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Forging Post-Capitalist Societies in Mexico

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Abstract

Socio-territorial movements in Mexico are an integral part of the strategy of *communitarian revolutionary subjects* to consolidate their societies on the margins of the nation-state. As such, they go beyond resistance to strengthen inherited institutions and traditions, innovating when appropriate to diversify and augment their productive capacities while ensuring the solidity of their governance, social structures, and capacity to care for their territories. This essay draws on reflections from a collaborative effort with colleagues from communities and social organizations as part of the project *Productive and Social Innovations to Strengthen Communities and Preserve Ecosystems*, project No. 319100, financed by the National Humanities, Science, and Technology Council of Mexico. Among the initiatives analyzed are the Mexican members of the Indigenous Peoples and Community Conserved Territories and Areas Consortium (Territories of Life, TICCA Consortium), the work of the Universidad Autónoma Comunal de Oaxaca (UACO), the National Network for Forest Agave Managers linked to the civil association Manejo Integral y Local de Productos Agroforestales (MILPA), and initiatives integrating traditional and agroecological farming techniques to deepen food sovereignty, including La Via Campesina, Paulo Freire secondary school, and the former Universidad de la Tierra in Oaxaca.

Keywords: Community subject, Radical ecological economics, Sociometabolic configurations

Forjando sociedades poscapitalistas en México

Resumen

Los movimientos socioterritoriales en México son parte integral de las estrategias del *sujeto comunitario revolucionario* para consolidar sociedades al margen del Estado-Nación. Como tales, van más allá de la resistencia, fortaleciendo sus instituciones y tradiciones heredades, innovando cuando es apropiado para diversificar y aumentar sus capacidades productivas al tiempo que fortalecen su gobernanza, estructuras sociales y capacidad de cuidado de sus territorios. Este ensayo parte de las reflexiones de un esfuerzo colaborativo con colegas de comunidades y organizaciones sociales en el proyecto *Innovaciones productivas y sociales para fortalecer comunidades y conservar ecosistemas*, proyecto No. 319100, financiado por el Consejo Nacional de Humanidades, Ciencias y Tecnologías de México. Dentro de las iniciativas analizadas se encuentran la sección mexicana del Consorcio Territorios y Áreas Conservados por Pueblos Indígenas y Comunidades Locales (Territorios de Vida, Consorcio TICCA), el trabajo de la Universidad Autónoma Comunal de Oaxaca (UACO), la Red Nacional de Manejadores de Maguey Forestal (RNMMF) vinculado a la asociación civil Manejo Integral y Local de Productos Agroforestales (MILPA), así como aquellas que promueven técnicas de cultivo tradicionales y agroecológicas para la soberanía alimentaria, como La Vía Campesina, la escuela preparatoria Paulo Freire y la antigua Universidad de la Tierra en Oaxaca.

Palabras clave: Sujeto comunitario, Economía ecológica radical, Configuraciones sociometabólicas

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Today's global capitalist system has dramatically reshaped the world economy, attempting to bring into its fold all the regions and peoples once controlled by colonial and imperial powers. Driven by the philosophy of neoliberalism, its development paradigm promotes a model of governance that advocates for the private control of all sectors of society, reshaping both humanity and the planet. This has resulted in deepening poverty, created unimagined levels of inequality, and environmental disruptions that threaten the very existence of humanity. In the process, it is systematically trying to exclude or even destroy the organizational, knowledge, philosophical, and productive systems of indigenous and peasant societies and cultures. Unfortunately, this logic is also present in Keynesian, progressive, and new-left governments. Although they do not aspire to take control of economic dynamics nor the privatization of all production means (as in neoliberalism), we find enough examples showing how these governments do not represent a real alternative to capitalist accumulation and, instead, perpetuate the spoliation of nature and socio-ecological crisis, with limited respect for the Peoples' self-determination (Tetreault, 2020).

Building on the paradigm of Radical Ecological Economics (REE) (Barkin *et al.*, 2020; Barkin and Fuente Carrasco, 2021; Barkin, 2022a), this essay introduces the concepts of the Communitarian Subject (CS) and the Communitarian Revolutionary Subject (CRS) as analytical categories exemplifying the experiences of communities, native peoples, and collectivities marginalized by the operation of the dominant socioeconomic models. These actors are actively shaping societies to build better alternatives that point to the ways for others to transcend current crises. Our epistemological approach places the CS and CRS at the center of analysis and action to understand and support their work towards organization, production, generation of knowledge, and autonomy.

The analysis is based on experiences from the project *Productive and Social Innovations to Strengthen Communities and Preserve Ecosystems* (InnovaSociales), financed by the National Research and Advocacy Projects of the National Council for Humanities, Sciences, and Technologies (ProNaII-CONAHCyT, No. 319100). In addition, we include movements for food sovereignty and the massification or scaling-up of agroecology, which are integral to the activities of the participating teams. The information and systematization are drawn from the period 2020-2024, when we worked as a multi-actoral collective to design and conduct socioeconomic and biocultural analysis; diagnose challenges and opportunities to amend socio-metabolic rifts; reappropriate local ecological knowledge; foster crossgenerational learning; build technical capacities in food sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and community health (with an emphasis on agroecology); and enhance local governance, autonomy, and community organization in relation to territories.

The first section of this article reviews the characteristics of the CS and the communities that support it, reflecting on their transformative and revolutionary potential. We highlight the organization models that improve the quality of collective life, prevent or repair biophysical imbalances or metabolic rifts (Foster, 1999; Moore, 2011), and create more egalitarian societies. This transformation is being carried out in myriad communities throughout Latin America by assuming responsibility for the territorial management of their productive systems, the generation and management of monetary and non-monetary surpluses, and the active search for autonomy.

In section 2, we reflect on the roles that the CS and CRS play in the construction and consolidation of post-capitalist societies. These subjects are committed to carefully defining their relations with the Nation-State within which they reside; they are not proposing to separate themselves from their countries, but rather to define increasing degrees of autonomy. Each one of them explores different ways of relating to the country, redefining the nature of their interactions, their demands, and, above all, the socio-territorial scope of their proposals. One of the axiomatic bases of these processes is the defense of their territory.

Sections 3 to 5 address three selected cases: a) Territories of Life Mexico, which is part of an international consortium promoting the knowledge, recognition, and strengthening of local communities and Indigenous Peoples, whose dynamic relationship with the territory result in the conservation of extensive ecosystems and landscapes; b) the Autonomous Communal University of Oaxaca (UACO), an institution born from the vision of *comunalidad,* which presents itself as an anti-capitalist and decolonial alternative; c) the National Network of Forest Maguey Managers (RNMMF), which promotes agroforestry production of *Agave*, supporting artisan manufacturing of *mezcal* in accordance with the ecological balance and the well-being of producer communities.

Finally, section 6 examines the strategies for promoting food sovereignty adopted by La Vía Campesina, along with an international network of communities and organizations participating in the massification or scaling-up of a Latin American version of agroecology, grounded in traditional agriculture practices and innovating when necessary. We highlight the actions of the Paulo Freire School, at the Sierra Norte de Puebla, and the Universidad de la Tierra (UniTierra) in Oaxaca. We observe that the results of these processes contribute to strengthening communities, reducing poverty, and reversing environmental deterioration.

The Communitarian Revolutionary Subject

The concepts of Communitarian Subject (CS) and Communitarian Revolutionary Subject (CRS) are theoretical categories (Barkin *et al.*, 2019; Barkin and Sánchez, 2020; Barkin and Fuente Carrasco, 2021; Barkin, 2022a) that contribute to explaining the actions of social subjects who "form the collectivity, the creation of networks, the ethics of care, and the sustainability of life, build autonomy to restore biophysical imbalances, improve quality of life and create more just societies" (Barkin, 2022a, p. 1). The actions of the CS become relevant alternatives to the Earth's socio-ecological crisis; hence, the importance of understanding and supporting them as effective proposals and comprehensive solutions.

The debate about what defines a CS as revolutionary (or not) is ongoing, because within the complexity of collectivities and communities, sharp limits cannot be established. Barkin *et al.* (2019) analyze the notion of revolution in the Marxist sense and its updating in the socio-political dynamics of the 21st century. A revolutionary movement can be described as "a changing organizational movement according to the historical context that makes social emancipation possible" (Barkin *et al.*, 2019, p. 43). This revolutionary character transcends the traditional notion of a Revolution as a violent and sudden event, instead encompassing "processes of social and productive transformation involving groups with a legitimate claim to their territories for their social, productive and ecological management" (Barkin *et al.*, 2019, p. 35). Community unity, rooted in both preColumbian historical legacy and new forms of social configuration, stems from inherited cosmovisions and political positions, forming the structure that sustains transformative action. This structure extends beyond the community, shaping regional alliances for families, labor, production, analysis, and reflection.

Although revolutionary action often transcends the community, it is the indigenous and peasant communities that offer guidelines to understand this process. When analyzing CS and CRS, rural configurations that have forged capacities to generate important socioeconomic, cultural, and socioecological changes throughout their history are made visible (see, for example, Pérez Riaño *et al.*, 2023).

These communities provide us with a guide for action that has proven to be politically effective throughout post-conquest history and efficient for the reproduction of life, despite the pressures of the subsequent economic development models (Fernández-Llamazares *et al.*, 2021). Villoro (2003) described the community as a CRS:

- Individuals recognize each other as part of a whole.
- Its foundation is service, seeking the common good through individual and family contributions, guided by reciprocity.

- While pursuing the common good, personal identity and individual fulfillment are not sacrificed.
- Common values are established, while incorporating individual values.
- Solidarity, fraternity, equity, and social justice are promoted as strengths that enhance all the above.

The CS and CRS are organized in different ways throughout Mexican territories to reproduce both biological and sociocultural life, and they extend their networks to broader regions in Latin America and the world. These formations cater to different social groups, ecosystems, and varying degrees of community integration; however, all of them share a commitment to organizing themselves and consolidating their productive capacities following the goals of a) improving quality of life, b) preventing and restoring biophysical imbalances, and c) creating more equitable societies.

The CS and CRS learn from their inherited cosmovisions to conceive the union between the human and the non-human, the integration of society and nature, taking advantage of science and technology to innovate in harmony with local processes. Thus, they implement strategies to avoid or restore metabolic rifts through traditional or innovative approaches that identify and combat these rifts or restore and care for ecosystems. In sum, the transformative action of these subjects covers three areas: a) territorial management of production systems, b) management of monetary and non-monetary surpluses, and c) political strategies to build autonomy (Barkin and Sánchez, 2020).

The ability to generate and handle community surplus derives from the socio-territorial character of the CS and CRS (see next section) through territorial management, work for collective production, and shared use and benefit of goods. The CS broadly aims to avoid distributive ecological conflicts and to improve the collective ability to increase agricultural, livestock, and agroforestry productivity, as well as diversify production. The subject is constantly organizing or re-organizing itself to establish and defend its autonomy, ultimately seeking a more virtuous future and a better collective and individual well-being.

The gender approach within the CS and CRS is also essential to understanding the dynamics of construction of post-capitalist societies outside the Nation-State, caring not only for human life, but also for environmental health and planetary existence. Women are overcoming the patriarchal system's historical discrimination and their exclusion in the distribution of land and credits for production, marketing, and sometimes consumption. In Mexico, women frequently face the impossibility of migration, nurture those who are displaced by violence and poverty, and gain local public spaces for decision-making such as community and local assemblies.

However, we acknowledge the constant need to make their role visible, since they are not always recognized as part of the assemblies—even though they represent half the population and have their own community participation mechanisms.

The Role of CS in the Construction of PostCapitalist Societies outside the Nation-State

Post-Capitalist Societies

The characteristics and historical continuity of the CS indicate that other societies are actively being forged—societies in which the individual accumulation of capital is discouraged and even reversed and where new socio-political and metabolic configurations are designed to resolve the contradictions imposed by the Nation-State with its dominant politics (Pérez Riaño *et al.*, 2023).

Barkin *et al.* (2019) characterize these alternative indigenous and peasant forms of social organization as "post-capitalist societies", meaning that they attempt to transcend existing organizational forms, based on private property, competition among individuals, and pecuniary incentives. These forms instead develop collective life projects that exist beyond the circuits of capital. Likewise, we frequently find an explicit intention to transform the power structures of capitalist societies[3]. The communities participating in these projects are not autarchic societies, nor are they isolated from the capitalist production system; on the contrary, they are familiar with its principles and its consequences. Sometimes they negotiate with the Nation-State of which they are part, incorporating certain political, institutional, economic, and productive processes. However, they go beyond it, with a defined political position and awareness of imposing clear limits, to achieve social change and recover the socioecological balance. In this context, it is important to reiterate the relevance of collective organization and the non-individual appropriation of surplus work, since they strive to avoid a proletarian social relationship.

In addition, these societies seek to reconstruct or recover dynamics, identities, and knowledge that have been eroded during their long journeys through colonial and capitalist history. This recovery includes the reassessment of their own characteristics, and the incorporation of new elements (scientific, political, economic, and ecological knowledge) that enrich their rich heritage of accumulated knowledge and facilitate the implementation of their future strategies. Likewise, it implies creating new options that allow the community, its members, and its networks to thrive. One of the main traits of these post-capitalist societies is their collective

[3] Arrighi *et al.*, (1989) offer a useful discussion of why these societies are "anti-systemic".

character, which transcends the individualistic rationality of capitalism, seeking the common good above private interest.

To move toward this type of society, five principles have been categorized (Barkin *et al.*, 2019; Barkin and Fuente Carrasco, 2021):

a. Autonomy, understood as a capacity for community self-management and the formation of intercommunity alliances.
b. Social solidarity and reciprocity, including equitable distribution of responsibilities and benefits.
c. Self-sufficiency in all facets of human and social sustenance, to the extent permitted by their environment[4].
d. Productive diversification.
e. Sustainable management of regional ecosystems, so that new socio-metabolic configurations are generated.

What Does it Mean to Be Outside the Nation-State?

In Mexico, as in other parts of the world, the economic and development policies of the 20th century (and earlier) generated poverty, inequality, and environmental deterioration. These problems result from an economic system that shaped an institutional structure and guided public policy, implementing productive and infrastructure projects that reorganized national space and society, based on the use and abuse of natural heritage. Likewise, many traditional communities and societies were marginalized or outright destroyed. The paradigm that sustains it—forged over centuries of colonialism and imperialism, and brought to perfection with the policies of liberalism and neoliberalism—exacerbated the differences between social groups (classes, nationalities, religions, races, ethnic groups) by disguising them up through negotiations between *peers*, denying the importance of class struggle or ethnic differences, the exercise of power, or discrimination as barriers to ensure social peace and general welfare. This system produced a deeply divided and unequal society, with institutions unprepared to face the challenges.

Based on the REE and the broad category of CS, our analysis departs from an alternative epistemological approach, derived from the experience of communities and social groups that were marginalized from the process of national *integration*.

[4] In this context, self-sufficiency does not mean the autonomy of isolated communities but relative selfsufficiency, in which the community or society decides the level of internal production and the ratio of production to consumption. They establish interdependent horizontal relationships with other communities, promoting solidarity, mutual support, and the construction of regional networks for economic exchange.

The CS and the CRS are central actors in alleviating poverty and reversing environmental deterioration in their fields of action, with emphasis on repairing the metabolic rifts that have been so damaging.

An important part of the REE episteme consists of revaluing and integrating the reflections and cosmogonies of Latin American Indigenous Peoples and civil organizations, as well as academic groups that question positivist, Eurocentric, and institutional paradigms, as the only valid way to approach reality. Methodologically, the REE is enriched in the context of CS, by explicitly incorporating a dialogue between knowledge systems and cosmogonies that have proven to be comprehensive and effective in designing alternatives to development and economic growth (Fernández-Llamazares *et al.*, 2021; Barkin, 2022b).

Local, community, and collective praxis aimed at improving the quality of life, restoring biophysical imbalances and creating more equitable societies refers us to the debate on whether the Nation-State is an effective instrument for social transformation. As mentioned, the results of state and government policies that have persisted into the 21st century include poverty, inequality, and environmental deterioration—or, in the least of cases, they have not been able to adequately address them. In this sense, the peoples included in this study have decided to engage in autonomous processes, to a greater or lesser degree, that start from (or derive in) structural changes in their social organization and in the management and enjoyment of their territories. Thus, they distance themselves, in various ways and measures, from official nature conservation programs, state extensionism for food production, formal educational projects and cycles, and productive regulations that worsen the socio-ecological crisis. Toledo (2015) considers that this type of social conformation constitutes a social power and an emancipating force with the capacity to overcome the crisis of civilization.

The Socio-Territorial Character of the CS and CRS

The rural, peasant and indigenous communities who are organizing themselves as CS and CRS are reconfiguring the social metabolisms of their productive activities and the reproduction of life in its broadest sense in accordance with their cosmovisions (González de Molina and Toledo, 2014). These belief systems are based on relationships with the land, biodiversity, ecosystems, and landscapes, mediated by socio-cultural and economic practices rooted in historically constructed territories. Natural goods are collectively appropriated, implying both the right to their enjoyment and their care, based on a community-nature relationship that is transferred from generation to generation. Many local worldviews do not consider land as a commodity but as a giver of life (Mother Earth) and its defense is an obligation (Fernández-Llamazares *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, community practices and the networks in which they are woven constitute socio-territorial movements with impacts on different scales. We find, for example, CS networks organized into social movements incorporating hundreds of millions of people, consolidating institutions and social and political frameworks, as well. as productive structures that promote the well-being of their members, with a renewed ecological and environmental awareness, leading to decisions to care for or restore ecosystems (Barkin and Sánchez, 2020). This is clearly exemplified by the International Consortium of Territories and Areas Conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (https://iccacorsortium.org), who cares for around a quarter of the world's territory (Garnett *et al.*, 2018). Another example is La Vía Campesina, which brings together 220 million peasants, small and medium producers, rural women, landless day laborers, Indigenous communities, migrants, agricultural workers, and artisanal fishermen, with a presence in 81 countries through of 182 national or regional organizations (https://viacampesina.org/es/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/04/List-of-members.pdf.).

Barkin *et al.* (2019) differentiate between social power and popular power. The former "houses alternative projects developed by various groups of organized people, in such a way that it includes communities, cooperatives, unions, associations, among other groups" (Barkin *et al.*, 2019, p. 55). For its part, in popular power, the main challenge for collective organization is the (extended) control of its territory. Therefore, this type of power is conducted by collectivities, groups, and communities that have already established—or seek to start up—an active relationship with the territory. Historically, in Mexico, the figures of agrarian community, *ejido,* and collectively managed private property, have been historically constructed. Many agrarian communities trace their legal origin back to colonial times, with social property titles granted to indigenous communities by the Spanish crown. For their part, the *ejidos* are a type of rural community consolidated after the Mexican Revolution as groups of rural owners with access to territory and natural assets, whose Assembly functions as the highest decision-making body. Their management as social property was drastically affected by the agrarian *counter-reform* enacted in 1992. Finally, there are cases of individual private properties, which are, in practice, managed collectively, such as the case of communities in the Sierra Norte of Puebla whose collective management systems date back more than 40 years old (Toledo, 2015; Boege Schmidt and Fernández, 2021).

The collective organization—encompassing the appropriation, management, and social enjoyment of the territory—represents a form of resistance and an alternative to capitalist insertion/exclusion. This structure is a palpable reflection of the conviction that the Earth cannot be a commodity or a simple material base for production, but rather an integral part of relationships and existence.

The cases addressed here include struggles and conflicts for the defense of the territory that often involve direct confrontation with megaprojects. Such is the case of the TICCA of the Yucatán Peninsula, which face pig farms and the destruction of the forest by commercial soybean plantations and their devastating effect on water systems and the production of organic honey—due to the use of agrochemicals that devastate populations of native bees. However, territorial control is also sought on a constant, daily basis, through: the appropriation of the means of agricultural, livestock, and agroforestry production; the autonomy in decision-making to improve the quality of life; and efforts to prevent or restore biophysical imbalances.

Control and management of surpluses for collective well-being also depend on the power over the territory and the means of production linked to it[5]. Only through such control can productive strategies and their level be managed. Governing the territory requires implementing diverse management mechanisms, including legal, political, social, economic, and ecological forms (Barkin *et al.*, 2019).

In the following sections, we present three case studies, emphasizing the elements that characterize them as CS in its broadest sense and describing the actions that make them postcapitalist alternatives on the margin of the Nation-State.

Territories of Life (TICCA)

The Territories and Areas Conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (TICCAs), also known as Territories of Life, comprise a subset of lands of Indigenous Peoples and local communities around the world. TICCAs encompass three main characteristics:

> "a) There is a close and deep connection between the territory or area and the Indigenous People or the local community that protects it. This relationship is usually rooted in history, social and cultural identity, spirituality, or the link of people with the territory for their material or non-material well-being;
>
> b) The people or community that protects the territory or area makes decisions or establishes regulations in this regard and ensures that these are complied with [...] through a functional and self-determined governance institution, which may or may not be recognized by external persons or by the statutory law of the relevant country; and

[5] Social organization for using surpluses is a core issue that exceeds the scope of this article. It is enough to point out that the collective mobilization of work, voluntary labor for public infrastructure, and the recognition of the contributions of women, as well as young and elderly people in social and environmental care activities, are mechanisms that are not valued in market economies and that are fundamental to strengthening these societies.

> c) Both the decisions and norms of governance and the management efforts [...] in general contribute positively to the conservation of nature and to the livelihood and well-being of the community." (UNEP-WCMC and ICCA Consortium, 2021, p. 8).

After a geographic and territorial analysis of the Territories of Life, the concept of potential TICCAs was also established, as an estimate of areas that "are in good ecological conditions and appear to be consistent with the main characteristics of TICCAs" (UNEP-WCMC and ICCA Consortium, 2021, p. 9). The only difference with the formally recognized TICCAs is that they do not self-identify as such by their guardians or administrators. According to the *2021 Report on Territories of Life*, TICCAs cover more than a fifth of the world's territory (21%, equivalent to 28 million km²), as well as more than a fifth (22%, equivalent to 2,6 million km²) of the world's key biodiversity areas. Likewise, potential TICCAs cover 33% of intact forest landscapes; 32% of the areas considered key to reversing loss of biodiversity, preventing CO2 emissions, and enhancing natural carbon sinks; and 32% of the terrestrial sites that are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. However, at least 16% of the potential TICCAs are highly exposed to the pressures of development proposals based on the extractive industry and large-scale agro-industrial producers.

For their part, Garnett *et al.* (2018) made a broader estimate. Based on public geospatial resources, they showed that "Indigenous Peoples manage or have tenure rights over at least ~38 million km² in 87 countries or political distinct areas on all inhabited continents. This represents over a quarter of the world's land surface, and intersects about 40% of all terrestrial protected areas and ecological intact landscapes" (Garnett *et al.*, 2018, p. 369).

In 2008, within the framework of the IV World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, the ICCA Consortium was founded as an international association whose objectives include increasing the understanding of these territories and their dynamics, as well as promoting the recognition of guardians and administrators of this large portion of the Earth. The Consortium also advocates respect for their rights, with special attention to the rights to self-determination over the land and its collective territories[6].

In Mexico, the ICCA Consortium is represented by Territories of Life Mexico (TICCA Mexico):

> The network is made up of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, individuals and civil society organizations that seek to promote a conservation ethic based on territories of life; understanding [them as] those whose inhabitants have close ties

[6] https://www.iccaconsortium.org

> between a healthy environment, the well-being of the communities and cultural heritage. (Chan, 2022)

TICCA Mexico arises from Indigenous communities and organizations to promote their own strengthening, support community processes, and increase the visibility of conservation in the face of the "siege, threat, and pressure that the megaprojects impose on the territories".

Currently, TICCA Mexico has an active work in the states of Campeche, Nayarit, Quintana Roo, and Yucatán. As part of the project, its consolidation and densification are sought, based on strategic planning that will allow the inclusion of more territories of life and its selfstrengthening (Borrini-Feyerabend *et al.*, 2021). This planning invites people and communities to reflect on their relationship with the territory, internal governance, and natural resources. Interactions between local, national, and international levels allow socio-ecological learning and contributions to have a space for listening and feedback from communities around the globe.

Considering the organizations that are members of TICCA Mexico as CS, they propose to improve the quality of life of their members and communities, restore biophysical imbalances, or repair metabolic rifts caused by megaprojects in agriculture, industrial pig production, urbanization, and dispossession of communal lands, to create more equitable societies. The territorial management of their production systems is carried out through agroecology, maintenance and protection of native seeds, and innovation in livestock production activities (e.g., backyard chicken farming, extensive livestock, and beekeeping). The surpluses produced are mainly non-monetary, through the expansion and consolidation of local infrastructure; increase and diversified food production; traditional medicine; political and technical training; new capacities, joint learning, strengthening of work and exchange networks; and technology transfer between groups and community members. Another facet, often overlooked in this dynamic, is the collective mobilization to ensure continuity of cultural and political traditions and celebrations, thereby reinforcing the historical and political memory that sustains the strength of the CS. Autonomy is reaffirmed in continuous processes of reflection, work within organizations, and deepening of indigenous knowledge as an essential part of productive work and their relationship with the territory.

The Autonomous Communal University of Oaxaca (UACO)

The UACO was officially constituted in 2020, with a critical pedagogical approach to promote Indigenous *comunalidad*[7] in the state of Oaxaca. Its conceptual proposal was established in essays published at the beginning of the 21st century (Robles and Cardoso, 2007; Martínez Luna, 2003). Although its official creation is recent, its activities began with the non-governmental organization La Fundación Comunalidad, that, in 23 years, has promoted the deepening of local cultures and collective management of the commons in hundreds of communities in the region.

Currently, the UACO is organized into 16 Community University Centers with associated Community Learning Units, which in turn are reinforced by the communities of origin of their students and teachers. Its members participate in social and academic activities, environmental education and training, participatory planning, public policy formulation, and territorial management. Teaching activities are carried out mainly in the form of *tequio* or volunteer work. Seventeen bachelor's degrees, two engineering, and three master's degrees are covered, serving around 600 students[8].

As CS, they pose an openly anti-capitalist and decolonial position, which transcends individualistic, anthropocentric action—a university approach that challenges the role of educational institutions as instruments of power, individual property, and the market. In this context, the UACO poses a proposal for a different conception of society, starting from a communal position, based on the cosmovisions and cosmogonies of native communities that articulate the human with the non-human as a whole (Martínez Luna, 2020).

The UACO is creating new opportunities and improving the quality of life of its students and their communities through teaching, research, strengthening, and dissemination of knowledge and culture, and supporting the diversification of the productive base in its regions of influence. This is expressed in the four pillars of *comunalidad*: territory, a multi-scalar and multi-value space; assembly, as a nucleus of participation and social organization; work, through which the educational experiences are channeled based on local needs; and celebration, as a principle of collective life for the peoples (Rendón Monzón, 2002; Martínez Luna, 2009; Jiménez Jiménez and Peralta Antiga, 2020).

Within the project, the UACO addresses the challenge of overcoming biophysical imbalances through community water management, care for the genetic

[7] A concept coined by Floriberto Díaz (2007) and Jaime Martínez Luna (2003) that characterizes the multidimensional belief system that guides the Indigenous communities in the Zapoteca and Mixe regions of Oaxaca.

[8] http://uaco.edu.mx/la-universidad/

diversity of native seeds, and the establishment of renewable energy projects in three communities. The work includes the participatory construction of a knowledge base that strengthens autonomy and informed decisionmaking on the three mentioned topics. Decision-making and training based on local needs, autonomy building, and overcoming metabolic rifts involving water, seeds, and energy generation contribute to the creation of more equitable societies. This is particularly evident in socio-cultural contexts where community organization, historical knowledge, and biocultural elements are solid, but constantly threatened.

It is important to highlight the role played by the dialogue of knowledge systems incorporated by the UACO. From *comunalidad*, the methodological tool of the triangle of *the own - the foreign - the possible* is proposed. It takes up ideas of pluralism, interculturality, and interscientific dialogue from Pannikar (2006), which are also raised by other South American authors such as Delgado Burgoa *et al.* (2013). Jiménez Jiménez and Peralta Antiga (2020) affirm that, despite the fact that the relations between *original* and other cultures have been primarily through imposition, resistance, and adaptation, power relations can be reversed by "thinking of native cultures as 'their own', of cultures that come from other logics as 'the foreign' and of the conscious/non-imposing relationship between both as 'the possible'" (p. 26). The authors emphasize always starting from the recognition of *the own* and its cultural reaffirmation.

The National Network of *Maguey* Forest Managers (RNMMF)

The RNMMF comprises more than 100 representatives of *mezcal*[9] managing and producing communities from 8 Mexican states. It was founded after the first two national meetings of forest *maguey* managers (2015 and 2016, respectively)[10], together with the non-governmental organization, Integral and Local Management of Agroforestry Products (MILPA), as an "inter-sectoral collective effort of producers, managers, researchers, and activists" (MILPA, 2022).

The relevance of drawing on the REE to understand the production of *agave* and its distillates is found in the context of socio-ecological conflicts triggered by the aggressive expansion of the commercialized sector, controlled by highly capitalized groups. The so-called *mezcal* boom and the *maguey* cultivation as the new *green gold*, stimulated a dramatic increase in the production volume of *tequila* and

[9] *Mezcal* is a distilled alcoholic beverage or spirit made from several species of *Agave* or maguey. The word means "oven-cooked agave" in *Nahuatl*. There are many regional variations that were developed over the centuries by Mesoamerican communities.

[10] See http://red-pfnm.org.mx/blog/actividades-8/post/segunda-reunion-nacional-de-manejadores-de-maguey-forestal-57

mezcal in the last decade (doubling and tripling, respectively). This brings with it the growth of the area planted with *agave* as a monoculture and the extraction of wild populations, which threatens the genetic foundations. The area recognized as the origin of *mezcal* has grown from 39 to 49 million hectares between the 1990s and the second decade of the 21st century (Lucio, 2022).

These increases are part of the agro-industrial, market, and consumption trends typical of a model of commodification of nature and agroextractivism controlled by transnational corporations (Tetreault *et al.*, 2021), which foment the displacement of diverse food crops[11] and deleterious effects on the territory, community structure, ecosystems, and landscapes (Lucio, 2022).

Among the socio-ecological impacts of the intensive production of mezcal, greater dependence on firewood as organic fuel and on water stand out. Artisanal *mezcal* that is distilled in clay pots and in traditional ovens has higher commercial value and requires more intensive use of firewood and water. Likewise, the expansion of the agricultural frontier of the *agave* monoculture implies changes in land use and accelerated deforestation, a decrease in wild populations of *agave*, loss of germplasm, affectation of pollinators, land grabbing, and disputes over the use of water (Tetreault *et al.*, 2021; Lucio, 2022)[12]. On the other hand, the Mexican regulatory context (NOM-070-SCFI-2016 and NOM-199-SCFI-2017) limits and excludes the participation of small producers—who have developed and maintained *agave* management and *mezcal* production techniques throughout history—or imposes guidelines for product labeling that make it difficult to market (Lucio, 2022).

The group of *agave* managers, *mezcal* producers, and other actors that make up the RNMMF can be understood as a CS that works to improve quality of life, avoid and prevent biophysical imbalances or metabolic rifts, and contribute to greater socio-environmental justice. Together with MILPA, the Network reinforces the capacities of *maguey* managers and *mezcal* producers based on local ecological knowledge while contributing to land management and raising the living standards of the communities involved. They are formulating alternative proposals for the economy-society-nature relationship (including the conservation of biodiversity and biocultural heritage) and carry out socioenvironmental research and advocacy actions through agroforestry management. Specifically, they are:

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[11] *Agave* wild populations or crops frequently coexist with other cultivars, such as *milpa* and fruit trees.

[12] This phenomenon and its intensity already occurred within the *tequila* industry, produced with the species *Agave tequilana*, which is currently controlled mainly by foreign capital that imposes a monoculture model destructive of the ecosystems and of the old communities of producers, transformed in poorly paid workers and with deplorable conditions of exploitation.

> […] promoting strategies for the prevention, restoration, and mitigation of the socio-ecosystemic effects caused by the boom in *agave* distillates, strengthening the alternative management of resources with agroecological and agroforestry perspectives. The participants are particularly concerned with deepening traditional ecological knowledge, through farmer-to-farmer exchanges, the dialogue of knowledge between academic communities and *maguey* producers/managers (as well as) promoting the recognition of family work, and the role of women and youth in these alternative production models (MILPA, 2022).

At the same time, other forms of recognition for local production and management systems are sought under *green seals* and *ecofriendly* labels, reflecting management practices that lead to adequate management of watersheds, carbon sequestration and the "conservation of biodiversity, that evaluate the productive sustainability from biological reproduction and germplasm, to the community governance structure of natural resources" (MILPA, 2022). These strategies link management with marketing and the production of surpluses. As for the contributions to socio-environmental justice, through ecofriendly certification models, they promote links between producers and consumers, regenerating local governance of natural assets and promoting their own notions of well-being.

The work of RNMMF represents an alternative to agro-industry and agro-extractivism, since they place at the center of their work the collective well-being, territorial health, and strong organization. This limits production according to ecosystems' bio-physical thresholds and strengthens the social fabric of producers, families, and their communities—something that capitalism does not do.

This experience is a clear example of a socio-territorial movement, where, through a focus on a botanical genus (*Agave*) and its distillates as commercial products, solutions to land use and socio-environmental conflicts are addressed in 40% of the municipalities throughout Mexico, implementing alternative proposals for management, production, and marketing.

Finally, the RNMMF facilitates collective progress toward autonomy in decision-making in the context of *maguey*. Lucio (2022) considers this process is part of "the defense of the commons, that is, the communities' territories and biocultural regions, requires not only recovering peasant knowledge while also strengthening the communitarian subject, challenging the commodification of nature that intellectual property laws seek to impose using denominations of origin in Mexico" (2022, p. 34).

La Vía Campesina, the Massification of Agroecology and Actions towards Food Sovereignty

The food sovereignty movement promoted by La Vía Campesina (LVC) and the scalingup of agroecology are two international movements with an important presence in Latin America and Mexico (Holt-Giménez, 2013; European Coordination Vía Campesina, 2018; Rosset and Altieri, 2017; Ávila Romero *et al.*, 2019). They illustrate the qualities of CS with a collective, organizational, and productive structures, which are deliberately involved in social and productive transformation (Barkin and Sánchez, 2020). As collective subjects, they have historical forms of organization that generate conditions to create better living conditions while attending to environmental concerns. Small-scale experiences come together to form networks and go far beyond government and university proposals, transforming themselves into community processes for managing and controlling the territory, through locally and regionally implemented solutions.

The study of these movements and communitarian subjects from the EER perspective provides an analytical framework along three previously mentioned directions: a) the construction of autonomies for greater socio-environmental justice; b) the strategies for reversing or reducing metabolic rifts and consequences of the agro-industrial model; and c) the generation and management of surpluses to improve quality of life (Camacho Benavides *et al.*, 2022).

The exercise of autonomy, in the framework of the search for food sovereignty and the scaling-up of agroecology, implies establishing and giving continuity to local production systems and decisionmaking about the management and enjoyment of their natural endowments. Achieving this autonomy requires consideration of the communities' political capacity to exercise their rights and to demand self-determination in defining their "life projects." LVC's declarations (Nyéléni Declaration, 2007; La Vía Campesina, 2021) emphasize the urgency of shaping of their own food systems, prioritizing culturally appropriate production and demanding that governments respect their economic, social, and cultural rights.

Regarding the reversal or reduction of metabolic rifts, we can understand the socioecological transformation driven by agroecology through the recovery of Indigenous and peasant knowledge, the strengthening of local production systems, and technical innovation aimed at achieving healthy, ecologically sustainable food systems with the capacity to supply enough food to peoples and communities (Altieri and Toledo, 2011; Rosset and Altieri, 2017; Giraldo, 2018; Mier y Terán *et al.*, 2018). The movements for food sovereignty and the scaling-up of agroecology promote "relationships and interactions to generate social metabolisms with lower entropic levels, taking into account the biophysical limits and the biogeochemical cycles of the territory, fostering the care and restoration of ecosystems" (Camacho

Benavides *et al.*, 2022, p. 49). In this way, they seek to avoid or reverse metabolic rifts through the construction of technical-productive alternatives that are committed to socio-environmental well-being, up to the rehabilitation of ecosystems impacted by the agroindustrial system in recent decades (Lucio, 2022).

Finally, the satisfaction of basic food needs and the generation of surpluses within these communities represent paradigms for forging post-capitalist societies outside the Nation-State (Arrighi *et al.*, 1989). They move away from proletarian relations that are the basis for the accumulation of capital and inequality, seeking conditions for the well-being of the CS, along with environmental health, and the recognition of productive limits imposed by biogeochemical cycles. This contrasts sharply with the agro-industrial model that requires an unsustainable process of economic growth. However, the proposals for agroecology and food sovereignty also allow for generating surpluses that encompass social, material, economic, and ecological goods and resources, each endowed with multiple value dimensions (Barkin *et al.*, 2019). They include monetary resources generated from the sale of their production, but also contributions to collective welfare through new skills, joint learning, work and exchange networks, and technology transfer. The social property systems, the social division of labor, and the community organization for the management of the territory and natural goods allow these surpluses to be assigned collectively (Carcaño Valencia, 2013).

Socioeconomic threats and pressures, as well as the food crisis and socioecological conflicts, are obstacles to achieving ideal co-existence between communities and their environment. Frequently, socioecological relationships with negative results are generated, particularly with a history of accelerated destruction of local ecosystems and food systems. In this setting, the CS that are part of the movements for food sovereignty and the scaling-up of agroecology take up and strengthen courses of action that have been identified by the REE as paths toward sustainability. In this regard, we can highlight the development of collective productive forces that strengthen traditional productive systems integrated with technical innovations and the diversification of the market through networks of mutual support (Fuente Carrasco, 2009).

In the project, we receive advice from La Vía Campesina to learn from their experiences related to projects on ethno-agroforestry and agroecological production. Likewise, as part of the project, the Paulo Freire School—a community secondary school in Huehuetla, Puebla, which promotes the Totonac identity and culture—concentrates on strengthening the local production *milpa* system by integrating agroecological innovations aimed at preserving local biological richness. Their actions focus on school gardens and family farming projects that help strengthen food sovereignty in the region.

Another key actor in these efforts is the former Universidad de la Tierra (UniTierra) in Oaxaca, a non-formal education center founded and directed by Gustavo Esteva. Although UniTierraOaxaca has paused its operations, it actively collaborated for many years with local communities to improve their quality of life, identifying valuable traditional knowledge and applying low-impact innovations; the participants continue to engage in the Global Tapestry of Alternatives (https://www.gta.org). They are developing systems to recover traditional planting methods, water, and soil management practices, as well as attention to the spheres of daily life—mainly food and healing. They are also adopting agroecological and ecotechnical approaches, promoting the sustainable self-management of water resources and the consolidation of their own forms of government, with an emphasis on agreement capacities. Food sovereignty is emphasized along with revaluing traditional and ancestral foods. The UniTierra team considers that both *comunalidad* and food sovereignty:

> […] are different ways of visualizing their commitment to transformation and life, which is not conceived from the hegemonic spaces of knowledge production. In the community context it provides clues to thinking about where to move forward in the construction of non-colonial relationships and alternatives to neoliberal capitalism. [...] Both arise as a response to the threat of dispossession of their natural resources (concessions for capitalist exploitation), for the defense of their community self-determination and for improving their living conditions. These are struggles that at the local level are designed to transform the relations of domination between the State and the native and peasant peoples (UniTierra, 2022).

Conclusions

Socio-territorial movements in Mexico are an expression of the actions and strategies of Communitarian Subject (and Communitarian Revolutionary Subject) working to build or move towards post-capitalist societies on the margins of the Nation-State. We contribute to the theoretical-methodological framework of the REE, by constructing an analysis of the actions of these CS. Their strength is grounded in community organizations and praxis that can be transformed into networks of collaborative work, learning, and territorial management. The community, as a pre-Hispanic heritage, enriched by Indigenous and peasant legacies, offers a guide for action that encompasses: the understanding of individuals as part of a whole; the service or gifting aimed at satisfying the common good; the recognition of individual fulfillment within the search for the common good; and strength through values of mutual support, such as solidarity, reciprocity, fraternity, equity, and social justice.

Faced with a history of dispossession of their territories and their natural heritage, colonial and neoliberal aggressions, the main goal of the CS is to recuperate the ethic of both human and non-human care. Current challenges are not minor, as they include violence and repression of alternative actions—many times disguised under the appearance of *green* or *positive* changes, such as renewable energies—or challenging communal organization for the sake of corporate profit. For this, autonomy from the Nation-State is essential, to a lesser or greater degree, since global socioeconomic policies that they promote have not only deepened inequality and poverty, but also generated serious socioecological crises.

The analysis presented in this article is based on specific experiences that contribute to our collaborative project. They are based on a common approach of organizing and strengthening the production and reproduction of life in each group, pursuing: a) the improvement of quality of life, b) the prevention and restoration of biophysical imbalances or metabolic disruptions, and c) the creation of more equitable societies.

The revolutionary nature of these CSs consists in the constant search for comprehensive control of their territories, managing their own means of agricultural, livestock, and agroforestry production, as well as autonomy in decision-making to improve the quality of life and overcome biophysical imbalances. In the post-capitalist sense, they aspire to overcome proletarian productive relations and surmount the hegemonic circuits of capital. The communities are not isolating themselves; rather, they negotiate with the system, although setting limits to the factors that generate socio-ecological imbalances. Social property, the social division of labor, and the organization forms typical of many Indigenous and peasant communities, as seen in the cases presented here, contribute to a better management of the territory, natural assets, and surpluses for collective benefit.

Being on the fringes of the Nation-State also stems from the organization and decisionmaking of the CSs and CRSs that implement strategies to reduce poverty and reverse environmental destruction. Autonomy is expressed in the distancing, to a lesser or greater degree, from government programs with territorial incidence, as these communities establish their own strategies that give (non-monetary) value to the land, biodiversity, ecosystems, and landscapes—as part of the commons or collective property, and not as a commodity or a simple material basis for production. This dynamic includes epistemological reflections and inherited cosmovisions, that are proving to be effective for finding solutions to part of the global socioecological crisis. The cultures, knowledge, and worldviews that support territorial management and economic relations of common welfare are gaining renewed importance.

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