




‘Murderous energy’ in Oaxaca, Mexico: wind factories, territorial struggle and social warfare

Alexander Dunlap  and Martín Correa Arce

ABSTRACT

This article examines the struggle against the new *Électricité de France* (EDF) wind park, *Gunaa Sicarú*, in *Unión Hidalgo* (UH), Mexico. Foregrounding Indigenous land defense, the article refers to wind energy as ‘wind factories’ to discuss agrarian change in the region. Revealing the *counterinsurgency colonial model* as a foundational approach to extractive development, the article argues that the distribution of money, *Sicarios* (hitmen) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are instrumental to engineering ‘social acceptance’. Moreover, the liberalism underlining NGOs, if not careful, advances processes of infrastructural colonization and, consequently, wider trajectories of (neo)colonialism.

KEYWORDS

wind energy; land grabbing; social war; infrastructure colonization; resistance

We tend not to see the damage being caused, but the money falling in our hands. – Guadalupe Ramírez

The terms ‘wind park’, ‘wind farm’ and ‘utility-scale wind energy’ do not capture the current reality behind wind energy development. These words, in actuality, subtly preform public relations by referring to parks, farms and public amenities to describe a type of power plant or private energy factory. Wind energy development, as a method of ‘green extractivism’, actually spreads *wind factories* to capture the vital force of winds. Extraction is understood as pulling, drawing out and harnessing (usually with special effort, skill or force) various minerals and hydrocarbons from subsoils or, as green extractivism suggests, kinetic energy from wind, solar, hydrological and bioenergy ‘resources’ (Dunlap and Jakobsen 2020). While windmill technology emerged from ancient civilizations (Pasqualetti, Richter, and Gipe 2004), industrial wind turbines are a relatively new type of power plant assemblage regarded as a ‘clean’, ‘green’ and ‘renewable’ energy source. It is often popular in environmental policy – especially in terms of combating ecological crisis, and by extension climate change – although this is questionable at best, and completely unjustified at worst.

Agrarian change, conflict and related existing or anticipated negative socio-ecological impacts from wind factories are increasingly acknowledged (Zografos and Martínez-Alier 2009; Lawrence 2014; Avila 2018; Franquesa 2018; Backhouse and Lehmann 2019; Siamanta 2019). Revisiting the region of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, known locally as the Isthmus (see Figure 1), this article examines the struggle against the new *Electricité de France* (EDF) wind factory called *Gunaa Sicarú* (meaning ‘Beautiful Woman’ in Zapotec),

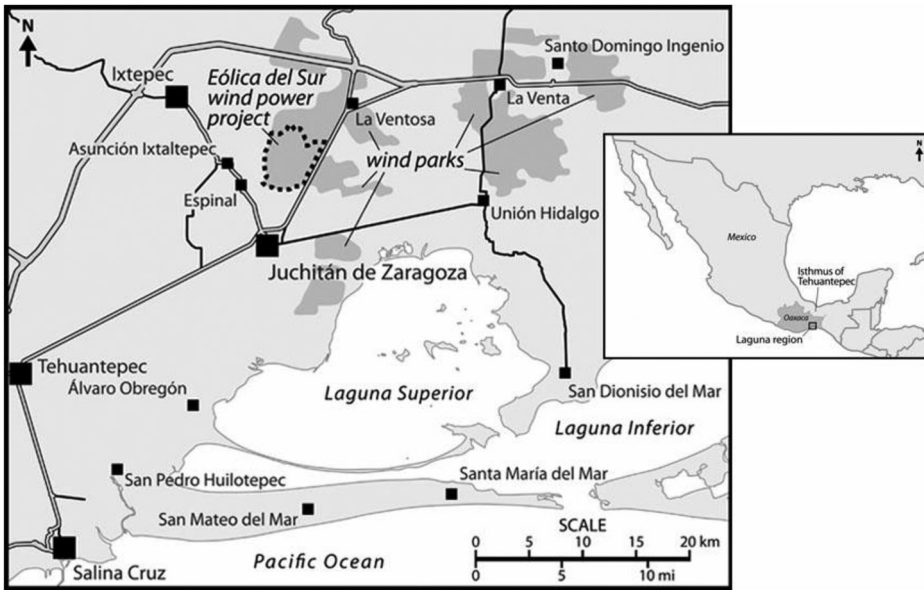


Figure 1. Map of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and Mexico, Oaxaca. Source: Carl Sack.

situated in Unión Hidalgo (UH; Rancho Gubiña), Oaxaca, Mexico. The Isthmus region is recognized by the International Finance Corporation (IFC 2014, 1) as ‘home to some of the best wind resources on earth’. By the mid-2000s, the region had experienced a ‘wind rush’ (Dunlap 2019a), covering it with over 2000 wind turbines. EDF’s wind factory, located on the communal land between UH and La Ventosa (see Figure 1), is the most recent of these efforts, comprising 96 wind turbines that can generate 252 megawatts (MW). This megaproject became official on 29 June 2017, when President Enrique Peña Nieto approved the factory (without consultation) through the Energy Regularity Commission (CRE), making it the twenty-ninth wind factory in the region (Manzo 2019). This wind factory was immediately contested by Zapotec farmers and fishers. Then, on 7 September 2017, the Isthmus region shook with an 8.2 magnitude earthquake – the second largest in Mexico’s history – resulting in more than 37 deaths and severe structural damage to about half of Juchitán’s 14,000 buildings (Dunlap 2020a). The earthquake (combined with poor urban planning and negligent relief efforts) caused serious psychological and emotional trauma, radical insecurity and displacement,¹ thereby provoking construction delays for the EDF wind factory.

While the construction of Gunaa Sicarú is incomplete, the threat of agrarian – and corresponding socio-ecological – change has spawned resistance in UH. In August 2018, EDF renewed its efforts to build the wind factory. Building on previous research in the Isthmus (Oceransky 2011; Howe 2014; Nahmad, Nahón, and Langlé 2014; Lucio 2016; Altamirano-Jiménez 2017; Dunlap 2017, 2019a), specifically on political violence that advances (neo)colonial trajectories (Dunlap 2018a, 2019a), the article details the

¹Interviews: 1, 12-12-2018; 2, 8-12-2019; 26, 1-18-2020.

micro-political processes involved in the social engineering of so-called 'social acceptance' or pacification for wind factory development in UH. The article implicitly responds to wind energy 'social acceptance' studies in the region that do not question industrial development or the various forms of coercion necessary to make it possible. Furthermore, responding to Marta Conde and Philippe Le Billon's (2017, 693) call for additional research into 'the repression of resistance' by extraction companies and 'the micro-politics and psychological dimension of conflict escalation', social war theory is applied to highlight three interlaced modalities of repression in UH: money, Sicarios (hitmen) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The role of money and Sicarios is briefly reviewed, while greater space is dedicated to understanding NGO dynamics. The article argues that NGOs and the liberal ideology underlying them, if not handled carefully, advance processes of infrastructural colonization and, consequently, wider trajectories of (neo)colonialism.

This research builds on long-term engagements with land defenders from the Isthmus region that began in December 2014 (see Dunlap 2019a). This complemented recent fieldwork conducted in December 2018 and from December 2019 to March 2020. Fieldwork resulted in 41 semi-structured recorded interviews with 35 people, comprising roughly 26 hours of audio. The semi-structured interviews have a male to female ratio of 2:1; interviewees came from various towns throughout the Isthmus, Oaxaca and Mexico City. The people interviewed were land defenders (farmers, fishers, teachers, herbalists, lawyers, laborers, professional activists, etc.), members of human rights NGOs, electricity grid administrators and the regional director of EDF. Also, more than 30 informal interviews were conducted on public transportation and at social events. Interviews were triangulated with secondary research material: books, public relations material, blogs, newspapers and academic articles. Because of the level of political violence in this region, names of research participants were altered or omitted. This article responds to issues we encountered when entering the region and, moreover, privileges the autonomous aspirations of land defenders in UH.

The article proceeds with a brief background on wind factory development and socio-ecological impacts in the Isthmus. This is followed by discussing colonial theory in relation to social warfare and the philanthropy sector, preparing readers for a critical analysis of an NGO in the last section. This begins with outlining the specific situation and dynamics in UH, before discussing money, Sicarios and ProDESC to understand the micro-political processes of engineering social pacification. The issues of money and, to a lesser degree, Sicario violence are well known. This leads us to dedicate more space to discussing the complicated ProDESC–Comuneros dynamic in UH. The article concludes by reflecting on 'the problem of organization' and the construction of good/bad consultations in relation to colonial practices that support agrarian change, contributing to progressive ecocidal–genocidal dynamics in the region.

Background: Istmeño wind factory struggles

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec's geographic location and natural resources have historically made it an important territory to control. While the Isthmus was subject to pre-colonial and colonial invasion (Manzo 2011; Dunlap 2019a), Howard Campbell (1994, 43) reminds us 'it was not until the post-Independence era that foreign firms obtained

concessions to the area and sent survey teams to explore possibilities for constructing a transcontinental road, canal, or railway'. The Isthmus, like other parts of Mexico (Manzo 2011; Toledo 2015), has been subject to extensive megaproject development. This includes the Tehuantepec railway (1907), the Pan American highway (1948), the Trans-Isthmus highway (1960), the electric plant (1960s), the rice-processing plant (1960s), the sugar mill (1960s and 1970s), the Benito Juárez Dam (1958),² the Pacific Coast PEMEX refinery (1979) and many other projects that were successfully resisted, such as eucalyptus plantations, steel mills, industrial shrimp farms and other schemes arising from Plan Puebla Panamá/The Mesoamerica Integration and Development Project (Call 2011; Manzo 2011). This trajectory has only intensified with the mid-2000s' wind energy 'rush' (Oceransky 2011; Nahmad, Nahón, and Langlé 2014). These 'neocolonial megaprojects' whose 'main objective is the privatization of energy sources and the territorial control by transnational companies', explains Carlos Manzo (2011, 102), have severe 'consequences such as ecocide and ethnocide that we continue to suffer to date'.

Land enclosure, control and profiteering are central features of wind factory development in the Isthmus. Land/green grabbing entails the control of land and natural resources, supported by various international, national and local actors, through 'a diversity of coercive and/or deceptive tactics' (Borras et al. 2012; Dunlap 2017, 18). Wind factory development in the Isthmus, it is argued, intensifies existing trajectories of land/green grabbing (Altamirano-Jiménez 2017; Dunlap 2017, 2018a; Sellwood and Valdivia 2018), but also neocolonization (Manzo 2011), 'internal colonization' (Lucio 2016) and colonization in general (Dunlap 2018c, 565, 2019a). Consequently, ardent resistance has characterized the Isthmus's wind factory development, primarily from Zapotec, Ikoot and Zoque peoples struggling to defend their land, sea and livelihoods from megaproject development (Oceransky 2011; Lucio 2016; Altamirano-Jiménez 2017; Lehmann 2019; Dunlap 2019a). While struggles over (deceptive) terms of incorporation began in 2007 with the first wind factories in the northern coastal Isthmus (Oceransky 2011; Lucio 2016), it was not until 2011–2016 (after the northern Isthmus developmental experience), as wind factories arrived in fishing communities, that Indigenous resistance and violent repression characterized wind factory development (Sellwood and Valdivia 2018; Dunlap 2018a, 2019b). 'The Mexican state has always been very cautious about imposing extractivist projects in the Isthmus, due to the fear of social reactions', as a human rights defender explains, yet wind energy extraction was promoted and defended by the Left in the Isthmus. 'Leftist heroes' and defenders of 'the people' became agents 'promoting transnational capital' and, as a daughter of a COCEI³ militant explains, 'ended up being land grabbers and cacique intermediaries for the companies, justifying themselves by saying they bring more development to the region'. Political elites (caciques), select land owners, politicians and their networks have certainly benefited (Oceransky 2011; Lehmann 2019; Dunlap 2019a), yet there are significant and underestimated socio-ecological costs associated with the land-use change brought by wind factory development.

²This entails related irrigation land disputes (1960s).

³The Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) is a Mexican socialist political organization in the Isthmus.

Wind factory ecological, economic and social impact

The ecological impacts of wind turbines are significant. Wind turbines necessitate tree clearance, road widening or construction. This negatively impacts the water table as well as animal habitats and migration patterns (Tabassum-Abbasi, Tasneem, and Abbasi 2014; Dunlap 2019a). Depending on the local geography, wind turbine foundations are 7–14 meters (32–45 ft.) deep, and about 16–21 meters (52–68 ft.) wide. Recent testimonies from workers drilling for bedrock on the Santa Teresa sand bar in 2010 attest that bedrock depths range between 17 and 48 meters (56–157 ft.).⁴ Water is traditionally found 1–2 meters below the surface in the Isthmus, and needs to be pumped out with the application of chemical solvents to harden the ground (Dunlap 2019a). Now ‘people have to dig their wells deeper to reach their water’, explains Ngupi,⁵ as there ‘is over 100 tons of cement injected into the foundations for each wind turbine. Then multiply that by 2,200’ wind turbines. Concrete is replacing ground water, severely affecting agrarian activities (Dunlap 2019a), which, according to Ngupi and others (see also Lucio 2016), is ‘creating a barrier of cement that stops fresh water from reaching the Lagoon system, accelerating its salinity and drying’. Inhibiting, degrading and preventing the subsistence of Zapotec and Ikoot peoples flirts with ecocidal and genocidal politics.

This type of construction also entails severe impacts on marine life (see Howe 2014; Altamirano-Jiménez 2017; Avila 2017; Dunlap 2019a). Fisherman Ta Chido, remembering the drilling on the Santa Teresa sand bar, recounts how the fish ‘did not die all of a sudden, like a heart attack, they lost their senses and their brains’ and ‘would wiggle and spin in circles in the water without being able to swim straight. Then waves would wash them onto the shore’.⁶ Once the wind turbines are in operation, they also affect avian life (Premalatha, Abbasi, and Abbasi 2014), ‘whose death from collision may exceed 6000 per year’ in the Isthmus (Ledec, Rapp, and Aiello 2011; Lucio 2016, 147).⁷ Wind turbines are reportedly systematically leaking oil into the ground from their propellers, resulting in reports of cow deaths and infertility (Dunlap 2019a). This also includes the issue of wind turbine decommissioning, which produces an abundance of infrastructure and e-waste (see Sovacool et al. 2020). This was compounded by testimonies of serious health issues in areas where people live near wind turbines (Lucio 2016; Dunlap 2017, 2019a), although this remains a topic deserving independent medical investigation. These impacts, in addition to the dependence on extreme mineral and hydrocarbon extraction, processing, manufacturing and transportation, is why Dunlap (2018d) argues ‘fossil fuel+’ is a more accurate term than ‘renewable energy’.

These negative ecological impacts, however, are often said to be compensated for by the resulting ‘employment’ and ‘social benefits’. Summarizing the situation, a land defender explains that when a company speaks of ‘employment’, it means becoming:

construction grunts, it means we can be working under the sun for them. It also means receiving all of the violence and insecurity of roaming hit squads, rising prices, the loss of biodiversity and our traditional ways of living. This all comes included with shitty job opportunities,

⁴Interview 13, 1-1-2020. Note that land defenders and costal ecologists speculated it may be 70 meters deep (see Dunlap 2019a).

⁵Interview 4, 14-12-2019.

⁶Interview 17, 3-1-2020.

⁷We imagine this figure is much higher now with the rise in wind turbine construction.

which you are forced to call ‘benefits’ even though you will not be able to plant your food anymore and eat healthy, but you will be able to have a wage salary in exchange. That is the way you are useful to the system, self-sufficient indigenous people become cheap manual labor because the world needs to continue its current level of construction.⁸

This speaks to discussions of dispossession and surplus labor in critical agrarian studies (Borras et al. 2012; Hall et al. 2015). Moreover, wind factory employment is temporary (6 months to 2 years), the quality of work is low and it pushes people into dependency and maldevelopment (Nahmad, Nahón, and Langlé 2014; Lucio 2016; Lehmann 2019; Dunlap 2019a). ‘Bigu’, an Ikoot land defender, believes this discourse of searching ‘for our benefits within these projects’ is ‘domesticating the will of the people’, propagating ‘the belief that there can be such a thing as a benefit’. In actuality, since 2007, Bigu contends, there have been ‘no benefits’ – ‘[w]e can count with our hands the number of land owners in the Isthmus who are benefiting by wealth increases’ – only ‘social and ecological erosion have been seen’ and this is ‘being suffered by all’ (see also Howe 2014; Altamirano-Jiménez 2017; Avila 2017).⁹ Resistance has been met with violent repression dispensed by state forces, private security and extra-judicial actors, which became particularly acute in 2013 and has escalated into ‘drug war’-style violence since then.

Finally, only Eólica del Sur, out of 28 wind factories, was subject to a free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) consultation (Manzo 2019). For many, FPIC consultations offered a sense of hope and a possible pathway for Indigenous self-determination through participation in extractive development (Franco 2014; Leifsen et al. 2017; Schilling-Vacaflor and Flemmer 2019). Yet despite exercises in civic participation, consultations are increasingly understood as ‘empty bureaucratic procedures aiming to depoliticize extractive activities, defuse tensions, and enroll community members in state projects of resource extraction’ (Leifsen et al. 2017, 1044; see also Franco 2014). The first FPIC consultation in Juchitán was widely acknowledged as a theatrical performance that represented a state–corporate conflict of interest, violated cultural norms, provided inadequate information and served as a marketing platform for the project rather than adequately addressing the issues raised by participants (e.g. income transparency; social and environmental impacts) (Friede and Lehmann 2016; Dunlap 2018b). The approval of the wind park and the spectacular failure to provide meaningful consultation led Dunlap (2018b, 106) to argue that FPIC serves as a technology of ‘inclusionary control’ that works as ‘a politico-military hold-and-build technique designed to (re)establish control and legitimacy over populations resorting to direct action and asserting their legal rights against destructive development projects’. Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) now employs consultations as the preeminent mechanism to implement its ambitious megaprojects and industrial corridor plans (AMLO 2018). These include the Isthmus Inter-Oceanic Corridor (SIPAZ 2020), which seeks to intensify extractive development in the Isthmus. For all these reasons, the land defender ‘Wild Tiger’ describes their experience with wind factory development as ‘murderous energy’ (*energía asesina*), since ‘the moment it enters a territory, it destroys the land, social bonds and comes with death threats to Indigenous people’.¹⁰

⁸Interview 20, 16-1-2020.

⁹Interview 15, 1-1-2020.

¹⁰Interview 1, 12-12-2018.

Consuming territory: (neo)colonization and social warfare

Megaproject development in the Isthmus, as mentioned, has been described as ‘neo-colonization’, ‘internal colonization’ and colonization generally. We contend that ‘internal colonization’ is legalistic and nation state-centric, as it demarcates artificial boundaries in a fluid and increasingly convoluted process of transnational capital accumulation. The line between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ actors become redundant, especially – but not only – in the case of regional collaboration that is further blurred by (trans)national investment, influence and regulation. Colonization and (neo)-colonization¹¹ honor the continuity, organizational trajectory and ethos underpinning the statist project (Dunlap 2018c). The ‘democratic’ state propagates a liberal value system, centered on individualism, rationalism, egalitarianism and ameliorism/progressivism, that ‘is territorialized onto the nation-state’ (Gilbert 2009, 199). Colonization in the Isthmus (and elsewhere), however, is distinctly infrastructural, retaining various and simultaneous modalities of colonization/statism, adaptation and resistance (Mignolo 2005; Ince and de la Torre 2018). Colonization entails variegated and progressive forms of ecocide and ethnocide (Short 2016), whereby ‘infrastructural colonization’ enacts a specific modality (Dunlap 2020b). Wind factory development, alongside other megaprojects, contributes to this trajectory by necessitating ‘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’ (Dunlap 2018b, 565). Megaprojects are territorial weapons that, to various intensities, dispossess populations and ‘roll out’ an apparatus of spatial, economic and psychosocial management. The Miguel Alemán (1954) and Cerro de Oro (1989) dams, among others in Southern Mexico (Tyrtania 1992; Manzo 2011), are examples of infrastructural warfare against Indigenous populations. Infrastructural colonization spreads social war predicated on the ideology of modernity, discourses of progress and the fabrication of desires/aspirations¹² of populations – near and far – to justify its socio-ecological repercussions. Social warfare recognizes that invasion is infrastructural.

The embrace, negotiation and rejection of infrastructural colonization is multifaceted (Borras et al. 2012; Hall et al. 2015). Land control and social war theory allow us to dissect the technologies of infrastructural colonization. Social war is a colonial theory that emerged from the Roman Social War (91–89 BC) (Trocci 2011; Gardenyes 2012). The Roman Republic learned the indispensability of political concessions and political-military ‘hold’ techniques for maintaining internal stability (Foucault 2003; Trocci 2011; Gardenyes 2012). Social war discourse, embodying Foucault’s (2003, 15) ‘politics as a continuation of war by other means’, views the colonial/state apparatus and its politics (see Loadenthal 2017, 170), economy, divisions of labor and hierarchical orderings as a complex apparatus of subjugation (Anonymous 2001; Trocci 2011; Gardenyes 2012; Dunlap 2014, 2019b). Related to anarchist political ecology (see Brock 2020) and agrarian

¹¹The parenthetical ‘neo’ pays homage to organizational development and computational shifts since the nineteenth century.

¹²The recent ‘rural aspirations’ focus is important (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 2, 10), yet this approach appears oddly apolitical in its neglect of social engineering or myriad of influences that shape ‘aspiration,’ rural or otherwise.

anarchism (see Roman-Alcalá 2020), social warfare dissects the ‘hard’ coercion and ‘soft’ social technologies of pacification emblematic of counterinsurgency (see Dunlap 2014, 2019b), while highlighting the social and/or psycho-geographical aspects as essential to colonial-statist intervention.

Social war is rooted in ‘a way of seeing the world’ (Gardenyes 2012, 7), which depends on creating ‘an imagined geography that begins the regimentation of space’ and influences political terrain as well as ‘the imaginations, desires, and possibilities of people’ (Dunlap 2014, 57–8). Emphasizing affinity over identity – social war as opposed to class war – recognizes ‘the enemy is not a class but a point of view, [a] subjectivity’ that cuts across classes, ethnicities and (non)genders¹³ and implies specific ecological relationships. Social war, following Joseph Gardenyes (2012, 11), is ‘a struggle against the structures of power that colonize us and train us to view the world from the perspective of the needs of power itself’ (see also Bonanno 1998). In this view, the root of colonization is ‘the logic of control in and of itself’ (Gardenyes 2012, 7), of which megaprojects are a flagrant expression. Social war acknowledges a psycho-social war embedded in differential processes of primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession¹⁴ to capture the ‘hearts’ and ‘minds’ of (traditionally native) populations to regiment them as ‘citizens’, ‘proletariats’, ‘bourgeoisie’ or, generally, claimed subjects of states and colonial empires. Liberalism emerges as not only a colonial export, but as a technology of social warfare and counterinsurgency.

The chapter ‘Indirect methods for countering insurgencies’ of the *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* Field Manual (FM3–24 2014) advocates the ‘generational engagement’ approach. This approach is designed ‘to educate and empower the population to participate in legal methods of political discourse and dissent’. It is applicable ‘in both high threat’ areas and ‘situations where an insurgency is at its infancy and combat is less intense’ (FM3–24 2014, 10–2). Keeping in mind the ‘preparation period’ and the targeting of non-violent social movements (see Dunlap 2014; Brock and Dunlap 2018), the counterinsurgency field manual advises to ‘undertake this method as soon as possible to affect the next generation’ of people by building ‘on a foundation of education, empowerment, and participation’ (FM 3–24: 10–2). The generational engagement diagram (see Figure 2) is an official representation of the liberal model as a social control system, celebrating a *counterinsurgency colonial model* to stabilize territories. NGO structures frequently project and emerge from this liberal vision. Echoing development discourse (see Moe and Müller 2017), this social warfare diagram openly advocates pacification by political means, employing ‘voting’, ‘education’, ‘town meetings’, ‘youth programs’, ‘empowerment’, ‘participation’ and, elsewhere, ‘sustainable development’ as devices of pacification to integrate members of a target population. Put differently (representative) democracy, civil society groups and education articulate a foundational method of social war, illuminating the strategies and tactics to engineer social pacification. NGOs emerge as an important mechanism promoting this model, which we later discuss in the context of UH.

¹³See *Baedan 1: Journal of Queer Nihilism*. Seattle: Contagion Press.

¹⁴This is the original or continuous dispossession of public and private lands; the redistribution of state resources; the manipulation of crises to advance economic privatization objectives; and the general advancement of financial mechanisms.

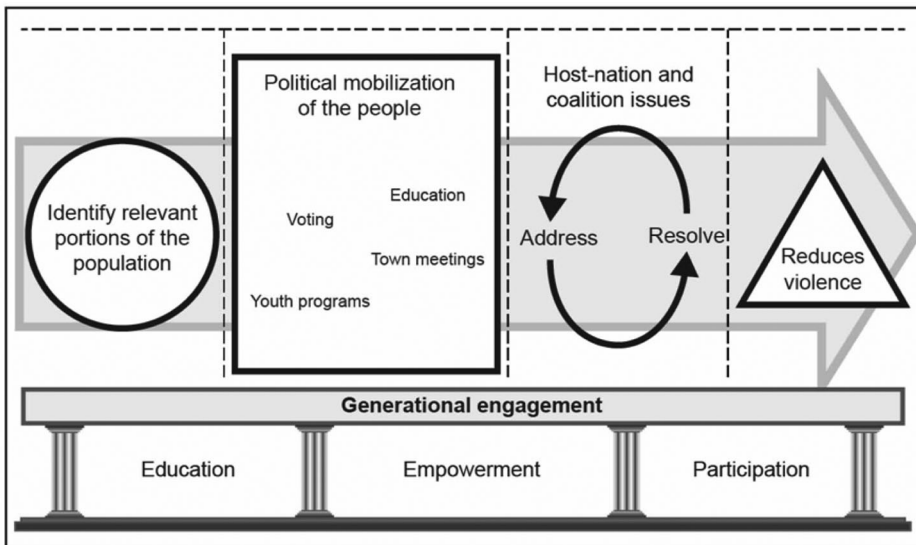


Figure 2. Generational engagement model. Source: FM 3–24 (2014).

NGOs and social warfare

NGOs are mechanisms of social warfare and (neo)colonization. Emerging in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, the NGO culture emanates from philanthropic foundations (e.g. Carnegie, Ford and Rockefeller). Philanthropy was designed to establish capitalist ideological hegemony, subdue class antagonisms and advance US foreign policy interests (Berman 1983; Esteva and Prakash 1998). This process has morphed and diversified with the onslaught of neoliberalism. Structural adjustment programs intensified the spread of NGOs, which James Petras (1997, 11, 14) contends ‘became the “community face” of neoliberalism’ that created ‘a political world where the appearance of solidarity and social action cloaks a conservative conformity with the international and national structure of power’ (see also Esteva and Prakash 1998). NGOs, Petras (1997, 12–15) continues, are ‘a new type of cultural and economic colonialism and dependency’ that ‘co-opts the language of the left’, promotes ‘non-confrontational politics’, creates ‘competition between communities for scarce resources’ and, overall, creates a system of ‘self-exploitation of the poor’ (see also Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). Raúl Zibechi (2012, 274) agrees, stating that NGOs ‘went from playing an oppositional role to collaborating with the state, specializing in consultation, mediating in social processes, and managing or promoting people’s local participation, but without questioning the macroeconomic politics’.

Generational engagement and the ‘local turn’ in counterinsurgency perform the same task as neoliberalism. This ‘local turn’, Moe and Müller (2017, 14) contend, has penetrated even further the logics of ‘counterinsurgency into the politics, governance arrangements and life worlds of the local’. Neoliberal governance and counterinsurgency strategies simultaneously ‘roll out’ governance frameworks instrumental for ‘global liberal order making’ that produce ‘individual subjects capable of self-governing’ themselves (Moe and Müller 2017, 19). NGOs, civil society groups and their programs of ‘empowerment’,

'participation' and 'sustainable development' are instrumental governance technologies. NGOs, Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor (2013, 5–7) explain, 'that frame their demands in liberal social democratic traditions tend to demand a humanized form of capitalism and a retooled state', which lead them toward 'managing and structuring dissent' by 'channeling this into organizational structures and processes that do not threaten underlying power relations'. The Mexican federal and state governments have a history of coordinating efforts in Oaxaca that employ armed action, psychological propaganda and 'the allocation of social funds with Preventive Actions that are aimed at promoting new agreements with trade unions and political and social organizations' (Arronte, Soto, and Lewis 2000, 75). 'Soft' counterinsurgency initiatives in Oaxaca tend to include social scientists mapping contested terrains, environmental programs and corporate social responsibility initiatives to 'deactivate the social movements' (Dunlap 2018a, 645). Walker et al. (2008, 539) acknowledge that NGOs dispersing technical assistance in Oaxaca are 'a major vehicle for cleansing "civil society" of its oppositional political possibilities, rescripting it as the social realm in which communities are improved through human capital acquisition'. It should be recognized, however, that these interventions are frequently rejected, negotiated or subverted to peoples' needs and that NGOs can take various forms.

There are, however, recurring and general attributes of NGOs. 'In order to commodify struggle, it must first be objectified', explains an Indigenous Action Media pamphlet, entitled *Accomplices Not Allies* (IAM 2014, 1–6). This pamphlet, voicing an Indigenous perspective, offers three general caricatures of NGOs.¹⁵ The first, 'Salvation aka Missionary Work & Self Therapy', speaks to 'romantic notions of oppressed folks' that people tokenize and wish to 'help', fostering mutually unhealthy relationships in the process. Second, 'Exploitation & Co-optation' speaks to the individual and institutional profiteering on liberation struggles, which simultaneously imposes liberal (reformist) agendas in structurally patronizing ways. Third, 'Gatekeepers' 'seek power over, not with, others'. Gatekeepers are NGOs, or persons within them, that create dependency by controlling and/or withholding information, resources, connection and support (see also Choudry and Kapoor 2013). NGOs can be instrumental to political struggle, and are frequently appreciated by opposition groups. NGOs, however, operate along a spectrum of enacting intentional corporate subversion or navigating solidarity in land struggles through a liberal politics of strengthening 'rights', 'due process' and 'inclusion' within statist capitalist systems. These overlooked issues deserve recognition and scrutiny in environmental conflicts, which are examined in the last section.

Unión Hidalgo and EDF

Central to land conflicts in UH, and the coastal Isthmus for that matter, is the privatization of communal land. While UH became a municipality politically independent from Juchitán in 1885, it was the presidential decree of 17 June 1964 that recognized 68,112 hectares of communal land between Juchitán, UH and La Ventosa (Campbell 1994; Call 2011). Before and since this resolution, there have been attempts to claim, regularize and privatize this land (Dunlap 2019a). Significant, however, during the COCEI struggle was the 1978

¹⁵The text also provides insights into NGO 'ally' personalities: 'Parachuters' and 'Navigators', which includes insightful hostility toward academics.

kidnapping and murder of Victor Pineda Henestroza, or Victor Yodo, who was the last 'agrarian promoter' (promotor agrario) responsible for protecting the communal lands (Campbell 1994; Manzo 2011). Since Victor Yodo's disappearance, the position responsible for protecting this communal land has remained vacant. Yodo's disappearance led the communal land 'assembly system to collapse',¹⁶ leaving it in a state of legal ambiguity and contestation.

Since the 1980s, UH has struggled against communal land claims from Santiago Niltepec and San Dionisio del Mar. There are approximately 90 living Comuneros registered with National Agrarian Agency (RAN); meanwhile, disputes over communal land have only intensified since the 2000 Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP) industrial corridor scheme and wind factory projects. In UH, apart from the PPP scheme, conflict also emerged over a 2500-acre industrial shrimp farm on the superior lagoon (Call 2011). This affront on communal lands, the mangroves and the lagoon ecosystem incited Zapotec resurgence and resistance, which instituted the Unión Hidalgo Citizens Council (Consejo Ciudadano Unihidalguense [CCU]), a traditional assembly decision-making council (Call 2011). Following a protracted struggle the shrimp farm project was eventually abandoned, but communal divisions as well as state and extra-judicial repression resurfaced, with beatings, imprisonments and killings (Gubiña 2005; Call 2011).

During this period, wind factory development was taking hold of the region. From 2011 to 2013, DEMEX (a subsidiary of Spanish Renovalia Energy) built the Piedra Larga wind factory on 2000 hectares of communal land in two phases, under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM 2006). The Piedra Larga consisted of 114 wind turbines with an installed capacity of 227.5 MW, which was organized under a ('self-supply')¹⁷ contract to produce electricity for Grupo Bimbo's 65 processing plants (Lucio 2016, 144–5). The issues of contract deception and coercion as well as various socio-ecological impacts were characteristic of the DEMEX project (see Lucio 2016). Residents did not want to repeat these consequences with the arrival of the EDF wind factory, which they were quick to challenge.

The Gunaa Sicarú wind factory is planned on 4400 hectares of communal land. It will consist of 96 wind turbines (provided by Gamesa) built between UH and La Ventosa (see Figure 3), which is regarded by locals as 'the most lively and fertile lands in our territory'.¹⁸ These lands, used for agriculture, livestock and palm leaf cultivation, were placed under threat on 29 June 2017 when the CRE approved a 30-year contract with the company, without an FPIC consultation. The devastation brought by the earthquake delayed the project significantly, which created new circumstances to petition the courts. Judge Elizabeth Franco Cervantes approved multiple court injunctions in April and May 2018, eventually authorizing a definitive suspension on the Gunaa Sicarú project to implement consultation procedures (Matías 2020). 'The consultation process right now is halted because of three reasons', explains 'Guchachi',¹⁹ 'a court injunction (*amparo*); a caution protocol [30 November 2018] (as opposed to recommendation) issued by the national human rights commission; and our

¹⁶Interview 5, 14-12-2019.

¹⁷'Self-supply' (*autoabastecimiento*) electricity is private, generated and reserved for the investors or co-owners of the wind factory.

¹⁸Interview 4, 14-12-2019.

¹⁹Interview 8, 15.12-2020.



Figure 3. DEMEX wind turbines, Unión Hidalgo. Source: Alexander Dunlap.

continued resistance'. On 23 March 2019 the 'prior agreements phase' began, and on 29 November 2019 the consultation 'information phase' began, which Comuneros now regard as 'fraudulent'²⁰ and 'a cruel joke' because 'the land contracts have already been signed before the consultation'²¹ (see also NVI 2019; Chaca 2020). A non-profit association working in Unión since 2011, ProDESC (The Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Project), remains enthusiastic about the wind factory consultation being 'supervised by federal judicial authority', as it marks a historical legal precedent (Miranda 2020). However, this is a precedent that the current governor of Oaxaca, Alejandro Murat, actively disregards, encouraging instead 'simulated consultations' (Matías 2020).

²⁰Interview 10, 15-12-2020.

²¹Interview 7, 15-12-2020.

The ‘information phase’ was done in a ‘single day’ by covering ‘all of the neighborhoods with propaganda’, explains Ngupi. The authorities ‘set up various module [information tables] in different parts of the town’. The consultations were inconveniently scheduled at five o’clock in the afternoon during weekdays, while Zapotec translators were absent; and, overall, few people came (see also NVI 2019). The information offered was also inadequate: ‘they just started talking about human rights and Indigenous rights’, explained Guchachi;²² ‘they need to inform us about the possible impacts’. Similar to the Juchitán consultation, important information regarding finance, construction, social and ecological impacts were converted into a ‘know your rights’ lecture. Rights education replaced the transmission of meaningful ecological, social and economic information.

The consultation displayed the same, if not worse, dynamics as Juchitán’s *Eólica del Sur* consultation. Recounting her consultation experience, Bereguidxa²³ explains:

Currently, public meetings and assemblies are filled with thugs paid to intimidate or make noise and disruptions. They are instructed to scream and whistle when indicated by certain hand signs from their leaders. These groups of thugs effectively intimidate people, nobody wants to go to the meetings anymore mainly for fear of being signaled out; there will be whispers about me and I can even be put on a hit list.

The consultation disruptions came mostly from construction unions and land owners. There are roughly five principal actors in UH’s wind factory conflict: the Mexican government (federal, state and municipal), EDF, land owners, construction unions, Comuneros and regional opposition groups. As Borrás et al. (2012, 411) point out, the state is providing ‘an occasional brake on land deals, especially when they threaten political legitimacy’. EDF, land owners and construction unions are the key actors in favor of the wind factory, and are associated with disrupting consultations and committing acts of violence. There has been a proliferation of unions and ‘worker committees’ to manage the arrival of the EDF wind factory. ‘Land owners who are already getting money for their land also want to be in charge of coordinating the construction’, explains Guchachi. ‘In the contracts, they are being named as land owner-builders (*propietarios-constructores*)’. The ‘worker committees’ are informal unions that distribute work to smaller groups of workers. People witnessed the amount of money committee coordinators were making, which led them to start forming their own construction and transportation unions. There has been a rapid proliferation of committees, although many only have three members. The committees are ‘intermediaries between the company and society’, explains a union worker,²⁴ who criticizes EDF for ‘choosing people they believe are influential and who will favor their interests’, instead of democratically electing people with the qualified skills beforehand. This, the worker believes, would avoid violent competition between (new and old) unions over EDF construction contracts.

UH is experiencing high levels of violence, not only against land defenders, but between landless workers in and outside the town: ‘they are literally killing themselves over it’, explains Guchachi. ‘To date, about five have been killed, five here in Unión’.²⁵

²²Interview 8, 15-12-2019.

²³Interview 22, 16-1-2020.

²⁴Interview 9, 15-12-2019.

²⁵Interview 8, 15-12-2019.

Borras et al. (2012, 412–3) rightly identified how '[o]rganizations of indigenous peoples and landless workers can also find themselves on opposite sides, with sections of the latter supporting job-promising enterprises', but the workers are also fighting each other for contracts. 'What I see clearly is that there are great struggles for power and how the committees and construction unions are killing each other, ambition is killing them', explains Comunero Herendira.²⁶ The 'contracts decide who is allowed to work and who doesn't', and 'every fifteen or twenty days you hear the whispers: "Oh, they killed that guy" or "Oh, they killed that one". It has been normalized to the point that all we can do is place wagers on who will die next'.

The regional EDF director acknowledges this dynamic, yet downplays the violence: 'It is the unions fighting for job posts ... They just argue amongst themselves, they fight among themselves, but the project has nothing to do with it'.²⁷ Alternatively, Bereguidxa contends,²⁸ 'a profound state of terror and fear' is spreading through 'the community'.

The Comuneros continue to uphold this recognition of communal land, Bereguidxa²⁹ contends: 'The bottom line here is that private property in Unión Hidalgo is non-existent, which is something the companies and local politicians are not willing to accept'. The EDF director did not acknowledge communal land in the interview. Meanwhile, Santiago Niltpec is using the wind companies against UH in their land dispute over 3000 hectares of communal land (Cha'ca 2016). While the Tuxtepec Unitary Agrarian Court has denied this claim, Niltpec authorities assert that they have signed land contracts with two wind companies and have received 100,000 pesos.³⁰ Wind companies are a vehicle to privatize communal land, which is accomplished through public notaries. Guchachi explains the process:

So private property started to invade the Isthmus. More fences started to appear with people claiming large patches of land and with no agrarian authorities to rule over them, what they do – or their tactic – is they write a document defining the boundaries of their desired land. They pay money to the municipal governments and then they look for a public notary who gives them a signature that certifies ownership over that stretch of communal land.

This references the 1978 disappearance of Victor Yodo and the lands' continued state of legal ambiguity. The political parties, aided by wind companies, organize farmers and send them to Oaxaca or Mexico City with public notaries to regularize their land title documents (see also Dunlap 2018a). The contention, however, is that 'public notary is an illegal procedure' that cannot be applied to communal land'.³¹ UH's mayor frequently attempts to undermine Comuneros' authority, while land owners and unions organize repression against them. This agrarian change, however, is also related to the death of communal land holders and to generational shifts. 'A big problem', explains Mixtu,³² is that the land owners 'are people who have 100 hectares because they screwed over their other family members when their grandparents died, so they seized their moment to regularize the land and get deeds'. The wind companies reserve the land by paying

²⁶Interview 6, 14-12-2019.

²⁷Interview 23, 17-01-2020.

²⁸Interview 22, 16-1-2020.

²⁹Interview 22.

³⁰Personal communications, 10-08-2020.

³¹Interview 3, 13-12-2020.

³²Interview 5, 14-12-2019.

people, according to Diana Manzo (2019), between 16,000 and 2,000,000 pesos (784–80,145 USD) annually, depending on the landholding size. ‘The government has worked hard for over fifty years, implementing all sorts of policies, to collapse a communal understanding of land and to undermine the legitimacy and capability of the communal assemblies’, says Mixtu.³³ ‘They have convinced us to believe that only the federal government can take decisions about our territory’. Not only do communal lands exist legally, but the struggles against wind factories are intertwined with struggles for Indigenous autonomy, self-determination and conceptions of land use.

Manufacturing wind factory development: money, Sicarios and NGOs

Despite the way the government, politicians, land owners and landless workers embrace wind factory development, agrarian change toward dependency, the loss of control over land and the failure to provide (noticeable) collective benefits have made the EDF wind factory unpopular. The socio-ecological pacification necessary for the Gunaa Sicarú development has necessitated three interlinked process of *distributing money, dispensing Sicarios* and *NGO intervention*. These three processes manufacture social pacification and enforce the wind factory’s ‘social license’ to operate.

Money

Development funds play an extremely divisive role in rural communities. ‘Gueu’³⁴ attributes divisions ‘both inside individual communities and the region ... to the presence of political parties [backed by wind companies] pumping in large sums of money’. The strategic distribution of money to create divisions and pacify resistance, as previously discussed (Dunlap 2018a), bears a resemblance to integrated monetary shaping operations (IMSO). Despite overlapping and being (relatively) synchronized, an analytical distinction exists between the distribution of ‘development money’ – land contract, employment and socio-infrastructure programs – and ‘repressive money’ – intimidation, physical attacks and killings. ‘That strategy of offering money or big rewards for going over to their side as opposed to being killed has been successful at dismantling resistance in Oaxaca’, explains ‘Wild Tiger’.³⁵ Wind factory ‘money is paying for everything’, contends Bereguidxa.³⁶ ‘When they come and start throwing around money it automatically divides the community’.

Aspirations for ‘development money’ can lead toward ‘repressive money’ used to employ people to commit violence against land defenders and other unions, in the context of the loss of agro-ecological self-sufficiency, rural poverty and, now, the destabilizing effects of an earthquake. The post-development school (see Illich 1969; Escobar 2012 [1995]; Kothari et al. 2018) has long indicated how development discourse and practice have powerful psycho-political effects that shape ‘rural aspirations’, a process ignored by Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen (2020). ‘They used to fool us with mirrors [during Spanish colonization], but now they [European companies] fool us with bills

³³Interview 5, 14-12-2019.

³⁴Interview 10 15-12-2019.

³⁵Interview 1, 12-12-2020.

³⁶Interview 22, 16-01-2020.

and money – painted paper’, said Herendira. ‘It is sad what our town has turned into after progress started to come’. Money is changing the political ecology of the region. ‘Yes, there are Sicarios, and yes, there are the projects with NGOs, but also with each passing day we face the problem of fishermen who are being bought off’, explains Wild Tiger.³⁷ ‘EDF plans to steal 40% of Unión Hidalgo’s total areas’, says Jorge,³⁸ ‘but only 90 people were “property owners” of that area, while Unión is comprised of 14,000 citizens’. Money creates the possibility to organize minority control over the direction of land use and development. Meanwhile, (post)developmental alternatives are stifled and discouraged by government policies, landless workers and the influx of transnational capital.

Sicarios

The levels of violence have skyrocketed in Unión, and in the Isthmus in general (Santos 2018). Guchachi counted five murders in UH since the arrival of wind factories; Jorge claims there have been ‘15 to 25 murders’ in the region since 2009, which ‘is something that did not use to happen here’.³⁹ ‘Before we did not have crude violence, it is true the Isthmus has always had gunmen (*pistoleros*) – I do not want to romanticize the towns’, explains Natalie.⁴⁰ ‘However, we have never experienced this kind of systematic violence that is being enforced daily with Sicarios, kidnappings, daily deaths in every town or their surroundings – we did not have any of that’. The rise of Sicarios (hitmen) is relatively new and relates to roughly three overlapping factors: repressing indigenous autonomy, union conflicts and cartel struggles. Militarized security forces are justified by the law and foreign direct investment in the region. Some police outfits, like PABIC (Auxiliary Bank, Industrial and Commercial Police), have been documented participating in extra-judicial activity (Dunlap 2018a), where official and unofficial forces blur in dispensing repression against Indigenous land defenders.

Construction unions need ‘to protect themselves and to threaten others [unions] or those who oppose the project’.⁴¹ This dynamic is also related to the arrival of other mega-projects and mining companies that ‘have their Sicarios, so anyone rejecting the projects are kidnapped and murdered’.⁴² This overlaps with northern Mexico cartel dynamics spreading to the Isthmus. Struggles over cartel territory, drug routes and the regional distribution of methamphetamines, according to land defenders, began proliferating as an issue in 2015.⁴³ The relationship between large-scale capital investments in the region and the escalation of violence resonates with experiences in other parts of Mexico (see Paley 2014; Correa-Cabrera 2017). The militarization of environments under the pretext of the drug war, as Dawn Paley (2014, 138) points out, does not stop the flow of drugs, but repeatedly acts ‘as a guarantee to investors seeking to insure their [extractive project] installations will be protected from community resistance’ (see also Ballvé 2019). On 4 November 2019, responding to community road blockades, the Jalisco

³⁷Interview 1, 12-12-2020.

³⁸Interview 1, 12-12-2020.

³⁹Interview 1.

⁴⁰Interview 20, 16-1-2020.

⁴¹Interview 10, 15-12-2019.

⁴²Interview 10.

⁴³Interview 1, 12-12-2018.

New Generation Cartel (CJNG) sent a series of text messages to nearly everyone in the coastal Isthmus. The message declared a 10pm curfew and demanded that protesters take down road blockades, stating:

We are going to deactivate any blockade in the area, and clear them out by any means. To all of those persons involved in blockades, especially in the Zanatepec-Niltepec blockade areas, we are giving notice to withdraw as soon as possible, you are affecting our operations. We have orders from our employer to raze everything on our arrival, we won't be held accountable, we're going to wipe out everything, we don't give a shit if its children, women, or any asshole walking around acting like a dick, there is a reason why we are the bloodiest group.⁴⁴

This 'wiping out' is a threat of massacre, which happened across the Lagoon in San Mateo del Mar (another town engulfed in conflict over wind energy development and political corruption). On June 21, 2020, two women and 13 men reportedly associated with disputing elections were brutally murdered at a Huazantlán del Río (Manzo and Pérez 2020). Rebuking AMLO claims that this is an inter-communal conflict, Luis Navarro (2020) reminds us that the 'massacre is part of the offensive of actual regional powers, useful to the wind industry, to dismantle or weaken the organized core that oppose the megaprojects'.

Human rights NGOs

Human rights NGOs have the potential to function as mechanisms of pacification by *shifting rebellious groups from total rejection to negotiation*. This shift is reinforced by legal impositions, (statist) threats of coercion and widening existing social divisions (Dunlap 2018b). 'No one is going to finance you to oppose a megaproject – nobody', explains a local human rights defender; 'you are going to get financing if you engage in long-term cultural promotion for community development, gender empowerment and disaster reconstruction'.⁴⁵ The September 2017 earthquake invited NGOs with such programs to the region. Wind and mining companies distributed humanitarian assistance plastered with 'company logos', which many felt was 'taking advantage of publicity space'.⁴⁶ Proud that the Isthmus is 'listed as a problematic region for NGOs', Natalie⁴⁷ asks: 'Why would we work with NGOs when their dynamic tends toward creating dependency based on their own agenda? In turn, that agenda is based on their own moral beliefs on how Indigenous populations should behave'. ProDESC is the main nonprofit working with the Comuneros and operating in UH since 2011, which deserves further attention.

Working with the Comuneros in UH for under a decade (ProDESC 2019b), in 2013 they submitted judicial proceedings to nullify DEMEX land contracts. Yet, as they described on their website, 'a judgement has not been issued recognizing the human rights violations committed by the company against community members, nor the cancellation of the contracts' (ProDESC 2019b). Founded by Alejandra Anceita, winner of the Martin Ennals Prize (known as the Nobel Prize for Human Rights), ProDESC's (2019a) mission is to 'defend and promote an integral DESC [Economic, Social and Cultural Rights] perspective of disadvantaged groups with respect to the full enjoyment of their rights'. While their

⁴⁴See <https://www.facebook.com/183849978361582/posts/2567926523287237/>

⁴⁵Interview 24, 17-01-2020.

⁴⁶Interview 26, 18-01-2020.

⁴⁷Interview 20, 16-1-2020.

work has been highly appreciated by some Comuneros, others have voiced concern, inside and outside the Comunero Assembly.

ProDESC is following the same line as the rest of the NGOs in the [AMLO's] Fourth Transformation,⁴⁸ which is to go straight for the consultations', explains Broma;⁴⁹ 'they are not against the [wind] projects, they are fighting for consultation processes that line up strictly to International Labour Organization (ILO) 169. They say they have achieved results, but the only thing they have accomplished is restarting the consultation processes'. Remembering the Juchitán consultation experience, another Comunero, Gueu, claims that the Comunero Board acts 'as if a divine light will awaken the hearts of the town's people during the consultation deliberation phase', but in reality 'all the governments and international organisations are behaving as if the project will be constructed, and they [Comunero Board] take that for granted'.⁵⁰

Two issues emerge from this process. The first relates to Comunero participation in the consultation. When consultation planning and implementation was clearly faulty, or 'simulated', the Comunero assembly agreed to reject the consultation. Yet many still participated. Some dissident Comuneros explain: 'we have all pointed out its theatrics. I then fail to understand why the fuck some Comuneros are participating'.⁵¹ The second, more substantive, concern is about filing an agrarian court injunction. The agrarian injunction would prohibit megaproject development on communal land, reserving this space for agrarian activity. Filing an Isthmus agrarian court injunction has been in the works since 2013, if not longer, yet Carlos González – a respected Nahua National Indigenous Congress (CNI) lawyer specializing in agrarian law – prepared an agrarian injunction for the Comuneros. The Comunero Board, working with ProDESC since 2011, wanted the lawyers to collaborate. González believes that even if carried out under ILO 169, consultations are surrendering Indigenous territories to the Mexican State (Camacho 2019). The agrarian injunction challenges ProDESC's civil injunction requesting an FPIC consultation. Crafting an agrarian injunction comes from decades of research and experience. ProDESC's organizational and legal work, presumably, did not inspire collaboration. It reached a point where the two lawyers 'are not talking to each other' and 'neither wants to'.⁵² Bluntly summarizing the situation, Broma⁵³ explains:

[H]aving a consultation process start all over again due to a court injunction that is a big media propaganda move. What happens? The agrarian court injunction instead cuts the process at the roots. It would make it possible to say: 'Why the heck do we have to fight for consultations when they should not even step into our territories in the first place?' If a state grants you consultation rights, he is immediately violating your self-determination. Consultations are in total contradiction and conflict, because it is forcing a decision upon us. But because these guys [ProDESC] make a living out of long legal processes, it makes them very uncomfortable to see a court injunction that attacks the root of the problem and prevents a longer legal process. Thus, the agrarian court injunction leaves them without a job.

⁴⁸AMLO's regime claims to be the Fourth Transformation in Mexico's historical development, the campaign of which claims to lower administrative salaries and tax (extreme) luxury products.

⁴⁹Interview 28, 7-02-2020.

⁵⁰Interview 10, 15-12-2019.

⁵¹Interview 10, 15-12-2019.

⁵²Interview 34, 04-03-2020.

⁵³Interview 28, 7-07-2020.

The Comuneros agreed in September to file this agrarian injunction, yet they wanted to have ProDESC's comments. The CNI lawyer was indirectly forced to share the injunction, and ProDESC submitted an opinion at the Comunero's request.

ProDESC's comments and the agrarian injunction were at the center of the 26 January 2020 Comunero Assembly. Another resistance group, who initially brought ProDESC to Unión, berated the Comuneros and ProDESC for not filing the injunction as it concerns all of the Isthmus' communal land. ProDESC's representative replied that based on their 'expertise', they found some 'weaknesses' and 'mistakes' in the agrarian injunction.⁵⁴ ProDESC's recommendations, however, were not read to the assembly and the Comunero's lead representative 'did not remember with detail its content', nor did they bring ProDESC's injunction opinion.⁵⁵ This provoked outrage in the assembly. Referring to this assembly, Broma⁵⁶ claims: 'So evidently ProDESC is halting the [agrarian] court injunction, because its success would end their long-term gold mine'. ProDESC claims, according to the Comunero Board, that it is 'wrong to have land written down as communal' because existing land titles 'legally prove they are the land owners'.⁵⁷ Broma⁵⁸ says these claims are 'absurd', stressing that they are not agrarian lawyers and have a vested interest in drawing out the consultation process.

In La Ventosa, an agrarian court injunction was recently filed against a Riverside Resources mine. The injunction was successful, yet quickly resulted in severe acts of intimidation. Heavily armed men, with modified bulletproof trucks, went door to door offering 80,000 pesos to injunction signatories.⁵⁹ The implication was: take the money or disappear. 'The state and companies are sensing the checkmate and they have been toughening up their legal defense', explains Broma, who assisted with the mine injunction. The agrarian injunction strategy is demonstrating some forms of success, resulting in immediate extra-judicial repression (Parada 2019). This has forced Comuneros in La Ventosa to revoke their signatures or leave town. Legal success, according to Broma,⁶⁰ is causing 'judges to demand documents that certify the Indigenous identity of every signatory of the agrarian injunction' as it threatens to terminate all megaproject development on communal land.

The Comunero Assembly is organized along hierarchical lines, which exhibits vanguardist tendencies. Assembly organization creates controls on information; meanwhile an informal hierarchy emerges between landed and landless Comuneros. This allows the Comunero Board to concentrate power, becoming the principal liaison with ProDESC. A mutually reinforcing 'gatekeeper' dynamic forms between the assembly vanguard and ProDESC. 'Undertaking paternalistic attitudes, some Comuneros make the decision on how to manage information in a way that will be to the liking of the [ProDESC] lawyer', explains Mixtu;⁶¹ the 'Comuneros want to feel that they have a bond with the [ProDESC] lawyers to feel secure and they think that by promoting an idea that the

⁵⁴Field notes.

⁵⁵Field notes. A woman next to him offered to go get the file he was supposed to bring, and he declined her offer.

⁵⁶Interview 28, 7-02-2020.

⁵⁷Interview 34, 04-03-2020.

⁵⁸Interview 34, 04-03-2020.

⁵⁹Interview 34, 04-03-2020.

⁶⁰Interview 34, 04-03-2020.

⁶¹Interview 5.2, 8-02-2020.

lawyers will feel comfortable with'. This behavior empowers ProDESC influence and decision-making within the assembly. Asking a ProDESC representative working in UH (repeatedly) about the agrarian injunction in a phone interview, they replied: 'Yes, we commented because the assembly of Comuneros asked us to. That is why we sent them directly to them and you are not anyone to know about that topic. *I do not even see the relevance of that topic*'. Mixtu⁶² argues that 'even if Comuneros do not agree with the ProDESC dynamic, they never speak out because they fear being marginalized or kicked out from the committee'.

There are micro-politics that ProDESC engages with, not uncommon amongst NGOs. First, although they have not been charging legal fees to the Comunero Board, cases like UH serve to create a portfolio favorable to grant writing. ProDESC has been expanding as an organization, repeatedly hiring new staff.⁶³ The UH case serves to demonstrate ProDESC as not only advancing a liberal politics of integration, in line with AMLO's consultation strategy, but also as fighting for social justice. Land defenders have identified this as 'a discourse of defeat'⁶⁴ and 'legal dispossession'⁶⁵ (see also Camacho 2019). 'They spread fear with their comments', explains Mixtu; 'I believe they distort the information that they present'. Others mention how ProDESC representatives employ an upper-class lawyer aesthetic, using technical terms and flaunting their credentials as 'experts' to convince the Comunero board to allow them to guide the process.⁶⁶

Second, ProDESC provides resources and a sense of (legal) security by creating struggle representatives. Human rights groups present marketable representatives to showcase their personality on their websites or in pithy promotional videos. While raising awareness about an issue, it simultaneously operates within a market-based logic. The struggle is transformed into social and grant capital, establishing organizational purpose and fighting for improved consultation procedures as well as (more equitable) participation in wind factory development. In terms of developmental reform, they showcase success: distributing resources and creating new opportunities for select Comuneros. In the struggle for Indigenous autonomy and land reclamation, however, they are solidifying capitalist relationships, pacifying resistance and eliminating socio-ecological alternatives to development. The NGOization of the UH struggle can reconcile development, but not Zapotec aspirations for autonomy and communal land.

The manufacturing of struggle representatives also has deeper political and psycho-social implications. '*Representative making*', we can say, mirrors a micro-political colonial strategy to 'appoint leaders to horizontal societies', because, as Peter Gelderloos (2017, 19, 22) tells us, a 'society needs to be accustomed to having leaders for a foreign power to effectively be able to appoint puppet rulers'. Representative-making in – ideally horizontal – Indigenous collectives replicates the counterinsurgency colonial/statist model on the local (see Dunlap 2018d). The pre-existing (informal) hierarchical nature of the Comunero council made them susceptible to the manufacturing of leaders, as this process employs allure and creates material possibilities for those willing to be

⁶²Interview 5.2.

⁶³Interview 5.2. See also <https://twitter.com/ProDESC/status/1229435340198334465>. Some employees also resign. On 25 February 2020, an ex-ProDESC member working in Unión sent notice of their voluntary resignation to the Comuneros, noting how their activity with ProDESC was compromising their ethics. This reportedly has happened before.

⁶⁴Interview 2, 8-12-2019.

⁶⁵Interview 1, 12-12-2018.

⁶⁶Interview 28, 7-02-2020.

professionalized Indigenous or struggle representatives. Describing the persistence of the ProDESC–assembly dynamic, Mixtu explains:

I think one of their [ProDESC's] main strategies to remain in the assembly, aside from not charging and absorbing all of the judicial costs, is that they formed moral links with people inside the committee. People they eat with, or that they pay visits to. They name them communitarian land defenders and they launch them as 'poster boys' for the media and they will take them to workshops in Oaxaca or Mexico City, they will even take them to summits and international events. It might seem silly, but people like it [being made human rights celebrities]. They like going to Europe, they love being interviewed in UN [United Nations] meetings and seeing themselves on video being land defenders. You see, so they weave this net of trinkets that wrap people up and make them feel morally in debt with them. So obviously those compañeros will defend them.

The micro-politics of land defender identity formation, celebration and professionalization are potent weapons of social warfare. Greta Thunberg and other 'climate youth leaders' are another large-scale example of this process (see Morningstar 2019), which relates to the objectification and spectacularization of socio-ecological struggle. The subjectivities of land defenders are bureaucratized, conditioning them to less overtly violent methods of struggle, micro-colonial meeting structures, political norms and working habits that alter struggle priorities and, by extension, their outcomes. The NGOization of struggle and the spectacularization of land defenders remain potent weapons in social war to pacify land defenders in the context of an infrastructural colonization that progressively contributes to wider ecocidal processes.

Conclusion

Wind factory development in the Isthmus has materialized significant negative socio-ecological impacts. Outlining the impacts and controversies related to wind factory development in UH, this article demonstrates how money, Sicarios and an NGO (focused on human rights) are important mechanisms for infrastructural colonization. Money creates important footholds amongst political elites, land owners and construction unions, a process that is reinforced by political violence emanating indirectly from EDF, and directly from landowners, unions and their armed associates. The (post)developmental aspirations of Indigenous land defenders and Comuneros are diametrically opposed and contest the entire legal regime permitting land titling and privatization, which intensify and strengthen (neo)colonialism. Coercive repression and legal pressures make the legal help from NGOs and social movement lawyers indispensable, yet internal disagreements emerge over information sharing and the legal route established. NGO influence intertwined with Comunero organizational dynamics creates another mechanism of social control. Money, Sicarios and NGOs, in the end, are crucial to social engineering acquiescence and, consequently, to gaining the 'social license' of EDF's Gunaá Sicarú project. Significantly under-researched, however, is the role that (various) Christian groups play in land grabbing and megaproject development in the Isthmus.

Collective organizational dynamics and the manufacturing of activist identity, celebrity culture and legal reassurance are relational and organizational processes that deserve self-reflection and renewed scrutiny. Organizing land defense under inhospitable and lethal conditions is challenging; and, it appears, traditional modes of 'Leftist'

organization are creating discontent and vulnerabilities to permitting infrastructural colonization. 'People in the resistance have to change their traditional ways of taking up struggle, widen their minds and be more creative', explains a local journalist, critiquing resistance in UH. Horizontal and radically democratic organizational structures are designed for direct participation, information sharing and limiting vanguardism (Springer 2016). Informal or post-millennial forms of organizing (see Bonanno 1998 [1996]; Anonymous 2001; Loadenthal 2017), on the other hand, challenge the inherently authoritative (colonial) nature of conventional organizational models, minimize co-optation and advance experiments in organizational politics. Consultations, with the ideal of 'good' consultations, still function as a 'bureaucratic trap' under the guise of liberalism, as social and ecological conditions are worsening in the Isthmus. The colonization process continues and affirms a trajectory of ecocide and genocide against Indigenous populations with the continuation of conventional and 'green' extraction projects.

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ORCID

Alexander Dunlap  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8852-9309>

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Alexander Dunlap is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo. His work has critically examined police–military transformations, market-based conservation, wind energy development and extractive projects more generally in Latin America and Europe. He authored the book *Renewing Destruction: Wind Energy Development, Conflict and Resistance in a Latin American Context* (2019) and co-authored the book *The Violent Technologies of Extraction* (2020).

Martín Correa Arce is an independent scholar with long-term participation in societies, in movements and in revitalizing *Comunalidad*. Martín has published in *Sociedad y Ambiente*.