

# The Mexican Government's Negligence, Manifested as a Polluted and Powerless River

Michelle Evangelista

Michelle Evangelista researched the Santiago River as a case of environmental injustice. The Santiago River, “the power of nine rivers” in the Nahuatl language, is one of the most polluted rivers in Mexico that winds through the towns of El Salto and Juanacatlán in Guadalajara, Mexico. As El Salto grew into the industrial hub for Guadalajara, so did problems of pollution with little enforcement of environmental laws and corruption. The frothy foam and overpowering stench from waste and toxins disposed into the river permeates residents’ homes and bodies, leading to cancer and other health complications. The condition of the river can be seen as a case of environmental injustice.

Through document analysis and interviews, this thesis examines the importance of acknowledging local residents’ experiences and culture to understand the significance of this environmental justice. To recognize how pollution affects the relationship between the river and local communities, this research explores the culture, knowledge, and histories of the people living in El Salto and Juanacatlán. It also critiques how governments recognize and acknowledge local identities, such as their Indigenous identities.

This research project highlights how the local residents have taken back their power to achieve environmental justice through self-determination, providing a model for how, one day, the power of the nine rivers can be restored to the Santiago River. While researching this case, Evangelista found that many academic articles observed the river through a scientific lens. So, she decided to focus on what the community thought about the Santiago River’s pollution and governance through document analysis and interviews.

“Ultimately, I want to give the people of El Salto and Juanacatlán a more personal and intimate narrative within academi,” she noted. “I want to remind the academic community that these communities are comprised of people who deserve to have their stories shared and respected by others, to be seen as who they are: people with ambitions, passions and livelihoods.”

Through Envagelista’s thesis, more is understood on how the people have taken back their power to achieve environmental justice through self-determination and reveal if one day, the power of the nine rivers can be restored to the Santiago River. Read about her research [here](#).