

# Governance, De-commoditization, and Communality among the Ngigua Leaders of San Marcos Tlacoyalco in Puebla, Mexico

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## Article abstract

The Ngiguas, an Indigenous community of San Marcos Tlacoyalco in Puebla, Mexico, are in the process of building their governance through the design and practice of their own development projects on issues pertaining to the protection and exploitation of their natural resources, media autonomy, and traditional foods. Such a building effort is grounded on the concept of *comunalidad* (communality), which was expressed in non-patriarchal and non-capitalist terms by the late Mixe intellectual Floriberto Díaz Gómez in the 1980s. Since then, it has been used by the Ngigua people in their grassroots constructions of governance and development. Starting from the premise that development constitutes a Ngigua strategy for crafting communality, this article looks at how Ngigua leaders negotiate their governance and decommmodification. Based on ethnographic research, this study presents communality as the spiral of intersubjective experiences of Indigenous people where the truth about the other is inhabited by Indigenous people in a non-linear dialogical perspective.

# GOVERNANCE, DE-COMMODITIZATION, AND COMMUNALITY AMONG THE NGIGUA LEADERS OF SAN MARCOS TLACOYALCO IN PUEBLA, MEXICO

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## Introduction<sup>3</sup>

In Mexico, we did and still fetishize, commodify, and objectify images of Indigenous people. Floriberto Díaz Gómez's 2014<sup>4</sup> critique of the historical reality faced by Indigenous communities provided the framework for honing the concept of communality, by which he meant to capture their singularity, solidarity, and contributions to the nation State. Even though the colonial State created subjectivities that made Indigenous resistance invisible, Indigenous people's traditional teachings, feelings, and ecological knowledge still forge their present (de Sousa Santos 2012). Consequently, Indigenous governance relates to two modes of thinking and feeling: first, as a problem from within the State; second, as autonomy against extractivism projects.

Although Díaz Gómez, an *ayuujk* (Mixe) leader, died in 1995, his communality grassroots constructions have continued resonating among Indigenous people and informed their sense of governance (*ruchueni ko*

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4. This work was published posthumously.

*tsu'en*). His concept of *rajnanee ni*<sup>5</sup> (communality) embodied the action undertaken by Indigenous people within a territory, which guaranteed the material and symbolic reproduction of collective life where neither capitalist nor patriarchal premises ruled their lives. In this sense, communality relates to intersubjective and complementary experiences, and it is currently used in grassroots constructions of governance and development. Today, it also relates to land and *tequio* (working for others without economic remuneration following the principle of collective wealth). These are expressions of *comunal* (communal) activities, which relate, but are not limited to, feasts, rituals, and celebrations among community members rather than individual achievements or recognitions.

Díaz Gómez's communality also included intersubjective experiences, where Indigenous people embrace the principle of complementarity when interacting with one another. Díaz Gómez proposed that mutual hosting represented the truth of cohabitation and, therefore, he encouraged the celebration of communality by using different indigenous languages: *guelaguetza* (*biniza'a*), *tequiyotl* (*náhuatl*), or *lekil kuxlejal* (*tzeltal*).<sup>6</sup> In this sense, communality represented a principle of both communality and dialogical reciprocity where shared experiences of life and death were integral to Indigenous lives.

Building on this line of thought, this paper looks at how Ngigua leaders from San Marcos Tlacoyalco (see Figure 1) are in the process of building their governance through the design and practice of their own development projects on issues pertaining to the protection and exploitation of their natural resources, media autonomy, and traditional foods. In other words, they negotiate their governance and decommmodification<sup>7</sup> within and across their community. In our analysis, we consider development as a strategy employed by Ngigua leaders to craft their communality. To this purpose, we intend communality as the Indigenous people's web of intersubjective experiences where the truth about the other is formed and understood in non-linear dialogical processes.

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5. A similar concept in the Ngigua language.

6. We use these words to express communality as historically linked to principles of reciprocity and horizontal organization. *Biniza'a* is spoken in the State of Oaxaca, *Náhuatl* in the central part of Mexico, and *Tzeltal* in the state of Chiapas.

7. Here, we follow Vail's (2010) concept of decommmodification, intended as a core feature of a market economy based on social collaboration and cooperation rather than on profit and hegemony. Moreover, decommmodification means the expansion of social protections and the provision of public goods for the implementation of an egalitarian agenda.



Figure 1. Nguigua Region. Source: López Varela's personal elaboration.

This paper reports the preliminary results of our research conducted in San Marcos Tlacoyalco. We employ data collected over a twelve-month period from September 2019 through 2020, including 6 months of fieldwork, one-on-one and online semi-structured interviews, and face-to-face informal conversations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted the last six months of our project at a distance through WhatsApp, Zoom, and Skype. López Varela spent six months (September 2019-February 2020) conducting fieldwork and interviewing key participants about their experiences and constructions on Indigenous governance. Manzano-Munguía conducted online interviews among Indigenous leaders (see Figure 2).

Here, we only included Indigenous people who hold leadership roles in the community. Their leadership should be understood in conjunction with political, socioeconomic, and cultural forces impinging upon their lives while accessing and holding positions of power (Manzano-Munguía 2008, 468). In addition, Indigenous leaders have an intellectual role as organizers, and they contribute to the continuation or modification of Indigenous worldviews. We were able to connect both face-to-face and virtually with some of these leaders. The students who are pursuing their undergraduate programs at the Intercultural University in San Marcos Tlacoyalco represent the newest generation of leadership and they are currently developing their political networks and positioning themselves

within and beyond their Indigenous communities, government institutions, and mainstream society. We begin by exploring ideas and practices of development for framing our discussion.

Name	Age	Current occupation	Marital status	Training	Location
Alfonso López	50	Justice of the Peace	Married	Constructor	San José Buenavista
Lucas Jaime	20	Student	Single	Student	San José Buenavista
Andrea Martínez	45	Housewife and university student	Married	Student	San Marcos Tlacoyalco
Fernando Ramírez	45	Police	Married	Tlachiquero <sup>8</sup>	San Marcos Tlacoyalco
Luz Rojas	35	Professor	Married	Teacher (basic education)	San Marcos Tlacoyalco
Saul Gámez	30	Worker	Married	Farmer	San Marcos Tlacoyalco
Jazmín Moreno	30	Worker	Married	Farmer	San Marcos Tlacoyalco
Karla Cruz	29	Worker	Married	Farmer	San Pedro Pericotepec
Lupita Flores	35	Worker	Married	Farmer	La Estación Tlacuitlalpan
Alejandro Carrasco	30	Worker	Married	Farmer	San Marcos Tlacoyalco
Juan Flores	30	Worker	Married	Farmer	San Marcos Tlacoyalco
Hector Martínez	35	Worker	Married	Farmer	San Marcos Tlacoyalco
Julia Juárez	30	Worker	Single	Peasant	San Marcos Tlacoyalco
Eligio Juárez Jara	40	Worker	Married	media expert	San Marcos Tlacoyalco

Figure 2. Nguigas participating in our study<sup>9</sup>

8. *Tlachiquero* is the person dedicated to producing a fermented alcoholic drink known as “*pulque*” extracted from the maguey. Specifically, the *tlachiquero* will know how to obtain the aguamiel which then is fermented.
9. The names included in our study are pseudonyms except Eligio Juárez Jara, who consented to be cited. Also, note that we only quoted a few of these participants in this essay.

## Development from below

Corrigan stated: “‘Difference’ is embodied by ‘Authority’” (1988, 261; quotes in original). Indigenous people historically experienced being the other and subverted from mainstream society. Some of the issues at stake among Indigenous communities pertain to poor development, failed leadership, and low entrepreneurship (Barras 2004). An old discourse in the political realm portrays development for the others and their needs, or put simply, capitalist needs (e.g., cheap labour force and extraction of natural resources) at the cost of others (non-industrialized nations, Indigenous people, and women).

Escobar suggested that development represented the United States’ hegemonic worldview “that increasingly permeate[d] and transform[ed] the economic, social, and cultural fabric of Third World cities and villages, even if the languages of development [were] always adapted and reworked significantly at the local level” (1995, 18). In this perspective, development represented hegemonic projects of the West, where series of calculated actions from governments and their official aid agencies honed neo-liberal economic projects that promoted “good government” and democracy (Clayton 1994; Robinson 1994). Escobar (2016) subsequently called for an alternative development framework where local articulations of development promoted and articulated grassroots epistemologies rather than the imposition of top-down models.<sup>10</sup>

We concur with Escobar’s vision, where development is understood

as a discourse [where] one must look not at the elements themselves  
[Escobar refers to the process of capital formation, technology,

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10. A precursor illustration of Escobar’s vision was the fourth world model proposed by First Nations leader George Manuel (1921-1989), which was widely used by scholars and Indigenous groups throughout the world (Manuel and Posluns 1974). Manuel, a Secwepemc First Nations intellectual and activist, contested categories and paradigms that neither reflected the oppression nor the inequalities faced by many Indigenous communities across the world. He engaged politically in transforming the living conditions of Indigenous people in Canada and around the world through rallies, persuasive speeches, and narratives (McFarlane 1993). The fourth world model addressed the development of Indigenous institutions from the ground up while serving their short- and long-term needs, including self-government, the maintenance of traditional knowledge and culture, leading culturally appropriate educational programs, and honoring Indigenous land and treaties (Manuel and Posluns 1974, 217). George Manuel’s work was carried on by his late son Arthur Manuel (1951-2017), who operated at the national and international levels.

population, resources, monetary and fiscal policies, industrialization and agricultural development, commerce, and trade] but at the system of *relations* established among them. It is this system that allows the systematic creation of objects, concepts, and strategies; it determines what can be thought and said. (1995, 40; emphasis added)

So, rather than interpreting Escobar's illustration of development as essentialist (Moore 2000), we can conceive of this model as a dynamic system of social, political, and economic relations that allow the creation of different types of development discourses and actions. The emphasis is on local grassroots epistemologies of development and Indigenousness as dynamic constructs always in the process of being reworked at the local level (Escobar 1995), but greatly influenced by global, nation-state, and local structures of power to which Indigenous people relate.

The following case of the Yshiro Indians of El Chaco, Paraguay provides a model for such grassroots constructions of development projects, which can be applied comparatively to other similar contexts, including that of the Ngigua of San Marcos Tlacoyalco.

In El Chaco, both government organizations and non-governmental organizations provided a variety of expert knowledge about Indigenous peoples and lobbied for international funding on development projects (Blaser 2004). However, Bruno Barras, a Yshiro leader, stated that,

NGOs treat us [Indians] as if we are babies... They speak for us and design projects for us. Most of the times they are the main beneficiaries of the projects for the communities. (2004, 49)

And,

We [Yshiro Indians] are proposing what I call *life projects*. I call it like that because our plans and projects are oriented to achieving autonomy in deciding our own future. (2004, 51; emphasis added)

In 1999, five Yshiro community leaders founded a Native NGO called *La Unión de las Comunidades Indígenas de la Nación Yshir* (UCINY – Yshir Nation Union of Indigenous Communities). This Native NGO pursued their interests and needs using a rhizomatic structure model (Deleuze and Guattari 1980), where Indigenous leaders and community representatives drove projects and programs for overcoming poverty and gender inequality.

We encountered this rhizomatic model of development, which is based on the idea of building and organizing social relations horizontally and from within, in the explanations of Indigenous models of development offered by our Ngigua participants. They likened this model to a fruit known

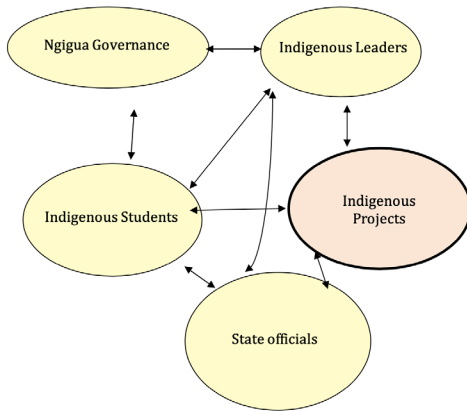


Figure 3. Rhizome Model of Development. Source: Manzano-Munguía's and López Varela's personal elaboration.

as *pitaya*, *pitahaya*, *mezquite*, *guaje*, or *kalanka* (see Figure 3). The *pitaya* recalls the image of a rhizome, different roots connected to one another for the benefit of all, including other species, such as the *kalanka* (Mexican chrysactinia), that live beneath its roots. In the Nguigua culture, reciprocity entails collaboration, respect, and well-being.

This model guides our analysis of Nguigua constructions of governance and development. In the following three sections, we look at some of the major development challenges that the Nguigua face and how their leaders negotiate the decommodification of natural resources.

### The *jagüey*<sup>11</sup> as axis mundis in the conservation and use of natural resources

In the past six decades, the Nguigua region has been subject to an increasing expansion of capitalism mostly related to “energy imperialism”<sup>12</sup> (Vega Cantor 2017), where changes in the social, economic, and political relations at the local, national, and transnational level have persisted. Despite domination, we identified Nguigua grassroots constructions of

11. Before colonization, the *jagüey* was an artificial method of water collection for land-based communities (high rainy periods were the high peak for its use). Today, it is still practiced and has the same meaning.
12. This concept relates to the limits of capital from the theory of value (Marx), where commodities represent the cause of ecological catastrophes. Consequently, different scenarios - which include expropriating, preying on, and plundering communal capacities for producing, accumulating, and circulating goods - may appear in the region.



governance in the design and practice of their own development projects, as expressed by different community leaders. Most of these communitary projects relate to the conservation and use of natural resources, and run under the collective principle of caring and protecting such resources. In order to understand grassroots efforts toward caring for the *jagüey* according to the principle of communality, it is necessary to consider their value of use in relation to time.

In Ngigua's perspective, communality is viewed as a constellation of desire, need, protection, and care. This proposition highlights the value of use of objects and denies its value of market (commodity). Cleaning the *jagüey* is one of the major collective activities undertaken by the community since ancestral times. This ancient method of creating an artificial water collection is especially recurrent in areas where rainfall is scarce. Consequently, caring for the *jagüey* implies honouring their ancestral relation through collective work.

Correspondingly, one of the major contributions of communal work is the concept of *thengijna chooni naa ko naa ni*<sup>13</sup> (to give a hand), which implies traditional knowledge, feelings, and communality in order to give back to the community for social benefit. As stated by Héctor Martínez,

There are activities within the community, which require collective work in order to be completed. A good example relates to "*tirar zacate o pixcar*" (to pick turf grass and sod), where family members, neighbours and friends help in the field. Usually, a group of women prepare food and share it with the workers. Our participation is collective and vital for work organization and no payment is involved. Why we do it? Because we receive back... what we call "*dar mano*" which means to help someone with necessities, and the call is made for everyone. Helping someone means it will return, because that is the baseline for community organization. (Interview with Hector Martínez, 2019)

Here Martínez emphasized the relevance of working and giving back to the community, hinting at both Floriberto Díaz's (2014) concept of communality and, more extensively, on Mauss's (1923-1924) emphasis on reciprocity in gift exchanges among community members. The Ngigua expression of reciprocity through the exchange of free labor reinforces the enactment of communal activities.

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13. We are grateful to community leader José Isidro Castro Valencia for his generous explanation for each concept elaborated in this paper, including the Ngigua language and its speakers.

Similarly, Lucas Jaime illustrated the communitary dimension included in the cleaning of the *jagüey* (see Figure 4). He stated,

We [community members] organize ourselves in committees which work in three different areas: the Catholic Church, water treatment plant, and drinking water reservoir. We meet every Sunday and follow the decisions proposed by the assembly for each neighborhood linked by committees. Each one represented 6 to 7 families, and each neighborhood included 60 to 70 people. Neighborhoods work around our agreements, which we reach during assembly meeting. The day of their collaboration [e.g., cleaning the *jagüey*] they [the assigned neighborhood] participate without restrictions. (Interview with Lucas Jaime 2020)



Figure 4. Cleaning the *jagüey* at San Marcos Tlacoyalco. Photo by Lucas Jaime, March 2021. Used with permission.

These committees represent the units of Ngigua self-governance and grassroots development in San Marcos Tlacoyalco. Indigenous people who serve in the committees forge their experience of community service and leadership through time. Their experiences exemplify and strengthen the principle of communality, which is based on recognition (prestige), volunteer work, and reciprocity. For instance, Ngigua governance promoted the practice of traditional activities such as *mano vuelta*, a form of social exchange of work devoid of monetary value, while cleaning and caring for the *jagüey*.

In the words of Juan Flores:

Ngigua governance is closely related to community gatherings because we elect our authorities and community representative. Our community gatherings are relevant for our decision-making process while selecting our representatives for community service on issues pertaining to water, sewer systems, infrastructure, among others. Our community has a gathering point in the central part of the community [downtown] where candidates are voted as local, regional, and national representatives. It is a circle; once the period of election is completed, another person will assume the position until each one of us holds a position of service. All the community should be included at least once for an elected position (Interview with Juan Flores, 2019).

The gathering for electing representatives is an inclusive activity. All community members, despite their social class, are expected to hold a position of service and representation. In other words, they will be the voice for and by the community, including in dialogue and confrontation with government officials and mainstream society. Here, we want to stress the issue that Mesoamerican cultures base their language on both speaking and listening skills, and Ngigua is not the exception (Lenkersdorf 2008). Their baseline includes auditory cosmos and imaginative *ethos*,<sup>14</sup> which create *una voz escuchada comunitaria* (a listened to community voice) that is not conceived as an individual voice, but a communal one. Colonial language conceals (Cusicanqui 2010, 19), but the value of listening to a communal voice represents the praxis of Indigenous governance today.

To sum up, cleaning the *jagüey* represents a social transformation where changes in social relations move beyond the dynamics of commodification. Indigenous knowledge and epistemic constructions from below encourage not only dialogue (heteroglossia) among Indigenous people, mainstream society, and government officials but also promote equity and justice.

### Media Autonomy: Radio Ngigua 87.9 FM

The call for a community-based project related to cultural and language revival within and beyond San Marcos Tlacoyalco led to the creation of Radio Ngigua 87.9 FM. Originally conceived and hosted by Eligio Juárez Jara and his family, it aired its first radio program on November 6, 2016. Since then, it has represented the voice for cultural, fundraising, and revitalization activities among Ngiguas living within and beyond San Marcos Tlacoyalco. Three years ago, Radio Ngigua commenced its online transmissions through media and social networks (e.g., Facebook, Youtube), thus reaching an increasing number of audiences in Mexico and the United States including, but not limited to, the following states: Baja California Sur, Nuevo León, and North Carolina. Eligio Juárez stated,

Despite the current differences among community members on issues pertaining to religious and political parties, our traditions and language connect us...Radio Ngigua is all cultural...from its inception, it is not related to political views or militancy, neither related to our government

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14 We concur with Bolívar Echeverría (2021, 75-78) who stated that *ethos* are strategies for survival among subaltern groups. In this context, it is relevant to look at the *ethos* of Indigenous languages, where different strategies aim mostly at the survival from colonial violence and linguicide.

authorities or municipality. We are not divided; our culture unites us!  
(Interview with Eligio Juárez, 2020)

Eligio Juárez is an engineer. He represents an example of leadership while promoting and providing information about cultural traditions and initiatives, such as the Ngigua language revitalization program, traditional dances, gastronomy, traditional dressing, and handcrafts (see Figure 5). To a greater extent, Radio Ngigua showcases cultural and language revival through community initiatives such as “Las Tocotinas Dance.” As Eligio Juárez explained,

This dance includes the participation of girls and only one boy...the king. They use long dresses, *naguas*, with two or three laced frills, including long red skirts, a red necklace, a red handkerchief, and a red ribbon on top of their head. They also use feathers and a rattle; they either wear *guaraches* [sandals] or they dance with their barefoot. *Las tocotinas* danced to the beat of the violin, they humble themselves towards the deity; they dance in circles moving back and forth the rattle and the feathers. At the end, they kneel before the king and the queen. (Eligio Juárez personal communication, September 27, 2019)



Figure 5. Ngigua Dancing Mural. Photo by López Varela, September 2019.

Three Ngigua dances were immortalized in the art piece named *la de Toriteros, las Tocatinas, and los Santiagones* by artist Tense Lechuga (see Figure 6). At the center, we can see the portrait of Doña María Trinidad Juana Luna Balderas, who taught how to dance *las Tocatinas*. The mural was financed by the Intercultural University of the State of Puebla as well as funds raised through the radio station from immigrants in the United States. Radio Ngigua also serves as fundraiser for the purchase of medicines, infrastructure projects (like the mural or the market), and other community needs.

Another significant contribution of Radio Ngigua pertains to the cultural events of the *Sabias* (Indigenous Elder women) and *Sabios* (Indigenous Elder men), who communicate their traditional teachings and knowledge through the radio to their vast audience within and beyond the community. This, by itself, is an initiative related to the current process of Ngigua cultural revival across Mexico and the United States. As stated by Eligio Juárez:

We seek the end of plagiarism of our traditions and culture. *Los Sabios and Sabias* collaborate in the design and implementation of research within the community, while also participating with the publication process



Figure 6. Maestra Doña María Trinidad Juana Luna Balderas. Photo by López Varela, September 2019.

in Ngigua language. Their knowledge about our traditions and cultural practices are clearly depicted through the practice of ceremonies, rites, and social gatherings. The Radio helps us understand our present and gives direction to our future. (Interview with Eligio Juárez, September 2020)

We concur with Floriberto Díaz's (2014) proposition of understanding Indigenous rites and festivities as "acts of resistance" (Scott 1985) to neocolonial, governmental, and patriarchal forces. This is precisely the strength of Radio Ngigua: it represents an autonomous and self-managed community-based project. The processes for strengthening community life and Ngigua culture are still unfolding notwithstanding that market economy considers their material culture as a commodity. This is the challenge for the upcoming Ngigua generations.

### **Food Governance: Baskets of solidarity**

In our Ngigua culture, the earth is essential, our culture, our mother, she gives us, she is our food. Every family in our community has at least a parcel or a piece of land. They cultivate corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, among others. The earth will always provide our food. The Ngigua community of San Marcos Tlacoyalco uses an extensive area for agriculture, rather than building houses or edifications. The earth is very important to us...it provides food and shelter. (Interview with Saúl Gámez, August 2020)

Indeed, food production involves material culture related to cazuelas (clay pots), corn, beans, and pulque. Furthermore, community members Jazmín Moreno and Fernando Ramírez (Interview, September 2020) stated, "we do not look at la cazuela, we look through it." These statements are testimony of the cultural implications of food in the construction and practice of governance among the Ngiguas of San Marcos Tlacoyalco. In this context, two cultural mechanisms related to food are at play in the forging of Indigenous governance: first, the production and use of values and, second, the socialization of collective work (known as *faena* or *tequio*), which is embodied in "promises" made during the agricultural cycle. As stated by Jazmín,

These [promises] are acts, which are related to the Catholic Church and the Saint being celebrated. Each neighborhood will participate in a random raffle where different community members will organize the feast for the Saint according to the calendar and thus, they will prepare food for celebration. (Interview with Jazmin, September 2020)<sup>15</sup>

15. In San Marcos Tlacoyalco there are 23 neighborhoods called *manzanas*; they

During the days known as *thi tenkininxinisincheeni* (the promise), there are multiple acts of gratitude shared among community members who organize the feast. Most of the families who belong to a neighborhood participate in the organization of the feast and contribute food as a gift for the rest of the families who attend the festivity. These are called “baskets of solidarity” (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Baskets of Solidarity Feast. Photo by Karla Cruz, November 2020. Used with permission.

For instance, when Jazmín celebrated the *Virgen de Guadalupe* (Virgin of Guadalupe) in December, she had to organize a feast. She said, “Before I left my promise at the church, the committees prepare the food for the guests and whomever is collaborating with cooking the beans, the rice, the corn tortillas, the mezcal, and *jamaica*” (Interview with Jazmín, September

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resemble what was known in precolumbian times as *calpullis* o *tlaxilacallis* (*barrios* or *neighborhoods*).

2020). Karen López described the celebration during the *thi tenkininxini sincheeni* as follows:

The altars included four elements of nature: earth, water, light, and wind. These are the four main elements needed for harvesting. In addition, there are medicine plants, which could be included in the basket. This offering could be made every week or as expressed by the organizer who will ask everyone for the four elements. (Interview with Karen López, October 2020)

This tradition can be seen as an act of resistance against modernity and capitalism. At the same time, the baskets of solidarity can be considered as an act of resistance against poverty, which has increased during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Following Bolívar Echeverría (2000), we look at these baskets of solidarity as strategies of survival in conditions of scarcity. In Mexico, the index of poverty level increased significantly since 2000. Today, four out of ten individuals, or 41.9% of the total population, live in poverty (CONEVAL 2018, 2020).<sup>16</sup> While 21 million people lived in extreme poverty in 2018 (Nájera 2019), by June 2020, this number increased to 33 million. Much of this increase is attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic (Miguel 2020).

Considering that the Indigenous population is generally vulnerable and living in poverty conditions, it is remarkable to see the persistence of the communal practice of the “baskets of solidarity,” given that food is scarce and there is an enormous need. This clearly exemplifies how traditional practices, such as the “baskets of solidarity,” link Indigenous governance to the Nigigua cultural values of communality, reciprocity, and *mano vuelta* (to give back to the community), while also trying to address the practical problem of widespread poverty in the community.

## Final Thoughts

In this essay, we illustrated three forms of Nigigua governance related to the practices of conservation and use of natural resources, a community radio station, and the control of food resources. This exemplifies the successful use of strategies for community well-being based on Indigenous epistemologies.

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16. CONEVAL (2020) measures the poverty level based on quality of life and living conditions such as health services, education, electricity, social security, sewage, and income, among others.



The struggle to confront the industrialization and monopolization of animals and food in the region revolves around the *jagüey* as a core communitarian activity, where scarce rainfall makes it necessary to protect the hydraulic resources of the Ngigua community through ancestral processes of community organization. In this sense, the election of the committees who will care for and clean the *jagüey* can be considered a form of development projects by the community. This, in turn, means that development is based on autonomous Indigenous governance that has community participation at its center.

The Radio Ngigua project, through the voice and work of Eligio Juárez, represents an important intercultural broker which promotes culture and language revival, as well as community fundraising events. Radio Ngigua provides the tools that the Indigenous people living in the Tehuacan Valley and beyond use in the production of knowledge and broadcasting of significant experiences. Furthermore, its programming in the Ngigua language promotes the teaching of traditional culture and gives voice to the Ngigua people's desire to shape and control their vision of development.

Food governance in the Ngigua region is based on *thi tenkininxini sincheeni* (promises) based on the *mano vuelta* system. The "baskets of solidarity" represent both the local response to structural difficulties, such as poverty, and a grassroots response to the lack of help from the government.

We referred particularly to the concept of communality expressed by the Mixe intellectual Floriberto Díaz Gómez to frame our analysis. Following him, we state that it remains necessary to dismantle the vision of power based on the principle of assimilation of Indigenous peoples that the Mexican State has developed during the last two centuries. Unfortunately, Indigenous peoples still face racism and discrimination; in particular, they continue to be seen as unable to develop their own forms of government. This study has demonstrated that, instead, there are viable forms of Ngigua governance, which are based on communal values and go hand in hand with language and cultural revival. There are cultural and community practices that have made possible the Ngigua people's resistance against the ethnocentric attitude of the Mexican state in its colonial, patriarchal, and capitalistic forms.

This case study has illustrated how a revitalized notion of communality and governance has emerged amongst the vigorously disrupted public affairs where a centralized state perspective seems absent. The successful implementation of this notion of communality by the Ngigua has

demonstrated that there is an alternative paradigm to the exclusionary binarism of the state, one in which Indigenous agency allows for the exercise of viable governance and development. Such a paradigm no longer needs to start from and to rest exclusively on capitalist accumulation. In this perspective, the maintenance of communal practices such as the *mano vuelta*, *thengijna chooni naa ko naa ni* (to give a hand), and *thi tenkininxinisincheeni* (the promise) can be deemed as grassroots, Indigenous responses to adverse structural conditions and constraints. In the navel of the modern capitalist, patriarchal, and colonialist ethos, we find that such a paradigm, grounded on the creative and imaginative potentials of the social fabric of communality, can succeed in making livable that which is unlivable.

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