

Towards Permanent Ecological Conflict: Insurrectionary Political Ecology and Reflections on the *Política Comunitaria* in Gui'Xhi' Ro/Álvaro Obregón, Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Exploring insurrectionary political ecology, this article argues that authoritarian organisation reproduces the core of colonial and statist politics that necessitate energy intensive bureaucracies. This article discusses how colonial forms of organisation are reproduced in areas of socioterritorial and autonomous struggle. Reflecting on experiences within an autonomous struggle in Álvaro Obregón, or Gui'Xhi'Ro in Zapotec, Mexico, the article explores ideas of popular ecological struggle and permanent ecological conflict. Drawing on fieldwork (2014-2017) while embedded in this conflict area, this article seeks to stimulate the imaginations and praxes of insurrectionary political ecology by critically reflecting on our experiences. Providing background to the case, and discussing anarchist organisational theories of resistance, the article attempts to challenge the common counter-hegemony and counter-power approaches. This article seeks to experiment beyond counter-power, promoting evasive, resilient and viral – or more accurately anti-viral – strategies of struggle. This purpose seeks to widen conversations on socioterritorial struggles and land defence against extractive development and statist conquest.

Keywords: *Insurrectionary political ecology, resistance, post-development, pluriverse, environmental justice, societies-in-movement*

INTRODUCTION

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

Graffiti, Oaxaca City, 2006

The mainstream dissemination, and popular awareness, of socioecological and climate catastrophe has increased since 2006 (Hase et al. 2021). Despite this awareness, however, a paradox emerges: within market and industrial societies, greater socioecological information and awareness do not necessarily translate into action, let alone effective action to redress socioecological and climate concerns (Stoddard et al. 2022). Ecological direct action is diverse (Sovacool & Dunlap 2022), requiring 'an ecosystem of tactics' that comprise lawyers, popular mobilisations, sabotage, civil servants and many more to sustain political change (Dunlap 2024; Baller & Bell 2024; IGD 2023). An entire scientific apparatus of coercion and pacification exists to confuse, dissuade, repress and pacify committed and growing socioecological/climatic opposition, which exacerbates underlying differences in ideologies, loyalties, and/or separations between the means and actions of these diverse actors (see Brock 2020a, 2020b; Dunlap 2020a, 2023; Anderson 2021; Dunlap & Brock 2022; Brown et al. 2017; Brown 2021; Granovsky-Larsen 2023; Benally 2023, Ch.5). Information bombardment, institutional dependencies and a lack of determined capabilities relate to larger psycho-politics, in military terms, of *demoralisation*: the process by which morale, discipline, courage, and vision are subverted. Counterinsurgency is designed to organise demoralisation (Dunlap 2014, 2020a; Kass 2025), employing violence to initiate and maintain institutional dependencies (and politics) but, most of all, sustaining the degradation and fragmentation of social fabrics, sense of place, and community.

Revisiting a 'socioterritorial movement' in Oaxaca, Mexico (Halvorsen et al. 2019), this article develops the insurrectionary political ecology lens by reflecting on experiences within a lightly armed low-intensity conflict in Gui'Xhi' Ro', or Álvaro Obregón in Spanish, between 2014 and 2015. Gui'Xhi' Ro' is located at the entrance of the Santa Teresa sandbar (*Barra de Santa Teresa*) within the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region of Oaxaca, Mexico (Figure 1). Gui'Xhi' Ro', known for harbouring armed militants for the Isthmus Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students (COCEI) – a Zapotec inspired Marxist-Leninist organisation later turned political party (1973-1990)¹ – eventually defied the regional, state and federal authorities to form a Communitarian Police (*policia comunitaria*) to fight the instillation of 102 wind turbines on the Santa Teresa Sand Bar,

known as the *Barra* (see also Howe et al. 2015; Dunlap 2018, 2019; Sellwood & Valdivia 2018). This struggle emerged alongside numerous other self-defence groups (e.g. *autodefensa*) across Mexico.

Autodefensas differ from (Marxist-inspired) revolutionary movements, such as the Zapatistas (EZLN), the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR)² or Insurgent People's Revolutionary Army (ERPI) (Stephen 2002; Norget 2005; Fitzwater 2019). While the Zapatista political movement resonates with, and even inspires, *autodefensas* formations (Gil-Vasquez, 2021), *autodefensas* focus on community self-defence rather than a larger, real or imagined, 'revolutionary programme' emerges as a distinguishing factor (even if community self-defence can be a revolutionary act). There remain, however, various and shifting organisational practices between *Autodefensas*, which relates to issues of community representation, changing political and material objectives (Sierra 2005; Gledhill 2015; Fuentes Díaz & Fini 2018). The Cherán –municipality in Michoacán remains particularly inspirational. The largely Purépecha Indigenous community of Cherán initiated an armed uprising in 2011 to advance Indigenous autonomy against loggers, narcotic traffickers and a complicit state (Guillén 2016; Gil-Vasquez 2021). Gui'Xhi' Ro' emerged around the same time yet remains a lesser known (lightly) armed struggle for Zapotec autonomy and self-defence that, instead of loggers, rejected large-scale wind energy extraction projects on the Barra.

While the intensity of the conflict has lessened due to movement disarticulations related to in-fighting, intimate abuses, formal governmental pacification, and extra-judicial attacks from narcotics traffickers (Lucio 2016; Sánchez 2017; Dunlap 2019a, 2019b, 2021; Ramirez 2019; Peña-Azcona et al. 2021; Dunlap & Correa-Arce 2022), the struggle in the region still continues against sustained megaproject imposition (Hofmann 2024; Torres Contreras & Flores Cruz 2025). Reflecting on this struggle, this article argues that *permanent ecological conflict* in its diverse and self-initiated articulations opens a space to advance autonomous struggles against extractive development and the state. Permanent ecological conflict, inspired by Alfredo M. Bonanno (1998b, p11), advocates 'attacking' without 'waiting for orders from anywhere else'. Bonanno (1998b) stresses the 'characteristic of being 'autonomous', that is of not depending on or having any relations at all with political parties or trade union organisations' and 'not proposing platforms of generic claims that would inevitably transform themselves into administration along the lines of a mini-party or a small alternative trade unions'. This means people – or groups, 'crews', families or communities – would

never subordinate themselves to higher political powers or organisations (see also Morea 2025). Instead, this implies maintaining networks, concerns and actions, even if they might be informally coordinated or cooperating with other groups or federations (see Gelderloos 2024). Embedded in the anarchist theory of the state (Bakunin 1990/1873; Gelderloos 2017; Nomad 2017; Ince & Barrara 2024; Morea 2025), permanent ecological conflict directly challenges demoralisation within struggles, meanwhile taking organisational inspiration from habitats and ecosystems; hence, as the Weelaunee forest defenders call it (IGD 2023), adopting ‘an ecosystem of tactics’. Emerging as a conceptual tool within insurrectionary political ecology, developing permanent ecological conflict seeks to advance immediate struggle through diversity and (relative) oppositional unity.

The notion of permanent ecological conflicts animates an organisational ethos present, to various degrees, in the so-called ‘ecoterritorial turn’ (Svampa 2011, 2021, p285). The case of Gui’Xhi’ Ro’ explores permanent ecological conflict against wind energy development (and implicitly other megadevelopment projects) in the

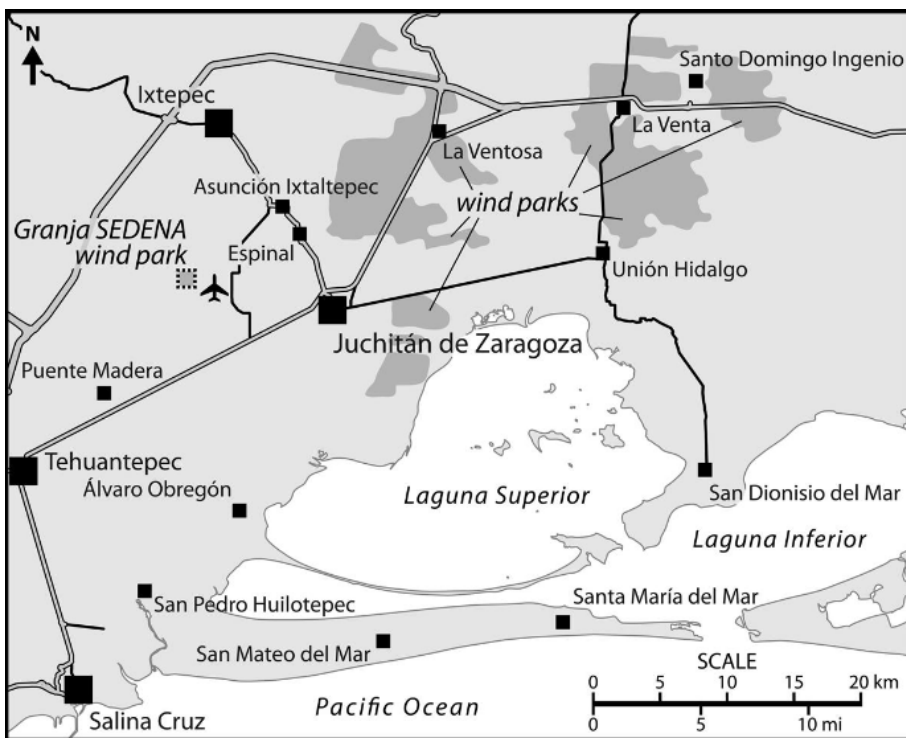


Figure 1, Coastal Isthmus of Tehuantepec, source: Carl Sac

Isthmus of Tehuantepec region of Oaxaca, Mexico. The article proceeds by first identifying the ‘enemy’ for land defenders, which extends beyond governments, companies and paramilitary forces to organisational technologies and authoritarian tendencies. The following section describes the research methods and provides a background to the wind energy conflict in the Isthmus. The main section presents experiences from being embedded for five months with the Communitarian Police (*polícia comunitaria*) in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’. The article concludes with a discussion of the combative struggle and the ideas of permanent ecological conflict.

(ECOLOGICAL) ANARCHIST THEORY AND POSITIONALITY

After setting fire to the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL) in Xalapa, Mexico, the anonymous anarchist group declared:

In sum, development – whether it is capitalist, socialist, fascist, or Lopez-Obradorist, is nothing more than: **War against the native; War against the different; War against the diverse; War against joy.** Because we know that their crusades against hunger are wars – crusades, at the end of the day – against families; to poison diets, to corrode the social fabric. Because we know that selling a watershed to French, Brazilian, or Mexican corporations is a savage war against the livelihood of everyone and everything (Anonymous 2015).

Development, for these anarchists and postdevelopment thinkers (Illich 1970; Rahmena & Bawtree 1997; Kothari et al. 2019; Dunlap & Tornel 2025; Garcia-Arias et al. 2025), is a euphemism for (imperial) warfare. Whether high- or low-intensity warfare, development is a continuation of war by other means, stabilising ideologies, modes of hierarchical governance and, overall, the rebranding of statism/(neo)colonialism. This does not deny, or ignore, the enchanting or captivating features of social development and capitalism (Light 2003; Cullather 2006; Owens 2015; Moe & Müller 2017), but recognises the embedded deception, coercion, dependency and addiction established by sociopolitical technologies – from low-quality ‘junk foods’ to dopamine hits from television and digital technologies (Alexander 2008; Samaha & Hawi 2016). This, among other reasons, is why anarchists have identified the state as a structure of conquest (Bakunin

1990/1873; Clark & Camille 2013; Gordon 2023), with the potential to absorb and recuperate people: ‘Activists do not change the state; the state changes them’ (van der Walt 2018, pp535). Development, as the Xalapan anarchists remind us, remains a continuation of colonial and statist warfare by other means, even as people celebrate, depend on, and remain addicted to (capitalist) modernism.

Anarchists, to advance anti-authoritarian and ecologically harmonious societies, are dedicated to fighting state, empire and colony as they intersect (Ferretti 2018; Zimmer 2018; de Laforcade & Hirsch 2020). While this conversation is evolving, explicitly intertwining with Indigenous anarchy (de Laforcade & Hirsch 2020; Anonymous 2021; Benally 2023; Dupuis-Déri & Pillet 2023), informal anarchist organisation and insurrectionary political ecology reveals three insights. First, leaders are a liability, not only because they delegate and concentrate power, but also by establishing mechanisms of social control over the group. Peter Gelderloos (2017, p20) reminds us that ‘[i]t is now commonplace that colonising states appoint leaders to horizontal societies they are trying to absorb through trade and warfare’. Second, avoid naming individual or collective action. While there are benefits of spreading critique through communiqués, solidifying ‘insurgent identity’ and communicating with other discontented people, it also runs the risk of separating people from the population, meanwhile materialising an ‘enemy’ for authorities to target. Additionally, this risks ‘group-think’ or organisational logics of righteousness and superiority can form among actions groups (Anonymous 2011; Bonanno 1998, 1999; Dunlap 2020b). This means promoting evasion and non-spectacularized ways of communication designed to combat statist/colonial domination.

The third insight, informal organising emphasises small groups based on affinity that act using available and easily reproducible means (Bonanno 1998/1996, 1999; Weir et al. 2015). While massive movements can form, direct action should remain rooted in collective initiative and remain autonomous from any political authority. This, as Bonanno (1998, 1999) outlined, emphasises relational quality over the quantitative and/or bureaucratic outlook of mass organisations. This approach, as Carlos López ‘Chivo’ (2015, n.p.) explains, seeks ‘to deepen the knowledge gained in struggles, without bureaucratic structures nor delegation of responsibility and rejecting possible hierarchies which give way to relations of power’. Informal groups, he continues, ‘are intended to disappear after completing the objective’ as ‘that which stagnates rots’. If capital and money are the circulatory system of the state, bureaucracy is the bones of the colony. This position views permanent organisations, which eventually bureaucratise –

requiring logistics and, ultimately, beginning to value their own organisational existence over the issue they claim to fight or the populations they serve—as calcifying and decomposing entities from the inside out.

Deepening the conversation around organisation, Gelderloos (2024, pp23-4) recognises that ‘the most fruitful organizing initiatives in recent years have been those that have emerged from comrades who are rooted in a specific territory’ and use different forms of organisation depending on the need and circumstance of a territory or community. This, for Gelderloos (2024, pp26-46), means people, and different segments of society, organising to meet different needs through affinity groups, thematic assemblies, local/vocational assemblies, gatherings, anarchist/anti-colonial assemblies, coordinating assemblies and federations. The federation, the most formal and scaled-up organisation, Gelderloos (2024, p44) cautions ‘can avoid the dangers of statism if it never attempts to unite the whole movement, if it conceives of itself as just one more element within an ecosystem of struggle, if it always practices a solidarity with other elements’. While Gelderloos (2024, pp24-5) continues by outlining the importance of care, solidarity and conflict resolution, the feature that should be emphasised is that any organising, or organisation, should be ready to ‘change completely according to the possibilities and needs of the struggle, according to the density of initiatives and the intensity of the conflict, according to the popular culture in a territory and the techniques and strategies of state repression.’ This assemblage of anti-authoritarian syndicates, federations and affinity groups emerges as an antithesis of authoritarian structures, not only in methodological praxis, but in the desire to undermine systems of colonial conquest.

Anarchist organising in rural areas mimics ideas of ecological defence and popular struggle (Virilio 1978/1990, 1980). This means creating permanent, decentralised and leaderless resistance that guards against the existence and possible reformulation of coercive power. Anarchist anthropology, notably by Pierre Clastres (1994 [1980]) and David Graeber and Wengrow (2021), was essential in recognising that various Indigenous nations actively sought to prevent the development of civilising states. Anti-authoritarian organisational practices, to differing degrees, already happen in the numerous ‘socioterritorial’ and ‘ecoterritorial’ movements across Aba Yala/Latin America (Halvorsen et al. 2019; Svampa 2021). Movements employed different strategies of individual/collective empowerment for creative and combative agency that frequently recognise the importance of taking a ‘fluid and vaporous’ form that does not condense into a formal organisation (Virilio 1980, p268). Popular examples include the

evasive forest gardening and, if need be, combative action documented by JC Scott (2009) in upland Southeast Asia or the ‘political forests’ constructed as a response to the anti-colonial guerrilla tactics relying on jungles in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia (Peluso & Vandergeest 2011). The companion of ecological defence is ecological autonomy, which, John Tutino (2007, p214) contends in Mexico: ‘emphasizes the ability of rural communities to sustain themselves and insurgent fighters independently of the structure of power and production they seek to transform’. This tension towards complete ecological autonomy were the historical norm for numerous Indigenous communities rejecting empire (Tutino 1988, 2007; Clastres 1994/1980; Scott 2009; Gelderloos 2017), cultivates, what can be identified, as an anarchistic practice rooted in the land to ‘produce basic subsistence crops along with livestock for food, transportation, and combat, and to turn basic tools of everyday life—machetes, hatchets, rifles – into weapons of guerrilla war’ (Tutino 2007, p214). Contrary to orthodox Marxists seeking to integrate rural communities into state capitalism (Roman-Alcalá 2022; Kass 2023), anarchists have respected and valued rural and Indigenous communities.

Similar connections emerged in Mexico between anarchists, rural and Indigenous people (Maldonado 2012; de Laforcade & Hirsch 2020), which the Zapatistas (EZLN 2016) in later years and Gui’Xhi’ Ro/Álvaro Obregón, among others (Maxwell & Craib 2015), demonstrate. Maristella Svampa (2021, p285) contends that the so-called ‘ecoterritorial turn’ began with ‘an unprecedented boom in the mining sector from 2002 onwards’. This, however, ignores much older anarchist roots, as well as Maoist and other forms of autonomous organising that stretches back to the 1960s, if not earlier, in Latin America and elsewhere against anti-colonial incursions (Maxwell & Craib, 2015; Cappelletti, 2017; de Laforcade & Hirsch, 2020). This practice against the increasing concentration of statist and industrial controls continues in anarchist strategies of informal organising and permanent conflict foundational to insurrectionary anarchism and anarchist political ecology (Dunlap 2020b; Brock 2020a; Springer et al. 2021), which employ evasive, small and reproducible direct actions with projectiles, hammers, and gasoline against extractive industries and (infra)structures of domination (Bonanno 1996, 1999; Weir et al. 2015). How people identify political technologies of power, the national/international economy itself and their imposition (e.g. psycho/social occupation) will shape the intensities of militant resistance.

Considering this, anarchist insight in relation to Indigenous communities becomes increasingly complicated. Informal and chaotic organisational strategies, as Clastres (1994), Tutino (2007), Gelderloos (2017, 2024) and Graeber

and Wengrow (2021) tell us, have deep roots within many rebellious Indigenous nations. Benally (2023) discusses how anarchist ideas resonate with Diné (Navajo) political and organisational culture. Indigenous, or Diné, anarchy has far deeper roots than settler colonial or desacralising ‘factory’ anarchism(s), which is why Benally (2021, 2023, p332) openly rejects ‘the identifier of “anarcho-Indigenous”’ because Indigenous anarchists ‘are not an appendage of a revolutionary ideology or strategy’.³ Diné anarchy, like many other anti-authoritarian Indigenous life ways, have not only likely inspired anarchist practices but exercise a practice of permanent ecological conflict which have ancient anti-colonial roots and directly reject assimilationist and Indigenous capitalists. A point of tension, however, is the formation of ‘permanent organization’ – especially as they are construed and constructed by governments. This anarchist tension towards organisations revives buried anti-colonial practices, offering an important consideration and political faultline to navigate struggles for autonomy in their respective contexts against coercive development projects or oppressive village customs. Acknowledging the anarchist critique of organisation we now turn to the case of Álvaro Obregón.

METHODS

This article emerges from a larger research project by the first author which initially collected 123 recorded semi-structured interviews and explored two additional sites of intensive wind energy development in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region, Oaxaca, Mexico. Additional follow-up visits were conducted in 2018 and 2019-2020. While influenced by this larger interview set and engagement in the region until 2021, this article primarily draws on participant observation along with thirty-four recorded semi-structured interviews conducted between 15 January and 20 May 2015 in Gui’Xhi’ Ro and follow-up interviews in February 2018⁴ and December 2019 to March 2020. The number of men interviewed in this smaller dataset was nearly double the number of women, while the number of third gender – ‘muxes’ – was significantly less. This smaller research project was centred on understanding the lived experiences of people surrounded by wind energy projects and the resulting conflict in the area, which are voices often discredited by wind companies, the Mexican government and the mainstream media (see Bárcenas 2016). The interviews were thematically coded by hand to provide greater interpretive precision for themes.

Participant observation, or ‘observant participation’ (Sullivan & Brockington 2004), remains particularly important for the insight and discussion within this article. Between 2014 and 2017 the authors lived in Gui’Xhi’ Ro. These periods of permanence were concentrated around times of social upheaval, where, according to anarchist ethnographic research ethics (Juris 2007; Springer 2016), we placed ourselves inside, within and as a part of the conflict. While contributing to decolonial methodology considered broadly (Smith 2013/1999; Zanotti et al. 2020; Murrey & Daley 2023), it goes beyond research inclusion and co-creation towards political affinity. This affinity implies the development of complicities as common struggles, which were intertwined with research. Rejecting the disembodied researcher, despite differences of resources, privilege and positionality, the research sought to reveal the practices and socioecological impacts of wind energy development. While this anti-anthropology (Dunlap 2019a, 2024), or insurrectionary political ecology, approach is intensive and insightful, it resulted in struggle, hardship and repression. Entering the village through pre-existing solidarity networks (that can be traced back to the Oaxaca insurrection in 2006), we joined the *policía comunitaria* (Communitarian Police) part-time (and other authors full time). While the *policía comunitaria* is discussed further below, this article reflects on embodied experience in (low intensity) combat to demonstrate solidarity, common interest and understand the extent of developing wind energy extraction zones in the area. In addition to conducting day and night patrols with the *policía comunitaria* four days a week in 2015, research was conducted between January and May 2015 in nearby towns for the other three days by the lead researcher. The authors had varied periods of permanence and sustained levels of commitment with the *policía comunitaria* during 2014 and 2017.

We also participated in fishing activities, attended free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) consultations, alongside other public events and numerous social and religious ceremonies with members of the Gui’Xhi’ Ro/Álvaro Obregón resistance. While a handful of people interviewed have now passed away from armed conflict and old age, research participant confidentiality is particularly important considering the conflictive nature of the struggle that continues against the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (*Corredor Interoceánico del Istmo de Tehuantepec* (CIIT) (see Hofmann 2024). Research participants are referred to by gender or by means of broad identity descriptors – for example ‘farmer’, ‘fisherman’ or fake names related to animals they had existing relationships or affinity with. Fieldwork for the first author ended early

due to repression (and pressure from the host university), while other authors continued and experienced violent social upheavals. The authors, and many other outside supports, saw common cause in defending the land, sea and dignity of Gui'Xhi' Ro'.

BACKS AGAINST THE WALL: THE STRUGGLE FOR ZAPOTEC AUTONOMY IN GUI'XHI' RO'

In 2003, the findings from a USAID-sponsored report confirmed that the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region of Oaxaca, known locally as the *Istmo* (Isthmus), was home to 'the best wind resources on earth' (Elliott et al. 2003; IFC 2014, p1). This triggered a 'wind rush' in the Isthmus and, despite popular resistance in the region, by January 2015 there were already 1,608 wind turbines built, with double that number planned (Torres Contreras 2023). Towns across the Isthmus were protesting, even taking up militant self-defence against the imposition of wind energy development (Dunlap 2019, 2021; Dunlap & Correa-Arce 2022). Notable among this resistance was the fishing town of Álvaro Obregón, or Gui'Xhi' Ro' in Zapotec, that sat at the land entrance of the Barra de Santa Teresa sand bar (Barra) that separated the Big and Small Lagoon.

Mareña Renovables, which was organised to build 102 wind turbines on the Barra, tried to enter the area in 2004. The San Dionisio collective land commissioner (*comisariado*) Alvaro Sosa, without the knowledge of residents, accepted a bribe and signed a preliminary contract to lease the 1,643 hectares of the Barra to the Spanish corporation Preneal (Smith 2012). Once Preneal merged into the Spanish consortium Mareña Renovables, in 2007, they began conducting negotiations with politicians to build 102 wind turbines on the Barra and another thirty on the Pacific Ocean around Santa Maria del Mar (Dunlap 2018). Eventually, the PRI-affiliated mayor of San Dionisio del Mar, Miguel López Castellanos, was paid between 14-20 million pesos in 2011 (US\$1-1.5 million) to allow construction on the Barra (Smith 2012). This included the construction of three electric substations, a submarine cable (less than 1 km long), fifty-two kilometres of high voltage transmission lines from the Santa Maria Substation to Ixtepec, and six docking stations to facilitate maritime access, as well as improvement of old roads and construction of new ones (Dunlap 2018). Mareña Renovables, locals identified, was appropriating the name 'sea people' – *mareños* – into the company name that was regarded as a contradiction and

condescending manipulation. After a court injunction (*amparo*) in 2012 and militant opposition from San Dionisio del Mar, San Mateo del Mar and Álvaro Obregón/ Gui'Xhi' Ro' would unite traditionally divided Zapotec and Ikoot towns, forming 'the triangle of resistance', against the invasion of wind turbines by the lagoons and ocean

WIND ENERGY PENETRATION IN GUI'XHI' RO'

The Mareña Renovables project sparked an insurrection. This insurrection was the result of four principal factors: (1) failure to consult the town collectively; (2) clientelism and unequal benefit sharing; (3) regulation of access to the Barra and/or sea; and (4) the mass-death of fish during preliminary construction on the Barra (Dunlap 2018; see also Dunlap & Correa-Arce 2022). Eventually, a barricade was formed to stop the project, pushing the company out of the town. Ejection of the wind company from the area resulted in a series of encounters and battles with state police. On 2 February 2013 the town rose up to prevent 500 state police from breaking the barricade and gaining access to the Barra in 'the Battle of the Barra'. The town succeeded, which led to the formation of the *policía comunitaria* (Communitarian police) and the *cabildo comunitario* (Community Counsel) known together as the Communitarians. After the victory, the Communitarians realised that if the Barra and the sea were to remain safe from development, their struggle would need to orient against *all* political parties. On 8 December 2013 (APIIDTT 2014), the Community Counsel peacefully seized the town hall (figure 2), which included expropriating a police car, pickup and dump trucks, and an ambulance. In accordance with federal law that creates a separate space for Indigenous self-governance in designated communities (see Stephen 2005; Dunlap 2018), the Communitarians, attempting to appropriate and exercise this legal space, began a process of Indigenous self-governance known as *usos y costumbres*, literally translated as 'practices and customs' and based on various governance and communal assembly protocols. This formal political takeover, however, led to civil conflict.

The displaced political officials, with the support of (the Leftist) Juchitán administration, formed the Constitutionalists, commonly known as *Los Contrás* (The Enemy). This split within the town turned to violent clashes on 2 March 2014. The Constitutionalists attempted to violently take back the town hall, which resulted in a day-long battle between the two factions,

including throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails as well as shooting slingshots, fireworks and guns (Dunlap 2018). This resulted in a low-intensity civil war dynamic of two opposing factions co-existing in the town, with the Constitutionlists supported by various regional political authorities indirectly supported by the wind companies, while the Communitarians had widespread support from grassroots and self-organised movements, including teachers, peace activists, (various) Marxists and anarchists, to name a few. The Constitutionlists are a political authority based on existing clientelist political networks, rejuvenated by wind company funds to local authorities that promised developmental prosperity to the town. While popularly contested, a struggle emerged to buy 'the conscience' of the town and to impose political authority and the wind project through a struggle of attrition. This brief outline of the ecological conflict in Gui'Xhi' Ro'/ Álvaro Obregón provides the basic background to discuss this situation.



Figure 2, Álvaro Obregón's Communitarian Town Hall,
Police truck and jail, photo: authors, 2015

Civilised traps, institutional coercion and theoretical considerations

As the Elder ‘Wild Cat’, discussing the entrance of the Mareña Renovables in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’, pointed out:

When we take their money ... we are giving them our hands so they can tie them. We will not have our road anymore, the freedom to move on that road and the freedom to go to the Lagoon. The wealth that God gave us in those Lagoons will be turned over to the wind energy companies. *That is why a lot of people from this town would prefer to die than to turn over that wealth.*⁵

Despite statist and capitalist hegemony, many Indigenous people and anarchists are willing to die for their freedom, the earth and, in this case, the sea and their way of life. People identifying and defending their social values alongside maintaining and/or reviving their imagination and political trajectory remains essential in general (Gelderloos 2022, p175), but especially to mitigate, or deflect, their acculturation and subsumption, *in whole or in part*, into the statist political economy or, in Wolfe’s (2006, p388) terms, a ‘structure’ of conquest.

Anarchist tensions were present in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’, not only in self-identification, but also through the autonomous anti-political disposition of the *polícia comunitaria*. Animating this and other desires within the struggle in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’, a member of the *cabildo comunitario* explained to a crowd from an anarchist solidarity caravan:

All the people that you can see here are the same people that fight against the wind energy projects. We are not saying ‘no’ just for the sake of saying ‘no’. We know with certainty that this project is not going to bring any kind of benefit to the community as a whole. The so-well-advertised ‘clean energy’ will destroy our Indigenous community. We are very conscious about everything. We are simple people, as you can see, but we are determined. We are here to fight, to resist. We are rebels. The phrase on the wall of the kiosk [behind us] says: ‘We will not take one step backwards, we will be united and we will not stop’ – this is indicative of our determination. We have similar ideas as you [anarchists]. We are against all political parties. When I started to read about Flores Magón, about all the pioneers and all the European anarchists I felt that we are the same, and all the twenty to thirty persons that are here right now have the same ideas as you.⁶

Anarchists had maintained relationships and solidarity with Gui'Xhi' Ro' before the Battle of the Barra. Even if an earlier genealogy might exist, the connection in Gui'Xhi' Ro' directly connects to solidarity during the 2006 Oaxaca City insurrection (see Vásquez 2007; Stephen 2013). Among numerous anarchists historically (Maldonado 2012; Cappelletti 2017; de Laforcade & Hirsch 2020; Anonymous 2021; Dunlap 2022), and the ones present in Gui'Xhi' Ro' during this conflict, there is an unquestioned common enemy, if not varying and differing levels of affinity depending on people (and their dispositions). Central to this connection in Gui'Xhi' Ro' and various anarchist collectives was a collective interest in reviving the ecological autonomy that historically characterises southern Mexico (Tutino 2007). Nevertheless, the task facing Gui'Xhi' Ro' was immense and complicated, which leads to considering the organisation of the Communitarians, specifically the *cabildo comunitario* (Community Counsel) and *Policia comunitaria* (Communitarian police), from an anti-political (anarchist) perspective. As Gelderloos (2024) recently reminds us, organisational technologies and the relationships that animate them are foundational to maintaining autonomous territories and, by extension, permanent ecological conflict.

Cabildo comunitario

The *cabildo* was originally a colonial technology of the Spanish Crown. 'The Spanish colonial structure, intervention, checks and balances may be judged a brilliantly conceived means of maintaining under colonial status a vast overseas empire', writes historian Fredrick Pike (1958, 139) continuing that 'nowhere was the success of this system more evident than on the level of local administration in the 'Indies', where it served to prevent the rise of an unchecked spirit of local autonomy while tending to preserve sentiments of loyalty to the crown'. The *cabildo* was the native municipal government that worked in accordance with *repartimiento* (the Spanish system of forced labour and production), the Catholic Church and the legal system (Yannakakis 2008). These governmental elements form the embryo of the colonial structure to legitimise socio/cultural and economic conquest. 'The average degree of intervention to which cabildos were subjected did not destroy independence of action', writes Pike (1958, pp157-8), adding that the cabildos 'had considerable ambit in which to experiment with certain of the [sic] forms of self-government'. The *cabildo* in Oaxaca emerged, and fused, with the well-known imperial and authoritarian legacy of Zapotec civilisation (Campbell et al. 1993; Zeitlin 2005). As Gelderloos (2017,

pp187-91) contends, this creates a foothold for colonial powers to employ strategies of indirect rule and administrative decentralisation, which today continue to blossom under some form of Chale's Hale (2002) and Astrid Ulloa (2013) conception of neoliberalism multiculturalism.

The right mix of trade, extermination, gifts, 'opportunities' and the introduction of political structures of legitimisation not only implanted the *cabildo* model but sustained it by permitting degrees of autonomy to construct a system of self-governance. The *cabildo* remains an underrepresented technology of statism (Ince & Barrera 2024), deserving greater sustained mixed methods research. Self-governance, now emblematic of the progressive—and conflict ridden – *uso y costumbres* legislation (Stephen 2005), continues this (statist/colonial) governance concession, which acts as a Mexican government strategy of indirect rule of unruly rural areas. This, among other reasons, is why Gustavo Esteva (2009, p47) writes: 'Those who taste power, whether at the summit of the State or in the smallest posts in some remote town, are made delirious by it. A similar delirium affects those who struggle for it'. Strategies of indirect rule and (statist) self-governance, thinking of Guattari (2009 [1973]), Foucault (1998) and Perlman (Gordon, 2023), unleashes these subordinate desires, making corporatism, clientelism and municipal rights structurally violent governmental technologies (Rubin 1997; Nuijten, 2003).

Decentralised corporatism, while permitting strong degrees of local autonomy, still constructs, in planning terms, a system of 'administrative decentralization'. Differing 'from community control', explains Jennifer Light (2003, p184), administrative decentralisation 'brought government closer to the people but did not hand over fundamental power'. Administrative decentralisation is the cybernetic incarnation of colonial systems of indirect rule, which viewed local leadership, social services, political participation and other amenities as central to managing local power and mitigating conflict. The 'delirium' for power, explains Esteva (2009, p47), impacts everyone, leaving them open to statist administrative decentralisation strategies, because 'power is a relation, not a thing that can be distributed, that some have and others lack, that one can conquer and exercise in the name of diverse goals, like any tool'. The allure for power, especially within colonial/statist architectures, embeds relations of domination (Bakunin 1990; Gordon 2023). Said differently, strategies of administrative decentralisation have deep colonial roots and construct hierarchical systems of government from the 'bottom-up'.

This requires a critical tension between self-governance and management.

Virilio (2008, p111) contends that the ‘desire for self-management coexists with a desire for hyper-centralization’, which attests to the decentralised systems of government, including neoliberal multiculturalism (Stahler-Sholk 2007; Ulloa 2013). The cultural values, relationships and dispositions adopted when facing insidious politico-military strategies of decentralised control cannot be overstated. The civil-military methods for countering insurgencies are rather explicit about employing ‘education’, ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘sustainability’ within so-called democratic political administrations (Dunlap & Correa-Arce 2022, pp462-3). In conversation, the Communitarians frequently acknowledged the legacy of the Zapotec empire (Zeitlin 2005; Gelderloos 2017), which historically created tensions between Zapotec and Ikoots, and actively wanted to take the best from the past (e.g. convivial technologies, agricultural practices) and leave the worst (e.g. hierarchy, inequality and imperialism). The project of Gui’Xhi’ Ro’ autonomy sought the resurgence of a Zapotecism to affirm egalitarianism, ecological relationships and convivial energy production.⁷

The struggle for Gui’Xhi’ Ro’ autonomy, however, faced significant structural challenges. Various Christian and Catholic churches, and these religions – sometimes amended by animism – retained a strong presence in the village. These institutions, which Isthemos have historically maintained their religions within (Campbell et al. 1993), still exerted an influence. Patriarchies, while negotiated, were still present alongside domestic violence and child abuse – features common to Mexico and elsewhere. Again, common to the Americas and reservations (Duran & Duran 1995), alcoholism and drug addiction were present, which extends to narcotics traffickers increasingly coming into the Isthmus, which led to a rise in violence in the period between 2016 and 2020 (Dunlap & Correa-Arce 2022). The church, elites (*caciques*) and political authorities exerted influence in the region, presenting a continuous challenge. Meanwhile, the Contreras, the threat of military intervention and extra-judicial skirmishes were factors shaping the struggle against wind turbine invasion and the politics that ‘sold out’ the people and the land. This stresses the complications of conflicts, lower or high-intensity, and whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous daily life is significantly influenced by the imposition of the national/international economy and the repressive forces that spread industrial (and digital) development – or in the words of Marcos (2001), the Fourth World War.

This attempt at community control in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’ was related to Oaxaca State’s recognition of Indigenous customary law: *usos y costumbres*. Obtaining

this legal recognition was not without serious struggle inside and outside state institutions. Consistent with neoliberal multiculturalism, and previous colonial governance strategies, funds were provided to recognise semi-autonomous Indigenous municipalities. Neoliberal multiculturalism seeks to maintain relative political cohesion, adapting to widespread upheavals for Indigenous self-determination and autonomy in Mexico and beyond (Stahler-Sholk 2007; Ulloa 2013). The problem in Gui'Xhi' Ro', like other Indigenous communities (Benally 2023), is that Zapotec municipal agents or politicians – whether associated with the COCEI or the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) – have sold out the land and/or sea, the culture and the poor. Zapotec castes and elites have been (Campbell et al. 1994), and continue to be, an issue for autonomy in these areas. When politicians and collaborating locals began selling the land, sea and dignity of people in the area, it was done unequally and without transparency (Howe et al. 2015; Dunlap 2018, 2019; Sellwood & Valdivia 2018). In the case of the wind energy conflict, the only direction left for residents was insurrection, evicting the company and seizing the town hall. After taking the town hall, the Communitarians established a form of *usos y costumbres*, which attempted to form a type of *comunalidad* (Luna 2010; Manzo 2011). This governance system is designed around *civil cargos* (community public duty), *mayordomías* (religious cargos/communal festivals), *tequio* (communal work obligations) and *cooperación* (collective pooling of resources for public works) (Stephen 2005). Among the civil cargo is the *topilillo* or *polícia comunitaria* that, discussed in greater depth below, serves a similar function following this tradition of communal services without pay. The Communitarian takeover implemented a less bureaucratised version of what already existed, opening greater spaces of democratic participation built on familial consensus.

There are benefits to mimicking the municipal agency, not only in terms of becoming legitimate in the eyes of the state and receiving funds, but also by not disrupting existing social norms. If the Communitarians could prove their legitimate status in the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (or later International Court) then they could also receive state funds, which would enable them to enact an alternative to extractive megaproject development (Escobar 2012/1995; Hofmann 2024). The legal process, however, required a lot of solidarity, especially from lawyers and, as we were initially told, was supposedly not the priority of the Communitarians. The municipal administration and assembly consisted of the Council of Elders (*Consejo de Ancianos*) who were the respected elders, representing key families in the town. The situ-

ation, however, was in a state of permanent tension, which only worsened after June 2015.

Oppressive patriarchal and religious norms remained largely unquestioned, because of the constant struggle to please the community and replicate the model of leadership and administration familiar to the town. That said, throughout this process aiming for autonomy, oppressive norms were slowly challenged in practice. This included reducing stigmatisation for using marijuana publicly, questioning centralised leaderships of politicians (and expanding horizontality), and challenging existing forms of patriarchy with women coming in solidarity from other parts of Mexico and participating in the *policia comunitaria* and battles. The Doñas, the mature women of Gui'Xhi' Ro', were a central foundation to the Communitarians. While men would fish at extremely early hours according to the tide, participate in unpaid bureaucratic cabildo duties, pursue paid work or drink; the doñas would be cooking and feeding everyone, providing an important logistics of care that sustained the struggle. On days of self-defence, like the 2013 Battle of the Barra, the 2014 Town Hall attack and the June 2015 invasion, the doñas were the last line of defence: if they were not preparing food they were standing in front of piles of rocks with large sticks ready to fight.

Gui'Xhi' Ro' was largely united around the sea. Even people collaborating with the wind companies have been recorded saying that they will *still* rise up when the companies enter to build. This, however, stresses the difficulties of poverty, the manufactured desire of progress and politics that underline the micro-politics of development (Dunlap, 2019a). The fact that so many ecoterritorial movements from Mexico, Latin America and around the world valued their struggle further empowered the process of cultural revitalisation, resurgence and autonomy. The struggle for Indigenous autonomy initiated positive social change that questioned the various oppressions that exist in everyday practices and desires. Undoubtedly an example of self-determination, organisation and sustained opposition, the *cabildo* still takes on municipal tasks and affirms existing political and industrial relationships that are energetically and logistically taxing on the struggle, creating a 'colonial hook' of conformity and promoting political divisions of labour between administrators, the Council of Elders (*Consejo de Ancianos*) and the *policia comunitaria*. The question arises, what are ways to extend and make this struggle more resilient that will challenge the deeply embedded costly and oppressive, if familiar, relationships? The next section turns to the *Polícia comunitaria* before considering this question in the concluding discussion.

Policia comunitaria

Since 2014 the *policia comunitaria*⁸ became responsible for police activities in the town. This includes civil affairs, monitoring who enters the town and protecting the Barra from survey crews and construction. This is all done on a voluntary and unpaid basis by the community, which is rooted in conceptions of *comunalidad* (see Martínez-Luna 2010; Manzo 2011). Comprised of over thirty official members, the Communitarian police use two pickup trucks taken from the town hall takeover (Figure 3), have informal ranks and a captain who participates in the Community Council. There are no women in the Communitarian Police. Women, as mentioned above, sustain the logistics in the town. This ‘care-work’ can be conceptualised as ‘care logistics’ (Caretta et al. 2020, p55), which takes on another intensity during repeated clashes at barricades and, later, the townhall. The Communitarians receive communal support from many families, who provide food to the Community Council, the Communitarian Police and their visitors.



Figure 3, Communitarian Police leaving for patrol, source: APIIDTT, 30 March 2014

Some members of the Communitarian Police have served in the military, but nearly all of them have entered the work-related migration corridors, working in hotel construction in tourist areas, agricultural fields, factories. Some were also participants in powerful gangs in Mexico and the United States. While out-migration was a reoccurring issue (Stephen 2007; Walia 2021), migration and different experiences generated a critique of modernity and urban life. While material poverty and lack of work was daunting in the Isthmus, becoming a member of the urban working poor – working all day, paying rent – and (for better or worse) being exposed to drugs, sex work and criminal enterprises, seeded reflections about the importance of Zapotec territory with little-to-no rent, high quality vegetables, fruits, corn tortilla products (e.g. totopo) and rich sea food (e.g. shrimp, crabs and various fish). The sea, fish and other communitarian relations they saw being destroyed by the arrival of the wind energy project necessitated autonomous resistance.

Everyday skills and experience were essential to developing what could be called permanent ecological conflict. The Communitarian police were also all fishermen. Drawing an important link between fishing, ecological autonomy and defence. ‘The Tank’, referring to the Battle of the Barra, explained:

When we were at the barricade and the police were moving toward us a lot of us using our fisherman wisdom start to move just like when we are fishing and start to surround the police. It’s important the fisherman wisdom, and with our slingshots we made them run because they knew that we had them.⁹

Fishing knowledge was the conceptual reference in battles that led to victories. Mixed with combative experiences with the COCEI between the 1970s-1990s (Campbell et al. 1994; Rubin 1997), this type of collective knowledge and communal relationship is sensitive and invaluable. Fishing, hunting, gardening and day labouring, along with flirtation and immersion in crime, were essential skills in organising and executing combative resistance.

While there are relational and valuable processes taking place, there were various intensities of divisions of labour, which affirmed gender roles, concentrated power and, most importantly, reproduced a form of government. Albeit more horizontal, the Cabildo, Council of Elders and Communitarian Police formed an administrative apparatus, complete with bureaucratised roles, a situation made only more difficult due to the pressure from the Mexican state,

wind companies and Constitutionlists. The Communitarian Police, however, began to represent the specialisation of domestic coercion. From the perspective of statism or colonial governance this is normal, even desirable, to most people (Williams 2011; Neocleous 2014). Police specialisation, however, still separates people into those with and those without authority and promotes a relation of governance to facilitate control and manage the town. This was combined with various relational and communal nuances rooted in place, but still exhibiting predictable outcomes of policing. The Communitarian Police were strong, dangerous and brutal. Within the community this caused concerns that the *Cabildo* was just another gang struggling for power within the town (see Rodgers 2006). Repressive state, federal, local and extra-judicial governmental pressures only provided greater stress, over time creating distance between the *Cabildo* and some of their supporters. The Communitarian Police appropriated an apparatus that required people to work as 'police' patrolling the town, picking up intoxicated individuals (sometimes their own who did not attend their shift), and mediating conflicts while combating Constitutionalist provocations, politicians and companies. The model of policing most familiar to statism, even in the case of *Gui'Xhi' Ro'*, with its more human development, scale and execution, was still replicated.

Generally speaking, anarchists had an uncritical attitude toward the Communitarian Police, and the Communitarians in general. This undoubtedly emerges with respecting the foreign context and enthusiasm to participate in Communitarian Police patrols. Frequent, however, were discussions between the anarchists. One recorded conversation began by offering a critique regarding organisation, specifically relating it to the origins of police in the United States and Europe (Williams 2007; Foucault 2002/1973, 2007/1975). This began with them saying, 'it is really wrong to try and see that [Euro-American police power] here', which can understandably be read as Eurocentric. Inversely, recognising the history of US intervention and training of the military, police and 'political police' in Mexico (Müller 2012; Granovsky-Larsen & Paley 2019), this question remains valid even in the face of contextual and cultural specificities.

An important distinction was that the statist police/prison system is designed to terrorise, torture and breed submission to political economy, while the Communitarian Police in *Gui'Xhi' Ro'*, obviously operating on a much smaller-scale, has a completely different relationship that does not isolate people from the community. When in jail, friends and family can come 'offer you cigarettes, water and food', and 'families can decide how things are going to be

fixed', explains the anarchist 'Jabalí'. When Jabalí and the authors were either witnessing and/or participating in some of these events this relational distinction got clouded by (1) being in a police truck, (2) conducting patrols with an intimidating demeanour and (3) doing police work, such as grabbing people and putting them in jail. The Communitarian Police were designed for communal and participatory resolution through cooperation that created social, as opposed to isolating, conditions of confinement.

This does not change concerns regarding organisations, nor the observations and experiences we had with the Communitarian Police. Communitarian Police, the first author said, 'are still fulfilling that structural role by arresting people, hosting events and maintaining a type of social peace'. Eventually, after discussing the positive impacts of the Communitarian Police in the town and then specific violent events, Jabalí acknowledged:

Ahhhhh, it is, I see troubles, so I am not trying to paint this like: 'Hey, these are the best guys ever'. I know they have a lot of troubles and they are violent guys and they act sometimes like they believe they are cops, you know? But that is something that needs to be broken by them, if they want to, it is not like destiny or something to make them understand ... Because from where we come from the police fucking arrest us all the time, for how we look, who we are, and what we are. So, they should not be trying to scare the people to take control of things [in the town]; like the things they do at the bars sometimes – that is horrible. I shared that [experience] with you. You are at the bar drinking and there is a [police] patrol outside watching you [with intimidating and violent eyes] – that is horrible.

This last part, referring to 'I share this with you', references a specific Communitarian Police patrol ride, when the first author and Jabalí were riding in the back of the truck, everyone with slingshots, machetes and some with shotguns when we drove by a bar full of Constitutionals. The truck just stopped; the Communitarians were masked up glaring at them in the bar. While this activity was frequent, the behaviour triggered this conversation since we have all, and to various degrees, faced violent intimidation by the police in and outside Mexico.

The pedagogical point raised by Jabalí regarding social change – it is behaviour 'that needs to be broken by them' – should not be taken lightly, indicating the delicacy and challenge of deeper socio/political change. This, however, does not change the problem of police. Policing structurally promotes a particular

type of self-image and biopolitical view of the population, which creates specialised roles dealing with and administering uncomfortable and violent situations. This creates an unfavourable psycho/social position, creating the space for acting out sadism and legitimate coercion in the name of the 'community'. We witnessed, on more than one occasion, the use of this authority to advance individual vendettas and self-interest, even if the line between the personal and the political was difficult to decipher in this (semi-)autonomous conflict triggered by large-scale wind extractivism projects.

The Communitarian Police have undoubtedly had positive roles in Gui'Xhi' Ro' and elsewhere (Sierra 2005; Fuentes Díaz & Fini 2018). During interviews in 2015, despite some of the criticisms, people resolutely, with a few Constitutionalist exceptions, saw the Communitarians having a positive impact (Dunlap 2018). Discussing the difficult situation of autonomous struggle is not intended to discredit the Communitarians: they are defending themselves, the land and their way of life. Rather, this article, taking up a theme in insurrectionary political ecology, is an attempt to problematise organisational strategies of resistance to avoid costly logistics, (patriarchal) divisions of labour and the reproduction of oppression under new leaders and rules. This, however, needs to come from everyone in the struggle, which is the challenge of organising permanent ecological conflict. Organisations tend to prioritise their existence over the issues they are fighting – 'that which stagnates rots' – which can lead to compromises and negotiations with unsavoury political and entrepreneurial actors. The question remains how resistance can become resilient, sustainable and indefinite against the repressive and alluring forces of statism and capitalism. The only real answer to this will be found in praxis, and this article, and the section below, seeks to offer some reflection on this experience.

NO CONCLUSION, ONLY DISCUSSION: PERMANENT ECOLOGICAL CONFLICT

The circulation of anarchists, leftists and others in Gui'Xhi' Ro' allowed the cross-pollination of ideas, information, knowledge, experience and, even, different appearances that challenged village (colonial) norms. The proposal here is to revive, build and expand networks of ecological autonomy and self-defence. Organising ecological autonomy and self-defence is the foundation of permanent ecological conflict, which unleashes an ecosystem of tactics. Instead of making counter-power organisations with administrations, 'the party' or police,

the idea would be to adapt informal anarchist organising based on the botanical rhizome to create ecological autonomy with all that entails. The notion of the rhizome, explains Springer (2016, p155), ‘is marked by a horizontal ontology, wherein things, ideas, and politics are able to link up in non-hierarchical patterns of association’. Not only does this strategy have historical precedents in rural areas, especially in Oaxaca (Tutino 1988, 2007; Campbell et al. 1993), but it re-conceptualises approaches to achieving autonomy and strengthening already existing relations diluted by colonial/statist imposition and (Eurocentric) Marxian forms of organisation and resistance (Esteva 2009). This challenges colonial, leftist and anarchist (syndicalist) models of administration rooted in civilised and industrial thinking. Permanent ecological conflict is a challenge to statism that advocates horizontal, informal, evasive, and self-organised resistance and/or resurgence. Ecological autonomy means working towards achieving food, electricity, sanitation and medical autonomy that reprioritises individuals and collectives to understand their capacity to create (Siamanta 2025), consume and begin to break with industrial/modernist dependency and addiction.

Autonomy, or permanent ecological conflict, is not about sustaining failing or costly infrastructure or towns but instead becoming increasingly conscious about the cultural values practiced and the food and the building material used – which includes integrating biological waste back into farming practices as well as reviving nearly exterminated ecological, medical and other land-based practices. This might entail drawing on insights from agroecology, rural and urban permaculture when appropriate, but the point, as the communitarian Elder reminded us, is that: ‘*Government will never lose when they give money to you*’.¹⁰ Ecological autonomy is the development of capacity through the self and others, which means establishing autonomy from within first, while simultaneously working to find, create and/or organise networks of people who feel strong about developing autonomous post developmental relationships to expand the commons/communal relationships based on need and (anarchistic) political antagonisms.

The situation in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’ is difficult, and this conflict lies dormant after a relative victory, repression and infighting. Eventually, Mareña Renovables changed their name to Eólica del Sur and their project location in the Isthmus. Meanwhile, after a series of shootouts and deaths (Torres Contreras 2023), the Communitarians became less formal and normalcy returned.¹¹ The insurrection against the wind energy company and political parties was not only an exercise in self-determination and post development, but also an attempt at reclaiming the future. This, however, does not change the difficulty of becoming autono-

mous amidst a conflict that has divided families, produced death and caused a proliferation of serious wounds, injuries, stress and accelerated ecological degradation (Howe et al. 2015; Dunlap 2018; Sellwood & Valdivia 2018; Dunlap 2018, 2019a, 2019b).¹² The experience of combative self-defence and municipal regime change has created new spaces of freedom, empowered residents and opened up pathways to further visualise new possibilities (as well as recognise new problems). The Communitarians articulated a counter-power that sought to combat statist-corporate interests and control, meanwhile becoming the new political force in town. The situation became increasingly divided, while the people were increasingly exhausted by the conflict, which for some included questioning the motives of the Communitarians.

Historically, a common tactic used by colonial powers and reaction by Indigenous groups is to begin organising on similar civilised and colonial terms to create leaders managing counter-powers, armies and, in this case, police (Boot 2013; Gelderloos 2017). In developing permanent ecological conflict, the idea is ‘the creation of defence without a body, condensed nowhere’ (Virilio 1980, p268, 1990), but ready to defend Indigenist¹³ and anarchistic values of social and ecological harmony everywhere. There remains an open question: How can Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities create ‘shapeless’, ‘fluid and vaporous’ forms of (anti-racist) resistance to develop capacities of ecological autonomy and self-defence? The colonial/statist organisational relationships are rotten – ‘what is stagnant will rot’ – creating systemic corruption through hierarchies, specialisation and divisions of labour. Reconsidering the legacy and contextual histories of ecological autonomy and self-defence seeks to advance permanent ecological conflict. The challenge of insurrectionary political ecology remains to develop praxis centred on ecological autonomy and popular defence. This would eliminate, if not reduce, political divisions of labour that permit colonial relations that pave over flora and fauna with asphalt, concrete and fibre optic cables, leaving ecosystems and the traditions of reciprocity forgotten in the light emanating from LCD screens.

The Communitarians reproduced specialisation and divisions of labour that risk being resource intensive, even on a small scale. Furthermore, organising coercive political control with a Communitarian Police force led to a significant obstacle: *becoming* government. Becoming government required the maintenance of order, administering civil works and taking over the roles of the municipality, which includes taking responsibility for administering industrial-scale utility systems. The insurrection against wind energy had many reasons,

but the question arises: how will Indigenous autonomy come to terms with the electrical, water and sanitation infrastructural grids as well as modern food consumption and waste patterns? This enduring post development challenge was, and continues to be, negotiated by the Communitarians, anarchists and other groups by theorising, discussing and finding practical ways to overcome these issues. At the time, this included ideas to 'recycle and resist', to transform waste (notably specifically plastics) into resources for resistance, and forming agricultural cooperatives. Self-determined and autonomous conflicts must face the barrier of negotiating dependency and desire for industrialised utility systems, especially as they fight imposed and extractive development: in this case, wind turbines on their territory. Consistent with insights from critical scholars (TIC 2015; Vidalou 2017; Kallios et al. 2023), the Communitarians had to directly confront the multifaceted 'power effects' of the (statist) power of infrastructural amenities that residents expected. Becoming government forces the negotiation of modern amenities, further illuminating a post development dilemma to overcome.

Despite political divisions, the existing practice of care-work sustained a combative logistics in Gui'Xhi' Ro'. Wind energy development threatens this autonomy by degrading land and, more so, the quantity and quality of fish in the lagoon that are foundational to this possibility. Targeting food supplies, rivers and, famously, buffalo in the 'Plains Wars' are standard methods of colonial warfare and counterinsurgency (Grenier 2005; Boot 2013; Dunlap 2019). This stresses the importance of socio territorial movements developing ecological autonomy, which seeks to develop material capacity through informal, familial relationships or other forms of anti-authoritarian organising (see Gelderloos 2024). While above ground communal logistics and exchange that already exist could expand, resistance takes a more clandestine character.

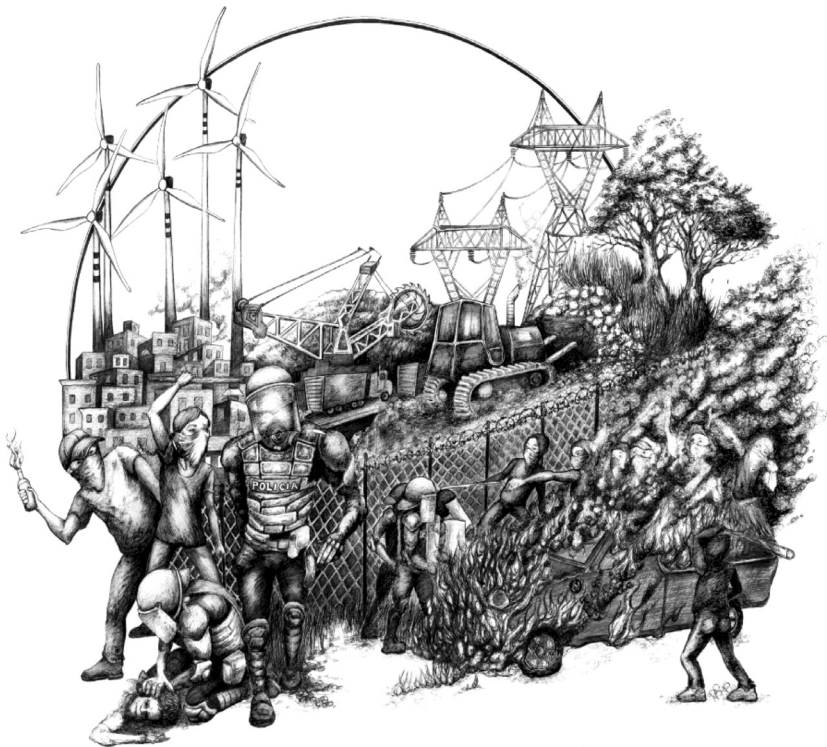
Resistance networks are organised through decentralised informality, maybe even without participants ever meeting, to create zones of ecological defence. Opposition, defence and resistance seek to be embedded and permanent features, similar to the decentralised popular networks in Northern Ireland that would bang garbage cans and pans as a popular alarm logistics when the British military were invading neighbourhoods. While permanent conflict can weave through struggle with armed vanguardist groups, permanent ecological resistance seeks to displace the vanguards and specialised militant (Bakunin 1990; Esteva 2009), instead organising affinity and familial relationships to form networks of militant self-defence that can spread out from points of contestation. Reflecting

on urban struggle in the 1960s, Ben Morea (2025) also advances this idea of informal organising through ‘the family’, which provided a model of anti-authoritarian armed action. Markus Kröger (2021) also documents similar relations in struggles against steel mines and smelters in India, reminding us that ‘viral’ and informal resistance strategies have a precedent.

Imagine in the case of Gui’Xhi’ Ro’, or elsewhere, how to create a situation where people can live their lives – fishing, farming, swimming, playing and hanging out at the beach – and can respond informally to mining, wind or so-called ‘security’ companies attempting to invade the town. The division of labour, time and resource demanded by the *Cabildo*, which included a gendered division of care work, should be minimised. When people were doing communitarian police patrols (which stopped in 2017), they were not farming, collecting wood, fishing or enjoying other pastimes, which became a resource drain, and sought to conform to Mexican legal standards. This indicates a challenge. The Communitarians were fulfilling the official role of the municipality, seeking to construct legitimacy and, consequently, reproducing a system that was costly in terms of energy, material and finance. This underlines the challenge with autonomous struggles constantly having to negotiate the hegemony of statist bureaucracy. This challenge to insurrectionary political ecologies is identified to further conceptualise and experiment with negotiating, subverting or undoing this reality.

The *Polícia Comunitaria*, furthermore, was a relational and material challenge to be undone. Could people patrol by doing their day-to-day tasks? This considers how people could form text networks or, if lack of cell service or repressive circumstances demanded, employ other means, such as developing communication methods with signals, whether with smoke signals, flares, or the like, to trigger the formation of groups with existing affinities and plans, in accordance with other affinity or familial groups, to combat the coming police invasion to break a barricade. Departing from the ego of the ‘badass’ Vato, ‘insurgent’ or ‘cop’ in the back of the patrol truck, ecological defence merges with lived values, trust and existing relationships to establish commitment and collective organisational discipline. Trusted relationships through childhood friendships, family, sports, fishing or working crews already exist in Gui’Xhi’ Ro’, but becomes a matter of intention, method and organisation. This organisation of permanent ecological conflict becomes clouded by political parties, authorities and their coercive and psychological interventions injected into the areas, which extends to the spread of cocaine, crack and methamphetamines. Affinity groups adapt their actions to the battle, remaining as unpredictable and illegible as possible.

This means developing informal and evasive logistics against military, police intelligence – integrated with marketing and data platforms – and civil services that seek to eliminate this invisibility. While forming networks of resistance, equally important are care logistics that exist before, during and after the battle in various capacities. People tend to the wounded, create and reinforce existing health care facilities and return to their lives. This might, arguably, include discussing how to have temporary or *emergency cabildos* to facilitate organisational processes. Important, however, is that they do not become stagnant bureaucratic features that absorb life, pastimes and other interests: they are part-time at best. The idea is to make living life first and organising life secondary. Despite the hardship of existent realities and struggles, permanent ecological conflict is about affirming, creating and maintaining joy – rejecting becoming a ‘cog’ in a counter-power machine.



Artwork by Riona O'Regan

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Ana Kristel Martínez, “Educación, infancias y protagonismo infantil. Autodeterminación de los pueblos. Saberes locales. Antropología política. Feminismos comunitarios”. Creando una biblioteca comunitaria con y desde las niñas y los niños’, *SOCIOGÉNESIS*, Junio, 2020

NOTES

- 1 See Campbell (1994) and Rubin (1997) for a deeper history in English.
- 2 Ejército Popular Revolucionario.
- 3 ‘There is a push by settler leftists, particularly by those entangled in the academic industry, to define an Indigenous Anarchism’, explains Benally (2022, p11, 2023, p227). Reading the introduction by Dupuis-Déri and Pillet (2023/2019), affirms Benally’s (2022, 2023, p344) concerns.
- 4 One of these interviews, with some edits, was almost published in its entirety by Dunlap (2019b). This interview serves as an informal epilogue to *Renewing Destruction: Wind Energy Development, Conflict and Resistance in a Latin American Context* (Dunlap, 2019a).
- 5 Interview, 9 May 2015.
- 6 Public Talk, 15 January 2015.
- 7 Fieldnotes, April 2015.
- 8 This is not ‘community police’ as this references a type of policing that comes

- from the state apparatus and combines with institutional agendas and police militarisation (see Williams 2007; Williams et al. 2013; Nomad 2016).
- 9 Interview FN, 16 February 2015.
 - 10 Interview FN-B5, 8 May 2015.
 - 11 There are at least five deaths related to the wind energy conflict in the region and numerous wounding yet calculating 'wind energy' related murders and/or deaths are difficult to discern from political elections and other political issues and projects in the Isthmus. People claim 21 June 2020, for example is one among them; there were two women and 13 men massacred, and this related to numerous political issues and wind turbines (Dunlap & Correa-Arce 2022).
 - 12 The rapid expansion of wind extraction zones in other parts of the Isthmus has also stressed the Lagoon (Lucio 2016; Dunlap, 2019).
 - 13 See Ward Churchill's (2003), 'I Am Indigenist: Notes on the Ideology of the Fourth World', to read an elaboration on this concept.

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