The Rising Tide of Indigenous Mobilization: Identity and the Politics of Refusal in Mexico and Ecuador

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The Rising Tide of Indigenous Mobilization:
Identity and the Politics of Refusal in Mexico and Ecuador

An Honors Paper for the Department of Government and Legal Studies

By Kelsey Jo Freeman

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“Behind our black faces, behind our armed voice, behind our unnamed name, behind those of us that you see, behind us is you, behind us are the same simple and ordinary men and women that are found in all ethnic and racial groups, that paint themselves in all colors, that speak in all languages, and that live in all places. The same forgotten men and women. The same excluded people. The same people who are not tolerated. The same people who are persecuted. We are the same as you. Behind us is you.”

- Zapatista activist Ana María, Intercontinental Conference for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism
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Chapter One
The Rise of Indigenous Voices in Mexico and Ecuador

What does it look like to demand a new world order? What does it mean for social movements to emerge that no longer just focus on gaining small concessions or even changing the larger state system, but rather seek to remake the political structure entirely? On a global scale, the trend towards greater Indigenous uprisings has been significant, particularly since the 1990s. From the Arctic to New Zealand to Central and South America, Indigenous groups have sought to counteract centuries of oppression from colonialism and its legacies and seek “a world where many worlds fit,” as one Zapatista slogan asserts. What is it that brings these very distinct groups together under overlapping identities? Is it their corresponding histories of colonial oppression, their general exclusion from domestic politics, or their goals for the future? Overall, the transnational linkages drawn between various Indigenous groups around the world clearly illustrate the power and importance of this rising tide. In the midst of this emergence, it becomes vital to examine how these Indigenous movements challenge our existing assumptions about social movements and what this may mean for Indigenous communities going forward.

In order to delve into the ways in which Indigenous movements may conform to and transcend existing social movement theories, this work analyzes two major movements beginning in the 1990s: The Zapatista movement in Mexico and the pan-Indigenous Ecuadorian movement. Each of these movements stems from groups with similar colonial histories and has evolved under political systems that have historically excluded them. Both groups presently lack resources that might aid mobilization. Likewise, the overall goals of each movement revolve around gaining greater autonomy. Autonomy entails a condition of self-government and freedom

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1 The use of a capital I in Indigenous throughout this work is intentional and based on the stated preference of the South and Mesoamerican Indian Rights Center (SAIIC) as a way to affirm their ethnic identities.
from external control, but articulations of this goal can take various forms, ranging from increased control over natural resources, power over education, the right to govern oneself, or even complete secession. These pursuits all emerge from the claim that Indigenous peoples have a right to control their own cultural, political, economic and social affairs. While the fundamental grievances of each movement fall within this autonomy spectrum, the strategies they pursue differ. In Ecuador, the movement began by seeking increased political participation, while the Zapatistas tended more towards a complete rejection of state authority from the start. Where does this difference in tactics emerge from, and what might it tell us about where Indigenous movements fall in the world of contentious politics?

This work will delve into the previous question by exploring how identity construction, transnational alliances, and varying political systems contribute to the strategies movements pursue. On an empirical level, I will explain the divergence in movement tactics by noting the success groups achieved with typical protest strategies. As Chapter Two notes, because the pan-Indigenous movement in Ecuador was more successful in achieving its goals through conventional methods (such as political participation), it began by working within state structures. The Zapatista movement, however, met significant failures by engaging with the state. Refusing state structures, therefore, was perceived by these communities to be a more viable, ideologically sound option. To claim autonomy or even refuse the authority of the state, however, both cases would need to frame their movements as legitimate forces that deserved authority instead of the state. To craft this legitimacy, both cases relied on a particular notion of what Indigenous identity is and what it needs to thrive, as Chapter Three explores. Overall, these cases help us better understand how political systems or varying resources cannot always explain
movement tactics, especially when the underlying identities behind the movements are not taken into account.

This chapter forms the foundation for understanding the evolution and intricacies of these movements. In order to understand their relationship with existing social movement theory, I first outline conventional frameworks for how scholars tend to conceive of contentious politics. Next, I provide an in-depth survey of how each movement emerged and developed over time. These details provide the reader with the necessary context to delve into deeper analysis in the following chapters.

**A Review of Social Movement Theory:**

Social movement theory generally relies on the political process model, which scholars utilize to explain the emergence, evolution and outcomes of social movements. In focusing on one or more of these elements, the political process approach can be subsequently divided into three explanatory factors: first, the political opportunities and constraints that the movement faces; second, the resources and forms of mobilization available to the movement; and lastly, the interaction between movement framing by leaders and the manner in which the general population or the state interprets this framing. These explanations have evolved over time and now are often employed in an overlapping manner. However, the dominant analytical frameworks of social movement theory hinges on these explanatory factors.

The political opportunity approach stresses that the institutions, structures and political avenues for change available to groups shape the nature of social movements. Political process theorists such as Charles Tilly (1978), Doug McAdam (1982), and Sidney Tarrow (1983) were among the first to articulate how social movements arise when political institutions or power
relations shift to spur opportunities (McAdam et al. 1996). Thus, political opportunities and constraints form the basis of movement emergence. Tarrow defines political opportunities as the “dimensions of political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics,” while political constraints represent “factors- like repression, but also like authorities’ capacity to present a solid front to insurgents- that discourage contention” (Tarrow 1998, 20). For Tarrow, movement formation depends first on whether political structures encourage or discourage contention. In short, political cleavages or shifting opportunities and constraints incentivize the formation of social movements. This approach has evolved to cross-national comparison of differing political opportunities. Scholars such as Kriesi (1992), Kitshelt (1986) and Rucht (1990) have focused on cross-national comparisons of similar movements in order to understand how political differences incentivize their emergence (McAdam et al. 1996).

While the political opportunity approach stems from the idea that political structures prompt movements, different scholars have emphasized various aspects of this concept. For instance, Charles Kurzman analyzes the factors that make a state vulnerable to public pressure along with the objective and subjective perceptions of political opportunity. He argues that the relation between these two elements dictates movement outcomes (1996). Herbert Kitshelt, however, contends that the relationship between political input (responsiveness to mobilization) and political output (the political capacity to create or grant change) shapes movement outcomes (1986). While emphasizing the configuration of political opportunity, Kurt Schock highlights the limits to the political opportunities framework in non-democratic contexts, due to the flow of information from an international context (1999).

As McAdam, McCarthy and Zald recognize, even in their various interpretations of the framework, scholars generally share a focus on four elements in their analysis: “1) The relative
openness or closure of the institutionalized political system 2) The stability or instability of a broad set of elite alignments… 3) The presence or absence of elite allies 4) The state’s capacity and propensity for violence” (1996, 27). These factors mold not only whether a social movement has sufficient political opportunity to emerge, but also the manner in which the state responds to the movement’s claims, a key element in shaping outcomes.

While political opportunities offer relevant factors for why movements emerged and help explain outcomes to some degree, many scholars have argued that this framework does not sufficiently explain how and why a movement evolves. As McAdams, McCarthy and Zald recognize, “Movements may be largely born out of environmental opportunities, but their fate is heavily shaped by their own actions” (1996, 15). The “own actions” of a movement introduces the second approach: mobilizing structures. In the original conception of mobilizing structures, scholars tended to focus on the resources available to movements. How groups link themselves to these resources determines how the movement evolves. McCarthy and Zald initially conceptualized this emphasis on group resources (1973, 1977). In doing so, these theorists broke away from the notion that action stems entirely from group grievances and instead focused on the mobilization processes of such groups (McAdam et al. 1996). The emphasis on mobilization processes complemented scholars who focused on movement emergence by seeking to map the development of a movement over time.

As this framework evolved, scholars began to also emphasize the organizational processes of a movement rather than just the deliberate use of available resources. Charles Tilly, for example, explored how grassroots organizations facilitate and provide structure for collective mobilization. Later scholars drew on this approach to explain more contemporary movements. Aldon Morris (1981) and Doug McAdam (1982) used a similar approach to examine the impact
of churches and colleges in the Civil Rights Movement, while Sara Evans (1980) explained the American Feminist Movement through the linkages formed by woman active in the Civil Rights Movement. Each of these works focuses on how organizational or informal group linkages spur collective action and shape the character of the movement over time (McAdam et al., 1996).

While resources and organizational structures may seem mutually exclusive, they actually both spur collective action in an interrelated fashion. For instance, the spaces that groups use to network and cultivate linkages (such as churches) can be viewed as organizational resources. In this manner, scholars have increasingly focused on the organizational dynamics of a movement. Tarrow, for instance, asserts that effective organization evolves out of context-driven local units linked by connective structures and coordinated through an organization (Tarrow 1998). In emphasizing context, connective tissue, and coordination, Tarrow highlights organizational structures at the local, regional, and national level. McAdams, McCarthy and Zald likewise illustrate how the “organizational profile” of a movement shapes its evolution. Specifically, they argue that mobilization procedures—such as disruptive tactics, the radical flank effect (where the presence of extremist groups makes a moderate group’s claims more reasonable), and the threats embedded in the group’s goals—explain how the movement develops. Overall, scholars in this framework tend to focus on three (sometimes overlapping) factors: “1) comparison of the ‘organizational infrastructures’ of countries… 2) specification of the relationship between organizational form and type of movement, and 3) assessment of the effect of both state structures and national ‘organizing cultures’ on the form that movements take in a given country” (McAdam et al. 1996, 4). In these factors, mobilizing structures begin to intersect with political opportunities within the state.
While political opportunity and mobilizing structures explore the interaction between a movement and the state, they do not probe the interfaces between movement leaders and the movement populace. The framing processes approach begins to dig into these interactions by exploring how leaders mold the character of the movement to achieve their goals and how these movements come to be interpreted. In order to mobilize, people have to both hold a strong grievance and a sense that acting collectively will help alleviate their distress. Thus, framing by leaders can spur or suppress action. David Snow is known as the primary scholar who constructed the concept of framing processes, and in doing so began to cultivate the importance of ideas in movements (Snow et al. 1986). Movements do not merely emerge out of the materials, organizing structures and political opportunities, but rather involve a complex interaction with those holding the grievances.

Even scholars such as Charles Tilly (1978), Sydney Tarrow (1983, 1989), and Joshua Gamson (1991), who tended to previously focus on the political and organizational factors behind movements, came to recognize the “catalytic effect of ideas” (McAdam et al. 1996, 5). The dissemination and social construction of new ideas, however, is a relatively amorphous realm. For this reason, scholars either tend to avoid the matter completely, or like Snow, confine themselves to a relatively strict notion of framing processes. Even McAdam et al. define framing as “the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action” (1996, 6). In this manner, framing processes are about strategically cultivating collective action by fashioning shared understandings, rather than voicing the shared understandings that already exist.

While scholars generally leave culture outside the lens of their focus, certain scholars have begun to examine how the dissemination of ideas interacts with existing cultures. Tarrow,
for instance, explores how leaders ground messages in the local culture to contextualize the movement. In this process, there is always a delicate balance between framing messages in a culturally relevant manner and using messages that are new and innovative enough to spur action. Collective action frames, Tarrow contends, are not just about reiterating the values and symbols of a culture (because often groups are rebelling against subsets of their own culture), but reframing these messages into frames of contention. Symbols begin to hold emotional value and electrify individuals into action through this type of framing. For Tarrow, framing processes entail embedding new frames into an existing cultural web to mobilize action (Tarrow 1998).

While social movement theory focuses on the role of the state, resources, organization networks and framing in shaping the course of a movement, the anthropological tradition considers the role of identity, both in facilitating movement development and in bringing up particular tensions. Although a comprehensive review of identity formation theory is not necessary for our purposes, certain conceptions of identity are noteworthy, due to the unique role of an Indigenous identity in these movements. For instance, gay rights scholar Mary Bernstein argues that in social movements, identity can be employed both instrumentally (to achieve a certain political goal) and expressively (to assert the value of that particular identity) (1997). Bernstein and Verta Taylor later build on this notion to note how movement identities that are both expressive and instrumental can often maintain an essentialist construction of what this identity entails. An essentialist or strict definition of what a certain identity is and who it includes can help differentiate a group from the dominant culture and thus spur collective action (2013). However, when a movement is based on a definitive group identity, gaining support from outside alliances that do not share this identity may be difficult. This pull between a strict movement
identity and a broader, inclusive identity lies at the root of the tension between gaining outside alliances and expressing the value of the particular identity at stake.

When focusing on Indigenous rights movements, scholars tend to combine an anthropological, identity-focused lens with elements of social movement theory. Alison Brysk, for example, begins her examination of Latin American Indigenous social movements by asking where these movements fit in typical conceptualizations of ethnic theory. Can Indigenous movements be regarded as ethnic mobilization or do they fall more in the realm of nationalism? Brysk draws on Crawford Young’s concept of cultural pluralism (1976), which argues that Indigenous identities transcend ethnic boundaries. However, she subsequently argues that Indigenous groups presently organize in an ethnic fashion. Brysk notes:

The boundaries of ethnic mobilization for indigenous groups are unusually imprecise and multiple, with overlapping identities. Yet at most of these levels… Indian movements display the ‘syndrome of characteristics’ said to define ethnic groups: a common name, myth of common origin, common historical memories and territory, cultural linguistic links, and a sense of solidarity (2000, 38).

Brysk leaves open the possibility that these groups also mobilize under a nationalistic frame, arguing that they “simultaneously assert claims as nations and within nations” (2000, 38) Such nationalism for Brysk, however, would fall under cultural nationalism rather than the traditional political nationalism (2000).

If Indigenous movements fall somewhere between ethnic mobilization and cultural nationalism, what role does identity play in their development? Brysk contends, “The Latin American Indian rights movement fits best a view of ethnic politics as an interactive construction of identity that embodies both strategic and symbolic elements and evolves over time” (2000, 39). She argues that since Indigenous groups often lack resources and avenues to address their grievances, the powerless enact change by projecting their identities and ideas into the global
arena. In this manner, movement framing and identity construction matter, both in producing certain identities and representing those identities to the state and an international audience. Such messaging helps to write a collective identity for Indigenous groups and cause communities to forge new ways of understanding themselves in the context of a nation-state. Change, according to Brysk, comes through the politics of persuasion and by using a local identity to link Indigenous causes to an international audience. Overall, Brysk underscores how movements both cultivate and transmit ideas and identities— a social constructivist approach to understanding Indigenous movements (2000).

If Brysk conceptualizes Indigenous movements in terms of their cultural-nationalistic, ethnic, and identity-based nature, other scholars consider how this identity power comes to confront state power. These scholars examine how groups confront not only the state, but the general international order. Noam Chomsky, for instance, highlights the ideological divide between European (or “Western”) notions of power and Indigenous systems of communalism (Meyer and Alvarado 2010). In a similar mode, Lois Meyer defines “Western” as “the hegemonic values, beliefs, and policies which undergird global neoliberal capitalism,” and she sets Indigenous movements in opposition to this order (Meyer and Alvarado 2010, 9). In a similar vein to Chomsky and Meyer, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz and Jerry Mander argue that Indigenous movements counter three broad trends stemming from the western world: individualism, homogenization, and neoliberal capitalism (2006). Homogenization includes historical and present cultural suppression as well as educational standardization. Neoliberal capitalism likewise involves a more globalized world order and exploitation (especially of resources) from capitalism. By framing many Indigenous movements in opposition to these Western developments, leaders once again link local identities with international ideals.
Certain North American scholars have gone even further than examining the oppositional nature of Indigenous social movements. Scholars such as Audra Simpson (2014), Taiaiake Alfred (2000), and Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) highlight Indigenous peoples’ active refusal of Western power structures. Alfred, for instance, unpacks the notion of sovereignty, highlighting how evoking this non-Indigenous concept through Western legal systems is the only way for many Indigenous people to address their grievances. He notes, “The practice of sovereignty in the structures of governments and state agencies offered another forum for the subordination of principle” (Alfred 2000, 24). While sovereignty is often referred to as a solution to tribal-state relations, Alfred demonstrates how Indigenous grievances must always be framed within existing Western structural and legal parameters. Alfred thus argues that Indigenous movements should seek to transcend and refuse Westernized sovereignty (Alfred 2000).

Both Coulthard and Simpson make a similar argument surrounding recognition of Indigenous groups by the state. Coulthard’s Red Skins White Mask unpacks the notion of recognition by illustrating how accommodation and recognition are asymmetrical exchanges that reinforce state domination. Since recognition gives the state the power to assess the validity of Indigenous existence, Coulthard argues that recognition is not a reconciliatory or neutral process. Through her explanation of the “politics of bestowal,” Simpson also asserts how any form of recognition, including citizenship granted by the state, is still a paternalistic act. Simpson describes politics of bestowal as a situation in which “sovereignty is bestowed rather than asserted, and then acknowledged as inherent” (2014, 157). If bestowed sovereignty and recognition are paternalistic acts, Simpson and Coulthard argue that refusing citizenship, recognition, and granted sovereignty represents an active affront to state power. Overall, Indigenous social movement scholars tend towards an anthropological, identity-centered
approach that considers how these groups confront both state power while linking their struggle to the international order.

This paper expands on the work of Indigenous movement scholars by continuing to examine how these relatively marginalized groups have come to challenge nation-state authority. By connecting their anthropological approaches to social movement theory, however, this work bridges the gap between a state-centered analysis and approaches that discount the role of state systems. To that end, I will consider the political opportunity structure, resource mobilization, and framing processes to examine how they are relevant to the selected cases. However, due to their lack of consideration of the role of identity, these frameworks are not an entirely sufficient explanation. I will thus expand on these theories, focusing particularly on the political opportunity structure, to note the limits to this particular framework when it comes to uniquely marginalized, identity-based groups.

The unique way in which these groups confront state power extends beyond the boundaries of the political opportunity structure. Just as Simpson, Coulthard and Alfred point out how Indigenous groups refuse certain state mechanisms (such as recognition and sovereignty), this work expands their concepts to point out how Indigenous groups in Mexico and Ecuador also refuse overall state dominance. This “politics of refusal,” as I will explore in Chapter Two, highlights how, since these Indigenous actors do not perceive viable political avenues available to them to address their grievances, they may aim to transcend the political opportunity structure. In refusing state power, they seek to create a new order with room for collective, Indigenous identities within the state. To build this new order, however, Indigenous groups must construct a legitimate collective identity that speaks to Indigenous peoples’ grievances. Chapter 3 will analyze the collective identities constructed throughout both movements, and how such
construction goes beyond the framing processes approach. With an examination of both the political opportunity structure and identity, this work will ultimately delve into how these two realms intersect. Specifically, it will dissect the political opportunity structure and complicate its central thesis with the notion of identity, highlighting how the political opportunity structure only truly applies to those that are substantially included in political systems.

The Zapatista Movement: Pursuing a New World Order

Like the pan-Indigenous movement in Ecuador, the Zapatista movement articulates itself as Indigenous and seeks greater autonomy based on this identity. Autonomy entails control over specific land, specialized educational systems, unique cultural rights, and the ability to have at least some self-government. The Zapatistas see the state as the principle perpetrator of oppression, although foreign influence (especially with the creation of NAFTA) is also identified as antithetical to what the movement desires. Despite these shared qualities with Ecuador and many Indigenous movements, the Zapatista’s principle tactic for pushing these claims has tended towards refusing state structures. While the movement began with armed resistance and then shifted to negotiations with the state, it now focuses inward. Rather than concentrating the entire movement on pressuring the state, the Zapatistas have rejected state authority and instead chose to implement their own systems of government, education, and medical care. To understand why this shift occurred, it first is necessary to understand how the movement developed.

The Zapatista movement began as an armed uprising on January 1st, 1994 to resist trends towards neoliberal policies in Mexico. On this day, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect between the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolabal, Chol and other Mayan communities organized to protest the burdens the agreement
would place on them. Although the movement became recognized during this time, peasant communities in Chiapas had been organizing for a decade before. These Mayan villages first united politically in an attempt to distance themselves from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that had been ruling Mexico since the 1930s and had continuously disregarded and exploited Indigenous communities. In December 1991, the PRI passed a “modification” to Article 27 in the 1917 Constitution, which had previously protected communal land ownership in Indigenous communities. The modification removed this fundamental right and threatened privatization of Indigenous collective lands. It was this threat to communal land that prompted greater organization among Mayan communities in the region (Stahler-Sholk 2010).

The PRI’s modification of the Constitution certainly helped instigate Mayan political organization in the Chiapas highlands, but the implementation of NAFTA was the tipping point in the Zapatista uprising. While the Mexican government propagated NAFTA as a modernization mechanism to bring Mexico into the global economic order, the agreement would engender immense poverty in Mexico, especially for Indigenous communities. This poverty was two-fold. First it would generate an infiltration of American-made goods that peasant communities couldn’t afford. Second, it would damage peasants’ livelihood because rural (often Indigenous) people, whose income relied on farming, could no longer compete with cheap American agricultural products. Thus, these communities could no longer make a living and couldn’t even afford the “cheap” American products that were theoretically supposed to improve their living standards (Rodriguez 1995). Because the Mayan communities in Chiapas relied almost exclusively on farming (particularly corn) to make a living, NAFTA became an Indigenous issue.
Over the course of its history, the Zapatista movement has sought to redefine autonomy, mobilize civil society, link into transnational networks, and ultimately refuse the dominance of the nation-state. Zapatistas emphasize that the movement must stem from the grassroots, gathering momentum from the voices of the community. This emphasis on the community has translated into asserting autonomy through Indigenous schools and health clinics, both of which put forth alternative forms of political legitimacy. In this realm, autonomy focuses on creating more horizontal and participatory spaces that incorporate Indigenous communities and exclude the state.

Zapatista leadership has been an essential element of the movement, especially the notorious Subcomandante Marcos, a mestizo man and former professor who became both a leader and a symbol for the Zapatistas. Marcos only first arrived in Chiapas in the 1980s, after decades of attempted revolutionary organizing in other parts of Mexico. Marcos emphasizes that he is “merely a ‘subcomandante’ beholden to a shadowy group of indigenous leaders,” and maintains that he has learned everything from these Mayan communities (Nepstad and Bob 2006). Nevertheless, Marcos is the primary strategist for the movement, planning its military fronts, protests, negotiations, and media appeals. His copious writings and intriguing persona have helped cultivate an international following (Nepstad and Bob 2006). In 2014, Marcos reinvented himself as Subcomandante Galeano, taking the name of a Zapatista teacher and leader that had been killed by Mexican paramilitary groups. While Marcos is the most famous and influential leader, other “subcomandantes” have also had key leadership roles in the movement, including seven female leaders. It is therefore important to remember that although the Zapatista movement does represent the collaboration of many Mayan communities, Marcos and other leaders maintain significant power over the movement’s development.
The movement began with an armed phase. In response to the perceived threat from NAFTA, The Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional (EZLN, Zapatista National Liberation Army) issued a declaration of war with the Mexican state on behalf of the region’s Mayan people. Subcomandante Marcos headed the EZLN and this initial occupation. On January 1st, 1994, an EZLN armed force of about 2,000 men and women seized government offices and thousands of acres of private land in Chiapas (Nash 2001). This self-proclaimed army certainly appeared unconventional from the start. Many of the rebels were barefoot, wore cheap army uniforms, covered their faces with bandanas, and carried sticks or hunting rifles. From a municipal building in San Cristobal de las Casas, Subcomandante Marcos emerged to issue the “First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle.” This statement not only declared war on the Mexican state, but also set forth the EZLN’s twelve demands: freedom, democracy, justice, peace, land, education, health, housing, food, development, cultural rights, and women’s rights (Ortiz 2001). These first demands largely centered on access to basic resources, health and education. In response to the uprising, the Mexican army sent about 12,000 federal troops to the region, causing a series of confrontations that resulted in 145 deaths and many more casualties (Escuelas para Chiapas 2015). The armed phase of the movement lasted only twelve days, as the two sides agreed to a cease-fire. This agreement was largely possible because of immense international human rights attention, particularly in regards to abuses from the Mexican state (Ortiz 2001).

The ceasefire led to further peace negotiations between the Mexican government and the EZLN, conducted by Bishop Samuel Ruiz García in a San Cristobal cathedral. The assassination of the PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, however, suspended these mediations. Despite this suspension, the EZLN did not cease organizing. In August 1994, the EZLN invited
civil society groups from across Mexico to a convention in Chiapas, focusing on next steps for the movement. The EZLN named the town where they convened “Aguascalientes” after the city where the Federal Constitution had been drafted in 1917 after the Mexican revolution (Ortiz 2001). After continued and failed negotiations with the state, the EZLN shifted their goals to a nonviolent campaign aimed at declaring the illegitimacy of the state and asserting the EZLN’s right to govern its own communities. In December 1994, Indigenous EZLN leaders created their own system of government, revolving around 38 Zapatista Autonomous Rebel Municipalities (Stahler-Sholk 2010). The EZLN declared these new municipalities to be superimposed over the preceding official municipalities, and to be governed by the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities (MAREZ), composed of Zapatista leaders. MAREZ would also be in charge of creating and running schools, health clinics, development projects and systems of justice. This assertion of autonomy was intended to reinvigorate ancestral, communal forms of government and represent greater resistance towards the Mexican state by undermining its authority over the region (S!Paz 2012). State and local government continued to function in non-Zapatista territories, however, and tension between these local structures and Zapatista communities have been significant throughout the movement.

As the EZLN continued to mobilize and resist in Chiapas, the Mexican state grew increasingly wary of the movement. In February 1995, the government broke the negotiated ceasefire with a military offensive against the Zapatistas. The army destroyed the Aguascalientes cultural center and issued arrest warrants for Zapatista leaders (Ortiz 2001). Mass numbers of peasants began to flee into the Lacandón rainforest to avoid the indiscriminate military attacks. Nevertheless, the military still arrested, jailed and tortured several dozen people under claimed terrorism charges (Escuelas para Chiapas 2015). By 1995, the army began to recognize the
ineffective nature of its offensive, and in March, it withdrew as the government reopened the opportunity for peace talks. The state created the Commission on Concordance and Pacification (COCOPA) as the organization in charge of corresponding with the Zapatistas. The EZLN responded to the destruction of their cultural center by building five new “Aguascalientes” cultural centers (Ortiz 2001).

After pressure from other Mexican civil society groups, the EZLN agreed to once again negotiate with the state. Beforehand, the group held a National Indigenous Forum attended by over 500 Indigenous people, as well as an “Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism” for thousands of worldwide human rights advocates (Escuelas para Chiapas 2015). Then in mid 1996, Zapatista leaders met with Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo and COCOPA in San Andrés, Chiapas and signed the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture. The accords focused on respecting the diversity of Indigenous communities, conserving natural resources in Indigenous territories, increasing their participation in political affairs, and asserting their right to self-determination. Because it would require significant concessions to Indigenous people (especially in terms of resources) the Mexican government, however, ultimately rejected this declaration, and Zedillo never signed it into law (Navarro 1999). The ELZN maintained that it would not return to negotiate with the state unless the San Andrés Accords were implemented.

Since negotiations with the Mexican government proved unsuccessful, Zapatistas moved to a new strategy of redefining power: rejecting the state’s claims to authority over Zapatista communities and claiming full autonomy. After 1996, these Indigenous communities rejected all government aid and programs, including the federally run schools in the region. This action was part of a larger strategy to reject the government’s carrot and stick approach- the Mexican state
neither had the authority to subdue the movement with force nor grant its legitimacy. Each of these claimed governmental powers, the movement contended, disempower Indigenous communities by undermining their own rights to control themselves (Stahler-Sholk 2010). To this end, the ELZN expanded the existing Zapatista municipalities to include their own judicial systems and political assemblies. Assembly leaders would be elected by the consensus of open community assemblies, and collective work would be an essential piece of each municipality (Ortiz 2001). While focusing on autonomy, the movement continued to press for the implementation of the San Andrés Accords, and in 1997, nine thousand civilians marched in San Cristobal for this end.

The Mexican state did not completely ignore the movement during this period. Rather, in 1997 and 1998, the army carried out a number of covert attacks on remote communities. The biggest of these, known as the Acteal Massacre, occurred when paramilitary groups associated with the PRI murdered 45 Indigenous Zapatista sympathizers, most of which were women and children. In 1998 alone, the government carried out four different significant attacks on Zapatista municipalities, arresting local leaders and killing civilians. During this time, the federal government also launched a campaign to expel foreign rights workers from the region (Escuelas para Chiapas 2015).

To pressure the government to leave the region and finally adopt the San Andrés accords, the Zapatista movement began to draw on leftist domestic and international support. In March 1999, the Zapatistas organized the Plebiscite on Indigenous Rights and Culture, and sent two Zapatista representatives to every municipality in Mexico to spread awareness of their overall goals. In 2000, Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) became president in what many consider to be Mexico’s first truly democratic election. This monumental election overturned
seventy years of rule by the PRI, and many Zapatista leaders remained hopeful that Fox would work with their demands. Similarly, Pablo Salazar, an oppositional candidate to the PRI, won the gubernatorial election in Chiapas. To capitalize on this political shift, the Zapatistas proclaimed that to reopen negotiations, Fox would need to remove troops from the region, release Zapatista prisoners, and implement the San Andrés Accords. While Fox did withdraw some troops and release a few prisoners, these were more token gestures than substantial changes, as small-scale warfare continued in the region (Burke 2003).

The Zapatistas continued to pressure the federal government by bolstering international attention, and in 2001, twenty-four Zapatista commanders (including Marcos) and over 100,000 supporters marched unarmed from Chiapas to Mexico City through an action titled the “March of the Colored Earth.” Upon arrival, Zapatista leaders addressed the Mexican Congress, calling for the full implementation of the San Andrés Accords and the right to autonomy. Because the political climate had shifted with the PRI’s defeat, President Vicente Fox was more accommodating to Zapatista claims. Fox recognized a version of the San Andrés Accords, which (at least in theory) allowed Indigenous communities to decide “their internal forms of coexistence and social, economic, political and cultural organization” (Vann 2001). However, it lacked the specificity that the former San Andrés Accords had provided, and thus Zapatista leaders rejected the document.

With its failed attempts to pressure the federal government for autonomy, the Zapatista leaders once again focused on autonomy. In 2003, Zapatista commanders decided to implement the rights outlined in the San Andrés Accords themselves. Leaders declared at a gathering of 10,000 people that Zapatista territory would be divided into five autonomous “Caracoles.” These new regions would bind Zapatista municipalities together and would be governed by rotating
“good governance councils.” The decentralized nature of government in this rural context meant that policy implementation would vary from one Caracol to another. However, the intent of this new structure was not to impose a unified central model of governance, but rather to adapt policies to the context of each region and include the voices of all community members (Stahler-Sholk 2010). Once again, the Zapatistas did not see their government as existing as a subset of the Mexican state structure, but rather as its own distinct entity.

In the early 2000s, the Mexican military continued its presence in Chiapas, which often erupted in violence. The army also began a campaign to displace Indigenous people from the Montes Azules Biosphere reserve in order to better “preserve the jungle.” It soon became clear that this campaign was rather intended to make room for tourism in the region and assert governmental authority. In 2005, the Zapatistas once again reconceptualized the movement by systematically linking itself to other leftists and social change groups domestically and internationally. With the launching of the “Other Campaign,” the Zapatistas invited leftist organizations to its preparatory meetings in Chiapas (Stahler-Sholk 2010). Through these reunions, the movement created a coalition of 64 leftist political organizations, 118 Indigenous groups, 197 social organizations, and 474 NGOs that all pledged their official support to the Zapatista cause. At the start of 2006, Subcomandante Marcos embarked on a six-month tour to meet with all the various groups taking part in the campaign (Escuelas para Chiapas 2015).

In subsequent years, the movement continued to gather and harness the support of Mexican and international leftist groups. In 2007, the Zapatistas led the First (and later Second) Encounter between the Zapatistas and the Peoples of the World as an opportunity to explain their campaign to over 2,000 people from 43 different countries. However, continued paramilitary attacks on Zapatista communities eventually forced them to suspend the campaign at the end of
the year. Additionally, in 2008, Mexico’s energy secretary announced plans to begin oil drilling in the Lacandón Jungle. A year later, the World Tourist Organization launched their plans for a major tourist development initiative in the region. By 2011, the Mexican Army even announced the formation of two military bases along the Chiapas-Guatemala border (Escuelas para Chiapas 2015). These examples can be viewed as instances of the federal government attempting to reassert its power over the region.

The Zapatistas, however, were certainly not complacent in the face of the federal government’s attempts to regain control. In 2011, twenty thousand Zapatistas, including twenty leaders, marched through the streets of San Cristobal to draw attention to the increased militarization of the region. To show support, eleven political prisoners, who had been members of the “Other Campaign” organizations, began a hunger strike at the state prison in Chiapas. As a result, two of these political prisoners were released. The end of 2012 brought another mass Zapatistas march, since it marked the end of the Mayan Long Count Calendar and the start of a new age– an age where, according to the Zapatistas, justice and inclusion would be the norm. On December 21st, forty thousand people marched through five Chiapas cities, marking the movement’s largest demonstration. During the march, one EZLN leader shouted, “Did you hear it? It’s the sound of their world ending. It’s that of ours resurging” (Escuelas para Chiapas 2015). This shift in calendar for the Mayan communities highlights how the Zapatista movement equated the coming of a new age with a new world order.

Today, the Zapatistas primarily focus on building their autonomy through continued expansion of schools, health clinics, and governmental systems. As one community member from the Zapatista community of Oventik noted, Indigenous villagers are focusing on their communities and awaiting the moment when Subcomandante Marcos will reappear and call for
another march (personal correspondence, January 2016). However, as Zapatista communities maintain their own social systems, they continue to struggle to sustain themselves economically. In this vein, they rely on their transnational network and international attention for financial support. Fair-trade coffee sales, artisan cooperatives, agroecology workshops, international donations and even “Zapa-tourism” initiatives have all contributed financially. Zapatista sympathizers even run multiple artisan stores in San Cristobal de las Casas for financial support. The Zapatista pursuit of autonomy through governmental, health care, and educational structures, therefore hinges on the support of international communities.

According to Richard Stahler-Sholk, a scholar focused on the uprising, Zapatista philosophy relies on four main concepts: reframing notions of power, redefining autonomy, constructing a new social subjective and creating radical democracy (2010). These elements interweave to create a movement focused on fundamentally contesting state domination. In reframing notions of power, Zapatistas stress the slogan “Another World is Possible” and envision a world where human rights and dignity are valued and where Indigenous communities maintain control over their resources and affairs (Stahler-Sholk 2010). In this manner, the Zapatista movement asserts itself against traditional state power in order to construct its own social order.

The movement also questions established forms of power by emphasizing that their rebellion is not a revolution. The overall goal is not to seize power in the existing state, but rather focuses on building a more just alternative political and economic order. In this manner, the Zapatistas are rebelling not just against Mexico, but also against the neoliberal framework. As scholar John Holloway notes:

What is at issue is not who exercises power, but how to create a world based on the mutual recognition of human dignity, on social relations which are not power relations…
This is the challenge that has been formulated most clearly by the Zapatista uprising in the southeast of Mexico (quoted in Khasnabish 2010, 82).

By not seizing control of the state, Zapatistas do not intend to perpetuate existing power struggles, but rather intend to create a system with space for their values and way of life. Thus, the Zapatistas have reconceptualized autonomy to be about neither secession nor gaining authority from the state. Rather, autonomy is centered on creating an inclusive social space where community members make decisions over their own affairs.

**Ecuador’s Indigenous Movement: Coalition-Building for Structural Change**

Unlike the Zapatista movement, the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement began with a greater focus on increasing political participation for Indigenous groups. Indigenous representation in government remained very low and without a political voice, increased autonomy seemed like a distant reality for many tribes. Prior to this national movement, alliances among Indigenous groups existed on a regional basis, if at all. As consciousness shifted to highlight how Indigenous grievances in the Amazon paralleled demands in the highlands, collective action by regional groups translated these desires to the national stage. The formation of Ecuador’s Confederación de las Nacionalidades de Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE) marked the combination of regional groups to push for Indigenous rights at the national level. Throughout the movement, Indigenous Ecuadorians have engaged with the political system to push their agendas, by toppling dictators, organizing marches, initiating lawsuits, and even forming their own political party. If Ecuadorian Indigenous groups held similar demands and had faced parallel historical marginalization, why did they choose to primarily engage with the state, while the Zapatistas chose to reject state
structures? To delve into this question, an in-depth look at the evolution of the Ecuadorian movement is necessary.

Since the 1980s, Indigenous groups in Ecuador have vacillated between popular uprising and political participation to pursue greater autonomy. Over the course of the movement, the debate has centered on whether Indigenous people should engage in politics, and if so, over the best manner to do so. Should the goal be to support existing candidates that might be sympathetic to their concerns, or should they put forth their own candidates? At the crux of the movement in 1995, Indigenous activists created their own platform for political participation with the formation of the Movimiento Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik (commonly referred to as Pachakutik). In Quechua, *pacha* means “time” or “land” and *kutik* means “a return,” exemplifying the Indigenous cosmology inherent in the party. As Marc Becker writes in his analysis of Pachakutik, “The word signifies change, rebirth, and transformation, both in the sense of a return in time and the coming of a new era” (2012, 1). In this sense, the word conjures up a situation in which oppression is remembered, but a new future becomes possible through self-determination (Becker 2012).

Pachakutik represented an avenue to participation in a political system that largely did not include Indigenous people. Through Pachakutik and CONAIE, Indigenous groups organized to support candidates who defended their interests (Becker 2012). While Ecuador’s Indigenous movement has been extremely successful at times in building coalitions across the nation’s numerous Indigenous groups, the diversity of interests involved in the movement has also caused significant fractionalization. Today, the debate centers on whether political participation is indeed the best route to change or whether Indigenous interests can only truly be pursued by refusal the existing political structure.
The diverse nature of Ecuador’s Indigenous groups highlights the difficulty of creating pan-Indigenous coalitions. The percentage of Indigenous people in Ecuador is highly contested and ranges from a low of 7% in the 2001 census to 40% by CONAIE’s estimates. These populations are divided between Ecuador’s three main geographic regions: the Pacific coastal lowlands, the Sierra highlands and the upper east Amazon basin (Becker 2012). The majority of Indigenous Ecuadorians live in the highlands, and are often grouped as “Kichwa,” due to their membership in the larger ethno-linguistic Quechua group. Among these highland groups, regional divisions and attachment to local identities remains strong. In the Amazon basin, the Achuar, Cofán, Huaorani, Secoya, Shuar, Siona, Zápara and Kichwa face increasing threats to their resources and are the most heavily affected by oil drilling. Six main groups remain in the coastal region: the Awá, Chachi, Epera, Manta, Tsáchila and Wankavilka, but these communities remain small and do not always maintain their ethnic identity (Becker 2012). Given the geographic and cultural diversity of Ecuador’s indigenous people, as well as their diversity of concerns and interests, fractionalization has been a consistent theme in Indigenous mobilization.

Attempts to mobilize various Indigenous groups began as early as 1944, when the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (Ecuadorian Federation of Indians, FEI) was created as the peasant arm of the communist party. However, the group’s cultural claims began to conflict with Marxist ideology, and thus it was unable to have any lasting political effects. During this time, however, new forms of Indigenous organization developed across the regions. The *comuna*, a traditional form of collective living that safeguards Indigenous values, practices, and land, is considered to be the nucleus of Indigenous society in Ecuador. However, in the northern highlands, Indigenous groups began to abandon this way of living in favor of the socialist cooperatives spreading throughout the region (Becker 2012).
In the central highlands, the Catholic Church gained support from Indigenous peasants by protecting Indigenous *comunas*. In the 1970s, the Church then played a major role in forming ECUARUNARI, the main group that would represent Indigenous interests in the highlands (Rice 2012). ECUARUNARI comes from a Quechua phrase meaning “Awakening of Ecuadorian Indians” and formed in 1972 by an Indigenous congress of 200 delegates from various Andean communities (with support from the Church). This congress met with the intent to create a strictly Indigenous organization in the Ecuadorian highlands that could work with non-Indigenous sectors of the population to advance socially, economically and politically (Ecuarunari). ECUARUNARI was a key part of the Indigenous movement in the 1990s and continues to be a strong presence in the highlands.

The Church was also a major organizing agent for Indigenous groups in the Amazon. Political parties tended to direct their interest away from the region because its poor infrastructure and low population density created difficulties in mobilizing voters. Due to this lack of political mobilization, Protestant and Catholic missionaries continued to be the main connective tissue between groups until the 1980s (Rice 2012). The organizational structures developed by the Church thus linked various tribes together and set the stage for Indigenous mobilization later on.

In the 1970s, the Indigenous movement often articulated itself as a distinctly peasant movement fighting for agrarian reforms, rather than an identity-based movement. In 1972, the FEI (the peasant arm of the communist party), ECUARUNARI, and FENOC (Ecuadorian Federation of Agricultural Workers), came together to form the Frente Unitario de Reforma Agraria (FURA, United Front for Agrarian Reform). The fact that ECUARUNARI, a decidedly Indigenous organization, participated in this new group for agrarian reform highlights the land-
based nature of Indigenous grievances. By 1978, FEI, FENOC and ECUARUNARI met once again to create the Frente Único de Lucha Campesina (FULC, United Front for the Peasant Struggle), once again illustrating the alliances between strictly Indigenous and broader peasant organizations. This group specifically articulated their opposition to the state’s most recent land reforms and sought to “define a united policy for the indigenous and peasant sectors” (Ibarra 1992, 100). The group later changed its name to Frente Único de Lucha Campesina e Indígena to articulate the group’s Indigenous identity (Becker 2008).

As ECUARUNARI formed with the help of the Church in the highlands, Amazonian groups began to unite to address their grievances against the state as well. To this end, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana (CONFENIAE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon) formed in August 1980 during the Regional Conference of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadoran Amazon. CONFENIAE was a non-governmental organization that fought the exploitation of Indigenous lands, especially by oil corporations. Its goals included the protection of Indigenous lands, creation of Indigenous unity across the Amazon, representation of Indigenous wishes in creating sustainable development, respect for Indigenous medicine and intellectual property, and advancement of bicultural education (Becker 2012, 6). Many of the aims mirrored the goals of groups across Ecuador, but with particular emphasis on resisting corporate development of their lands. CONFENAIE was the first group to begin articulating its grievances based on the unique position of Indigenous nationalities (Becker 2012). As Indigenous scholar Alfredo Viteri articulates, “We have claimed the term nationalities as a category that includes all of the different Indigenous groups” (1983). This emphasis on nationality was an important step in uniting communities across the region and eventually across the country.
By October 1980, the linkages between these regional Indigenous groups continued to expand. On October 16th, the alliance between ECUARUNARI, FENOC, and FEI mobilized to action with the National Peasant Indigenous March “Martyrs of Aztra” in Quito. The march denounced electoral corruption, opposed recent agrarian reforms and sought to cultivate a “united peasant-indigenous group against hunger and governmental corruption” (Ibarra 1992, 99, my translation). Towards the end of October, this mobilization culminated in the formation of the Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONACNIE, National Coordinating Council of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador). This new group was created by ECUARUNARI and CONFENIAE, representing an important link between highland and Amazonian Indigenous groups (Ibarra 1992).

These growing pan-Indigenous linkages set the stage for the emergence of the key organization behind the Indigenous movement, which would serve to unite Indigenous groups from all major regions. In November 1986, delegates representing nine Indigenous groups and twenty-seven organizations gathered outside Quito to form the Confederación de las Nacionalidades de Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE). This national Indigenous group united CONFENIAE in the Amazon, ECUARUNARI in the highlands and a smaller coastal organization called the Coordinadora de Organizaciones Indígenas de la Costa Ecuatoriana (COICE, Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Ecuadorian Coast), which CONAIE created at the time to unite coastal tribes. CONAIE intended to join existing groups under one umbrella organization in order to push Indigenous agendas for political, social, and educational reforms to the national level. As Indigenous activists previously had recognized, “If we do not reinforce our unity, there is a danger that various maneuvers would divide us and we would lose our presence” (in Becker 2012, 8).
In addition to consolidating Indigenous interests, CONAIE aims to fight for the protection of Indigenous territory, the right to intercultural and bilingual education, the fortification of cultural identity, against the oppression of civil and church authorities, and against colonialism. Overall, they aim to defend “the dignity of Indigenous nationalities and communities” (conaie.org, my translation). CONAIE maintains that the right for Indigenous groups to maintain their own governmental systems that prioritize communitarian living lies at the heart of these goals, but that political participation in a fair democracy is also essential. Lastly, they maintain that relations with Indigenous groups across the continent are crucial to creating an alternative way of living for Indigenous people (CONAIE 2015). These goals intend to encompass the varying aims of each regional Indigenous group. CONAIE’s leadership consists of an elected president and a few other top leadership posts, with regional leaders forming a second tier of organizational governance (Jo-Marie 2000). With this structure, each regional group’s demands hold a key place in the national movement.

The ability to unite Ecuador’s various Indigenous groups depended on CONAIE’s capacity to blend both ethnic and class struggles in order to tie into the increasing unity between Indigenous groups and labor movements. CONAIE thus sought to cultivate solidarity with the workers’ movement and progressive sects of the population by building on previously mentioned ties between Indigenous and peasant identities. These alliances strengthened the organization’s presence in the political world. However, CONAIE consistently struggled to incorporate the views of its differing populations. Because COICE had been created by CONAIE, and there wasn’t a strong history of Indigenous organization along the coast, the coastal segment of CONAIE remained largely symbolic. Despite the imperfect nature of Indigenous unification, CONAIE did bring these groups together to seek not just political participation, but “the
transformation of the nature of the current power of the hegemonic uni-national State which is exclusionary, anti-democratic, and repressive,” and instead build a “humanistic, plurinational new society” (CONAIE quoted in Becker 2012, 6). Thus the original aims of the organization sought to rebuild conceptions of state dominance.

If CONAIE’s goal was to challenge the exclusionary state by asserting Indigenous rights, its methods throughout the 1990s coupled popular uprisings with electoral pressure and participation. In June 1990, CONAIE coordinated a decentralized Indigenous uprising, where communities across the nation built road blockades that effectively shut down the entire country for a week (Rice 2012). This uprising represented CONAIE’s emergence as a national actor. The uprising sought recognition from the state that Ecuador was not a homogeneous nation, but rather rooted in the profound diversity of its Indigenous groups. Although no specific political gains were made, the uprising succeeded in drawing significant national attention.

As Indigenous groups gained greater attention from the government, their call for cultural recognition shifted towards demanding a specific declaration naming Ecuador as a plurinational state. Then in 1992, conservative President Sixto Durán Ballén pushed forward a neoliberal economic reform package, which quickly sparked joint uprisings by the United Worker’s Front and CONAIE (Becker 2012). By April of the same year, an Amazonian regional Indigenous group led a march from Puyo to Quito in order to demand titles to their land and the formation of a plurinational constitution. Such mobilization in the Amazon also prompted these groups to seek reclamations for oil drilling and its ensuing human health and environmental damages. In 1993, several Amazonian tribes jointly filed a lawsuit in New York against Texaco, highlighting how grievances were at times aimed at both the state and international actors (Becker 2008).
In 1994, Durán Ballén sought more neoliberal reforms, including the privatization of water rights, increased agricultural exports, sale of state-owned lands, and most importantly, a proposed measure that would allow communally held Indigenous lands to be sold. When Durán Ballén ignored Indigenous disapproval, CONAIE united with other peasant groups for the “Movilización Por La Vida” (Mobilization for Life) uprising, where decentralized road blockades once again shut the country down for ten days. While Durán Ballén did eventually use military force to quell the protests and still enacted many of his neoliberal policies, these uprisings gave the struggle a reputation as the strongest Indigenous movement in Latin America (Becker 2012). Although the movement gained much in terms of public profile from these protests, it did not make many strides in terms of concrete policy.

In order to pursue concrete political goals, many Indigenous activists argued that CONAIE had to enter electoral politics. In 1995, CONAIE partnered with the Coordinadora de Movimientos Sociales (CMS, Social Movements Coordinator) to form Pachakutik, a political party that would allow the movement to put forth its own candidates. In its first election in 1996, Pachakutik won a surprising 20.6 percent of the presidential vote (Becker 2012). During this election, Luis Macas, the president of CONAIE at the time, also won a post as a national deputy in the National Assembly, running on the Pachakutik ticket. Macas’ appointment represented Pachakutik’s first political victory (Becker 2008). By 2000, fifty-three Indigenous representatives held local and provincial posts and four members had been elected to the 123-seat Congress, after running on the Pachakutik ticket. Indigenous representatives held an additional seven seats in the National Constitutional Assembly in 2000 (Jo-Marie 2000). Pachakutik thus became CONAIE’s avenue for political participation.
Mounting political pressure from these mass uprisings led to a large symbolic victory in 1998. On June 5th, Congress enacted Ecuador’s eighteenth constitution, declaring the nation to be “pluricultural and multiethnic.” However, it did not proclaim the state to be plurinational, the recognition Indigenous groups were demanding. For many Indigenous activists, the lack of such a distinction represented a failure. While a pluricultural and multiethnic state recognized Indigenous culture and ethnicity as distinct from mestizo culture, it did not acknowledge their existence in the political order or grant specific rights in the way the term “plurinational” does (Clark 2007). Rather than recognizing Indigenous groups’ unique standing as nationalities, the Constitution stated that they “define themselves as nationalities” (in Becker 2012, 143). As scholar Donna Lee Van Cott argues, CONAIE backed down from its long-term push for plurinationalism for the recognition of certain (largely symbolic) rights (2000). These cultural and language rights would not be specified until Ecuador’s latest Constitution in 2008. While still largely symbolic, this declaration of Ecuador as a pluricultural state highlighted the growing weight behind the Indigenous movement.

As it continued to grow, the Indigenous movement began to play a role in ousting presidents. In 1997, CONAIE conducted an uprising pressuring Congress to impeach President Abdalá Bucaram. Bucaram had introduced drastic neoliberal reforms and was notoriously corrupt. On February 6th, the Ecuadorian Congress voted to oust Bucaram on grounds of “mental incapacity,” placing his vice-president in power (New York Times 1997). Indigenous groups played an even greater role in 2000, when activists led an enormous uprising to oust President Jamil Mahuad, due to frustrations with further corruption and the worsening economic crisis. Because the legislative path for impeachment became unclear after the 1998 ousting, Indigenous groups formed an alliance with military officers, particularly Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, to occupy
Congress and overthrow the president. High ranking military officers who did not participate in the coup turned to Congress for a legislative answer, which quickly voted to oust Jamil Mahuad (Pérez-Liñán 2007, 183). These impeachments exemplified the height of Indigenous power at the national level.

The 2003 elections marked a turning point for Pachakutik that ultimately began to splinter the party. Pachakutik formed a coalition with the Partido de Sociedad Patriótica (PSP, Patriotic Society Party) to help elect Lucio Gutiérrez as President. Upon election, however, Gutiérrez appeared less loyal to Indigenous claims than before, and after disputes over the unequal assignment of ministerial posts between PSP and Pachakutik leaders, Pachakutik withdrew from the government after only six months in power. The episode served to fragment Pachakutik and CONAIE by dividing the grassroots support that had brought the party to power from Indigenous activists that no longer believed they could remake the political system through participation in electoral politics. In the 2006 election, Pachakutik gained only 2.2 percent of the votes, highlighting how the movement’s power quickly dissipated (Rice 2012).

The 2006 elections that brought Rafael Correa to power marked an interesting development for Ecuador’s Indigenous movement. Correa’s Alianza PAÍS party utilized populist discourse to identify with the general population, and thus began to occupy the political space that Pachakutik and other small leftist parties had previously (Rice 2012). Despite Correa’s mainstream support, the Indigenous movement pushed back against his regime, claiming his populist discourse to be more lip service that actual reform. Indigenous movements, many activists asserted, reached further than Correa in supporting the oppressed, by encouraging communities to organize for themselves and by pursuing more radical solutions.
Although Indigenous groups may not have supported him entirely, it was under Correa’s regime that the long sought-after pursuit of a plurinational constitution was realized at least in theory. For CONAIE, a plurinational state entailed “the recognition of a multicultural society that recognized, respected, and promoted unity, equality, and solidarity among different peoples and nationalities despite their historic, political, and cultural differences” (Becker 2012, 14-15). In the tumultuous lead up to this new Constitution, Correa sought legal approval to rewrite the Constitution while CONAIE led marches to push Indigenous inclusion and plurinational recognition into the Constitution.

CONAIE’s demands for the Constitution, however, differed from the result. Under CONAIE’s demands, Article 1 would read, “Ecuador constitutes a plurinational, sovereign, communitarian, social and democratic, independent, secular, unitary state with gender equality” (CONAIE 2007). The Constitutional Assembly refused to adopt this article; they did, however, incorporate the term plurinational. Article 1 thus declared that Ecuador was a “constitutional state of rights and justice,” and was characterized as “social, democratic, sovereign, independent, unitary, intercultural, plurinational and secular” (Constitución de 2008). In regards to language, the Constitution stated, “Spanish and Kichwa are the official languages for intercultural relations. The other languages of the nationalities are official in the regions and areas of their use and comprise part of the national culture” (Constitución de 2008). Lastly the new Constitution included an expanded definition of collective rights, including the protection of communal territories and resources (Becker 2012). While each of these areas represented tremendous strides forward in terms of recognition, the practical applications of such assertions remained tenuous.

After Correa’s 2009 reelection, the regime increased spending on education and healthcare and heeded populist calls for higher wages. However, Indigenous groups continued to
criticize him for his “petro populism,” where he allowed oil extraction and mining in Indigenous territories and used the revenue to fund new social programs (Becker 2012). Thus, not only had Correa usurped the power of Indigenous social movements, but he also continued the same exploitive practices.

Today, the debate among Ecuador’s Indigenous movement revolves around whether electoral politics is an effective tool to achieve Indigenous self-determination and autonomy or whether activists should push for these aims outside the existing political order. Many activists and Indigenous scholars on the left condemn Pachakutik for seeking change from within the system. As scholars Petras and Velmeyer argue, “Electoral politics is a game that the popular movement cannot win, governed as it is by rules designed by and that favor the dominant class, and that compel the movement to settle for very limited change and the illusion of power” (2005, 137). Others argue, however, that electoral politics may not be perfect, but that it is the only practical recourse for concrete change. If Indigenous people actually want a say over their own affairs, they argue, they must not only enter the dominant system, but make trade-offs in the process. Former CONAIE president Luis Macas, however, refutes this idea, claiming that Indigenous movements become weak when they are too willing to compromise on ideology to gain government posts. He argues that while it may be necessary to engage in the dominant social and political spheres, the movement cannot allow politicians to co-opt activists so that they lose sight of greater goals (in Becker 2012). This fundamental debate now largely immobilizes the movement from nationwide action. It remains to be seen whether it is indeed possible to attain widespread, substantial change through political participation for these communities.
Both these cases emerged out of relatively similar circumstances. They both stem from very resource poor groups that faced centuries of social and political marginalization. The identity of both movements revolves around Indigeneity, a category that distinguishes these communities from the dominant culture of their country. Each movement maintains economic, land, and identity-based grievances and strives for autonomy over their own affairs. Lastly, both gained strength over roughly similar time periods, a stage when the international community turned its attention towards Indigenous groups across the globe.

Despite these similarities, notable differences between the movements still persist—namely the divergence in movement strategy. While the Ecuadorian movement engaged in the political system by negotiating with the state, creating a political party, and even toppling dictators, the Zapatista movement rapidly shifted to an overall refusal of the state. In addition to this crucial divergence, key differences exist in how these cases developed. The movement in Ecuador, for instance, had the benefit of an established web of existing networks, created by prior efforts to organize Indigenous groups decades before (such as networks formed by the Catholic Church in the highlands or linkages stemming from previous class-based movements). Organizing between Mayan villages in Chiapas, however, did not occur until the 1980s.

Furthermore, the Ecuadorian movement represented a nationwide coordination between regional groups, whereas the Zapatista movement only existed regionally and involved a portion of Mexico’s Indigenous population. While the Ecuadorian movement grew off of early alliances with class-based movements, the Zapatistas have focused on gaining international alliances. Lastly, although the Ecuadorian state utilized arrests and force to silence its Indigenous people, it did not quite employ the same type of sustained militarization and outright murder as the
Mexican state. These differences are key factors to understanding the development of each movement.

If the Zapatistas shifted towards refusing Mexican state authority early in the movement, what forms the basis for this unique tactic? How can a group with very few resources and little political clout claim authority? Why did Ecuadorian Indigenous groups choose to engage with the state and participate in the political process? This next chapter will delve into the logic behind these movement tactics while exploring what it may mean to refuse state power.
Chapter Two
The Politics of Refusal: Seeking Opportunities Under Political Constraints

In articulating and pursuing their demands for greater autonomy, both the Zapatista and Ecuadorian Indigenous movements have worked through existing state structures and outside of them. For the Zapatista movement, the shift from a brief armed uprising to negotiations with the state to eventual refusal of the state’s power over their territories demonstrates their drive to articulate a new world order, where Indigenous autonomy is safeguarded. The change from political participation and nonviolent protest in Ecuador to the current debates over whether working within the state can really protect Indigenous autonomy also highlights how Indigenous leaders are grappling with how to effectively navigate state structures. In Ecuador, some scholars and leaders are now coming to the conclusion that protecting Indigenous rights necessitates refusing to participate in the existing political structure.

This unique rejection of state authority emerges out of the often-tense relationships between states and Indigenous peoples. In her book *Mohawk Interruptus*, Audra Simpson makes the claim that the “recognition” of Indigenous people by the state under the guise of multiculturalism is a damaging act that places all authority in the hands of the state to articulate Indigenous existence. State treatment of many Indigenous groups around the world has historically been so rooted in paternalism that seemingly beneficial acts such as recognition still carry domineering undertones. Indigenous people, however, are fighting back against such state domination. She asserts:

There is an alternative to ‘recognition,’ the much sought-after and presumed ‘good’ of multicultural politics. This alternative is ‘refusal’… (Indigenous people) deploy it as a political and ethical stance that stands in stark contrast to the desire to have one’s distinctiveness as a culture, as a people, recognized. Refusal comes with the requirement of having one’s political sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing (2014, 11).
Certainly Indigenous refusal of government recognition stands as a potent articulation against state authority. When recognition no longer becomes a vehicle for Indigenous freedom or dignity, but rather a means for the state to reinforce colonial relations of domination, stark opposition questions state legitimacy. Simpson’s “refusal of recognition” is an extremely valuable concept to understand how Indigenous groups can contest state domination despite their disadvantaged position.

I would argue that Simpson’s “refusal” transcends recognition to apply to all governmental actions that reinforce colonial relations by asserting the state’s supreme dominance over Indigenous affairs. When Indigenous people invalidate state authority by repudiating its dominance, these groups are exercising what I would term the “politics of refusal.” By questioning state legitimacy in their assertion of Indigenous authority, these communities place their right to self-determination on an equal or even higher level than state power. They simultaneously assert their own legitimacy while negating state legitimacy. In this manner, the politics of refusal is the construction of a new way of thinking, a worldview that reconceptualizes the role of Indigenous people in society. This assertion values their unique conception of the world and carves out spaces for it to exist. At various points through both the Zapatista and Ecuadorian Indigenous movements, groups have trended towards the politics of refusal. Facing political systems with few opportunities for Indigenous people, these groups had to consider alternative means of addressing their grievances. While the Zapatistas actualized the politics of refusal as early as 1994, the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement is now just beginning to articulate similar ideas through discourse that emphasizes community development over political participation.
If both movements seek greater autonomy and Indigenous power over their own affairs, why would the politics of refusal manifest itself as a strategy? Why would Indigenous Ecuadorians choose to pursue political participation for the majority of the movement, only later articulating refusal, while the Zapatista movement moved quickly to not just verbalize refusal, but enact it through their own political structures? Why did the politics of refusal unite Mayan groups in Mexico, yet splinter Indigenous activists in Ecuador? On a more theoretical basis, if Indigenous groups are beginning to counteract state structures through this refusal, what does this strategy say about the political opportunity structure? Given these developments in refusal in Indigenous movements, can scholars maintain that these movements will evolve based on the political opportunities and constraints embedded in state systems?

This section will seek to unpack these questions by dissecting the tactics for pursuing the politics of refusal in the Zapatista and Ecuadorian Indigenous movements. To begin, I will examine how political opportunities and constraints have evolved structurally in each country, noting how these systems have excluded Indigenous people. Next, I will analyze how the movements emerged and developed despite the constraints of their respective political systems, and eventually sought to transcend the bounds of their political opportunity structures by refusing state systems. These groups are not just demanding systemic change, but rather seek a reconstructed system with room for Indigenous ideologies. On a more empirical note, I will illustrate how the Zapatista movement turned towards the politics of refusal over political participation (as in Ecuador) as their means towards autonomy earlier because of an overall ineffectiveness of negotiating with the state. On the contrary, political and demographic factors granted Indigenous Ecuadorians more impact through conventional protest methods. Overall, the politics of refusal highlights how a group with a particular claim to sovereignty may assert their
power in an unconventional manner, despite a lack of resources and constraints within the political opportunity structure. The politics of refusal, therefore, is both a pertinent political tactic when the state is unwilling to negotiate and a growing ideological force that redefines what it means to be Indigenous.

**Indigenous Political Opportunities in Mexico:**

Indigenous people across Latin American have been subjected to immense oppression since colonial contact; in Mexico, their exclusion from politics has resulted in a political structure that was not constructed in any way for Indigenous people. During the colonial period (1521-1821), economic and political structures were built around the exploitation of Indigenous people. As one Spanish colonizer, Solorzano Pereira, articulated, “(T)he Indians, because of their lack of intelligence, have to be subjected to the Spaniards as provided by the Law of Nature, the Spaniards being the ones who will elevate them to a life of rationality” (in Vargas 1994, 17). The Spaniards’ supposed divine right to exploit and assimilate Indigenous populations stemmed from the notion that they were childlike, savage, and incapable of functioning for themselves. Certainly there were Spaniards (such as Fray Bartolome de las Casas) that disputed this narrative. However, colonial ideologies and practices created a political structure reliant on exploitation, which would have lasting consequences to present day.

After Mexico gained its independence 1821, the new republic put forth the notion of “legal equality,” in which criollos, mestizos, Africans, and Indigenous people were all theoretically embraced as citizens. In practice, however, such legal equality proved to be entirely symbolic, especially since the federal government was systematically dismantling Indigenous

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2 Persons born in Latin America during the colonial period but of Spanish descent.
communal lands at the same time. The Nationalization Act of 1856, for instance, privatized mass sections of “idle land,” that had been held communally by Indigenous groups. Especially in regions like Chiapas, the seized lands were not redistributed to individuals, but rather consolidated into massive estates or latifundios held by elite criollos. Arbitrary dispossession of land prompted Indigenous and mestizo uprisings throughout the 19th century. These revolts, however, induced legislation intended to pacify the “barbaric Indians” by use of military force (Vargas 1994). Thus, as the new Mexican republic developed after independence, it became clear that the political structure was ruled by criollos and designed to inflict criollo dominance over the Indigenous population.

The Mexican Revolution and the resulting Constitution of 1917 certainly reshaped the nature of land distribution in the country and in theory advanced Indigenous grievances. For instance, in his 1911 Plan de Ayala, Emiliano Zapata claimed “The immense majority of peoples and Mexican citizens” lacked or had been disposed of their land by abuse of the Nationalization Act. Zapata asserted the right to “expropriate these lands, hills and waters… so that the peoples and citizens of Mexico can obtain ejidos (communal farms), colonies, public lands for villages or (lands) for agricultural work… thus improving the prosperity and well-being of the Mexicans” (Vargas 1994, 18).

Indigenous people acutely felt these grievances regarding land. However, since these revolutionary demands were not articulated as having an ethnic dimension, the 1917 Constitution did not take into account the specific desires of Indigenous people. The Constitution itself did not even mention the words “Indigenous” or “Indian.” While it did include the idea of “social rights,” Indigenous people were not explicitly included under these rights. Overall, the demands that Indigenous people articulated during the Revolution were not specifically addressed. The
Constitution only referred to communal lands obliquely in Article 27, granting “communal lands to rural communities” (Vargas 1994, 18). Because Indigenous people were not referenced as an ethnic group, the Constitution did not take into account the location of Indigenous groups when drawing geographical boundaries for Mexico’s twenty-nine states and two territories in Article 43. As anthropologists now observe, no state in Mexico “responds to a criterion of ethnic identity of some indigenous group” (Vargas 1994, 18).

Because they represent a minority in each state they live in, Indigenous people have little electoral power in Mexico’s federal system and thus no representation in the Federal Congress and almost none in their State Legislatures. There are no Indigenous quotas in any governmental bodies, nor are there electoral systems in place to ensure an Indigenous voice (Vargas 1994). The fact that the existence of Indigenous people was not even mentioned in the 1917 Constitution not only failed to grant them rights, but also set the stage for their continued political exclusion.

Political exclusion was not the state’s only strategy towards Indigenous people through the 20th century. Following the Revolution, the Mexican Republic began a policy of nationalism, which sought to “Mexicanize” Indigenous people and forge a cohesive national identity. Distinctive Indigenous identities were viewed as obstacles to national progress, and thus education became the vehicle for acculturation. In the decades prior to the Revolution, there were very few schools in Indigenous communities. As anthropologists and Indigenismo writers became increasingly interested in Indigenous communities, these scholars began to highlight the isolated and poor nature of the villages. Thus, many scholars supported the state’s efforts to prevent “cultural stagnation” and facilitate assimilation through the creation of rural schools. The Rural School Project (1922), Casa del Pueblo (1923), and Misiones Culturales (1925) were all state-sanctioned institutions that created schools in Indigenous villages. In 1926, the federal
government launched the Departamento de Incorporación Indígena (Department of Indigenous Incorporation) and the Casa del Estudiante Indígena (House of the Indigenous Student), both of which aimed to urbanize young Indigenous people by bringing them to Mexico City. The state also established Centros de Educación Indígena, Indigenous boarding schools located in eleven ethnic regions. These policies were tremendously successful in terms of state-building initiatives; by just 1924, there were 1,417 rural schools in Indigenous communities (Gutiérrez 1999). However, it is crucial to recognize that these schools were not merely neutral devices, but rather employed harsh assimilationist policies. They intended to strip Indigenous people of their cultural practices and ideologies and instill a sense of shame for speaking their native languages. Despite recent cultural revival efforts, this period of internalized cultural shame would continue through generations to undermine the foundations of many Indigenous cultures.

By the 1940s, the assimilation paradigm shifted slightly, and the idea of respecting Indigenous cultures while still integrating them into the dominant culture became the goal. In the last year of his presidency (1940), Lázaro Cárdenas held the Inter-American Indigenous Congress, in which he began to shift the rhetoric surrounding Indigenous policy. At the opening address, Cárdenas stated, “What must be supported is the incorporation of the Indian into the universal culture, that is to say, to promote the development of the race, the improvement of their living conditions by introducing universal technology, science and art; but always on the basis of maintaining the Indians’ racial personality and showing respect for their consciousness and identity” (Cárdenas 1940, 138). Although Cárdenas’ statement takes a step towards respect for identity, he still ultimately assumes the existence of a universal (western) culture that Indigenous groups should aspire to. Since assimilation and building state-cohesion was still the aim, one can imagine that respect for culture was still largely symbolic.
Cárdenas did create the Instituto Nacional Indígena (INI, National Indigenous Institute), which was the first formally governmental organization “having the aim of integrating the indigenous communities into the economic, political and social life of the nation” (INI, in Gutiérrez 1999, 98). What the government deemed best for communities, however, was certainly not always beneficial in Indigenous peoples’ eyes. For Cárdenas and the following administrations, respecting Indigenous identity entailed appropriating certain aspects of their culture, particularly art, as representations of general Mexican culture. In this manner, aspects of Indigeneity gained visibility in Mexican culture, but without any Indigenous say over this appropriation. Indigenous weavers, for instance, gained little from the mass sale of products using their techniques, feeding into the idea that “Mexico should use the Indian cultures in order to enrich the national one” (INI 1978 quoted in Gutiérrez 1999, 97). Celebrating Indigenous culture symbolically still resulted in no tangible political or economic gains for these communities.

It was not until the 1970s that the government’s assimilationist stance started to shift to a more pluriethnic ideology. As scholars began to denounce the Mexican state’s homogenizing policies, increasing pressure mounted for the government to redefine their approach towards Indigenous people. Inspired by Indigenous conferences pushing for plurinational reform in South America, in 1975, The First Council of Indigenous Peoples met to put forth a formal request for a pluriethnic society. Pluralism, however, was not legally instated into the Constitution until two decades later. In 1992, President Salinas de Gortari heeded Indigenous demands and mounting political pressure by amending Article 4 of the Constitution. The new paragraph read:

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3 In 1971, Indigenous representatives met for the Fricción Interétnica de América del Sur no-Andina (Interethnic Friction in Non-Andean South America) and produced the Barbados Declaration, which denounced nation-building, homogenizing projects. In 1978, a second workshop involved Mexican organizations and social scientists. The conference generated the Barbados Declaration II, calling for plurality in national agendas across Latin America (Gutiérrez 1999).
The Mexican nation has a pluriethnic composition originally based on its indigenous peoples. The law shall protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, uses, customs, resources and specific forms of social organization, guaranteeing to their individual members an effective access of the jurisdiction of the State. In the agrarian suits and proceedings in which those members are a party, their legal practices and customs shall be taken into account in terms established by the law (quoted in Vargas 1994, 39).

At the time, this legal change marked a resounding political success for Indigenous groups in Mexico and across Latin America.

Despite the above claims on behalf of Indigenous people, communities continue to push for specific legislation that will detail their rights. To exacerbate the lack of specificity, there is no legal definition for who an Indigenous person is under Mexican law. Mexican “legal equality” means that all Mexican citizens are technically considered equal in the eyes of the law, and thus the law does not need to differentially identify its citizens (Vargas 1994). However, how can the state be held accountable to protect “the development of their languages, cultures, uses, customs, resources and specific forms of social organization” for its Indigenous communities if it is not even legally defined who Indigenous people are? Given the amorphous nature of Indigeneity, where certain mestizo populations might choose to emphasize their Indigenous heritage, a legal definition of Indigeneity might exclude these people, perhaps problematically so. Additionally, a state delineation of what constitutes Indigeneity would represent another example of external forces deciding who Indigenous people are and how they should behave. Despite the problems a legal definition would carry, the lack of one leads to a deficiency in implementation of the rights outlined in Article 4.

While Indigenous people have made significant strides in at least rhetorical recognition from the state, as in Article 4 above, their actual political avenues for addressing grievances remain slim. Out of Mexico’s 500 lower house legislators, only 14 were seats held by Indigenous
people in the 2012-2015 term (United Nations Development Program 2013). Mexico does not have reserved quotas, voluntary quotas, or specific appointments for Indigenous people in the legislature. The fact that most Indigenous groups are divided among multiple states makes it even harder to elect representatives. As a survey conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union finds, the legislature in Mexico has a proportionally low number of Indigenous people. The study attributes this trend to poor voter registration and participation (particularly in rural areas), party resistance and discrimination against Indigenous candidates, the lack of impact that Indigenous representatives have historically had on Indigenous peoples’ lives, and general lack of confidence in national decision-making (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2014, 6). With a lack of formal representative, avenues for addressing grievances within state structures remain slim. Thus, the historical construction of a political system that exploited and excluded Indigenous people has not ceased to do so because of its pluralistic discourse.

**Indigenous Political Opportunities in Ecuador:**

The Ecuadorian political structure has similarly been constructed in a manner that excludes full Indigenous participation. Relations during the colonial period between Ecuadorian criollo populations and Indigenous people followed similar patterns as in Mexico. Indigenous people were legally considered wards of the state and inferior to criollo (American-born) and peninsular (European-born) whites. This legalized notion of inferiority set the state for colonial exploitation. The Spanish Crown, however, had varying policies for “dealing” with Ecuador’s Andean and Amazonian Native peoples. In the Andean region, the Crown forcefully organized Indigenous groups into peasant communities that were allowed a limited degree of self-government, provided they fulfill periodic labor services to Spanish officials and pay a per capita
tribute. In the Amazon, the Spanish aim was more to pacify Indigenous “barbarians” through military garrison and missions (Peña 2005). It is important to note that not all Indigenous groups (like the Huaorani) came into direct contact with Spanish officials and settlers. Nevertheless, the overall policy of colonialism in Ecuador also set the stage for continued exploitation.

As Ecuador gained independence in 1822, the new state was faced with how to define Indigenous relations going forward. Similar to Mexico, a year before official independence, the state enacted Article 181 of the Law of 1821, which eliminated all honorific titles granted by the Crown and granted all Ecuadorians (including Indigenous people) equal citizenship before the law. The Law of 1821 also compelled Indigenous people to relinquish their communal lands to the heads of their families, with excess lands auctioned to criollos (Sattar 2007). This policy eradicated legal communal ownership of land by transferring ownership to one Indigenous leader rather than the community. Although the mandatory Indigenous tribute had been eliminated for a period of time, it was quickly reinstated as Ecuador separated from Gran Colombia and found itself in significant debt. By 1830, Indigenous tribute accounted for 28-35 percent of all state revenue (Sattar 2007, 25). Despite their significant contribution to revenue and their supposed “legal equality” under Ecuadorian citizenship, Indigenous groups were still legally defined as minors, and official state discourse referred to them as the “raza miserable” (miserable race) that required state protection. This paradox in Ecuadorian law proclaimed on the national level that all Ecuadorian (including Indigenous people) were equal, but on local scales, they were defined as holding a distinct political, social and judicial status, which was seen as inferior and thus subjected them to a number of exploitative laws (Sattar 2007).

By the 1850s, the notion of Indigenous people requiring greater state protection began to dissipate. In 1854, the Institution of Indian Protectors, which had previously mediated between
Indigenous individuals and the state in court (since Indigenous people were not allowed to represent themselves in court or sign contracts), was abolished. Article 2 in the Law of 1854 stated that the institution was “clearly in contradiction to democratic ideals” (Sattar 2007, 34).

The rhetoric of the period also led to the abolition of the Indigenous tribute. Although the end of this policy may seem beneficial, its elimination removed certain aspects of Indigenous autonomy. Their individual monetary contribution to the state was replaced by labor obligations, especially constructing and maintaining roads that legally applied to all Ecuadorian citizens, but was disproportionately applied to Indigenous people. Additionally, the policy left communal lands much more vulnerable to state exploitation, as they lost certain protections that came with the tribute (Sattar 2007). While shifting away from certain paternalistic state policies, the state continued to threaten Indigenous land and autonomy.

The Liberal Revolution of 1895 brought with it a new conception of the Indigenous role in society. As mentioned, the Indigenismo movement across Latin America brought anthropologists and writers who sought to understand the Indigenous “other” in order to help facilitate their “modernization.” As coastal populations overthrew the conservative regime of Luis Cordero and instated Eloy Alfaro, many Indigenous groups joined this liberal uprising. As previously mentioned, many local officials exploited Indigenous populations, using Indigenous legally obliged labor services as justification to transform them into personal servants. To avoid these legal obligations to state labor, many Indigenous people worked on latifundios. However, various forms of bondage and debt peonage prevented individuals from leaving these estates, further entrenching Indigenous people in a system of semi-forced labor (Baud 2007). For many, the Liberal Revolution provided an avenue for addressing these grievances. Alfaro seemed to turn toward Indigenous grievances in the Reglamentación del concertaje of April 12, 1899,
which read, “The Constitution obliges the public powers to protect the Indian race in order to improve its social situation… (It) prohibits slavery in the territory of the republic” (Baud 2007, 79). This declaration on the national level once again did not guarantee compliance on the local level, as powerful landowners and local officials were capable of evading much of this progressive legislation. The courts were often filled with complaints from Indigenous people reporting abuses by landlords, priests, and local officials (Baud 2007). The discrepancy between legal discourse and local action is a continued theme throughout Mexican and Ecuadorian political history.

After decades of local corruption and inability to implement federal decrees for Indigenous rights, Indigenous people joined a mass uprising of workers, peasants and students in the 1944 Glorious May Revolution, resulting in the overthrow of President Carlos Arroyo del Rio. These organizing efforts culminated in a Constituent Assembly and Ecuador’s fifteenth constitution. The assembly met for months, debating how to define Ecuadorian nationalism going forward. A few leftist voices in the assembly began to argue that the Ecuadorian state had been used as an instrument to perpetuate exploitation, but they did not necessarily come to this conclusion in terms of the treatment of Indigenous people (Becker 2007).

As a result, the Constitution of 1945 did not grant Indigenous people the right to vote, nor did it offer them other practical rights of citizenship. Indigenous people would not gain the right to vote until 1980, highlighting how they have been excluded from the political process. Due to fears of more uprising, the Constitution did create a system of functional representation where congressional seats were reserved for certain “minority” groups. Given that Indigenous people actually represented a majority of the population at that time and that special interest groups—such as professors, merchants, the military, agriculturalists and the press were also guaranteed
representation—these quotas were hardly substantial. While special interest groups could select their representatives, Indigenous people were deemed incapable of doing so. The Constitution also created the Federación Ecuatoriana de los Indios as the first governmental organization for Indigenous affairs. It too, however, was run solely by non-Indigenous elites. Thus, as scholar Marc Becker notes, “Elites continued to control state structures to their own benefit” (2007, 114).

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the idea of pluriculturalism emerged in Ecuador as an idea that would form the basis of Indigenous goals for the following decades. In 1979, the Constitution Assembly extended the right to vote to illiterate people, which finally included a substantial portion of the Indigenous population. The same year marked a transition to democratic rule, with the election of Jaime Roldós. Roldós was also the first president to include a passage in Kichwa in his inaugural speech and ultimately set the stage for symbolic appeals to Indigenous people. His presidency brought discourse regarding pluriculturalism—the respect and recognition of Indigenous groups as a key piece of national development—to a federal level. For the first time, the state engaged in dialogues with Indigenous leaders. As Amalia Pallares notes, “Pluriculturalism thus demanded a focus on the specific character, or distinctiveness, of indigenous culture from white-mestizo culture” (2007, 145). Especially in terms of bilingual and bicultural education, this period marked a turning point in the state’s willingness to recognize Indigenous groups.

Although pluricultural reforms had been institutionalized through literacy campaigns and bicultural education by the late 1980s, the socioeconomic status of Indigenous groups had not improved. In response, Indigenous groups once again began to mobilize, eventually leading to the formation of regional groups and later CONAIE. Despite pluricultural policies, these groups
argued that Indigenous people still lacked political participation, their material demands were ignored, and the celebratory discourse of multiculturalism did not result in substantial change. For these Indigenous activists, pluriculturalism extended beyond recognition to cultural rights, economic rights, and political participation, or what can be termed a more “plurinational” approach. These demands were based on control over land and the right to self-determination, goals which underlie the movement today.

Overall, the evolution from colonial suppression to at least some pluricultural recognition has not been linear. Like in Mexico, Indigenous state-relations in Ecuador may have improved, but the political system historically was constructed explicitly and deliberately to exclude these populations. Exclusion embedded within the political system does not disappear, even over generations, without deconstructing the policies that have lead to such marginalization.

**Open versus Closed Political Systems:**

While historically Indigenous groups in Mexico and Ecuador have been politically excluded, it nevertheless remains vital to examine the political structures in each state today. Social movement scholars, especially those focused on structural explanations, often distinguish between open and closed political systems. The relative openness of a political system not only determines governmental responsiveness, but many scholars argue that it can also affect the strategies that the movement pursues. For instance, if political systems are open, movements may seek to work through institutional systems rather than pursuing disruptive tactics (such as large protests) (Caraway 2006; Kitschelt 1986). It is thus useful to compare the present openness of political systems in Ecuador and Mexico to determine whether small variations in political opportunities indeed contributed to the differences in strategy across movements.
As noted, in his 1986 article focusing on European democracies, Herbert Kitschelt begins to expand the political opportunity structure by taking into account not just the political system’s responsiveness to a movement, but also its ability to enact change. Kitschelt combines these two factors to develop four indicators that determine a system’s openness to political demands: 1) the number of political parties or groups with electoral demands 2) the capacity of the legislature to control policy independently of the executive 3) the relationships between various interest groups and the executive (more fluid and pluralistic linkages create a more responsive government) 4) mechanisms that aggregate demands into policy. To actually output this responsiveness into policy, however, Kitschelt puts forth three additional indicators: 1) the nature of centralization in decision-making 2) governmental control over the market (the more control it maintains, the more difficult it is to challenge existing norms) 3) the independence of the judiciary (1986, 63-64).

These indicators are certainly extensive and provide useful insight into examining the role of political structures. However, for the purposes of this work, they can be simplified into overall trends. In a discussion of transnational activism, Teri Caraways asserts that a country’s degree of democracy (measured by free and fair elections, enforcement of rule of law, and respect for human rights), the presence and effectiveness of NGOs, and the ability to circulate information, determines political openness (2006).

In the Mexican and Ecuadorian cases, a combination of these ideas proves most useful. First, the electoral process remains crucial to governmental obligation to its constituency. Fair and free elections have not always been the norm in either country, and thus the electoral process deserves scrutiny. Secondly, Kitschelt’s indicators emphasize independence in various spheres from the executive. By analyzing political pluralism, freedom of expression, judicial processes,
and overall corruption, we gain a greater sense of the degree of executive control. Lastly, the degree of organizational rights not only provides insight into NGO capacity, but also helps illustrate the state’s tendency to shut down movements.

2015 Comparison of Political Openness in Mexico and Ecuador

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator of Open/Closed System</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>Ecuador</th>
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| **Electoral Process**           | - President elected 6-year term, no reelection  
- 128-member Senate elected through mix of direct voting and proportional representation  
- 500-member Chamber of Deputies  
- Recent reform bars current members of Congress from reelection  
- Elected governors have significant authority, especially over police forces  
- 2012 presidential election: allegations of vote buying, media bias, manipulations of polls, overspending  
- Federal Electoral Institute oversees elections, seen as fair  
- Allegations of abuses of public resources at the state level persist | - President elected 4-year term, one reelection  
- 137-member unicameral National Assembly, elected by each province  
- Organization of American States reports elections to be free  
- 2012 reform to seat allocation now favors larger parties |
| **Political Pluralism**          | - Few official restrictions on political organization  
- Three major political parties  
- Many states with fewer parties, more prone to municipal and state-level corruption  
- More than 12 small town candidates killed between 2010 and 2013  
- Indigenous groups underrepresented in political institutions | - Few restrictions on political organization  
- Four major political parties  
- 2008 constitution required reregistration of all political organizations, allegedly misrepresenting support for each organization  
- Women must account for 50% of party lists in national legislative elections |
| **Government Effectiveness**     | - Organized crime limiting effective governing  
- Public sector employees (such as teachers) prone to extortion in some regions  
- Allegations that illegal drug money | - Lack of investigative capacity into government activities, prone to corruption  
- Transparency and Social Control branch of government oversees corruption, had 64 corruption cases in 2013 |

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<th>Freedom of Expression</th>
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<td>- Broadcast media controlled entirely by two major corporations, one accused of overtly supporting specific candidates</td>
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<td>- Since 2006, reporters can face high risk of physical harm if dealing with sensitive subjects</td>
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<td>- Internet not restricted, but instances of cartels targeting online reporters</td>
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<td>- Harassment against journalists, human rights group Fundamedios reported 253 cases of abuse against journalists in 2014.</td>
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<td>- National broadcasts used to condemn opposition leaders</td>
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<td>- Government maintains unlimited access to public service airtime</td>
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<td>- After two journalists sued Correa for his response to a 2010 police revolt, they were imprisoned for 18 months.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Organic Law on Communications placed executive control on journalists and media outlets, and created media regulatory bodies controlled by the executive - criticized by human rights groups as placing excessive executive control on media</td>
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<td>- 2013 criminal code restricts freedom of expression and seeks to give government greater regulatory powers</td>
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<td>- Government employs private firm to remove sensitive videos from internet</td>
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<td>- Academic freedom and freedom of religion generally unrestricted.</td>
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<th>Organizational Rights</th>
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<td>- Constitutional protection for free assembly, but civic expression restricted in some regions</td>
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<td>- Nongovernmental organizations active, but have received threats and violent resistance</td>
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<td>- National security legislation maintains a broad definition of terrorism, which has been extended to acts against unarmed protesters</td>
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<td>- In 2013, a teacher was given an eight-year prison sentence for encouraging her students to protest</td>
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<td>- Right to organize guaranteed by law, but NGOs under increasing governmental scrutiny</td>
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<td>- 2011 presidential decree limited capacity of foreign-sponsored NGOs</td>
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<td>- 2013 presidential decree made process of forming an NGO difficult and gave executive power to dissolve organizations.</td>
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<th>Justice System</th>
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<td>- Vague definition of organized crime impedes prosecution</td>
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<td>- Coordination on law enforcement weak</td>
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<td>- Officers prone to bribery and corruption</td>
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<td>- 2013: Sentences issued on less than 2% of registered murders</td>
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<td>- Reported military abuses</td>
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<td>- Judiciary comprised of 21-member National Court of Justice and 9-member Constitutional Court</td>
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<td>- Lack of transparency in appointment of judges, concerns that judges align too closely with government</td>
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The above table provides the details for a comparison of these indicators between Mexico and Ecuador. While key differences persist between them, the overall lack of political openness in both cases overwhelms smaller differences. Slight variations, however, may prove useful in explaining divergence in strategies. First, while the electoral process does not appear entirely free of corruption in either country, Mexico has received more allegations of electoral corruption. Neither country restricts political pluralism, but in practice both trend towards larger, more powerful party systems (Freedom House 2016). In Mexico, less pluralism on the state and municipal levels leaves more power for governors and more space for corruption. Both countries experience high levels of general corruption, although Ecuador currently ranks slightly more corrupt (with a score of 32) than Mexico (with a score of 35) on Transparency International’s 2015 Corruptions Perceptions Index (2016). In Mexico, corruption is more frequent on state or municipal levels, and more often tied to organized crime than in Ecuador. Although expression is not entirely free in either country, harassment of journalists and censorship is currently a more pressing issue in Ecuador. While few corporations control the airtime in Mexico, the Ecuadorian government is increasingly restricting broadcasting in Ecuador (Freedom House 2016). This tie between government and the media epitomizes an environment where new demands would not gain traction.

Organizational rights also highlight differences between Mexico and Ecuador. Organizations straying from government ideology are certainly not free from intimidation and sometimes violence in Mexico. However, in Ecuador the executive has recently focused on suppressing NGOs, as demonstrated by the aforementioned imprisonments and presidential decrees. Lastly, the justice system maintains its respective issues in each case. In Mexico,
organized crime impedes prosecution, poor coordination between national and local police forces leads to corruption, and the Mexican military has been criticized for human rights abuses. In Ecuador, the tie between the judiciary and the executive is suspect and speaks to overall executive power (Freedom House 2016).

Such characteristics of these political systems speak more of general political problems than specific attempts to exclude Indigenous people, yet they affect Indigenous groups as much as any other community. Despite minor variations, these systems are more similar than different in that both are only partially free systems that are relatively closed to Indigenous people. When the electoral process is not entirely free and fair, political parties are few, corruption of local and national officials is prevalent, expression is limited, organization is suppressed and the justice system is flawed, it becomes difficult to articulate new demands. These elements are prevalent in both cases. Separation between the executive and other aspects of the state is key to an open system. Such separation exists formally in both countries, but in practice corruption subverts it.

In Mexico, the connection between government officials (especially local officials), organized crime, the media, police forces, and the election process can be particularly strong. Ties between these groups create an environment where demands outside of what this block deems appropriate can be particularly dangerous. Similarly in Ecuador, the executive has gained increased control over expression, the judicial process, and nongovernmental entities, which likewise creates a difficult environment for new demands. Above all else, these connections create high potential for various forms of corruption, which makes both recognizing new demands and enacting laws to address them exceedingly difficult.

In addition to present freedoms, it is necessary to consider the changes in political and civil rights over time. As the following figures demonstrate, overall rights in Mexico and
Ecuador have shifted over time. In the early 1990s when these movements were both beginning to gain traction, Ecuador maintained better political and civil rights than Mexico, according to Freedom House’s Freedom in the World rankings. Greater rights from the start of the movement likely swayed groups towards engaging with the state and perhaps even towards participating in the electoral process. In 1996 when Pachakutik was formed, political rights in Ecuador were rated at 2 out of 7 (with 7 as the least rights and 1 as the most) with civil liberties at 3, highlighting how engaging with state systems seemed viable for Indigenous groups in Ecuador. However, as political and civil rights in Mexico began to improve in the 2000s, rights in Ecuador declined (Freedom House 2007). Perhaps this regression of rights in Ecuador contributed to Pachakutik’s lack of success later on and the overall fragmentation of the movement.

Political and Civil Rights in Ecuador and Mexico, 1980-2006

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In addition to civil and political rights, differences in the party systems in each country helped Ecuadorian Indigenous groups engage in the political system more directly. In Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) held executive control and a majority in Congress for 71 years, ending in 2000. Mexico’s supposed two-party system in practice was a one-party reign during the time the Zapatista movement emerged. Even organized political parties with a broad base of support, such as the National Action Party (PAN), could not substantially contest the PRI. Such a political environment was certainly not conducive to an Indigenous political party. In contrast, Ecuador’s highly fragmented party system, exacerbated by political and economic divisions among elites, meant that the Ecuadorian movement did not have to confront one ruling party. Rather, constant shifts in political power in Ecuador have made it possible for a small minority party like Pachakutik to have at least some political sway (Jo-Marie 2000).

While variations in parties and political and civil rights between the two countries have swayed each movement towards a tendency to refuse or engage with the state, they do not tell the whole story. For instance, in Mexico, the Zapatista movement emerged in 1994 at a time when political and civil liberties remained at 4, or comparatively low. The Zapatistas shifted from
negotiating with the state (while pressing for the San Andrés Accords) to the politics of refusal while political and civil rights remained low. However, as rights steadily increased in the early 2000s, the Zapatistas did not return to significantly negotiate with the state. Had their tactics been solely premised on the political opportunities available, it seems this new trends toward democracy in Mexico would have prompted greater negotiation. Instead democratization accompanied further refusal from the movement.

Certain scholars argue that these political structures in Mexico and Ecuador would set the range of likely protest activities for movements. Peter Eislinger (1973), for instance, contends that in closed systems, mobilization is limited due to fear of repression, while in open systems, protestors tend to take advantage of more institutionalized avenues (Tarrow 2011). While differences in political and civil rights may have allowed the Ecuadorian movement to engage with the state more than the Zapatistas, political factors did not entirely dictate movement tactics. In these cases, both movements faced systems that were not entirely free and remained relatively closed to Indigenous people. Despite the repressive nature of both states (as exhibited by corruption and violence perpetrated by both states), substantial mobilization nevertheless arose in both cases. Eislinger’s characterization of closed political systems would not predict these trends. Because it begins to expand beyond the purely structural approach, Kitschelt’s framework provides a key foundation to better understand the relevance and limitations of the political opportunity structure for these Indigenous movements.

If movement tactics at least somewhat depend on the relative openness of the political system, closed structures with less political and civil rights lead to more provocative strategies. As Kitschelt argues, “When political systems are closed and have considerable capacities to ward off threats to the implementation of policies, movements are likely to adopt confrontational,
disruptive strategies orchestrated outside established policy channels” (1986, 66). This characterization appears accurate both in the Zapatista and Ecuadorian Indigenous movements. Disruptive or confrontational strategies include the armed occupation, marches, road blockades and organized protests that have occurred throughout both movements. The fact that the Zapatista movement began with an armed occupation of San Cristobal de las Casas highlights how in a closed political system, tactics that force the government to respond may be a group’s only viable option. This trend may be especially true given Indigenous peoples’ historical exclusion from political avenues in both states.

While a closed political system influences movement strategies, Kitschelt notes how it also can impede the impact a movement is able to make. He characterizes demands as either procedural (seeking new channels of participation), substantive (changing specific policies), or structural (changing the political opportunity structure itself). The movements in Ecuador and Mexico have sought a combination of these demands at various points throughout their struggles. Kitschelt, however, notes that while open regimes more willingly accept new groups, closed systems have no incentive to do so, since “policy-making is the prerogative of a circumscribed cartel of political actors” (1986, 67). If fixed linkages already exist between different spheres of the state (such as the media and the executive in both countries), new alliances become challenging. When successful policy or procedural shifts are difficult to obtain in closed systems, groups trend towards more structural demands. Kitschelt notes, “Structural impacts will figure when a political system cannot bring about either procedural or substantive reforms. In this instance, a social movement will try to broaden its demands to include those for altering the existing political system fundamentally” (1986, 67). This dynamic also applies to the Zapatista and Ecuadorian movements. After limited success with procedural and substantive aspects of
their overall push for autonomy, these movements have begun to seek an altered political structure.

Thus far, the political opportunity structure appears to substantially explain both movement strategies and their demands. In a simplistic account, the closed political structures in each country caused both movements to pursue disruptive tactics and evolve to more structural demands. This story, however, does not fully explain the variation in strategies between the movements. Nor does it take into account that these movements, particularly the Zapatistas, went beyond just disruptive strategies to active refusal of the state and its systems. This politics of refusal, as previously termed, demanded not just to alter the existing political structures, but to fundamentally rebuild a new system. While Kitschelt gets at how groups may evolve from focusing on one policy to focusing on the whole political structure, this paper takes it a step further. Although in different ways, both movements have shifted from focusing on the entire political structure to reimagining a completely new system.

Kitschelt’s argument is useful in understanding some developments of the movement and how the political structure played a role, but it comes up short in terms of explaining the politics of refusal. What, then, does this say about the relevance of the political opportunity structure in these cases? Understanding the politics of refusal requires more than the political opportunity structure as an explanatory factor. For this key tactic, employed in the Zapatista case (but also articulated in the Ecuadorian movement), Albert Hirschman’s book *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* provides a relevant framework. Although Hirschman constructs his analysis through an economic lens, he makes the argument that in any firm, corporation, institution, or even state, participants learn to live with a certain level of dysfunctional conduct. However, once this
undesirable behavior reaches a certain threshold, members choose to voice their grievances, exit the organization, or maintain their loyalty (1970).

Hirschman’s fairly straightforward argument takes an interesting turn when applied to the politics of refusal. Hirschman argues that “exit” is a strategy that applies to economics, while “voice” is employed in politics. Hirschman explores exit as a strategy used when consumers are dissatisfied with a product and thus choose to purchase from another company. In our cases, however, exit can actually be a tactic used against the state. Hirschman describes exit as a uniquely powerful option where “in some situations, exit will be a reaction of last resort after voice has failed” (1970, 37). This characterization is accurate in both Indigenous movements. While both movements have certainly “voiced” their grievances, dissatisfaction with the outcomes (such as the failed San Andres Accords in Mexico or the emptiness of the plurinational constitution in Ecuador) has led to a tendency towards refusing the state, rather than working within it. The politics of refusal can therefore be viewed as a unique form of exit.

When applying exit to social movements and the state, it can be both strategic and symbolic. The politics of refusal (exit in our case) symbolically asserts Indigenous power and seeks to construct a new system, which aims to strategically undermine state authority. However, in delegitimizing state power, the politics of refusal indirectly pressures the government to reimagine the nation-state structure. In this manner, exit is an assertion of power that rejects the state while not completely leaving it behind, since groups have not abandoned the hope to change the state system.
The Politics of Refusal as a Tactic:

The politics of refusal, as employed in the Zapatista case and articulated in the Ecuadorian case, can be viewed as both a tactic for gaining leverage against the state and a means of building an ideology that rejects an exclusionary state. In this manner, the politics of refusal is both a tactic and a principle. Why has it emerged as a tactic? Is there strategic value in refusing the state?

To answer this question, it is useful to compare the tactics employed in each case at various points in the movement, as represented in the diagram below. As noted in the key, the diagram compares five categories of tactics used over the course of each movement. Dynamic campaigns refer to either armed or unarmed disruptive tactics intended to gain attention and pressure the state. Examples include marches, road blockades, nonviolent uprising, and armed take-overs. Negotiation with the state refers to attempts made between the movement and the government to either establish relations or implement some of the movement’s demands. Political participation entails actions that seek to gain an increased role in the existing political affairs of the state. Transnational linkage represents efforts to gain international attention to support the campaign. Lastly, the politics of refusal refers to a rejection of the existing political structure and an attempt to somehow refashion a new order.
A Timeline of Movement Tactics

**Mexico**
- The EZLN issues a declaration of war with the state.
- Peace negotiations conducted by Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia begin.
- Nine thousand march in San Cristobal to press for signing of San Andrés Accords.
- EZLN holds "Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity against Neoliberalism" to draw international support.
- Zapatistas reopen negotiations, signs San Andrés Accords with COCOPA.
- "March of the Colored Earth" to Mexico City.
- Leaders reject Fox's version of the San Andrés Accords, implement it in their own territories.
- Zapataistas lead the "First Encounter between the Zapataistas and the Peoples of the World."
- Zapataistas march in San Cristobal.
- Twenty thousand Zapataistas march in San Cristobal.
- Creation of "Caracoles."
- Largest demonstration: forty thousand march through five Chiapas cities.
- Continued expansion of Zapataista schools and health clinics.

**Ecuador**
- CONAIE partners with United Worker’s Front to protest neoliberal reforms.
- Amazonian Indigenous leaders organize march from Puyo to Quito.
- CONAIE coordinates road blockades across the country.
- Amazonian groups file lawsuit against Texaco.
- "Mobilization for Life" uprising coordinated by CONAIE brings more road blockades.
- CONAIE partners with the Social Movements Coordinator to form Pachakutik.
- Pachakutik wins 20.6% of the presidential vote in its first election.
- CONAIE president wins post as a national deputy in the National Assembly.
- Congress enacts Ecuador’s first "pluricultural and multiethnic" constitution.
- Pachakutik joins with Patriotic Society Party to elect Lucio Gutiérrez as President.
- Pachakutik withdraws from government due to disputes over post assignments.
- Movement begins to splinter, arguing whether working within the confines of the state is the best option.
- CONAIE continues to lead marches to push for a plurinational constitution.
- Creation of a plurinational constitution.

**Key:**
- **Dynamic Campaigns**
- **Negotiations with the State**
- **Political Participation**
- **Transnational linkage**
- **Politics of Refusal**

*While a lawsuit is not strictly negotiating with the state, it does involve working through the dominant legal structures of the state.*
As the above diagram demonstrates, Ecuador has largely pursued a combination of dynamic campaigns and political participation through the bulk of the movement. As the campaign toppled and put forth political leaders (with mixed results), it simultaneously built a base of public pressure through dynamic campaigns. The Zapatista movement, on the other hand has pursued a more varied mix of dynamic campaigns, refusal, and transnational linkage, with a few negotiations with the state early on. Most significantly, the Zapatistas employed the politics of refusal as early as December 1994 with the creation of its own government. By comparison, the only action by the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement that fully represents refusal is Pachakutik’s withdrawal from governmental posts after not achieving the desired results through political participation. Refusal in the Ecuadorian movement now mainly comes through debate and discourse, as activists such as Luis Macas (former CONAIE president), debate the effectiveness of engaging with the state. Thus, while the Zapatista movement was able to turn towards the politics of refusal early on, the Ecuadorian movement recently made that shift. For the purposes of this work, this is the most significant difference in tactics between the movements.

So why turn to refusing the state? If one examines the above diagram, it becomes clear that these groups turn to refusal when other options dwindle. Limited success in procedural (increased political participation) and substantive (policy-based) demands leads movements to think more structurally (Kitschelt 1986). They begin to address the political system as a whole. In Mexico, when local, policy-based demands related to the privatization of communal Indigenous lands failed, groups turned to structural changes through the San Andrés Accords. When Amazonian groups in Ecuador continued to face the detrimental effects of oil drilling, they strayed from focusing on individual policies and joined the movement for a plurinational
constitution. These structural demands, however, also failed to achieve their desired impact. The San Andrés Accords were ultimately not implemented in Mexico, and Ecuador’s 2008 plurinational constitution differed significantly from what CONAIE envisioned. If structural demands continually fail, what options are left for groups who have been systemically excluded from the political world? Refusal. Put more simply under Hirschman’s framework, refusal or “exit” comes as a last resort after “voice” has failed.

The divergence in movement tactics between the Zapatistas and the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement thus can be attributed to differing levels of success in more conventional methods. The Zapatista originally turned to refusal earlier due to the ineffectiveness of other options, while the Ecuadorian movement experienced more successes through political participation and disruptive campaigns. In Mexico, the most significant sign that negotiations with the state were failing (from the Zapatista) perspective was the government’s rejection of the San Andrés Accords. In the “Sixth Declaration of The Lacandon Jungle” in 2005, the EZLN articulates this disappointment. The declaration asserts, “In these agreements the bad government said that, yes, they are going to recognize the rights of Mexican Indian communities and they are going to respect their culture, and they are going to make it law in the Constitution. But, after they had signed them, the bad government forgot about them, and many years passed and they never implemented these agreements” (EZLN 2005, 2, my translation). This structural attempt at reform failed relatively early in the movement, leaving the Zapatistas with few options aside from pursuing the same strategies with no results. They could continue to pressure the government to actually implement the accords, but in this political system, pressure from Indigenous groups did not appear effective. Or, they could refuse the government’s authority. As the Sixth Declaration describes, “The EZLN then decided to implement the San Andrés Accords,
just by one side (or what they call ‘unilaterally’)" (EZLN 2005, 3, my translation). In other words, they refuted the government’s authority to validate their rights and thus decided to implement the accords “unilaterally.” The stark lack of cooperation from the state subsequently prompted refusal on the part of the movement.

In Ecuador, however, concessions were more achievable, and success through existing political structures was at least a somewhat viable option. Since CONAIE and Pachakutik represented a coalition of Indigenous groups across the entire country, they could assert more pressure on the existing political structure. For instance, while road blockades were employed as a tactic in both movements, in Ecuador they were constructed across the country and fully shut it down for significant periods, whereas in Mexico their impact was minimal. The Ecuadorian Movement also had more widespread support from the general public, whereas in Mexico their message appealed to mainly leftist groups. For instance, in a survey administered immediately after CONAIE’s 1997 overthrow of Abdalá Bucaram, 71% of Ecuadorian polled said they were in favor of the Indigenous movement (Jo-Marie 2000). The widespread nature of the movement meant that even a closed government that excluded Indigenous people could not ignore such pressure.

While the Ecuadorian movement was not always successful in achieving its desired changes and policies, it was successful in gaining increased consideration from the government. As Marc Becker states, the movement “placed Indigenous peoples and their issues at the center of political discourse and paved the way for their entrance onto the public stage on their own terms… it introduced a decade of greatly intensified activism during which Indigenous demands gained a new visibility and urgency” (2012, 1). This entrance into political discourse at least provided a possible avenue through the state where grievances could be reconciled.
The increased Indigenous presence in the Ecuatorian political arena allowed for successes such as winning 20.6% of the presidential vote in Pachakutik’s first election and joining with the Patriotic Society Party to elect Lucio Gutiérrez as president. While these developments represented significant symbolic victories for Indigenous people, they resulted in few actual changes to the daily conditions they faced. When even the 2008 Plurinational Constitution failed to significantly address Indigenous grievances, the movement continued to splinter over whether political participation advanced or impeded its goals. Luis Madonado, Indigenous activist and former minister of social welfare, for instance, argued that Pachakutik and CONAIE have not devoted enough energy to constructing alternative systems for Indigenous communities. Similarly, former CONAIE president Luis Macas asserted in a 2005 speech, “Initially, we engaged in a struggle for our territory, for our traditional homelands. And we will continue the struggle to recover our lands— the autonomous lands of each of our peoples. But we also recognize the need to establish our own indigenous systems of thought and education” (in Mander and Tauli-Corpuz 2006, 42). The trend towards Indigenous systems of education is particularly pronounced in Ecuador and represents a turn away from the state and towards community development. Since increased political participation did not result in substantive gains for Indigenous communities as hoped, the Ecuatorian movement has likewise turned towards refusal, although in a more splintered fashion.

If differing levels of success with more common protest methods explains the divergence in movement tactics, what accounts for this differing success? As mentioned, political factors— namely greater political and civil rights and a more fragmented party system in Ecuador— did help sway Indigenous groups towards political participation. However, such participation was only successful because the movement in Ecuador represented coordinated, widespread
mobilization that exerted pressure from across the country, as opposed to the Zapatista movement that occurred in one particular region.

The national nature of the Ecuadorian movement was made possible by two essential factors. First, demographically, Ecuador maintained a greater Indigenous population. In the early 1990s, at the height of the movements, Indigenous people represented between 30 and 38% of the population in Ecuador, while in Mexico they accounted for between 12 and 14% of the national population (Yashar 2005, 21). This key difference meant that Indigenous political candidates would likely earn more votes in Ecuador than in Mexico (assuming that this candidate could capture the Indigenous vote). Furthermore, since Indigenous people in Mexico are distributed across states such that they represent a minority in each, their voting power is diminished (Vargas 1994). Indigenous groups in a number of provinces in the Ecuadorian highlands represent a majority of their province and thus have more electoral sway. Differences in demographics have therefore allowed for more electoral (and general) pressure from Indigenous groups in Ecuador, contributing to a more coordinated effort that pursues greater political participation.

Although resource mobilization theory was not a primary factor in explaining the divergence in tactics (since both movements were relatively resource poor), it did play a small role in Ecuador’s ability to build a national coalition. As Charles Tilly recognized in the 1970s, linking to existing organizational structures can be considered a resource to aid collective action (McAdam et al. 1996). Therefore, the second factor that allowed Ecuador to build a more widespread Indigenous movement has to do with the organizational networks that had been constructed over decades. In both the central highlands and the Amazon, the Catholic Church played a key role in connecting various Indigenous tribes to form regional organizations, as
missionaries set up schools and health centers in remote areas. Such connections between
Indigenous groups began as early as the 1940s and grew particularly strong in the 1970s.
Additionally, Indigenous linkages to class-based organizations in Ecuador proved to be a key
resource that propelled the Indigenous cause to other sects (Rice 2012). In contrast, Mexico has
not seen the same kind of consistent regional organization of Indigenous groups that would make
a national movement possible. While the Zapatistas have certainly made efforts to link their
cause to other interests, this initiative arose after the movement had already shifted towards
refusing the state, and thus was more of a means of gaining support for that tactic. Therefore,
while resource mobilization is not the main explanatory factor, Ecuador’s organizational linkages
did play a role in its success via conventional protest movements.

When procedural, substantive, and eventually even structural demands failed in both
Ecuador and Mexico, groups began to give up on the state entirely. Their actions were no longer
determined by opportunities or constraints within state structures. In this manner, by turning
towards refusal or “exiting” the political system, groups simultaneously exited the political
opportunity structure. Therefore, to explain the politics of refusal, we can no longer rely on the
political opportunity structure. Rather, the politics of refusal stems from a unique position of
marginalization where groups have not only been excluded from the political system presently
and historically, but have also met significant failures when seeking particular demands. It is a
unique last resort, a political and ideological attempt to carve out a space for excluded
Indigenous identities.

Given what we learn from these cases, we can conclude that the politics of refusal may
arise under three key conditions: 1) when groups experience a lack of perceived success through
more conventional methods of collective action 2) when a group has a particular claim to
sovereignty based on the articulation of a specific identity 3) when a movement cultivates sufficient allies outside of the government (often internationally) that can help sustain refusal. By delving into the construction of identity in each case and movements’ efforts to connect to transnational support, Chapter Three will unpack the last two factors that foster the politics of refusal.
Chapter Three
The Instrumental and Expressive Nature of Identity

The contemporary Indigenous movements in Ecuador and Mexico have been accompanied by a surge of Indigenous uprising across Latin America and the world and an amplified construction of what it means to be Indigenous. However, protest by Indigenous people is not a new phenomenon; Indigenous people in Ecuador and Mexico have been engaging in rebellion throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods. These uprisings, however, were largely articulated as localized struggles that operated under peasant, rather than Indigenous, identities. Why, then, are these movements choosing to connect into and redefine Indigenous identity? Is there something inherent that defines what it means to be Indigenous and thus connects these groups together? What binds the Huaorani of the Ecuadorian Amazon together with the Kichwa populations of the highlands?

If the politics of refusal helps us understand how uniquely marginalized groups find unconventional avenues to address their grievances, examining how these groups fashion and articulate their identities is also essential in comprehending this claim to autonomy. Understanding how and why identity is constructed through each movement is crucial for four reasons: first, identity highlights the elements that unite relatively disparate groups under a political platform; secondly, Indigenous identity can be a means to articulate a unique claim to autonomy; third, expressing the value of Indigeneity is one of the underlying goals of the movements; lastly, the interaction between how identity is presented to and influenced by transnational networks gives insight into the instrumental value of forming particular identities.

Before delving into these aspects of identity, it is first necessary to outline how we conceive of this term. Theories surrounding ethnicity provide insight into the formation of Indigenous identity. While Indigeneity is not an ethnicity per say, it plays a similar role in
forming and mediating bonds between groups. Identity in this case is not an inherent attachment to others as Clifford Geertz might argue (1973). Geertz conceptualizes ethnic identity as primordial, explaining:

By a primordial attachment is meant... the given-ness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language... and following particular practices... One is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbour, one’s fellow believer, ipso facto, as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself (1973, 259-260).

For Geertz, ethnicity is not a malleable or a rational concept, but rather an innate attribute that binds groups together in solidarity. Primordialism contends that people will seek refuge in their ethnic identities and maintain them even in extreme cases of discrimination and prejudice. While there are certain elements of ethnicity that stem from ancestry, primordialism largely simplifies a more complex situation. If groups are so rooted in their bloodlines and maintain strong attachments to their ethnicity, this idea assumes that past ethnic conflicts will prevail indefinitely into the future. Additionally, primordialism assumes that individuals maintain clearly recognizable identities and thus ethnic groups are homogeneous units with specific interests and agendas.

When applied to the notion of Indigeneity, identities are certainly not fixed or inherent, nor are tribes at all homogeneous. Groups may have a somewhat strong attachment to their identity as Mayans, for instance, but framing this Mayan-ness as Indigenous highlights how identity is constantly negotiated and reinvented. If Indigenous groups place themselves under the Indigenous umbrella, they are choosing to emphasize their similarities over their differences, allowing their identities to intersect and even mold together.
If Indigeneity is not primordial, the constructivist perspective provides substantial insight into its formation. As Kanchan Chandra argues, constructivism recognizes how ethnic categories that we take as natural are in fact the product of socio-political processes or the human attempt at creation and interpretation. Chandra outlines three essential elements of constructivism: individuals have multiple ethnic identities; these identities can change; and when such change does occur, it is the product of human processes (2012). While scholars disagree on the mechanisms for ethnic change, constructivism recognizes how external and historical processes shape a more fluid notion of ethnic identity.

Indigeneity represents the epitome of this framework, since the distinction between Indigenous people and settlers did not exist before colonization. As a historical process, colonization labeled all people that originally resided in the Americas as “Indian,” highlighting the external nature of group identification in this period. This historical distinction between groups caused Indigenous groups to identify themselves in opposition to settlers, and thus claim their Indigeneity to the land they occupied. As historical dynamics have shifted, Indigenous groups’ identities in turn changed, as many began to formulate their identity in opposition to dominant mestizo populations rather than the Spanish settlers of the past. Simultaneously, non-Indigenous people have adopted this term to perpetuate the mestizo-Indigenous separation. The United Nations has never officially defined Indigeneity, due to the diversity of the groups included. However, it claims that their understanding of the term is based on “self-identification; a strong continuity with pre-colonial societies; a strong link to territories and natural resources; distinct political, economic or political systems; distinct language, culture and beliefs; form non-dominant groups of society; and resolve to maintain and produce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples” (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues).
is interesting to note that this definition requires maintaining a distinct culture and worldview in order to remain Indigenous. In this sense, Indigeneity is both an internally and externally defined construction.

While the constructivist perspective illustrates how Indigeneity emerged as a concept as social processes shifted, it does not entirely delve into why the term is employed in the multiple and broad ways it is today. An instrumentalist approach highlights the utilitarian reasons why identifying as Indigenous may prove beneficial or detrimental depending on the context. There are two main subsections of instrumentalism. First, as argued by Abner Cohen, instrumentalism recognizes how individuals identify with certain ethnicities in order to receive specific benefits from the state, such as housing, education, greater access to certain jobs, or seats reserved in the legislature (1974). In this sense, ethnicity becomes a rational and potentially beneficial tool. The second subsection, elite instrumentalism, contends that leaders shape ethnic identities through deliberate mechanisms in order to achieve certain ends (Brass 1996). These ends may be economic benefits, as Paul Collier argues, or they may be specific political outcomes (2001). While some scholars assume instrumentalism to be self-serving, with elites seeking to manipulate ethnic identities in order to ignite ethnic conflict, this theory can also apply to elites that frame identity such to motivate collective action, an aspect relevant to this paper. Overall, instrumentalism claims that ethnicity is coopted by elites as a tool to achieve their own agendas.

In the cases of Ecuador and Mexico, Indigenous identity is constructed. It emerged from colonial processes and is perpetually reshaped (both internally and externally) based on evolving racial consciousness and relations with the state and other sub-groups. However, in both movements, the choice to articulate an Indigenous identity is largely an instrumental choice by leaders. Since the boundaries of who “counts” as Indigenous remain quite broad in these
contexts, groups can choose to frame their grievances as inextricably bound up in their
Indigenous identities, or they can distance themselves from the Indigenous label entirely. For
instance, the 2006 teachers’ strike in Oaxaca, Mexico and the creation of the Popular Assembly
of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) involved a large number of Indigenous teachers, yet it did not
represent itself as part of an Indigenous movement. The Zapatista movement, in contrast,
involves some mestizo populations, relies on the support of national and international groups,
and was directed by a mestizo leader (Subcomandante Marcos). Yet its platform is conveyed as
deeply Indigenous. Given this key difference, why would the Zapatista and Ecuadorian
movements express their platform as Indigenous? What values does this representation hold?

This chapter will delve into the articulation of identity by the movements to prompt both
domestic pressure and transnational support. I will begin by examining the tools that each
movement has used to unite their diverse Indigenous communities. This challenge is especially
pronounced in Ecuador, where coastal tribes and highland communities arguably differ more
than Mayan villages in Chiapas. These “uniting factors” will highlight how, particularly in
Ecuador, a broader Indigenous identity has been constructed as the key connective tissue
between groups. The last two sections will delve into the instrumental and expressive uses of
Indigeneity, analyzing the choice to build each movement under this identity. I will argue that
invoking Indigeneity was a strategic way of claiming the right to autonomy and even
legitimizing the politics of refusal, but it was also a way to express the power behind this identity
itself. Lastly, I will consider how the movements’ identities have been cultivated in order to gain
transnational support, especially in Mexico, and how outside actors have in turn influenced this
identity. Overall, the chapter will seek to illuminate how identity has been constructed and
articulated instrumentally and expressively and how this formation ties into the politics of refusal and transnational support.

**Identity Construction and Uniting a Movement:**

When examining the use of an Indigenous identity, there is a common assumption among scholars that all Indigenous groups share at least some core values that are inherent and unite across geographical distance, such as a reverence for the natural world. Even Alison Brysk maintains, “Most (Indigenous groups) have a sacred relationship with nature, strong kinship structures including past generations, an emphasis on reciprocity within the community, a nonlinear sense of time, diffuse authority relationships, and a high value for harmony and balance” (2000, 56-57). Brysk goes on to note how these core characteristics have informed Indigenous movements, as environmentalism sparks alliances with environmental groups and kinship ties facilitate pan-Indigenous relations.

The way in which Brysk relies on inherent cultural factors to explain movement development is overly simplified for two reasons. First, it homogenizes vastly diverse cultures that do not necessarily share these traits. Even if a culture does emphasize a spiritual relationship with the earth, we cannot assume that this trait will automatically align with the interests of environmental groups, and therefore use it to explain the evolution of a particular movement. The Huaorani of the Ecuadorian Amazon, for instance, have constantly had to navigate their relationship with environmental groups, especially when they decided it was in their best interest to sign contracts with oil companies. As the organization Acción Ecológica emphasizes, many environmental groups see Indigenous people as a “natural environmentalist, a spiritual protector of the forest– really an updated version of the 'noble savage’” (quoted in Ziegler-Otero 2004,
The assumption that Indigenous groups always seek to prioritize environmental concerns can create false expectations that goals will always align.

Secondly, Brysk’s claim forms the false notion that Indigenous groups are fixed in time and thus will continue to maintain these traits, if they are indeed a piece of their culture. Indigenous cultures, like any, are not static or perpetually rooted in particular values; rather they adapt and shift in their respective contexts. While it is convenient to rely on the idea that all Indigenous groups maintain some similar traits and use these traits to explain unity in a movement, these groups are actually quite heterogeneous. Even certain Mayan villages in Chiapas, for instance, are known to be long-standing adversaries, despite their shared language and overlapping cultures (personal communication 2016). Thus, just as we cannot rely on Geertz’s primordialism to explain collective identity formation in these movements, we cannot hinge on these assumed inherent elements of Indigeneity.

If intrinsic aspects of Indigeneity may or may not exist, but are not a reliable basis for explaining the collective identity formation of a movement, what unites these various communities? I argue that it is in fact Indigenous identity that forms the connective tissue between groups, but that it is a particular construction by movement leaders of what Indigeneity means. This formed identity may be bound up with a peasant identity, a marginalized status, and even some shared values, but it is an active construction rather than a given. In her analysis of identity-based resistance in Ecuador, Amalia Pallares explores how identity is constantly reshaped. She asserts, “In contrast to previous analyses that see indigenous struggle as either a class or an ethnic struggle… my thesis is that class, race, and ethnicity are remade by the activists in the process of a political struggle” (2002, 34). This distinction is useful in that it highlights how seemingly distinct identities can actually interweave to create a new politicized
identity. The Indigenous identities in both cases draw on a shared history, parallel experiences of marginalization, a racialization that ranked Indigenous groups at the bottom of a complex social hierarchy, and ideas surrounding shared values to remake Indigenous identity. This refashioned identity serves to both unite groups, make specific claims to the state, and gain transnational support, as I will explore in subsequent sections.

If identity is reconstructed in a political fashion, what does this process look like in each case study? As noted, Indigenous identity constitutes the base of how each movement identifies, but the term itself is fairly ambiguous. In the document “Proyecto Político de la CONAIE,” CONAIE defines Indigenous communities as cohesive collectives that “are original inhabitants of their region and have been placed inside the institutionalization of another dominant society… They define themselves in relation to a society that isn’t original” (1994, my translation). In this sense, Indigenous identity relies on a unique claim to land (based on being original inhabitants). Even more crucial, however, is the way in which Indigenous identity relies on highlighting its contradistinction from dominant society.

The following chart showcases how particular constructions of Indigenous identity have been articulated throughout the movements. The Zapatista movement has issued six declarations written by the EZLN that outline the movement’s demands, progress and identity. While less linear, CONAIE has also written documents asserting similar movement characteristics, and the documents below represent a sampling of these. The quotes below represent each instance where the given document has explicitly defined the movement as something. These quotes do not incorporate references to movement demands or grievances, but rather solely focus on how the movements seek to define themselves.
### A Classification of Articulated Identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Description</th>
<th>Peasant/ Agricultural Status</th>
<th>Marginalized Status</th>
<th>Unique Conception of the World</th>
<th>Claim to Land</th>
<th>Lack of Resources, Simplicity</th>
<th>General Public/ Sameness</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (June 1994)</td>
<td>“Face the anger of the campesinos (peasants).”</td>
<td>“The same intimidation and repression that our people have suffered for the last 65 years.”</td>
<td>“Voices from the land we hear our pain and our history.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“We are Mexicancs.” “We are all under siege.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (December 1994)</td>
<td>“Subjected to a great campaign of defamation and indiscriminate repression.”</td>
<td>“EZLN watched, powerlessly, as the best sons and daughters of the dignity of Chiapas were assassinated, jailed and threatened.”</td>
<td>“Recognition of the characteristics of Indigenous people's own social, political and cultural organization.”</td>
<td>“The country again forgot the original inhabitants of these lands.”</td>
<td>“The earth does not rest; it walks in our hearts.”</td>
<td>“Our struggle is national.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (January 1996)</td>
<td>“All those communities, all those who work the land, all whom we invite to stand on our side” (Emiliano Zapata quote read at start).</td>
<td>“We are here, we are rebel dignity, the forgotten of the homeland.”</td>
<td>“Men and women who reject conformity.”</td>
<td>“The government discovered its ignorance in regards to the original inhabitants of these lands.”</td>
<td>“A people armed with wooden guns and the word of dignity.”</td>
<td>“Brothers and sisters of other races and languages, of other colors, but with the same heart.” “The Zapatista war is only a part of that great war which is the struggle between a</td>
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6 EZLN documents accessed in English; CONAIE documents are my translation.
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<tr>
<td>Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (July 1998)</td>
<td>“The indigenous heart which is the dignified root of the Mexican nation.”</td>
<td>“The words of the first inhabitants of these lands now hold a special place in public opinion.”</td>
<td>“Zapatistas do not respond with violence.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (July 2005)</td>
<td>“Our way to do what we say.”</td>
<td>“We are going to seek, and to find, those who love these lands and these skies even as much as we do.”</td>
<td>“Our heart was not the same as before, when we began our struggle. It was larger, because now we had touched the hearts of many good people.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Now we are going to explain to you how we, the Zapatistas, see what is going on in the world. We see that capitalism is the strongest right now.”</td>
<td>“Touch the hearts of humble and simple people like ourselves.”</td>
<td>“It is only from the left that a plan of struggle can emerge, so that our Patria, which is Mexico, does not die.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecuador:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Project of CONAIE (1994)</td>
<td>“We have survived exploitation, genocide, ethnocide and dehumanizing suppression from western civilization.”</td>
<td>“We practice a communal way of life, since the appearance of our agrarian-collectivist society.”</td>
<td>“We practice an integrated humanism when man and nature, in harmonious interrelation, guarantee life.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“We are indigenous communities that have the same origin, a common history, our own languages; and that we are governed by our own laws, customs, beliefs and forms of social, economic and political organization in our territories.”</td>
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This chart highlights how Indigenous identity is based not just on a particular worldview, but rather is a complex web of characteristics that differentiate these groups from dominant society. This unique claim to self-determination may at times be based on marginalization, but it might also hinge on being the original inhabitants of an area. Both movements share this interweaving of identities that differentiate Indigenous people from dominant society. However, when it comes to expressing similarities with popular society and crafting their struggle as more universal, these cases diverge. While simultaneously differentiating themselves from dominant society, The Zapatista movement has made an explicit attempt to construct their struggle as universal and thus attract the attention of leftist and social justice groups. Although the Ecuadorian movement has also sought international support, these efforts have been more focused on tying into the pan-Indigenous movement, rather that appealing to other causes.
Through its simultaneous universalizing and differentiation of the Indigenous cause, the Zapatista case has sought to both legitimize its claims and gain international support.

If these communities deliberately use an Indigenous identity to unite various groups, gain autonomy from the state, and reap transnational support, how does this identity construction differ from the framing processes of social movement theory? If we revisit the ideas put forth by Snow et al., framing is a conscious and strategic effort by leaders to present grievances in a particular fashion intended to legitimate and motivate collective action (1986). Framing is thus a deliberate process, usually for policy gains, aimed at a specific named target (such as the state). There are certainly aspects of identity construction in these cases that fall in this realm. For instance, these movements have framed themselves as groups with a particular claim to sovereignty in order to gain policies that grant such autonomy from the state. However, before framing is even involved, there is a separate identity project at the root of these movements: the reclamation and redefinition of Indigenous identity. This is not a strategic aspect of the movement that seeks particular policy changes, but rather intends to express the value of Indigeneity and thus question exclusionary cultural norms. This assertion of Indigenous power holds expressive value for those involved in the movement, and thus is an aspect of collective action that transcends strategic framing processes.

The deliberate expression of Indigenous identity holds potential value both for strategic and expressive purposes. In her article on gay rights in Vermont, Mary Bernstein begins to explore how a collective identity is necessary for any social movement. She notes how scholars tend to conceive of identity-based movements as either expressive, by challenging dominant norms and seeking cultural transformation, or as instrumental. Instrumental movements aim towards achieving specific goals, rather than seeking the recognition of new identities. However,
Bernstein argues that identity can be both deployed as a political strategy (instrumental) and be the goal of the movement (expressive) simultaneously. Groups may aim not just for specific changes, but to assert their identity and rights simultaneously. Asserting identity may seek to transform political and cultural norms in society (2002, 86).

The Zapatista and Ecuadorian cases mark concrete examples of both expressive and instrumental identity-based movements. Although not explicitly outlined in the above chart, each document refers to the Indigeneity behind the movement numerous times as a way to assert and reclaim what it means to be Indigenous. As the “Third Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle” asserts, “With the offensive in December 1994, the EZLN sought to show, to Mexico and to the world, its proud indigenous essence” (EZLN 1994). This is just one of many instances where Indigeneity is articulated as an honorable, strong force that will no longer tolerate oppression. The Zapatista case is particularly noteworthy for frequently describing its Indigenous identity as exemplifying dignity. The equation of dignity with Indigeneity underscores how the Zapatista movement seeks to reconstruct political and cultural norms that have generally conceived of Indigeneity as negative.

When expressive and instrumental values of identity are embedded together, groups must balance their pursuit of concrete goals with identity displays. In an overview of identity and social movements, Bernstein and Taylor note how identity can be constructed as essentialist, an element that has sparked debate in the gay rights movement. An essentialized identity is a fairly narrow construction of what is needed to fit into a particular group, where certain characteristics are vital to being considered part of the identity. As the above chart illustrates, both cases invoke somewhat of an essentialist identity in order to differentiate themselves from dominant society. As Bernstein and Taylor recognize, these essentialized identities stem from political contexts in
which the dominant society devalues this identity (2013). In response, groups construct an essentialist identity to assert who they are and their value in society. Essentialism thus carries an expressive benefit.

Constructing an essentialist identity can also be strategic. Nancy Naples (2003) helps clarify this point through the feminist perspective. As Bernstein and Taylor summarize her argument, “Self-definition and the creation of knowledge through the development of a standpoint is a form of political activism and does not rely on false universal understandings of categories such as race, gender, sexuality or class. Thus organizing around an identity represented as essential can be strategic” (2013, 2). In our cases, as Naples asserts, identity becomes more about political activism than false reliance on universal concepts of what Indigeneity entails. Relatively essentialist identities, therefore, are constructed for political gains, not to create a false notion that all Indigenous groups share inherent characteristics.

Essentialism, as noted, helped differentiate Indigenous groups from dominant society. However, neither Indigenous movement pursued a solely essentialist identity. Rather, both fluctuated between essentializing and universalizing their struggles for entirely different ends. As the next two sections will explore, constructing relatively essentialist identities in both cases and differentiating themselves from dominant society helped these movements legitimize their grievances and strategies. Specifically, essentialized identity construction legitimized groups’ claims to land, specialized education, and ultimately autonomy and the politics of refusal. However, both groups sought to align with international movements to augment their causes. This created a tension for both movements, since such alliances necessitated constructing a more universalized version of their struggle rather than relying on a strict identity. Because the
Zapatista movement pursued transnational support more extensively than CONAIE, it had to navigate the tension between essentialist and universal identities to a greater degree.

**The Instrumental Value of Essentialized Identity:**

Upon reflection, it becomes quite clear that both the Zapatista and Ecuadorian Indigenous movements are expressive identity movements. Given the negative associations of Indigeneity historically, translated into exclusionary policies as previously noted, it seems natural for groups to want to reclaim and redefine this identity. This reclamation project has served to unite quite heterogeneous groups. What remains slightly less apparent and more crucial to explore is the strategic value of identity construction. An essentialized Indigenous identity differentiated from dominant culture puts weight behind Indigenous calls for autonomy, since a right to sovereignty can only really be claimed by a group perceived as unique and separate. It is crucial to note that these constructed identities in both cases were not always essentialist. The Ecuadorian movement expanded the identity of their cause through alliances with class movements, while the Zapatistas magnified their identity to an ideology by appealing to international anti-capitalist groups. Because Indigeneity is so amorphous in nature, essentialism in these cases refers to the ways in which these groups articulate Indigeneity as distinct from the majority of the population. Thus, it does not apply to the Zapatista attempts to appeal to Mexican civil society nor building alliances with other populist political parties in Ecuador.

When it comes to differentiating an identity from dominant culture, social movement scholars focus on the balance between essentializing for movement cohesion versus suppressing differences to build alliances. As Sidney Tarrow explains in regards to the 1993 lesbian and gay march on Washington, “(the organizers) face a dilemma: how to put forth a set of unsettling
demands for unconventional people in ways that will not make enemies of potential allies. They do so by playing down their differences before the media and the country while celebrating it in private” (1994, 10). In our cases, however, the movements reclaim and assert their difference not just in private, but also in the public realm.

Bernstein unpacks this debate further by examining the factors that lead a movement to either celebrate or suppress differences. She argues that variations in political access, oppositional forces, and relationships among organizations under the specific identity lead to “deploying identity” in either an inclusive or exclusive manner. Black nationalism during the Civil Rights Movement, for instance, was not just a way of strategically deploying an essentialist identity, but it did so in a way that was critical of dominant society. Bernstein writes:

By fostering an identity based on differences from the majority, black nationalism was a way to challenge dominant cultural values, to build communities, and to create revolutionary change. Leaders hoped that deploying critical identities based on perceived cultural differences would be a crucial step toward economic independence and political power (1997, 557).

In this sense, a critical identity (a strategic, essentialist identity) legitimized the Black right to revitalize their communities and pursue a more revolutionary cause.

Political access, oppositional forces to the movement, and interactions among organizations within a movement indeed help shape the essentialization of identities in these cases. Since the forces against both movements were significant (both in terms of a lack of political compromise and military opposition), it seems natural that groups would assert a strict identity as a means to push back against this opposition. However, these aspects outlined by Bernstein are more what I would call “input factors,” that is the institutional factors that mold how a movement constructs identity. More relevant for these cases are what I deem “output factors,” or the potential outcomes that a movement might expect from constructing an
essentialized identity. Output factors in these cases consist of the ability to claim land, specialized education, self-government or even refuse existing systems, based on essentialized Indigeneity.

Due to the unique nature of Indigenous identity, where being the first inhabitants alone creates difference from the majority, these groups have the potential to reclaim their rights by reclaiming their difference. The push for autonomy therefore stems from a narrow construction of Indigenous identity. In other words, an Indigenous identity legitimizes the claim for land, multicultural education, communal forms of living, self-government, and refusal, at least from the movement’s point of view.

How do these groups utilize an Indigenous identity to push for autonomy over their affairs? In Ecuador, intercultural bilingual education, land rights, communal self-government, and cultural strength remain at the forefront of the movement, as stated in its original demands (conaie.org). In its 1994 document on their political project, CONAIE asserts:

The cultural identity of many people and nationalities has disappeared, and they have instead suffered serious influences and impositions from western cultural values, that debilitate and threaten our cultural and spiritual richness. Political and cultural colonialism… negates the potentiality and diversity of existing cultures in Ecuador (1994, 41, my translation).

In this statement, CONAIE articulates Indigenous identity as threatened by the infiltration of western values, a common sentiment among many Indigenous leaders. If western ideals overrun a particular culture, reasserting the right for cultural spaces requires naming the identity specific enough to merit its own space. The document goes on to claim, “Cultural imposition is another obstacle to the development of our cultural identity, and therefore we should fight firmly and with dedication until its destruction” (1994, 41, my translation). The document then outlines several ways to fight this cultural imposition by strengthening spaces for Indigenous culture,
including through Indigenous-specific education and healthcare. Even at its inception, CONAIE was leveraging an identity that differentiated Indigeneity from the majority to push for its own autonomous systems.

In the Zapatista movement, leaders drew on an Indigenous identity as the basis to push for similar rights. Carving out a space for Indigenous cultures and languages in education was a vital aspect of this goal. The San Andrés Accords, for instance, declared that all Indigenous education must be bilingual and bicultural (Shenker 2012). Without the weight of a specific identity behind this claim, bicultural education would not be a consideration. When the accords were rejected, however, the Zapatistas still implemented multicultural education in their communities. Autonomous schools served as a key way to nourish and reclaim this identity. As anthropologist Sarah Dee Shenker recognizes:

> The Zapatistas’ desire to ‘build from below for alternatives to neoliberal destruction’ has been partially fulfilled by the autonomous schools, which by working to meet their objectives have challenged the ‘homogenizing national project’ and constructed an alternative educational model: a new space in which indigenous identity can breathe and thrive” (2012, 441).

Constructing these spaces where “indigenous identity can breathe and thrive” requires differentiating this identity from dominant culture.

Multicultural education in both Ecuador and Mexico continues to be a key realm where leaders articulate difference. Luis Macas, former president of CONAIE, notes, “We take for granted that a differentiation between the two cultures (Indigenous and western) is fundamental; though they share a common ancestry, they are distinct in their respective cosmovisions. Plain and simple, we are different in our conceptions, principles, sciences, knowledge, and our processes for constructing knowledge and identity” (in Meyer and Alvarado 2010, 239). Noam Chomsky also makes the claim that, based on specific identities that differ from the dominant
culture, Indigenous students do not thrive in western educational systems. In a 2004 interview regarding Indigenous education in general, Chomsky argues:

The official and conventional education system, the communication media, schooling—these are all enemies of indigenous communities because, in the end, the individual whose being is intrinsically communal, whose behavior and lifestyle are collective, is culturally alienated, individualized, confused, and adopts strange behaviors and even behaviors antagonistic to the community. Therefore, education should be communitarian, a responsibility of the community, within the community, and for the community” (in Meyer and Alvarado 2010, 241).

In this passage, Chomsky uses the notion of Indigenous identity as inherently communal to legitimate his call for autonomous education. In this sense, the essentialized identity that limits Indigeneity to those with a communal cosmology and way of life holds strategic value.

Ultimately, the same essentialized identity that legitimizes these claims to autonomy validates the politics of refusal, not necessarily for the state, but for the communities involved in the movement. Even when the state does not recognize the distinctiveness of Indigenous identity as a viable reason for a community to create its own systems, this identity construction gives validity to this claim within the movement. If identity is constructed to be distinct from dominant culture and specialized systems and rights deemed necessary, creating these systems becomes more important than gaining support from the state. In other words, if the state is not willing to support the unique systems that a specific identity needs, the groups will create those systems themselves. Because an essentialized identity helps legitimize groups’ claims to autonomy for the state and refusal for communities involved, this identity construction is both externally and internally strategic.

A bit more insight into Zapatista schools helps highlight how movement leaders use the uniqueness of Indigenous identity to gain support for refusal as a tactic. First, Zapatista leadership voiced the sentiment that government schools were inadequate spaces for Indigenous
identities. In regards to his schooling experience, Arnulo, a Zapatista elected representative of Pico Aglando, stated:

I studied at the government primary and secondary schools. The teachers weren’t enthusiastic; they came from far away and often didn’t arrive to class. Sometimes, they even arrived drunk, and they were violent… They only taught us to read and write, and always in Spanish – pure Spanish! I didn’t enjoy it – it gave me a headache (quoted in Shenker 2012, 435).

Arnulo’s reference to the prioritization of Spanish over Indigenous languages represents one way of claiming that Indigenous people need schools that recognize their unique identities and incorporate their cultures into the classroom. Sarah Dee Shenker, an anthropologist focused on Zapatista schools in Riocolán and Pico Aglando found that the main goals of the autonomous schools were the protection of Indigenous values, culture, and language; gender equality; and gearing education to the rural context (2012). Both Zapatista leaders and community members use the claim that state-run schools do not substantially recognize their cultures, languages, or identities, to augment their grounds for creating their own educational system. The construction of this essentialized, distinct identity therefore puts weight behind the politics of refusal.

Gaining Transnational Support Through a Universalized Struggle:

An essentialized identity is not the only form of identity the Zapatista and Ecuadorian Indigenous movements articulate. Because of the severe marginalization and lack of political power Indigenous people have faced, these groups have leveraged alliances to have their demands heard, whether those alliances are other Indigenous movements, NGOs, international groups, or even the United Nations. Indigenous movements, therefore, face a unique and difficult dilemma: on the one hand, their claims to autonomy necessitate defining an essentialized
identity, while on the other, attracting crucial alliances requires highlighting relatable characteristics of the movements.

This dilemma is not unlike the “queer dilemma” put forth by Joshua Gamson (1995) and Judith Lorber (1999), where a movement seeks to deconstruct categories of race, class or ethnicity, but to do so they must articulate their identity and thus rely on those same categories. As Lorber writes, “We want to erase the boundaries between categories of race, gender and sexuality, but to do so, we have to use them, for without categories, you can have neither a politics of identity nor a politics of transgression. Categories are needed for group power and boundaries are needed to transgress against” (quoted in Bernstein and De la Cruz 2009, 729). Neither Indigenous movement in our case seeks to erase racial boundaries entirely; rather they seek to redefine what it means to occupy a particular ethnicity and pressure the state to recognize their identities in a profound fashion. In this sense, the movements do not fully face the “queer dilemma.” They do, however, require boundaries for group power and a more inclusive discourse to gain transnational support.

This tricky balancing act is quite evident in the discourse employed by each movement, particularly by the Zapatistas. Ultimately, by restricting movement identity to explicitly Indigenous but broadening their overall struggle to be more universal, the Zapatistas seek to navigate this dilemma. Attempts to make their struggle more appealing to transnational groups remain prevalent throughout the movement. In each of the six declarations (which are geared towards the international community), the EZLN calls for a “radical” transformation of the state of Mexico, but they never refer to themselves as “radicals.” Rather, they refer to themselves as “rebels” or to their “rebel cause,” usually pairing this description with the words “dignity.”
Straying away from self-defining as radical demonstrates how the Zapatistas seek to define their movement as part of the universal struggle for justice.

The depiction of a just cause highlights the attempt to appeal to a wide array of outside groups for potential support. For instance, in the Fourth Declaration, the EZLN writes, “Brothers and sisters of other races and languages, of other colors, but with the same heart now protect our light, and in it they drink of the same fire. When the homeland speaks its Indian heart, it will have dignity and memory” (EZLN 1996). The reference to those “with the same heart” seeks to appeal to human rights groups and other individuals who might sympathize with these Indigenous groups. This metaphorical rhetoric seeks to construct unity between groups across Mexico and the world.

The last column in the “Classifying Identity” chart above highlights instances in which the EZLN had tried to emphasize their similarities to the general public over their differences. These similarities range from emphasizing cohesion as Mexicans, as in the statement “We are all Mexicans,” to appealing to other leftist movements (EZLN 1994). For instance, the EZLN proclaims, “The Zapatista war is only a part of that great war which is the struggle between a history which aspires for a future and an amnesia which has foreign vocation” (EZLN 1996). Here, the EZLN emphasizes the notion that the ideology behind the movement is pervasive in struggles across the globe. The dichotomy between amnesia and those who aspire for a future once again casts the Zapatista as on the side of justice, which seeks to appeal to human rights and humanist groups. The ELZN often refers to their supporters as “the good people” or “people with similar hearts,” which stands in stark contrast to their constant description of “the bad government.” These quotes emphasizing similarity with certain groups highlight the malleable nature of identity and its role in gaining transnational support.
There is no doubt that through diverse ways of framing their movement, the Zapatistas were able to galvanize a wide array of transnational groups, although it remains unclear whether these linkages have actually pushed the movement towards meeting its goals. The 1994 occupation of San Cristobal de las Casas, a tourist destination, certainly attracted international attention in a way that less disruptive movements did not receive. In the two weeks following their initial occupation, there were 337 stories written on the Zapatistas in major English-speaking international newspapers, expanding to 743 stories after ten weeks (Bob 2005). Drawing on the attention gained in their original armed phase, the Zapatistas’ subsequent shift to non-violent tactics allowed them to differentiate themselves from other Latin American guerilla movements to the international community.

The Zapatistas’ large body of written documents has certainly contributed to its ability to appeal to outside networks. These written works can largely be attributed to Subcomandante Marcos, who produced a large output of documents, manifestos, and even fables regarding the Zapatista agenda. The ability to tap into the Internet as a resource has significantly boosted the movement’s support. A list serve established as early as 1993 provided a space for academics and activists to circulate Zapatista materials, and the ¡Ya Basta! website produced in 1994 by a Swarthmore College employee provided “a mouthpiece for the Zapatistas in cyberspace” (Bob 2005, 132). By 2003, the ¡Ya Basta! website had already reached four million visits. Personal contacts supplemented their Internet circulation. In mid 1994, the Zapatistas spread to the U.S. through the creation of the National Committee for Democracy in Mexico, based in El-Paso, Texas. The group lobbied U.S. legislators to pass resolutions in support of the Zapatista struggle, pushed to keep media attention on Chiapas, and published Libertad, a monthly newspaper on the Zapatistas (Bob 2005). Such efforts to spread their message overseas demonstrate how
invaluable even symbolic gestures (such as a supportive resolution) from international actors could be for the Zapatistas.

As political scholar Clifford Bob acknowledges, the Zapatistas’ effective diffusion of their message has largely “hinged on the groups’ respective standing, accessibility, and public relations skills” (2005, 134). Skills regarding media relations, use of the Internet, writing and translating documents, and deliberate movement tactics have certainly played a role in distributing messages. However, merely circulating a message does not necessarily trigger the financial or symbolic support that the Zapatistas seek. Movement leaders thus began to target the amorphous mass of “civil society” with messaging intended to draw leftist populations into the effort to form a more inclusive Mexico. Conventions such as the “International Meeting for Humanity against Neoliberalism” or the “Encounters between the Zapatistas and the People of the World” marked significant attempts to mobilize this collection of possible supporters. The Zapatistas have even distributed polls domestically and internationally on key issues. In June 1995, for instance, the Alianza Cívica circulated a poll asking whether the Zapatistas should form their own political wing. One million three hundred thousand people from across Mexico and another 55,000 from abroad participated in the poll, highlighting the Zapatistas’ growing visibility (Bob 2005).

Through these alliance-building efforts, the Zapatistas have constructed a broad set of linkages. Human rights organizations remain at the center of this network, as international groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International issue reports on abuses from the Mexican government and paramilitary groups and keep Chiapas under the media spotlight. A number of social justice NGOs compliment the work of human rights groups, drawn to the region by the poverty that the movement shed light on. These organizations run programs
directly in Chiapas, which range from funded local NGOs to aid shipments, for both Zapatista and non-Zapatista Indigenous communities. Solidarity organizations make up the third strand of the network. These organizations, which are directly sympathetic to the Zapatista cause, issue reports, send aid shipments, assist in local disputes, lobby their home-country governments for supportive resolutions, host Zapatista leaders on international visits, and issue statements of solidarity. The main locally based solidarity organization is Enlace Civil, located in San Cristobal de las Casas. Enlace Civil coordinates between Zapatista communities and serves to link Zapatistas with allied international groups, continually expanding their network (Bob 2005). This web of sympathetic organizations primarily serves to draw more attention to the Chiapas conflict and to financially support the creation of autonomous communities.

Overall, the Zapatistas have sought to attract transnational support by shifting their grievances from everything from domestic marginalization to lack of political inclusion to foreign domination through neoliberal reforms. These expansive goals and grievances construct their struggle as more expansive than a group of Indigenous peasants rebelling in southern Mexico. When aimed at transnational (especially leftist) audiences, the identity behind the movement expands to an overarching ideology. Their Indigenous identity may be more essential, but what they intend to stand for is more universal.

For the Zapatista movement, an Indigenous identity combined with a universalized struggle helped garner transnational support. An Indigenous identity, for instance, has not only allowed (even the mestizo) leaders to link to the pan-Indigenous movement, but it has also attracted non-Indigenous supporters sympathetic to the long-excluded group. Latter-day U.S. politician Tom Hayden, for instance, wrote about how his trip to Chiapas represented “a personal Holy Grail,” where he was able to reclaim his “collective indigenous roots, mangled beneath the
architecture of our modern selves… I felt slightly like another in the long line of gringos seeking rebirth in Mexico” (2009, 78, 83). Indeed, “zapa-tourism” has been an emerging source of visibility and revenue for the movement, attracting activists, scholars, and leftist travelers to Chiapas. The Indigenous identity of the movement has created somewhat mystical, romanticized images for many people that cultivate further intrigue. Many Indigenous groups in North and South America have issued statements of solidarity with the Zapatistas, although some have critiqued their socialist origins and mestizo leadership (Bob 2005). Support from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups worldwide showcases how the Zapatistas have crafted their image to appeal to a wide range of networks. Ultimately, constructing an essentialized Indigenous identity fighting a universalized struggle has made this support possible.

Since the pan-Indigenous movement in Ecuador has held transnational linkage as much less of a tactic, their identity construction has not been quite so universalized. Rather than appealing to a wide array of transnational networks, the Ecuadorian movement has largely sought to tap into the pan-Indigenous movement from North to South America. In the “Who We Are” section of their website, CONAIE even describes one of their ten goals as “Maintain international relation with Indigenous nationalities of the ABYA-YALA continent, in order to create viable alternative communication among Indigenous peoples and with other social sectors committed to the cause” (CONAIE 2015, my translation). Abya-Yala is a Kuna (a Panamanian Indigenous group) term for the American continent, stretching from the North American arctic to Patagonia. Its use among Indigenous groups across the continent represents an attempt to cultivate a sense of unity between tribes and reclaim the American continent as Indigenous. Because connecting into this Abya-Yala Indigenous network is the Ecuadorian movement’s
principle focus transnationally, it does not have to universalize its struggle like the Zapatistas. Rather, an essentialized Indigenous identity can augment this support.

While navigating identities for an international audience is not a key aspect of the Ecuadorian movement, balancing identities domestically certainly is. As Ecuadorian scholar Amalia Pallares notes, in its shift from largely class-based platforms to an Indigenous identity, activists have had to maintain a relatively flexible program in order to bring together heterogeneous groups across the nation. A national Indigenous identity did not exist previously, as many Indigenous communities in the highlands felt little affinity for Amazonian groups, and visa versa (Yashar 2005). As Pallares recognizes, “It is precisely because indianismo is so porous that it can be many things to many different people and can mobilize local movements as disparate as the ones in Cacha and Cotacachi” (2002, 219). In this manner, Indigeneity itself has brought groups together, precisely because it can be interpreted in so many ways.

The ability to forge an Indigenous national identity hinged on tapping into existing networks that helped cultivate shared identity within communities or regions. Churches, unions and NGOs often laid the groundwork for Indigenous organization later on, both by forming organizational structures and reorienting ethnic consciousness. When CONAIE organized to connect regional Indigenous networks that were already forming, it did so with the intent of preserving these local Indigenous systems rather than completely taking over. The 1988 “Preliminary Draft of the Law of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador,” proposed that CONAIE would direct national dialogues, but local leaders and assemblies would still be the site where communities would decide their actions in the movement (Yashar 2005). The goal was thus to connect local struggles that held similar grievances and transport their voices to the national level. This initial idea was crucial to the ability to bring tribes across the country together
through CONAIE, as it prioritized the local struggles of communities through diffuse organization. In practice, however, CONAIE’s capacity to maintain local strength was limited, which partially contributed to its decline in support in the early 2000s.

Along with bringing together groups on an Indigenous basis, CONAIE also had to balance class interests with ethnic demands in its construction of this national movement. By constructing Indigenous identity as inherently tied to class grievances, the group was able to maintain previous overlap between class and regional Indigenous struggles. The call for agrarian reform, for instance, hinged on both class and ethnic rationales. CONFENAIE, the regional organization for Indigenous Amazonia, articulated how land is key to ethnic survival, as natural surroundings form the basis of ethnic identity, cosmology, and way of life for many groups. ECUARUNARI in the highlands, however, tended to operate with a more class-based conception of land, where territory was a productive resource. In the formation of CONAIE and the merging of these distinct perspectives, the new organization had to blend class and ethnic grievances in order to craft its own rationale for land reform (Yashar 2005). As Amalia Pallares recognizes in regards to this shift, “In this new perspective, there was a cultural dimension to all material needs and demands, and cultural issues/policies could not be kept separately from the material needs of the population” (1997, 349). The blending of ethnic and class demands under the amorphous umbrella of Indigeneity reflects CONAIE’s attempts to navigate a heterogeneous array of interests and identities.

In both cases, identity proves to be both an essential tool and a difficult category to navigate. An Indigenous identity in both the Zapatista and Ecuadorian movements has served to unite heterogeneous communities under a reconstructed racial conscience. An essentialized version of this identity helped these groups make claims for autonomy, including specialized
systems of education, government, cultural spaces, and land rights. This particular identity, framed as deserving autonomy, has even been used to rationalize the politics of refusal to the communities involved. However, defining a movement around a specific identity carries difficulties as well, as building crucial alliances may be more challenging. To that end, the Zapatista movement has balanced an essentialized Indigenous identity with a more universalized struggle, while the Ecuadorian movement has sought to blend Indigenous and class-based issues into its overall framing. A broader identity construction has helped the Zapatista movement gain transnational attention and support, although it remains unclear whether this international boost has actually advanced Zapatista goals. Overall, Indigeneity has been constructed as both unique and inclusive in order to cultivate unity among groups, garner transnational support, and redefine an identity that has so long been cast aside. The reclamation of Indigeneity as the foundation of these movements marks a crucial turning point in how these communities envision themselves and their place in the world.
Conclusion
Power in Unlikely Circumstances

When I visited Chiapas, Mexico to gain a broader perspective of the Zapatista movement, I found myself wandering around the Centro Indígena de Capacitación Integral (Indigenous Center for Comprehensive Training, CIDECI), one of the Zapatista’s largest and most extensive autonomous schools. CIDECI is something like a communally-minded trade school, where students live on campus and are responsible for maintaining the school. Students take elective classes ranging from carpentry to bread baking to literacy, and the work produced from these classes contributes to the school in some way. As one of the students gave me a tour around the center, I couldn’t help but admire the extensive farm and the beautiful artwork that these students had helped create. It was a unique space. And yet this semi-remote school did not exist in total isolation: the municipal government frequently tried to undermine the Zapatista’s legitimacy by cutting its power and water supplies. Even when asserting their autonomy, these communities must reckon with what it means to live under nation-states and navigate spaces for power in systems that do not always see Indigenous people as equal.

This study began with a comparison of two contemporary social movements that transcend the bounds of how we traditionally conceptualize collective action. Both movements express themselves under an Indigenous identity, strive for greater autonomy, and face states that not only have historically excluded them, but also presently provide few options for these groups to gain political voice. While the movements use similar rhetoric emphasizing their marginalization, unique worldview, peasant status, and rights to land in order to gain greater autonomy, their strategies for gaining greater autonomy have differed. Tribes in Ecuador have sought increased political participation, only recently turning towards the politics of refusal in intellectual debates and greater focus on community development. Zapatista communities,
however, pursued refusal from the early stages of the movement, both to assert a principle of Indigenous power and to push for a reconceptualization of the nation-state system.

These diverging tactics cannot merely be explained by differing political opportunities. While there are of course slight variations between political systems in Ecuador and Mexico, both states are relatively closed systems with high levels of corruption, lack of free and fair elections, limited expression and organization, lack of separation between the executive and other aspects of the state, and a high capacity for coercion. Rather, Indigenous Ecuadorians did not directly refuse state structures because they were able to obtain at least partial concessions by pursuing disruptive tactics and political participation, such as a pluriethnic and later plurinational constitution. The fact that the Ecuadorian movement involved coordinated pressure from Indigenous groups across the country, not just from one area, can explain these partial triumphs. Such widespread coordination was made possible by Ecuador’s higher population of Indigenous people (that could have a greater electoral impact) as well as the organizational networks between Ecuadorian groups built over decades.

The Zapatistas, on the other hand, faced greater opposition from the state. With the state’s failure to implement the San Andrés Accords, the Zapatistas began to articulate a complete lack of confidence in the government. The politics of refusal thus arose as the primary tactic once negotiations with the state failed. While the Zapatistas certainly gained attention from the state with their disruptive tactics, they could more easily be ignored or even repressed with force (as in the Acteal Massacre), due to the regional nature of the movement. Transnational alliances certainly amplified the Zapatista cause; however, the Zapatistas did not construct this transnational network until after they had already refused the state. The politics of refusal thus arose out of a situation where both disruptive campaigns and negotiations with the state failed.
While these failures prompted the politics of refusal, it was ultimately their articulation of a
unique identity with a claim to sovereignty and their broad system of transnational alliances that
has allowed the Zapatista’s strategy to continue to the present.

The Indigenous identities behind both movements also add to the unique nature of these
instances of collective action. While Indigeneity evolved out of “Indianness,” a concept
originally constructed by colonialist forces and perpetuated by the state, activists in these cases
have redefined the identity, choosing which aspects of this amorphous category to emphasize.
Because the movements engaged with identity in ways that were both expressive and
instrumental, the role of identity goes beyond simple framing processes. Identity was certainly
framed in a particular light at times for strategic value, but in the expressive aspects of the
movement, identity was the goal rather than a strategic tool. Identity was expressive in the sense
that both movements involved reshaping negative perceptions of Indigeneity and replacing these
associations with images of Indigenous power. Both movements, however, also used identity
instrumentally. The construction of a more essentialized identity based around marginalization,
poverty, unique worldviews, peasant livelihoods, and being the first inhabitants of specific lands,
had two specific purposes. First, in both cases, essentialized Indigeneity legitimized groups’
claims to land, education, cultural rights and overall autonomy— not necessarily in the eyes of the
state, but for the movement communities themselves. Secondly, in a similar but more extreme
vein, essentialized identity legitimized the politics of refusal for the Zapatistas, since building a
new system must have some ideological base.

However, an essentialized Indigenous identity in both movements had to be balanced
against other goals. In the Ecuadorian case, narrowing the definition of Indigeneity too much
might exclude some regional groups and counteract the crucial coalition-building occurring
between tribes across the nation. To work around this tension, CONAIE sought to articulate Indigeneity as a broader term that would include everyone from highland to coastal groups, while preserving the structures of regional organizations as spaces for local identities. The Zapatistas, however, had to balance emphasizing their uniqueness as Indigenous people with accentuating the universal nature of their struggle in order to build crucial transnational alliances. Essentializing identity was more critical in the Zapatista case because of the need to legitimize refusal. Therefore, the Zapatistas sought to maintain their essentialized Indigenous identity while expressing their overall ideology as part of a broader human rights struggle in order to appeal to transnational groups. These tensions over how to strategically frame identity highlight the difficult nature of identity construction for groups that have been extremely marginalized.

**Theoretical Implications:**

This analysis of the tactics and identity construction behind the Zapatista and Ecuadorian Indigenous movements suggests general implications for how we understand Indigenous movements in the context of social movement theory. By examining these cases through the more macro lens of social movement theory, we gain greater insight into how the groups navigate relations with the state. An exploration of Indigenous movements, however, would not be complete without the more anthropological realm of identity. As these two perspectives merge, we see that the politics of refusal, identity, and transnational support all interact in complex ways that cannot be explained by a strictly structural approach. Transnational support allowed for the politics of refusal in the Zapatista case, since the state violence and coercion that occurred once negotiations subsided could only be mitigated through outside attention. However, this transnational support has also shaped the identity of the movement, as the Zapatistas have
inevitably had to represent their identity to appeal to this transnational network. Although the Ecuadorian movement has not explicitly appealed to transnational groups, they have become part of the pan-American Indigenous movement, which has molded the movement as well. This relation with pan-American Indigenous thinkers is perhaps what prompted Ecuadorian activists towards adopting a discourse related to the politics of refusal. Identity has also shaped the nature of refusal and transnational support. As mentioned, an essentialized Indigenous identity legitimized the politics of refusal, while a broader articulation of identity appealed to transnational audiences. Thus, identity, transnational support, and the politics of refusal do not exist in isolation, but rather overlap. In this manner, movements are not purely the result of external factors, but rather they play a substantial role in creating new, powerful identities and tactics.

Scholars who focus primarily on institutional factors for movement emergence and development do not usually capture the agency that movements maintain over their tactics and identities. The political opportunity structure maintains that movements evolve and emerge based on shifting opportunities and constraints within the political system. When structures change such that a new way of addressing the state or a new potential for organization occurs, collective action can be the result. This state-centric view, however, does not take into account the constructed identities of a movement or changing ethnic consciousness. In particular, it does not consider how groups that have been historically and presently excluded from political opportunities may still conjure up alternative means of organizing. In the case of these Indigenous movements, groups faced a general lack of resources, many political constraints, and immensely limited opportunities. However, the Ecuadorian case still managed some political participation and a few limited (if only symbolic) steps towards a more inclusive system. The
Zapatistas even transcended the political opportunity structure by focusing on creating autonomous systems. These counter-intuitive results can only be understood when we account for the agency of the movement.

It was not the political opportunity structure that allowed for these unlikely actions, but rather these gains occurred in spite of the political hand communities were dealt. The political opportunity structure did play small role, since differing party systems and political and civil rights granted Ecuadorian Indigenous groups more success with political participation. However, it is not the primary explanatory factor. Furthermore, it does not explain why these movements emerged despite the repressive systems they faced, particularly in their treatment of Indigenous people. Rather than opportunities spurring action and constraints limiting them, Indigenous groups managed collective action under considerable constraints.

The theoretical insight of this work is therefore to demonstrate the need to expand beyond narrow, separate frameworks (such as the political opportunity structure, resource mobilization, and framing) to consider both how such factors do not exist in isolation but instead interact in complicated ways. In certain cases, these social movement frameworks provide the backdrop for the construction of identities that turn out to be powerful resources for the movement. When a movement is both about gaining specific policy concessions and asserting particular identities, identity, social movement theory, and the agency of the movement should form the basis of any comprehensive analysis. As Goodwin et al. put it, we must “recognize that cultural and strategic processes define and create the factors usually presented as ‘structural’” (1999, 52).
Further Questions:

This work does not seek to develop set laws for when certain social movements might arise or to test particular hypotheses. Rather, I sought to explore why and how these highly marginalized groups with a unique Indigenous identity were able to shake the very core of the nation-state system and redefine Indigenous power. What does this confrontation of current power structures mean for the communities involved in the future? Certainly, these movements, aimed at more than procedural or substantive gains, have brought Indigenous voices to the national stage in a manner that the state could not ignore. However, when movements simultaneously aim to express a particular identity and gain substantive changes from the state, as in these cases, is there a trade-off? Does identity politics– which often necessitate significant work within the community– distract from more structural changes– which require greater engagement with the state and other allies? There is no clear answer to this question, but certainly tensions exist between asserting an identity or ideology and the practical nature of making change. The Zapatista autonomous schools, for instance, may be spaces for reclaiming Indigenous identity and autonomy, but they are not state-recognized and thus Indigenous people who attend them cannot go on to Mexican universities. The Zapatistas want to assert an anti-consumerist, anti-capitalism ideology, but they rely on the sales of artwork and artisan coffee to support their cause. CONAIE seeks to assert Indigenous power through coalition building across tribes, but so many heterogeneous voices may simultaneously complicate moving forward on specific goals.

Perhaps the politics of refusal transcends this tension between identity expression and policy advances by disregarding policy as the main target. When the tactic is to carve out spaces within the community for Indigenous identities and gain more autonomy over one’s affairs,
maybe identity is supported while communities achieve certain goals (such as land rights or multicultural education). Even if this is so, sustaining these autonomous systems is exceedingly difficult, especially when the state is intent on dismantling them. Not only are finances and resources a question, but communities must also constantly negotiate what it means to exist inside a state and maintain autonomy without seceding. Furthermore, since the Zapatistas criticize the neoliberal nation-state structure as a whole, their alternative is a nebulous system where all groups are included and Indigenous cultures are fully valued. It remains unclear what such a system might look like or how it may come about. What is clear is that the Zapatistas— and increasingly Indigenous Ecuadorians— do not perceive the current state system as a structure that could ever fully meet their needs.

The tension between identity politics and practical changes highlights another question: is movement leadership always aligned with the communities involved? In terms of identity, what does it mean for a mestizo man such as Subcomandante Marcos to lead a movement that represents Indigenous power? Is some of the expressive power of the movement lost? Additionally, a paradox of leadership means that in order to spend time meeting with state representatives or traveling to meet with leftist groups, even Indigenous leaders may become increasingly disconnected from the people they represent. In his ethnography of Randy Borman, a white leader of Ecuador’s Cofán people (but who was raised among the Cofán), Michael Cepek explores this dilemma. He notes, Borman’s “time in Quito creates a great political irony: the bulk of his life is consumed by working to protect something that he can no longer enjoy” (2012, 118).

I would add that Borman’s time spent fighting for environmental protections on Cofán land moves him further from direct contact with those he represents, yet he retains ample power
over the interpretation of Cofán goals. As with many Indigenous movements, there may be an issue of translation, as the political intricacies of the Ecuadorian state might be culturally foreign to Cofán members who have not spent much time outside of the Amazon. However, the potential disconnect between leaders (who translate between Indigenous people and the dominant culture) and the communities that hold the actual grievances may be significant. While leadership is necessary for practical changes (especially leaders that can navigate the dominant culture), it is crucial to evaluate their ties to the communities and their motivations for involvement. In the Zapatista and Ecuadorian cases, the wide array of leadership (including women, men, Indigenous and non-Indigenous) may mitigate this disconnect. To some degree, however, it remains an inevitable consequence of mediating between cultures.

The push for autonomy and self-determination by Indigenous groups around the world raises important questions about how communities can pursue this goal and how states can best navigate groups’ demands. While there is certainly no one way to manage this tension, this analysis has highlighted how constructing a movement as both a human rights and identity struggle can legitimize claims to a special status. States should recognize self-determination as a special path to an equal status, considering the impact of prior marginalization on Indigenous groups. If we are to have systems that fully value the unique identities and circumstances of Indigenous people, these programs must be primarily self-generated. Self-determination is the first step in this essential process.

Indigenous movements offer a unique lens for analyzing contemporary social movements. They ask the question, how do marginalized, resource-poor groups that organize themselves around a specific identity, and are excluded on the basis of this identity, gain political influence? Despite differences from country to country, the key first step is to construct an
identity that creates a widespread coalition, bringing together groups that otherwise might not see themselves as so similar. A widespread network of support, whether transnational or domestic, helps augment the power created by coalition building. The expanded pressure created from these two developments, however, does not determine how the state will react. The politics of refusal as a means to gain attention and support, claim autonomy and redefine the power of a marginalized identity may be a growing trend in these circumstances. Even movements such as Black Lives Matter in the U.S. have articulated community building rather than appealing to existing power structures as their focus going forward (Yates 2016). In a situation where appealing to existing power structures and looking for avenues within the political system has been the norm, it makes sense that uniquely marginalized groups would look for alternative methods. Rather than placing the power in the hands of the state by seeking increased involvement or recognition, the trend may be shifting towards fashioning one’s own power. This power grows from a particular identity, but ultimately revolves around seeking a more just world that values the uniqueness of all.
References


