

## **Chapter 2 Biopolitics: "letting die" and modes of resistance in Mexico. The case of the Nguia people of San Marcos Tlacoyalco**

### **Capítulo 2 Biopolítica: “dejar morir” y modos de resistencia en México. El caso de la comunidad Nguia de San Marcos Tlacoyalco**

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## **Abstract**

Here biopolitics is understood as the management of life that ensures healthy and vigorous development in turn, its counterpart is the sovereign right of the State to let die those sectors of the population that are, for some reason, disposable. Here we look at if this is the case within the Ngigua community of San Marcos Tlacoyalco and how the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened this issue at stake of being disposable and to a greater extent, detrimental for them. Nevertheless, we also strive to illustrate the agency deployed among community members in order to ensure survival and health during the pandemic.

## **Biopolitic, COVID-19, Modes of resistance, Ngigua community**

### **Resumen**

La biopolítica como gestión de la vida para asegurar el desarrollo sano y vigoroso, tiene su contraparte en el derecho soberano del Estado para dejar morir a aquellos sectores de la población que resultan, por alguna razón, eliminables. Quisiéramos ver cómo esto se demuestra en la comunidad Ngigua de San Marcos Tlacoyalco y de qué manera la situación del covid 19 lo ha profundizado en perjuicio de las poblaciones. En este contexto, buscamos analizar las formas en que la gente de la comunidad ha enfrentado esta problemática.

## **Biopolítica, COVID-19, Modes of resistance, Comunidad Ngigua**

### **1. Introduction**

The economic and social crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has specially affected the most vulnerable: Indigenous communities, the poor and rural communities. The experiences of Indigenous communities in Mexico included, but were not limited, to precarious working conditions, racism, discrimination, and their living conditions of being in the margins of the State (Daas and Poole, 2004). In most cases, they lack medical services, live in poverty and with few resources to get through this type of crisis. COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, has come to aggravate an already existing social and economic exclusion, which is directly related with the State biopolitics and racism (Foucault, 2006 & 2011). In order to get closer to this problem at stake, we analyzed the indigenous situation in Mexico since the 19th century in light of Foucaultian concepts that guide our methodological axis. This allowed us to see the general situation of indigenous communities during the pandemic, and to know if their living conditions were aggravated. Consequently, we discuss in the last section, the results of our fieldwork conducted in March 2022 among the Ngigua community members living in San Marcos Tlacoyalco in Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez. The focus of our research emphasized their modes of resistance during the pandemic affluence. In addition to demographic data survey collection, informal and semi-structured interviews were also collected among community members. Questions were directed to elucidate how Indigenous communities experienced the pandemic was lived in the area of study, if they received government help and which surviving strategies applied on individual, familiar and community level (see DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

### **2. Biopolitics and racism in Mexico**

Historically, poverty and social marginalization represent a continuum among indigenous communities in Mexico. To a greater extent this is closely related to a racist subtract hooked with colonization. Independence did not improve this issue, but most of the time it was aggravated. Intellectuals from the nineteenth century had a keen interest on studying Indigenous populations specially, with the intention of integrating/aculturating them to mainstream Mexican society. Also of interest was the appropriation of their lands and their convergence into the productive system. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, interest and concern about Indigenous communities included journalistic articles, novels and historic essays.

To a greater extent, to delve at Indigenous communities had an economic rationale. Industrialization advance, capitalism and with it, the need for cheaper and exploitable labour force, moved many intellectuals to look at these communities in Mexican territory, most were isolated not only geographically but also, culturally.

Through the lens of different intellectuals, comprehensive and at the same time homogenizing constructed stories, the issue at stake related to the following: what are we going to do with them [referring to Indigenous people]? If we consider that by 1895 the first general census in the republic noted 12.576.730 people as the total population of which approximately 6 million were Indigenous<sup>1</sup>. So, we can have an idea of the total number they represented in the country. Hence some newspapers proposed the idea and practice of assimilation through labour force, it represented a more economical solution than importing immigrants. Thus, these intellectuals were wondering the way to assimilate Indians into civilization projects. The *Diario del Hogar* (8/10/1892) published on its first page, the “Memory of Secretary of Finance”, which analyzed the country situation from July 1<sup>st</sup> 1891 to June 30<sup>th</sup> 1892. In these memories, and under the “Immigration” title, the following dilemma arose:

*[Indigenous people] remained in a state of total isolation and self-sufficient, as far as possible, to cover their meager necessities; in a way that they consumed what is produced by themselves, and they produce[d] very little for exportation, and under that aspect they d[id] not represent a factor on public richness. The Government’s duty was civilization of our fellow citizens living in that situation; to put them in touch with the rest of the country and the civilized world; to make them producers and consumers of the national and foreigner merchandise; to educate them, teach them, at least, the Castilian language (Spanish), to read and write, and when that goal was achieved; then indigenous people disinherited until now, participated from the advantages and amenities of civilization, as being achieved. So to speak, transportation of millions of colons into our country without the expenses and the inconveniences of bringing foreign population.*

But if we pay attention on this speech that was repeated an infinite number of times during 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup>, we see a concern about life where Indigenous populations interest in assimilation through the flow of civilization. But if this did not occur, death was not lamented because within this context, this population was not be useful to the nation. In other words, disposable. This is the sense that diplomatic and writer Federico Gamboa, on September 29, 1898 and as part of his speech at the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria’s* commemorative evening, after referring that all Mexicans came from Spain, and nothing was owed to Indigenous cultures, he added:

*Pure blood Indian, legitimate and primitive, it’s a shame for me: sometimes I’m ashamed and I think that the United States, the Argentinan Republic and the Chilean Republic have been in the exact same, when they destroyed them [referring to the Indigenous population] or gave them to the deserts, although with such a measure they have not been accredited as humanitarian (Gamboa, 1910, p. 74).*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectual, indigenous communities’ situation, isolated and at the same time denied their “national integration” it was something that greatly distressed Gamboa, almost getting to lament its practice in Mexico. Measures such as the ones opted by countries for the nearly extermination of their Native populations (e.g., Canada and the United States) and *letting them die* on “reserves” represents an important amount of those who survived.

We believe that these examples allow us to visualize the biopolitics functioning in Mexico on issues related to the policies of exclusion, racism and discrimination among and between Indigenous groups as well as the current suffering. Othering also target other social groups of biopolitical control (Andreucci & Zografos, 2022). Biopolitic is, roughly, as the term itself indicates, the biological treats turn into politics. To understand it’s functioning, we turn to synthesize Michel Foucault’s postulates.

This French philosopher discovered in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a transformation in the power mechanisms and it’s functioning. In order to clearly explain it, contrasts with what he calls the *sovereign power*, whose domain of the political field extends from the feudal period to the Enlightenment. The main characteristic of this power of the sovereign is the exercise, by the king, the appropriation of time, things and the life of his subjects too. It would be a question of a power of death that Foucault (2011) defines as the power to *make die and let live*. This power encounters its highest point in the right to kill.

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<sup>1</sup> “We have pure blood Indigenous population that probably exceeds half of the population in the Republic, that is more than 6 million” (Memoria de la Secretaria de Hacienda. En el *Diario del Hogar*, de Filomeno Mata, 8-10-1892).

Well then, towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and with the industrial revolution, the peak of cities and the need of workforce, Foucault finds the displacement of sovereign power that is not going to disappear completely, but that it would be relegated to reduced spaces. With the arising of national states, we see another type of power objectifying the management of life to make it grow healthier. From this moment, the biologic involved the politics scenario. And in this sense, it will pay special attention to the different diseases that depleted it continuously. At this point medical knowledge came into play and, according to the degeneration theory, will identify vices and diseases alerting the population about the danger, not only for those who suffered but from all their descendants. Foucault explained that wars did not justify the king's defense, but everyone's protection. This power used two technologies. On one hand, disciplinary technique focused on individual bodies. Time control technique, on the spaces, on life in its detail. It was an anatomopolitic of the human body (Foucault, 2011, p. 129). On the other hand, biopower relied on regularizing techniques centered on populations as living bodies. This population biopolitics took care of the processes of natality, mortality, morbidity, etc. Both technologies allowed biopower the control of life in its entirety. These were techniques allowing "the subjection of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault, 2011, p. 130). This meant that life came into the field of politics and under such rationale, it became part of the knowledge field, just as the intervention of power (Foucault, 2011, p. 133). At this point, Foucault identified a transformation on the exercise of power. If the sovereign exercised it to the extent that he caused death, in this historical formation we find ourselves with a power that had interest for life. In other words to make live and to let die.

The "let die", in Foucault's analysis, not only meant the fact of death itself as the end of life, but to all planned politic than the socially excluded both at the individual level or whole populations.

Let's see a 19<sup>th</sup> century example, within the speech of a doctor about alcoholism:

*The individual with an alcoholic habit if it's not harmful, at least is useless, he gets physically and morally depressed. The population decreases because the genetic faculty weakens, and by the degenerate fruits of vice, they are, epileptic already, idiots already, or at least of weak constitution, unable for the same, to perform functions in society (Ortega, 1885, p. 38).*

In the example that we just quoted, alcoholics, represented dangerous individuals for the author, that were genetically marked for vice and placed the society at risk as a whole; their life was of little matters. One of the consequences of this power upon life was the appearance of a normalized society. This is, a society that classifies, ranks, normalizes and therefore, distinguishes between individuals and populations. But that does not mean that killing stopped. On the contrary, the atomic bomb represents a proof that not only kills is meaningful, but actually kills on a previously inconceivable scale.

Foucault explains that death power could be possible thanks to racism. Biological racism, already located on state mechanisms, it allowed them to discern about those who must live from those who must be left to die because their existence itself puts in risk the society existence. "Racism caters to the death function on biopower economy, according to the principle that the death of others means the biological strengthening of oneself as a member of a race or a population" (Foucault, 2006, p. 233). This allows the integration of whole populations into the fight against those elements conceived as harmful and dangerous. Foucault makes here the distinction between racism understood as hate or contempt at the Other, that is considered different, against this new modality where this is part of power technology and functioning of the modern state. While it is governed from the principles of biopower, racism will be inevitable because it is part of the logic of this biopower.

Integration with civilization purposes was raised in the *Diario del Hogar*, common place for intellectuals at that time, it is another way to let die. Another very clear example is Andrés Díaz Millán, columnist in the newspaper *El siglo diez y nueve*, who presents about the possibility of blood mix among Indigenous people in order to "improve the blood".

*Do you think you are not forced to improve that big race, like you would improve your cattle, crossing it with European immigrants, that makes their blood richer and fight against the physiological misery you have sunk in? (...) lets improve, them, these races, let's regenerate them, and we will make the theater of future human civilization from our America (08/23/1892)*

Racism, as a social differentiation element, was crucial to sustain policies focused on life, as well as those connected to let die. We refer to death by omission, meaning, and not related to providing, to determine individuals or whole communities, the adequate medical services, or not to establish schools with all that implied, meant, not only the architectonic place but also paid teachers, study materials or even politics oriented to promote education, job opportunities with salaries according to the country wages, or even jobs that did not place the population in major vulnerability situations. As is the case of migrant day labourers, they had to move every year with their families to work in remote fields and, under extremely difficult situations (Martínez Gómez, Sánchez García, 2017).

Racism became, in modern societies, the differentiating element of populations. So, every time that the other's death needed to be justified, or letting whole populations to die, State racism was used.

### 3. COVID-19 and its impact on indigenous communities in Mexico

As we have stated since the beginning of this work, indigenous communities in Mexico, face a chronic vulnerability and marginalization that the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated. If we think in terms of the "let die" biopolitics, we think that an unexpected event like this, highlighted the critical conditions that this population experience.

From the systems of health access to the economic suffering, result in the growing difficulty to sell their produce, until the hard situation of children's education, those who have to look for a way of acceding basic knowledge with practically a lower number of teachers, but also, without the school breakfast that was given daily at the institutions, the indigenous saw their already delicate situation turned even more precarious.

On December 31st, 2020, the Secretary of Health, (Chair of Epidemiological Information) stated on the twelve COVID-19 epidemiological *analysis of Indigenous population* identified 25,694,928 Indigenous people, which represented 20.01% of the country's entire population. The Socioeconomic Index *of original people of Mexico, 2015 [Socioeconomic indicators of Mexico's indigenous population]* provided information about the Intercensal Survey 2015 made by the National Institute of Statistic and Geography, Indigenous population tallied 12,025,947, meaning, there was a difference as more as twice between both figures, which was probably due, to the self adscription factor, meaning, how each person defines oneself<sup>2</sup>. In any case, the figures are just an estimate but they help to dimension the topic. provided information about the Intercensal Survey 2015 made by the National Institute of Statistic and Geography, Indigenous population tallied 12,025,947, meaning, there was a difference as more as twice between both figures, which was probably due, to the self adscription factor, meaning, how each person defines oneself<sup>3</sup>as Indigenous. In any case, the figures are just an estimate but they help to dimension the topic.

According with the *Indicadores* (Indicators), the entities with a larger number of Indigenous populations were: Oaxaca (14.4%), Chiapas (14.2%), Veracruz (9.2%), Mexico City (9.1%), Puebla (9.1%), Yucatán (8.8%), Guerrero (5.7%) e Hidalgo (5.0%). These 8 states concentrated 75% of the Indigenous population in the country.

Furthermore, adding the 55.5% of the Indigenous population who live in states with higher or very high marginality, and 87.5% of Indigenous municipalities find themselves in high or very high marginality. In fact, 12.8% of the indigenous households lacked piped water and 4.4 did not have electricity. Moreover, 13.9% lacked flooring and 58.8% of the homes cooked with charcoal or lumber. Under these conditions, it is unlikely to follow the normativity that points out the importance of hand washing and the use of antibacterial gel, products that can be hardly found in Indigenous communities and the money needed for buying these products, including the facemasks (Alcalá Gómez, 2020). This gives us an idea of the socioeconomic situation faced by these populations, such as an unexpected event as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>3</sup> In the survey people were asked if according with their culture, they would consider themselves indigenous. The data that was obtained allows therefore to identify the population that, even without practicing a native language, speaker or being of an indigenous home, culturally they identify or self-ascribe as indigenous.

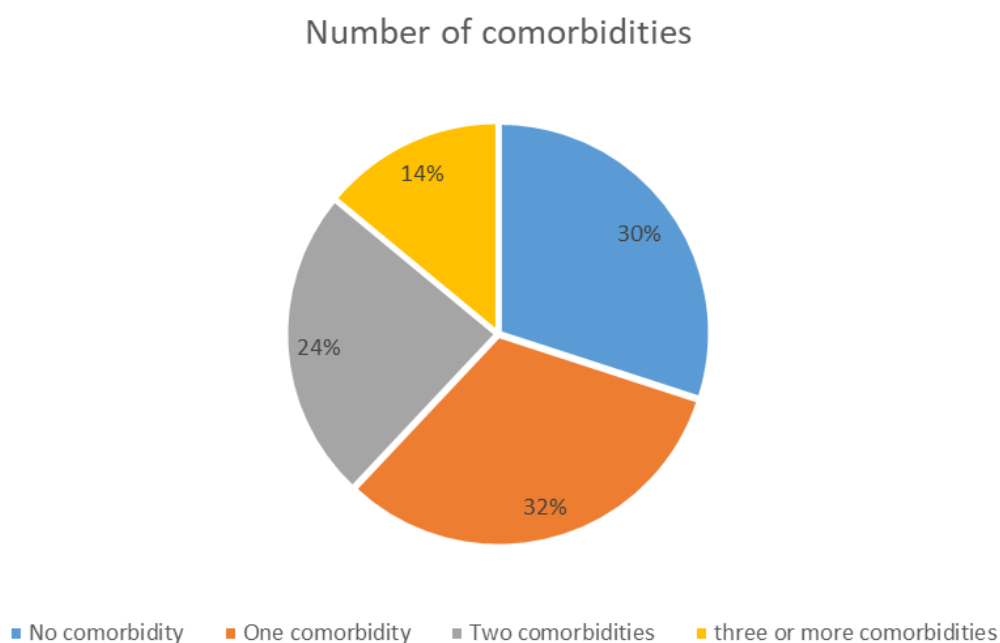
Although the census from 2015 notes that in medical services 8 out of 10 Indigenous person is affiliated to one health service and that in the entities of Guerrero, Chiapas, San Luis Potosí and Puebla, 9 out of 10 people is affiliated to the popular insurance, other factors must also be considered. We refer specifically to the location of hospitals with regards to the location of their communities and the possibility to move there, as well as the existence of medical care supplies. Health insurance does not make sense if you do not possess these factors.

A study made by the Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL) [“National council of evaluation for social development policies”] in 2018, the organism calculated 69.5% of the Indigenous population lived in poverty, which represented around 8.4 million people and 27.9% (3.4 million) lived in extreme poverty.

Undoubtedly, the Covid-19 pandemic had a profound impact over this population group. In January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021, a report submitted by the Secretaría de Salud [“Secretary of Health”] (*COVID-19 MÉXICO: Overview of the population who identify themselves as Indigenous*) provided a series of figures of the disease among Indigenous communities. Data extracted from hospitals receiving patients represented an approximate figure, because the light cases or those that did not need assistance were not counted. Furthermore, when a family group, a person was diagnosed with the disease the rest of the family also contracted the disease and notified their health status as long as they did not require hospitalization.

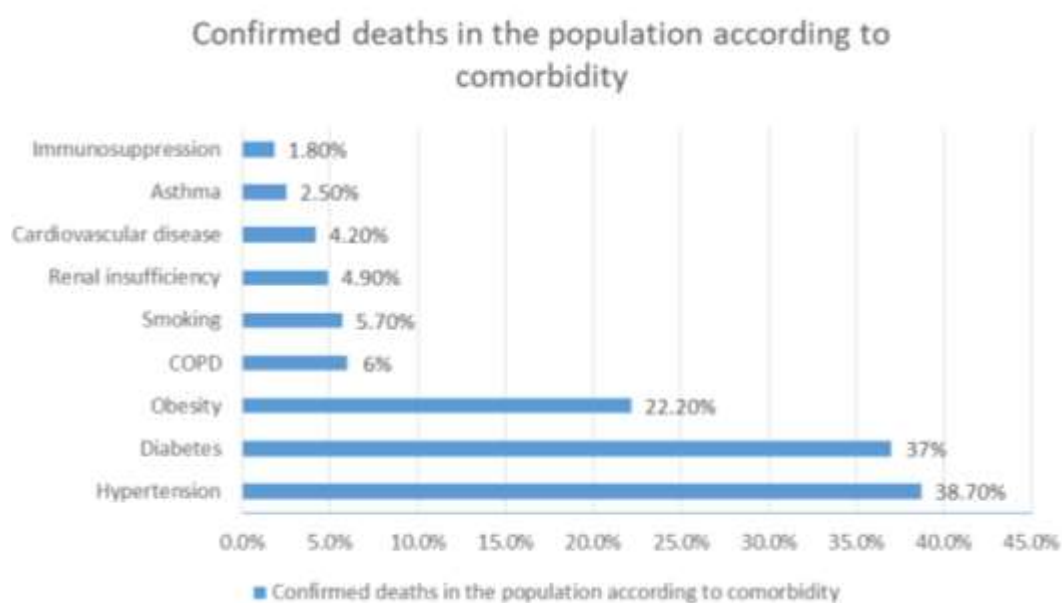
According to this report, there were 34,917 infections among Indigenous population, and 4,366 deaths caused by COVID-19. The state of Puebla occupied the 9<sup>th</sup> place with 1,300 infected, and the third place on death rankings, with 390, right after Oaxaca (714) and Yucatán (739). The report highlighted that 70% of Indigenous people also suffered comorbidity, of which hypertension, diabetes and obesity were highlighted as main concerns.

**Graphic 1** COVID-19 Number of comorbidities in November 10<sup>th</sup> 2021



*Source: Health Secretary, 2021*

**Graphic 2** COVID-19 Mexico: confirmed deaths in the population according to comorbidity in January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022



*Source: Health Secretary, 2022*

In order to inform about the caring measures for facing the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretaría de Salud [“Health Secretary”] jointly with the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INALI) [“National Institute of Indigenous Languages”] distributed and printed posters and brochures, including audios and videos recorded in Indigenous languages. In Mexico, 68 Indigenous languages are spoken and the brochure “*Culture of Prevention*” was written in 62 Indigenous languages.

**Figure 1** Government made brochure in indigenous language “Stay at home”



*Source: National Institute of Indigenous Languages*

Figure 2 “Prevention culture”



Source: National Institute of Indigenous Languages

Nevertheless, even that the effort made by organizations such as the INALI, it is clear that we must consider how difficult is to reach some of those communities. Most of them do not have internet, which means there is no connection with social media. Most of the information was accessed through the community radio. However, 30 of the 80 faced precarious conditions mostly related to government funding reduction by 50% (Alcalá Gómez, 2020).

In the midst of the pandemic and the difficulties faced by the population we thought again about the “let die” biopolitics. In November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the state of Tabasco suffered serious flooding. The president traveled to that entity to, in conjunction with local authorities, in order to make a decision to help Villahermosa, the state’s capital. So, they decided to close the Carrizal River gate, which crossed the city:

*All the dam water follows the Samaria, to the lower zone (...) we had to choose between drawbacks. Not to flood Villahermosa and make the water to come out for the Samaria, through the lower zones. Of course, people from Nacajuca were prejudicated, they are the Chontales, the poorest. But we had to take a decision (Video of the president Andrés Manuel López Obrador at the helicopter, flying over Carrizal River. In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SW-5IUFSpmc>).*

This is a clear example that allow us to prove the way that biopolitics, just as Michel Foucault delineates the state policy and decision making.

#### 4. Modes of resistance: the Nguia community of San Marcos Tlacoyalco

Pandemic forced us to rethink the ways of life and social coexistence allowing us to adapt to the new configurations spelled out by the experience suffered by the most vulnerable populations: Indigenous people. Thus, their communities faced critical situations and the inhabitants sought new forms of resistance, as a way to survive the crisis.

To understand what Foucault, understood as resistances, we must refer to the conception of power, which we will briefly outline: For the French philosopher, power was fundamentally the relation of forces. Power did not come from a superstructure, but it related to the whole social body. It was about mobile relations, changing relations. “Power is everywhere; is not that covers it all, but it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 2011, p. 87). This force of relations enacted themselves under three aspects: to be able to affect the other, to be able to be affected by the other and to be able to resist.



Resistances exceeded, in fact, a determined power diagram, but they were not in a position of exteriority with respect to it (Deleuze, 2014, p. 208). In fact, resistances allowed the power relationships to work, only from this multiplicity of resistances, this act as power adversary the last one can exist (Foucault, 2011, p. 90). And Foucault is very clear at the moment he explains that resistance does not understand a place of great rejection, but several mobile points that act as a counterweight in the power diagram and at the same time, forces it to constantly and mutates. While this diagram strives to capture those points, new resistances are emerging.

We want to see how the COVID-19 pandemic promoted, in San Marcos Tlacoyalco, modes of resistance to the adverse relations of power and that they hook with the racism and marginalization. San Marcos Tlacoyalco is a locality that belongs to Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez municipality, located in the Mexican state of Puebla. In the municipality inhabit 54,757 according to the 2020 population and housing census (INEGI). The region has a high level of poverty, 42,398 people live in poor conditions (Annual inform about the social lag and poverty, 2022)). In San Marcos Tlacoyalco inhabit 10509 according the same INEGI census. The population is mostly indigenous, belonging to the Ngigua ethnic. In fact, it is the population with the highest percent of Ngigua language speakers.

This research was conducted at the Intercultural University in San Marcos Tlacoyalco with students attending the school. 7 students between the ages of 20 and 36 years were interviewed. A survey of demographic data was also applied. From there, a series of issues related to pandemic emerged, which we will summarize in 5 points: Access to information, medical care, drinking water, economical support and finally, traditional healing methods to alleviate the adverse effects of the disease (see Figure 3.1).

**Table 1** Demographics from our interviewees

Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female
AGE	22	31	20	20	29	31	36
Do you work?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Do you study?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marital status	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single
Do you have kids?	No	One kid	No	No	No	No	Three kids
Do you have family in the U.S?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Have you had COVID-19?	No	No	Si	No	No	No	No
Have any of your family had to be hospitalized?	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Do you have any medical insurance?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Dr. Tiverovsky data

From the figure above we observe the following: 7 students had access to the Mexican Institute of Social Service (IMSS health provider), one had COVID-19 and three family members were infected. Only two have children but remain single. They contribute to their household income; 6 students work within the community and five of them have a community member living in the United States. Under this scenario it is relevant to note the precarious conditions faced while not being to study as a full time student without the need to complement their income with a job. Moreover, their health was also stricken by COVID-19 while taking care of a sick member and seeking medicines and oxygen. Now we turn to a few issues they highlighted during our interviews:

#### 1. Information

The main information source came from university authorities. A *spot* in Ngigua language was made and shared in social media. Furthermore, some posters were put up in the town and also in public transportation. Nevertheless, they think it was difficult to access by the elders because some of them are illiterate and they don't know how to use the internet.

During the first months, and facing the lack of information available about the pandemic many people, especially the elders, questioned themselves if the disease was real. They thought it was a government deception or creation. People even thought and were afraid to take their relatives to the doctor because a rumor had circulated about being killed over there (the hospital).

## 2. Medical care

Although there is a health center in the community, the doctor is rarely there because he also treats other neighboring communities. A nurse is left in charge of the clinic, only to report that there is no service. This means that, in an emergency situation, the patient must go to a private doctor who charges \$400 per consultation, which represents an excessive expense if we consider the level of wages in the region, which does not exceed \$7,000 per month.

The intercultural university students have health access through the *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social* (IMSS) health insurance. In order to have access to the service they must travel to Tlacotepec or Tehuacán. Given that COVID-19 caused severe respiratory problems in some cases, it was the family itself who had to bear the cost of the oxygen tank.

**Figure 3** Community Health Center



*Photo: Dr. Sol Tiverovsky, 2022*

## 3. Water

Water, an essential element to disinfect in times of pandemic, it is scarce in this region that is characterized by being arid-semi-desert. This means that water scarcity has been a real problem in the community. That was the main reason for the creation of Jagueyes, which helped irrigate the region's crops. A few years ago, deep wells were dug to provide the region with drinking water.

However, one of the two wells that supplied the community is running dry. Some students believed that the practices of washing and disinfection have caused a higher consumption of water and therefore, a decrease in it. The community rations to water reached homes once every 20 days, so people stored and manage it efficiently (see Figure 3.2).

**Figure 4** Desinfection methods in a food establishment



*Photo: Dr. Sol Tiverovsky, 2022*

#### 4. Support

The students explained to us that although their income decreased when the pandemic started, because most of them lost their job or decreased considerably, they did not go without food. On one hand, because most of the houses in San Marcos Tlacoyalco they had animals like chickens, turkeys and pigs. “In case of need, you can always sell a pig” one of the students told us. Furthermore, people use to grow corn or beans at their homes and kept the leftovers as a reserve. They were asked about any support received from the municipality, but neither they nor their families received any financial aid, gel, facemasks or medicines. They only remembered that on one occasion pantries were distributed, but only to a few houses.

The interviewees, as students at a public university, received the Benito Juárez scholarship. That allowed them to cope with the situation. In addition, some inhabitants of the community have family in the United States. They were the ones who helped financially by sending money. In other cases, some had to leave town to work elsewhere. A student told us that she and her family went to Monterrey because her brother, who had been living there for a while, found a job for them. Not only they were able to earn money and survive the pandemic, but the salaries were higher than in their community. An office job in this northern city meant fewer working hours and double what they would pay in the municipality of Tlacotepec.

#### 5. Traditional healing methods

A student from San José Buenavista, a town near San Marcos Tlacoyalco, said that a woman from her town discovered a way to help people with herbs and steam. Apparently, this remedy did not prevent the disease but helped alleviate the symptoms. Many inhabitants went to her because it was effective and relieved them from discomfort, but also because her treatment, of natural origin, was cheaper than going to the doctor and buying medicine. In San Marcos Tlacoyalco these traditional healing methods were also practiced.

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## Conclusions

In this paper we explored the concept of biopolitics and State racism as theoretical tools that allow us to understand the historical situation of marginalization of Indigenous peoples in Mexico. As well as to explain how communities faced COVID-19 since March 2020. We have verified that the biopolitics of "letting die" was expressed in the indifference or omission of the authorities in the face of the needs of the population. Specifically, we refer to the lack of information, as well as economic support and medical assistance.

The pandemic meant for a significant number of people, not only the loss or decrease of income, but also the increase in expenses, because care and disinfection implied an increase in water consumption and the purchase of disinfectants to prevent the spread and contagion. All this was assumed by each family.

From the interviews with the students of the Intercultural University in San Marcos Tlacoyalco, it appears, on the one hand, that not enough information was received about COVID-19. The University fulfilled an important role for the students in disseminating information, the gap seems to continue despite the efforts to provide clarity. However, they believed that older adults found themselves in a vulnerable situation, living in the uncertainty of not knowing how real the disease was.

The interviews also allowed us to understand that the pandemic had aggravated a precarious economic situation within the community. Faced with little help from the political authorities in the region, the population organized itself autonomously to survive and resist this adverse situation. At the family level, migratory work networks were created. In addition, those who had relatives living in the United States represented a pillar for economic survival. Likewise, in an emergency situation they resorted to selling their animals to solve a certain problem. At the community level, they spontaneously organized themselves by delivering food to help those families in need.

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