

# The Problem of Erasure

## Indigenous Organizing Beyond the Zapatistas

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Senior Honors Thesis  
Global Studies  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

April 2018

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank all those that contributed to this thesis and supported me during the year and half of writing. A special thanks to my advisor Michal Osterweil and my second reader Susan Bickford for the guidance they provided me throughout the process. I am also very grateful for my thesis buddies and for all of the feedback they gave me. Thank you for helping me avoid “the inevitable.”

I would also like to thank the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and the Global Studies Department at UNC for the funding that made my research possible. My trip to Mexico would not have happened without their financial and logistical support. I have endless gratitude for my friends in Chiapas, especially those at the Seminario Intercultural Mayense in San Cristobal that were so welcoming during my time there.

Last but not least, I need to thank my amazing friends and family for the support that they have provided for me. Thank you for your endless love and encouragement.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

I was in a car with my friend Javier – we were driving through the Mexican countryside, the Chiapas landscape flying by. As we wove along a small winding road, making our way out of the City of San Cristobal toward the community of Oventic, we started passing indigenous communities. They consisted of many small buildings some of which had murals painted on the side. One mural in particular kept recurring as we passed through these different communities. It had the words, “María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, 2018.” I began to wonder – who was this María? Why were all of these communities in support of her? What was happening in 2018? Becoming more and more curious, I asked Javier about her and her relationship to the indigenous communities. He explained to me that she had recently been chosen by indigenous people across the nation to run as a presidential candidate. As most of my knowledge of Mexico was about the Zapatistas, I assumed that she must have been from Chiapas, from a Zapatista community, fully supported by Zapatistas. Being indigenous himself, Javier explained to me that she was not Zapatista, that she was from Jalisco in the western part of the country, and that although she was supported by the Zapatistas, they had not chosen her.

Eager for more information, I immediately did more research once we returned home. I quickly learned of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) in Mexico, a group of representatives from indigenous communities from around the country. I suddenly felt very foolish. There were other indigenous activist groups outside of the Zapatistas? I had spent months reading and researching about the indigenous people of Chiapas. How had I not realized that other groups existed? Of course there would be other organizing efforts.

As my time in Chiapas went on, I began to notice the many other organizations

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around the city that seemed to be working alongside the Zapatistas to advocate for the needs of indigenous people. I wondered about other parts of the country. Surely that meant there were organized activists in other states as well. How were all of these groups connected? Did this mean that there were groups that existed before the Zapatistas? I asked the friends I had made - most of whom were indigenous- these questions, and they were all surprised that I had not realized this before my visit. They made it clear that indigenous liberation in Mexico was so much bigger than the Zapatistas. Their work since 1994 had made a lot of noise and grabbed the world's attention, but they were not the only group fighting for justice for the indigenous people of Mexico. The discrepancy between the popular narrative and the truth about the social movements is at the foundation of my thesis.

As I began to look deeper, I came to realize that the Zapatistas are just one of many indigenous organized efforts that have arisen over the years to fight for the rights of indigenous people. How does recognizing that the Zapatistas are just one of many players in the fight for indigenous autonomy alter our understanding of social change in Mexico and more broadly in Social Movement Theory? How has the erasure of lesser known groups and historical context impacted the understanding of indigenous movements in Mexico? I also began to wonder if these patterns could be seen in other movements. Was this limited to indigenous organizing in Mexico or was it a problem spanning across the study of social movements?

I explore these questions by using the various groups and histories of Mexican indigenous organizing to critique the gaps in social movement theory that do not recognize the links between social movements that target similar issues. I look at how indigenous

movements in Mexico, as well as other prominent movements in North America, have been simplified and in turn historically mislabeled. Ultimately, I argue that our academic understanding of indigenous liberation in Mexico is limited by the omission of hundreds of years of resistance by indigenous people previous to the rise of the Zapatistas. I argue for an academic understanding that portrays one ongoing indigenous movement that encompasses the Zapatistas as well as the many other groups that have worked previous to and alongside of them.

The goal of this introduction is to provide context and background to a complex social and political movement that has largely been simplified to only include the Zapatistas but in reality has been so successful because of the contributions of indigenous people from across the country for many centuries. The long history of indigenous oppression and rebellion are critical to understanding the current fight of indigenous people in Mexico – these include but are not limited to the Zapatistas. In this first chapter in addition to explaining my thesis and central question, I provide a background to the Zapatistas and the popular narrative of indigenous organizing, and introduce erasure, the central theoretical concept in my argument.

## **I. The Popular Narrative of Indigenous Organizing - The Zapatistas**

In researching indigenous activist groups in Mexico, I found that most research focused on the Zapatistas.<sup>1</sup> When there was a history present, it revolved around the

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility* (University of Toronto Press, 2008); Shannon Speed, *Rights in Rebellion- Indigneous Struggle and Human Rights in Chiapas* (Stanford University Press, 2008); John Holloway and Eloína Peláez, *Zapatista! : Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (Pluto Press, 1998); Ben Clarke and Clifton Ross, *Voice of Fire* (New Earth Publications, 1994).

timeline of the Zapatistas but left out much of the critical influence of others and the much longer history of indigenous uprisings that predated the Zapatistas. The following information summarizes what is included in the popular narrative that dominated most of the sources that I found, both in academic literature and more informal sources.

On January 1, 1994, a revolutionary uprising led by a united force of indigenous groups, known as the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation or EZLN), began in Chiapas, Mexico. This uprising was the result of years of built up tension and frustration rooted in the marginalization of the indigenous groups from this region. These communities had been outspoken about their disapproval of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the negative effects that it would have on their communities. The signing and implementation of this agreement on January 1, 1994, despite their previous protests, served as the spark, which ignited the Zapatista Revolution and caused them to declare war on the Mexican government. They were not only critical of the government and their treatment of indigenous peoples but also of the process of globalization and forced capitalism on an international level. The EZLN occupied seven towns in Chiapas, Mexico, blocking roads, and demanding the government's attention. Their goal was to get the Institutional Revolutionary Party out of office, ending the 70-year hold that they had over government. The Zapatistas saw this



party as being largely responsible for the suffering and exploitation that they had experienced and felt that the PRI's time in office needed to come to an end.<sup>2</sup>

The EZLN refers to the trained Zapatista combatants. It has grown to include nearly 250,000 people, including almost 22 percent of the indigenous population of Chiapas.<sup>3</sup> The EZLN began to form in the mid 1980s as small numbers of people decided to retreat into the jungle and come up with a course of action to get the government's attention.<sup>4</sup> This army was the result of a united effort by many different indigenous groups, most specifically the Tojolabal, Chol, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal people.<sup>5</sup> These indigenous groups are all descended from the Mayans but each have distinct cultural traditions and speak different languages. The EZLN required those who were interested in joining to leave their homes and train in the jungle. There they were trained in combat and taught how to be leaders in their communities. Since the soldiers all spoke different indigenous languages, they had to learn Spanish in order to communicate with each other. The EZLN provided them with the resources to be able to do this.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Guiomar Rovira, *Women of Maize: Indigenous Women and the Zapatista Rebellion* (Latin America Bureau, n.d.); Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*; Gemma van der Haar, "The Zapatista Uprising and the Struggle for Indigenous Autonomy," *Revista Europea De Estudios Latinoamericanos Y Del Caribe*, 2004, <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/208898562?accountid=14244>; June C. Nash, *Mayan Visions: Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization* (Routledge, 2001); John Holloway and Eloína Peláez, *Zapatista! : Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*; Hilary Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories* (Seven Stories Press, 2015); Rosalva Hernández Castillo, Shannon Speed, and Lynn | Stephen, *Dissident Women : Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas*, 1st ed., Louann Atkins Temple Women and Culture Series, Book Fourteen (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories*.

<sup>4</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*.

<sup>5</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen, *Dissident Women*.

<sup>6</sup> Rovira, *Women of Maize: Indigenous Women and the Zapatista Rebellion*.

The EZLN provided the basis of Zapatismo in training members who would later return to their communities and spread the word of their work. They were eventually able to get entire communities to commit to their values, developing schools, laws, and local governing techniques, distinct from that of the federal government. These autonomous communities allowed them to live according to their own rules rather than the international rules of capitalism and neoliberalism.<sup>7</sup>

This brief history summarizes the popular narrative that is established by media sources and academic literature as the bulk of indigenous organizing. Rarely are other people or groups outside of the Zapatistas included in this history. In effect, this narrative erases many of the other indigenous groups across Mexico that have also risen up against oppression. The Zapatistas and their past are incredibly important to recognize and can serve as an inspiration in many different ways. However their history is just one small part of a larger narrative that includes so much more. By leaving out the rest of the picture, the impact of indigenous activism is simplified and many critical parts of history are forgotten. This thesis points to many of the other amazing ways that indigenous people have worked with and alongside the Zapatistas to improve their communities. The complete history of indigenous organizing is necessary to fully understand the challenges that face indigenous communities today and how they are responding to them. Otherwise, the popular narrative presents an oversimplified and inaccurate picture of what indigenous communities and activist efforts look like in Mexico.

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<sup>7</sup> Rovira; Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*; van der Haar, "The Zapatista Uprising and the Struggle for Indigenous Autonomy"; June C. Nash, *Mayan Visions: Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization*; John Holloway and Eloína Peláez, *Zapatista! : Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*; Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories*; Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen, *Dissident Women*.

Although Mexican indigenous people across the country are connected in the sense that they are indigenous, each group and community has distinct differences in the languages they speak, cultural traditions they practice, regions they represent, climate they live in, and relationship to the government. In Mexico at large, there are 25,694,928 indigenous people, making up about 21.5% of the overall population. This includes over 623 indigenous municipalities, with 68 different languages spoken, in 364 distinct dialects.<sup>89</sup> The Zapatistas only include a very small portion of the indigenous population of Mexico, representing only specific indigenous groups, mostly descendants of the Mayans. Even within Chiapas, there are many more communities than those that identify as Zapatista.

The heavy emphasis put on the Zapatistas in research and coverage of indigenous organizing in Mexico has excluded all other groups, both in Chiapas and in other parts of the country, and the work that they have done along side of and completely separate from the Zapatistas. The erasure of these groups from the popular narrative historically and presently misrepresents what indigenous activism in Mexico is. I argue that a more holistic understanding of how indigenous activism in Mexico has developed would help avoid the erasure of these groups and the historical events that have influenced the state of indigenous activism today.

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<sup>8</sup> Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, “Indicadores Socioeconómicos de Los Pueblos Indígenas de México- Numeralia Indígena 2015,” 2015, <https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/239941/02-numeralia-indicadores-socioeconomicos-2015.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Consejo Nacional de Población, “Infografía- Población Indígena,” May 10, 2016, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia\\_INDI\\_FINAL\\_0808\\_2016.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDI_FINAL_0808_2016.pdf).

## II. The National Indigenous Congress

Previous to the start of the Zapatistas, other indigenous organizations and social groups had formed and acted on behalf of the overall indigenous community. One of the most notable organizations working on behalf of indigenous interests is the National Indigenous Congress (Congreso Nacional Indigena, CNI).

In 1974, the Catholic Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, brought together over a thousand people from Tzeltal, Tzotsil, Tojolabal, Chol, and other various indigenous backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> The congress was originally called the First Indian Congress, but later took the name the National Indigenous Congress, growing to include representatives from communities across the nation. This meeting helped inspire the formation of the EZLN (National Zapatista Liberation Army), although the CNI remained a completely separate entity from the Zapatistas and their army.<sup>11</sup> Many of those involved do not identify as Zapatista or even Mayan, but desire to make the voices of indigenous people across Mexico heard.<sup>12</sup> The congress has met many times over the years to bring groups together and create a united indigenous front. They have been intentional about addressing women's issues and other indigenous concerns that the Zapatistas have also fought for.<sup>13</sup>

The CNI is the perfect example of an organization that has been left out of the popular narrative that I outlined above. When included, they are often described as a Zapatista organization or at least as being largely dominated by the Zapatistas.<sup>14</sup> In reality

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<sup>10</sup> Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories*.

<sup>11</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen, *Dissident Women*.

<sup>12</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen.

<sup>13</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Conniff, "Marichuy: Mexico's First Indigenous Woman Presidential Candidate," *The Progressive*, February 14, 2018, <http://progressive.org/dispatches/marichuy-mexicos-first-indigenous-woman-presidential-candid-180213/>; Teresa Gutierrez, "Indigenous,

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they are composed of indigenous people from across the country that represent communities very distinct from those of the Zapatistas. The diverse representation of the CNI is erased when the congress is mislabeled as a Zapatista Institution.

Recently, the National Indigenous Congress decided to endorse a candidate to run for President of Mexico in the 2018 election.<sup>15</sup> The candidate is an indigenous woman named María de Jesús Patricia Martínez. Patricia, or “Marichuy,” as she is more commonly known, serves as a healer for the Nahuatl people and although she is sympathetic to Zapatismo and their goals, she does not identify as Zapatista herself.<sup>16</sup>

The goal of this endorsement is not necessarily to have Marichuy elected as president; rather the CNI is strategically using her candidacy to disrupt an electoral system that has traditionally marginalized their communities, to bring attention to the gender inequalities in the country and the lack of female involvement in the political system, and to amplify the voices of indigenous people and the demands that they have for their communities and their country.<sup>17</sup> It is an activist strategy being used to shed light on the issues concerning indigenous people across the country.

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Female, Zapatista- and Running for President of Mexico,” *Workers World*, February 2018, <https://www.workers.org/2018/02/07/indigenous-female-zapatista-and-running-for-president-of-mexico/>; Paulina Villegas, “In a Mexico ‘Tired of Violence,’ Zapatista Rebels Venture Into Politics,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 2017, sec. Americas, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/26/world/americas/mexico-zapatista-subcommander-marcos.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Villegas, “In a Mexico ‘Tired of Violence,’ Zapatista Rebels Venture Into Politics.”

<sup>16</sup> Laura Castellanos, “The Feminist Indigenous Candidate Running for President of Mexico,” *Vice*, November 13, 2017, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/9kqbqd/the-feminist-indigenous-candidate-running-for-president-of-mexico](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/9kqbqd/the-feminist-indigenous-candidate-running-for-president-of-mexico).

<sup>17</sup> Walter D Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez, “Mexico’s Indigenous Congress: Decolonising Politics,” *Al Jazeera*, September 27, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/mexico-indigenous-congress-decolonising-politics-170926093051780.html>.

Often the CNI is left out of the popular narrative and completely ignored, or they are assumed to be a Zapatista organization that solely consists of people that identify as Zapatista. The CNI is just one of many organizations and critical parts of indigenous organizing that needs to be made a part of the popular narrative in order to more accurately understand the full scope of indigenous activism in Mexico. I further discuss the CNI and Marichuy in Chapters 3 and 4, as well as many other groups that have also been erased from the popular narrative.

### **III. Social Movement Studies and the Problem of Erasure**

Social Movement theory has largely been used to define the concept of a social movement by limiting it to specific organizations and distinct uprisings. This often means compartmentalizing movements into specific time frames. Few authors or theorists offer ideas of how social movements are defined temporally, meaning that connections are rarely drawn between groups that organize on the same issue at different points in time. In fact, social movements are often depicted as distinct entities, despite common members, organizations, and other continuities. When connecting events that happen over time, the boundaries and limits of a social movement can seem very vague. Lawrence Cox argues that the interconnections between social movements are what make them strong and relevant. He argues:

“What I want to suggest here is that - rather than see these, with orthodox ‘social movement studies,’ as so many different movements, it makes more sense to start from their interconnections, in terms of participants, political traditions, organising skills and shared culture. In this perspective, we have so many different aspects of the same social movement, whose linkages, mergers and separations can be

understood in a historical perspective: not that this movement died, and this movement was born, but that the one movement changed its shape.”<sup>18</sup>

As he says, claiming that “this movement died” and “this movement was born” is limiting and a misrepresentation of reality.<sup>19</sup> We should recognize a movement as having “changed its shape” and highlight the ways that the many parts of a movement are interconnected and feed off of one another.<sup>20</sup> In fact, I want to take this further and argue that when these interconnections are not recognized as they should be, an erasure of critical contributors and defining historical events occurs.

Lawrence Cox also describes the constantly changing state of social movements. He describes the differing ways that social movements have been defined over time and how that has impacted the movements themselves. He suggests that we continue to develop social movement studies to embrace a lens of continuity when writing about and researching movements.<sup>21</sup> As he states, “we have so many different aspects of the same social movement” that need to continue to be connected and recognized as small parts of a larger whole.<sup>22</sup> We can continue to develop social movement theory so that it embraces the idea of ever-changing movements that persist over time, rather than movements that are limited to a particular time, place, and context.

In this paper I use the term “erasure” to refer to the neglect or inadequate recognition of certain groups and their constant work for a particular issue. This idea illustrates the groups that are left out of the popular narrative of social movements by not

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<sup>18</sup> Cox, Lawrence, “Eppure Si Muove: Thinking ‘the Social Movement’ 2003, <http://www.iol.ie/~mazzoldi/toolsforchange/afpp/afpp9.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Cox, Lawrence, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Cox, Lawrence, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Cox, Lawrence, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Cox, Lawrence, 2003.

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recognizing the connections between uprisings and organizations. It also refers to a historical or temporal erasure that oversimplifies critical historical narratives. The longevity of the issue and how it is influenced by the past is ignored, or erased. I use the concept of erasure to describe many of the problematic patterns in research on indigenous activism in Mexico. The specific patterns of erasure that I have identified are: erasure of critical players, erasure from the oversimplification of history, and erasure through an overemphasis on legislative action.

As I explored these patterns of erasure, I came to realize that this was not unique to the Indigenous movement in Mexico, but rather that this was a common problem in our perception of many social movements with which I was familiar in the United States. I found that the ways that other movements are talked about and studied reflect very similar problems. This suggests that erasure is a larger problem than just this one case and demonstrates that particular narratives dominate how movements and events are known, causing other perspectives, groups, and events to be forgotten and ignored.

This thesis is intended to focus on Mexico and the portrayal of indigenous activist efforts, to show very specific ways in which indigenous peoples of Mexico and their work is being erased. And yet, it is also important to see and recognize that erasure is not specific to Mexico, but is a larger problem with how social movements are studied and talked about. In Chapter 4 I point to three movements- Black Liberation, Native American Activism, and United States Feminism- as movements that also suffer from these patterns of erasure. This is a crucial parallel because it points to larger shortcomings in our dominant treatments of social movements. On a more positive note, if we can begin to read



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for these erasures, we might go a long way in furthering their visibility and thus their power.

#### **IV. Methodology**

The methods used for this thesis were primarily close reading and analyzing of relevant texts and materials. In this thesis, I explain the lack of information provided about indigenous social organizing and activism outside of the Zapatistas. I became aware of this when I started looking for academic sources that provided information about other groups and uprisings and found it hard to find much information that didn't revolve around the Zapatistas. The information that I did find was mostly from old newspaper articles or academic sources written previous to 1994 when the Zapatistas made themselves known to the world.

Attempting to find information on other groups was a critical part of my methodology because it showed me just how little these other groups are talked about and recognized in academia. Almost any search related to indigenous life in Mexico led me to sources covering the Zapatistas. If I was able to find an uprising or a group mentioned in a newspaper article reporting an event, or a specific indigenous community, I could then search that specific group or event and find some limited information. However even when I found a source on other events or groups, they were usually not presented as a part of a larger movement, but were seen as isolated uprisings or groups.

In the second chapter of this thesis I describe many of the literatures that I used and what their significance in my research was. For many, it was not the information that they contained, but rather the information that was lacking. This proved to be true as I looked at

literature on Zapatismo as well as literature on indigenous organizing in Mexico outside of the Zapatistas, neither of which created the complete narrative that I desired.

## **V. Outline of Thesis**

In what follows I continue to explore Patterns of Erasure and the impact they have had on our understanding of indigenous groups in Mexico. In Chapter 2, I discuss how temporality has been studied in social movement theory and how this has affected our understanding of social movements. I then point to literature written about the Zapatistas and what it includes. I also draw on literatures written on other forms of indigenous organizing in Mexico and how they contribute to our understanding of the popular narrative.

Next, in Chapter 3 I provide a more in depth analysis of the relationship between Zapatismo and other forms of indigenous organizing, mostly focusing on Chiapas and Oaxaca, as they are the two states with the largest indigenous presence. This chapter illustrates the widespread work being done across the country, and the negative impacts of these groups being erased from the popular narrative. I expand my analysis in Chapter 4 as I relate what I have found to be true with Zapatismo and Indigenous Organizing in Mexico to other social movements that have occurred in the United States. I illuminate certain patterns that are present across these movements and the impact that they have on the social movements themselves.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I outline the main literatures used to gain the information presented in this thesis. The topics of focus include: temporality in social movement studies, Zapatismo, and indigenous organizing outside of the Zapatistas in Mexico. I describe the critical information presented in these literatures as well as the gaps that exist.

### I. The Framing of Temporality in Social Movement Studies

Social Movement Studies covers a wide variety of topics related to social movements and how they develop. In this thesis I focus on the way that Social Movement Studies has looked at the temporality of movements. I use the term temporality to refer to the way in which authors describe the time span of a movement. Traditionally, social movement theorists have attempted to compartmentalize individual movements into specific timelines focusing on a small number of big events within a relatively short time frame.<sup>23</sup> Theorists have used many different ways to look at the temporality of movements, a few of which I now discuss.

One of the defining ideas pertaining to temporality in social movement studies is Cycles of Protest, a theory developed by Sidney Tarrow (1998). This theory says that when political institutions offer more freedom for dissent, society is encouraged to form social movements that spread across groups (students, teachers, laborers, environmentalists, women, etc.).<sup>24</sup> When one of these groups begins to take a stand, all of the others feel inspired and begin to disrupt society to bring attention to their issue. These new

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<sup>23</sup> Cox, Lawrence.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Almeida, "Cycles of Protest," *Oxford Bibliographies*, May 2014.

movements rise up and gain strength all simultaneously. The movements slow down when barriers such as participant burn out, government reform, or state repression appear.<sup>25</sup>

Tarrow has used different terms to describe this phenomenon, most commonly using “cycles of contention” or “cycles of protest.”<sup>26</sup> These cycles describe a pattern of the formation and decline of social movements. When a state has liberal reforms that allow for more political expression and participation on behalf of citizens, it is expected for multiple social movements to appear in response. A sense of social discontent happens across communities as the state provides more space for protest. Connected communities fuel each other and encourage even more protest in their distinct areas of interest.<sup>27</sup> He also describes how particular movements respond differently to these cycles and are uniquely affected by the cyclical pattern. Those that happen earlier in the cycle have a different experience than those that happen later.<sup>28</sup> He also argues that each individual community changes after each cycle of protest and a new cycle begins in response to a new set of experiences.<sup>29</sup>

Daniel Meyers and Pamela Oliver expand on this phenomenon in their article titled “Networks, Diffusions, and Cycles of Collective Action.” They argue that the cycles of a movement are necessary because they create a rhythmic pattern.<sup>30</sup> A rhythm - such as a pattern of protest, rest, protest, rest- is required for a movement to be sustainable. They

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Almeida.

<sup>26</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011): p.195-214.

<sup>28</sup> Tarrow.

<sup>29</sup> Tarrow.

<sup>30</sup> Pamela E. Oliver and Daniel J. Myers, “Networks, Diffusions, and Cycles of Collective Action,” in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 173–78.

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argue that the continuity of protest does not allow for participants to rest and recover. Movements naturally die so that people have time to recuperate in between uprisings.<sup>31</sup>

Alberto Melucci offers another perspective by defining the cycles as having periods of “latency” and periods of visibility. He describes latency as the time when the actors of a movement are experiencing societal injustices and as they begin to unite and take a stand to create change, they move into a period of visibility. This period is when they are actively protesting the forms of oppression that they have endured during the period of latency.<sup>32</sup> This theory builds on the dominant narrative of a cycle in assuming that there is a period when actors are sitting quietly and not organizing in some way.

These theories offer important insight into how movements function and why. They help explain the ideal conditions for a movement to be successful. By helping us understand when people are more likely to support and participate and when they are not, these theories provide potential solutions to collective action problems that occur when organizing a movement.

Although these theories help describe social movements and how they function, they are somewhat limiting when it comes to defining what a social movement is and how it operates. They offer little recognition for the constant work that organizations are doing. These theories ignore the temporal connections between uprisings and see such events as separate entities rather than as merely a continuation of the same idea, the same fight, and the same movement.

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<sup>31</sup> Oliver and Myers.

<sup>32</sup> Alberto Melucci, “The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements,” *Social Research, Social Movements*, 52, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 800–801.

In the first chapter I pointed to the work of Lawrence Cox, specifically his 2003 piece titled “Eppure Si Muove: Thinking ‘the Social Movement,’” in which he analyzes Social Movement studies and the tendency to leave out certain aspects.<sup>33</sup> He argues that social movement theorists are isolated from the actual work on the ground, and so in turn they often misrepresent the very movements that they study.<sup>34</sup> Most importantly, Cox, along with other prominent social movement theorists, emphasizes the ever-changing nature of social movement studies and the ability for the field to continue adapting to be more inclusive and accurate.<sup>35</sup> I build on the work of these theorists, in hopes that through my analysis, the field will be strengthened as future theorists take these critiques into consideration.

## II. Studying Zapatismo

There is a great deal of literature about the Zapatistas. Studying Zapatismo has become a very useful tool for those studying social movements, anti-globalization efforts, Latin American guerilla movements, or female activism. Academics study the Zapatistas as a unique and successful example of these topics. There are a number of books that focus on some aspect of Zapatismo, however very few make the connection to any other form of indigenous activism in Mexico.

Many authors focus on the Zapatistas specifically and describe the unique tactics that the Zapatistas have used and how they have impacted indigenous lives. They write

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<sup>33</sup> Cox, Lawrence, “Eppure Si Muove: Thinking ‘the Social Movement.”

<sup>34</sup> Cox, Lawrence.

<sup>35</sup> Cox, Lawrence; Michal Osterweil, “In Search of Movement: Italy’s ‘movimento Dei Movimenti,’ Theoretical-Practice and Re-Making the Political,” *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2010, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/751336206?pq-origsite=summon>.

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about the autonomy and political structure of Zapatista communities, the development and role of the EZLN, the political involvement and interaction with the state in the 90s, and the social changes implemented within Zapatista communities.<sup>36</sup>

Alex Khasnabish writes about the Zapatistas in his book *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*.<sup>37</sup> The scope of this book is focused on the impact that Zapatismo has had on the rest of the world, other organizations, and other movements world-wide that have been inspired by this form of Mexican indigenous organizing. He emphasizes the revolutionary tactics and politics of the Zapatistas and how they can and should serve as a model for other groups around the world. He focuses on their anti-globalization efforts and the impact that they have had on globalized politics. In doing this he emphasizes their participation in a larger anti-globalization movement rather than a Mexican Indigenous Movement.<sup>38</sup>

In her book *Rights in Rebellion*, Shannon Speed goes into length about the historical development of human rights abuses in Chiapas and how this led to the rise of Zapatismo.<sup>39</sup> Speed's primary focus is on the state of Chiapas and the Zapatistas. However, she includes a few other groups outside of the Zapatistas to illustrate the larger scope of the work of indigenous people.<sup>40</sup> June Nash has a very similar discussion in her book *Mayan Visions: Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization* as she goes through the history of social

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<sup>36</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*; Shannon Speed, *Rights in Rebellion- Indigenous Struggle and Human Rights in Chiapas*; June C. Nash, *Mayan Visions: Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization*; John Holloway and Eloína Peláez, *Zapatista! : Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*; Ben Clarke and Clifton Ross, *Voice of Fire*.

<sup>37</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*.

<sup>38</sup> Khasnabish.

<sup>39</sup> Shannon Speed, *Rights in Rebellion- Indigenous Struggle and Human Rights in Chiapas*.

<sup>40</sup> Shannon Speed.

uprisings in Chiapas, explaining the transformations of indigenous community and how it has been affected by the development of the nation-state over time.<sup>41</sup> She offers a more comprehensive understanding of the history of indigenous peoples in Chiapas and the many barriers that they have faced in the last five hundred years.

Other authors focus specifically on women in the Zapatista movement. They highlight the unique and revolutionary ways that women have organized and created change within their communities.<sup>42</sup> For example, in their book, *Dissident Women*, Hernández Castillo, et al, focus on the role of Zapatista women and the work they have done for gender equality.<sup>43</sup> Like most authors writing on Zapatismo, they provide a history of the Zapatista movement, starting with organizing in the Lacondon Jungle and moving through the events of the 90s.<sup>44</sup> One unique aspect to this book is a chapter that includes a few of the most important documents and speeches in Zapatista organizing that pertain to women and gender equality such as the Women's Revolutionary Law, Women's Rights in Our Traditions and Customs, and a speech by Comandanta Esther. They emphasize the impact these women have had and how their work has changed their communities.<sup>45</sup>

Many of these authors and their books have a very specific focus on the Zapatistas and their work. They are intended to study and better understand the tremendous impact

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<sup>41</sup> June C. Nash, *Mayan Visions: Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization*.

<sup>42</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen, *Dissident Women*; Margara Millán, "Chapter 3: Zapatista Indigenous Women," in *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (Pluto Press, 1998); Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories*; Rovira, *Women of Maize: Indigenous Women and the Zapatista Rebellion*; Mercedes Olivera, "Feminist Practice in the Zapatista Movement," *International Feminist Magazine*, October 31, 1996, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/237225086?pq-origsite=summon>.

<sup>43</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen, *Dissident Women*.

<sup>44</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen.

<sup>45</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen.



of the Zapatistas. However because of the narrow focus on the Zapatistas, few authors mention the work of other indigenous groups or activist organizations in other parts of the country. Shannon Speed, and Hernandez , et al, both offer some references to other groups working in Chiapas, but they do not spend long focusing on their work as their goal is to write about the Zapatistas. Because there has been little focus on the smaller groups and uprisings outside of the Zapatistas, the general knowledge of indigenous organizing in Mexico has been limited to the Zapatistas and their work. The impact is limited and the perspectives of those outside of the Zapatistas are largely erased.

### **III. Indigenous Organizing in Mexico Outside of the Zapatistas**

Outside of literature focusing on the Zapatistas, there are a few books that look at specific parts of Mexican history involving indigenous people and the controversies surrounding them. In his book, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion*, Nicholas Higgins writes about early uprisings in Chiapas and what conditions led to them.<sup>46</sup> Diane Nelson writes about the 1869 Caste War of Chiapas and what led to the war in her journal article titled “Crucifixion Stories, the 1869 Caste War of Chiapas, and Negative Consciousness.” She describes a brief history of indigenous life in Mexico and the various ways that people understood what happened in the Caste War.<sup>47</sup> Both of these authors write about indigenous uprisings previous to the Mexican Revolution of 1910. They both provided historical context, connecting specific events to a history of indigenous oppression in

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<sup>46</sup> Higgins, Nicholas P., *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion : Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian* (University of Texas Press, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Diane M. Nelson, “Crucifixion Stories, the 1869 Caste War of Chiapas, and Negative Consciousness: A Disruptive Subaltern Study,” *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 2 (May 1997): 331–54.

Mexico. Their focus remains on the history of these events and does not venture to address uprisings or activist efforts today, or the ongoing effects of these historical occurrences of indigenous organizing.

Other authors write about specific activist groups that have been vocal in recent years. My research focuses on the authors that write about Las Abejas, an organization in Chiapas that has been doing work to improve indigenous communities since the 1970s.<sup>48</sup> The literatures described the timeline of the organization and wrote about the work that Las Abejas has done within their communities. These literatures defined Las Abejas as an indigenous organization and made it clear that most participants were from indigenous communities.<sup>49</sup>

Literatures describing larger social movements such as APPO, a teachers rebellion in Oaxaca, differed from the literature describing groups like Las Abejas in how they talked about indigenous participation. Authors writing about APPO did not focus specifically on indigenous people and their contributions, however both mention their critical participation. They mostly write about the complexities of APPO and provide a deep analysis of the conditions that led to a teachers' rebellion in 2005.<sup>50</sup>

Todd Eisenstadt also focuses on Oaxaca in his piece, "Customary Practices, Women's Rights, and Multicultural Elections in Oaxaca." He writes about the implementation of *usos y*

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<sup>48</sup> Christine Kovic, "The Struggle for Liberation and Reconciliation in Chiapas, Mexico: Las Abejas and the Path of Nonviolent Resistance," *Latin American Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (May 2003): 58–79; Marco Tavanti, "Las Abejas: Constructing Syncretic Identities of Resistance in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico" (Loyola University Chicago, 2001).

<sup>49</sup> Kovic, "The Struggle for Liberation and Reconciliation in Chiapas, Mexico: Las Abejas and the Path of Nonviolent Resistance"; Marco Tavanti, "Las Abejas: Constructing Syncretic Identities of Resistance in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico."

<sup>50</sup> Lynn Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca: Testimony and Social Movements* (Duke University Press, 2014); Diana Denham and C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion: Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca* (PM Press, 2008).

*costumbres* in Oaxaca, the new standard for political practice in Oaxacan towns that was influenced by traditional indigenous practices. He covers both the negative and the positive aspects of the implementation of these practices and the impacts that they have had on both indigenous and non-indigenous people.<sup>51</sup>

#### **IV. The Significance of the Literature**

The literatures discussed above provide a comprehensive background to the Zapatistas, Mexican history, and other groups that are involved in indigenous activism in Mexico. Although this information is helpful in gaining a better understanding of these groups and the work that indigenous people have done, there is a significant gap in the connections made between these groups. The information is excluded from each of these sources was just as important to my research as the information that was included. The literature that I reviewed describing how social movements have been studied, helped me better understand these patterns of erasure. They allowed me to see that the patterns are rooted in a larger problem in all of social movement theory rather than just centered in indigenous organizing in Mexico. The next two chapters work to elucidate these holes.

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<sup>51</sup> Todd A. Eisenstadt, "Customary Practices, Women's Rights, and Multicultural Elections in Oaxaca," in *Politics, Identity, and Mexico's Indigenous Rights Movements* (American University, 2011), 104–28, <https://doi-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1017/CBO9780511976544>.

### **Chapter 3: Analysis of Indigenous Organizing in Mexico**

This chapter looks at the erasure of specific groups and people that are left out when the focus of indigenous activism in Mexico solely stays on the Zapatistas. Although the Zapatistas have done incredible work, they are not the only ones working on behalf of indigenous lives. I aim to demonstrate how complex and widespread the work on behalf of indigenous people in Mexico has become. This chapter is intended to show what is erased when a full narrative is not presented.

In the first section of this chapter I look at some of the specific groups that have been overlooked and point to their accomplishments and contributions to indigenous progress. I explain how the exclusion of these groups from the popular narrative demonstrates the erasure of critical players. In the second section I focus on erasure through the oversimplification of history as I present a slightly more comprehensive historical account than what is recognized in the popular narrative of indigenous activism. In the third section I go over some of the important pieces of legislation influenced by indigenous people in Mexico and the impact they have had on indigenous activism and indigenous communities across the country. This helps demonstrate erasure through legislative action. This chapter shows what is excluded from the simple popular narrative that was outlined in the first chapter and why this is problematic. The complexities of this larger indigenous movement and the intricate connections between these many groups and historical events offer just a small glimpse at what is being overlooked.

## **I. The Groups that are Erased**

In this section, I show a few of the groups that are doing incredible work to improve indigenous lives in Mexico, and yet are erased from the popular narrative. I label this form of erasure as “the erasure of critical players.” In this section I demonstrate some of the influence that these erased groups have had on the Zapatistas and on the rest of Mexico. These are just a few of many groups that deserve recognition and inclusion in a proper narrative of indigenous activism in Mexico. And yet even these few show how much is missing when academia and other sources misrepresent how widespread indigenous organizing in Mexico is.

### **A. The National Indigenous Congress**

As discussed in the Introduction, the National Indigenous Congress has been a huge unifier for indigenous Mexicans outside of the Zapatista movement, and yet is often misunderstood and described inaccurately. Its most recent action, nominating an indigenous woman to the presidency, is in itself a form of activism and indigenous organizing. A key purpose of Marichuy’s candidacy is to raise awareness of these alternative and inclusive models of governing that contrast with the traditional model of western democracy that Mexico has followed in the past. Although they are partaking in a traditional political practice, it is for the purpose of highlighting the flaws of the process.<sup>52</sup> The CNI, although not a political party, had a very advanced process of selecting a candidate. They consulted indigenous people and communities across the country until

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<sup>52</sup> Walter D Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez, “Mexico’s Indigenous Congress: Decolonising Politics,” 2017.

they were able to narrow it down to one person.<sup>53</sup> This created a contrast to the creative and inclusive ways that indigenous groups decided to become involved in the system, as opposed to the process of selecting a candidate used by the formally recognized political parties. The CNI and Marichuy have made it very clear that they are not participating in the race to try to gain political power. They are participating in the system with the very goal of deconstructing the system and building a new one, to show the world the many flaws that exist in the governing of the country and demonstrate an alternative path that is less exclusive.<sup>54</sup>

This candidacy also offers a new platform by which indigenous voices and perspectives can be amplified so that it is harder for the public and the government to ignore them. As previously discussed, indigenous lives in Mexico have often been overlooked and even exploited over the last 500 years. The sad history of unfair labor conditions and displacement from claimed land has resulted in widespread poverty and few opportunities for indigenous people across the country.<sup>55</sup> These conditions of poverty and inequality have been reflected in the electoral system that is not built to reflect indigenous needs.<sup>56</sup> However, the candidacy of Marichuy is using the attention of the press and international media to draw the focus to the issues that indigenous people are concerned about such as domestic abuse of women, the depletion of natural resources, and

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<sup>53</sup> Walter D Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez, "Mexico's Indigenous Congress: Decolonising Politics," 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Walter D Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez, "Mexico's Indigenous Congress: Decolonising Politics," 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*.

<sup>56</sup> Khasnabish.

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even the lack of response to the earthquakes in Oaxaca and Chiapas by the government.<sup>57</sup> Marichuy has said that she is merely the spokesperson, not a leader necessarily. They are not campaigning for her, but for the issues that she speaks about, and the genuine betterment of indigenous communities across the country.<sup>58</sup>

The National Indigenous Congress and Marichuy are a perfect example of indigenous organizing outside of the Zapatistas. Marichuy does not identify as Zapatista and yet she is commonly labeled as the Zapatista candidate.<sup>59</sup> The CNI is greatly influenced by the Zapatistas and encourages Zapatista participation. However there are many participants that distinguish themselves from the Zapatistas. By labeling them all as Zapatista, the diversity in indigenous representation in the CNI is diminished to just Zapatista and Chiapan culture. The CNI is composed of many critical players that are erased from the common understanding of what indigenous activism in Mexico is and the work they are doing.

## B. Women

It is no coincidence that the CNI chose a woman to be the candidate that they would campaign behind. They have made it clear that her gender is part of the statement that they are making; she is not just indigenous, she is a woman that wants to be able to speak from the perspective of a woman.<sup>60</sup> Those that spoke on her campaign tour were exclusively

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<sup>57</sup> Laura Castellanos, "The Feminist Indigenous Candidate Running for President of Mexico," 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Laura Castellanos, "The Feminist Indigenous Candidate Running for President of Mexico," 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Conniff, "Marichuy: Mexico's First Indigenous Woman Presidential Candidate," 2018; Gutierrez, "Indigenous, Female, Zapatista- and Running for President of Mexico," 2018

<sup>60</sup> Laura Castellanos, "The Feminist Indigenous Candidate Running for President of Mexico."

women speaking about the unequal representation of women, women's issues in politics, and the disproportionate rates of violence against Mexican women.

Addressing gender equality within Mexican and indigenous culture has been a critical part of indigenous activism as a whole and the nomination of Marichuy is just one example of the work that has been done. Many indigenous groups, the Zapatistas included, have initiated discussions around women's issues within the context of indigenous struggles. They have been able to address their needs not just as women, or as indigenous people, but as indigenous women.

The Zapatistas have been widely recognized by scholars and activists alike for their intentional inclusion of women and promotion of gender equality. One key component to this was the Women's Revolutionary Law, one of many revolutionary laws presented in 1994 when the Zapatistas made their demands public. This document is essentially a list of declared rights that all Zapatista women possess, including such liberties as "the right to work and receive a just salary," "the right to education," and "the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle."<sup>61</sup> The charter was followed up with the "Women's Rights in our Traditions and Customs" document that explains in detail each aspect of the Women's Revolutionary Law. These two documents were the first written expression of indigenous Mayan women's demands for gender equality.<sup>62</sup> The Zapatistas were also very intentional about including women in the EZLN, making it clear that women could participate in any way they desired.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen, *Dissident Women*.

<sup>62</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen.

<sup>63</sup> Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories*.



However, even with all of these actions taken for the purpose of gender equity, the Zapatistas were not the beginning of women's resistance and demand for equality, nor have they been the only source of female empowerment since their start. The church contributed significantly in the fight for gender equity by offering educational opportunities to women so that they could learn more about the bible and how it supported indigenous and women's rights. The Catholic Church in Chiapas has been a part of the resistance from the beginning and consistently invited women to be involved. Liberation theology, or the use of the Bible to support social movements that combat oppression and discrimination, was used to convince women that their work was the kind of behavior that the Bible called for.<sup>64</sup> They used biblical stories to inspire the women, in hopes that the experiences of hunger, strength, and rebellion in the Bible would help the women relate to what the Bible was saying.<sup>65</sup> Bible studies created spaces for women to come together and reflect on their experiences as indigenous women. These discussions helped women realize that they had rights that were not being recognized and that they had the ability and the power to fight for those rights.<sup>66</sup>

In 1997, the First National Women's Indigenous Congress took place, bringing together women from across the country, to come together publicly to be united in their femininity and discuss how they could work together to fight for more gender equality within their own communities, as well as within the country as a whole. They were able to share experiences, reflecting on successes and failures in their own cultures, and how they

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<sup>64</sup> Karen Turner, "Peacemaking in Chiapas," *Baptist Peacemaker: The Journal of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America* 32, no. 2 (June 2012): 6-9.

<sup>65</sup> Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories*.

<sup>66</sup> Klein.

could learn from each other.<sup>67</sup> Once again, Zapatista women played a large role in this event, but they were not the only actors. They hold positions of power and influence and have made themselves heard, but so have other women, groups, and organizations who are also working tirelessly to contribute to the indigenous rights movement in Mexico as a whole.

APPO (The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca) as well as other groups in Oaxaca have had women at the forefront of their fight, acting as the lead organizers and getting the most recognition in the press.<sup>68</sup> Many other organizations across the nation have formed over the last fifty years that were started by indigenous women, with the intention of fighting on behalf of indigenous women. A large number of these groups have arisen to address specific needs or issues. There are certain groups that aim to support female indigenous healers and their important role within communities. Others merely want to create a space for indigenous women from around the country to share their experiences and come together in their femininity.<sup>69</sup> These many organizations have been working alongside Zapatista women as well as separately to work towards the larger goal of the advancement of indigenous women and address the many issues that affect them.<sup>70</sup> By simplifying all of this work down to just the work of the Zapatistas, there is an erasure of all of these other efforts to fight for women. These other critical players are ignored and their work is overlooked. These many other efforts should not be forgotten about or made invisible but should be linked to and associated with the work of Zapatista women.

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<sup>67</sup> Sylvia Marcos, *Mujeres, Indígenas, Rebeldes, Zapatistas* (Ediciones y Gráficos Eón, S.A. de C.V., 2013).

<sup>68</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen, *Dissident Women*.

<sup>69</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen.

<sup>70</sup> Hernández Castillo, Speed, and Stephen.

C. Las Abejas

Although the Zapatistas have had a huge impact on indigenous life in Chiapas, and have accomplished an incredible amount in a relatively short time, they have not been working alone. Many other groups have risen up in Chiapas and continue to work on the behalf of indigenous people in the state. One of the much lesser known groups is known as Las Abejas (the Bees). They are a group that formed in 1992 as a nonviolent, Catholic organization that has aimed to promote indigenous interests. In the 1970s, a bishop in Chenalhó who was of the Catholic Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas constructed a church for the purpose of aiding poverty in the area. Throughout the 70s the church became a new model of evangelizing in working with the poor rather than serving to the poor. Those who became involved with the church were encouraged to speak out against injustice themselves and have agency to push for their own path of liberation, with or without the church.<sup>71</sup>

During the 1980s the church began to offer workshops teaching about human rights and the shortcomings of the government through the lens of the Bible. This then sparked a number of organizations that branched off from this church to focus on specific areas of poverty, human rights, and indigenous empowerment, one of which was Las Abejas

In 1992, the Xi'Nich' March for Peace and Human Rights of the Indigenous Peoples occurred, bringing over 700 indigenous people from a number of groups to show opposition to the oppressive ways of the government, particularly on a local level.<sup>72</sup> Xi'Nich' is another organization that was active at this time. The name means "ant" in the Ch'ol

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<sup>71</sup> Kovic, "The Struggle for Liberation and Reconciliation in Chiapas, Mexico: Las Abejas and the Path of Nonviolent Resistance."

<sup>72</sup> Christine Kovic, 62.

language, signifying the waves of protest and elaborate connections of the indigenous community, much like the organization of an anthill.<sup>73</sup> This protest in March of 1992 served as a starting point that ignited Las Abejas, as a large gathering of indigenous people. Many of the church members from Chenalhó decided to unite under the name of “the bees” with the goal of fighting from an equal playing ground, in a nonviolent manner to achieve indigenous liberation.<sup>74</sup> They chose the identity of the bee to highlight equality between all of the members, working with one another to serve their Queen, the Kingdom of God.<sup>75</sup>

Due to the political climate and the abrasive presence of the PRI in indigenous communities in Chiapas, there was lots of violence and tension during this time. Las Abejas took the path of nonviolence to combat the deepening divisions that were occurring in communities and the harsh climate that existed between different groups. Although Las Abejas chose nonviolence, they have still been the recipients of violent acts on multiple occasions and been affected by the violence that surrounds them as a result of oppressive PRI actions. They have been attacked and confronted both by the PRI and other organizations that do not approve of their work.<sup>76</sup> However despite the resistance to their efforts, the organization has continued to work, and has persisted along with rise of the Zapatistas, all the while remaining totally separate from the EZLN and their orders. They sympathize with Zapatista efforts but do not wish to participate in the violence associated with the Zapatistas and the EZLN.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Christine Kovic, 62.

<sup>74</sup> Christine Kovic, 64.

<sup>75</sup> Marco Tavanti, “Las Abejas: Constructing Syncretic Identities of Resistance in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico” (Loyola University Chicago, 2001), 72.

<sup>76</sup> Marco Tavanti, 74.

<sup>77</sup> Christine Kovic, “The Struggle for Liberation and Reconciliation in Chiapas, Mexico: Las Abejas and the Path of Nonviolent Resistance”, 68.

Las Abejas are a great example of a critical player that has been erased from the popular narrative. Even after spending months reading literature on indigenous organizing, I had never heard of this group. It was not until I came across their name in an obscure newspaper article that I searched for academic sources on them. I was able to find a few sources that described their work, but all of the literature was specifically on Las Abejas. They described the history and context of the group but did not explain the influence of other indigenous efforts in Chiapas or other parts of Mexico. None of them seemed to link Las Abejas to a larger indigenous movement or connect them to the Zapatistas. Unless you knew to look for them, you would completely miss this important case.

Countless other indigenous organizations and efforts like Las Abejas are pursuing the liberation of indigenous lives in Chiapas and Mexico as a whole. These groups have worked in conjunction with the Zapatistas to cover specific interests, such as non-violence with Las Abejas. Other groups have focused specifically on issues surrounding women, land rights, or electoral involvement. These groups have worked together as a whole to improve the living standards of indigenous people and provide more opportunities to live their lives as representatives of their unique cultures, outside of those offered by the government. The lack of mention of groups like Las Abejas in literature on Mexican Indigenous Social Movements points to this larger problem of erasure. There is a lack of connection between this group and the multitude of other groups that are working on behalf of indigenous people. This group has been erased from the more common understanding of indigenous activism.

D. APPO

In Oaxaca, a key group rose up in 2006 that has had a tremendous impact on indigenous communities. At a peak point of social discontent, a teacher's rebellion began that would pave the road for the start of an organization called APPO (the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca). In 2006 there was a sit-in in front of Oaxaca's public buildings to demand that the governor resign.<sup>78</sup> APPO and other groups involved in the sit-in were able to occupy the center square of the city of Oaxaca as well as take control of the privately owned radio and television stations in the area to inform the public of what was happening. The governor and other state officials were being forced to meet in private places because they could not enter their public offices.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately, despite APPO's commitment to non-violence and peaceful protest, government officials and the police responded with brutality killing and injuring people on multiple occasions.<sup>80</sup> This particular rebellion lasted for 6 months, proving to be one of the most influential events in Mexico's history.<sup>81</sup>

Although not strictly an indigenous group, APPO and other similar organizations were largely influenced by indigenous practices.<sup>82</sup> There were huge numbers of indigenous participants and supporters of the sit-in and related actions. Many of the groups fighting for social change in this region, such as APPO, have taken after indigenous traditions where community leaders are chosen through a community oriented selection process and such

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<sup>78</sup> Gustavo Esteva, "Enclosing the Enclosers," *Turbulence*, January 2007, <http://www.turbulence.org.uk/turbulence-1/enclosing-the-enclosers/>.

<sup>79</sup> Gustavo Esteva.

<sup>80</sup> Denham and C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion: Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca*.

<sup>81</sup> Denham and C.A.S.A. Collective.

<sup>82</sup> Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca: Testimony and Social Movements*.

leaders have limited power and are held accountable to act on behalf of the desires of the larger group.<sup>83</sup> However the indigenous influences on this organization are largely unrecognized as a part of an indigenous struggle. Indigenous participants and their cultural influences are critical players that are erased both from the basic understanding of APPO, but also from the understanding of indigenous activism as a whole.

## **II. A History of Indigenous Revolt**

Indigenous rebellions in Mexico have been occurring since the arrival of the Spanish. There have been numerous revolts and uprisings to protest the treatment of indigenous people. These rebellions have been largely overlooked and rarely focused on by academics. This means that the people involved in these rebellions and the impact they had have been mostly erased. I describe a few of these instances to demonstrate what is lost when the Zapatistas are the only ones recognized as indigenous organizers in Mexico. An oversimplification of indigenous history in Mexico has resulted in an erasure of these important events and those who organized them.

### **A. Activism in Chiapas**

Because of its distinct characteristics, the state of Chiapas has been the home to a number of these revolts. Chiapas is widely known as the home of the Zapatistas. However it is also the home of so many other forms of indigenous organizing and activism completely separate from the Zapatistas. Chiapas is a state with extremely high rates of poverty, as well as the third largest indigenous population in the country. It is home to 28 percent of

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<sup>83</sup> Stephen.

the indigenous people in Mexico.<sup>84</sup> Because of these factors, Chiapas has been the site of many forms of indigenous resistance as a result of harsh living and working conditions. These indigenous organized efforts include, but are not limited to, the Zapatistas. I start with the state of Chiapas to show that even within the state given that is most well known for its indigenous resistance, the full picture is rarely shown. This section fills in some of the gaps and points to the groups that are rarely seen as prominent indigenous activists.

Between the end of colonization in Mexico and the Mexican Revolution of 1910, there were a number of revolts involving indigenous people. One of the first major indigenous rebellions to take place in Chiapas was the Tzeltal revolt of 1712. This revolt was a product of over a hundred years of disease and violence caused by Spanish invaders.<sup>85</sup> Those who revolted, although largely Tzeltal, included people from 32 towns from around the area, with many different indigenous groups and languages represented.<sup>86</sup> This Mayan revolt would be the first of many over the next three hundred years. Half a century later, in 1767, a group of indigenous people and mine workers organized a rebellion in response to regulations demanding loyalty to the Spanish crown. Local authorities expelled a local Jesuit community and groups rose up to protest the unjust nature of this mandatory loyalty to the colonizing administration.<sup>87</sup> In the early 1800s, indigenous people had a significant contribution to the war against Spain and a newly won independent state. They united with other parts of the population that now identified as

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<sup>84</sup> Consejo Nacional de Población, "Infografía- Población Indígena."

<sup>85</sup> Victoria R. Bricker, "Documents Concerning the 'Tzeltal Revolt of 1712' in the Archivo General de Las Indias: Introduction, Indexes, and Transcripts," *Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies* The Foundation Research Department (n.d.), <http://www.famsi.org/research/bricker/>.

<sup>86</sup> Higgins, Nicholas P., *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion : Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian*.

<sup>87</sup> Higgins, Nicholas P.



Americans and wanted to separate themselves from the Spanish regime. They participated in the War of Independence both as Mexicans and as Indigenous people, hoping that a declaration of independence would mean more just societal conditions for their people<sup>88</sup>

From 1867-1869, the Chamula Indians held a series of rebellions known as the War of the Castes.<sup>89</sup> There are very few accounts of this rebellion and historians have struggled to determine the actual cause of the war and how it played out. The information that is available is heavily influenced by the colonial perspective and is based on the assumption of the indigenous groups involved to be ruthless and violent.<sup>90</sup> The limited amount of information on this rebellion further demonstrates the lack of academic literature that exists surrounding indigenous organizing in Mexico outside of the Zapatistas.

These are just a few examples of rebellions and forms of protest that have been taken to advocate for indigenous people in Chiapas throughout many time periods. There are multiple other efforts that have occurred over the last 500 years to express indigenous discontent and oppression. There are so many groups and organized rebellions that are overlooked when the history of Chiapas is oversimplified to just focus on the Zapatistas.

#### B. The Revolution of 1910

One of the most well known rebellions to modern day indigenous organizing occurred during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The indigenous peoples from the south played a prominent role in the restructuring of the country. The Revolution started in 1910

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<sup>88</sup> Higgins, Nicholas P.

<sup>89</sup> Higgins, Nicholas P.

<sup>90</sup> Nelson, "Crucifixion Stories, the 1869 Caste War of Chiapas, and Negative Consciousness: A Disruptive Subaltern Study."

as a result of discontent with the dictator of the time, Porfirio Diaz.<sup>91</sup> Peasants, the majority of whom were indigenous, dominated the southern part of the country. They united themselves under the common goal of land reform in the attempt to give the land back to the peasants and end the exploitation of their people by the elite. They took up arms to ensure that their agrarian interests would be reflected in the new state and drew attention to themselves by their surprising number of supporters.<sup>92</sup> Their leader Emilio Zapata rose to be one of the main figures of the Revolution. Although he was not elected as president, nor did he have the desire to be, Zapata and his followers had a tremendous influence over the outcome of the revolution and the first few presidents that were in power.<sup>93</sup>

The Revolution of 1910 drastically changed the course of Mexican history, and the peasants of the south were a huge part of the reason why. The revolution still allowed for the wealthy to rule the country but indigenous people had made themselves heard and the elites had been forced to listen.<sup>94</sup> The constitution of 1917 was one of the most progressive constitutions ever written, and included many protections for the peasants and workers of Mexico under Article 27 that was written to address land reform.<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately the state has not enforced or regulated most of this legislation that the peasants and workers fought so hard to have, and this has led to a continued pattern of repression and indigenous discontent since the implementation of the constitution. Most peasant land struggles took the form of organized land reform claims, petitions to reclaim colonized land, ambushes on

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<sup>91</sup> Judith Adler Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis* (New York: Homes and Meier Publishers, 1983).

<sup>92</sup> Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J Henderson, *The Mexico Reader- History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>93</sup> Judith Adler Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis*.

<sup>94</sup> Judith Adler Hellman.

<sup>95</sup> Ruth Berins Collier, *The Contradictory Alliance: State-Labor Relations and Regime Change in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley, 1992).

local land owners, and even occupation of local towns.<sup>96</sup> Even with all of these tactics, many people did not gain back land until decades later, some not even until the 1980s.<sup>97</sup>

Those who began to organize the modern day Zapatistas named themselves after Emilio Zapata because of his efforts to elevate indigenous voices during the Revolution of 1910 and fight for land reform. They wanted to associate themselves with Zapata and recognize the legacy of his fight in their own work. Those who used to be united under the idea of land reform are now united under the idea of indigenous autonomy, honoring the legacy of Emiliano Zapata.<sup>98</sup> However the literature describing these events does not make it seem as though the Zapatistas were continuing the work of the followers of Zapata. They merely explain that Emiliano Zapata was an important indigenous historical figure. The Revolution of 1910 and the contributions of indigenous people are not seen as a part of larger movement that connects to the Zapatistas.

### C. The Erasure of Indigenous Activism in Oaxaca

Perhaps nowhere is the unitary focus on the Zapatistas more problematic than with regard to Oaxaca. Because it is home the Zapatistas, Chiapas is usually known as the state of indigenous rebellion. However Oaxaca has had a tremendous amount of indigenous activism as well. By focusing on the Zapatistas, the efforts to organize in Oaxaca are erased and made invisible in the popular narrative, moreover the centrality of indigenous peoples to the movements of Oaxaca is often overlooked, was the case with the uprisings in 2006.

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<sup>96</sup> Aaron Bobrow-Strain, *Intimate Enemies: Landowners, Power, and Violence in Chiapas* (Duke University Press, 2007), p. 82-103

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87

<sup>98</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*.

Oaxaca is the state that sits right next to Chiapas, sharing many of the same defining characteristics. The two states are consistently ranked as the poorest states in Mexico, with large portions of their population living in extreme poverty.<sup>99</sup> With 16 different ethnic groups, Oaxaca is home to the largest number of indigenous people in Mexico.<sup>100</sup> Being one of the most diverse states in the country, Oaxaca, like Chiapas, has been the site of many social uprisings, as many of these groups have seen repression and a continued pattern of human rights abuses. In the year 2000, the PRI, the dominant political party that had held power for over 70 years, lost the presidential election to a representative from a competing party. However, in Oaxaca, the PRI managed to stay in control through violence, payoffs, and electoral fraud.<sup>101</sup>

Elsewhere in this chapter I point to two forms of indigenous organizing that have taken shape in Oaxaca - the implementation of *usos y costumbres* and the group APPO. These two examples are not the only ways that indigenous people in Oaxaca have taken a stand for indigenous issues. As with Chiapas, these are just a few of many efforts taken to promote indigenous political and social needs. However, these efforts in Oaxaca are largely overlooked because they are excluded from the popular narrative. These aspects are not looked at along side of the Zapatistas, nor are they discussed as a part of a larger indigenous movement. The influence that these groups have had on a local and national level has largely been ignored which lessens the impact that they could have. This leaves Oaxaca as a whole out of the picture and erases the participation of the many activists in

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<sup>99</sup> Denham and C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion: Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca*.

<sup>100</sup> Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca: Testimony and Social Movements*.

<sup>101</sup> Denham and C.A.S.A. Collective, *Teaching Rebellion: Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca*.

this state. An oversimplification of the history of indigenous activism in Mexico erases the organized efforts that have occurred outside of Chiapas. Groups in Oaxaca and other states are erased from the popular narrative of indigenous organizing in Mexico.

### **III. Reframing Legislative Successes**

In response to indigenous activism in Mexico, the government has responded with legislative action on multiple accounts to address the issues at hand. Article 27, the San Andres Accords, and *usos y costumbres* are three examples of legislation that have been proposed by, and often as a result of, indigenous protest. However in all three examples, the legislation did not solve the problems at hand or fully alleviate the barriers that indigenous people face in Mexico. The legislative actions taken have resulted in an erasure of the persisting problems facing indigenous communities and the larger systemic issues at play. These legislative actions also tend to make it seem like indigenous activism has ended, when the organized efforts around the issue persist, despite legislation being passed. It contributes to the perception that there is no one overarching arc of indigenous liberation, but rather there are these small movements that end with legislation.

#### **A. Article 27**

Article 27 of the Mexican constitution was implemented in 1917 when the new constitution was put in place after the Revolution of 1910. This article was meant to address the demands put forth by Emilio Zapata and his followers pertaining to land

reform.<sup>102</sup> Previously, haciendas, or large chunks of land owned by elites, were notorious for the terrible treatment of peasant laborers. The workers were often subjected to abuse, low pay, and difficult working conditions.<sup>103</sup> These demands for land reform were a huge part of the revolution of 1910 and Article 27 was the main policy that addressed all of the effort that Zapata and his followers had advocated for.<sup>104</sup> However, this article was assumed to fix most of the problems. With the end of the revolution, it was assumed that the issue of land reform was over, that the discussion had ended, and that peasants had gotten what they wanted.

Article 27 set up ejidos, a system of land distribution to peasants. Ejidos were plots of land given back to peasants as collectively owned farms within a community.<sup>105</sup> This was supposed to end the concept of haciendas and allow for local peasants to own their own land again. However, within the ejido system, there was often corruption and neglect on behalf of the government officials that were in charge of the ejido system. In some cases as few as three officials would be in charge of thousands of ejidos, affecting tens of thousands of people.<sup>106</sup> Ejidos were commonly limited to specific forms of agricultural activity so local workers often had little say over what their land was used for.<sup>107</sup> Much of the land distributed was of poor quality, a large majority unsuitable for growing crops.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Christopher Thomas, "The Inadequacy of Article 27 Reforms in Shaping Sustainable Ejidos" (University of Michigan, n.d.), <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/bitstream/handle/10535/1095/thomsc041400.pdf?sequence=1>, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> Christopher Thomas.

<sup>104</sup> Christopher Thomas.

<sup>105</sup> Christopher Thomas, p.5-9.

<sup>106</sup> Christopher Thomas, p.9.

<sup>107</sup> Christopher Thomas, p.7.

<sup>108</sup> Lance Selfa, "Mexico After the Zapatista Uprising," *International Socialism*, no. 75 (July 1997).

In 1992, the President of Mexico at the time, Carlos Salinas, proposed a number of reforms to Article 27 that would encourage foreign investment in agriculture, effectively ending the ejido system.<sup>109</sup> Many authors use these reforms as one of the key contributors to the Zapatista uprisings of 1994. However, the Zapatistas and the EZLN had been organizing for many years before Salinas announced the reforms. The Zapatistas were not simply reacting to the changes to Article 27 in 1992, they were reacting to a 500 year long series of unending let downs on the part of the government. They were continuing the same battle that so many before them had fought.

Article 27 was supposed to be the end of land reform protests in Mexico. However, between the end of the revolution and the beginning of the Zapatista uprisings, there were continuous revolts and pushbacks from the local peasants to express their discontent with the supposed “solution” implemented into the constitution.<sup>110</sup> Although the government recognized problems that persisted in the south of Mexico where the ejido system had the biggest impact, Article 27 remained the main way that the government had dealt with the problem. Because of the assumption of finality of a land reform movement, Article 27 was assumed a success despite the many inequalities and injustices that persisted.

Article 27 is the perfect example of erasure through legislative action. In this situation, in 1917 Article 27 was included into the constitution to appease the followers of Emilio Zapata and yet almost nothing happened to benefit rural communities until decades later. Even then the actions were limited and provided little help to the extremely impoverished lives that were affected. Then in 1992, Carlos Salinas wanted to take away

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<sup>109</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*.

<sup>110</sup> Eric P. Perramond, “Rise, Fall, and Reconfiguration of the Mexican ‘Ejido,’” *Geographical Review* 98, no. 3 (July 2008), [http://www.jstor.org/stable/40377336?seq=5#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40377336?seq=5#page_scan_tab_contents), p. 357.

Article 27 because he didn't think that it was needed anymore. He thought that international investment was more important than local agriculture.<sup>111</sup> Salinas used the guise of legislative action to make it seem like the problem was solved and other interests, such as foreign investment, should now be pursued instead. Article 27 has resulted in the erasure of the continued struggles of indigenous people and created a false sense of accomplishment despite continued poverty, exploitation, and in turn, continued discontent and activist efforts.

Article 27 is critical to understanding the continuity of a larger indigenous movement and why it is important to recognize the longevity of indigenous organizing. Many assumed that Article 27 resolved the concerns expressed by Zapata and his followers during the Revolution of 1910. And yet indigenous people have continued to organize and protest because this article was not sufficient in alleviating hundreds of years of discrimination and injustice. Article 27 has been the inspiration for many indigenous uprisings and activist efforts. It is also the perfect example of a false solution to a movement. Indigenous organizing did not start solely for the purpose of Article 27 and it did not die with its creation. This article is essential to understanding the government's treatment of indigenous communities and how they have been able to neglect indigenous needs for so long.

#### B. The San Andres Accords

One of the most well known projects in indigenous activism in Mexico is the San Andres Accords. In 1996, after much discussion and debate between numerous indigenous

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<sup>111</sup> Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders- New Imaginations of Political Possibility*.



groups, prominent Zapatista leaders and the Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo signed the San Andrés Accords. This peace agreement recognized the respect and rights of indigenous groups and granted the autonomy of their communities. It was agreed that indigenous people would have the right to be involved in the policy making process and be able to promote their cultural practices within their communities, including teaching Mayan history and language in schools. They would legally be able to establish their local political structure in what they found to be the most effective manner.<sup>112</sup>

Unfortunately, within a few months, it became clear that the Mexican government was not going to keep its word. President Ernesto Zedillo claimed that the Accords conflicted with the Mexican Constitution and needed to undergo a few alterations. The Zapatistas and the government went back to the negotiating table until the EZLN finally felt that the compromises had gone too far and that they could no longer approve of the agreement.<sup>113</sup> The government proposed the Indigenous Law but the frustrated EZLN turned it down because it lacked the respect and rights to autonomy that the original agreement had included.<sup>114</sup> After this, the Zapatistas decided that they would no longer seek the support of the Mexican government but that they would control the fate of their communities with or without the consent of the government. They have since structured a very complex but effective system that incorporates all community members and can function without a larger governing authority.<sup>115</sup>

Although it was Zapatista leaders that negotiated the San Andrés Accords, many distinct groups from around the country influenced the Accords. One of the key influences

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<sup>112</sup> van der Haar, "The Zapatista Uprising and the Struggle for Indigenous Autonomy."

<sup>113</sup> van der Haar.

<sup>114</sup> Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories*.

<sup>115</sup> Klein.

on the Accords was the Oaxaca legislation implementing *usos y costumbres* that was passed in 1995.<sup>116</sup> The success of the push for indigenous autonomy in Oaxaca was a part of the inspiration for the Zapatistas' signing of the San Andrés Accords.

The refusal of indigenous people to sign the San Andrés Accords helped protect against the potential for an overemphasis on the success of legislative action. Had they signed the San Andres Accords, it is likely that the Mexican government would have said that the issues facing indigenous communities were solved. It might have allowed them to turn a blind eye to any future protest and would discourage the public from paying much attention to indigenous activists. They would have been able to assume that the many indigenous efforts to combat oppression would end with this agreement.

The fight for indigenous autonomy in Mexico is one that has brought together many different groups on a regional and national level. A common goal that most of these groups share is to have recognized indigenous autonomy, so that groups are able to use their traditions and practices to decide who has authority, how laws are created, and what laws exist in their communities.<sup>117</sup> The San Andres Accords were a common focal point for many of these communities, groups, and organizations. The Accords called for the legal implementation of various levels of indigenous autonomy and involvement in the political system.<sup>118</sup> Although it has been largely credited to the Zapatistas, the San Andres Accords were inspired and influenced by many other groups.

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<sup>116</sup> Gaspar, "Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination in Mexico," *Cultural Survival*, March 1999, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/indigenous-rights-and-self-determination-mexico>.

<sup>117</sup> Gaspar.

<sup>118</sup> Gaspar.

### C. Usos y Costumbres

The last 40 years in Oaxaca have been ones of deepening repression and pushback as the peasants, teachers, indigenous groups, and students have sought to not only overthrow those in power, but also change the system to allow for more local autonomy.

Starting in 1995, but officially implemented in 1997, the state of Oaxaca passed legislation known as *usos y costumbres*. It allows for the election of municipal authorities through local communal based traditions without intervention from political parties.<sup>119</sup> Many people who were involved in the push for local autonomy in Oaxaca went to the National Indigenous Congress meeting in 1996. At this first meeting of the CNI in Mexico City, Zapatista representatives were inspired to organize a forum on Indigenous rights in San Cristóbal de las Casas to figure out how to push for a similar type of autonomy in Chiapas, as had been formally achieved in Oaxaca.<sup>120</sup> The advocacy for *usos y costumbres* coincided with advocacy for the San Andres Accords in Chiapas. Advocates for the two forms of legislation were influenced by each other. The agreements had different goals and effects but both had the intention of benefitting indigenous communities.<sup>121</sup>

This form of legislation is critical to the discussion of indigenous organizing because it is an official part of how the state of Oaxaca functions and it was inspired by traditional indigenous practices. This represents a significant effort by indigenous people to influence the state to act on behalf of indigenous interests. Even though it was actually successful,

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<sup>119</sup> Gaspar.

<sup>120</sup> Gaspar.

<sup>121</sup> Todd A. Eisenstadt, "Customary Practices, Women's Rights, and Multicultural Elections in Oaxaca," in *Politics, Identity, and Mexico's Indigenous Rights Movements* (American University, 2011), 104–28, <https://doi-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1017/CBO9780511976544>, p. 108.

*usos y costumbres* did not get nearly as much attention as the San Andres Accords. It is also less recognized as a part of a larger indigenous movement.

The implementation of *usos y costumbres* is another example of legislative action that has caused erasure. In this case, *usos y costumbres* was inspired by indigenous people, but it did not solve all problems facing indigenous communities in Oaxaca. *Usos y costumbres* has been beneficial in some communities, but has been problematic in communities where indigenous and non-indigenous people live together.<sup>122</sup> It has shown to discriminate against women and other minorities and allows the same people to rotate through positions of power.<sup>123</sup> However the state legislature has not had to address these problems because there is a common understanding that the implementation of this legislation would fix the problems at hand.<sup>124</sup>

*Usos y costumbres* has not been perfect and still needs to be restructured in order to be fully effective.<sup>125</sup> However it is critical to recognize a traditional structure used by certain indigenous groups to then be put into legislation. Unlike the San Andres Accords, this legislation was passed and has been commonly used within indigenous communities in Oaxaca. This is just one more example of progress in the fight for indigenous people that has largely lacked recognition and been erased. This huge part of Oaxacan history has not gotten nearly as much attention as the San Andres Accords. In turn, all of the work that was done to advocate for changes like *usos y costumbres* is erased. Additionally, the recognition that the legislation *has* gotten has been used to make it seem like the issues at hand have been solved, when in reality there are still many levels of discrimination left in place. *Usos y*

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<sup>122</sup> Eisenstadt, p. 113-117.

<sup>123</sup> Eisenstadt, p. 117-123.

<sup>124</sup> Eisenstadt, p. 124.

<sup>125</sup> Eisenstadt, p. 127-128.

*costumbres* is a great example of these two different kinds of erasure- a more general erasure of indigenous people outside of the Zapatistas, and erasure through an overemphasis on legislative action.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This section points to what is left out when the popular narrative focuses on one small part of the larger picture. These many critical players are left out of the picture when the Zapatistas are given sole credit for work done to improve life in indigenous communities. Although I do not think that the Zapatistas deserve any less press for their incredible work, it is critical to understand the larger scope of the issue and recognize the many other groups that are working with and along side of the Zapatistas. Chiapas and Oaxaca are both rich with groups that are actively organizing around particular issues concerning indigenous communities. Even outside of these states, in greater Mexico, groups like the National Indigenous Congress are taking huge steps, like nominating an indigenous woman for president. Indigenous women across the country are coming together to represent their particular needs as indigenous women and push for the issues that affect them most. The groups discussed in this chapter and the work that they have done is erased when they are excluded from the narrative of indigenous activism in Mexico. A proper history that includes a more comprehensive understanding of indigenous rebellions over time is necessary to properly grasp how groups today have been shaped. Oversimplifying history erases important historical events that have impacted how indigenous communities have developed over time. Lastly, an overemphasis on legislative action regarding indigenous communities can result in a false sense of success and an erasure of the problems that persist.

The erasure that is seen in indigenous organizing in Mexico is not isolated but rather can be seen in many movements, three of which are explored in the next chapter. The discussion of these movements further solidifies these patterns of erasure: erasure of critical players, erasure through the oversimplification of history, and erasure through an overemphasis on legislative action. The broader implications of these patterns of erasure shows that this problem is rooted in the ways that social movements are studied and understood, both academically and in the popular discourse.

## **Chapter 4: The Broader Implications of Erasure**

As I highlighted the patterns of erasure that exist in indigenous organizing in Mexico, I began to notice similar patterns emerge in the context of other social movements in the United States. I found that erasure was not isolated to the work of indigenous groups in Mexico but that many movements reflect these patterns. It is common for the popular social narrative to focus on specific moments or aspects of a larger ongoing movement, which allows for many perspectives to be forgotten, or erased. In this chapter, I continue to develop the patterns of erasure that I have previously defined: the erasure of critical actors, an overemphasis on legislative action, and erasure through the oversimplification of history. I use Native American Activism, the Civil Rights Movement, and United States Feminism to further explore these three forms of erasure. Although these patterns can be seen in many different social movements, I chose these three in particular to help better understand what these patterns of erasure look like.

### **I. The Invisibility of Native American Activism**

Standing Rock was an event that reminded the world of the history of oppression and exploitation that is consistently forgotten about – or at least historicized rather than seen as presently occurring. Standing Rock highlighted the continued persecution of indigenous groups by the United States government.<sup>126</sup> History books tend to make out the poor treatment of indigenous people as actions of the past; a mistake that occurred long ago. Although the colonization and invasion of Europeans into the homes of Native

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<sup>126</sup> Joanne Barker, "Corporation and the Tribe," *American Indian Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 243–70.

Americans is perceived as negative by many, it is painted in our minds as a historical event that has long since been over.<sup>127</sup>

Native American activism as a whole is the perfect example of an erasure of critical players. Very few would recognize an ongoing Native American social movement in the United States, or even be able to name important events in Native American history. The majority of American history pertaining to native peoples has been erased or simplified into a basic story that leaves out critical aspects. There have been many important points throughout history where Native people have fought for issues concerning their communities and yet these efforts have been erased along with other parts of native participation in American society. In 1911 the Society of American Indians (SAI) was formed as the first national pan-Indian group. Then in 1944 the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) continued the work of the SAI once they had been disbanded. In the 1960s, the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) formed alongside the American Indian Movement (AIM) and efforts of other more general organizations.<sup>128</sup> These groups all worked together to fight for the same issues, pushing back against the same government neglecting their rights as indigenous people.<sup>129</sup> These are just a few of many groups that have formed on behalf of Native interests in the United States and yet even these are rarely discussed.

The Supreme Court is one institution that has used its authority to strip the power of native communities in the United States. In response, many court cases have been

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<sup>127</sup> Joanne Barker.

<sup>128</sup> Doug Kiel, "Rebuilding Indigenous Nations: Native American Activism and the Long Red Power Movement," *Expedition* 55, no. 3 (December 1, 2013).

<sup>129</sup> Doug Kiel.



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waged against the government by Native peoples to combat systems of oppression.<sup>130</sup>

These court cases demonstrate just one avenue of activism that indigenous people have taken for centuries to fight for their needs as a community.

In addition to these legal battles, Native people in the United States have gotten attention for being involved in the Occupy movements and Standing Rock. However it is rarely understood that Occupy and Standing Rock are ongoing movements. They are built from many years of pushback against the government's consistent prioritizing of corporations over indigenous lives. They are intended to highlight the longstanding history of oppression, they are not just pointing to one moment in time.<sup>131</sup>

Leaders at Standing Rock emphasized their hope to keep the action moving and have this moment of activism continue into a more permanent set of priorities, even after the decision around the pipeline had been made. They hoped to continue working towards a society that doesn't operate at the expense of the natural world, but that works to coexist with nature.<sup>132</sup> They hoped that non-indigenous people would take what they learned in the camps at Standing Rock about how to live sustainably, and use this knowledge to teach others how to do the same.<sup>133</sup> This shows the longevity of the goals of this movement. Standing Rock was not merely about this one pipeline. It was about the priorities of the government. It was about those in power respecting the needs of these Native groups and being pushed to see the world from a new perspective. The solution was never going to be the banning of a pipeline. That was just one small step in a series of a long-standing

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<sup>130</sup> Joanne Barker, "Corporation and the Tribe."

<sup>131</sup> Joanne Barker.

<sup>132</sup> Naomi Klein, "Lessons From Standing Rock- Daring to Dream," in *No Is Not Enough - Reisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* (Haymarket Books, 2017).

<sup>133</sup> Naomi Klein.

movement that native groups are constantly engaged in. Indigenous people in the United States have been fighting for their communities and the earth since the invasion of the first Europeans.<sup>134</sup> This is not a battle that started with the Occupy, with climate change, or with Standing Rock, but one that has been going on for centuries. An erasure has occurred here, where the many specific oppressive actions of the government towards native people has been made invisible, and in turn native activism to combat this oppression has been erased and ignored.

The fact that so much Native American activism has been completely erased from the popular American understanding of history relates to the erasure of many of the indigenous groups in Mexico and the important work they have done for the promotion of indigenous rights. As discussed in chapter 3, there are countless numbers of indigenous groups all over Mexico, each with different histories and cultural practices. Many of these groups and the activist work that they have done is forgotten when the focus is put on the Zapatistas. For native groups in the United States, the entire population and their many efforts to organize are often made completely invisible. Rather than one group, like the Zapatistas, standing out and receiving lots of recognition while others are overlooked, the entire movement has remained largely invisible. A long history of oppression as well as the many ways that Native Americans have organized on behalf of their communities is largely forgotten about and erased.

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<sup>134</sup> Doug Kiel, "Rebuilding Indigenous Nations: Native American Activism and the Long Red Power Movement."

## II. Looking Beyond the Civil Rights Movement to Black Liberation

Following Keeang Yamahtta Taylor (2016), I use black liberation to refer to any social or political organizing done on behalf of black lives in the United States to combat racism.<sup>135</sup> Society presents the Civil Rights Movement of the mid twentieth century as beginning in 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education*, and ending with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the voting Rights Act of 1965 after a few years of large protests and speeches.<sup>136</sup> However it could be claimed that the Civil Rights movement goes far before 1954, and far after 1965. In fact one can pin-point the 1930s as a key starting point as the United States saw the changes brought on by the end of World War II.<sup>137</sup> Those who have authority have been able to emphasize the existence of formal racial equality, in the sense that both black and white citizens can vote, hold office, and legally have all of the same rights. All other existing problems that disproportionately affect black communities are blamed on the failures of black people, and not on the institutions that supposedly ensure equality.<sup>138</sup>

The lack of recognized continuity between these supposedly distinct movements has led to a falsely perceived success of legislative action, and therefore falsely perceived finality to a movement. In the 1970s, after the activism of the 50s and 60s had created legislative change, success had transformed itself into colorblindness. Those in power dared to say that they no longer saw color. They claimed that racism was dead and so the problems of black communities were of their own doing, not the result of racist

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<sup>135</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2016).

<sup>136</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 91, no. No. 4 (March 2005): 1233–63.

<sup>137</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall.

<sup>138</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall.

institutions.<sup>139</sup> The perceived end of the Civil Rights Movement allowed for an assumption that the Civil Rights Amendments of 1964 had eliminated racism and prevented discrimination from ever occurring again.<sup>140</sup> The need for Black Lives Matter arose because of this colorblindness and the tendency to ignore the continued discrimination against black communities. Police brutality and its disproportionate target of black men is a result of a lack of recognition to the racist institutions at play.<sup>141</sup> The election of President Obama has often been used as proof to say that racism is over. There was now a black president, so how could black communities still insist that they were not being given equal opportunities?<sup>142</sup> Colorblindness has allowed the problems facing black communities to be ignored because it was understood that the Civil Rights Movement was over, racism had been terminated, and therefore black people should have no more reason to complain.<sup>143</sup>

It seems clear that black liberation has been the continuation of one long movement, a fight against racism and all of the many layers that it permeates in our society. Emancipation was not a solution, Suffrage was not a solution, the Civil Rights Acts were not a solution, and even a black President was not a solution to the hundreds of years of systemic racism at play. And yet in each of these instances, these small steps were assumed to be the final goal, the final solution, and yet continuously we see new uprisings by black communities to draw attention to the problems that endure. The assumed success and finality of the Civil Rights Movement is not only inaccurate, it has allowed racism and inequality to persist without being recognized on a political level.

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<sup>139</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*.

<sup>140</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor.

<sup>141</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor.

<sup>142</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor.

<sup>143</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor.

The false sense of success and the supposed colorblindness that occurred after the Civil Rights Movement with the legislation passed in 1964 can be paralleled with Article 27 and its relation to indigenous organizing in Mexico. Both actions taken by the government – Article 27 in Mexico and the Civil Rights Acts in the US – occurred because of uprisings by marginalized groups. However in both situations the core, underlying problem was not solved by these legislative actions. The marginalized groups affected continued to experience the very injustices that they were protesting against in the first place. And yet in both situations, Mexican and American societies were able to create the narrative that the problem at hand had disappeared. The activist work done outside of these strictly defined social movements has been erased because of these legislative acts.

These similarities point to a larger thematic problem at hand. The erasure caused by legislative action demonstrates how social movements are portrayed in societies is not accurate when representing the continuation of the problem and social discontent within the affected communities. If instead, the continuities of a movement such as black liberation were more widely portrayed, there would more space to recognize the work that continues to be done as well as the injustices that persist. Not only would it prevent erasure of the people working to combat racism, but also it would prevent the erasure of the persisting problem. It would be much harder to pretend that a systematic problem is solved through a simple piece of legislation if there were more clear connections drawn between uprisings and organized efforts.

### III. United States Feminism – More than Just Waves

Feminism in the United States most strongly shows erasure through the oversimplification of history. For the feminist movement, “Waves of Feminism” is a perfect example of the cycles of protest theory that was introduced in Chapter 2. This theory says that social movements appear in cycles- or waves in this case- of organized efforts. In between these waves there is a supposed quiet and lack of organization that erases the efforts that are actually being done during this time. In this last chapter I showed how many of the groups and their work that has been erased when only the most well known events are recognized in the popular narrative. When only certain events and points in time are recognized as part of an indigenous movement, much of the critical work done by indigenous groups in Mexico is erased. In this section, I show how the same has been done for feminism in the United States.

Feminism in the US is often described to have started with the suffragist movement and the Women’s Rights Convention of 1848. The right for women (more specifically white women) to vote is usually considered the main defining factor of the first wave of feminism that spans from 1848 to 1920.<sup>144</sup> The second wave is thought to have arisen in the 1960s, supposedly with a wider consideration for the diverse perspectives of women.<sup>145</sup> The third wave is usually described as the last wave, or the current wave. It began in the nineties and has been dominated by intersectionality and an even stronger push to include more perspectives in feminism than just straight white women.<sup>146</sup> However, if we look more closely at the “wave” narrative of feminism in the United States, it becomes clear that it

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<sup>144</sup> Nancy Hewitt, *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (Rutgers University Press, 2010).

<sup>145</sup> Nancy Hewitt, p. 1-10.

<sup>146</sup> Nancy Hewitt.

limits the movement. It reduces feminism to small components, not recognizing the efforts of those other than white women that occurred in the same time frame. Many important groups and critical moments are left out by segmenting feminism into waves that only include certain parts of history, rather than encompassing the entirety of the feminist movement.<sup>147</sup>

The first wave does not account for the black women that stood up during slavery, as well as after emancipation, to push for black women's rights, and their specific efforts towards black women's suffrage.<sup>148</sup> The second wave is often limited to white women's efforts to talk about race, rather than actually including multiracial feminism and the women of color that were writing and teaching about their own perspectives.<sup>149</sup> Third wave feminism, because it is posed to be the only wave that includes women of color and their work, solidifies the idea that they were never a part of any other wave and allows the diverse set of women activists previous to the 1990s to be further ignored and forgotten.<sup>150</sup>

Wave theory additionally leaves out all of the work done between these "waves."<sup>151</sup> It does not recognize the women that came before the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and the progress that they had made previous to the fight for suffrage. The period after the nineteenth amendment, between the 1920s and the 1960s, is largely forgotten in regards to the feminist activism that took place. Lastly, many try to argue that the third wave has ended and that no further progress can be made because sexism has been eliminated.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Nancy Hewitt.

<sup>148</sup> Nancy Hewitt, *p. 15-20*.

<sup>149</sup> Nancy Hewitt, *p. 39-60*.

<sup>150</sup> Nancy Hewitt, *p. 99*.

<sup>151</sup> Nancy Hewitt.

<sup>152</sup> Michaele L. Ferguson, "Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (March 2010): 247-53.

According to the wave narrative, it is as if the before and after period of each wave consists of no activism at all on behalf of women, erasing the work of women that continued to organize.

Recently a new concept of “choice feminism” has dominated modern feminism.<sup>153</sup> Choice feminism can be defined as “the widespread belief... that the women’s movement has liberated women to make whatever choices they want.”<sup>154</sup> This concept is problematic because it assumes that women make choices solely based on what they desire. It ignores the oppressive systemic influences and societal pressures that can influence the choices that women make on a daily basis. It prevents feminists from being able to criticize aspects of society because some women still find it appealing and choose to conform to gender norms.<sup>155</sup> This phenomenon of “choice feminism” was created because it is assumed that sexism has been defeated and that women are now able to make these choices. The women that fought during the first two waves of feminism, have made it possible for the women of the present to make decisions for themselves.<sup>156</sup> Because sexism is over, feminism is no longer needed and the movement has ended. And yet, one still sees actions such as the Women’s March on Washington and the inability of a woman to be elected as President that reveal the persisting problems that women face everyday and the reciprocating activism of women to combat these problems. Most recently, with the surge of sexual assault allegations that have come out against some of America’s most respected and famous men, many people have been pushed to reconsider how common sexist tendencies are in United

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<sup>153</sup> Michaele L. Ferguson.

<sup>154</sup> Michaele L. Ferguson.

<sup>155</sup> Michaele L. Ferguson.

<sup>156</sup> Michaele L. Ferguson.



States culture.<sup>157</sup> The popular narrative describes feminism in a very compartmentalized and limited sense that allows certain perspectives to be erased, and allows a false sense of success to be accomplished that assumes that sexism has been eradicated.

The wave narrative that has dominated feminism erases many groups throughout history that have played a critical role in the movement. It has allowed white women to get most of the recognition and allows us to forget about many of the women of color that have been contributing to the advancement of women's rights for centuries. The wave narrative also allows us to think that the third wave may have already ended and there is no longer a need for feminism. The problems that arise from the wave narrative would be improved if there were more connections drawn between the supposed waves and more recognition of the lesser-known contributors. Like with indigenous activism in Mexico, an oversimplification of history has erased many important parts of the past that are critical in understanding the issues at hand today.

#### **IV. The Relevance of Other Movements**

Black liberation, Native American activism, and feminism in the United States are just three of the movements that demonstrate these patterns of erasure. The tendency of the popular social narrative to focus on specific moments or aspects of a larger ongoing movement, allows for many perspectives to be forgotten, or erased. It also allows for a false sense of success in assuming that the problem was solved or eradicated. Additionally, it assumes that movements were completely ended with these supposed solutions, delegitimizing those who continue to speak out against the problems that remain. Social

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<sup>157</sup> Me Too Movement, "You Are Not Alone," Me Too, n.d., [metoomvmt.org](http://metoomvmt.org).

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movements such as these need to be more broadly defined to allow for more recognition of lesser known aspects and an avoidance of these patterns of erasure.

Many social movements have seen these problems arise: the erasure of critical players, erasure from an overemphasis on legislative action, and erasure through the oversimplification of history. These problems are apparent in indigenous organizing in Mexico but the presence of them in other movements as well shows that it is bigger than this one movement. These other three movements- black liberation, Native American activism, and United States feminism- are used to gain a deeper understanding of what these problems say about how social movements are studied and discussed.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

My experience in Chiapas allowed me to see the extreme indigenous pride that is present in this part of Mexico. From conversations with my indigenous friends, visits to local communities, touring CIDECI (a local indigenous university), and from experiencing the very visible presence of indigenous people in the city of San Cristobal, it quickly became clear to me that this pride is not a product of twenty years of Zapatista rebellion, but of hundreds of years of social organizing and fighting to for the greater visibility and representation of indigenous people against Spanish conquerors, early Mexican dictators, and now the current Mexican state. These efforts by indigenous people across Mexico cannot be condensed into the actions of the Zapatistas. Their resistance has been incredibly complex and drawn out, with many periods of repression and repeated organized resistance since the invasion of the Spanish.

Many authors describe the Zapatista uprising as its own entity, not as an uprising that was a continuation of many years of protest. However it could alternatively be viewed as one aspect of a long drawn out process of pushing the government to listen to the indigenous perspective. By not recognizing these connections, there is an erasure of critical players, an oversimplification of history, and an overemphasis put on legislative action.

There seems to be a pattern in social movements where they are recognized as much less than they actually are. These critical social movements are limited to moments in time or specific events that are falsely solved by legislative action. However in reality, these movements are more elaborate and complex than what they are recognized as. The problems at hand – racism, sexism, and indigenous rights – cannot be solved with one piece of legislation, and yet they are continuously portrayed as though they are. When these

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movements resurface, the world seems surprised that the problem is still present and much time and effort is spent denying it. With this thesis, I want to bring this pattern to light. I want to make these connections to explore what happens when the complexity and longevity of these movements is not recognized.

In this thesis I was not able to cover every single indigenous act of protest in Mexico but tried to highlight just a few. There are still many uprisings, groups, and organized efforts that were not mentioned and yet still are pertinent to understanding the full scale of a movement that is commonly oversimplified. These other groups still deserve to be recognized and emphasized, however because of my limited resources, time, and space, I was not able to cover every single one. I hope that in future research, these many other contributions can continue to be uncovered and recognized for their importance.

I would hypothesize that there are also many more movements in the United States as well in other parts of the world that exemplify the patterns that were pointed to in Chapter 4. Black Liberation, Native American Activism, and United States Feminism are not the only movements where these patterns are present. Once again, for the purposes of this paper I had to focus on a few specific movements in order to efficiently illustrate the patterns. I hope that future research can continue to discover how erasure manifests itself in other movements and the damage it causes.

Even with my inability to cover every indigenous contribution in Mexico and every movement that shows similar erasures, my intention was to point to these overarching patterns that seem to be present across movements. My goal was to raise awareness of the problem of a limited narrative and demonstrate some of the ways in which groups are erased.

Most importantly, I hope that this thesis shows the ways in which social movements can be studied more effectively in the future, in ways that don't create an erasure of critical components. This would entail recognizing the continuity of social movements and the connections between the prominent moments in time. It would mean being intentional about which players are given credit and highlighting the contributions of the lesser-known participants. It would require celebrating when political or policy goals are achieved but not encouraging a misconception that the war has been won, and all of the problems are solved. I hope that my paper has pointed to some of these problems and will push academia in the future to take these steps to avoid patterns of erasure.

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