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INTRODUCTION

*Indigenous Governance and Development: How Do Community Members Respond?*¹

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In this era of reconciliation and unprecedented challenges – exemplified by the 2015 landmark report and recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada (Niezen 2013; TRCC 2015); the Aborigines' shared effort with Parks Australia to close Uluru to tourism in 2019 (Everingham, Peters, and Higgins-Desbiolles 2021); the current COVID-19 global pandemic that has caused comparable crises in Indigenous communities, such as the Diné (Navajo) in the U.S. and the Yanomami in Brazil, and non-Indigenous communities worldwide (see, among others, Smith L. 2021; Wang 2021); and the decades-long threats that fossil fuel extraction and development have posed to indigenous health and land rights in places such as Ecuador and Alaska (see, among others, Berry 1975; Coates 1991; Coyne and Hopfinger 2011; Herrmann 2019; Postero and Tockman 2020) –, indigenous approaches to government, community social programs, and economic development have necessarily taken forms that blend cultural continuation with strategic or forced alteration.

Notwithstanding common opportunities available to and challenges facing all Indigenous peoples globally, the idiosyncratic history of each Indigenous community and the particular social, political, and economic contexts in which these are set have allowed for the customization and periodic revising of governance and development practices. Such a notion of uniqueness in a local setting has been pushed further by scholars like Benjamin Gregg (2020), who went as far as questioning the applicability

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of the term indigenous on a broad, international scale – thus also doubting the efficacy of umbrella instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations 2007). Rather, Gregg envisioned the state, with its corresponding policy instrument the “indigenous rights state” (2020, 106 and *segg.*), as the only legal and political context within which indigenous rights, which are always internal and never international, can be constitutionally recognized according to the kind of state and the unique history and status of the local Indigenous peoples. Gregg’s perspective challenges the more established view that sees Indigenous peoples and indigeneity as valuable, if not necessary, actors in a decolonized international arena (see, among others, Lightfoot 2016; Sarson 2019; Simpson 2014; Tucker 2013).

Setting semantics aside, contemporary indigenous cultures and practices of self-governance stem from and, at the same time, intersect with various aspects of indigenous experiences that include identity (see, among many, Alfred 2009; Poliandri 2011), the retention and change of customary leadership and traditional political practices (see, among many, Hania and Graben 2019; Nas, Nurlinah, and Haryanto 2019), economic development (see, among many, Hotte *et al.* 2018), relations with state governments, international political bodies, and corporate entities (see, among many, Chase 2019; Shadian 2017, 2018), sustainability and resource conservation (see, among many, Artelle *et al.* 2019; Diver *et al.* 2019; Lee *et al.* 2019), Indigenous nationhood and nation-building (see, among many, Cornell 2015; Poliandri 2016; Seelau and Seelau 2014), migration, and activism, in no particular order of importance when considered on a general basis. These dynamics, which have developed as reactions to and/or in collaboration with non-Indigenous international, national, regional, and local political bodies, have often affected or altered the social and cultural contexts and daily experiences of Indigenous community members.

At the same time, the unique prioritization of such order by specific Indigenous communities, whether within the borders of a modern state or across multiple states, and, by result, their tailored approach to governance become then critical when considering individual cases in specific socio-geographic and political contexts. Keeping the political aspect of these processes as a backdrop, this special issue of *Ethnologies* offers a collection of case studies that address several of these aspects of indigenous experience, exploring how members of Indigenous and local communities worldwide have maintained or adjusted their social and cultural practices to tackle challenges and take advantage of opportunities in current times.

Identities

Identity – which may be conceptualized as the triangulation of self-identification, identification by others, and identification of others in the speaker’s mental social map (Poliandri 2011) – is a dimension of human experience that has affected the development of intra- and inter-community relationships for many, if not most, Indigenous peoples across the globe. The questions of “who is” and “who is not” have functioned as barriers, shelters, or sources of power and representation (and self-representation) which, in turn, have shaped or greatly affected the lives of Indigenous individuals and groups.

Indrakshi Tandon, in this volume, illustrates how stereotypical and paternalistic images of India’s indigenous peoples, which were crystallized during British colonialism, have remained in post-colonial India to shape relations between tribal (or *adivasi*) and non-tribal people as well as tribal peoples and the state. Such images – which include the portraying of tribal people as backward, disrespectful of legality, welfare dependent, and financially irresponsible – are employed in the maintenance of existing social hierarchies that see tribal people at a disadvantage compared to caste communities.

Tandon also sheds light onto the mechanism by which stereotypes and imagined identities not only shape the relations between Bhil tribal and non-tribal peoples, but they also affect the way in which the Bhil construct their identities. The author demonstrates how, at times, the Bhil strategically choose to align with mainstream identities to gain access to benefits and resources; a strategy that, although it may seem to reveal their acceptance of a socially inferior status, nonetheless discloses a degree of agency and resistance to tackle unfavorable socio-economic conditions.

William Bissou, also in this volume, discusses the retainment of indigenous rights to land, linked to customary practices and traditional occupancy in pre-colonial and colonial times, in the current city of Douala, Cameroon. These rights were established during German colonization and were solidified in the post-independence governmental effort to recognize indigenous rights. Such efforts, which were enshrined in a series of constitutional amendments in the 1980s, signified the politicization of indigeneity by the government, which aimed at capturing indigenous votes against the non-Indigenous opposition. Furthermore, such a politicization of indigeneity resulted in the creation of a new policy by which Douala mayors must be of indigenous heritage. This guarantees Indigenous people a share of

the power in land management and transactions. Thus, indigenous identity has become strictly intertwined with urban development and land tenure.

In this perspective, Bissou sheds light on how local Indigenous people have been able to use indigenous identity as a political tool in both their reclamation of land rights and power. He demonstrates that the strategic use of indigenous identities has become a governance tool in the hands of Indigenous communities as well as a source of empowerment in reaction to colonial and post-colonial disenfranchisement.

This, of course, does not come free of challenges, as different Indigenous groups compete with one another for land control and power over development projects in Douala. At times, such a situation has resulted in the impossibility to carry out urban development projects that require some level of compromise and the sharing of benefits. It is somewhat comforting, though, that such a framework implies nonetheless agency on the part of this Indigenous population.

Indigenous Leadership

The role that Indigenous leadership plays (or should play) in the current development of indigenous governance varies in different geopolitical contexts. Whether as bridges between their people and external institutions and powers, guides for their communities in rapidly changing political and economic contexts or, when devoid of authority they once held, reclaimers of such traditional legitimacy, these leaders are undoubtedly linked to the development of governance in their communities.

Susan Chand and Lemmel Thomas, in this issue, illustrate such a complex scenario focusing on the role of the *Toshaos* (Captains), traditional leaders presiding over the village councils as mediator between their people and the government's imposed anti-COVID measures in Guyana. *Toshaos* guarantee "cultural continuity," which entails their role as guides for their people for the use of traditional practices and beliefs in the current world (where space is not exclusively indigenous).

Chand and Thomas, the latter a *Toshaos* himself, use the term "resiliency" to define the *Toshaos'* approach to governance. In this, they reflect the principle that Hanrahan identified for Canadian First Nations that "[...] without cultural match, [Indigenous] governance is doomed" (2016, 81; parentheses added), as well as the notion that "[n]ew governance models can look very different from pre- and early colonial models. It is the

[indigenous] values, then, that have to shape indigenous governance; actual practices and structures do not have to be, and indeed, cannot usually be replicated” (Hanrahan 2016, 82; parentheses added).

Chand and Thomas shed light on a variety of leadership styles and approaches that village *Toshaos* have adopted when tackling the sensitive issue of presenting and, eventually, implementing state-mandated measures in relation to the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented to the Indigenous communities of Guyana. These leadership styles range from full compliance with and deference to governmental programs to taking a creative approach when rejecting the government’s COVID-19 protocol. This implies that the *Toshaos* must assume a mediating role between the government and their communities with the intent of finding creative ways to culturally match (thus raising levels of support for and compliance with) externally imposed measures such as mask wearing, social distancing, and frequent hand washing. The accomplishment of such a difficult task in the context of the current health crisis speaks volumes about the importance of *Toshaos* leadership in a successful model of indigenous governance.

Many indigenous governments have engaged in what Angela Riley (2007) called “good Native governance,” a theoretical perspective that identifies effective indigenous governance with those practices that allow citizens freedom of exit and dissent, are based on indigenous principles, provide group members and outsiders with forums to resolve disputes and, most importantly, constitute a cultural match with the Indigenous group’s value system. Riley’s perspective builds on and complements models, such as the now classic one by Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) economist Dean Howard Smith (1994a; 1994b; 2000), who theorized the necessity of a robust economic component for the successful exercise of culturally-matched indigenous sovereignty. Although Riley focused on the (re) creation of indigenous governance rather than economic development as Smith did, she nonetheless echoed Smith’s and inspired Hanrahan’s central notion according to which culturally matched institutions benefit from a high degree of support from the Indigenous communities and, therefore, have greater chance to be effective in tackling indigenous problems and needs, as they are identified and prioritized by the Indigenous communities themselves.

Karen Lopez Hernandez’s case study of the Wayuu people of Colombia, in this volume, highlights the intersection of traditional ideas and practices of indigenous governance with the needs stemming from current social and political action. Specifically, Lopez Hernandez illustrates the challenge

of blending traditional forms of indigenous governance with forms of leadership more effective in dealing and negotiating with state institutions and corporate interests.

In the twenty-first century, Wayuu decentralized leadership has had to adapt to a reality in which state programs and corporate resource extraction projects affect all communities on a larger scale than just local communities led by lineage leaders in villages. Lopez Hernandez discusses how the path to effective implementation of the recent constitutional provisions, which opened up funding and development opportunities to Indigenous communities of Colombia, has seen the creation of associations, which comprise several Wayuu communities, led by newly created mediator figures. In this context, such a development of leadership has created a more effective access to state funding and put greater decisional power in the hands of the association's member communities; however, this has also resulted in both internal conflict and, at times, the devaluation of traditional leaders, thus leading to the undermining of Wayuu traditional political culture. Such a discrepancy also intersects with and is affected by issues related to mistrust due to the identity of such mediators – who are often part Wayuu, have been raised outside Wayuu communities and, in some cases, do not speak the Wayuu language – or rumors, however grounded, that these mediators operate based on personal agendas.

The Wayuu leaders have developed different and, sometimes, conflicting strategies to navigate the political waters in local, regional, and national contexts. Parallely, some communities have responded by abandoning the association model and renewed their trust in traditional authority to pursue direct negotiations. Other communities have retained mediator leaders and, in some circumstances, have initiated or suffered from conflict with neighboring communities over competing interests.

It appears that Wayuu traditional governance practices are for the most part ill adjusted to negotiations with state-level institutions and multinational corporations. In this context, it seems that the challenge before these Indigenous communities lies in a dichotomy between, on the one hand, developing new forms of broader leadership that are better equipped to serve Indigenous communities' interests before state and corporate forces and, on the other hand, retaining traditional leadership and governance practices that do not seem to fit well within the existing structure of interactions with state institutions and economic forces.

It is certainly reassuring that a recent Colombian constitutional reform

has shown great interest in the well-being of Indigenous communities and placed an increased degree of agency in the hands of Indigenous people to achieve this, thus allowing for the creation of these new leadership institutions. Lopez Hernandez suggests that the Wayuu Indigenous communities seem now invested with a greater amount of power than ever before and, therefore, seem better equipped to tackle the challenge of adapting their traditional political culture and practices to their present needs.

Development, Culture of Governance, and Community Relations

Guillermo López Varela and María Cristina Manzano-Munguía, in this volume, discuss the current process of governance-building among the Ngigua people of San Marco Tlacoyalco, an Indigenous community in the state of Puebla, Mexico. The authors shed light on the grassroots process that has allowed the Ngigua leadership to employ specific elements – namely, a series of practices of conservation and use of natural resources, a community radio station, and a food-sharing practice to combat scarcity in times of need – for the definition and practice of effective, culturally-matched development and, consequently, the shaping of Ngigua governance based on the principle of commonality. Such an indigenous model of development aims at building and managing social relations horizontally – what López Varela and Manzano-Munguía refer to as a “rhizomatic model” – where benefits are manufactured by and made available to all community members.

The authors illustrate how, in San Marcos Tlacoyalco, this form of horizontal development, and the strengthening of community that has resulted from it, is exemplified by three community initiatives: firstly, the collective care for the *jagüey*, a traditional artificial implement for the communal collection of water, which is related to the practices of conservation and use of natural resources. The second of such initiatives is the work of the community-run Radio Ngigua 89.7, which provides the Ngigua people with an instrument to promote solidarity and seek financial and emotional support from within Mexico and, at the same time, from transnational Ngigua migrants across the U.S.-Mexico border. Furthermore, this media instrument gives voice to the Ngigua people and allies, allowing them to share their experiences and tell their own stories directly, a privilege which, usually, is not afforded to indigenous peoples with often negative consequences in terms of image and narrative accuracy (Norman et al. 2020). Finally, such horizontal development is exemplified by the recurring practice of the *baskets of solidarity*, community feasts based

on food sharing that allow the community of San Marco to achieve control of its food resources as well as fight poverty according to the Ngigua values of commonality and reciprocity, thus escaping the tenets of capitalist accumulation.

These initiatives and, more broadly, the Ngigua principles which underpin them provide a recent alternative to centuries-old relations of power based on the assimilation of Indigenous peoples by the Mexican state. This demonstrates, if there were any need, that Indigenous communities can survive and, in fact, even thrive using development models based on their own epistemologies. This perspective, of course, does not disregard how global, state, and local structures of power influence such development processes; rather, it considers such external forces as the framework within which Indigenous peoples are able to retain a degree of agency in the definitions of their goals and strategies to achieve them. The case of San Marco Tlacoyalco, then, provides evidence of how indigenous-led development plays an important role in the construction of a culture of indigenous governance.

Cooperation and Confrontation with Governments and Economic Forces

The nature of the relationships between Indigenous communities and political-economic forces worldwide has ranged from cooperation to confrontation, and everything in between. It has been proven time and again, in the words of von der Porten and De Loë among many, that to be effective in the management of land and natural resources (not to mention to be fair and equitable) “the theory and practice of collaborative governance must recognize the distinct perspectives, goals and rights of Indigenous peoples” (2013, 3).

Similarly, Cornell and Jorgensen (2019) proposed the extension of a “social inclusion” model of governance – which Canada and the United States have championed (albeit with mixed results) as a strategy to increase the disadvantaged populations’ level of participation in the economic, social, and polity life of the nation – to Indigenous peoples in a substantive, rather than assimilationist, fashion. They argue that remedying such a missing element would increase the footprint of effective indigenous governance in both countries, thus resulting in “more equitable outcomes for Indigenous citizens” (Cornell and Jorgensen 2019, 293).

Several scholars, such as McKivett *et al.* (2021), have maintained that the benefits of such an inclusive approach extend beyond the political

aspect of governance to include areas such as health care as well as the tackling of health inequities that many Indigenous peoples and communities suffer from. Following the analysis of the merits and shortcomings of a governmental program aimed at improving communications between healthcare practitioners and Australian Aborigines, McKivett and colleagues concluded that “[t]he inclusion and prioritisation of Indigenous voices in the design and shaping of vital institutions such as medical education and health care can work towards enhancing the collective wellbeing of the Indigenous community” (2021, 6473).

The passage of the International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 in 1989 (ILO 1989), which aimed at safeguarding and, at the same time, promoting the autonomous participation of Indigenous groups into projects of development and preservation of habitats and natural resources, represented an important step toward the recognition of Indigenous people’s rightful links to traditional territories and resources. Yet, as scholars such as Veronika Chase (2019) have argued, there has been a discrepancy between the rhetoric and the practice of what Indigenous groups are allowed to access and use in their traditional lands. Speaking in broader terms, thus extending beyond just issues of development and access to territory and natural resources, Maura Hanrahan summarized one of the greatest challenges to participatory opportunities that Canadian First Nations constantly face in these terms: “The consent of the state is required for virtually any significant political change for indigenous people” (2016, 75).

When illustrating the successful installment of a hybrid governing system – one blending traditional forms of governance (read “Council of Elders”) with an executive branch in line with the Bolivian national law –among the Guaraní of the municipality of Charagua Iyambae in 2017, Postero and Tockman (2020) presented this achieved autonomy as a double-sided coin. On the one gleaming side, the Bolivian government managed to transfer much decision-making power into the hands of local, Indigenous authorities, thus allowing an increase of the level of self-determination by the Guaraní of Charagua. On the other unpolished side, the Guaraní’s actual exercise of governance in the municipality of Charagua has remained limited because of two main factors: first, Guaraní governing institutions remain heavily dependent on governmental funding; second, their right to be consulted and to free-and-prior consent to hydrocarbon extraction projects in their territory, a measure of true exercise of self-determination in the words of the UN Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, remains all but void in practice.

Nonetheless, the degree of success and effective collaboration among Indigenous leadership worldwide, on one side, and state and economic forces, on the other, continues to range between high and none, as it has since early colonial times.

(Positive) Cooperation

Chand and Thomas, mentioned once again, present the case of a positive, even constructive, relationship between state government and the Indigenous traditional leadership in Guyana. It is, in fact, the authoritative efforts by the *Toshaos*, acting as mediators between their people and government, that have ensured their communities' high rate of compliance with the state imposed anti-COVID measures which, in turn, has resulted in a public health benefit for these communities. The fundamental role played by the *Toshaos* in today's Indigenous villages of Guyana is both testimony and a guarantee of "cultural continuity," which entails their role as guides for their people for the use of traditional practices and beliefs in the current world (which is not exclusively indigenous space). In this sense, Chand and Thomas present yet a different picture of indigenous governance than the one that Hanrahan, among many, offered about Canadian First Nations, according to which, "colonial policy destroyed indigenous governments as well as governance practices with a combination of stealth and blunt instruments of political oppression" (2016, 76-77).

Dieufort Deslorges, in this volume, provides another example of such a positive relationship. He illustrates how in Haiti, specifically in the bio cultural reserve of La Salle, the local communities are challenging the ineffective measures that have been adopted through historic top-down and, more recently, decentralized governmental policies to maintain and promote bio cultural diversity. Although investing in state-supported initiatives to guarantee the cultural and environmental sustainability of the communities in their territories, such as the "reforestation through education" program (which entails the exchange of tree planting labor for school tuition and fees), these communities have come to terms with the limited results of both top-down and bottom-up governmental efforts. To this end, they have identified a hybrid model of governance as the most viable solution. Such a mode of governance is one that has called for the reintroduction of state oversight and central control (which, of course, includes funding and political leadership), which disappeared in the late 1980s, alongside actual decision-making power by the local authorities and people (which would supply the cultural and practical principles of

sustainability and development of the forest environment).

This, at the moment, is yet to be achieved. It remains to be seen whether such a model may be actualized in the face of historical and recurrent challenges of inefficiency, corruption, private interests, and competition for scarce resources that have characterized the recent history of Haiti. Nonetheless, Deslorges's chapter provides evidence of a renewed agency by these local communities, which are now in the position of voicing their concerns and, at the same time, proposing a governance solution that would not necessarily exclude the state or the local authorities from decision making. This is already a positive first step forward towards any inclusion of the local communities in the governance process.

(Negative) Confrontation

There are also innumerable cases where the relationships between Indigenous communities and governmental and economic forces have been characterized by disagreement and even confrontation. Nikolakis and Nelson (2019) pointed at trust – whether inter-individual trust among community members, political trust in Indigenous and state institutions, or social trust in one's own community in times of need – as a necessary component in the development of effective indigenous governance. Where and when such a trust, particularly that in state and institutional entities and policies, has not developed, Indigenous communities have resorted to alternative methods of governance to promote their interests and well-being.

Such is the case of Cherán (Michaocán) in central Mexico, illustrated by Mónica Piceno Hernández in this volume, where illegal logging by criminal drug cartels, carried out successfully with the “approval” of conniving local government and police officials, hindered environmental sustainability and, thus, community development. In 2011, the Indigenous inhabitants of Cherán led by women, tired of the narcos' violent presence and illegal logging in the area, rose up against them as well as the corrupted local government and police. The community formed its autonomous government system, based on a system of direct democracy (self-government), while refusing to vote and participate in the national and regional political system. Now, the community is run collectively, with volunteer paramilitary patrols formed to protect their land and forests (see Lianes 2021).

And...Everything In Between

There are also contexts in which the nature of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and state and economic forces is more complex, one where both opportunities for and challenges to collaboration coexist. This usually forces Indigenous communities to make or be affected by difficult choices on things such as the degree of autonomy they retain or acquire in their decision-making power, the retainment or change of traditional governance structures, and the creation of new internal relationships among community members and existing and new Indigenous institutions.

Such is the case of Madagascar, which Manohisoa Rakotondrabe, Miezsaka Razafindralambo, and Fabien Girard present in this issue, where the state recently added the Community Biocultural Protocol (CBP) – an administrative tool created to further decentralize the management of natural resources by consolidating the local communities' right to self-determination – to the existing Natural Resource Management Transfer (NRMT) – an instrument crafted in 1996 that recognizes local communities' customary rights to land and created legal bodies (the Basic Communities or *Vondron'olona ifotony*) that act as community representatives in negotiations for the protection of natural resources.

Whereas the CBP filled several regulatory gaps in the NRMT, namely extending decision-making power to whole communities rather than keeping it confined within the Basic Communities (which have been tainted by issues, such as alleged corruption and partisan interests, that are common to many local and Indigenous institutions; see, among many, Aliye 2020 for a comparable discussion on this topic), this has nevertheless created new challenges that may hamper the exercise of power that local communities have in the management of land and resources. In their analysis, the authors tested the coexistence of these two instruments in the western municipalities of Mariarano and Betsako, revealing that while, on the one hand, the CBPs have strengthened community-wide decision making based on traditional principles, thus removing the threat of partiality, on the other hand, they have undermined the power of the Basic Communities which, to this date, represent the only Indigenous legal entity recognized by the state.

There are certainly many positive aspects in this regulatory upgrade, which will likely become more visible in the years to come. Yet the immediate result seems to have been a greater degree of incompatibility between state regulatory protocols and local customer practices and, at the

same time, increased disputes within the local communities. Such a scenario highlights once again the challenges to the exercise of effective governance faced by Indigenous and local communities and, concurrently, the necessity for them to always balance and often adjust traditional governance practices to fit regulatory protocols by state and economic entities (see, among many, Hendrix *et al.* 2020).

Those Who Leave and Those Who Remain

It is nowadays a truism to affirm that transnational migration is a survival strategy, or an unavoidable need, for many Indigenous groups in many areas of the world. In recent times, though, an alternative approach has appeared and, in many cases, succeeded in offering local (not exclusively Indigenous) populations from several economically, socially, and politically disadvantaged areas the choice to remain in their territories of origin while being able to support themselves. These “right to stay” programs address the challenges of migration by promoting the creation of sustainable socio-economic conditions for prospective local (often Indigenous) migrants in their locales. Organizations such as the Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB; Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations) – which has worked since 1991 in both Mexico and the United States to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples of Mexico on both sides of the border to either migrate or stay in their places of origin (Ramirez 2007) – have increasingly offered legal and logistic support to actual and potential migrants, as well as advocated for policy changes that would create economic opportunities for disadvantaged people in their places of origin, thus preventing them from being forced to migrate to survive.

At the same time, the transnational migration of individual family members has also been a strategy that families utilize to allow some group members to remain in their places of origin, where life and business remain sustainable thanks to the remittances these migrant members send back home (see, among many, Borraz 2005; Conway and Cohen 2008; Garcia Zamora 2020). These are cases where “right to stay” is indeed guaranteed by the concurrent need to migrate which, in turn, creates opportunities for those who stay. It is the reality, for instance, for many Mexican migrants to the U.S. whose financial support provides family members who remain in their places of origin a viable alternative to migration. Ties remain solid in these cases, where it is money and other forms of material support that move rather than people (Llano 2022).

Briana Nichols, in the volume, illustrates and discusses the work of *Nuestro Futuro*, a local Maya nonprofit organization devoted to creating local opportunities as an alternative to transnational migration in Guatemala. In her analysis, Nichols moves away from the dichotomy of “those who live” and “those who remain”; rather, she focuses on the process of creation of political capital in Maya communities where migration, development, and indigeneity intersect. By doing this, Nichols turns the reader’s attention towards the ways in which Indigenous actors politicize the reality and perceived effects of extensive migration to disrupt external models of development that are still based on the modern-backward (read, western-Indigenous) paradigm.

This happens, for instance, when *Nuestro Futuro*, whose work is grounded on a Maya vision of development that is far from capitalist accumulation, strategically employs expected essentialist notions of indigeneity – highlighting cultural harmony, commonality, and closeness to nature – to gain or retain the precious support of external (foreign) funders. This process entails the negotiation with and the creative reformulation – what Nichols terms *disruptive bricolage* – of long-standing models of development and community-based action. In this regard, it constitutes a form of empowerment for the Indigenous communities involved in the creation of an alternative practice of governance based on alternative notions of migration, development, identity, and belonging.

Taken as a single body, the articles in this special issue of *Ethnologies* offer a series of different and, at times, overlapping considerations on the current status of indigenous governance and its different development in diverse geographic, social, political, and economic contexts. Furthermore, the authors illustrate the responses that Indigenous communities in specific areas of the world offer in reaction to such development, as well as the strategies underpinning such responses. While offering new knowledge about and deeper understanding of these specific cases, this collection of articles represents a forum to push the existing discussions of indigenous governance forward as well as spark new discussion. At the same time, this issue of *Ethnologies* aims also at providing visibility and, ideally, voice to Indigenous peoples.

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