take, how we should prioritize our efforts, and whether and when we should consider changing directions (2002: 78).

Hall also speaks of the power and utility of the imagination for marginalised resistance struggles. He claims that the imagination can be called on to construct unified communities whose constituents choose to coalesce around a particular representation of their “cultural identity” enabling them to better resist marginalisation and persecution. Indeed, he argues that this:

continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples ... We should not ... underestimate or neglect ... the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered essential identity entails (Hall in Parry: 1994: 175).

This is a position with which Parry expresses considerable empathy, as she writes:

before we pillory Hall for reviving the myth of an organic communality, we should note that he emphasizes the impossibility of its indivisible, homogenous meaning, recognizing this to be an ‘imaginary reunification’, imposing an ‘imaginary coherence’ on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, and

acknowledging that its other side is rupture and discontinuity (1994: 175).

The recognition of the political importance of coalescing around essentialised identities, coupled with an understanding that such identifications are impossibly reductionist, is also expressed by the Luis Villoro. Villoro, writing specifically about the EZLN and its vision of a plural, democratic Mexican nation, notes that “[t]he search for a collective identity aspires to the imaginary construction of a figure drawn by ourselves, that we can pit against the gaze of the other” (1998: 67). He goes on to state that:

Identity would be, in this conception, an imaginary representation, a proposition of a collective, of an ideal that could satisfy the needs and basic desires of all. The road to finding it would not be the discovery of one’s own hidden reality, but the assumption of certain values coherent with one’s reality. Identity would not be a fact, but a project (Villoro, 1998: 76).

It is a project that Sandoval believes is best realised via the imagination and access to differential consciousness. Indeed, for Sandoval, the methodology of the oppressed “is a set of processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination” to free marginalised people from the dominant ideologies of their society that produce their oppression, so that they can imagine new ways of being (2000: 69). She writes that:

The methodology of the oppressed acts as a punctum, a courier that accesses the realm of consciousness that is differential. *This* differential consciousness is a practice for identity, a political site for the third meaning, that obtuse shimmering of signification that glances through every binary opposition. Taken together, these processes and procedures comprise ... a method for generating oppositional global politics (Sandoval, 2000: 182; emphasis in original).

The strength of the non-narrativisable realm, such as differential consciousness, derives from the fact that it elaborates politically advantageous strategies outside of the existing dominant relations of power. Attempts to challenge existing political, economic and social hegemonies by employing authorised modes of political action could be understood as producing evolutionary rather than revolutionary change because the dominance of those relations of power are reinforced rather than radically deconstructed and overhauled. However, the radically different political tactics elaborated in a non-

narrativisable realm, such as differential consciousness, may hold the potential for revolutionary change. This position is also articulated by Esteva and Prakash who state that “[n]o challenge to the proliferating experiences of people’s powerlessness succeeds when conceived and implemented inside the institutional and intellectual framework which produced it” (1998: 20). Indeed, as cultural analyst Molefi Kete Asante asks, “how can the oppressed become empowered if they use the same theories as the oppressors?” (Kete Asante in Somers and Gibson, 1994: 55).

While tactics that are non-narrativisable within the dominant discourses many contain revolutionary potential, the possibility of effecting radical change is restricted due to what Sandoval identifies as the subjunctive nature of differential consciousness. She writes that:

Dependent on the chances provided by power, the differential mode of oppositional consciousness movement is conditional: subject to the terms of dominant power, yet capable of challenging and changing those very same terms (Sandoval, 2000: 180).

Sandoval’s attempts to explain differential consciousness as subjunctive point to the link between her purported postmodern theorising and theories relating to subalterneity. Indeed, as previously argued, the subaltern constitutes a potentially destabilising force yet its means of resistance are delimited by the dominant powers and discourses which relegate it to a marginalised, disempowered subject position. The multiply oppressed US third world feminists that Sandoval studies effectively constitute a subaltern group to which she accords a similar level of conscious agency as did the South Asian Subaltern Studies group to their newly anointed historical subject. However, despite ascribing them a degree of agency, Sandoval argues that these individuals constitute a “grammatically enslaved” group which is only able to free itself from this position by accessing the non-narrativisable realm of differential consciousness. Yet, the subjunctive nature of this tactic means that the oppressed are unable to create the conditions for their liberation; they remain subject to the possibilities and restrictions imposed on them by the dominant powers. Thus, while Sandoval canvasses the ability of the subaltern to affect the political,

economic and social relations of society, she also highlights the limitations these efforts encounter—an element that the Subaltern Studies group did not satisfactorily attend to. Sandoval's work addresses the resistance and transformative capabilities of the oppressed while also attending to the limitations on their level of political agency. Significantly, however, her work does not interrogate the possibilities of the subaltern developing the tactics necessary to overcome these imposed limitations.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the issues of identity, representation and agency because the indigenous Zapatistas' occupation of a subaltern subject position problematises issues of how, and by whom, they can be represented. Identification with a subaltern subjectivity also raises concerns related to the indigenous Zapatistas' ability to constitute agents of political change. After analysing theories of political action related to subalterneity it is evident that those who occupy this subjectivity possess a limited degree of agency which enables them to act in a politically conscious manner to interrupt the dominant narratives of, and effect the development of, their societies. This agency, however, should be understood as limited for it is enacted from within a marginalised, relatively disempowered social location. Thus, the efforts of the Subaltern Studies group to recast the subaltern of South Asia as *the* historical subject are presented as overly ambitious and potentially politically regressive insofar as they obfuscate the relations of power which produce the subaltern subjectivity. The postpositivist realist identification of the subaltern's epistemic privilege and Sandoval's location of "differential consciousness"—a postmodern form of consciousness that is accessed by multiply marginalised individuals—each, in vastly different ways, position the subaltern as potential agents of radical political, social and economic change. However, these theoretical perspectives are shown to be problematic because, while they point to the limitations that continue to restrict the efficacy of political action waged by multiply marginalised individuals and groups, they do not detail how these can be challenged. The following chapter demonstrates that the EZLN has overcome these limitations through the elaboration of a

politicised practice of strategic translation.

Chapter Four

The Zapatistas and Identity Politics: A Coalition for Social Transformation

This chapter presents the EZLN as the orchestrator of a social revolutionary movement which is unable to be adequately analysed or explained within the confines of existing theories of political action. What cannot be grasped by these theories is the unique nature of the relationship between the movement's indigenous constituents and the *mestizo*, urban *Subcomandante* Marcos. This relationship produces political and discursive strategies that represent a new form of political mobilisation delineated by a rearticulation of identity(ies) and agency. Although Moya's postpositivist realist theory and Sandoval's conception of differential consciousness are unable to account for this new form of political mobilisation, they prove useful in analysing the EZLN insofar as they position marginalised groups, such as the indigenous Zapatistas, as able to consciously enact effective political action that intervenes in the dominant relations of power. Once this degree of political agency is established it is possible to identify the new form of political mobilisation produced by the EZLN as created through the practice of translation; a practice whereby the indigenous agents are shown to have willingly engaged with *Subcomandante* Marcos to translate their respective political positions and identities into a new politically progressive, unified movement that does not negate or subsume difference. This strategic translation has produced a coalition for social transformation which enables the subaltern indigenous Zapatistas to articulate demands for radical political change within a dominant discursive space opened up by *Subcomandante* Marcos. Many dispute this reading, arguing in some instances that Marcos's highly visible role as a spokesperson and military commander problematises the movement's claims to indigeneity, while others claim he has co-opted the indigenous Chiapans into a Marxist uprising. These arguments are based on a belief that the marginalised social location of the EZLN's constituents equates to a lack political agency. However, this chapter argues that through the practice of translation facilitated by *Subcomandante*

Marcos and the EZLN, the movement has been able to produce new articulations of indigenous Mayan identity in order to present these people as active political agents able to challenge the existing political, economic and social structures of Mexico.

Locating a Zapatista identity

Experiences of marginalisation and silence within the dominant discourses that construct Mexican society dominate historical representations of the Maya of Chiapas. As argued previously, the Maya are a people subject to such extreme marginalisation that they can be represented as subaltern. While this subjectivity effectively positions them outside the dominant discourses of power which shape their society, this section argues that the indigenous Mayan constituents of the EZLN can concurrently be understood as possessing certain characteristics, shaped by their experiences of impoverishment and marginalisation, which potentially imbue them with what the postpositivist realists term “epistemic privilege”, or with access to the postmodern form of consciousness Sandoval calls the differential. This leads to a rearticulation of the indigenous Zapatistas’ subjectivity, and the practices in which they engage, in order to represent their silences within the dominant power relations as consciously enacted strategies employed according to political saliency. Consequently, the indigenous Zapatistas are presented as possessing a level of political agency which enables them to actively pursue coalitional political relationships with non-marginalised members of society—if they identify this as a politically advantageous strategy. However, the level of political agency available to subaltern individuals or groups remains limited insofar as they are not always able to alter, in a radical or rapid fashion, the power relations of their society which construct them as marginalised⁵⁶. In some historical conjunctures, such as that which produced the EZLN, this can be overcome by the subaltern actively seeking out political coalitions with non-marginalised members of society in order to advance its political aims.

⁵⁶ While the agency of all citizen-subjects is limited in various ways, the subaltern occupies the social location with the most restricted degree of agency and, concurrently, the subjectivity with the most need to challenge the power relations that position them as such.

The representation of the indigenous constituents of the EZLN as emanating from a specific social location in this thesis is produced with an awareness of the multiplicity and somewhat transitory nature of identity attachments. It is not an attempt to affix the Zapatistas to a specific, unitary, unchangeable identity. Rather, it is a desire to understand and explain some of the common experiences with which these people identify and which have compelled and enabled them to coalesce around a collective subjectivity to form a unified political project. Recognition of the indigenous Zapatistas' attachment to a particular subjectivity is, in accordance with both Sandoval's and Moya's work, not understood in this thesis as incongruous with an understanding of identity as multiple, fragmented and changing. Indeed, Moya argues that identity is composed of both fluid, discursively constructed facets as well as non-arbitrary references to elements of the external or extra-discursive realm, whereas Sandoval contends that attachment to a seemingly essential identity is an important tactic for marginalised individuals that enact a differential form of social movement⁵⁷.

Moya contends that identities are best understood as *not* being purely discursively constructed because such a perspective does not sufficiently account for the existence of certain restrictions on the range of subjectivities which one is able to assume, such as those related to ethnicity, skin colour or gender. Consequently, she argues that postmodernist theory fails to recognise and validate the commonality of experience that identification with these subjectivities is able to produce. Moya locates this as a significant problem because many social movements constituted by marginalised groups are identity-based political projects within which participants coalesce around essentialist identities deemed ontologically suspect by some postmodernists, of whom Moya locates Butler as the most notorious. In a similar vein to Moya's reading of Butler, Bourdieu also emphasises his scepticism of essentialist identities and would most probably contend that both Moya and the marginalised groups she speaks of are involved in a process of "misrecognition". Within this process these groups are understood as mistakenly

⁵⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, this tactical adherence to an essential identity shares similarities with, but moves beyond, Spivak's elaboration of strategic essentialism.

identifying themselves in certain ways that force them to wrongly recognise their experiences as produced by a “naturally” marginalised social location. As Webb, Schirato and Danaher explain, Bourdieu claims that this produces “symbolic violence”, or the “violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (2002: 25). To further explain how and why this occurs Bourdieu writes:

The agent engaged in practice knows the world ... too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment ... he feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of the habitus (Bourdieu in Webb et al., 2002: 25).

Thus, marginalised individuals naturalise their state of subalterneity as it is the only subjectivity they know, and the only identity through which they have mediated their experiences of the world. However, the act of misrecognising one’s social location can produce politically progressive and productive movements. Indeed, it can facilitate, as it does in the case of the postpositivist notion of epistemic privilege, the identification of potentially powerful strategies and unities among groups marginalised in diverse ways. While epistemic privilege may be a product of misrecognition, this thesis argues that the agency with which it imbues marginalised or subaltern groups is politically significant and helps explain the conscious political actions initiated by the divergent ethno-linguistic Mayan groups who choose to coalesce around the common subjectivity of indigenous Zapatistas.

The notion of essentialist identities has been conceptualised as highly suspect within postmodernist theories, in which it is only able to be employed strategically, because it homogenises the multiplicity and diversity of an individual’s identity attachments. However, if we rethink this recognition of common traits, actions or experiences as representative of an amalgam of numerous elements, rather than derivative of an overall homogenous experience, then it becomes possible to understand that movements which coalesce around a common, unified identity can be produced by a carefully constructed commonality of traits, actions or experiences. This would enable the identification of a unified position while concurrently recognising its discursive construction. Therefore, the

common identity around which marginalised or subaltern participants of many social movements coalesce could be understood as not constituting an exact reflection of their material circumstances and experiences. Rather, it represents a constructed identity which they elect to adhere to in order to further their political agenda. Such an understanding undermines representations of marginalised subjects as duped by false, “stable” identities and validates an emphasis on identity as a driving component of social revolutionary movements enacted by marginalised individuals. It also highlights the importance of discursive strategies which understand this unified identity as a construction useful for challenging dominant representations of marginalised people. Such an approach is able to draw on key facets of Moya’s two-part conception of identity. It implies that while the unity of traits, actions or experience is constructed from a variety of elements that do not necessarily directly reflect specific material conditions or circumstances, access to this new discourse of unity necessitates participation in particular ontologically verifiable identities such as race, gender or class—whether the marginalisation of these identifications are produced by misrecognition or not. By employing this two-tiered analysis to the study of marginalised individuals and their development of social revolutionary movements, we are able to critically examine, and potentially validate their reliance on, the enactment of a struggle based on identity politics. Indeed, this approach demonstrates that such struggles can be based on a collective and strategic subjectivity while also enabling the individual participants to simultaneously identify with a unique, “real” subjectivity.

By questioning the legitimacy of the poststructuralist and postmodernist critiques of social movements that invoke identity politics as the basis for their struggle, the EZLN can be read as a movement which is characterised by the relationship between subaltern individuals who have chosen to coalesce around the subjectivity of indigenous Zapatistas and to work with the non-marginalised *Subcomandante* Marcos. This relationship has produced a new political project within which the voice of the subaltern is articulated. This voice is not considered to be an “authentic” or “true” expression of a culture or a people which has been uncovered after being masked for centuries by colonial powers. Rather, this voice, like all voices, is subject to mediation and translation. It is not a false

construction which encourages participants to recognise a fundamental unity where there is none. It is a carefully fabricated voice which enables individual participants (whose life experiences encourage them to understand key elements of their identity as directly linked to what they consider to be “real”, verifiable identifications—such as race, colour of skin, sex or gender) to have what they identify as their common experiences recognised, while simultaneously having their many differences validated and incorporated within it.

The many faces of the Maya

The Maya of Chiapas are not a homogenous group. There are distinct divisions and diversity across many fields—linguistic, cultural, political and religious. These divisions were highlighted by the formation, after the 1974 Indigenous Congress in Chiapas, of competing factions working nonetheless towards the same goals of land reform and recognition of human rights, as discussed in chapter one. Indeed, the communities of Chiapas have been altered significantly throughout their 500 years of contact with the Spanish and *mestizos*. Harvey emphasises this when he writes that:

Rather than assume the existence of pristine native traditions, we must instead acknowledge the historical fact that communities in Chiapas have been restructured in the process of resistance and increasing involvement with ladino society (1998: 65).

The national government dramatically altered the make-up of eastern Chiapan communities through its practice of attending to disputes over land rights claims in other states by offering people land in the Lacandón Jungle, forcing the displacement of the native Lacandón Maya and indigenous Chiapans settled there from other parts of state. This forced the new, as well as the existing inhabitants of the region to develop new practices of coping with a linguistically and culturally diverse population. Indeed, Hernández notes that the new communities that formed were heavily influenced by their interaction with the Catholic Church and were united by a common demand for land reform:

to build communities and lives in the uninhabited jungle, they [the dislocated Maya] relied on the presence and accompaniment of the Catholic Church, which in this region was particularly respectful of people's traditional customs—and on the notable absence of governmental institutions. Religion became the glue that held these new communities together (1994: 9).

Hernández also argues that “[a] second element that gave cohesion to these communities was the struggle for title to their land” (1994: 9). These claims are supported by Harvey who, drawing on the work of the Mexican ethnographer Leyva Solano, points out that:

Because the Cañadas [the canyons which are a geographical feature of the Lacandón Jungle] received migrants from each of the different indigenous groups, this pluriethnic mix obliged communities to either maintain or transcend linguistic and cultural differences. The catechists played a fundamental role in helping communities adopt the latter position. As a result, community cohesion in the lowlands was given not by strict adherence to native traditions, but by a shared organizational militancy and a common set of religious beliefs. Ethnic identity was in this way re-created as the basis of political unity (1998: 65).

The emphasis that both Hernández and Harvey place on the role of the Catholic Church in promoting unity and the recreation of an ethnic identity from the diverse indigenous population of Chiapas is interesting in light of the secular nature of the EZLN. As previously discussed, the Catholic Church's 1974 Indigenous Congress inspired the creation of numerous indigenous groups agitating for their own rights. However, by the late 1970s the majority of these had declared themselves to be secular entities. The role of the Catholic Church and its practice of liberation theology, or what is also termed the “preferential option for the poor”, can be understood as one of providing the indigenous people with politically salient and adaptable strategies for forming unified coalitional movements. The alterations to the traditional indigenous Maya communities of Chiapas—caused by development, forced resettlement and the corresponding reorganisation of the social and political operations of these communities—discussed by Harvey and Hernández demonstrates that many of the indigenous people were both willing and able to renegotiate their beliefs, customs and organisational structures to adapt to changes in their geographical location, population and cultural composition. It is possible that they employed tactics imparted by the Catholic Church catechists in their

attempts to unify the diverse population, while still allowing the maintenance of diverse traditional practices. These observations also imply that this renegotiation and organisation of communities was often produced according to the political salience of the resulting structures and discourses. This is supported by Harvey who points out that this restructuring was enacted “in the process of resistance”, and that it enabled “ethnic identity” to be “re-created as the basis of political unity” (1998: 65). Similarly, Hernández writes that, along with the Catholic Church’s role in supporting the reconfiguration of indigenous communities, the struggle for the indigenous people’s title to land was also a prominent element that gave cohesion to their struggles (1994: 9). This process of negotiation resulted in the establishment of a common political agenda that enabled the creation of a politically viable point of unity around which diverse constituents could coalesce. It also demonstrates that these indigenous peoples were, and are, able to consciously enact a process of negotiation with a view to further strengthening their resistance struggles.

Consequently, the diverse discursive strategies of the EZLN, many of which are grounded in a conception of ethnicity, cannot be understood simply as an attempt to express an essential indigenous subjectivity. Rather, they are best understood as an expression of a mediated conception of an indigenous identity within which the diverse Mayan population is able to recognise (or misrecognise as the case may be) their common experiences of oppression, repression and marginalisation, while not forsaking their differences. Indeed, the EZLN is fighting for self-determination and the consequent construction of autonomous zones, which they contend will reflect the pluri-ethnic dynamics of Mexican society. It is this very plurality that the EZLN wants protected in the Mexican Constitution. Indeed, they have called on the government to:

promote a pluralist orientation in society, capable of actively combating every form of discrimination, and of correcting economic and social inequalities ... reflecting the intercultural dialogue with common standard for all Mexicans and respect for the internal systems of law of the indigenous people (*San Andrés Accords*, 1996).

The objective is to have both political and judicial protection for autonomous indigenous

regions—which are already occupied by indigenous communities that support the EZLN—along with pluri-cultural education and pluri-cultural communication networks throughout Mexico. Thus, they are fighting for a new political culture within which an heterogeneous indigenous Mexican identity can be redefined. This chapter argues that the new political culture can be understood as a product of a translation produced by a recomposition of indigenous and *mestizo* realities which does not forsake the cultural heritage or traditions of the various constituents. Rather, it enables them to produce politically salient temporal articulations of subjectivities and experiences.

The agency of the Maya

The level of self-consciousness and reflexivity required to produce politically advantageous articulations⁵⁸ is theoretically difficult to ascribe to a group that coalesces around an extremely marginalised subject position. This debate was addressed in chapter three where the controversial ideas espoused by Mohanty, Moya and Sandoval were introduced. Beyond Moya and Mohanty’s postpositivist realist claims concerning the two constituent components of identity—the discursive and extra-discursive elements—these two theorists attempt to demonstrate that the experiences engendered by some features of this extra-discursive realm are able to imbue some individuals with “epistemic privilege”. Those who have epistemic privilege occupy a social location from which they are better able to accurately recognise and identify the discourses of power that construct their society. The postpositivist realists contend that, because marginalised people are constantly forced to negotiate these power trajectories in order to survive, it is *their* social location which is imbued with this possible degree of epistemic privilege. Thus, Moya and Mohanty argue that marginalised people occupy the best position from which to enact social or progressive political movements which challenge and demand a

⁵⁸ While the degree to which the Zapatista movement has been effective is debatable, the fact that it has a national and international presence is evidence of a degree of political success. Moreover, a key aim of the EZLN was to position indigenous Mexicans as active political subjects in order to combat, what it claims, is their 500-year history of silence and invisibility. It is an aim that this thesis argues the movement has achieved.

reconstruction of the existing power relations of society. It is a situation they claim can be proven through the production of a rigorous theory of identity. Indeed, Moya writes that:

To understand them [identities], we need to be able to distinguish those identities that provide more promising perspectives on the underlying structures of social conflict from those that do not. We need to take the epistemic status of identities seriously enough to make such distinctions (2000a: 9).

As previously argued, the Mayan constituents of the EZLN constitute an extremely marginalised group enabling them to be represented as subaltern. Therefore, Moya and Mohanty would contend that these people possess the potential to most accurately understand the power structures of their society and mediate their participation (or marginalisation) within the dominant structures. This theoretical perspective provides a means of reinterpreting the history that characterises the experiences of the Maya of Chiapas by presenting their history of resistance struggles as a product of their ability to accurately read and negotiate the power relations that repress them. It also provides an explanation for their past failures to radically change their society. Indeed, if they have access to this accurate knowledge of power relations, it is knowledge that is contingent on their exclusion from participation in the discourses that construct the dominant social, economic and political “realities” of their societies. Consequently, the utility or significance of having access to such knowledge is questionable, in regards to practical application, because the ability of marginalised people to use the information to challenge the existing structures of their societies is not guaranteed. They do not necessarily possess a practical literacy in the actual discourses of power from which they are excluded.

It is possible that this problem could be overcome if there was a collaboration or negotiation between those who identify as non-marginalised and have a literacy in dominant discourses of power, and those who are interpolated into a marginalised subjectivity. However, such a collaboration invites the danger of reproducing the dominant group’s subordination of the marginalised. Yet, if the marginalised group is seen as possessing political agency—as the Maya of Chiapas have been shown to have, particularly in their post-1974 development of resistance movements—they can be

understood as able to initiate and mediate the collaboration, thus reducing the danger inherent in this political project. Furthermore, a clear-cut division between marginalised and non-marginalised individuals is unable to convey the complexity of human subjectivities. While this is acknowledged by Moya and Mohanty, they argue that material conditions set up obvious differences between the two groups. This distinction is evident between the participants of the EZLN: the university educated *Subcomandante* Marcos and the impoverished Maya who, although they come from different ethno-linguistic groups, all identify with an experience of extreme impoverishment and marginalisation against which they have continuously struggled for over 500 years. It is a struggle that was advanced when the EZLN's 1994 cry of *Ya Basta* (enough is enough) gained national and international attention.

The call of *Ya Basta* encapsulates the aims and objectives of the EZLN. It signals the Maya's refusal to continue to endure quietly (insofar as their resistance struggles were regional and their demands not addressed within the dominant relations of power) their marginalisation and persecution. It is a call which represents both an advancement of their historical legacy of struggle against the colonisers, and a new articulation of this resistance which sees the local fight move beyond regional borders to gain national and international attention. In the *Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle*, the Zapatistas declared that "[t]oday we say *Basta*", continuing:

We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation, the dispossessed, we are millions and we call upon all of our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a more than 70-year long dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative and sell-out groups. They are the same ones ... that sold half of our country to foreign invaders, they are the same ones who brought over a European prince to govern, they are the same ones that formed the 'scientific' Porfiriato dictatorship ... they are the same ones that massacred the railroad workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, they are the same ones that today take everything from us, absolutely everything (EZLN, 1993; my translation).

This narrative of the Mexican Government's consistently harsh repression of resistance struggles and the consequent continuation and ever worsening marginalisation of the

nation's indigenous and impoverished population, aligns the constituents of the EZLN with these previous fights, thus reinforcing their location as historically oppressed and marginalised. By aligning themselves with these diverse struggles against the political elite—from the murdered leaders of the 1810-1821 struggle for independence to the students massacred for protesting against the secrecy and centralisation of the PRI Government just prior to the 1968 Olympic Games—the EZLN locates its struggle both inside and outside of the Lacandón Jungle and the state of Chiapas. This demonstrates that the movement identifies as part of a Mexican history of marginalisation and repression as well as an indigenous Chiapan history, both of which inform its call to arms under the mantra of *Ya Basta*.

As described earlier, the postpositivist realists argue that the most marginalised members of society exist in a social location that enables them to more objectively and clearly identify the matrices of power which construct that society. It could be argued that within the EZLN movement, *Subcomandante* Marcos—a representative of the dominant, non-marginalised groups—identified the epistemic privilege of the impoverished persecuted Maya. This could explain his purported rethinking of his socialist ideas and the reading of power relations provided by Marxist, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist theoretical perspectives, in favour of those espoused by the indigenous communities.

As the cry of *Ya Basta* represents a people with a history of marginalisation and repression, those who identify with this mantra must perform themselves as historically marginalised and silenced in order to participate in, and ensure the success or the authenticity of, this performative utterance. Only by locating oneself as part of this history of struggle and by representing oneself as having access to the experiences that only impoverishment, marginalisation and repression can engender, can one have access to the performative power of the discourse of *Ya Basta*. Martin locates two key characteristics within discourses of authenticity:

first, the fact that discourses of authenticity emerge in settings where we are least likely to find the 'pure forms' implied by the term; and, secondly, that one finds a dimension of performance associated with activities and objects viewed as

authentic (1993: 4).

The presence of the EZLN's cry of *Ya Basta* on the international stage via the World Wide Web, soon after its localised Chiapan uprising, suggests that the movement's claims to authenticity based on its constituents experiences of impoverishment, occurred in a setting—the technologically advanced and digitally mediated environment of the internet—where the “pure forms” (frustration with a history of marginalisation) implied by the term were unlikely to appear. Moreover, the cry of *Ya Basta* can be understood as a performance of authenticity which establishes a binary by positioning the EZLN as the legitimate, righteous actor in relation to the repressive Mexican Government. Martin, drawing on the work of De Certeau, emphasises the utility of discourses of authenticity in resistance struggles, noting that they:

emerge as ‘tactics’ of resistance that serve to carve out an arena of control in dominated terrain ... To label some practice, object, or person authentic is to establish a boundary in an otherwise unbounded space, thereby designating a space where the forces of oppression are weakened by their association with the inauthentic (1993: 7).

The EZLN's appeal to authenticity through the discourse of *Ya Basta* can be read as a conscious political strategy employed by the Maya in order to mark out and colonise a discursive space in otherwise “dominated terrain”. By performing themselves as the authentic and legitimate inhabitants of this terrain they are able to weaken the “forces of oppression” which subordinate them in this space. Yet, key to this performance of authenticity is the participants' identification with marginalisation and the subaltern subjectivity which is intimately linked to the cry of *Ya Basta*. While the discourses of authenticity can be utilised by groups other than the impoverished, the EZLN has established the experiences of marginality of its indigenous constituents as evidence of *their* authenticity and, thus, their ability to occupy a space that produces self-representations that challenge those constructed by the “forces of oppression” (namely the Mexican Government).

Holloway suggests that the Zapatistas' concept of *Ya Basta* enables the expression of the

movement's key discursive construct of dignity by positioning its constituents as active resisters (1998: 159-60). He goes on to state, categorically, that the power of the Zapatista movement emanates from "the *ya basta*, the negation of oppression, which exists in the depths of all of us" (Holloway, 1998: 185). So, dignity—the expression of a people who have had enough oppression—is presented as existing only to counter the negation of basic human rights that the Zapatistas believe is facilitated by neoliberal practices. It is not necessarily an essential, fundamental human characteristic, rather, it is something born out of necessity in order to resist human degradation at the hands of the global phenomenon of neoliberalism. The EZLN attests that:

Each country, each city, each rural area, each house, each person, everything is a large or small battleground. On the one side is neoliberalism with all its repressive power and all its machinery of death; on the other side there is the human being (EZLN, 1996c; my translation).

It is from this site of resistance, this reactive repository of human dignity so antithetical to the alienating principles of capitalism, that the call of *Ya Basta* emanates. The EZLN's use of the mantra of *Ya Basta* serves as an indicator that the movement attempts to gain legitimacy by linking itself to the experiences of marginalised people. Such a tactic could be read as evidence of the epistemic privilege of these groups and promotes the benefits of incorporating knowledge born out of their experiences in any attempt to mount a successful social revolutionary movement. This would be politically advantageous for it is within the discursive spaces they manage to colonise, in a society in which they are otherwise dominated, that their resistance is best able to be articulated.

Granting the Maya epistemic privilege challenges conceptions of these people as easily co-opted, latent radicals, the very notion Marcos declares to have had when he arrived in the Lacandón Jungle. Instead, it places them in a position to potentially effect societal change. Indeed, the EZLN does not present merely as a product of Marcos's thought and his revolutionary training. The movement functions in accordance with the indigenous community's processes of decision-making and debate. This argument is supported by various occurrences: the fact that indigenous members of the movements were the only

ones to address the Congress during the March for Indigenous Dignity in 2001; and the distinct differences evident between the EZLN's political and discursive tactics and those of the Guevarism of the Cuban revolution and the Marxist, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist movements which were a feature of Latin America in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, the indigenous practices incorporated in the EZLN are not solely grounded in an appeal to authenticity. Instead the practices, and the meanings associated with them, are open to change, reinterpretation and negotiation. After all, the indigenous peoples' culture has changed and altered in response to factors such as land redistribution and contact with the *mestizo* majority of Mexico throughout the past 500 years, and will continue to do so in the future.

While it can be argued that the indigenous constituents of the EZLN have access to epistemic privilege, the concept itself is extremely contentious. Indeed, if such a privilege is available to marginalised individuals, then how they are able to access tools, tactics or strategies to utilise their privileged knowledge is not made overtly clear in the work of the postpositivist realists. However, despite these problems, the notion of epistemic privilege presents a compelling case for the acknowledgment of the subaltern subject's ability to act with agency to negotiate and develop politically salient temporal articulations of her or his identity. While Sandoval's work also highlights the agency of the subaltern, it suggests that the Maya should instead be understood as possessing a survival skill which enables them to pick and choose when to employ particular identities and ideologies based on political saliency. This is achieved by enacting a strategy of "differential consciousness" and is not equivalent to possessing access to a superior form of knowledge, as implied by the concept of epistemic privilege. Instead, it indicates that the Maya have well developed reflexes, skills and tactics of resistance that enable them to be represented as active human agents capable of manoeuvring within their subjectivities to construct politically viable temporal identities which serve their particular political aims at various points in time. The ability of multiply oppressed people to constantly shift among identities results from the fact that they are forced to move among identifications more often than non-marginalised people. A situation which arises in response to their need to assume identities which facilitate resistance to the multiplicity of constantly

changing forms of oppression which they encounter. Because non-marginalised people do not have to continuously seek out a subjectivity that will not be repressed, or eradicated, they are less skilled at these dramatic changes in focus or temporal articulations of identities.

If the Mayan constituents of the EZLN are represented as enacting a strategy of differential consciousness, as expounded by Sandoval, then they are positioned as active subjects able to negotiate their own politically salient identities. The significant difference between understanding marginalised people as the practitioners of differential consciousness, rather than as having access to epistemic privilege, is that Sandoval's theorisation does not position multiply oppressed people as better able to identify trajectories of power. Rather, she contends that they are better able to work against them because, for the sake of their survival, they are forced to move amongst a greater number of identity positions than non-marginalised people. It is not an *a priori* ability or advantage, but a skill developed within the discourses which shape their lives. While the theoretical perspectives that produce epistemic privilege and the "survival tactic" enabled by differential consciousness are vastly divergent and present as problematic for different reasons, their most significant and politically progressive insight, for the purposes of this thesis, is the mutual recognition of the agency of marginalised subjects.

If marginalised people are active agents able to select forms of resistance from a variety of limited tactics and strategies capable of actively disrupting or intervening in the dominant narratives, then they can no longer be represented as ignorant, co-opted, silenced groups. Moreover, if they are indeed able to act with agency, then the fear that they will be automatically co-opted or further silenced if they engage with non-marginalised subjects should also be reduced. Indeed, such acts could be represented as a component of their conscious political strategy. While the relations of power that marginalise these individuals would still exist and could result in the co-option, corruption or destruction of their political projects, this does not militate against the possibility of this form of coalition being politically advantageous. The manner of collaboration or coalition enacted by the subaltern indigenous constituents of the EZLN

and *Subcomandante* Marcos attests to the political efficacy of this form of coalition within their particular historical conjuncture. Acknowledgment of the agency implied by the divergent concepts of epistemic privilege and differential consciousness is important to understanding the creation of the EZLN's translative project. However, neither epistemic privilege nor differential consciousness provide a strategy or tactic for a progressive coalitional politics intent on enacting social transformation, yet their recognition of the agency of subaltern or marginalised subjects could be understood as a necessary precondition for the development or construction of such a politics. The EZLN's practice of translation enables the movement to overcome the limitations of these theories of political action to produce a coalitional movement capable of effecting radical social, political and economic change.

Identifying the role of *Subcomandante* Marcos

The most overt evidence of the influence of *mestizo* culture on the EZLN is represented in the figure of *Subcomandante* Marcos. This thesis contends that Marcos's role in the movement is best understood as being that of a translator who has assisted the Chiapan Maya to reconstruct and to translate their struggle into a significant performative utterance. This has ensured that the movement has been able to interrupt and undermine Mexico's dominant relations of power by suggesting the possibility of radical political, economic and social alternatives to the nation's populace. It has also enabled the movement to have an impact internationally.

It is generally accepted that groups attempting to capture and persuade an audience to advance a particular political agenda require spokespeople who are able to participate in the discourses of the target audience—meaning that they are literate in the practices and discourses of this audience—in order to effectively represent and further the demands and needs of the group they purport to speak for. This is a significant issue for Bourdieu who points out that:

the manner as much as the substance of discourse, depends on the social position of the speaker, which governs the access he can have to the language of the

institution, that is, to the official, orthodox and legitimate speech. It is the access to the legitimate instruments of expression, and therefore the participation in the authority of the institution, which makes *all* the difference (1991: 109; emphasis in original).

This statement suggests that the key element in determining the effectiveness of a designated spokesperson is her or his ability to participate in the discursive life of the authorised institution. However, this condition highlights the problems that can arise in relation to the legitimacy of a spokesperson who is part of the dominant group yet claims to represent those excluded from the “official, orthodox and legitimate speech”. The question arises as to whether such an individual is an appropriate spokesperson who should be granted the authority to speak on behalf of a group that is unable to perform legitimate and authorised communicative acts within the discourses of power that marginalise them. Bourdieu, drawing on the work of Austin, examines this issue of appropriateness, writing that:

Most of the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order for a performative utterance to succeed come down to the question of the appropriateness of the speaker—or, better still, his social function—and of the discourse he utters. A performative utterance is destined to fail each time that it is not pronounced by a person who has the ‘power’ to pronounce it, or, more generally, each time that the ‘particular persons and circumstances in a given case’ are not ‘appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked’; in short, each time that the speaker does not have the authority to emit the words that he utters (1991: 111)

This argument has considerable relevance to the EZLN and the role of its spokesperson, *Subcomandante* Marcos—a university educated *mestizo* who speaks Spanish, the language of the conquistadors, and is, or at least once was, able to participate freely in the dominant discourses that shape Mexican society. Marcos’s social location questions his right to speak on behalf of people who are fighting against a 500 year history of marginalisation perpetrated by the Spanish and perpetuated by their *mestizo* descendants and their policy of *mestizaje*. The social location which Marcos occupies seems to militate against his ability to legitimately speak for the Chiapan Maya, despite the fact that he presents himself as an authorised mouthpiece able to express the will and the needs of these people. However, as demonstrated by Bourdieu’s elaboration on Austin’s

work above, “[a] performative utterance is destined to fail” when a person enunciating an utterance does not have the “power” to do so, or when the person’s experiences do not establish her or him as a legitimate speaker (Bourdieu, 1991: 111). Determining the appropriateness of a spokesperson is not a straightforward matter. Many deem Marcos inappropriate due to his epistemic location as a *mestizo* Mexican entitled to rights and participation in the discursive life of the nation’s prevailing institutions. Yet, it is precisely this social location which enables him to be an effective spokesperson. Indeed, if his position was untenable and inappropriate, his “performative utterances” would have failed and it could be argued that there would not have been a renewed vibrancy in indigenous rights groups in Mexico. Nor would the government be acknowledging and expressing a willingness to negotiate with this marginalised minority. The current visibility of the indigenous population, and the government’s public claims of concern for their rights, can be linked to the Zapatistas’ ability, primarily facilitated by *Subcomandante* Marcos, to reconfigure the rules for the authorised and legitimate discourses and speech acts. This reconfiguration challenges the representation of Mexico and, most significantly, the representations of its indigenous population produced by the dominant, empowered *mestizo* majority. This analysis is in consonance with Bourdieu’s observation that:

It is the most *visible* agents, from the point of view of the prevailing categories of perception, who are the best placed to change the vision by changing the categories of perception. But they are also, with a few exceptions, the least inclined to do so (1991: 239; emphasis in original).

Perhaps it is because there are so few non-marginalised individuals willing to assist marginalised people to gain access to the tools and techniques of the dominant groups that the presence of one such as *Subcomandante* Marcos arouses such suspicion. Indeed, Bourdieu’s work suggests that an individual such as Marcos would provide a marginalised group with the best possible hope of challenging its current

representations⁵⁹. However, if a degree of agency is identified within marginalised subjectivities (whether these are misrecognised or not) which enables them to select their spokesperson according to political utility, then it is possible to imagine representatives of marginalised and non-marginalised groups or individuals working together in a coalition for social transformation—a relationship within which the marginalised’s subalterneity is not necessarily reinscribed. The Chiapan Mayan constituents of the EZLN can be conceptualised as possessing this degree of agency to the extent that *Subcomandante* Marcos was only able to assume the position of spokesperson after the indigenous communities had authorised his acting in this role. Marcos’s actions and utterances continue to require the approval of the communities in order to be effective. Indeed, as Arquilla and Ronfeldt state, Marcos learned that “he could not give an order—his order would simply not exist—if it had not been authorized by an assembly or a committee representing the indigenas” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt in Schneider, n.d.).

Issues of translation

The Zapatistas’ discourse professes to support the many varied international struggles for democracy, freedom and justice for all humanity while simultaneously pursuing an agenda for national reform. In the *Second Declaration from La Realidad*, the movement declares that it is struggling “[f]or the whole world: Democracy! Freedom! Justice! From whatever reality of whichever continent” (EZLN, 1996c; my translation). This attempt to relate to international struggles, coupled with the necessity of harmonising the rights of the many different regional indigenous and *mestizo* Mexicans, may explain why the EZLN employs such a wide variety of tactics and strategies within its discourses. The EZLN’s diverse ethnic make-up problematises any attempts to privilege a particular “worldview”, and any specific linguistic conception of it. Consequently, for the discourses of the EZLN to achieve their diverse aims and appeal to people from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds (as demonstrated by its ethnic Tzeltel, Tzotzil, Chol

⁵⁹ Such an extrapolation of Bourdieu’s work does not fit neatly into all aspects of his theoretical framework, as it could be argued that the Maya are misrecognising their marginalised subjectivity and, thus, do not actually require the assistance of a spokesperson such as Subcomandante Marcos.

and Tojolabal make-up), the discourses must attend to issues of translation. Indeed, the discourses of the EZLN must be able to establish a degree of unity which attends to, rather than negates, the diversity of people and the aims they seek to represent. The Zapatistas' engagement with a practice of translation has provided the movement with an effective way of achieving this.

The notion of translation developed in this thesis reflects on and supplements work undertaken across a number of fields, including that of translation studies. The dramatic changes that have occurred in this field in the past decade point to the increasing importance of this area of scholarly work and its intersection with other fields of contemporary theoretical thought. In a text published in 1990, Barbara Godard notes that:

Currently dominant [in the field of translation studies] is a theory of translation as equivalence which is grounded in a poetics of transparency. It maintains that a message may be transposed from one language to another so that the meaning of the message is preserved (1990: 91).

Both she and the editors of the text, Bassnett and Lefevere, claimed that this notion was beginning to change in 1990 thanks to what Bassnett refers to as the “cultural turn”, whereby the notion of context—particularly political and historical—was beginning to be considered as a factor influencing and, in fact, shaping the practice of translation. Their speculation was confirmed by 1998 when Bassnett stated that:

Translation never takes place in a vacuum; it always happens in a continuum, and the context in which the translation takes place necessarily affects how the translation is made. Just as the norms and constraints of the source culture play their part in the creation of the source text, so the norms and conventions of the target culture play their inevitable role in the creation of the translation (1998a: 93).

Walter Benjamin, not constrained by the field of translation studies, advocated a form of contextual awareness long before the 1990s. In his influential essay, *The Task of the Translator*, he describes translation as a mode that must be faithful to the intention of the original text while also facilitating a move towards “pure language”, or “to turn the symbolizing into the symbolized”, (Benjamin, 1999: 80) which he claims is “the only

perfection a philosopher can hope for” (1999: 77). Benjamin contests that a translation must produce a new articulation which is unique and different from the original. Indeed, he warns against translators attempting to replicate the original, stating that:

as regards the meaning, the language of a translation can—in fact, must—let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio* (Benjamin, 1999: 79; emphasis in original).

Translations are temporal, provisional works which are produced in times, cultures and languages different from those within which the original work was created. Benjamin identifies that, while translation enables the original to rise “into a higher and purer linguistic air” (1999: 75), and “points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages” (1999: 76), this process or “transfer” is temporary and partial. He claims that what actually reaches this realm is that element of the original which is untranslatable—that element which binds the content and the words employed, which both shape and convey this content in a manner that cannot be captured in a translation. Benjamin explains that “[w]hile content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds” (1999: 76).

Homi Bhabha seizes on the provisionality of translation outlined by Benjamin. He suggests that it is the existence of an element of untranslatability in relation to cultural difference which implores the search for alternative hegemonies which do not encounter “*the element of resistance* in the process of transformation” (Bhabha, 1994: 224; emphasis in original). Bhabha writes that:

The migrant culture of the ‘in between’, the minority position, dramatizes the activity of culture’s untranslatability; and in so doing, it moves the question of culture’s appropriation beyond the assimilationist’s dream, or the racist’s nightmare, of a ‘full transmissal of subject-matter’, and towards an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture’s difference (1994: 224).

Bhabha recognises the necessary partiality and temporality of translation as its very

condition of possibility. Translation, he contends, is able to present as a subversive mode or practice which demands the creation of alternative conceptions of cultures which challenge modernist pursuits of homogeneity and unity at the expense of diversity. Quoting from Rushdie, Bhabha notes that translation may offer the means by which “newness enters the world”, precisely because translation is never able to fully capture all elements of the original (Rushdie in Bhabha, 1994: 227). Consequently, the practice of translation enables the development and articulation of alternative ideas and hegemonies.

Bassnett and Lefevere similarly suggest that the need for constant renegotiation and renewal of translation, what they term “rewriting”, imbues this practice with the potential to create new or alternative ideas. They claim that:

Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990: Preface).

However, Bassnett and Lefevere qualify what they identify as the productive potential of translation by noting that “rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain” (1990: Preface). Containment, according to Tejaswini Niranjana, has traditionally been the primary aim and result of translation. She writes that “[b]y employing certain modes of representing the other—which it thereby also brings into being—translation reinforces hegemonic versions of the colonized” (Niranjana, 1992: 3).

Niranjana analyses the destructive impact the practice of translation and its reproduction of dominant, powerful ideologies has had on marginalised people, particularly those of the “non-Western world”. However, she also highlights the ability of translation to “uncover” or point out the inadequacies of modernist conceptions of authenticity and the monolithic notion of truth elaborated in these metanarratives. Thus, Niranjana advocates a rethinking of translation that casts it as a potential site for the enactment of social transformation, writing that:

It seems more urgent than ever to be aware of the instability of the ‘original,’ which can be meticulously uncovered through the practice of translation. The arbitrariness of what is presented as ‘natural’ can be deconstructed by the translator or her/his alter ego, the critical historiographer. The drive to challenge hegemonic representations of the non-Western world need not be seen as a wish to oppose the ‘true’ other to the ‘false’ one presented in colonial discourse. Rather, since post-colonials already exist ‘in translation’⁶⁰, our search should not be for origins or essences but for a richer complexity, a complication of our notions of the ‘self,’ a more densely textured understanding of who ‘we’ are. It is here that translators can intervene to inscribe heterogeneity, to warn against myths of purity, to show origins as always already fissured. Translation, from being a ‘containing’ force, is transformed into a disruptive, disseminating one. The deconstruction initiated by re-translation opens up a post-colonial space as it brings ‘history’ to legibility (1992: 186).

For Niranjana, translation, or her proposed re-translation, presents as a powerful force in the postcolonial subject’s struggle to challenge its marginality. Basnett and Lefevere argue that the power inherent in the “manipulative” role of translation constructs it as an important practice to study, noting that:

in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translaion [sic] can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live (1990: Preface).

Indeed, Bhabha identifies the manipulative role of translation as fuelling a potentially transgressive role for the practice. In his use of Yunus Samad’s work on Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*, he reads the act of blasphemy in the text “as a transgressive act of cultural translation” (Bhabha, 1994: 226). The subversive nature of this act is, for Bhabha, the manner in which it questions and challenges traditional, accepted cultural norms. This very questioning may not offer fully articulated alternative hegemonies, but it suggests their possibility. Bhabha elaborates on this point when he claims that blasphemy:

⁶⁰ Niranjana notes that “[t]he subaltern, too, exists only ‘in translation,’ always already cathected by colonial domination” (1992: 43). The postcolonial can be read as the subaltern in Niranjana’s text.

is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular; it is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation. Into the asserted authenticity or continuity of tradition, ‘secular’ blasphemy releases a temporality that reveals the contingencies, even the incommensurabilities, involved in the process of social transformation (1994: 225-26).

Similarly, Godard contends that, for feminist theory, the practice of translation, which she claims includes “imitation, adaptation, quotation, pastiche, parody—all different modes of rewriting: in short, all forms of interpenetration of works and discourses”, presents as a useful tool for displacing dominant discourses that marginalise and silence women (1990: 93). By linking translation to concepts such as parody, which are already accepted as politically significant tools within feminism, Godard broadens the scope of subversive practices and, in so doing, offers alternative ways of conceptualising the act of translation. One of the most significant aspects of this work revolves around the notion of “difference”:

Though traditionally a negative topos in translation, ‘difference’ becomes a positive one in feminist translation. Like parody, feminist translation is a signifying [sic] of difference despite similarity. As feminist theory has been concerned to show, difference is a key factor in cognitive processes and in critical praxis (Godard, 1990: 93).

Operating primarily in the field of postcoloniality rather than feminist theory, Bhabha makes a similar observation by suggesting that the “performativity of translation”, is in fact “the staging of cultural difference”—a concept which he identifies in Benjamin’s work (1994: 227). Indeed, Bhabha conceives of translation as a practice that highlights the irreducibility of cultural difference and, consequently, offers a means of challenging the dominance of an homogenous, monolithic original text. He writes that “[c]ultural translation desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and in that very act, demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation *within* minority positions” (Bhabha, 1994: 228; emphasis in original). In so doing, it demands a recognition of cultural difference. Bhabha also claims that “[t]ranslation is the performative nature of cultural communication”, for if an original text is able to be translated, or if it has a high level of “translatability” as Benjamin terms it, it is able to

have meaning for people from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds (Bhabha, 1994: 228). This is of course contingent on the production of a “good” translation which, as defined earlier by Benjamin, is both true to the original *intentio* and produces its own unique *intentio*. This means that the *intentio* of the original is able to assume a variety of forms in the process of translation, yet the original remains closely related to the subsequent translations produced for it is its very “translatability” which makes the creation of new articulations possible. Benjamin uses the following analogy to further illustrate this point:

Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel (1999: 79).

That is to say that although certain articulations translated from the same original may appear to be quite divergent and even opposed, their difference does not necessarily mean that they share no degree of commonality, nor that they cannot fit together somehow. Indeed, the mode of translation can be understood as offering a method or practice for fitting these different pieces together. For, as Bassnett writes, “[t]ranslation is, after all, dialogic in its very nature, involving as it does more than one voice. The study of translation, like the study of culture, needs a plurality of voices” (1998b: 138-139).

Butler also highlights the importance of translation in facilitating the construction of coalitions among marginalised groups, noting that it is difficult to form “a strong coalition among minority communities and political formations that is based in a recognition of an overlapping set of goals” (2000b: 168). Butler locates competing notions of universality as the central problematic militating against the formation of such coalitions. In an attempt to develop a strategy for overcoming this barrier, Butler advocates a rereading of Hegel’s notion of universality to promote a move away from traditional interpretations which position it as something that exists outside cultural

norms, noting that:

Although Hegel clearly understands customary practice, the ethical order and the nation as simple unities, it does not follow that the universality which crosses cultures or emerges out of culturally heterogeneous nations must therefore transcend culture itself (2000a: 20).

Instead, Butler locates the practice of translation as integral to the production of a successful and carefully fabricated notion of universality which should be understood as a temporal cultural construct, the meaning of which is produced within particular societies, not outside of them. Indeed, she insists that:

for the claim [of universality] to work, for it to compel consensus, and for the claim, performatively, to enact the very universality it enunciates, it must undergo a set of translations into the various rhetorical and cultural contexts in which the meaning and force of universal claims are made (Butler, 2000a: 35).

Thus, universal claims are in a constant process of reinterpretation, change or translation—their meanings are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in different cultural contexts. This suggests that it is what Benjamin identifies as “the translatability” of a notion, a text or a construct that enables it to become a universal. Consequently, the notion or practice of translation offers the potential for creating points of commonality or shared ideals among various different cultural groups, and within subcultural groups, by generating new ways of understanding universals as having “particular” meanings in different cultural contexts. Butler points out that this situation “means that no assertion of universality takes place apart from a cultural norm”, while also stating that “no notion of universality can rest easily within the notion of a single ‘culture’, since the very concept of universality compels an understanding of culture as a relation of exchange and a task of translation” (2000a: 24-25).

This suggests that if translation is understood as an integral component in the development of a conception of universality—the monolithic notion of which Butler contends is the central element preventing marginalised people from forming coalitions to enact effective political action against their oppression—the opportunity exists to

produce translations which emphasise cross-cultural commonality while, simultaneously, not reducing cross-cultural difference and particularity. If universals are understood as concepts each culture is able to actively engage with and “make their own”, rather than concepts which are forced onto people, then what Butler locates as the barrier among divergent cultural groups created by traditional notions of universals may be weakened by recognising that differences do not negate the possibility of recognising or constructing similarities. Moreover, acknowledgment of the importance of translative practice to the formation of common goals could help ensure greater participation in unified projects because such a practice does not attempt to negate or override the particularity or uniqueness of different cultural groups. Rather, it highlights the necessity of attending to and respecting this particularity so that commonality or unity is not formed at the expense of difference, as it was under colonial and expansionist logic. Butler notes that by employing the concept of translation new notions of universality are developed:

Without translation, the very concept of universality cannot cross the linguistic borders it claims, in principle, to be able to cross. Or we might put it another way: without translation, the only way the assertion of universality can cross a border is through a colonial and expansionist logic (2000a: 35).

This very notion of “colonial and expansionist logic” is one of the key elements the EZLN discourse purports to challenge. Consequently, if we employ Butler’s work, the EZLN’s discourse must represent an act of translation or constitute a translative practice for it presents as a political unity—with a degree of universal appeal—which has been constructed from, and in order to represent, the varied ethnicities which make up the Maya of Chiapas. In the following chapter, I argue that the EZLN’s discourse has produced a change in the language of the dominant discourses of Mexican politics through the discursive construct of dignity.

Though Butler focuses her work on issues of gender, the complexity of weaving together a potentially successful political unity is extremely relevant to the EZLN and the various groups, people and ideological aims its discourses attempt to incorporate and represent.

This is particularly true in relation to Butler's claims that:

The universalizing effects of the movement for the sexual enfranchisement of sexual minorities will have to involve a rethinking of universality itself, a sundering of the term into its competing semantic operations and the forms of life that they indicate, and a threading together of those competing terms into an unwieldy movement whose 'unity' will be measured by its capacity to sustain, without domesticating, internal differences that keep its own definition in flux. I do believe that, *contra* Žižek⁶¹, the kinds of translations that are needed politically involve an active engagement with forms of multiculturalism, and that it would be a mistake to reduce the politics of multiculturalism to the politics of particularity. It is better understood, I believe, as a politics of translation in the service of adjudicating and composing a movement of competing and overlapping universalisms (2000b: 168-169).

Here Butler argues that it is a political imperative to understand the importance of engaging with, or working amongst, a number of discourses of particularity in order to produce a discourse of "unity" which ensures the maintenance of the particular within a broader picture of politically useful commonalities. She also presents the practice of translation as a means of achieving this. This position can be read as Butler's attempt to address what has been considered by many, most recently Hardt and Negri, to be the key impediment of postmodernism's potential political utility: the embrace of difference at the expense of politically effective and powerful unities (2000b: 142).

Many theorists have argued that difference is a potentially empowering site for oppositional politics that could pave the way for the development of radically new, more inclusive political practices. Sawicki is one such individual who identifies in the work of Foucault, a liberationist "politics of difference"⁶², within which she reads "difference" as a "resource" that "enables us to multiply the sources of resistance to particular forms of

⁶¹ Slavoj Žižek is a professor at the Institute for Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana in Slovenia and at the European Graduate School. His work is heavily influenced by Lacan, and he uses psychoanalysis to examine popular culture. The work of Butler that is currently being discussed comes from *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, a text in which Butler, Laclau and Žižek engage in a form of written academic debate and dialogue in relation to the concepts of universality and hegemony.

⁶² Sawicki reads Foucault's politics as a politics of difference "because it does not assume that all differences can be bridged. Neither does it assume that difference must be an obstacle to effective resistance" (1991: 28).

domination and to discover distortions in our understandings of each other and the world” (Sawicki, 1991: 28).

Feminist theorists and activists such as Spivak, Butler, Lorde and Sawicki argue that modernist attempts to mount a politics of liberation are highly problematic for they rely on the construction of a monolithic, unified, essentialised identity which effectively negates difference and delegitimises the multiply marginalised identities assumed by indigenous people, those in developing nations, and the subaltern, to name a few. This position is articulated by Audre Lorde when she writes that:

difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways to actively ‘be’ in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters (Lorde in Russo, 1991: 305).

Thus, difference is cast as politically productive. However, it must be noted that, as discussed in chapter three, Spivak argues that the essentialism expounded in modernist theories can be successfully utilised by people attempting to challenge their marginalisation in a “strategic” manner. While recognising the political utility of essentialism, Spivak remains sceptical of marginalised members of society appropriating as a source of power the very conditions which are employed to repress them (1994: 66-111). She argues that such strategies perpetuate the political reliance on a monolithic, unified subject position allowing the “dominant power” to homogenise the subordinate members of society and negate the multiplicity of subject positions from which they speak. Moreover, Butler invites us to understand the various particularities that make up these different subject positions as irreducible and unable to constitute an essentialised identification, whether viewed as strategic or not. Rather, in the process of developing a politically salient unity, these particularities need to be incorporated rather than subsumed. While the Zapatistas’ discourses do suggest that people the world over, or humanity at large, are victims of the monolithic force of neoliberalism, the movement acknowledges that the manner in which the exploitation manifests itself, or is performed,

cannot be generalised across different contexts. The EZLN seeks to support varied world-wide struggles both individually and as part of a greater fight against the diverse policies of neoliberalism asserting that “humanity, recognising itself to be plural, different, inclusive, tolerant of itself, with hope continues” (EZLN, 1994). Therefore, the EZLN’s discourse simultaneously universalises the fight of humanity world-wide as one against neoliberalism while acknowledging that these struggles are formed and waged in a distinct manner in each region. Thus, coupled with the movement’s attempts to promote a degree of “unity” in the experiences of humanity, it also wishes to support and perpetuate the varied struggles and tactics of resistance employed by divergent marginalised groups worldwide.

Butler’s work suggests that the EZLN’s self-professed task to support worldwide resistance against neoliberalism is difficult because the movement is dealing with extremely marginalised, subaltern people who are represented within existing discourses as shadows or traces, what Butler terms “the spectral remainder”, rather than as active subjects. She writes that:

Those who should ideally be included within any operation of the universal find themselves not only outside its terms but as the very outside without which the universal could not be formulated, living as the trace, the spectral remainder, which does not have a home in the forward march of the universal. This is not even to live as the particular, for the particular is, at least, constituted within the field of the political. It is to live as the unspeakable and the unspoken for, those who form the blurred human background of something called ‘the population’ (Butler, 2000b: 178).

In this statement Butler directly addresses some of the difficulties that arise when attempting to establish a political agenda that is not premised on the exclusion and silence of the “spectral remainders”, raising the question of whether those who occupy this social location are able to challenge and subvert their silenced subjectivity. Butler points out that “[t]o make a claim on one’s own behalf assumes that one speaks the language in which the claim can be made, and speaks it in such a way that the claim can be heard” (2000b: 178). However, subaltern people, by their very social location, are unable to do this. Consequently, if their social location is to be changed to enable them to “speak”, we

must interrogate the possibility and legitimacy of others speaking and advocating on their behalf to facilitate this change. It is a scenario Butler can foresee, as evident when she asks:

Who occupies that line between the speakable and the unspeakable, facilitating a translation there that is not the simple augmentation of the power of the dominant? There is nowhere else to stand, but there is no ‘ground’ there, only a reminder to keep as one’s point of reference the dispossessed and the unspeakable, and to move with caution as one tries to make use of power and discourse in ways that do not renaturalize the political vernacular of the state and its status as the primary instrument of legitimating effects (2000b: 178).

Consequently, contrary to Moya’s identification of Butler as a theorist who further marginalises subaltern subjects by rejecting the ontological validity of their identity-based political projects, Butler is in fact working towards developing a politics that enables these individuals to gain a “voice” and advance their political project. However, Butler claims that the identity attachments the subaltern form, and the articulations produced through these particular identifications, are located in the realm of the “unspeakable”—meaning that their pronouncements are unable to be “heard”, or unable to be represented in any meaningful way within the dominant discourses of society. Consequently, Butler identifies the need for relatively non-marginalised subjects such as herself (that is, individuals who are recognised as having a social location that legitimates their participation in the dominant relations of power), to assist in the production of a “translation” of these “unspeakable” utterances. It is a position similar to that described by Bourdieu in relation to the roles of spokespeople. Butler highlights the danger inherent in such a project whereby the translator could easily reinscribe the marginality of those they purport to represent, noting that “translation always runs the risk of appropriation” (2000a: 36). Yet she argues that this does not mediate against the utility of such a strategy. Rather, Butler claims that facilitators of these forms of translations occupy or speak from no recognisable “ground”, indicating that they are in a constant state of negotiation among the various competing power relations that attempt to locate them and, thus, do not necessarily occupy a subject position that will reinforce the subjugation of the subaltern. However, to avoid this Butler contends that a new language must be

developed that enables “the spectrally human ... to enter into the hegemonic reformulation of universality” (2000b: 178); a language that:

will be the labour of transaction and translation which belongs to no single site, but is the movement between languages, and has its final destination in this movement itself. Indeed, the task will be not to assimilate the unspeakable into the domain of speakability in order to house it there, within the existing norms of dominance, but to shatter the confidence of dominance, to show how equivocal its claims to universality are, and, from that equivocation, track the break-up of its regime, an opening towards alternative versions of universality that are wrought from the work of translation itself (2000b: 179).

Butler positions translation as a method of developing new articulations that are able to question and critique the dominance of existing power relations. Consequently, she understands translation as an extremely complex notion which does not merely render utterances comprehensible in another language or form. Rather it is about working within or against, whichever practice is necessary at particular points in time, existing notions of language and comprehension to facilitate the development of new modes or tropes of thought.

If translation is understood as a method that is not required to adhere to the discourses of power that produced the original statement, then it presents as a potentially useful tool in the struggles of social revolutionary movements that attempt to resist, work against and reposition the relations of power which produce the marginalisation of its constituents. Indeed, if translation enables the opening up of “alternative versions of universality” then it offers some hope for marginalised people attempting to challenge their subalterneity which is so entrenched in the universal claims of those who participate in the power relations of the dominant discourses. Yet it must be pointed out that, as Benjamin states, “all translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages” (1999: 75). Translation is not able to capture all elements of the original, nor does it provide a final, perfectly coherent and cohesive outcome in which all articulations and ideas are harmoniously brought together. It is a project that entails a constant process of renewal and renegotiation. The temporal, provisional nature of translation imbues the practice with the revolutionary potential to generate alternative

hegemonies, as will be argued in chapter five.

The Zapatistas have used the revolutionary potential represented by the practice of translation to produce new ways of articulating indigenous identity, thereby challenging the existing political hegemonies that construct Mexican society. I argue that *Subcomandante* Marcos positions himself in the same location of no “ground” between the realm of “unspeakability” and that of “speakability”, where Butler positions herself. Therefore, he constantly has to realign and renegotiate his allegiances to the “dispossessed and unspeakable” while participating in the discourses of the state that legitimate and enforce the oppression of the marginalised people, and whose language represents the threat of reinscribing and reinforcing their marginality. By positioning Marcos as a translator in this location, I recognise that it is difficult terrain through which he has to negotiate and that there always exists the danger of his social location as a university educated *mestizo* disrupting any project aimed at advancing the political cause of the Maya of Chiapas. Moreover, translators in general are often looked upon with caution as evident in the commonly referred to aphorism “*tarduttore, traditore*” (translator, traitor) (Mahony in Derrida, 1985: 94). The intimate relationship between translator and traitor is particularly poignant in Mexico due to the historical significance of Malinche, the young indigenous woman who became the translator for Hernán Cortés during his conquest of Mexico. Anna Lanyon points out that since the early part of the nineteenth century, three hundred years after the death of Malinche, many Mexicans have identified Malinche as a traitor because her translations were vital to Cortés’s ability to forge alliances with disaffected ethnic groups and successfully challenge the powerful Aztec Empire, enabling him to eventually establish Spanish rule in Mexico (2001: 47). However, while this attitude suggests that any attempt to identify *Subcomandante* Marcos as a translator would be greeted with great scepticism by Mexicans, this should not negate the potential efficacy of his role as a translator and his ability to enable a rearticulation of the power relations that marginalise the Maya. Indeed, perhaps, as Butler writes in response to Žižek’s claim that she is “caught in the game of power” that she opposes, “such complicity is ... the condition of agency rather than its destruction” (2000c: 276-77). Lanyon argues a similar point in relation to Malinche, who gave birth to

the first child acknowledged by Cortés and, thus, is often identified, at least symbolically, as the common ancestor of the modern-day *mestizo* Mexican population. She writes that Malinche:

and the millions of Indigenous women like her who gave birth to *mestizo* children in the aftermath of Conquest, ensured their people's [the indigenous Mexicans] inclusion in the future ... Malinche represented life and the beginning of an 'epic marriage', rather than finality (Lanyon, 2001: 51).

Thus, Malinche's assumption of the role of "traitor" can be understood as the means necessary to ensure the continuation and survival of the indigenous people and their culture, albeit in the form of the *mestizo*. If we extrapolate this scenario to that of Marcos and the EZLN, and add to it Bourdieu's claims related to the importance of spokespeople being literate in the dominant relations of power through which they need to negotiate, then we are able to represent Marcos's state of complicity with the dominant discourses of power as the necessary factor which imbue him with the agency to act as a translator for the indigenous Maya—regardless of the difficulties involved in this process of negotiation. This understanding of translation proves to be very useful in the development of progressive notions of coalition politics as articulated by the Zapatista movement.

Conclusion

The indigenous Maya of Chiapas made a politically conscious decision to engage with *Subcomandante* Marcos in order to produce a progressive coalitional political project that rearticulates their subaltern subjectivity and highlights the inadequacies of the political, economic and social hegemonies of Mexico. The notion of coalition politics developed by the Zapatista movement has produced a unique discourse that is best understood as a transformative translation whereby the resulting articulation represents a new, dynamic and progressive mode of politics. The practice of translation is not necessarily solely instigated or enforced by a dominant subject who wishes to produce articulations that fit her or his ideological framework. Rather, as Spivak suggests should occur, the dominant subject can unlearn her or his privilege so as to interact with marginalised individuals

and groups to create new political articulations that can challenge, rather than reproduce, the status quo of a particular society's relations of power. By recognising the indigenous Zapatistas' political agency and Marcos's efforts to unlearn his privilege—necessitated by the indigenous constituents unwillingness to engage with him and his socialist ideological framework when he first arrived in the Lacandón Jungle (as discussed in chapters one and two)—the EZLN can be understood as a coalitional political project able to articulate radical political alternatives to the existing Mexican hegemony. As detailed in chapter two, Marcos's prominent role within the EZLN has been critiqued because of his identification as a *mestizo* who, many analysts contend, has no right to speak on behalf of the marginalised Chiapan Maya. However, I have demonstrated that Marcos's potential to be an effective translator for a marginalised group should not be dismissed purely based on his ethnic identification and social location. Rather, Marcos's identification as a legitimate actor within the dominant relations of power that construct Mexico, coupled with his willingness to rethink his ideological persuasions in order to engage with the Chiapan Maya, should be recognised, as Butler suggests, as the very condition of possibility needed for him to present as an effective translator for the marginalised Maya. This argument does not suggest that marginalised individuals cannot interrupt and effectively act in the dominant relations of power, but it does suggest that if a representative of the subaltern gains an influential voice within these relations, it occurs through a process of mediation that rearticulates her or his voice, subjectivity and political project—a mediation that can be corrupting and damaging, or primarily positive and progressive. Thus, the ability to advance a political project within the dominant relations of power requires a degree of literacy in the dominant discourses. I have shown that *Subcomandante* Marcos possesses both this literacy and the willingness to unlearn his privilege in order to act as a translator to articulate and advance the political agenda of the EZLN.

Chapter Five

Articulating the Zapatista Struggle: The Discourse of Dignity

This chapter argues that the discursive battle that has characterised the EZLN struggle since the end of the twelve-day armed uprising in 1994 has challenged the dominant social, political and economic discourses of Mexico. This challenge has seen the EZLN offer the possibility of alternative hegemonies to the Mexican populace through its critique of dominant representations of the nation's indigenous people and the movement's ability to introduce new words and concepts into the dominant political lexicon. I contend that the EZLN's introduction of the discursive construct of dignity into the existing political field is the most important and effective expression of this challenge. The discourse of dignity has disrupted the existing hegemony to such an extent that it has created a new discursive space within which the possibility of alternative forms of progressive political action can be articulated. The strength of this discourse derives from its intentional ambiguity and, consequently, its potential to be strategically deployed to advance particular political aims which alter in response to tactics employed primarily by successive Mexican governments. Thus, I contend that the responsive nature of the discourse of dignity enables it to be understood as a Foucauldian reverse discourse. However, dignity can also be interpreted as having what Benjamin refers to as a high-degree of "translatability". As argued in the preceding chapter, the act of translation enables the constant production of new articulations, meanings and concepts and, as such, is a practice that contains the potential to subvert hegemonic ideas as well as to perpetuate them. Therefore the fluidity of the term dignity, and its ability to be translated into a variety of forms in accordance with political efficacy, positions it as a discourse able to destabilise and interrupt the dominant Mexican political and social hegemony. Moreover, I argue that dignity's lack of a solid, singular signified positions the term as a "punctum", that which punctures through everyday discourses allowing access to the realm Sandoval has defined as "differential consciousness". It is within this non-narrativisable realm that the EZLN has been able to establish a unified oppositional

movement from the diverse ethno-linguistic Mayan communities. A movement that is capable of challenging the legitimacy of the existing hegemonies and suggesting the possibility of political alternatives. However, the politically progressive possibilities developed within this realm of differential consciousness are only able to enact their radical program when they are articulated within the dominant discourses. This can be achieved through the practice of translation. Consequently, this thesis presents the translatable and translated discourse of dignity as the key political strategy elaborated by the EZLN and the most useful weapon in its stated struggle for the realisation of a “truly” democratic Mexico.

Dignity in Mexico’s dominant political lexicon

In order to develop an argument that positions the EZLN’s discourse of dignity as the principal means through which the movement has been able to challenge Mexican state hegemony, this section demonstrates that the term has been accepted into the dominant political lexicon of the nation. Indeed, the acceptance by successive national governments of the term as a synecdoche for the Chiapan conflict attests to the movement’s ability to affect Mexico’s dominant political lexicon and, therefore, the ability to act upon and expand the nation’s existing hegemonic political discourses. The government’s use of dignity is significant because, while the movement’s calls for democracy, freedom and justice are common demands with established political and legal implications, the concept of dignity presents as relatively unfamiliar within these fields. As a consequence, while successive Mexican governments have recognised that the term is central to the aims of the EZLN, and accepted its usage, the actual meaning that the movement ascribes to dignity—and therefore the legal and political implications evoked by the concept—remains elusive, enabling the movement to disrupt the existing hegemony and, in so doing, to disrupt the claims to universality that sustain it.

While dignity has previously been utilised in political discourses in Latin America—most notably by President Perón⁶³ in Argentina and, more recently, President Chávez⁶⁴ in Venezuela—and also in discourses of international human rights⁶⁵, the term was not used in any significant way by members of the institutional political parties of Mexico prior to the EZLN uprising. Outside of the authorised political system however, the term appears to have had some degree of cultural and political capital in resistance campaigns initiated by regional indigenous and peasant groups as well as civilian organisations. This is exemplified by the initiation of a March for Dignity and Freedom from Chiapas to Mexico City in September 1983 by the *Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinas* (CIOAC), the Independent Trade Union of Agricultural Workers and Peasants. Those who orchestrated this march sought to use mass mobilisation to force the Chiapan State Government to end the repression of the state’s peasant population, as well as to attend to land redistribution claims, and to release CIOAC activists from prison (Harvey, 1998: 157-58). Harvey states that this mobilisation “received wide coverage in the national press”, and that this “obliged the state government to accept the presence of

⁶³ In Argentina, the term was utilised extensively by Juan Domingo Perón and his wife Eva, affectionately known as “Evita”, particularly during the campaign for, and throughout, his first presidency from 1946 to 1955, though it was also used in his second presidential term from 1973 to his death in 1974. An analysis of Perón’s speeches and statements reveals that his use of the term is very different to the fluid concept elaborated by the Zapatistas, with three key meanings being evident in the Argentine form of dignity. Firstly, and most prolifically, Perón spoke of dignity as an attribute that belonged to, and was controlled by, the state. Consequently, people could only access or experience dignity via participation in the dominant political discourses of the nation. This is evident in Perón’s statement:

Today the voice of order should be ‘onward on this path’ and this is what I ask of all my compatriots, friends or enemies, for the supreme dignity of the state, for the obligation that we have to continue forward, honouring the virtues of our elders and aspiring for the happiness of our descendents (Perón, n.d.a; my translation).

Perón also claimed that dignity flowed from work, for the men at least, stating that “[I]n the new Argentina, work is a right which dignifies man” (Perón, 1998). This idea, however, is directly related to the first as the *Peronistas* aimed to “dignify” work by enshrining workers rights in state legislation. Once again, access to dignity was mediated through the government. Finally, the term was used to refer to the fulfilment of the basic needs of the Argentine people. Perón stated that his “permanent aspiration will be that in Argentine society, each family will have the right to a dignified life, and they will have all their needs met” (Perón, n.d.b; my translation). Once more, these needs would be met by the state, the bastion of Argentine dignity.

⁶⁴ More recently, the term was employed by Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez Frías, who upon winning the presidency in 1998 ordained himself the “President of dignity” (Chávez in O’Donoghue, 1998). While Chávez utilises the term much less frequently than Perón, he still situates dignity as an attribute of the state, claiming that “Venezuela will be worthy again, in its march towards dignity” (Frías, 1999; my translation).

⁶⁵ This is perhaps most evident in the United Nation’s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which employs dignity numerous times to describe a fundamental human right, as revealed in the statement that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (All Human Rights For All, n.d.).

CIOAC as a legitimate representative of peasant communities in Chiapas” (1998: 158). The similarities in name, aims and destination between this march and the EZLN’s 2001 March for Indigenous Dignity from Chiapas to Mexico City, or the Zapatour as it was dubbed by the Mexican press, suggest that the term may have particular significance to the indigenous peasants of Chiapas—a link that the EZLN has itself established, as shown in chapter two. However, contrary to this idea, and in support of the strategic utility of the term, dignity has also been employed by an oppositional political group in the state of San Luis Potosí in Mexico’s northern central highlands that made no claim to peasant or indigenous identity. This organisation, known as the Potosino Civic Front, sought the realisation of local democratic government, an aim it attempted to further by creating what Harvey refers to as a “marriage of dignity and democracy”, in which dignity constituted an assertion of the moral high ground “born of the moral outrage at consistent fraud ... and corruption” in all levels of the nation’s institutionalised political structures (1998: 25). The importance that the movement assigned to the term dignity was demonstrated in its 1991 staging of the March for Dignity (Harvey, 1998: 25). Therefore, dignity presents as a term that has been bestowed with a certain political significance by regional groups in Mexico who have utilised it to advance their struggles for the recognition of peasant and indigenous rights and the realisation of democracy—aims similar to those identified in the discourses of the EZLN. However, despite their usage of dignity, none of these groups established the term as a significant feature of national politics with which the institutional political parties had to engage. It was not until the 1994 EZLN uprising that the term became a key political concept accepted into Mexico’s dominant political lexicon.

The concept of dignity elaborated by the EZLN was accorded a prominent place in the political discourses of the nation almost immediately after the cease-fire which ended the twelve-day armed uprising. This is evident by the fact that, in accordance with the EZLN’s requests, the resulting peace negotiations were charged with the official task of developing Proposals for a Dignified Peace in Chiapas (EZLN, 1994; my translation). Though these negotiations ended unsatisfactorily amid EZLN claims that the government’s peace offers were “undignified”, the term dignity, with government

acquiescence, was again central when peace negotiations resumed in 1995 under the procedural framework of Dialogue and Negotiation of an Agreement of Concord and Pacification with Justice and Dignity (EZLN, 1994;my translation; Hernández Navarro, 1999: 299).

The use of dignity as a central component of the 1994 and the 1995 to 1996 peace negotiations illustrates that under both the most recent PRI Governments headed by President Salinas (1988-1994) and President Zedillo (1994-2000), the term had become incorporated into the nation's dominant political lexicon. President Fox (2000-2006), further reinforced dignity's location within the hegemonic Mexican political discourses by employing the term in a variety of ways since assuming office in December 2000. This was particularly evident in the months surrounding the EZLN's March for Indigenous Dignity which began on 28 February 2001. Indeed, Fox claimed at the beginning of February, in his weekly national radio program, *Fox en vivo, Fox contigo* (Fox live, Fox with you), that during his recent European tour he had discussed the situation in Chiapas with the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner, Mary Robinson. He reported that in these discussions they:

spoke of the human rights of indigenous Mexicans; we spoke of the COCOPA Law that we [the PAN Government] have introduced into the Chamber of Deputies, which will return, to all the indigenous people and all of their communities in this country, many things that they have never known; things that relate to their *dignity* and *dignification* (Fox in Venegas, 2001a: 3; my translation; emphasis added).

These references to dignity not only highlight the significance of the term within Mexican politics but also suggest that Fox understands the term in relation to its articulation within international discourses of human rights. Moreover, it indicates that Fox identifies dignity as an important concept within international politics; a notion that was affirmed when, at an international economic forum in Canada in April 2001, he stated:

We Mexicans are conscious that the construction of a new democratic national project ... will only be viable if we attend to the demands of the indigenous

communities and bring about a *dignified* and lasting peace in Chiapas (Fox in Venegas, 2001d: 3; my translation; emphasis added).

While at an international level Fox demonstrates an awareness of the importance of the human rights aspects of dignity—and its specific relationship to marginalised groups—he has employed the term quite differently in the national context. On 11 February 2001, Fox told a gathering of Mexican armed forces that a peace agreement would soon be achieved in Chiapas that would be “*dignified* for everyone, particularly in accordance with the ideals of the soldiers of the Mexican armed forces” (Fox in Venegas, 2001b: 7; my translation; emphasis added). The extrapolation of the notion of dignity to all Mexicans, particularly the armed forces, suggests that in this instance Fox identified the term as having political import outside of direct references to the human rights of impoverished, marginalised groups. However, such references aside, Fox has most commonly used dignity to refer directly to the rights of the nation’s indigenous people. Such usage is typified in a speech delivered to inaugurate a program aimed at reducing the poverty of 250 of the nation’s most marginalised regions (which are primarily populated by indigenous people), and in which Fox implores the nation’s populace not to oppose or obstruct the EZLN’s March for Indigenous Dignity (Venegas, 2001c: 5; my translation). In this oration Fox expresses hope that the EZLN’s march will end with the signing of a peace accord that will “return *dignity* and justice to the indigenous communities, and recognise that as a country ‘we have failed’ [them]”, he continues that “we are disposed to begin to pay off this debt that we have with our indigenous brothers and sisters” (Fox in Venegas, 2001c: 5; my translation; emphasis added).

Fox’s seeming acquiescence to the idea that dignity is essential to the creation of peace in Chiapas was again expressed on 19 February 2001 when he claimed to be seeking “a *dignified* and just solution [to the situation in Chiapas]” (Fox in Garduño and Aranda, 2001: 3; my translation; emphasis added). One of the President’s most overt engagements with the notion of dignity occurred in a televised address to the nation which aired on 23 February 2001 and was reproduced, in the form of a full-page public announcement, in the nation’s metropolitan newspapers the following day. In this statement Fox declared his commitment to improving the lives of the nation’s indigenous inhabitants, his

support for the March for Indigenous Dignity, and his desire to achieve peace in Chiapas. Indeed, Fox stated that “[t]his is the hour of our indigenous brothers and sisters” and, thus, that he aimed to achieve a “prompt and lasting peace” which would incorporate “*dignity and social justice*”, claiming that “[o]nly dialogue and negotiation will produce an honourable, *dignified* and just outcome for everyone” (Fox, 2001b: 9; my translation; emphasis added; Fox, 2001a: 7; my translation; emphasis added). The prominence of the term dignity in Fox’s political vernacular, both nationally and internationally, indicates that his Government was resigned to the place of dignity within the nation’s dominant, hegemonic political discourses.

Despite the acceptance and usage of dignity in the dominant political lexicon, the EZLN’s definition of the term, and thus its legal and political implications, has remained unclear, despite sustained government efforts to remedy this situation. The futility of its efforts is referred to by Marcos in an anecdote about the government delegates at the 1995 to 1996 peace negotiations whom, Marcos states:

confessed that they have studied hard to learn about dignity and have been unable to understand it. They ask the Zapatista delegates to explain what is dignity. The Zapatistas laugh—after months of pain, they laugh (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 2001b: 266).

Marcos asserts that the Zapatistas laughed because they consider dignity to be a concept that is unable to be defined or studied abstractly. Rather, it is a notion that has meaning only in practice:

The indigenous peoples who support our just cause have decided to resist without surrender, without accepting the alms with which the supreme government hopes to buy them. And they have decided this because they have made theirs a word that is not understood with the head, that cannot be studied or memorized. It is a word that is lived with the heart, a word that is felt deep inside your chest and that makes men and women proud of belonging to the human race. This word is DIGNITY. Respect for ourselves, for our right to be better, for our right to struggle for what we believe in, for our right to live and die according to our ideals. Dignity cannot be studied; you live it, or it dies (*Subcomandante Marcos*, 2001b: 265; emphasis in original).

This statement is indicative of the EZLN's use of dignity to consciously confound the Mexican government by elaborating a discourse that prevents it from fully ascertaining the term's political and legal implications, as discussed in chapter two. The EZLN's conscious decision to use dignity strategically in order to advance its struggle is reinforced by *Comandante Tacho's* comments that the Zapatistas promised to tell the government "what dignity means for us" if it agreed to sign a peace agreement (*Comandante Tacho* in Holloway, 1998: 174). Dignity was clearly not a concept the EZLN wished to render transparent to the government. Indeed, it is apparent that its strength and utility as a political tactic emanates from its very indefiniteness.

The EZLN's employment of a discursive strategy to confound the Mexican Government constitutes an attempt to highlight the inability of the nation's existing hegemonic political, economic and social discourses to adequately attend to the movement's demands. Thus, as I will argue in this chapter, the EZLN has utilised the ambiguity of the term dignity both to indicate the possibility of, and to legitimate its demands for, the construction of a "truly" democratic political system in Mexico. By establishing dignity within the dominant political lexicon, the subaltern constituents of the EZLN have demonstrated that they are able to act upon or within the existing hegemony in order to suggest alternative ways of conceptualising Mexican politics. The remainder of the chapter examines how the subaltern and historically silenced indigenous Chiapans have been politically effective through their construction of a common indigenous Zapatista identity and through the creation of a coalitional political movement in alliance with *Subcomandante Marcos*.

Dignity, translation and differential consciousness

The EZLN's use of a fluid conception of dignity indicates that the term's significance does not derive from a specific definition that links it to indigeneity or to universal human rights, but rather from its very ambiguity. Indeed, I contend that the discourse of dignity constitutes an effective component of the EZLN's discursive strategy precisely because the movement's ascription of multiple meanings to the term enables it to

constantly avoid being anchored to a specific location and definition. Thus, the movement employs the term strategically in order to consistently confound the Mexican Government and highlight the inability of the nation's existing political structures to accommodate the movement's calls for the creation of a peace with dignity. As such, the discourse of dignity presents as a Foucauldian reverse discourse through which the movement highlights the inadequacies of the existing political system (Blake, 1996: 12). Moreover, the EZLN's insistence on presenting dignity as a key political concept suggests to the Mexican populace that it is possible to envisage an alternative politics, represented by this new vernacular that articulates concepts not authorised by the state. This implies that the movement has access to the non-narrativisable realm Sandoval refers to as the differential, and the form of consciousness developed therein. This form of consciousness can be accessed when oppressed peoples choose to construct a "common speech" by assuming a collective political identity in order to advance a consensus of political aims. While the previous chapter argued that the constituents of the EZLN have assumed just such a collective oppositional identity, this chapter contends that "dignity" is indicative of their "common speech". However, the possibility of the non-narrativisable realm of differential consciousness producing a radically new form of democratic politics, as suggested by the EZLN's discourse of dignity, can only be articulated and present as potentially effective when narrativised within the dominant discourses. I contend that the EZLN achieves this narrativisation through a practice of translation facilitated by *Subcomandante* Marcos, whereby the constructed "common speech" of the indigenous Chiapans is translated into a discourse of dignity that is narrativisable within the dominant political discourses. Moreover, I argue that dignity's high degree of translatability, as suggested by Butler, enables it to challenge existing hegemonic conceptions of universality. This facilitates the formation of new oppositional fronts, or coalitions, between or among groups that had previously been in conflict over competing notions of universality, thus suggesting the possibility that an alternative form of progressive politics could be constructed, as exemplified by the EZLN.

From a poststructuralist perspective, the EZLN's use of dignity can be understood as a reverse discourse which is formed directly in response to opposing powers or forces, in

accordance with Foucault's observation that "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1979: 95; Blake, 1996: 12). Furthermore, for Foucault there is a constant struggle among power relations which, permits different "regimes of truth" to become accepted at different points in time, or in different epistemes. He writes that:

we are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we *must* speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit. In the last analysis, we must produce truth as we must produce wealth, indeed we must produce truth in order to produce wealth in the first place (Foucault, 1980: 93-94; emphasis in original).

While these truths are insurmountable during their reign, they are only temporary and, due to the volatility of power relations, may be dramatically different in the future. For Foucault, power is not merely a repressive entity whose enunciators pass judgment and mete out punishment. Rather, it is also a positive, vital, creative force. Indeed, Foucault affirms "as soon as there's a relation of power there's a possibility of resistance. We're never trapped by power: it's always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy" (Foucault in Sawicki, 1991: 24-25).

While the EZLN's conception of dignity can be understood as a reverse discourse, the ability of marginalised people to articulate an idea able to dramatically modify dominant discourses is limited. Thus, the potential for oppressed people, such as the Mayan constituents of the EZLN, to articulate the possibility of alternative forms of progressive political action, as implied by the movement's discourse of dignity, suggests access to what Sandoval terms the realm of differential consciousness which enables the development of the "precise strategy" Foucault identifies as necessary to modify power's hold. Indeed, Sandoval claims to have identified a new form of postmodern consciousness, the differential, that is accessed by oppressed people. The political effectiveness of differential consciousness derives from the fact that this realm cannot be defined for it "functions outside speech, outside academic criticism" (Sandoval, 2000: 140). Thus, it functions outside, and is therefore non-narrativisable within, dominant

ideologies and discourses. This is its very condition of revolutionary or politically progressive potential, however, it is concurrently its principal weakness because the alternative modes of politics developed within this realm are unable to be articulated in a way that imbues them with linguistic legitimacy within the dominant discourses. Therefore, the ability for the concepts developed within the realm of differential consciousness to effectively challenge the existing hegemonies is greatly restricted.

This thesis has established that the indigenous Chiapan constituents of the EZLN occupy various marginalised subject positions in response to which they construct forms of resistance. These are the very conditions necessary to gain access to differential consciousness in order to enact a differential social movement. Indeed, Sandoval claims that this form of oppositional consciousness was first utilised in the social movements enacted by US third world feminists from the 1960s to the 1980s, claiming that:

Both in spite of and because they represented varying internally colonized communities, U.S. third world feminists generated a common speech, a theoretical structure that remained just outside the purview of 1970s feminist theory, functioning within it—but only as the unimaginable (2000: 42).

Indeed, she claims that US third world feminists “developed an original form of historical consciousness, the very structure of which lay outside the conditions of possibility that regulated the praxes of 1960s, 1970s and 1980s U.S. social movements” (Sandoval, 2000: 42).

The conditions of possibility that gave rise to the US third world feminists’ development of a form of consciousness that was non-narrativisable within the dominant discourses and narratives of US social movements—that is a form of consciousness only able to be conceived of within discourses of the “unimaginable”—have many parallels to the conditions that led to the creation of the EZLN. Indeed, similarly to the US third world feminists, the EZLN’s constituents also hail from “varying internally colonized communities”, namely the various ethno-linguistic Mayan groups that the movement incorporates such as the Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol and Tojolabal, and the diverse communities they constitute. Moreover, just as the US third world feminists

constructed a common oppositional movement from their various distinct experiences of oppression, the numerous Mayan communities acted with a degree of political agency, as argued in chapter four, to construct a unified front which required them to identify as marginalised indigenous Zapatistas so as to present as a potentially effective oppositional social movement. I contend that the discourse of dignity represents the “common speech” the EZLN constituents decided to subscribe to in order to construct a unified collective with the aim of furthering a consensus of political objectives—namely the realisation of indigenous rights through the creation of a democratic Mexico.

The discourse of dignity has not only been effective for the EZLN because its lack of a singular signified enabled it to be deployed strategically, but also because the term remains intimately linked to the aims and objectives of the Zapatistas for it has not been co-opted by the government. A key facet of the discursive strength of dignity emanates from its ability to present as a unifying concept around which the diverse constituents of the EZLN and its supporters can, and have, coalesced. However, this unity must be conceptualised as a carefully fabricated construction that individuals elect to identify with, rather than as a fundamental consensus or collective based on “real”, extra-discursive facts. The importance and necessity of constructed unities is discussed by Villoro in relation to the realisation of national political systems that attend to difference and ethnic plurality. He notes that “the biggest danger for a plural state is, in effect, conflict between different competing groups” (Villoro, 1998: 61; my translation). To avoid this, Villoro proposes the creation of an aspirational idea or concept of unity—a collective identity that still allows for the expression of difference, warning that:

A plural state is not able to look for unity in the collective adhesion to values that everyone shares ... you cannot present it as an historical community whose identity was forged centuries ago, but as a voluntary association born from a common election (Villoro, 1998: 61 my translation).

As discussed in chapter three, Villoro claims that this collective identity would be “an imaginary representation” (1998: 76; my translation). Thus, identity is represented as a “project”, something to be consciously moulded and shaped, rather than an inalienable

fact that reflects an extra-discursive “reality” (Villoro, 1998: 76; my translation).

The EZLN’s elaboration of the discourse of dignity represents Villoro’s notion of a voluntary association and embodies the conception of identity as a project that can be constructed and developed to satisfy the collective demands and needs of those who choose to adhere to a newly fabricated group or oppositional front. Thus, Villoro’s work is relevant not only to the development of plural national democracies, but also to the movements that advocate their creation. The construction of such a commonality to further progressive forms of politics, and the conception of identity as a project, also strongly echoes Sandoval’s notion of differential consciousness. Indeed, a significant aspect of differential consciousness is that it is not accessible to individuals simply because they are marginalised or oppressed in some way. It becomes accessible only when oppressed individuals consciously decide to “assume a politicized oppositional identity”(Talpade Mohanty in Sandoval, 2000: 62) and engage in a “radical form of cognitive mapping” which constitutes, according to Sandoval’s reading of Jameson, “a specific methodology that can be used as a compass for self-consciously organizing resistance, identity, praxis, and coalition under contemporary U.S., late-capitalist cultural conditions” (Sandoval, 2000: 62). The realm of differential consciousness requires individuals to constantly renegotiate their identities in accordance with political efficacy. As it is for Villoro, a collective identity for Sandoval is an “imaginary representation” that is created in order to advance particular political projects. The EZLN’s discourse of dignity can be understood as embodying this representation of a collective identity which is created through the movement’s participation in the realm of differential consciousness.

Access to this realm is neither accidental nor able to be definitively mapped. Rather, it is achieved via a punctum “that which breaks through social narratives”, and therefore that which is unable to be conceptualised or represented within the existing dominant narratives (Sandoval, 2000: 141). The EZLN’s concept of dignity, through all of its strategic incarnations, acts as this very “punctum” because it highlights the inability of the existing political discourses and narratives to define and accommodate it, suggesting

the need for the construction of alternative political hegemonies. Indeed, the possibility of a new politics evoked by dignity is unable to be fully articulated or narrativised; it exists solely as a suggestion of alternative hegemonies. Sandoval claims that whenever “meaning cannot find a solid signified” passage to the realm of differential consciousness is permitted (2000: 147). Consequently, I contend that the possibility of alternative political hegemonies suggested by the EZLN’s discourse of dignity, which breaks through existing social, economic and political narratives, is the means through which the movement’s constituents have been able to access the realm of differential consciousness and, thus, envisage and develop an alternative politics for the nation of Mexico. By strategically employing the term dignity to highlight the inability of the existing Mexican political structure to adequately attend to the movement’s demands, the EZLN has demonstrated both the need for, and the possibility of, alternative means of conducting political relations. It is a possibility that is non-narrativisable within the dominant discourses and is only able to be articulated through the “unimaginable”, which Sandoval claims is realised in the realm of differential consciousness.

While the EZLN is able to suggest the possibility of alternative political structures through its participation in the realm of differential consciousness, the effectiveness of these alternatives is contingent upon the possibilities that exist within the dominant relations of powers. For Sandoval, the differential social movement, as previously mentioned, is “both subject to the terms of power and capable of transforming them” (2000: 181). Indeed, she explains that:

the differential is subjunctive; it is that which joins together the possible with what is, the place where indirect style or discourse occurs until it finds purposeful, guided, political reason to be through the reconfiguration of units-of-power in the interests of their egalitarian distribution. This form of political subjectivity resides in a state of contingency, of possibility, readying for any event (Sandoval, 2000: 180).

Thus, differential consciousness does not constitute a pre-discursive or extra-discursive space. It is a realm where concepts and terms always suggest the possibility of new meanings and alternative ideas. However, these meanings are contingent upon the

dominant powers and the possibilities present in the authorised narratives. By positioning the realisation of the politically progressive potential inherent in the realm of differential consciousness as dependent upon the possibilities opened up within dominant discourses—a situation over which the marginalised participants are presented as having no control—its identification as an active site of resistance is questioned. Consequently, the agency bestowed on the marginalised individuals therein also presents as tenuous.

The “subjunctive” nature of differential consciousness contradicts Sandoval’s identification of this realm as a site in which oppressed people possess the agency to generate radically progressive forms of politics. While her position is consistent with her postmodern framework, it does not necessarily represent a significant political advance for oppositional struggles waged by marginalised groups, for it simply suggests the possibility of political and social change without providing the tactics for enacting this. Instead, while oppressed peoples are represented as ready to act to bring about change, they ultimately remain acted upon by dominant discourses and are forced to assume a “political subjectivity” that is in a perpetual state of “contingency, of possibility, readying for any event” (Sandoval, 2000: 180). Therefore, they are unable to forge a discursive opening within which the political possibilities developed in the realm of differential consciousness can be effectively articulated.

Thus, the realm of differential consciousness, as conceived of by Sandoval, has limited possibilities for realising a radically progressive politics. However, its radical political potential may be more readily and effectively realised if those marginalised subjects with access to it collaborate with comparatively non-marginalised individuals who lack access but whom are literate in and able to function within the dominant discourses of society. Such a collaboration would enable these two groups to engage in a practice of translation, as detailed in chapter four, whereby the possibilities envisaged in the realm of differential consciousness could be narrativised within the dominant discourses. While I do not contend that marginalised groups are unable to enact a practice of resistance on their own, I argue that they do not have to do it single-handedly. Rather, engagement with representatives of non-marginalised groups through the practice of translation could

significantly advance their political agendas. Indeed, this form of interaction has proven to be productive for the EZLN. While the EZLN's marginalised and oppressed constituents enabled the movement to gain access to differential consciousness in order to imagine radical alternatives to the existing political system, these alternatives only became politically effective when they were translated into the dominant political discourses of Mexico through *Subcomandante* Marcos. A collaboration of differential consciousness, the social movement it constructs, and the EZLN's practice of translation, enabled the movement to enact its unique mode of progressive political action.

The notion of translation elaborated in this thesis refers to a process that is able to produce new concepts and meanings in accordance with Rushdie's observation that translation is able to provide the means by which "newness enters the world" (Rushdie in Bhabha, 1994: 227). Consequently, translation represents the potential to subvert existing ideas and hegemonies as well as to perpetuate them. However, it is the possibility of challenging dominant hegemonies that is perhaps the most unrecognised attribute of the practice of translation, and the characteristic seized on in this thesis. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, translation is able to provide the mechanism through which the subversive ideas of hitherto marginalised and often silenced groups can enter the dominant discourses in a necessarily mediated and negotiated form. The success of such a strategy relies on the presence of a translator who is both culturally literate in the dominant discourses and a legitimate subject therein. Moreover, the translator must be conscious that her or his ability to participate in the dominant discourses places her or him in a position of power over oppressed groups. As a result of this, for the translator not to wilfully or unintentionally reproduce or reinforce the marginality of the oppressed group, she or he must constantly monitor her or his actions and enunciations. In Spivak's terms the translator must attempt to "unlearn their privilege", so as to be able to actively and creatively engage with marginalised individuals, rather than silencing or co-opting their discourses (1994: 91). While this is an extremely difficult and unusual position to occupy, it is not unattainable.

Such a process of translation has characterised the EZLN movement in which the

indigenous Maya of Chiapas have been able to articulate their grievances within the dominant national political discourses through the translator, *Subcomandante* Marcos. Through this process the EZLN has been able to actively disrupt the dominant discourses and create a space for the articulation of alternative, politically progressive ideas conceived within the realm of differential consciousness. While the possibilities of oppositional action remain delimited by the dominant powers, the process of translation enables the Zapatistas to actively create the discursive space that facilitates the articulation of the possibility of political alternatives.

As established in this thesis, the subaltern indigenous constituents of the EZLN have historically been silenced within the dominant political, economic and social discourses of Mexico, and therefore have been unable to articulate their grievances and demand that their rights be guaranteed. This is in consonance with Spivak's claim that the subaltern cannot speak (1994: 104). However, as Butler points out:

Spivak does not mean by this claim that the subaltern does not express her desires, form political alliances, or make culturally and politically significant effects, but that within the dominant conceptualization of agency, her agency remains illegible (2000a: 36).

This observation complements Sandoval's argument that the political actions and subjectivities conceived by marginalised individuals within the realm of differential consciousness are illegible or non-narrativisable within the dominant discourses. However, the EZLN's assertion of its indigenous constituents' political agency, and its demands for the construction of a Mexican democracy that would uphold the basic human rights of all citizens—including those of the indigenous population—have successfully challenged the existing political hegemony of Mexico in many ways, as evident through its ability to introduce the term dignity into the dominant political lexicon. As the indigenous Chiapans lack a legitimate voice with any cultural capital and are excluded from the purview of universal human rights within Mexico, they have not achieved this hegemonic challenge solely through their enactment of a differential social movement. Such an analysis is supported by Butler's work, as demonstrated when she

notes that:

When one has no right to speak under the auspices of the universal and speaks nonetheless, laying claim to universal human rights, and doing so in a way that preserves the particularity of one's struggle, one speaks in a way that may be readily dismissed as nonsensical or impossible (2000a: 39).

The EZLN have spoken and laid claim to universal human rights in order to assert themselves as indigenous Mexicans. However, they have not been "readily dismissed", rather they have challenged the political hegemony of the nation because their ability to conceive of political alternatives through access to the realm of differential consciousness has been translated by *Subcomandante* Marcos into the discourse of dignity. A discourse that is not only narrativisable within the dominant discourses and narratives, but which has been accepted into the nation's political lexicon. Dignity's acceptance into the political vernacular of Mexico attests to the success of the EZLN's engagement with the practice of translation. Indeed, Butler notes "[f]or translation to be in the service of the struggle for hegemony, the dominant discourse will have to alter by virtue of admitting the 'foreign' vocabulary into its lexicon" (2000b: 168).

In relation to the EZLN, the practice of translation presents as a significant tool in the construction of progressive politics because it challenges the existing political hegemonies by demonstrating that they, and the universals that underpin them, are temporal. The legitimacy and pervasiveness of universals and the hegemonies they produce is contingent upon their appearance as ideology, meaning that they function only insofar as they are understood as permanent, innate "truths". Thus, as Butler argues, challenges to existing hegemonies, and demands to retheorise the boundaries of universals, undermine the very validity of these concepts:

The universal announces, as it were, its 'non place,' its fundamentally temporal modality, precisely when challenges to its *existing* formulations emerge from those who are not covered by it, who have no entitlement to occupy the place of the 'who' but nevertheless demand that the universal as such ought to be inclusive of them (2000a: 39; emphasis in original).

As established in chapter four, Butler advocates a retheorisation of the concept of the universal. She suggests a rereading of Hegel that challenges the traditional interpretation of a universal as something that exists above cultural differences, suggesting in its place an understanding that presents it as a temporal articulation of a concept that is translated into, or fabricated within, specific cultures (Butler, 2000a: 35-36). The principal impetus informing Butler's work is her desire to assist the formulation of a progressive politics whereby groups that are marginalised in different ways can form coalitional fronts to advance their struggle for social transformation. Butler identifies competing notions of universality as the most significant element preventing the formation of such potentially powerful alliances of marginalised groups. Therefore, by undermining the stability of the universal as a metanarrative and presenting it as a temporal, constructed articulation—as the EZLN's discourse of dignity has done—competing universals no longer represent a fundamental divide. Once this is recognised, Butler contends that the practice of translation can be employed to produce a coalitional political project and the subjectivities required to operationalise it. However, I argue that Butler's work can be extended beyond her focus on the formation of marginalised coalitions to also incorporate the construction of coalitions between marginalised and non-marginalised groups. Although the power differential between these two groups suggests that any coalition would constitute a dominant and dominated element, this does not militate against its progressive potential. Indeed, regardless of the social location of those involved, the process of translation is always “dangerous” insofar as it runs the risk of appropriation and domination. Indeed, Butler notes in relation to the formation of coalitions of marginalised groups that:

There are universal claims intrinsic to ... particular movements that need to be articulated in the context of a translative project, but the translation will have to be one in which the terms in question are not simply redescribed by a dominant discourse (2000b: 168).

Therefore, the risk of marginalised groups being subjugated, co-opted or appropriated is present even when all groups in a resistance front are constituted by disempowered minorities. Moreover, a coalition that incorporates a non-marginalised group may be

most able to effect radical social transformation for it facilitates more direct participation within, as well as the authorised ability to act upon, the dominant discourses of power. This thesis argues that this form of interaction characterises the EZLN and provides the movement, within its specific conjuncture, with the most adequate means of enacting a radical oppositional political project.

Conclusion

The practice of translation is central to the EZLN movement. Translations occurred initially between the diverse ethnic Maya groups who elected to construct and coalesce around the new, politically advantageous subjectivity of indigenous Zapatistas; then between the discourses of the indigenous Zapatistas and the ideological framework of *Subcomandante* Marcos and the other original *mestizo* members of the EZLN; and finally between the movement and the Mexican and international communities. The EZLN's translatable and translated discourse of dignity highlights the political utility of translation through its challenge to the existing political hegemony of Mexico and its demonstration of the temporal nature of universality. Consequently, this elucidates the fact that different conceptions of universals do not demarcate essential, innate differences between groups that coalesce around diverse subjectivities or political practices. The movement has achieved this by employing the ambiguous discourse of dignity to enable the indigenous Zapatistas to demand the realisation of the rights they claim to be denied under the existing Mexican political hegemony. The practice of translation between the indigenous constituents of the EZLN and *Subcomandante* Marcos is best understood as a political strategy that facilitates the construction of a coalitional front that advocates radical political change. That is to say, these two participants—the heterogeneous Maya and the *mestizo*—who subscribe to many different and competing notions of universality, have worked together to produce a translative project that presents as a new political articulation in a manner akin to the formation of coalitions among minority groups envisaged by Butler. The articulation of the discourse of dignity developed within the realm of differential consciousness, in a form comprehensible within dominant political narratives of the nation, represents the practical expression and political efficacy of the

EZLN's coalitional relationship. Moreover, the high level of translatability ascribed to the term presents it as a discourse capable of forging new alliances and coalitions among marginalised groups that could realise the political alternatives the discourse suggests are possible. Such coalitions would be developed by various participants who elect to pursue common aims and goals by constructing a common subjectivity that is not based on innate similarities. Indeed, the practice of translation may provide the best chance of constructing new politically progressive aims and the identities necessary to achieve them. The EZLN's discourse of dignity indicates that this is the case within the specific conjuncture that produced the practices of the Zapatistas.

Conclusion

By analysing the oppositional political praxis developed by the Zapatista movement in relation to the specific historical, political and economic conjuncture in which it was produced, this thesis has demonstrated the possibility of a group marginalised within contemporary neocolonial global conditions developing an innovative and effective politics of resistance. An important step towards understanding the EZLN's unique mode of resistance requires recognition of the political agency of the movement's heterogeneous subaltern indigenous constituents. Once marginalised groups are established as capable of being active political agents who can assume politically advantageous subjectivities, it is possible to imagine them constructing an effective politics that disrupts the dominant relations of power that shape their societies. While such a degree of political consciousness demonstrates that marginalised groups are not wholly disempowered, nor completely acquiescent to hegemonic rule, the degree of agency and the strategies of resistance available to them remain delimited by the marginalised subjectivity with which their experiences of repression and exclusion encourage them to identify. The indigenous Zapatistas overcome these limitations firstly by constructing a unified indigenous political subjectivity from the divergent ethno-linguistic Maya groups, and secondly by engaging with the educated, media savvy, *mestizo Subcomandante* Marcos to produce a coalitional political project represented by the EZLN. The movement is then able to enact an effective resistance in its particular historical conjuncture through the elaboration of the ambiguous, politically advantageous discourse of dignity.

The construction of coalitions among groups marginalised in different ways, and between these groups and representatives of the dominant groups that they claim marginalise them—as is the case with *Subcomandante* Marcos in the EZLN—is shown to be extremely productive for the development of effective resistance struggles which aim to radically restructure the power relations that sustain contemporary neocolonial global conditions. These coalitions must be based on the participants' willingness to rearticulate their various political aims and ideals in order to produce new collective political

projects, and to assume the new subjectivities required to operationalise these. Such projects must be based on a degree of constructed commonality that does not negate difference. This thesis has posited translation as the practice through which this can be achieved. Translation presents as useful because it is dialogic and productive in nature and, thus, enunciates new concepts and ideas from multiple voices and languages which cannot, and should not aspire to, reproduce the originals. While the practice of translation always involves the risk of appropriation or misrepresentation, I have shown that it is an integral and useful political practice for the resistance struggle enacted by the EZLN. It may also prove useful outside of the Mexican context for other groups marginalised within the contemporary cultural logic.

The possibility of translation constituting a politically significant practice outside of the conjuncture that produced the EZLN is in consonance with the movements' own attempts to utilise its international political presence to encourage and support the various expressions of worldwide oppositional resistance to neoliberal cultural conditions. This is most evident in the movement's convening of the Intercontinental *Encuentros* for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism and the subsequent development of an "intercontinental network of resistance", as discussed in chapter two. However, while an international support network has been vital to the relative success of the EZLN, a global coalitional movement mobilised by a desire to resist the various manifestations of repression caused by the economic logic of neoliberalism has not been constructed. This failure suggests that such a coalition is not easily or readily formed. Indeed, I have demonstrated that the various theories discussed in this thesis—from modernist (the Marxist-informed Subaltern Studies group), postmodernist (Sandoval's differential consciousness), and postpositivist realist (Mohanty and Moya) perspectives—do not provide strategies and tactics that suggest ways of developing these coalitions. However, I contend that the practice of translation that the EZLN uses to forge a common Zapatista subjectivity from the diverse ethno-linguistic Mayan groups and the *mestizo* identification of *Subcomandante* Marcos may also prove useful for forging collective global forms of resistance that do not negate or subsume difference.

The identification of the necessity of constructing a global collective movement of people marginalised by neoliberal conditions in order to bring about the radical transformation of society could be read as an attempt to reinstate the importance of universal claims to enacting effective resistance politics. The notion of universality has been derided within postmodernism for its failure to sufficiently attend to difference, particularly that expressed within the heterogeneous categories of the marginalised. However, as argued in chapter four, Butler rearticulates the notion of the universal, drawing on the practice of translation, to recast it as a potentially productive political site. Butler contends that the universal is only able to perform the universality it lays claim to when it is understood as intimately linked to the particular and, thus, to sites of difference:

By emphasizing the cultural location of the enunciation of universality, one sees not only that there can be no operative notion of universality that does not assume the risks of translation, but that the very claim of universality is bound to various syntactic stagings within culture which make it impossible to separate the formal from the cultural features of any universalist claim. Both the form and the content of universality are highly contested, and cannot be articulated outside the scene of their embattlement (2000a: 37).

Therefore, Butler contends that universal claims only function effectively through the practice of translation. The recognition of a universal form of repression, identified as the neocolonial postmodern condition by Sandoval, and the global force of neoliberalism by the EZLN, can only occur when the universal claim is translated into the various cultures it purports to represent. Universal claims do not transcend particularity, rather they are produced and reproduced within cultures through the practice of translation. However, for the translation to be politically progressive and productive for marginalised groups, it must articulate a coalitional project that maintains discursive spaces for difference. Indeed, Butler states that “one of the tasks of the present Left is precisely to see what basis of commonality there might be among existing movements, but to find such a basis without recourse to transcendental claims” (2000b: 167). As argued in chapter four, the practice of translation produces this respect for difference within a constructed commonality, for, as Derrida points out, “the original is indebted a priori to the translation. Its survival is a demand and a desire for translation” (1985: 152). This statement echoes the sentiments expressed by Benjamin who claims that translation

always produces something new which is linked to the original insofar as its translatability enables the production of a new, articulation, but which constitutes neither a reproduction nor a rejection of the original (1999: 70-84). The practice of translation is capable of articulating alternative ideas which may manifest themselves in oppositional political projects.

This thesis has argued that while translation always runs the risk of appropriation or of reinscribing the power of the dominant, it is also a promising site of political action which enables the production of effective resistance struggles that challenge existing hegemonies and articulates alternatives. The utility of translation for the marginalised indigenous constituents of the EZLN has been consistently demonstrated throughout this thesis. Moreover, outside of the particular political, economic, and social conjuncture within which the EZLN is produced, translation may also be a useful practice for groups world-wide who are marginalised in divergent ways by contemporary postmodern cultural conditions. Thus, translation may be the specific method required to produce the “global transcultural coalitions for egalitarian social justice” that Sandoval envisages, insofar as it provides the means of constructing coalitions from within, across and between difference in order to challenge repressive hegemonies (2000: 64). The potential political utility of the practice of translation for resistance movements other than the EZLN is identified in this thesis as a productive site for future research. Any in depth exploration of this possibility is outside of the scope of this thesis, which is definitively located within the political, economic and social discourses that produced and shaped the Zapatista movement of Mexico. In the oppositional political movement of the EZLN, the practice of translation has facilitated the construction of a coalition that has been able to challenge the dominant political and economic hegemonies of Mexico. This has been achieved through the indigenous Zapatistas’ transition from a subjugated, silenced social location to an active, politically conscious subjectivity from which they, in collaboration with *Subcomandante* Marcos, have elaborated the politically effective discourse of dignity to consistently confound the Mexican government and to challenge the nation’s hegemonic political structures.

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