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Reconsidering the Logistics of Autonomy: Ecological Autonomy, Self-defense and the Policía Comunitaria in Álvaro Obregón, Mexico

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Reconsidering the Logistics of Autonomy: Ecological Autonomy, Self-defense and the *Polícia Comunitaria* in Álvaro Obregón, Mexico

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Abstract

*Inspired by experiences in Álvaro Obregón, or Gui'Xhi'Ro in Zapotec, this paper discusses ideas of popular ecological struggle and self-defense. Gui'Xhi'Ro, a largely Zapotec town, was confronted in 2011 with a wind energy megaproject on the Santa Teresa sand bar (Barra). This project triggered an exaggeration of local political corruption, unequal benefit sharing, new regulations and threatened local livelihoods. Consequently this wind project sparked an insurrection, not only against the wind company, but all political parties, transforming into a struggle for Indigenous autonomy that established town-wide governance based on Indigenous customary law—*usos y costumbres*—and forming a *polícia comunitaria*. Acknowledging industrialism as 'the structure of oppression,' this article begins by relating industrial organization to authoritarian populism and its 'green' articulations through environmental and climate change discourse. This critical lens towards industrialism, as it relates to colonial-statist forms of organization, leads to reviewing anarchist ideas of informal organizing, ecological autonomy and self-defense, before outlining the struggle in Álvaro Obregón. Following this outline, the next section reflects on the experiences and limitations faced in Gui'Xhi'Ro. The article concludes by discussing the value of reviving strategies of popular ecological struggle(s), which resonate historically and practically with autonomous Indigenous struggle.*

Keywords: Mexico; Álvaro Obregón; Wind Energy; Colony; Resistance; Ecological Struggle; Climate Change

They want to make us govern, we aren't going to fall for it

—Graffiti, Oaxaca City, 2006

*In sum, development—whether it is capitalist, socialist, fascist, or Lopez-Obradorist, is nothing more than: **War Against the native; War against the different; War against the diverse; War against joy.** Because we know that their crusades against hunger are wars—crusades, at the end of the day—against families; to poison diets, to corrode the social fabric. Because we know that selling a watershed to French, Brazilian, or Mexican corporations is a savage war against the livelihood of everyone and everything.*

—Anarchists Communiqué, Xalapa, 2015

‘[I]nvasion is a structure not an event,’ writes Patrick Wolfe (2006: 388) and, now more than ever, it is time to recognize that this structure is called *industrialism*. Capitalism, the colonial project and the state are the manifestations, projections and outgrowth of industrial organization. The placement, design and function of everyday, built and social, infrastructures serve to reinforce and reproduce the logical structures of industrialism that privilege governance based on utilitarian and capitalist values (Dunlap, 2017c; Dalakoglou and Harvey, 2012; Rodgers and O'Neill, 2012). Industrialism, and its requisite disciplining and regimenting of people and landscapes, has always necessitated the creation of real or imagined popular legitimacy to justify capitalist expansion (Scoones et al., 2017: 2), colonial ventures (to spread productive and statist modes of administration) and its organizational affirmation and growth—a process requiring ceaseless human and nonhuman resources. Encouraging ‘debate about emancipatory possibilities, and also about what is being resisted,’ Ian Scoones et al. (2017: 9) assert: ‘The structures of oppression need to be revealed, in order to be resisted and overcome.’ Responding to this call, this paper centers industrialism as the structure of oppression and offers a way to conceptualize resistance against the industrial machine¹ that imposes an order of permanent resource acquisition and control that has generated a proliferation of social and ecological crises.

Anthropogenic climate change is ecological crisis on an industrial-scale. The result of state formation, the spread of political economy and industrial humanity, climate change emerges not only as a national security threat, but an uneven threat to the human and nonhuman populations of the planet (Gilbert, 2012; Dalby, 2013, 2014; Dunlap and Fairhead, 2014). Climate change has stirred moral panic, especially among urban populations, that has led to numerous international summits, governmental boards and, consequently, market-based mitigation strategies (Dunlap and Fairhead, 2014; Hunsberger, *et al.*, 2017). The framing and organization of climate change now constitutes a pathway to an ‘authoritarian populism’ (Hall, 1980), which not only preserves the industrial structure, but assumes its existence and, consequently never questions its operations or deleterious effects. Emerging as a term to discuss shifts between the Keynesian and Neoliberal models in 1970s and 80s, authoritarian populism explores political control ‘from above’ that harnesses and manufactures ‘moral panics’ to gain populist consent ‘from below’ (Hall, 1985: 118). While associated with the reactive politics of Reagan, Thatcher and, now, Trump (Kellner, 2016), authoritarian populism can take on less-reactive forms, yet with far-reaching political and economic consequences. The present articulation of climate change and its market-based mitigation approaches serves such an example. Reinforcing governmental control, climate change policy does not localize or ‘bring home’ the everyday processes that collectively contribute to climate change—mass consumptions, radioactive and industrial wastes—rather through environmental panic it solidifies (global) governance and action, giving the message ‘that only governments, corporations and NGOs can stop this phenomenon’ (Dunlap, 2015b: n.p.). The ‘higher good’ of authoritarian populism brandishes climate change as a means of greater governance (e.g. Good Governance, Earth System Governance), but, more importantly, it simultaneously affirms the present trajectory of economic growth and industrial infrastructural development that underpins the present crisis by intensifying green economy and/or climate commodity markets (Dunlap and Fairhead, 2014; Hunsberger, *et al.*, 2017). This includes strengthening the commodification of the natural environment (Sullivan, 2009, 2013a, 2017), market-based conservation initiatives (Büscher et al., 2012; Hunsberger, et al., 2017; Huff and Brock, 2017),

¹ Also known as the social machine (Dunlap, 2014a) or genocide machine (Davis and Zannis, 1973).

militarizing nature (Dunlap and Fairhead, 2014; Lunstrum, 2014; Verweijen J and Marijnen, 2016), mining offsets (Seagle 2012; Sullivan, 2013b; Brock and Dunlap, 2018), geoengineering (Dalby, 2015), biofuels (Borras et al., 2010; Hunsberger et al., 2017) and other ‘green’ and renewable energy schemes (Dunlap, 2017b; Bigger and Neimark, 2017; Siamanta, 2017). Notably, this rebranding of industrial development through the green economy and climate change legislation is intensifying ecological impositions and land grabbing (Fairhead et al., 2012; Corson et al., 2013; Cavanagh and Benjaminsen, 2017), resulting in heightened ecological degradation and conflict (Dunlap and Fairhead, 2014; Hunsberger, et al., 2017), consequently brandishing a type of ‘green authoritarian populism’ that uses environmental crises to seize greater political and economic control over populations and ecosystems.

Wind energy development in Isthmus of Tehuantepec region of Oaxaca, Mexico—known locally as the *Istmo*—serves as an example of this green authoritarian populism. This populism emerged on two levels, locally and internationally. First, Zapotec (*Binníza*), Ikoot (Huave) and other local farm and fishing interests are enticed, negotiated and coerced into the imperatives of profit driven industrial-scale wind energy development, which is secondarily reinforced by the ‘higher good’ of mitigating climate change (Howe, 2014). These political and economic ploys, however, generated fierce conflicts throughout the region between the years 2010-2016, which still continues to various degrees (Dunlap, 2017e). A notable town within this conflict was the primarily Zapotec farming and fishing community of Álvaro Obregón, or Gui’Xhi’ Ro’ in Zapotec (see Dunlap, 2018a), positioned at the entrance of the Santa Teresa sand bar (Barra) that separated the Lagoon Superior from the Lagoon inferior (see figure 1). In 2007, the Spanish consortium Mareña Renovables began conducting (illegal) negotiations with politicians, later surveying the area in 2011 to build 102 wind turbines on the Barra and another 30 on the Pacific Ocean around Santa Maria del Mar (Smith, 2012). This developmental intervention led to an upheaval against the company, which required defeating 500 state police, the formation of the *cabildo comunitario* (Community Counsel) and, eventually led to the seizure of the town hall to establish a recognized form of Indigenous self-governance known as *usos y costumbres* (Dunlap, 2015a, 2018a; Howe et al., 2015). Thus the fight against wind energy turned into a fight for Indigenous autonomy that established its own structure of governance, which included a *policia comunitaria* (communitarian police) to protect the Barra from wind companies and their political allies.

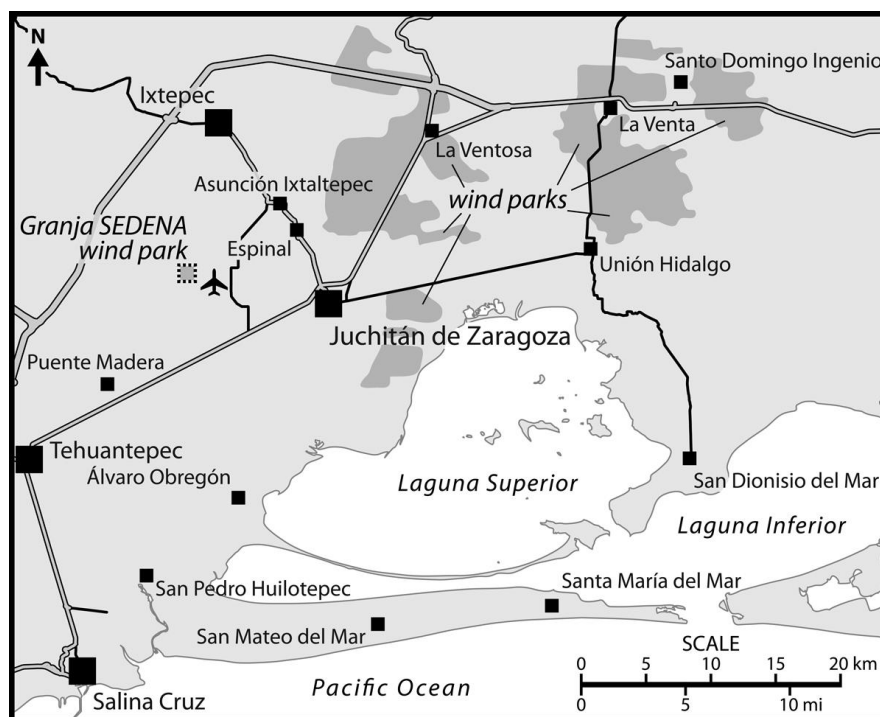


Figure 1. Coastal Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Source: Carl Sack

Investigating wind energy development in Gui'Xhi' Ro' and participating part-time in the *policia comunitaria* for over four months, this article provides a theoretical exploration into emancipatory possibilities to undermine not only 'green' authoritarian populism, but authoritarian politics in general. Applying anarchist theory, this paper offers a theoretical provocation for considering ways to strengthen the struggle for Indigenous autonomy and self-determination. This begins by examining the organizational principles of the colony model, the state and industrialism to better understand the 'structure of oppression' and its need 'to be resisted and overcome' (Scoones et al., 2017: 9). This includes reviewing anarchist ideas of informality as they relate to 'ecological autonomy' (Tutino, 2007) and 'popular defense' (Virilio, 1990/1979, 1980). Turning to Gui'Xhi' Ro', the next section summarizes the key events and formations of the *cabildo comunitario* (community counsel) and their struggle for Indigenous autonomy, providing observations on possible constraints on the autonomous project. The concluding discussion, briefly considers anti- or post-organizational alternatives based on informal coordination to revive ecological autonomy and self-defense. This paper seeks 'to encourage debate about emancipatory possibilities,' which is not a judgment or a program, but strictly a theory-based reflection on experiences with insurrectionary Zapotecs and Ikoote. The following is an invitation for people to reflect on how diffuse structures of repression may be challenged in rural communities to widen both nascent and existing spaces of social liberation, ecological harmony and militant resistance.

Industrial Conquest, Authoritarian Populism & Its Antithesis

Industrialism as a structure of conquest is about a method and mode of organization. Emerging from Ancient civilization, the colonial and, later, industrial model came to fruition during the Roman Republic with the model of the Roman military camp (Dunlap, 2017d). The organizational heart of the colonial project, then and now, is the development of specialized tasks, divisions of labor, hierarchy and, consequently, the biopolitical vision of population (Dunlap, 2017d), which values utilitarian organization and geometric symmetry (Dunlap, 2013, 2014b). The Roman military camp was the model absorbed into European empire and later nation state (Dunlap, 2017d; Foucault, 2007), Paul Virilio (2008/1983: 166-7), summarizing this point, explains: 'the colony has always been the model of the political State, which began in the city, spread to the nation, across the communes, and reached the stage of the French and English colonial empires.' The state is the colonial model (Virilio, 2008; Katsiaficas, 2006/1997; Dunlap, 2014b, 2017d; Springer, 2016; Gelderloos, 2017), which means specialization, divisions of labor and hierarchy are key mechanisms in the structure of oppression. Highlighting this point in relation to megaprojects from Ancient Civilization to the present, Kirkpatrick Sale (2000/1991: 122), summarizing Murry Bookchin (1982), explains:

societies that dominate nature also dominate people. Where there is the idea that a massive dam should be built to control a river's flow, there is the idea that people should be enslaved to build it; where there is the belief that a giant metropole may serve itself by despoiling the surrounding countryside and devouring its raw materials, there are castes and hierarchies to ensure that this is accomplished.

Human separation, alienation (see RF, 2014: 4-6) and the construction of a 'higher good' creates notions of superiority (hierarchy) that rationalizes governance and exploitative systems. Authoritarian populism then emerges as a political technique to manage the long-term project of industrial conquest. An anarchist critique of organization is indispensable in this regard. 'The state over the past several centuries have sapped the *independent, self-organizing* power of individual and small communities,' explains James C. Scott (2012: xxi, xxii) going so far to say that the '[L]eviathan may have given birth to its own justification.' It should be recognized, not only is the colonial, state and industrial project built on systemic forms of coercion, participatory slavery, genocide and ecocide (Dunlap, 2017d), but people and movements demanding structural political change, such as fighting ghettoization-gentrification, police/prison system, institutional intolerance (racism, sexism, speciesism, homo-transphobia) and economic growth are constantly undermined and coopted. Instead, state organizations react in self-preserving fashion with widespread and increasing surveillance, repression and 'organizations that try to channel that defiance into the flow of normal politics, where it can be

contained' (Scott, 2012: xviii; see also Berman, 1983). Said simply, the state, and its political economy of control, continues to deploy and develop a comprehensive 'all-of-government approach' to countering autonomous political movements that challenge the foundations of the state project (Williams, 2004/2007; Dunlap, 2014, 2016, 2017a: 19; Nomad, 2016). This recuperation and integration of systemic dissent has led self-reflecting anarchists to realize that 'positive anarchist projects of self-organization' that are 'separated from a relationship of social conflict,' do not only pose limited alternatives, 'but that they are alternatives that try to make us legitimate to civil society' (Ilud, 2016: 9). This asserts the necessity of an *anti-politics* (not to be confused with an apolitical) position.² Anti-politics rejects Politics as a system of social control, designed to pacify and domesticate people into an organizational apparatus that mediates and reifies issues, meanwhile perfecting regimentation of people to the organizational imperatives and life of the state apparatus and its industrial and/or cybernetic progress. '*Anti-politics* means self-organization, [being] against all delegation, [and] reclaiming the force of our desires' (RF, 2014: 6). The anti-political position directs people towards challenging and undermining industrial and capitalist relationships internalized and (relatively) legitimized in various degrees by the populations, 'civil society' and their respective emersion in authoritarian populism(s).

Challenging divisions of labor, specialization and hierarchy remains foundational not only to undermining civilized institutions, but also to resistance. Critiquing Italian armed struggle organizations in the 1970s Alfredo Bonanno (1998/1977) explains:

In order to break out of the magic circle of the theatricals of commodities we must refuse all roles, including that of the 'professional' revolutionary. Armed struggle must not let itself become something professional, precisely that division of tasks that the external aspect of capitalist production wants to impose upon it. 'Do it yourself.' Don't break up the global aspect of play by reducing it to roles. Defend your right to enjoy life. Obstruct capital's death project.

The goal is to break down specialized roles and hierarchy to create affinity based-self organization that is diffuse in spreading anarchist action and values. This might be conceptualized as undermining integration strategies of techno-capitalist organizations, which delegates statist values to maintain and spread capitalist values (read virus) to every corner of the world through ideas of industrial progress, social development, microenterprise, agricultural efficiency, and, in a word, 'Development.' Springer (2016) conceptualizes anarchism as a reaction to the colonial and imperial project, a project Rahnema (1997) and Veracini (2014) find heuristically useful to compare with a virus, which anarchist praxis continues to undermine with the rise of informal organizing.

Consider three insights from informal anarchist organization. First, leaders are a liability, not only in delegating power, but in the concentration of power and establishing mechanism of social control over the group. 'It is now commonplace that colonizing states appoint leaders to horizontal societies they are trying to absorb through trade and warfare,' writes Peter Gelderloos (2017: 20, 22) who continues that:

A society needs to be accustomed to having leaders for a foreign power to effectively be able to appoint puppet rulers. Those societies that already have traditional forms of hierarchy, though these might not be enough to qualify them for statehood, are more easily forced into a statist logic. If a stateless people has no local, traditional forms of hierarchy that can be exploited by a colonizing state, or if the local leadership—the potential chiefs—cleave to the popular values of anti-authoritarianism and autonomy, a colonizing state has very few possibilities to expand its control. It can either attempt a policy of genocide through extermination or resettlement, or accept the autonomy for the stateless society, at most demanding tribute....

² For more on anti-politics *Return Fire* Vol. 2 (2014: 6) available at: <http://325.nostate.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/return-fire-vol2.pdf>

This recent historical overview, focusing on processes of divide, conquer and colonial-statist usurpation, locates leaders as a reoccurring mechanism for imperial powers to conquer Indigenous communities.

Second, leadership also combines with forming and naming an organization. While action groups or individuals naming themselves and producing communiqués can solidify ‘insurgent identity’ and spread critique, knowledge and inspiration to other discontent people, it also separates people from the population, meanwhile manifesting an ‘enemy’ for authorities to target. Notably, organizations also risks creating ‘group-think’ or organizational logics of righteousness and superiority (Anonymous, 2011; Bonanno, 1998, 1999). This means promoting evasion, not publicity and legibility or finding nuanced ways to combine the two.

Related to the latter two points, the third rejects formal organization, not only to promote evasion, but also to serve an anti-political practice. The alternative is informal organizations arising as a reaction to the quantitative mentality and logic of mass-organizations, which instead emphasizes small groups based on affinity that take action using available and easily reproducible means (Bonanno, 1998/1996, 1999; Weir et al., 2015). Informal organization is based on two-to-eight people organizing themselves to attack and develop strategies of permanent conflictuality with a particular target or harmful process. Action is always rooted in collective initiative and remains autonomous from any political authority. Anarchist informal organizing is the antithesis of authoritarian populism, not only in methodological praxis, but in the desire to undermine systems of conquest. Importantly, anarchist informal organizing is a response to the structure of oppression and its repressive operations.

The idea behind informal anarchist organizing is one of ecological defense and popular struggle (Virilio, 1978/1990, 1980). This means creating permanent, decentralized and leaderless resistance that guards against the existence and possible reformulation of coercive power. Meanwhile, deploying a strategy of individual empowerment for creative and combative agency that is ‘fluid and vaporous’ and does not condense into a formal organization (Virilio, 1980: 268), but remains everywhere and ready. Ideally, this would also include relationships that collectively work towards building emotional, spiritual and psychological strength to combat oppressive value systems. The companion of ecological defense is ecological autonomy, which, John Tutino (2007: 214) writes, ‘emphasizes the ability of rural communities to sustain themselves and insurgent fighters independently of the structure of power and production they seek to transform,’ and, furthermore, often transforms them. Tensions towards complete ecological autonomy was the historical norm of rural communities (Tutino, 1988, 2007; Clastres, 1994/1980; Scott, 2008/1985, 1990, 2009; Gelderloos, 2017), which was an anarchistic practice rooted in the land to ‘produce basic subsistence crops along with livestock for food, transportation, and combat, and to turn basic tools of everyday life—machetes, hatchets, rifles—into weapons of guerrilla war’ (Tutino, 2007: 214). This practice against the increasing concentration of statist and industrial controls continue in anarchist strategies of informal organizing and permanent conflict, which includes evasive, small and reproducible direct action—hammers, projectiles and gasoline—against the structures of domination (Bonanno, 1996, 1999; Weir et al., 2015). This, however, is always dependent on how people perceive this structure, their culture and political context—something governments, police and the military are all-to-aware of and cultivate with authoritarian populism.

Explaining informal organizations, Carlos López “Chivo” (2015: n.p.) writes they are ‘the more or less stable relation of people, groups, or movements which are maintained in a constant approach seeking to deepen the knowledge gained in struggles, without bureaucratic structures nor delegation of responsibility and rejecting possible hierarchies which give way to relations of power.’ López continues that such informal groups

... build and learn with those they can count on when it is time to take action. These small groups are intended to disappear after completing the objective for which they were formed and from this new ones will arise, retaking the aforementioned “that which stagnates rots”. The union of diverse affinity groups is also part of this informal form of organization.

The formation of permanent organizations are regarded as stagnant and rotting entities, which eventually bureaucratize, require logistics and begin to value their own organizational existence over the issue they claim to fight or the populations they are intended to protect. Considering this anarchist insight in relation to Indigenous communities becomes increasingly complicated as such formations could easily be considered a ‘permanent organization’—especially as they are construed and constructed by governments. This anarchist tension towards organizations, however, offers an important consideration and social fault-line to be considered and navigated by rural and Indigenous people in their respective contexts to expand spaces of liberation whether against coercive development projects or oppressive relationships and customs of village life or, what can be termed, ‘village tyranny.’ The industrial system’s intense, even ‘extremist,’ articulations of specialization, divisions of labor and hierarchy requires slavery and enslaving technological enchantment that lurks as a common enemy (Glendenning, 1994; Porter and Kakabadse, 2006; Alexander, 2008). Because groups of people, tribes and clans that specialize, develop divisions of labor and hierarchy—even as a reaction to neighboring groups collaborating with colonial powers in trade—are susceptible not only to the colonial and, later, developmental virus (Rahnema, 1997; Veracini, 2014), but can also fall into rapidly self-destructive ways of life and defensive strategies that come to mimic the conventional armies of imperial powers (Gelderloos, 2017; Boot, 2013; Virilio, 1990). “[I]n the end,” writes Gelderloos (2017: 36; see also Nandy, 2009/1983), it is a common occurrence for a colonized people to imitate the colonizer even as they rebel against him, such that a movement for freedom from a specifically statist oppression becomes a reproduction of state authority.” Acknowledging industrialism as a system of conquest and the anarchist critique of organization we now turn to the case of Álvaro Obregón.

Backs against the Wall: The Struggle for Indigenous Autonomy in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’

In 2003, the findings from a USAID sponsored report confirmed that The Isthmus of Tehuantepec region of Oaxaca, known locally as the *Istmo*, was home to ‘the best wind resources on earth’ (Eliott et al., 2003; IFC, 2014: 1). This triggered a ‘wind rush’ in the Istmo and, despite popular resistance in the region, by January 2015 there were already 1, 608 wind turbines built and double that planned (Rivas, 2015; Briseno, 2016). Towns across the Istmo were protesting, even taking up militant self-defense against the imposition of wind energy development (Dunlap, 2017a, 2017e, 2018a). Notable among this resistance was the Zapotec fishing town of Álvaro Obregón, or Gui’Xhi’ Ro’ in Zapotec, that sat at the entrance of the Barra de Santa Teresa (Barra) sand bar that separated the Lagoon Superior from the Lagoon inferior.

An agricultural military colony established in 1930 by General Heliodoro Charis Castro after the Mexican Revolution, Álvaro Obregón was named after Charis military superior and Mexican president (Smith, 2009). Currently, Álvaro Obregón is a municipality of Juchitán de Zaragoza (Howe et al., 2015; Dunlap, 2018a), but notable is that General Charis became the leading political boss (cacique) of the region, which was supported by Larazo Cárdenas presidency. While retaining cacique-style autocratic features (Smith, 2009), Charis was of Zapotec decent and fought for the relative autonomy of the Istmo from Oaxaca and Mexico City. Following Chatterjee (1993), Jeffery Rubin (1997: 46) called this a ‘domain of sovereignty’ that he argued:

aptly describes the development of Zapotec culture and Juchiteco politics that were in no way radical or oppositional, but that established the possibility of autonomous, locally initiated activity—fostering, from the beginning of the postrevolutionary system, a counter-weight to national power.

The autonomous and self-determining aspirations emblematic of Charis, also combined with negotiations with the Federal and State government to acquire funding for schools, hospitals, roads and, also, respect for Zapotec culture (Smith, 2009). Charis and other socially minded caciques were instrumental to co-creating or, more accurately, negotiating the decentralized corporatisms or

administrative decentralization characteristic of Mexico's governance strategy (Mackinlay and Otero, 2004; Stephen, 2005; Solano and Mayor, 2012/2007).

Charis eventually died in 1964. His death resulted in political instability, opening the region to power struggles, developmental state impositions, land grabbing—specifically of social property—and political appropriation and disputes over General Charis political vision (Monjardin, 1993; Rubin, 1997). This evolved into violent struggles between the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Workers Peasants Students Coalition (COCEI)³ (Campbell et al., 1994; Rubin, 1997), which represented a nuanced mix of Zapotec culture with Marxist-Leninism to achieve student, peasant and student rights. The Istmo was characterized by bandit groups and later armed political gangs (Smith, 2009: 405; Rubin, 1997), which developed a capacity for armed self-defense. Continuing the autonomous Zapotec and (contradictory) agrarian justice ideals emblematic of Charis, the COCEI developed a relationship with Gui'Xhi' Ro', which included important agrarian victories in the town (Campbell, 1994; Rubin, 1997; Dunlap, 2018a). During this time, Gui'Xhi' Ro' not only became an important COCEI town, but an armed stronghold for the party. Eventually after electoral success, severe political repression (e.g. military intervention, outlawing the COCEI and the onset of paramilitary politics) and the rise of 'neoliberal multiculturalism',⁴ the COCEI began to change. This looked like collaborating with the PRI in 1986, allowing Salinas de Gotari to give a speech in the region in 1989 as well as softening their position on transnational corporate penetration in the region (Campbell et al., 1993), which eventually led to welcoming transnational wind energy companies (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2014). The important lesson is the unruly, armed and autonomous nature of the region that values its cultural heritage, seeks development, but also its autonomy and self-determination.



Figure 2 Communitarian Town Hall, Charis Statue and Communitarian Police Graffiti: Source: Author

³ Coalición Obrera Campesina Estudiantil del Istmo. The COCEI was an interesting mix of Marxist-Leninism and Zapotec indigenism, which was more nuanced than most groups leftist groups of the time.

⁴ See Hale (2002)

Wind Energy Penetration in Gui'Xhi' Ro'

In 2007, the Spanish consortium Mareña Renovables began conducting negotiations with politicians, later surveying the area in 2011 to build 102 wind turbines on the Barra and another 30 on the Pacific Ocean around Santa Maria del Mar. This included the construction of three electric substations; submarine cable (less than 1 km long); fifty-two kilometers of high voltage transmission lines from the Santa Maria Substation to Ixtepec; and six docking stations to facilitate maritime access as well as improving old and constructing new roads (IDB, 2011). Backed by climate change legislation (Howe et al., 2015; Dunlap, 2017b), the Mareña Renovables wind park was among the largest wind energy project in Latin America with 394 megawatts (MW) and the only wind park in the world proposed on a sand bar (Howe, 2014). The Mareña Renovables Project received loans from the United Nations clean development mechanism (CDM) and Inter-American Development Bank (IBD) alongside investors from the Maquarie Group, Mitsubishi, FEMSA and the Dutch pension fund PGGM that sought to use the proposed energy to power Coca Cola, Heineken, Walmart and Bimbo among others shareholders (Smith, 2012; Howe, 2014).

This wind project sparked insurrection. The insurrection was the result of four principle factors: (1) the town was never consulted collectively; (2) clientalism and unequal benefit sharing; (3) regulating access to the Barra and/or sea; and (4) the mass-death of fish with preliminary construction on the Barra (Dunlap, 2018a). Eventually a barricade was formed to stop the project, which pushed the company out of the town. Ejecting the wind company from the area resulted in series of encounters and battles with state police. On February 2, 2013 was The Battle of the Barra, where the town rose up to combat 500 state police from entering to break the barricade to gain access to the Barra. The town succeeded, which led to the formation of the *policia comunitaria* (Communitarian police) and the *cabildo comunitario* (Community Counsel) known together as the Communitarians. After the victory, The Communitarians realized that if the Barra and the sea were to remain safe from development then their struggle must be extended against *all* political parties. Then on 8 December 2013 (APIIDTT, 2014), the Community Counsel peacefully seized the town hall, which included a police car, pickup and dump truck as well as an ambulance. In accordance with legislation in Oaxaca state (see Stephen, 2005, 2013), the Communitarians began a process of Indigenous self-governance known as *usos y costumbres*, literally translated as practices and customs and based on familial consensus-based decision making centered around a communal assembly. This formal political takeover, however, led to civil conflict.

The displaced political officials, with the support of the regime in Juchitán, formed the Constitutionalist—commonly known as *Los Contrás* (The Enemy). This split the town and on March 2, 2014, the Constitutionalist attempted to violently take back the town hall, which resulted in a day long battle between the two factions throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails and shooting slings shots, fireworks and guns. (Dunlap, 2015, 2018a). This resulted in a low-intensity civil war dynamic of two opposing factions co-existing in the town, with the Constitutionalist supported by various regional political authorities who were backed by the wind companies, while the Communitarians had widespread support from grassroots and self-organized movements—teachers, peace activists, leftists and anarchists to name a few. The Constitutionalist are a political authority based existing clientalistic political networks, rejuvenated by wind company funds that promised prosperity to the town. While popularly contested, a struggle emerged to buy ‘the conscience’ of the town and to impose political authority and the wind project through a struggle of attrition.

This crude outline of the ecological distribution conflict in Gui'Xhi' Ro' / Álvaro Obregón provides basic background to discuss this situation (Martínez-Alier, 2002).⁵ Moving from green authoritarian populism and its popular contestation in Gui'Xhi' Ro', the following section will draw on experiences from within the resistance to highlight potential issues and limitations with the intention of strengthening rural insurrectionary and autonomous movements—Indigenous or otherwise.

⁵ Also ontological conflict even if not discussed here, see Blazer (2013)



Figure 3 Álvaro Obregón's Communitarian Town Hall, Police Truck and Jail. Photo: Author

Civilized Traps, Institutional Coercion and Theoretical Considerations

Widespread social alienation, authoritarianism, ecological and climate crisis increase the importance of anti-authoritarian value systems. Value systems in opposition and irreconcilable to capitalist relationships, retaining alternative socio-cultural, ontological and ecological relationships are an antithesis to the present techno-capital industrial system. Indigenous and anarchists share not only a common enemy,⁶ but retain lines of affinity (Eberhardt, 2011/1900; Churchill, 2003; Aragorn, 2005; Lasky, 2011; Baker and Pickerill, 2012; Waste, 2012; Bazil, 2014; Benally and Aragorn, 2014; RF, 2016). Indigenous and anarchist influence and co-creation reaches back to the turn of the century in Mexico with Enrique and Ricardo Flores Magón, 'whose aim,' writes Benjamin Maldonado, 'was the destruction of the capitalist socioeconomic model and the reconstruction of Mexico based on a libertarian schematic nourished by the historical experience of indigenous community organization' (Bufe and Verter, 2005: 15). This was because the 'indigenous and *mestizo* (mixed race) populations would be relegated to the same misery they had endured for three centuries' (Bufe and Verter, 2005: 23). There are many types of 'Indigenous' and 'Anarchists' with different loyalties and tendencies, which in no way should detract from or cloud the reality of alternative values, desires and the fact that in Gui'Xhi' Ro', as the Elder 'Wild Cat' discussing the entrance of the Mareña Renovables, points out:

When we take their money...we are giving them our hands so they can tie them. We will not have our road anymore, the freedom to move on that road and the freedom to go to the Lagoon. The wealth that god gave us in those Lagoons will be turned over to the wind energy

⁶ For more, listen to the final track 'Our Common Enemy: The State' of the audio lecture by Ward Churchill (2002), *Doing Time: The Politics of Imprisonment*. Oakland: AK Press

companies. *That is why a lot of people from this town would prefer to die than to turn over that wealth.*⁷

Despite capital-industrial hegemony, there are many Indigenous and anarchist willing to die for their freedom, the earth and in this case the sea and their way of life. Important is that people must identify and defend their social values to revive imagination and projectuality—avoiding acquisition and subsumption, *in whole or in part*, into the structure of conquest.

Anarchist tensions were undoubtedly present in some capacity, not only in self-identification, but also in an anti-political disposition. Animating this and other desires behind the autonomous projects in Gui'Xhi' Ro', a member of the *cabildo comunitario* explains to a crowd from an anarchist solidarity caravan:

All the people that you can see here are the same people that fight against the wind energy projects. We are not saying “no” just for the sake of saying “no.” We know with certainty that this project is not going to bring any kind of benefit to the community as a whole. The so-well-advertised “clean energy” will destroy our Indigenous community. We are very conscious about everything. We are simple people as you can see, but we are determined. We are here to fight, to resist. We are rebels. The phrase on the wall of the kiosk [behind us] says: “We will not take even take one step backwards, we will be united and we will not stop”—this is indicative of our determination. We have similar ideas as you [anarchists]. We are against all political parties. When I started to read about Flores Magón, about all the pioneers and all the European anarchists I felt that we are the same, and all the twenty to thirty persons that are here right now have the same ideas as you.⁸

Anarchists have maintained relationships and solidarity with Gui'Xhi' Ro' before the Battle of the Barra. There is unquestioned influence and a common enemy, if not varying and differing levels of affinity. This included reviving the ecological autonomy that has historically characterized southern Mexico (Tutino, 2007). Nevertheless, the task facing Gui'Xhi' Ro' was immense and complicated, which leads to considering the organization of the Communitarians, specifically the *cabildo comunitario* (Community Counsel) and *policia comunitaria* (Communitarian police), from an anti-political anarchist perspective.

Cabildo comunitario

The *cabildo* was originally a colonial technology of the Spanish Crown. ‘The Spanish colonial structure, intervention, checks and balances may be judged a brilliantly conceived means of maintaining under colonial status a vast overseas empire,’ writes Historian Fredrick B. Pike (1958: 139) continuing that ‘nowhere was the success of this system more evident than on the level of local administration in the “indies,” where it served to prevent the rise of an unchecked spirit of local autonomy while tending to preserve sentiments of loyalty to the crown.’ The *cabildo* was the native municipal government that worked in accordance with *repartimiento* (the Spanish system of forced labor and production), the Catholic Church and the legal system (Yannakakis, 2008), all of which formed to domesticate and legitimize the structure of conquest. Importantly, ‘the average degree of intervention to which cabildos were subjected did not destroy independence of action,’ writes Pike (1958: 157-8) further noting that the *cabildo* ‘had considerable ambit in which to experiment with certain of the forms of self-government.’ Indirect rule and administrative decentralization currently blossoming under neoliberalism is nothing new, instead it’s a continuation and intensification through technological advancement that promotes self-identification and internationalization of the institutional, ‘the free market’ and, even, democratic governance itself (Ellul, 1964; Landstreicher, 2006; Invisible Committee, 2015; Güven, 2015). Instrumental to implementing colonial systems was trade and Indigenous intermediaries. Yanna Yannakakis (2008: 6) reminds us that ‘[w]ithout language,

⁷ Interview, May 9, 2015.

⁸ Public Talk, January 15, 2015.

negotiation, and native allies, it is unlikely that Cortés's small entourage could have survived long on Mexican shores.' The right mix of trade, extermination, gifts, 'opportunities' and the introduction of mechanized structures of legitimation, not only implanted the *cabildo* model, but sustained it by permitting degrees of autonomy to construct a system of self-governance in the service of the Spanish Crown. This structure and trajectory has defined the Mexican political structure, especially in unruly rural states such as Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas that articulate modes of governance through various forms of corporatism, clientalism and municipal rights.

It is unquestionable that Indigenous communities have appropriated and co-evolved the *cabildo*, Catholic Church and other exogenous structures (Campbell et al., 1993; Zetilin, 2005). After independence the *cabildo* structures were appropriated and negotiated locally, allowing substantial Indigenous relational influences that reinvented *comunalidad* and various degrees of ecological autonomy (see Dunlap, 2018a). The concern, however, while Indigenous negotiation (through institutional politics, intermediaries and business) is often linked to individual, even communal, survival or profiteering strategies, they also becomes a pathway toward self-transformation or reconfiguration of life ways into a cog in the mechanized order of colonial and state formation. The *cabildo* was designed to appropriate and domesticate Indigenous savagery to the imperatives of colonial economics and politics, making it the enemy of *comunalidad* as it attempted to appropriate, repackage and domesticate previous relationships. This is a process that has been resisted and evaded since the Spaniards, but a process, nevertheless, carried forward with coercion and enchantment by the Mexican state and its associates.

This requires a critical tension towards self-governance and management. Vrilio (2008: 111) explains, 'this desire for self-management coexists with a desire for hyper-centralization, which is the result of technology.' One could assert, *IF* a culture is rooted to the land and retains an ontology of *being nature* or in Western terms saw their 'higher good' or God(s) as being in sync with nature and/or Indigenous 'natural law,' then arguably the colonial imposition reconfigures this relationship to the land and gods, from natural to cybernetic.⁹ Willfully projected and/or coerced is the belief that above everyone, puppeteering people, is no longer the natural cycle of the earth or ecosystems, but instead the imperatives of the economy, state and technological progress. Notably, this shift has spiritual and ontological dimensions, which might even include mythologies of shamanistic warfare where shamans lose battles in the spiritual realm, returning to the material realm only to poison tribes with ideas of hierarchy, patriarchy and expanded divisions of labor (Clastres, 1994; Taussing, 1987; Sullivan, 2009). The colonial system necessitates leaders, divisions of labor and hierarchy, which reconfigures existing polities by forcing and enticing people into a divide and conquer strategy to enter into either submission or a self-managed state system (Gelderloos, 2017). This only stresses the importance of the cultural values, relationships and disposition to adopt and defend when facing insidious politico-military strategies of decentralized control that are progressively tightening and 'shrinking spaces' of political agency and freedom around the world (TNI, 2017).

While Zapotec culture retains ecological ontologies and autonomies, it is also a culture emerging from a violent imperial civilization with distinct hierarchies, divisions of labor, intensive agriculture and an imperial army (Zetilin, 2005). This history was recognized by the Communitarians, who were seeking not only alternative formulations and revivals of Zapotecism to affirm ecological relationships and alternatives to wind energy development. Behind the wind energy insurrection and autonomous movement lurks the condition of state imposition (police, military and political parties), *the Contras*, patriarchy, material and psycho-social poverty imbued by the industrial apparatus. This is an acknowledgement that Indigenous people (and others) are not free to choose their life trajectories, forms of progress and development. Everything is conditioned by the imposition of the national/international economy and the police/military that enforce the spread of industrial (and computational) development—in a Fourth World War (see Marcos, 2001). Furthermore, this attempt at community control was related to Oaxaca State's unique recognition of Indigenous customary law—*usos y costumbres*— that in accordance with previous colonial governance strategies promotes and provides

⁹ This is a theme retained in the new television series *American Gods*.

funds to semi-autonomous arrangements. This relates to state strategies of maintaining cohesion through the deployment of neoliberal multiculturalism that adapts to widespread upheavals for Indigenous self-determination and autonomy (Stephen, 2005, 2013; Dunlap, 2018a). The problem in Gui'Xhi' Ro', like most Indigenous communities, is that the Indigenous politicians have sold out the land and/or sea, the culture, the poor and, furthermore, fail to distribute the benefits of land privatization. The only direction left to residents was insurrection; evicting the company and seizing the town hall. The politics that replaced it pushing towards *comunalidad* was a less bureaucratized version of what already existed, opening up greater spaces of democratic participation built on familial consensus.

The *cabildo* adapted the existing municipal model. The legacy of indigenous appropriation of *cabildo* or church, hollowing out its insides to retain Indigenous practices and religions are foundational to Indigenous survival (Campbell et al., 1993; Zeitlin, 2005). This practice is no secret and while Indigenous politics and religions are still practiced in the shell of the *cabildo* and Catholic church with proliferating diversity, to various degrees it still becomes diluted, coopted and appropriated to serve the order of the state and church—maintaining their order, but also spreading their moralism and values that had gain near hegemony in Gui'Xhi' Ro'. This hegemony is not perfect, there are many lines of flight, but the situation is increasingly complex, difficult and conflictive due to historical and present impositions from transnational companies, various tiers of the Mexican government as well as churches and consumerism. There are benefits for mimicking the municipal agency, not only in terms of becoming legitimate in the eyes of the state and receiving funds, but also by not disrupting existing social norms. If the Communitarians could prove their legitimate status in the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (or later International court) then they could also receive state funds, which would enable them to enact alternative developments. The legal process, however, required a lot of solidarity, especially from lawyers and was supposedly not the priority of the Communitarians. The municipal administration and assembly consisted of the Council of Elders (*Consejo de Ancianos*) who were the respected elders, representing key families in the town. They would in turn openly negotiate and work to undermine the Constitutionlists and open ways to fight corruption and their own development, in which anarchist and leftist groups had been participating. The situation, however, was in a state of permanent tension, which only worsened after June 2015.

Oppressive patriarchal and religious norms remained publically unquestioned, because of the constant struggle to please the community and replicate the model of leadership and administration familiar to the community. That said, throughout this process aiming for autonomy, oppressive norms were slowly challenged in practice and deed. This included reducing stigmatization for using marijuana; questioning centralized leaderships of politicians (and expanding horizontality); as well as challenging existing forms of patriarchy with women coming in solidarity from other parts of Mexico and participating in the *policia comunitaria* and battles. The circulation of anarchists, leftists and others in Gui'Xhi' Ro' allowed the cross pollination of ideas, information, knowledge and, even, different appearances that challenged village norms. The fact that so many people from Mexico, Latin America and around the world valued their struggle, assertion of Indigenous identity and culture empowered the process of cultural revitalization and autonomy. The struggle for Indigenous autonomy initiated positive social change that questioned internalized and various oppressions that exist in everyday practices and desires.

Gui'Xhi' Ro' was largely a united town around the sea. Even people collaborating with the wind companies have and are recorded as saying they will still rise up when the companies enter to build. This stresses the difficulties of poverty, the manufactured desire of progress and politics that underline the micro-politics of authoritarian populism. While there are undoubtedly many important examples of self-determination, organization and sustained opposition through appropriating the *cabildo*, it takes on municipal tasks and affirms existing political and industrial relationships that are energetically and logistically costly. The question arises, what are ways to extend and make this struggle more resilient that will challenge the deeply embedded costly and oppressive, if enchanting, relationships? The next section turns to the *Policia comunitaria* before considering this question in the concluding discussion.

Policia comunitaria

Since 2014 the *policia comunitaria* or Communitarian Police¹⁰ became responsible for police activities in the town. This includes civil affairs, monitoring who is going in and out of the town and protecting the Barra from survey and construction. This is all done on a voluntary and unpaid basis for the community, which is rooted in conceptions of *comunalidad* (see Dunlap, 2018a). Comprised of about thirty official members, the Communitarian police use two pickup trucks inherited from the town hall takeover and retain a captain and informal ranks who participate in the Community Council. There were notable age disparities, which also were reflected in dress and cultural influences, which also accompanied less historical political baggage leftover from the PRI and COCEI, even if the affiliations and mythologies continue to persist. There are no women in the Communitarian Police. Women, however, are active in the town wide battles, combating Constitutionlists and known for combatively holding the barricades and town hall. The Communitarians receive communal support from many families, who provide food both to Community Council, Communitarian Police and their visitors.



Figure 4 Communitarian Police leaving for patrol. Source: APIIDTT, March 30, 2014

Members of the Communitarian Police have served in the military, while nearly all of them have migrated within Mexico or to the United States and have returned. Working in hotel construction in tourist areas, agricultural fields, factories and were participants in powerful gangs in Mexico and the United States—one based only thirty-five minutes from where I grew up. While out-migration was a reoccurring issue (see Stephen, 2007), this led many of them to retain a critique of modernity, while highly valuing the sea, fishing and other Communitarian aspects they saw being destroyed by the arrival of the wind energy project (Dunlap, 2018a). Drawing an important link between fishing, ecological autonomy and defense, ‘The Tank,’ referring to the Battle of the Barra explains:

When we were at the barricade and the police were moving toward us a lot of us using our fisherman wisdom start to move just like when we are fishing and start to surround the police.

¹⁰ This is not ‘community police’ as this references a type of policing that comes from the state apparatus and combines with institutional agendas and police militarization (see Williams, 2007; Williams et al., 2013; Nomad, 2016).

It's important the fisherman wisdom, and with our slingshots we made them run because they knew that we had them.¹¹

Fishing knowledge was the conceptual framework and reference in the resistance that enabled the outflanking and strategic dominance of the invading state police. Mixed with combative experiences with the COCEI between the 1970s-1990s, this type of collective knowledge and communal relationship is sensitive and invaluable. This is everything patriotism and settler colonial cultures seek to harness and reconstruct within their populations (Anderson, 2006/1983; Perlman, 1985). While there are relational and valuable processes taking place, there were various intensities of divisions of labor, which affirmed gender roles, concentrated power and, most importantly, reproduced a form of government. Albeit more horizontal, the government still needed an administrative apparatus, police and bureaucratized roles—a situation made only more difficult with pressure from the Mexican state, wind companies and Constitutionals.

The Communitarian Police represent the specialization of domestic coercion. From the perspective of colonial governance this is normal, even desirable to most people. Police specialization, however, still separates people—those with and without authority—and promotes a relation of governance to facilitate, control and manage the town. This was combined with various relational and communal nuances rooted in place, but still exhibited predictable outcomes of policing. The Communitarian Police were strong, dangerous and brutal. Within the community this caused concerns that they are just another gang vying for power within the community (see Rodgers, 2006), which over time, along with concerted state sanctioned strategies to divide the resistance movement (Dunlap, 2018a), distance was created between them and some of their supporters. Importantly, to this conversation, is how the Communitarian Police began a nascent apparatus that required people to work as 'police' patrolling the town, picking up drunk people (sometimes their own who did not attend their shift), mediating conflicts and combating provocations from the Constitutionals in accordance with their political and business allies.

Generally speaking anarchists had an uncritical attitude toward the Communitarian Police, and the Communitarians in general. This undoubtedly emerges with respecting the foreign context as well as enchantment with participating in the Communitarian Police patrols. Frequent, however, were discussions between the anarchists. One of these discussions was recorded with an anarchist active in the town for over two years. The conversation began by offering a critique regarding organization, specifically relating it to the origins of police in the United States and Europe (Williams, 2007; Foucault, 2002/1973, 2007/1975). Understandably this began with them saying, 'it is really wrong to try and see that here,' which can understandably be read a Eurocentric. Recognizing the history of US intervention and training of the military, police and 'political police' in Mexico (Dunlap, 2017a), this question remains valid even in the face of contextual and cultural specificities that deserve acknowledgment. Based on our experiences together in the *policia comunitaria*, the conversation continued in detail, discussing conceptions of time, the fallacy of Hobsbawm's (2017/1959) 'primitive rebel,' *comunalidad* and the difference between the police and communitarian police. An important distinction was that the statist police/prison system is designed to terrorize, torture and breed submission to political economy, while the Communitarian Police in Gui'Xhi' Ro' has a completely different relationship that does not isolate you from the community, people can come 'offer you cigarettes, water and food' while in jail and 'the families come decide how things are going to be fixed—I see a lot of difference,' explains the anarchist 'Jabali'. Witnessing and participating in some of these events, this is an important, even obvious, distinction. The Communitarian Police were designed for communal and participatory resolution through cooperation that created social, as opposed to isolating, conditions of confinement.

This did not change my concern with organizations based on theory, observations and experiences with the Communitarian Police. I asserted that the Communitarian Police 'are still fulfilling that structural role by arresting people, hosting events and maintaining a type of social peace.' Eventually,

¹¹ Interview FN, February 16, 2015.

after discussing the positive impacts of the Communitarian Police in the town and then specific violent events and issues, Jabalí acknowledges:

ahhhh, it is, I see troubles, so I am not trying to paint this like: “Hey, these are the best guys ever,” I know they have a lot of troubles and they are violent guys and they act sometimes like they believe they are cops, you know? But that is something that needs to be broken by them, if they want to, it is not like destiny or something to make them understand. We are not from here, we do not have the same vendettas on our schedule, maybe the Contras have done some things to us [anarchists] and we may have some vendettas on our schedule for those people, but we really do not know them all and that is why we need to start chatting with them about why we do not want to arrest people. Because from where we come from the police fucking arrest us all the time, for how we look, who we are, and what we are. So they should not be trying to scare the people to take control of things [in the town]; like the things they do at the bars sometimes—like dude that is horrible. Dude I shared that with you. Like, you are at the bar drinking and there is a [police] patrol outside watching you—that is horrible.

AD: We were both in that patrol.

And outside that patrol.

The concern is the structural nature of police organizations. Jabalí’s pedagogical point regarding social change—it is behavior ‘that needs to be broken by them, if they want to, it is not like destiny or something to make them understand’—is completely correct, but does not change the point concerning police relationships. Policing structurally promotes a particular type of self-image and view of the population—biopolitical and paternal—potential for acting out sadism and provides justification for coercion based on an authoritarian populism that uses ‘the community’ to advance individual vendettas and self-interest—which, naturally, was common in this conflict. The Communitarian Police have undoubtedly had positive roles in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’ and elsewhere (Sierra, 2005; Vazquez, 2017) and discussing the difficult situation is by no means intended to discredit the Communitarians, they are defending themselves, the land and their way of life. This article is an attempt to problematize organizational strategies of resistance to avoid costly logistics, divisions of labor and the reproduction of oppression under new leaders and rules. Organizations tend to prioritize their existence over the issues they are fighting—‘that which stagnates rots’—which can lead to compromises and negotiations with unsavory political and entrepreneurial actors. The question remains how resistance can become resilient, sustainable and indefinite against the industrial structure of conquest. The Santa Teresa sand bar has a renewable lease that makes it an official target for up to 90 years, meanwhile the Mexican State has perfected the art of divide and conquer and, like the Spanish Crown, seeks to ‘prevent the rise of an unchecked spirit of local autonomy.’

Discussion: Ecological Autonomy and Self-defense

The situation in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’/Álvaro Obregón is difficult. The insurrection against the wind energy company and political parties is not only an exercise in self-determination and alternative self-development, but also an attempt at reclaiming the future. This, however, does not change the difficulty of becoming autonomous amidst the processes of industrial conquest that has enforced conditions that have produced death, a proliferation of serious wounds, injuries, stress and ecological degradation (Dunlap, 2018a). The experience of combative self-determination is invaluable, creating new spaces of freedom, agency and a way to conceptualize new possibilities. Dissolving a municipal government to replace it with a more horizontal version is no easy task, especially while navigating and fighting the legal system, state police and Constitutionlists. The Communitarians articulated a counter-power that sought to combat statist-corporate interests and control, meanwhile becoming the new political force in town. The situation became increasingly divided, while the people were increasingly exhausted by the conflict, which for some included questioning the motives of the Communitarians. The Communitarians reproduced specialization and divisions of labor that proved resource intensive, even on a small scale—policing is not fishing or doing the other desired pastimes

or labors. Furthermore, this led to a significant obstacle: becoming government. Becoming government required the maintenance of order, administering civil works and taking over the roles of the municipality. This includes taking responsibility for food, electricity, water and sanitation in an industrial sense. The insurrection against wind energy had many reasons, but the question arises: how will Indigenous autonomy come to terms with the electrical, water and sanitation infrastructural grids as well as existing food consumption and waste patterns? These were all issues being navigated in various degrees in the mist of this conflict, where Indigenous, anarchists and other groups were theorizing, discussing and finding ways overcome the existence and proliferation of plastic across the land, finding ways to ‘recycle and resist’—to transform waste into resources—and forming agricultural cooperatives. These are common issues that semi-modernized and subsistent towns will face in challenging industrial and capitalist relationships. The following seeks to offer an experimental idea and/or possible tool for Indigenous and rural people to consider within their existing cultures, histories and contexts to support existing strategies of survival but also self-defense to transform situations (of planned) dependency to autonomous sovereignty.

The proposal is to revive, build and expand networks of ecological autonomy and self-defense. Instead of making counter-power organizations with administrations, ‘the party’ or police, the idea would be to adapt informal anarchist organizing based on the botanical rhizome to create ecological autonomy with all that entails (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005/1987). Not only does this strategy have historical precedents in rural areas, especially in Oaxaca (Tutino, 1988, 2007; Campbell et al., 1993), but it re-conceptualizes approaches to achieving autonomy and strengthening already existing relations and forms diluted and clouded by colonial imposition and (Eurocentric) Marxian forms of organization and resistance. This is to directly challenge mimicking colonial, leftist and, sometimes, anarchist (syndicalist) models of administration rooted in civilized and industrial thinking. This statist challenge should be informal and evasive. Ecological autonomy means working towards achieving food, electricity, sanitation and medical autonomy that reprioritizes individuals and collectives to understand their capacity to create, consume and begin to break with industrial dependency. This is not about propping up towns or cities, but instead people becoming increasingly conscious about the building material they use and consume, the flipside of which is integrating their biological waste back into farming practices, reviving nearly exterminated ecological practices. This might include drawing on insights from agroecology, rural and urban permaculture when appropriate to bridge the gap with lost, or rather exterminated, knowledge and ecological practices that have been disciplined out of people, pushed out of and hidden under the metaphorical rock. Because as one combative Elder reminded me: ‘*Government will never lose when they give money to you.*’ Seizing and reviving ancient land-based knowledge, which includes appreciating non-monetary relationships, done through sharing and solidarity, which the Istmo and the rest of Oaxaca has a rich a vibrant tradition of—*comunalidad*. Ecological autonomy is the development of capacity through the self-and others, which means establishing autonomy from within first, while simultaneously working to find, create and/or organize networks of people who feel strong about developing self-autonomous relationships and capacities that seek to expand the commons/communal relationships based on need and political antagonisms. This can begin with the building of informal networks of people, collectives and communes that are operating on various degrees on what could be loosely called ‘anarchistic values’ as a means to create autonomy and combat the spread of industrial tentacles.

While ecological autonomy seeks to develop material capacity through informal and familial relationships, resistance is organized through decentralized informality, maybe even without ever meeting, to create zones of ecological defense. Imagine in the case of Gui’Xhi’ Ro’ how to create a situation where people can live their lives—fishing, farming, swimming, playing and hanging out at the beach— and can respond informally to wind companies or security forces attempting to invade the town. Maybe a flare shot into the sky, or another designated signals, that would trigger people to shoot flares themselves as a means to spread a message to trigger popular defense and ecological struggle. There might be pre-decided meeting points for families, friend, church or fishing groups, where these combative groups have pre-existing relationships, knowledge and experience of one another and could have even preemptively discussed a variety of preliminary strategic plans for the initial

confrontation—which will be set in motion depending on the movement of the invading force. This already exists to some extent, but developing and honing these strategies might bear consideration.

These flares could also have different colors to communicate different time frames or types of conflicts, which would provide information on how to organize in that moment. The key point is that it signals the immediate formation of groups with existing affinities and plans, possibly in accordance with other collectives, to combat the coming invasion or issue. Ecological defense merges with lived values, trust and existing relationships, which is something organizational discipline only tries to guarantee through coercion, reward and repetition.¹² Trusted relationships through childhood friendships, family, working and fishing already exists in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’, but, there becomes a matter of intention and organization for the town, which is a process impeded by political parties, authorities and their coercive and psychological interventions. These groups would then execute their attack and adapt it to the circumstances of the battle, which is largely unpredictable, illegible and unpredictable. After the battle, people tend the wounded, create and reinforce existing health care facilities and returning to one’s life, which, arguably, might also include discussing how to proceed with the situation in temporary or *emergency cabildos*. The idea is to make living life first and organizational life secondary—undermining Politics and authoritarian populism—which in turn promotes a viral strategy were anyone and everyone in the town is an agent of this informal strategy. These conflicts should be avoided due to coercive military reprisal, which emphasizes the need of evasion.

Historically, a common tactic by colonial powers and reaction by Indigenous groups is to begin organizing on similar civilized and colonial terms to create counter-powers, armies and in this case police (Virilio, 1990; Boot, 2013; Gelderloos, 2017). The idea here is ‘the creation of defense without a body, condensed nowhere,’ but ready to defend anarchistic values of social and ecological harmony everywhere (Virilio, 1980: 268, 1990). This is an open question, how can Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities create ‘shapeless,’ ‘fluid and vaporous’ forms of resistance to develop capacities of ecological autonomy and self-defense? Because the colonial/statist organizational relationships are rotten—‘what is stagnate will rot’—creating systemic corruption through hierarchies, specialization and divisions of labor. This is the challenge to the colonial and Eurocentric heritage of all people subject to industrial conquest and feeling the consequences of authoritarian populism—left or right with oil black or money green—to reconsider the legacy and contextual histories of ecological autonomy and self-defense and its continuation through, often de-territorialized, anarchist ideas of informality in the bellies of the colonial beast. Rural areas have the most potential to consider and openly develop intentional strategies of ecological struggles (see La ZADs in France¹³, Hambach forest in Germany¹⁴ and many more¹⁵), but the challenge remains to develop a praxis of ecological autonomy and popular defense, which is embedded into everyday life, eliminating political divisions of labor that permits authoritarian populism to flourish and industrial systems to pave over Flora and fauna with asphalt, concrete, television and, often rendered forgotten, in the face of LCD screens.

¹² This is a relationship built on coercion and insecurity from military barracks to schools that underlines most civilized institutions.

¹³ http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/visuel/2015/12/21/la-carte-de-france-des-projets-contestes_4836014_4355770.html

¹⁴ See Brock and Dunlap (2018).

¹⁵ See <https://ejatlas.org/>



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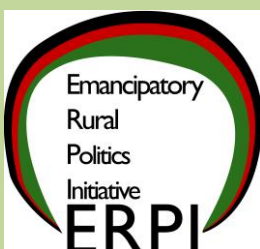
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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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