

The 'solution' is now the 'problem:' wind energy, colonisation and the 'genocide-ecocide nexus' in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca

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ABSTRACT

The coastal Isthmus of Tehuantepec region of Oaxaca, Mexico – known locally as the *Istmo* – is regarded as one of the best wind energy generating sites in the world. Marketed as a preeminent solution to mitigating climate change, wind energy is now applying increasing pressure on indigenous groups in the region. The article begins by outlining a definition of colonialism that assists in identifying the temporal continuity of the colonial project to understand its relationship with wind energy development. The next section briefly reviews colonial genocide studies, discussing disciplinary debates between liberal and post-liberal genocide scholars, the relevance of self-management within colonial systems, the genocide-ecocide nexus and the 'intent' of destructive development projects. This leads into reviewing the claims and findings that emerged from fieldwork in the *Istmo*, which is divided into the north and south to show the different, yet similar dynamics taking place in the region. Finally, the article concludes that wind energy development as a 'solution' to climate change not only distracts from its dependence on fossil fuels and mining, but renews and continues a slow industrial genocide, assimilating and targeting (indigenous) people who continue to value their land, sea and cultural relationships.

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The road to hell is paved with good intentions – English Proverb

When I first arrived in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region of Oaxaca, Mexico to research wind parks, I knew there were a range of issues emerging over wind energy development. I would soon find myself, however, confronted with a discourse that was far more intense than I originally imagined. This emerged in conversations and interviews with people claiming that the Mexican state and wind companies 'are going to kill us all', 'annihilate us' and that they are slowly committing 'ethnocide', 'ecocide' or 'genocide'. After two weeks of living in Álvaro Obregón, this perspective emerged in an interview with an anarchist who had been visiting the town for over two years. Discussing the different perspectives on wind energy in the town, they described an argument at a party with a

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Constitutionalist (Contra) who believed wind turbines were an opportunity for the town and the gateway to 'progress'. Then I asked:

AD: You are someone who isn't from an 'Indigenous community' per say, you grew up with more of the luxuries of modernity than some of the people in this village. So when you hear him [the Contra] say: 'You are a halt to my progress, you have no right to do this', which implies you have modern luxuries that you are preventing him from having and that you have no right to do this. What do you say to this?

[...] When they tell me I am an impediment to progress and that I have no right to do this. First, I believe that this issue is not just [local] – I hate the term local and I think this term comes from neoliberalism, nobody is a local. It has a reference that reflects the metropolis. But what is happening here, is happening in a lot of places in this country and in this state and it needs to be halted. Because I think the progress of modernity is a threat to life itself – it is going to kill us. It is a hegemonic power that does not respect any other way of life and it has to be stopped. The Industrial revolution in Europe destroyed a shit ton of things there, it wiped out just about everything – a bunch of species, trees and many other ways of living. So yeah, it has to be stopped and it does well fucking concern me! But I think the power to halt the renewable wind energy projects is important, because yes, I believe these projects are part of a strategy of ethnocide – I do think that they want to kill them [the Indigenous people].

I did not expect this reference to ethnocide. Also in that moment it did not dawn on me to integrate questions about this perspective into the semi-structured interview questions. Instead, I continued asking about social impact, conflict dynamics and repressive strategies deployed by the Mexican government and wind companies. However, these references to extermination became reoccurring throughout interviews in the region. Especially given the circumstances I experienced in the area, after fieldwork I began to inquire into colonial genocide studies to see what insights might emerge from this study to support the assertions of a genocidal process taking place. This article emerges as a product of this research, examining the relationship between wind turbines and genocide.

This research is based on participant observation, 123 recorded semi-structured interviews and embedding part-time with the Álvaro Obregón Communitarian Police (*policia comunitaria*), who were actively defending their land and sea from wind companies and their political collaborators. Fieldwork included tours of wind park affectations, fishing trips, joining a pilgrimage to a religious site as well as participating in local ceremonies. This research was conducted with an interpreter with ties to the resistance, referred to in the text as a 'friend' because during this research they were more than an interpreter. Fieldwork abruptly ended in May 2015, after five months, due to repression related to embedding and participating in the resistance groups. Because of the conflict in this region, preserving research participant confidentiality is a priority in this article.

Drawing on fieldwork, this article argues that wind energy development advances a trajectory of progress that requires political and ontological assimilation,¹ which amounts to continuing, what Jennifer Huseman and Damien Short called, 'a slow industrial genocide'.² Wind energy is renewing the destructive tendencies of industrial development in the coastal Isthmus of Tehuantepec region, known locally as the *Istmo*. Driven by increased international/national emphasis on renewable energy and market-based environmentalism, wind energy necessitates not only the intensification of enclosure and privatisation, but also renews direct and indirect coercive impositions on indigenous territory

and land relations to further integrate wind resources into capitalist production. Beginning by discussing theory, this article examines the colonial model, the political state and its relationship to 'genocide-ecocide nexus' to contextualise how wind energy development continues the trajectory of colonial genocide by advancing social and environmental pressure on indigenous groups in the Istmo. The first section begins by outlining a definition of colonialism that assists in identifying the temporal continuity of the colonial project to later understand its relationship with wind energy development. The next section provides a literature review on colonial genocide studies, which briefly discusses the increasing relevance of self-management in colonial genocide studies, the 'genocide-ecocide nexus' and the 'intent' of destructive development projects. This leads into reviewing the claims and findings that emerged from fieldwork in the Istmo, which is divided into the north and south to show the different, yet similar dynamics taking place in the region. Finally, the article concludes that wind energy development as a 'solution' to climate change (as it is positioned next to more overtly destructive methods of energy production – oil, hydraulic fracturing, coal and nuclear energy) not only distracts from its dependence on fossil fuels and mining, but renews and advances the colonial genocide process by continuing to assimilate and target (indigenous) people who continue to value their land, culture and relationships.

Welcome to hell: the colony model

Colonisation is not only a discussion of the past, but also of the present. This conversation requires an examination of the colony model and its evolution to better understand its continuation and relationship to climate change, ecological crises and wind energy development. Dating back to the Roman Republic, colonialism is often wedded to the Latin word *imperium* – imperialism – that signified Roman states, while the colony originates from the word *colonia* that designated Roman military settlements on conquered territory.³ The Roman Empire had a robust agricultural system to support its territorial expansion,⁴ which was incorporated into military camps, not only stimulating agricultural production in their regions of settlement (to feed soldiers), but there was also evidence of soldiers farming themselves.⁵ Furthermore, integral to the Roman camp were roads, military mobility and legionaries, who were skilled both as soldiers as well as road builders.⁶ The relationship between the military camp, roads and agriculture is deeply intertwined, which comprises the heart of the colony model in Roman times and afterwards.

Imperium and *colonia* would combine to create the notion of empire. This signified the domination of one society by another by military force, designating the different tactics, strategies and politics of creating and maintaining an empire.⁷ Hence the imperial relationship of unequal exchange that refers to the mother country-colony, center-periphery and the urban-rural divides that often imply dependency, if not a type of master-slave relationship. The 'recurrent problem' concerning the relationship between 'colonialism' and 'imperialism', explains Daniel Butt, is that some scholars see colonialism as an instance of imperialism, the domination of a territory from an external metropolis or nation, while others refer 'to a particular model of political organization', which emerges from the Roman military camp.⁸ Quoting Edward Said, A. Dirk Moses writes, "imperialism was the theory, colonialism the practice of *changing the uselessly unoccupied*

territories of the world into useful new versions of the European metropolitan society”, others simply equated the two’ (emphasis added).⁹ From this definition, the core of colonialism can be whittled down to an assertion: that there is only one, right way to use land, live, organise culture and/or develop a nation. Inherent is a sense of superiority that articulates itself not only through overt domination with the ‘right of conquest’, but also the good intentions that manifest in paternalism, charity, or as one critic has called it, ‘the white-man’s savior complex’,¹⁰ which can even take the form of ‘solidarity’ from non-profits and activists.¹¹

Colonialism, according to Moses, is ‘a specific form of rule’ that is embodied by the ‘occupation of societies on terms that robs them of their “historical line of development” and transforms them “according to the needs and interests of the colonial rulers”’.¹² Consequently this results in the great transformation of indigenous social, cultural and economic institutions, which disciplines ontological outlooks, interpersonal relationships between humans and, equally important, non-human life or ‘more-than-human nature’ (plants, animals, landscapes, trees, etc.).¹³ Nonetheless, Butt identifies three primary characteristics of colonialism: (1) the external domination of one people by another; (2) the imposition of colonial ‘culture and customs onto the colonized’; and (3) the exploitation of the colonised (slavery, natural resource extraction and ‘misappropriation of cultural property’ to name only a few).¹⁴ This also justified what Gayatri Spivak following Foucault called ‘epistemic violence’, which constructed a method of knowledge to justify claims to superiority over the ‘Other’,¹⁵ and that simultaneously served to discredit and subjugate alternative perspectives, and knowledge that asserted different values and ontologies.¹⁶ While these are foundational characteristics of colonialism, if one wanted to understand the heart, the composition and the way colonialism enforces these cultural relationships, then these definitions remain relatively open-ended and ambiguous.

In order to understand and identify the colonial model and its relationship to wind energy, Paul Virilio is helpful when he writes: ‘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’.¹⁷ In other words, colonisation is the processes to spread a form of organisation emblematic of the ideology, form and purpose of the European political state. The spread of which, argues Lorenzo Veracini following Patrick Wolfe’s distinction between colonialism and settler colonialism, takes on viral and bacterial qualities.¹⁸ Revealing the affinity between the Roman camp and the political state, Foucault explains:

The form of the Roman camp was revived at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, precisely in protestant countries – and hence the importance of all this in Northern Europe – along with the exercise, the subdivision of troops, and collective and individual controls in the major undertaking of disciplinarization of the army.¹⁹

The roman camp laid the foundation for a ‘military dream of society’²⁰ designed around divisions of labour, specialisation and hierarchy, and later the roman camp was adopted by European states to reproduce these values to regiment people to imperatives of nation-state formation, ‘modernization’ and later industrial progress. Anarchists call this ‘prison society’.²¹ While rooted in the Roman camp, the colony begins in the city, but more specifically, the ancient Greek *Polis* and organisational precursors in the ancient Greek *oikonomia* (household governance).²² Demonstrating the affinity between the

colonial/state model and democracy, Ferit Güven returns to Plato's question in the *Republic*: 'What is the best way to rule a community as a whole?'²³ Democracy would emerge as the answer, distributing the crisis of central authority and the desire for political unity in the Ancient Greek *Polis*, establishing citizenship (and slaves), civil participation and the nascent juridical-political machine of the *Polis*.²⁴ While there are many forms of democratic participation, democracy as a system of political control²⁵ arises from how to construct and/or maintain the *Polis* (and *oikonomia*), exemplified by Attica as an organisational structure of participation that united spatial and political practices that served as an inspiration for the Roman camp. Investigating democracy as a political disciplinary technology, Güven defines colonialism as 'neither a simple series of acts of domination, nor an unqualified exploitation, but rather a process and discourse of disciplining, ordering, rendering visible, unveiling, and making comprehensible.'²⁶

Güven's definition does not explicitly discuss spatial qualities. This 'disciplining, ordering, rendering visible, unveiling, and making comprehensible', however, is indeed coded into colonial space and organisational practices. Achilles Mbembe, summarising Franz Fanon, explains that

colonial occupation entails first and foremost a division of space into compartments. It involves the setting of boundaries and internal frontiers epitomized by barracks and police stations; it is regulated by the language of pure force, immediate presence, and frequent and direct action; and it is premised on the principle of reciprocal exclusivity.²⁷

Re-designing space to promote spatial legibility for population control, economic imperatives and industrial growth is foundational to nation-state development and re-development that codes its values into space.²⁸ Enforcing the colonial model with military, even genocidal force, occupation and administration established an evolving and dynamic system of conquest. Restricting colonialism to a historical era is a short-sighted, naïve and politically convenient conception to enable the unchecked expansion of the colonial model, an expansion that can be called political economy. These structural, organisational and technological relationships not only situate the evolving nation-state, but contextualise the historical place and operation of wind energy within global political economy.

Colonial genocide: revisiting the genocide machine

Defining colonialism enables us to locate the continuities and changes taking place within the colonial system and its relationship with genocide, development and, as we will see later, with industrial-scale wind energy parks. The politics of genocide studies have been contentious. Grappling with the legal politics of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The UN Convention), Raphael Lemkin's original definition of genocide as well as issues of 'intent to destroy' as they relate to economic operations, the politics of genocide is complex. To contextualise the claim that the process of wind energy development in the Istmo is continuing the process of colonial genocide, this section offers a brief literature review and theoretical insights.

The word genocide, coined by Raphael Lemkin in the 1944 book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, combines the word *genos* meaning tribe or race of people and the Latin *cide* meaning killing.²⁹ Genocide is tribe killing, which Lemkin originally described as 'a

coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves'.³⁰ This includes 'the disintegration of the political and social institutions of culture, language, national feelings, religion and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups'.³¹ Furthermore, Lemkin writes:

Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization of the area by the oppressor's own nationals.³²

Destruction and reconfiguration of cultural values, or deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation³³ are notable characteristics of genocide which only partially appear in the 1948 UN Convention. Article II states 'genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious groups as such':

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.³⁴

The negotiations over the terms of the UN Convention were largely conditioned by United States (US) and Soviet concerns of self-incrimination for indigenous extermination and assimilation.³⁵ Furthermore, the UN Convention did not recognise political identities,³⁶ produced a dominant conception of genocide based on mass-killing and, most importantly, largely neglected aspects of 'cultural genocide' in Lemkin's writings.³⁷

The politics behind the UN Convention, Lemkin's wider definition of genocide and the continuing destructive processes of capitalism, the nation-state and industrial development have given rise to an ontological split in genocide studies. Moses makes the distinction between liberal and post-liberal conceptions of genocide.³⁸ The liberals³⁹ emphasise state actors, intentionality, totalitarian ideology and the industrial killing emblematic of the Nazi regime, which they position as historically 'unique', 'unprecedented' and 'singular', consequently down playing and, at times, positioning colonial genocides as insignificant compared to the atrocities of the Nazis.⁴⁰ The post-liberals, on the other hand,⁴¹ see genocide as more complex than *just* mass-killing, highlighting not only the differences, but also the continuity between colonial genocide(s), the holocaust and how these acts are coded into the structure and trajectory of the nation-state and its development. The focus for post-liberals is on how states continue to eliminate and/or reconfigure competing value systems from/into their institutional and economic structures. 'When I say "Killing", I obviously do not mean simply murder as such', said Foucault, 'but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on.'⁴² Foucault's

notion of killing here is in line with the post-liberal conception(s) of genocide, where ‘indirect murder’ references the under-acknowledged concept of ‘social death’ that describes the hollowing out of cultures, habits and religions. Social death does not directly kill people, but instead disciplines and transforms them, instilling various degrees of helplessness, social fragmentation, extreme depressions and post-dramatic stresses among other existential crises.⁴³ Damian Short reminds us that ‘social death can occur without specific “intent to destroy” as such, through sporadic and uncoordinated action or as a by-product of an incompatible expansionist economic system. They might even result from attempts to do good: to enlighten, to modernise, to evangelise.’⁴⁴ Social death calls attention to the science of elimination, assimilation/conversion and population management that has been normalised within the state apparatus, its social (schools, malls, hospitals, public space, etc.), coercive (military, police and extra-judicial adherents) and cultural (churches, museums, family structure, etc.) institutions.

The liberal position has been rightfully critiqued for a type of Eurocentric exceptionalism placing greater importance on the Holocaust,⁴⁵ ‘invoking a snapshot view of history divorced from past context and experience’ that prioritises legal definition over lived experience.⁴⁶ The post-liberal approach rejects the narrow definition of the UN Convention, drawing connections between colonialism, economic development and genocide, which consequently discredit the foundational myths of liberalism.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the post-liberal position argues that this process is intensifying and morphing through technological advancements working to perfect industrial/computational based systems of production, consumption and resource control.⁴⁸ Keeping the idea of social death in mind, discussing democracy Güven writes: ‘While the totalitarian regimes “take power by destroying all oppositions”, within democracy opposition are allowed to survive’⁴⁹ as long as they conform to the rules, operations and imperatives of political economy. On the other hand, post-liberals are criticised for not providing culpable agents and being static in the face of changing dynamics,⁵⁰ which, this article contends, misses the nuance, flexibility and adaptation of the colonial system to normalise violence, maintain its existence and integrate opposition into its structures – leading some authors to call capitalism structural genocide.⁵¹

This liberal critique neglects the important conversation concerning the internalisation, self-identification and reproduction of colonial values. It should be clear that not only is a colonial/state pattern imposed (referred to here as political economy), but it can be self-managed by the targeted population with a series of disciplinary and biopolitical mechanisms that constantly work to integrate people into its political structures.⁵² Wolfe sees colonial genocidal processes in three non-deterministic phases: (1) initial confrontation (or invasion); (2) Carceration period (displacement/resettlement); and (3) assimilation period that aims to integrate indigenous populations into the colonial system.⁵³ Here, a fourth phase should be added: *self-management*, which is an intensification of the assimilation phase to normalise colonial structures, making them self-reinforcing and managing. In short, state/colonial structures seek to become socially and economically *sustainable*. The colonising process, also known as ‘modernization’, ‘industrialization’ and ‘development’, intensifies and continues to reconfigure the most sensitive features of people’s cultural values and sociality, amounting to a systemic social war to regiment and integrate people into the various operations and (managerial) positions within the system of political economy.⁵⁴ Self-management not only attempts to erase past genocidal

and internment programmes, but it also works towards normalising present forms of symbolic, structural, infrastructural and political violence.⁵⁵ This legacy of violence severely complicates political analysis, which frequently remains neglected by mainstream social science. This analytical neglect, arguably results from various and overlapping degrees of self-identification, dependency, addiction and/or desire for the social, ecological and self-destruction implicit with the colonial/state systems. William Dugger reminds us:

Social control through coercion is temporary. More permanent social control is based on the ability to alter the internal values of others to gain their willing acceptance of the control. Then the control becomes legitimate. It is deemed right and good by those over whom it is exercised. It no longer requires a whip.⁵⁶

Almost everyone, in various intensities, is disciplined, inoculated and integrated into the machinations of colonial structures that construct an organisational system that promotes self-domestication into institutional, environmental and cultural structures that blur individual social values, self-interest and identities with the functioning of political economy itself. 'In other words, to become a colonizing culture, Europe first had to colonize itself,' explained Ward Churchill to a German audience, '[i]n fact, your colonization has by now been consolidated to such an extent that [...] you no longer even see yourselves as having been colonized'.⁵⁷ This alludes to the erasure and/or normalisation of genocidal violence, the importance of colonial collaborators, the manufacturing of consent and/or desire to emulate colonial culture.⁵⁸ In sum, genocide impacts and influences everyone, underlining nearly every political and ontological ecological conflict wedded to the implementation of destructive development projects.

Before moving forward, there are two important insights from colonial genocide studies. The first is recognising the relationship and inseparability of Indigenous people and their land, where ecologically destructive interventions are then experienced as attacks against indigenous (and non-indigenous) populations themselves subsisting, valuing and identifying with their ecosystems.⁵⁹ Developing this insight, Crook and Short recognised ecocide as a method of genocide that forms the 'genocide-ecocide nexus', which attempts to undermine the life, existence and resistance of indigenous populations⁶⁰ – where killing the buffalo, fish, crops and other means of subsistence are textbook counterinsurgency 'starvation' tactics part of a larger extermination strategy.⁶¹ Said simply, attacks against the land can have genocidal consequences for (already marginalised) indigenous communities, groups and individuals who derive their material and spiritual life from the land. The second regards the 'intent to destroy' and development projects. Severe physical, cultural and ecological 'transformations' resulting from mega-development projects are disregarded and denied, because the 'intent' underlining this destructive transformation is economic. The resulting death, displacement, illness and social fragmentation are then seen separately, distanced from previous and existing processes of physical and/or cultural genocide and, instead, understood as 'unintended consequences' of the project.⁶² Short, following Helen Fein, contends that genocidal 'intent can also be *inferred from action*, which is a long established principle in British common law'.⁶³ Judging by the action and outcome as opposed to legal script, assessing genocidal-ecocidal impacts as an outcome rather than based on the standards, vision and laws of state institutions – a product of colonial conquest themselves – is a step forward in breaking the colonial spell, maybe even 'decolonising' approaches to genocide

studies. The genocide-ecocide nexus is a long-term, continuous and coercive process operating by various means and methods. The key point here is that, in the words of Wolfe, 'invasion is a structure not an event', imbuing discipline, desire and coercion to make the colonial/state process self-managing and reinforcing.⁶⁴

Cultural genocide and wind turbines

The unique geographical features and positioning of the Istmo between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean has triggered a wind rush in the region.⁶⁵ This began with the 2003 USAID sponsored report, *Wind Energy Resource Atlas of Oaxaca*,⁶⁶ mapping the 'excellent' wind sources in the region that the International Finance Corporation (IFC) later called 'the best wind resources on earth'.⁶⁷ When discussing the coastal Istmo, it is useful to think of it as being composed of two sections: the north and the south. Sitting at the base of the Atravesada mountain range, the northern part of the region is generally regarded as Zapotec (*Binníza*), while the southern side is predominately Ikoot (Huave) territory. These territories overlap and are home to five different ethnic groups and a *mestizo* population. Since 2004 wind energy development, according to newspapers, has resulted in the construction of 1,642 wind turbines,⁶⁸ with double this planned for the region.⁶⁹ While the desire for work, social development and prosperity is what created a foothold and support for wind projects in the region. In towns like La Ventosa in the Northern Coastal Istmo many of these promises remained unfulfilled, limited and benefited a minority of the population,⁷⁰ which was seen by other towns and fishing communities in and around Lagoon Superior in the south. The wind parks and their continued expansion towards the south had become an increasing source of discontent in Istmo, especially for those who continue to appreciate their subsistence from the land and sea. The specificity of how the wind turbines entered into the different parts of the Istmo had both difference and commonality, but in the present struggle the north and south coastal Istmo represent two different archetypal, yet overlapping, forms of resistance that are revealing of their respective contexts. Opposition in the north is centred on unequal, exploitative land deals and labour contracts as locals fight for greater incorporation, as well as for individual and collective benefits. This includes unions fighting for more wind parks, who also criticise the wind companies for the importation of technical employees and unequal pay between Mexican and Spanish workers. While in the south, there is the total rejection of wind energy projects largely arising out of the belief that the wind companies and political system cannot be trusted and propagate lies to take their land and damage the sea – their ability to subsist.

Resistance in the north was scant and fragmented because of a pre-existing concentration of political power, land ownership and selective dissemination of information to the general public – many people had no idea what wind energy was, the scale of the projects, or their social and ecological impacts.⁷¹ Additionally, individuals had ambitions concerning profit, while the town was wrapped in hopes of social development and projects were promoted as environmentally sustainable or 'green' and marketed as mitigating climate change.⁷² Eventually, La Venta and La Ventosa became engulfed by wind turbines, while other towns such as Santo Domingo Ingenio and Juchitán were only partially enclosed.

Interviews in the north dripped with discontent. This ranged from manipulating land contracts to unrealised social development and what amounted to a type of rural gentrification that made nearly everything in towns go up in price. This also included the exporting of electricity from these wind parks to industrial zones, mining companies and other countries, while electricity prices increased locally.⁷³ People were engulfed by electrical infrastructure and in some instances live between distances of 280 and 30 metres from wind turbines both in and outside the La Ventosa and La Venta. Further, during interviews people discussed the land use change around the town that not only altered agricultural and livestock patterns, but necessitated the clearing of animal habitat, compacting of soil for roads, loss of birds, transforming the ground water into concrete for wind turbine foundations and, finally, leaking oil into the ground, which people claimed contaminated both the ground water and animals.⁷⁴ Albeit less extreme, these ecological impacts are similar to other modes of conventional fossil fuel energy production.⁷⁵ According to local farmers, wind turbines and their foundations create extreme drying and flooding of the land, depending on the season, which made it difficult to continue farming. This was compounded by various reports of minor-to-severe health impacts that resonated with the controversial wind turbine syndrome.⁷⁶ The overall findings from this research echo other studies on wind turbines' impact.⁷⁷ Despite some wealth increases and token social development projects in the last ten years of wind energy development in La Ventosa, these projects appear to have largely reinforced income inequality, furthered poverty entrenchment and increased food vulnerability and worker dependency on the construction of more wind parks, which cumulatively has led to an increase in work-related out-migration and environmental degradation.⁷⁸ The presence of wind turbines creates a struggle to make the best out of a bad situation that leaves people fighting for more social benefits, hopes of land owners' negotiating free electricity for more wind projects, as well as adapting to the situation to survive. A woman summarised the situation, saying: 'We are still poor and now we are surrounded by wind turbines.'⁷⁹

The South Coastal Istmo, on the other hand, witnessed and listened to the stories of wind energy development in the north. Politicians and some landowners were interested in negotiating the terms of the Barra de Santa Teresa (Barra) project on communal land outside Juchitán. The process began with the help of local elites, politicians and interested *comuneros*; the general public was initially left in the dark, later taking a position of total opposition.⁸⁰ Public consultation was bypassed, instead opting, in both the north and the south, for selective negotiations with select regional administrators, elites and social property members. This resulted in the spread of social conflict all along the southern towns, notably San Dionisio del Mar, Álvaro Obregón, San Mateo del Mar and Juchitán between the years 2011 and 2015, which is a struggle that continues in varying intensities today. It took over ten years for the first free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) consultation to arrive in Juchitán, which reinforced state-corporate power, while simultaneously acting as a wind energy marketing platform and constructing the illusion of real dialogue, negotiation and, by extension, democratic decision-making.⁸¹ The key difference between negotiation/incorporation with wind companies in the north and the current of insurrection against them in the south is that these were fishing communities dependent on the sea, not only for material, but also spiritual sustenance – identifying as part of the sea. This raised deep concerns about the environmental impact of wind turbines and how the construction, vibration and noise from the wind turbines would affect the aquatic

life they live from. Likewise, land concentration was more diffuse, aside from *ejidos* there is also communal lands and roads, which wind turbines threatened. Similarly, political corruption, unequal land deals and a loss of access to the sea combined with fishermen witnessing the mass-killing of fish during the construction of a pilot wind turbine on the Barra. This led villagers to unite and rise up against the wind companies and political parties.⁸² The quality of life, land relations and livelihoods were threatened by the possibility of construction on the Barra and the Lagoon. The Barra comprises primarily sand and vegetation and the Marña Renovables project sought to build 102 wind turbines with the foundation depth estimated to be up to 70 metres deep, as opposed to the average 8–13 metres deep on the land in the north. The first attempt at building a foundation, according to testimonies, resulted in the mass killing of fish as far as the eye could see.⁸³ In addition to wind turbine construction, barge docks, a less than 1 kilometre submarine transmission line and a 52 kilometre transmission line to Ixtepec substation would be constructed.⁸⁴ This would create a situation of systematic noise, vibration, electrical currents and aircraft warning lights flashing on the wind towers, which the fishermen in the Seventh Section neighbourhood in Juchitán will tell you will push the fish populations deeper into the lagoon. This means fishermen have to drive to other towns to fish and this has fermented inter-communal conflicts, when other towns or members thereof collaborate with the wind companies, but then travel to other villages resisting wind energy development to fish. Drawing from these accounts and secondary literature on wind energy impacts, these wind projects represent a structure of systemic low-intensity⁸⁵ ecological destruction, which the majority of the residents in the south felt had to be stopped at all costs. Hence the emergence of militant resistance against these projects in Juchitán, Álvaro Obregón and the lesser mentioned San Dionisio del Mar and San Maria del Mar.

Cultural change: the northern coastal Istmo

After having been enclosed by wind turbines, people in the north live next to or are at the centre of wind energy generation sites. This has resulted in cultural change, which is compounded by a rise in health affectations – real and imagined – and widespread reports of cancer, the source of which remains undetermined.⁸⁶ The changes to these towns have been significant. The findings suggest that a dramatic rise in land, rent, food, and electricity prices, that paralleled an increase in drug consumption and crime, accompanied the wind energy projects. This included a large and rapid influx of wealthy foreigners, migrant workers and their preferences. Likewise, wind energy development is proclaimed as green, sustainable and climate friendly, but in reality, wind energy development is still the result, in every aspect of its production, of fossil fuels. Wind energy still requires large mining and processing facilities to refine iron, stainless steel, dysprosium, oil lubricants, sealing resins, fibreglass, concrete as well as the construction of transportation and electrical infrastructure networks.⁸⁷ These issues are compounded by the fact that the electricity generated by the wind turbines is private, under a ‘self-supply’ (*autoabastecimiento*) regime that reserves the energy produced for shareholders, such as Grupo Bimbo, Wal-mart, industrial construction companies, and mining companies, and it is exported to the US, Belize and Guatemala.⁸⁸ The energy from these wind parks does not go to the residents and is largely controlled by transnational companies.

The difference between the residents participating with the wind companies and those who did not or could not resulted in a rise of income inequality, which was further exaggerated by increases in land, rent and food prices. This manifested itself on the street in La Ventosa with infrastructural degradation, signs of malnourishment in people and raggedy clothes that meshed with the circulation of brand name American SUVs, new clothes and refurbished or new-build compound-style homes with fresh coats of paint, tiles, barbwire and sometimes security cameras. These infrastructural trends combined with changes in food. Referring to a restaurant in La Ventosa, one local human rights activist explains that

you could eat garnachas there, cocada, torta, coffee – not anymore, it is all gringo food. Light skinned people like you, more or less, go there and they have their menu. This is a way of understanding how the people from [the wind companies] there are modifying their way of life and that is without thinking about the economy that revolves around them.⁸⁹

Large influxes of foreigners with money brought their habits, lifestyles and preferences with them, which subtly altered the type and price of food in the town.⁹⁰ Similarly, one woman believed the severe health problems in the town were linked to greater dependency on the importation of food, where people used to eat free-range chicken, pigs and cows, now they are more reliant on canned food from neighbouring regions. People in La Ventosa also repeatedly spoke about a rise in crime, drugs distribution and consumption, which some mothers are convinced emerges from a lack of opportunity, wealth inequality and new habits brought by the foreigners. Consequently, the locals claim that this has generated greater insecurity in the town, while people explain that the police protecting the wind parks are actively arresting and fining people enormous sums of money for hunting. Hunting has been an important part of people's livelihoods and seasonal festivals, which are slowly circumscribed by police enforcing environmental protection laws, while, ironically, protecting wind turbines that are repeatedly cited as destroying animal habitat, killing birds and, according to research participants, reducing the overall animal population. The prohibition of hunting is another cost placed on people who are disadvantaged by the arrival of wind parks in La Ventosa.

Interestingly, there is a form of settler colonialism taking place, which is organised around megaprojects. The influx of European businessmen, representatives, engineers and other workers from around the world flood these small towns for about one and a half to three years. Not only does this influx bring promises of prosperity, jobs, social development and images of modernisation that create enchanted visions of development,⁹¹ it also seems to be changing the prices in the town, increasing drug use and altering social composition at an accelerating rate. The town is flooded with people holding values which prioritise wind park construction, capital generation and the right to work. This takes on intimate qualities when workers and wind company representatives begin dating and marrying into the town. Not just in the north, but all over the coastal Istmo. Numerous research participants felt that young women were taken advantage of through promises, drugs, and money, as well as being seduced by older, confident and 'blue eyed' foreigners.⁹² According to interviews, once the wind projects were completed there became a lot of 'fatherless children' as people moved onto the next job and/or went home to their families in other countries. While victimisation was a common narrative, it was also said that many Istmeños women were active, if not strategic, about forming relationships with foreigners to further their lives, desires and possible opportunities.

Power is fluid, flexible and worked to the strengths of each individual, nonetheless, these relationships also created openings for communal integration and access to land in the area. Said simply, marrying into the region provided access to land and wind resources,⁹³ a relationship that is by no means simple, but allowed the further penetration of wind energy and the change that comes with it.

The circuit of labourers that travel from megaproject to megaproject – renewable or otherwise – forms a roaming settler colonial machine that integrates the values of modernisation based on the demands of work. In La Ventosa, after the wind company jobs left, there was a rise of mototaxi drivers, landless workers and subsequent out-migration, creating, after Marx, an increase in the ‘industrial reserve army’ for not only the semi-specialised labourers on the megaproject construction circuit,⁹⁴ but also workers in agriculture, factories, tourism, and construction, among a variety of other available jobs.⁹⁵ Megaprojects in general, and wind energy in particular, create a self-fulfilling cycle of state, economic and energetic dependency on infrastructure systems through large-scale development that gradually weakens localised food systems, while promoting development on a scale incompatible with ecological sustainability, which also stifles potential development alternatives.⁹⁶ The end result is a continuation of cultural change taking place in this village, which is emblematic of the processes and outcomes of neoliberal economic restructuring of the past 30 years that is increasing political conflict, altering productive structures – commodity pricing, food systems, drug consumption and health concerns, etc. – and promoting gated community style homes and SUVs.⁹⁷

The southern coastal istmo

The south is subject to similar changes, from environmental impact to the influx of wealthy foreigners, but these issues are significantly compounded by wind energy development at sea. Not only is the sea a significant cultural symbol, but it is also foundational to livelihoods – ‘We are poor, but you do not die of hunger here’, as one person explained. Arguably, fishing creates a greater connection to the cycles of the ecosystem and it also provides an immediate correlation between life and the sea. This is not just with fishing, but also with direct subsistence food systems, where dependency is directly situated with the land and sea as opposed to bureaucratised market-based supermarket food systems.⁹⁸ Despite centuries of colonisation, bombardments from media advertisements, movies and ‘the merchants of cool’⁹⁹ as well as new schooling regulations that many feel are eroding traditional values in the areas around Álvaro Obregón,¹⁰⁰ a large portion of the population remains steadfast to defend the land, sea and their cultural integrity from wind companies and their political collaborators. Two foundational issues emerged with wind energy development in the southern coastal Istmo: changes in food production and quality of life.

The land change from agriculture to wind turbines, which according to farmers also accompanies cuts in agricultural subsidies, threatens their existence. In the words of one farmer outside Juchitán: ‘If [...] the wind turbines arrive there are not going to be farmers anymore and that is when the natural food will be finished.’ Preserving, living and working with the land is crucial to the inhabitants I interviewed and the arrival of wind energy threatens to disrupt and, as is claimed by many, will significantly degrade their quality of life. Summarising this relationship a farmer explains: the wind company

is going to give you money so you can eat food from over there [the city] – canned food. Who knows what canned food is!? Sometimes the food is over eight months or a year old, not like the food here in Juchitán.

This farmer, and others during interviews, becomes enthralled talking about the diversity and quality of food in the region and consequently resents the imposition of urban food systems with the quality of life they bring. The same farmer continues:

I do not throw fertilizers onto my produce, only pure nature, because the food has a lot of medicine. [For example,] [t]he soda that has a lot of gas, makes the people die faster. All of my family, my grandpa and my grandma they lived to 105 and 115 years old. They were drinking [hot] chocolate at six in the morning, they ate chocolate every day, cheese and tortilla, but real tortilla's from the oven. Now tortilla stores use machines and machines use gas to cook, which is why people hearts are stopping and they die, but the real tortillas that came from the oven they used wood that is why the people live to be 110, 115 years old. Now the people who do not eat fresh food, they die at fifty or sixty years.¹⁰¹

This antagonism towards processed food, from industrial fertilisers to canned food, was related to life expectancy. This is a relationship that is being threatened with the arrival of wind turbines, which according to this farmer is made worst by money. 'Many of my friends who received money, they say they live happily now, but they drink [beer] all day and every day and one of them has already died because of this money.' Money is implicitly described as a weapon, before the farmer drifts into a tangent about the great quality of tortillas, tamales and *atole*,¹⁰² later explaining that the people who sign contracts with the wind company drink all day and are 'dying because they are assholes'. Someone from the communitarian police in Álvaro Obregón explains that the wind turbines will destroy everything, 'even their watermelon, which is what happened to people in La Ventosa. We want to continue free, so everybody can work on their farm, have their crops, farm their corn, beans, squash – all of that – and we can continue to fish'.

Many felt the life brought by wind turbines was going to break them into a form of wage slavery. Appreciating the beauty of their environment, the 'Big Bear' explains:

See we are going to lose these animals and we do not know what else, why are they [the wind companies] going to do this? Over there [in the city], you have to pay for light, water, you have to pay for everything and you are going to have to work like a slave to earn 2,000 pesos and you pay 2,000 for rent for one month, how are you going to eat? Then 600 pesos for water, and then the next week you have to pay 600 pesos for light, and then you will pay 800 peso for eating for one or two weeks – I have already been there and I have seen it.¹⁰³

For the inheritors of revolutionary agrarian reform, modern life looks like slavery: people work all day, have little money and no time to enjoy life. This type of life is common in urban areas, but regardless of material poverty in the coastal Istmo, people still share their food and eat high-quality fish, fruits and vegetables. Another farmer explains:

There is only going to be people with money, so they are going to eat canned food, but our sons are going to suffer a lot, like the elementary school books say: 'That many people work from six to six and they have chains on their feet's, this is coming back.

These older farmers and fishermen associate modernity and wind turbines with slavery, which, they claim, comes at the cost of a few getting rich, while the majority get poor, meanwhile farming and fishing conditions are degraded and the existing problem of

work-related out-migration only increases. Furthermore, acceptance of wind energy development in this region is viewed as putting their kids' and grandkids' future at risk – limiting their freedoms, quality of food and relationship with the land and sea. On the contrary, people in favour of wind turbines feel they are putting their children's future at risk by not bringing money and social development and having them fall behind the Mexican standard of education. There is an active and fervent desire to acquire greater incomes, move away from subsistence living and ride that one-way train of Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth*¹⁰⁴ and wind energy development is that ticket.

These are some of the feelings leading to popular revolt against wind energy development.¹⁰⁵ The people revolting against these projects are undoubtedly many and have legitimate concerns over these projects, but as it is common with discrediting resistance, from colonial times until now, the opposition groups are slandered as a 'minority' of 'violent', 'drunk', 'bandits' – the modern equivalent of 'savages'. These claims are not entirely untrue, but they are the propagation of a moral discourse to delegitimise the concerns of people seeking to protect the land, the sea and to preserve what remains of their cultural integrity. The impact of wind energy is substantial for the qualitative dimensions and ontological relationships with the earth, food production and how life is lived.

Wind energy and the genocide-ecocide nexus

State-sanctioned land grabbing by corporations in the name of sustainable development is accumulation by dispossession by environmental ethic – green grabbing¹⁰⁶ – which walks a fine line with genocide. 'The Rana', exclaims: 'We hold responsible all of the political parties of Mexico, the government in its different levels for the attempt to annihilate us, the attempt to grab our land and to wipe us off the map.' The elder 'Mapache', discussing the struggle of the community council of Álvaro Obregón against the Mexican government and wind companies, asserts that as 'long as we can hold out and have peoples' support, we will say: "You will have to kill us first"'. With tears running down his face, he continues by saying that the community council will defend their territory and 'that is why they are going to kill us'. The struggle over wind turbines is conceived as a war devised to 'annihilate' them, which is seen as a generational fight – 'for my people, for our sea, our land, our children, grandchildren and future generations'. Assessing the benefit of the wind energy projects, the 'Wild Tiger' asserts, 'the wind energy project for us is a tool of ethnic cleansing that does not build anything useful for me'.

Delving into the genocide-ecocide nexus and relating it to offsetting,¹⁰⁷ 'Hada' explains

[T]here are over two hundred types of medicinal plants and each medicinal plant has its area – its natural habitat. So when the wind energy projects invade they kill this area, they kill part of the herbs. How are they going to transplant those herbs to another place that is not their natural habitat? [...] The same with the animals, they already have their dens, they already have their special trees where they make their nests – where they reproduce. So if you watch the bird eggs not all of the birds are returning to hatch them, it is a really high risk of extermination. I call it ecocide, genocide that is what they are doing with our way of life. Water, which is our vital liquid, [...] to build the wind turbines they are digging six to ten meters under the ground, which they fill with cement and rebar and so it brutally harms our life.¹⁰⁸

For the Zapotec and Ikoot people, listening, interacting and identifying with the land they see their fate intimately related. Hada describes the genocide-ecocide nexus, where wind

energy necessitates various degrees of destruction and/or disciplinary transformation of plants, animals, water and people, altering existing land relationships, creating new prohibitions and denying the free and qualitative aspects of medicinal herbs. Despite denial from wind companies that they are causing this type of harm,¹⁰⁹ companies claim that farming can co-exist with wind turbines,¹¹⁰ while corporate social responsibility (CSR) offers social development schemes and offsets programmes utilised to justify this industrial destruction.¹¹¹ Wind turbine development is destroying natural medicines, killing fish, impeding cultural sites¹¹² and altering land relationships deeply tied to the livelihood and culture of Zapotec and Ikoots people. This situation is intensified with overt and covert methods of repressive counterinsurgency techniques where the good intentions of the green economy are combined with the violent intent to secure investment.¹¹³ The factions totally rejecting wind energy developments perceive this struggle as not only about wind turbines, but also about how to preserve and continue what remains of Zapotec and Ikoot lifeways ‘that value mother earth’, know ‘how to ask for forgiveness’ from the land and know how to share harvest yields.¹¹⁴ While there are benefits to out-migration,¹¹⁵ these experiences, according to people in the region, were related to hardship during travel, language difficulties, racism, abusive working conditions and drifts towards excessive drug use, leaving people feeling trapped as disciplined workers and consumers between the extremes of village and urban life.

Wind energy development is an opportunity for modernisation, economic growth and carbon dioxide reduction. Carbon dioxide reduction assumes the industrial economic trajectory,¹¹⁶ which does not challenge, but only ‘softens’, industrial degradation by deploying the logic of econometrics to justify what amounts to a double-bind of the political lesser of two evils between fossil fuels and renewable energy. This leaves the root cause of these problems unchallenged. Despite this logic that does not challenge the industrial-scale degradation of human and non-human natures, the intention of the economy is ‘good’; seeking to develop the underdeveloped, making useful ‘marginal’ and ‘idle’ land¹¹⁷ and, in the words of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) on the Mareña Renovables wind project: this is ‘land exposed to intense human activities in the past decades which have led to a deterioration of the “natural” character of the area’.¹¹⁸ This means, given that the ‘natural character of the area’ has deteriorated, the situation of material poverty, wind energy megaprojects, like all foreign direct investment (FDI) according to the logic of neoliberal capitalism is ‘good’ for (economic) development and will not make the environmental and social conditions any worse. This is *not* the case. With the widening of income inequality, a large influx of foreigners, rising social conflict, disruptions to farming land and marine life as well as increases in land, rent, food, electricity prices and drug consumption these are new or significant intensifications of existing social and ecological degradations. According to neoliberal ideology, FDI is always ‘good’ and as the CDM document states concerning the Mareña project it will: (1) develop renewable resources; (2) enforce environmental sustainability, avoiding fossil fuels; (3) generate employment for construction and maintenance; (4) Land owner income ‘without giving up stockbreeding, fishing and agriculture’; (5) raises foreign capital; (6) diversify the national energy portfolio; and (7) infrastructure improvement (roads, bridges, etc.).¹¹⁹ These are the selling points, which from the perspective of political economy assume these are all ‘good’ improvements, progressive steps and measures to

address climate change and in the words of President Peña Nieto help one of *'the most backwards regions of the country'*.¹²⁰

The change taking place, however, is summarised well by Hada explaining the qualitative environmental changes on their land where the Bii Hioxo wind park is now built.

Before you went to a ranch [...] you hear the birds sing, the growling of the wind, all of this relaxes you, but now it is not that way. You go there to the rancho and you start hearing a bothersome Buuzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz – how can you relax?

From birds chirping and tranquillity to the buzz of electrical currents and wind turbine gears grinding, this is the change taking place. For people living with and connected to the land, the impact of industrial wind turbines is significant to say the least, for urban dwellers this might already be their life, but the monotonous buzz, turbine rotations and shadow flicker continue as long as the wind blows. George Tinker's words come to mind when reading the CDM document above: 'the good intent of some may be so mired in unrecognised systemic structures that they even remain unaware of the destruction that results from these good intentions'.¹²¹ This quote is painfully applicable to market structures, whose ideological dogma is normalised to the point of justifying the continuation of a slow industrial genocide. From military interventions to native boarding schools, and now with wind energy development swarming indigenous lands further imposing capitalist values, land relationships and infrastructure into the cultural life of Zapotec, Ikoot and other farmers and fishermen in the Istmo.

Conclusion

This article has sought to investigate and develop the argument that wind energy is continuing a slow industrial genocide. The first section begins by outlining a definition of colonialism that assists in identifying the temporal continuity of the colonial project to understand its relationship with wind energy development, which leads to a literature review of colonial genocide studies. This section asserts the increasing relevance of self-management as key to the genocidal process, while highlighting the 'genocide-ecocide nexus' and the 'intent' of megaproject development – green or otherwise. Following this section, the key dynamics and outcomes of 'wind rush' in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region are reviewed. Listening to Zapotec and Ikoot experiences asserting the genocidal and ecocidal consequences of wind parks, this article argued that wind energy development continues a slow industrial genocide through market-based environmentalism and climate change mitigation programmes.

Interesting, however, are the social divisions over wind energy. Not all indigenous people are against wind energy in the Istmo. Resistance arises specifically from farmers, fishermen and others who recognise the intrusive colonial behaviour, unequal benefit sharing, disregard for public consultation as well as the cultural and ecological impacts of wind parks. There are many perspectives regarding, and alternative to, development, which include aspirations for communal¹²² and micro-scale wind energy developments directly linked to towns as opposed to profit-centred exporting of electricity to industrial centres. Despite the risk of essentialising people with the label of 'indigenous', there is an undeniable process of manipulation and coercion inherent to wind energy development in the Istmo. This process is legitimised through capitalist mentalities, growth imperatives,

federal, state and local politicians as well as elites. It should be no surprise that capitalist culture continues to dominate, which continues to intensify from earlier colonial, state and economic interventions in Mexico, and the Istmo in particular. Wind energy takes on genocidal qualities when flora, fauna and cultural relationships are being destroyed and/or re-regimented into ‘offsets’ sites or migration corridors leading to agricultural fields, tourist and industrial zones in Mexico and the US. At issue here is the elimination of different cultural values, ontologies and relationships emblematic of indigenous people. The values and relationships of actively respecting and living with the land, resisting statist and market assimilation are the specific targets of the slow industrial genocide carried forward by wind energy development. The colonial process and its socially and ecologically destructive trajectory are self-managed by various people and identities – indigenous politicians, elites and people – which has long been the case in Europe and in civilisations across the world.

The green economy emerges in the shadow of conventional fossil fuel production, presenting itself as a ‘solution’ and pathway to slow the effects of ecological, climate and economic crisis.¹²³ Said differently, renewable energy in particular, and the green economy in general, emerge as the ‘lesser evil’ of industrial development. Discussing the principle of ‘lesser evil’, Eyal Weizman writes, ‘less brutal measures are also those that may be more easily naturalised, accepted and tolerated – and hence more frequently used, with the result that a greater evil may be reached cumulatively’.¹²⁴ The green economy is the lesser industrial evil, utilising a technique of war to morally buffer and continue the proliferation of industrial waste in the name of climate change mitigation, which according to this research results in greater cumulative social and environmental alterations and, even, the systemic and increasing destruction of alternative value systems and ways of life valuing their relationships with their ecosystems. This is a process that is not separate, but builds from processes of colonisation, nation-state formation as well as energetic systems ranging from coal to nuclear power. Wind energy remains the least destructive fossil-fuel-based technology, but this does not change its subtle and embedded logic of extermination that renews and extends the industrial system, consequently applying further pressures on the plants, animals and indigenous (and other) people living from the land, sea and wind in the Istmo.

Notes

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