

Revisiting the wind energy conflict in Gui'Xhi' Ro / Álvaro Obregón: interview with an indigenous anarchist

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Abstract

Revisiting the village of Álvaro Obregón, or Gui'Xhi' Ro in Zapotec, this interview discusses village life since the wind energy conflict of 2012-2015. This interview serves as a companion piece or epilogue to a previously published article in the *Journal of Political Ecology (JPE)*, titled: "Insurrection for land, sea and dignity: resistance and autonomy against wind energy in Álvaro Obregón, Mexico" (2018). The interview discusses the subsequent skirmishes, shootings, debates over state funds, impact of migration, schooling programs and cultural revitalization projects that are shaping the autonomous process taking shape in Gui'Xhi' Ro.

Keywords: Wind energy; development; conflict; resistance; schooling; self-defense; post-development

Résumé

Cette interview porte sur la vie de village à Álvaro Obregón, ou Gui'Xhi' Ro à Zapotec, au Mexique, depuis le conflit de l'énergie éolienne survenu de 2012 à 2015. C'est un complément ou un épilogue à un article déjà paru dans le *Journal of Political Ecology (JPE)* intitulé: «Insurrection pour la terre, la mer et la dignité: résistance et autonomie contre l'énergie éolienne à Álvaro Obregón, Mexique» (2018). L'entretien discute des escarmouches, fusillades, débats autour des fonds publics, de l'impact de la migration, des programmes scolaires et des projets de revitalisation culturelle qui façonnent le processus autonome qui se dessine à Gui'Xhi' Ro.

Mots clés: énergie éolienne; développement; conflit; la résistance; scolarité; auto défense; post-développement

Resumen

De regreso al pueblo de Álvaro Obregón, or Gui'Xhi' Ro en Zapoteco, esta entrevista analiza la vida cotidiana del pueblo despues del conflict sobre energia eolica 2012-2015. Este entrevista sirve como complemento o epilogo de un artículo publicado anteriormente en la *Journal of Political Ecology (JPE)*, titulado "Insurreccion por tierra, mar, y dignidad: resistencia y autonomía contra la energia eólica en Álvaro Obregón, México" (2018). La entrevista analiza los debates sobre fondos estatales, los encuentros violentos posteriores, los tiroteos, el impacto de la migración, los programas educativos, y los proyectos de revitalización cultural que definen el proceso autónomo que se está configurando en Gui'Xhi' Ro.

Palabras clave: energía eólica; desarrollo; conflicto; resistencia; escolarizando; autodefensa; postdesarrollo

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Introduction

This interview follows up the 2018 *Journal of Political Ecology* (*JPE*) article titled "Insurrection for land, sea and dignity: resistance and autonomy against wind energy in Álvaro Obregón, Mexico" (Dunlap 2018b). The article outlined events in the Zapotec town of Álvaro Obregón, or Gui'Xhi'Ro in Zapotec, that was fighting the construction of 102 wind turbines on the Santa Teresa sand bar—the narrow strip of land that separates the Lagoon Inferior and Superior (Figure 1). This struggle, however, transformed into one for Indigenous autonomy and self-determination that continues into the present. The article outlines this conflict, the battles between the years of 2012-2015, and the different political factions, tensions and concerns within the town. Yet after I left Gui'Xhi'Ro in May 2015, violence continued to erupt until the present. This was acknowledged through secondary sources in the *JPE* article. Little, however, was actually known about the specifics surrounding this violence, and even some land defenders living in other cities—in different collectives—in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (*Istmo*) region did not know the situation² since internal political disagreements caused exaggerated rumors and newspaper articles circulated with limited information.

This interview offers some answers to not only to the violence that has continued in Gui'Xhi'Ro, but also the way the struggle for autonomy has unfolded. This conversation takes place in December 2018 and with a now long-time friend, we will call "Banda", who lives in the village and offers a detail account of the shootings, strife and developments that have taken place in the town. As the introduction of my recent book, *Renewing destruction: wind energy development, conflict and resistance in a Latin American context* notes there has been years of anarchist solidarity, collaboration and influence in Gui'Xhi'Ro (Dunlap 2019; see also García 2015). The book, however, avoids detailing these engagements for ethical reasons (see also Dunlap 2018b)³, yet Banda emerges as someone influenced by anarchist ideas and active in the larger project of Zapotec cultural revitalization. While working to preserve what is left, and to further revive Zapotec socio-ecological practices through anti-authoritarian ideas, the interview with Banda offers an engaging socio-political analysis while also providing exceptional detail on events.

Important here, is to recognize that this is one account and one story. Despite the detailed personal accounts presented here, some of this information has not been confirmed or triangulated. Even if the information animates events documented in newspaper articles and offers a full explanation to the half-rumors circulating in the region about members of the Communitarian Police (Figure 2), it still remains one account. Moreover, the interview is positioned on the side of the Communitarians, which is apparent as the so-called Constitutionlists are referred to here as *Contras*—the slang attributed to them by the Communitarians. The names used in this interview align with the names previously published in the *JPE* article and the *Renewing destruction* book, while others have been changed. Despite the detail of inter-communal conflict, accounts of action and death, the purpose of this interview should not be lost: **the unraveling of the political ecology of wind energy development**. Undoubtedly, the interview favors the political by documenting the rippling violence and micro politics from earlier attempts of wind energy development on the Santa Teresa sand bar, yet the ecological is embedded as a central force guiding this conflict. The interview begins where I left off in the article.

² Over the years, and as recently as December 2018, I would hear different and inaccurate stories about what was happening in Gui'Xhi' Ro. This was matched by periods of silence from various contacts in the *cabildo comunitario* that caused concern.

³ Ethical reasons this interview bends and straddles, yet it was agreed to share.

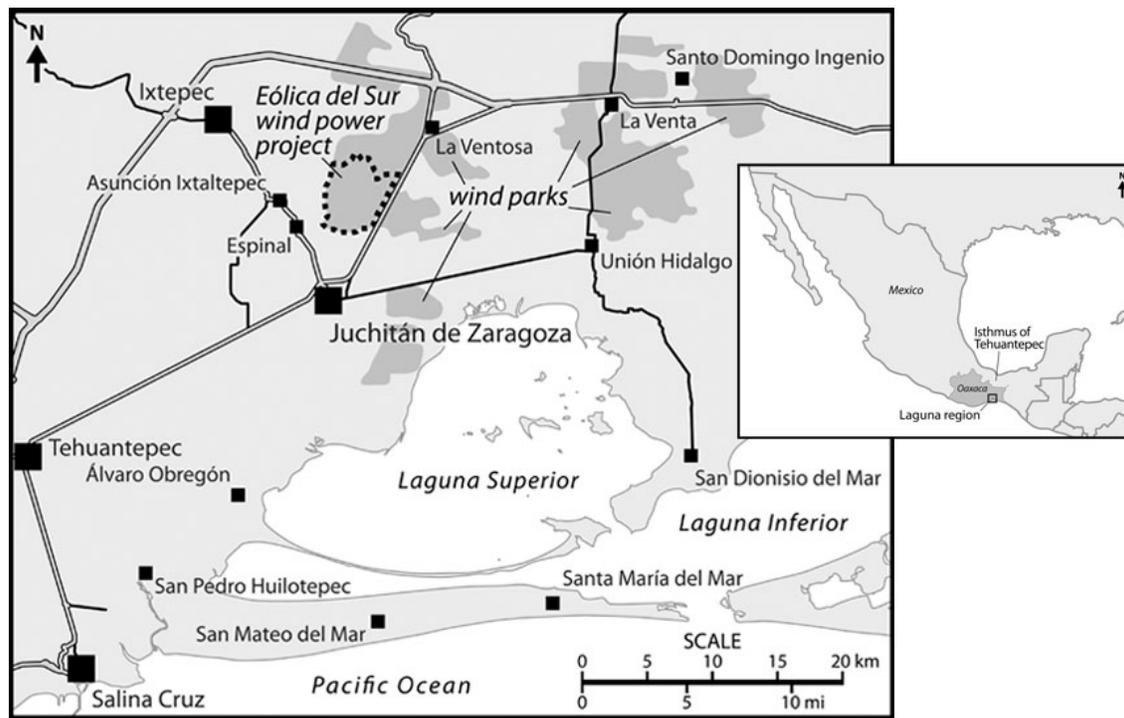


Figure 1: The coastal Istmo. Maps by Carl Sack.

Alexander Dunlap (AD): So what happened? I left on May 19th 2015 worried that there was going to be a military siege⁴ on the town because they were boycotting elections and fighting the regional politicians, so what happened?

On June 7th government forces were overwhelmed by the social uprising against the elections taking place across the greater part of the country. Gunmen from the Seventh Section of Juchitán entered Gui'Xhi' Ro in the early morning (*madrugada*), at like three in the morning in boats. They came by boat because the people of the town had barricades at the entrances into town. Nobody was going in or going out of town. So the gunmen snuck in by sea and, yes, the gunmen had low caliber weapons (.22 rifles, shotguns). The highest caliber weapon was a .38 revolver.

That day, there were about 40 anarchists. It was the day when the town was crowded with the most anarchists ready to fight, but many of those anarchists did not all trust each other. Not because they thought each other were police, but just as anarchists they did not trust each other because of previous combat experiences or because of personal things. I mean a group of 40 is a big group and it was not one group, a lot of people from many groups and individuals arrived there from other parts of Mexico. So to have them collaborate in an environment where they do not speak the language, everything is going on in a language that they do not speak, because Zapotec is the spoken language. They did not fully understand what was going on—they were just willing to help in the fight.

So they were divided into two barricades [that reflects the two main entrances into town]. Near one of those barricades... the election time was ending and El Comandante pulled out his .38 revolver and shot in the air and that caused a car full of gunmen to accelerate into another part of town and El Comandante went

⁴ See Dunlap (2015).

after them and a lot of anarchists jumped into that truck. When the truck was stopping they were shot with shotguns loaded with pellets for bird hunting, metal pellets. El Comandante was hit on the lip and his lip started to bleed heavily and the rest of us jumped down and hid on the side of the truck. We hid and dispersed as we did not know the caliber of the weapons being fired at us, for all we knew it was going to pierce the metal of the truck. El Comandante was in shock and he handed his revolver to another person, El Sapo, and he started shooting his revolver. The revolver had a short nose, and I saw it was a waste of bullets and he was getting nowhere and they were firing at us and it was clear that they had rifles.

While we were running out of the truck, Panco was hit, he was a guy from town and was shot in the leg—it was a .22 bullet. He shouted: "Ooohh, I'm hit, I'm hit." I was moving that way and took the revolver from El Sapo, I said: 'Give me that.' And he gave it to me without hesitation and I ran and got closer to them [the gunmen] and I hid behind a tree and I went out and pointed at one of them and I shot and the bullet hit the floor because it had an angle, the gun was heavy and it hit the floor in front of them—it was long distance and a short pistol. It was the first time I shot a pistol, I said, "Oh, I got the hang of this" and I pointed it at the gunmen and I was sure I was going to kill him and I shot, 'click' and heard the hammer hit, but nothing happened. I did not understand why it wasn't firing and they were going to fire at me, then I realized I could see the bullets because it's a revolver and it does not automatically expel the bullets, but because El Comandante and Sapo fired the bullets I was out of bullets, I fired the last one. So I was there hiding, and the Bore and other friends grabbed handmade grenades (*coyotas*) and they threw them and they exploded with glass and aluminum shrapnel and that made them break their formation and I could go out from behind the tree as they had me pinned there hiding. I got out and they went and hid somewhere else and then on the other street the other [Policia Comunitaria] truck with anarchists came, but they came in closer. And when they got out of the truck and attacked those gunmen the gunmen wounded approximately ten of them.

The Dragon and El Vato went to go help that group of anarchists. The thing was, El Vato grabbed the shotgun and they shot one of the gunmen in the intestine (and that gunman was in critical condition for nine months, he could not leave the bed for nine months). But the shotgun got stuck, so they could not fire another round. When he tried to put another cartridge in, it was stuck, so they only had one shot. While the gunmen were firing, firing, firing and firing, we approached them and the Bull, he had a shotgun, but with only one shot because he was not prepared. So he took that shot and then, I do not know what he was expecting, because he wanted to attack them and then encouraged us to follow him into charging the gunmen. He said, "Oh c'mon do not leave me alone! Let's do it!" We went in with him and we could feel the bullets flying around our heads, it was like, 'ssssip, sssip' and you could feel the wind from the bullets, but he did not have any shells in his shotgun. So I do not understand what he expected by engaging them, when he was close to them he would wave his shotgun at them, like, 'Yeeeahhh!' screaming, hoping that if we charged them they were going to run. We were loud and I could feel the bullets flying close and none of our people got hit and after that ended.

AD: How did it end?

The anarchists had a lot of handmade grenades. There were two anarchists that had two really strong arms and they were throwing rocks better than anyone on our side and their rocks were hitting their target and there were also hand grenades being thrown at the gunmen and they did not have body armor. They were getting hit with explosions of glass and shrapnel and that caused them to break their formation, even if the other side was running out of ammunition. So both sides disengaged, but there were heavy gunshot wounds.

The *Contras* [Constitutionalist] they called help from the outside, we do not know who they called, but a caravan of soldiers arrived to the town thru the road from [Santa Maria] Xadani and we were on the barricade and we saw a huge cloud of dust rising and a caravan of about eight trucks of soldiers arrived in town and they got down. The adrenaline was going down and now we see a cloud of military trucks going straight to our barricade. It was like: "*Banda* we made it to this point, there is a huge caravan of soldiers coming this way and 12 of us were wounded."

AD: You thought it was the final hour.

We thought it was the last stand. But they stopped at a distance and walked quite peacefully to the barricade and they said that somebody reported gunshots. "Yeah there were gunshots here." They said, "Well, how many people are dead?" And the people from the *cabildo* (council) said: "Well, nobody is dead here." The Solider said, "No one? No one is dead?" Someone on our side said, "Yeah there are no casualties." The solider said: "Well if there are not any casualties we do not care; we do not give a fuck. Call us next time someone is dead", and they got in their trucks and left. They left the same way they came in.

AD: Holy shit... [laughter].

It was crazy. So that happened and the anarchist groups were arguing because one of the squats got more wounded than the other. The one with the ten wounded was blaming the other for not having as many wounded.

AD: What? Are you serious?

They were saying that they chickened out, because how else could you explain that they had no wounded, I mean there were shots being fired. It would be expected for them to be wounded. So there was an argument and the adrenaline was pretty high.

AD: I see they were tripped out on adrenaline turning in on each other a little bit?

Yes. There were ten of them that were wounded, they were pissed. So the majority of them left the next day. There was a lot of violence in the village and the majority of the anarchists left, some came back. Especially the ones interested in building autonomy, but the anarchists that came to the elections in 2016 were pretty decided people, because they had been in the shootouts the year before and then they came back, so I mean they knew what it was.

AD: So what happened before the next year? How many people were wounded on the Communitarian side and how many were wounded on the *Contra* side in June 2015?

On the *Contra* side 1 or 2 were wounded.

AD: So the Communitarians took a huge hit.

Yes they took a huge hit... And many of the Communitarians felt a huge shame because many of the anarchists who had come to help them had sustained all the wounds, well one was communitarian, but the rest... and El Comandante on his lip also....

Time started to pass and time showed fishermen that the wind turbines were harming fisheries because the fishermen from Playa Vicente ran out of fish, they did not have fish anymore.⁵ So they come to Gui'Xhi'Ro to fish but they hide this, because they know the people from Gui'Xhi'Ro will not allow them to fish on their side of the Lagoon because they sold out. And the *Contras* they are fishermen, and they notice how the people from Play Vicente do not have fish anymore and that they come to their side of the Lagoon. So that proved to them how wind turbines are a problem to wildlife in general—to birds, to turtles, to fish—and that is why I believe that there is a general consensus against wind turbines now, even on the *Contras* side. The question that remains is which group will get and distribute the money from the state. So the Communitarian side is saying that there should not be a political party as an intermediary to that money, that they should receive it directly from the Federal Government or from the United Nations and self-administer that money. And the *Contras* [Constitutionalists] say there should be an intermediary.

⁵ The people of Playa Vicente allowed the Bii Hloxo wind park to be constructed near their fishing grounds. For more information on this wind park see Dunlap (2018b, 2019).



Figure 2: Communitarian Police leaving for patrol. Source: APIIDTT, March 30, 2014.

AD: So this is coming from the Mexican State?

Yes, because in the tributary law it says a percentage of your taxes are sent to budget item (*Ramo*) 11 and 22

AD: Or 27.

Or 27 and that represent the percentage of your taxes that you have a right to use where you live. So many other Communitarians have argued with me, even if they do not wish to pay taxes, saying that it is not possible because many products are taxed in Mexico. Since taxes are taken from them forcefully they believe that if there is a way to get that money back, then they will do it because that money belongs to them in the first place. So that is what the *cabildo* is after, the self-administration of that money without political party intermediaries.

AD: Interestingly, when I was living there the Communitarians were saying "we do not want the money, we do not give a shit as long as we can be autonomous", remember? That was the line from many of the council of elders told me. So this is interesting how this is more of an open issue now.

It's an open thing that they say is their strategy. For instance, they argue that the majority of men have to leave town to work as fruit pickers or builders for hotels in Cabo San Lucas, Cancun and so on, where they are paid 4,000 pesos weekly [US\$ 210]. The salary you make working in the village, at the most, is 150 pesos [US\$ 6.5] a day. Bearing in mind 100 pesos a day, is 700 pesos [US\$ 31.5] a week and working in Loreto they will make 4-5,000 pesos a week, which means a lot of men are not there and the *cabildo* argues that there are not enough people to defend the town in case of a police attack, because many of the men are working outside the town. So they argue that if they had those millions that belongs to them—that they feel is their money—they say with those millions they could pay people to stay [in town] and they would not have

the need to go work somewhere else because they could have money for their families and ammunition. They say that Cherán [Michoacán]⁶ receives their money.

AD: Oh yeah?

Because in Cherán's elections they make bonfires and that is where they have their assemblies and they have a council of 12 and that is recognized by the Mexican electoral system as valid because it is an Indigenous community that has a right according to the UN [see Guillén 2016; Sedillo 2018]. So Cherán is recognized by that and receives their money and they buy assault rifles with good ammunition, bullet proof Kevlar and they have an action group (*rounda*) in the forest to protect it from deforestation. So the people from Cherán have a permanent action group with good weapons and Kevlar and that is because they receive the money from the Federal Government and that is why they can effectively defend their forest against the Narcos who have big guns. So the people in Gui'Xhi'Ro say, "If we want to leave our shotguns, have Kevlar and good guns, we probably need the money like Cherán has, we could use it." That is their argument. Because they say working the fields they get money for their families, but they do not have a surplus to buy the big guns, so they say.

AD: Yes, the weapons from the United States!

Yeah... [laughter]. The AR-15. Well it's interesting as that is their strategy, but, as I told you, in 2016 I witnessed an assembly in which the fishermen were discussing the mining projects that were coming to the mountains of the Istmo [with the onset of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) legislation], the Sierra Atravesada and to the Sierra Mixe that is back there. In Ixtepec City they are planning to build a dam that people are opposing and the energy from that damn is going to give energy to a mining project in those mountains.⁷ In that assembly Bettina [Cruz] was present and she brought the news, but also all the *Contra* leaders were present, the *Contra* leaders from the town were there. And they listened to Bettina, even the *Contras* listened to her, and she told them about the mining and all of that. Everybody said that they were against that, that they were against mining and that they were against wind turbines, and even the *Contras* said it. Even the *Contras* assured Bettina that they were willing to defend with their bodies against a mine. They thought, "We should help them"— the people from Ixtaltepec — "because a mine there is also a threat here to the Lagoon." And they said they were willing to go and fight over there because it was also a fight to protect their land. I was present when that consensus was reached in the assembly.

AD: Alright, so there is some movement from the Constitutionals into another direction, but what is the situation like in the village in September 2015?

Tension dissipated and normal life kicked in. People went fishing and, like I told you, more people in the town started to realize wind turbines do have an impact on the environment. There was a big drought, there was a terrible drought that year, and it did not rain the year after you left.

AD: Because we all know, according to Zapotec folklore that once you kill all the birds the rain does not come any more.⁸

Yes, so the rain did not come and things got darker for us. For the first time in Juchitán history, the buckets hit the ground in the water wells. There was no ground water for the first time in Juchitán history in 2015/2016. There was no water and they did link it to the wind turbines.

⁶ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqI9_kKBwws

⁷ See <https://pagina3.mx/2016/09/comisariado-de-ixtepec-acusado-de-recibir-dinero-para-beneficiar-a-mineras/>

⁸ This is reference to people talking about how the wind turbines are killing birds and that, even in 2015, people of all ages were observing less rain in the region.

AD: Who is this exactly?

Zapotec people in general. There has always been ground water and all of a sudden they built these wind turbines all around Juchitán and now there is no water for the first time ever.⁹ I mean, it's not really hard to see a link and, generally speaking, people made that link. People like Peter were saying: "Okay, no politicians, but we need an investor. We need somebody strong, somebody with money who can help us buy weapons and equipment, buy cars. The [Community] Radio has been broken for almost four years."

AD: Since I left?

Yes, since you left there has been no radio. And Peter was saying: "We need an investor that can help the radio and things like that." Other people, like The Elder Wild Cat and the Lizard, they were against an investor. That discussion waged on in assemblies for months, but they could not find anybody and that was when the Dragon was getting desperate. Then the Dragon left for many months and when he returned, he returned crazier. I told him that we should go smoke a joint one day and talk and they told me they did not smoke weed anymore. He told me that in Cabo San Lucas that he quit weed and he was only doing cocaine now and that was one of the last times I talked to him, because right afterwards he went rouge and he accused the *cabildo* of being 'soft' and not going after the *Contras* and killing them. So he went with Jessica Sánchez, who was Morena—the new left party—he promised her Gui'Xhi'Ro if she would give him guns and money for fighting the wind turbines.

AD: Cocaine.

And Jessica Sánchez, said "yeah" and that she was against wind turbines and that she would accommodate him. And that is how it went. I was dedicated to fishing and working the land and biological remediation, permaculture experiments.

AD: The Dragon returns from Cabo San Lucas, high on cocaine, not smoking weed, and ready to go to war and kill the *Contras*. So what happens?

So there was going to be elections soon and he invites Jessica Sánchez to do a rally in Gui'Xhi'Ro.

AD: So this is May 2016.

Yeah.

AD: What happens?

Jessica Sánchez's people are afraid of Gui'Xhi'Ro people, because Gui'Xhi'Ro people are crazy. So when a Communitarian truck was approaching them to tell them to leave the town, they started opening fire and they wounded elders from the council of elders (*el consejo de ancianos*) and even a guy who was shooting, he did not know, but his father was one of the Elders who was in the truck, but he was a *Contra*. So he shot his own father with a shotgun and wounded his father, because that guy was a police *Contra* and his father was a Communitarian Elder, but he did not know and he just opened fire on the truck and wounded his dad.

AD: So his father was in the council of elders on the Communitarian side?

Yes, Mr. June, the strong skinny one who is always dressed like a baseball player.

⁹ This link, while combined with peoples' observations in the region of less rain (that also resonates with modeling), refers to observations by locals of them digging wind turbine foundations — generally between 7-14 meters (32-45 ft.) deep and about 16-21 meters (52-68 ft.) in diameter — and pouring chemicals that solidify or evacuates the drinkable groundwater. For an account, see Chapter 3 in Dunlap (2019).

AD: So how many Elders were wounded from the initial shoot out from Jessica Sánchez's side?

About three. It was a big crisis because many people in town were grandchildren of the wounded Elders, so the town was surprised because it is not considered fair to open fire on a truck of old people. So what happens, the Communitarians arrive and there is a shootout and they kill somebody and wound about three of Jessica's people. So there are three wounded and one dead on the *Contra* side and the dead one is from Gui'Xhi'Ro.

AD: Someone else got wounded?

Yes, El Comandante got wounded.

AD: How did that happen?

What I know is that the Dragon approached the [Communitarian] truck and pulled out a revolver and shot him in the chest, in the ribs up close.

AD: The Commander of the Communitarian Police?

Yes, he was the one who was shot by the Dragon.

AD: They were friends, why do you think the Dragon did it?

Yes, friends... Ego?

AD: Cocaine?

Yes, cocaine might have something to do with it.

AD: Cocaine and ego are closely related—cocaine is the drug of capitalism... This is sad news.

So the Dragon stayed in town, he did not leave. A year went by before he was killed. He was living there and there was tension, but nobody... it was not really strong tension.

AD: So what happens to the Dragon?

He went to pick a fight during the party and he lost that fight. He was killed in a pistol duel, even though he had a higher caliber weapon. He raised his gun like this [holding it at a side tilt with an extended arm].

AD: Trying to be gangster?

Trying to be gangster and he left all of this [his ribs and right side] open. And the other guy pulled it from his waist and did not raise the gun, directly from his waist he shot upwards. So he grabbed it like this, turned it and shot. So while the Dragon was swinging his arm up, the other one was already shooting him, right here [in the ribs/chest].

AD: Damn...

By the time the Dragon extended their arm like this, he had probably already taken two shots in the ribs from a .22.

AD: I have heard different stories about the Dragon, so it is nice to hear something more detailed.... Okay, so the Dragon is down, what happens between the time between the time of the Jessica Sánchez shoot out and 2017? So what is happening in the village? The *Contras* are against mining and wind energy projects, but now there is just the issue of how the Federal and State funds will be administered and used?

The majority of people, I heard—from young and old people—are happy... When you were living there it was their first or second year without politicians, but now after more years have passed, they do not miss them and they say that things are better because there are not policemen. The *Contras* might be dressed like police officers, but they are not. They do not care if people are smoking weed, they just do not care. So people like the fact that they are outside the coercive institutions of the Mexican state, people value that and they say no police it is a reason for living there. I have heard people saying that it is better without police.

AD: There is a system of governance in place, it's not like it's an unruly or anarchistic state.

It's not, it's not. Also what happened was Odelio finished his term as the agent of the town hall and Bettina and Rodrigo wanted an experienced fisherman to be the next leader.

AD: What year was this?

2016

AD: Late 2016 after the shootout with Jessica Sánchez?

Before it. It was early 2016, they chose a Zapotec guy, but he is not from Gui'Xhi'Ro. He was from San Blas Atempa.

AD: Yes?

Yes... San Blas Atempa is a town nearby that has always gotten on well with people from Gui'Xhi'Ro and he is married to a woman from Gui'Xhi'Ro and lives there. He has a good job at the oil refinery and has a salary from that. So people from Gui'Xhi'Ro said, he was with them and if he was the municipal agent he could buy things himself, so they appointed him. And he had a bar and he sold a lot of alcohol and some drugs¹⁰, not a lot, but he sold some.

AD: Bettina and Rodrigo appointed him?

No, Bettina and Rodrigo wanted to appoint an old fisherman, but the town appointed this person from San Blas Atempa. Rodrigo and Bettina were very angry that they appointed him, because they considered him morally unacceptable, because he sold drugs and he was not from Gui'Xhi'Ro. So for them [the situation] was morally unacceptable and they got angry, withdrew their support from Gui'Xhi'Ro....

AD: They withdrew Gui'Xhi'Ro from the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Defense of Land and Territory (APIIDTT)?¹¹

Yeah, so they withdrew Gui'Xhi'Ro from that and that guy, the new municipal agent, was afraid of the Dragon. So when the Dragon was killed, he was happy, because the Dragon was trying to extort him also. So eventually the new municipal agent got pissed off because he realized that he had been appointed an agent, but with no real power at all. There is nothing he can really do, nobody listens to him and nobody even asks him for advice. They only see him as a way to get money and do not even take him into account. So he gets tired and he renounces his position and quits. This was at the end of 2016 and ever since the town has been without a municipal agent.

¹⁰ Specificity of term to more general substance.

¹¹ This has since then reversed.

AD: Yes?

Yes, and the people say that they notice that they do not need one. There is no municipal agent and nothing is happening, there isn't an issue, nobody gives a damn. They realized it is not an important figure. So it has been two years without a municipal agent and when someone needs council or a document to be signed, they go to the town hall [Figure 3] and there is the Council of Elders and they give them council or if they need a document signed, someone signs it. There are no appointed roles. So the structure is dissolving, they still retain the *cabildo* because they have to give signatures for the documents, but they are not electing positions anymore. Whoever is there signs it and things are like that. Since perhaps November 2016, it has been like this—there is no municipal agent.



Figure 3: The Communitarian Town Hall, jail, expropriated police truck and festival preparations. Source: Author.

AD: Wow, this seems like a nice progression. So the people from the council of elders hanging out, talking and watching TV from at the municipality now informally fulfill the bureaucratic functions when someone needs it—this is nice, a nice way to minimize the disciplinary coercion of bureaucratic life. So what is going on with the old *Contra* leader, Jorge Alonso? [Figure 4]. What is going on with him in all of this?

Ahahahahaha! Jorge Alonso, well... he was the municipal agent for the *Contras* for a period that was like 3 years—it's a term—or something. When his period ended, he went back to normal life and he went over to the Communitarian side.



Figure 4: Graffiti at the town entrance: "*Jorge Alonso Cannot be a [political] candidate because he is a killer.*"¹² Source: Author.

AD: Really?

Yeah, he just walked over to the Council of Elders and said he was not the [Constitutionalist] mayor anymore and that he wanted to be with them and everybody accepted him. And now he is the driver, he is the chauffeur of the patrol car.

AD: Of the Communitarian Police!?

Yeah, but they do not go and patrol anymore because there is no threat of the wind company in this moment. The school is the main problem, because school forces people to require money, because school needs pencils, pens, notebooks, lunch and books and it is time when people cannot be helping out fishing, they cannot be helping at home because they have to be in school and they cannot help at home because they have to do homework. People would not require as much money if there was not the school, so school is one of the main reasons why people migrate out of the town to Loretta and to Cabo San Lucas, because if they have children in school every day they need to send them money for lunch and school supplies. People say, "I have one, two or three kids in schools, so I have to send money to my wife so my children can be in school." So school, I believe is the main counterinsurgency institution operating right now. Because it is what makes fishermen want to sell their fish to get money. They tell me: "Back then, we use to fish and we use to eat and that would be enough, but when we have children in school that is an expense and eating is not enough

¹² Note: this "killing" is a reference to a drunk- driving accident that killed someone in the past. *After taking this photo I was attacked by Constitutionalist police who tried to abduct me in April 2015.

and you need money for their books and shit." And when they enter junior high or high school it gets worse.¹³ So that is an issue now and, there is no communitarian police anymore because everyone is working for their children. There is the police truck and they use it to run errands.

AD: Wow... school as counterinsurgency.¹⁴

Yes, the everyday counterinsurgency is being very effective. Even the Mexican textbooks that are given out to all the communities and schools for free all across the country all have big images of wind turbines and wind parks—massive wind parks—in chapters labeled "ecology" or "saving the planet" and that is in official text books. So even the kids from Gui'Xhi'Ro, Juchitán or San Blas Atempa they are reading text books with images of wind turbines labeled as saving the planet. From one side the kids are listening to their elders or family discussing in the assembly or at home about how those wind parks are leaking oil into the ground, killing the fish and so on. Then on the other hand, they are looking at information and text books in schools that are "scientifically certified" that proclaim a truth respected over the word of their elders because of the times we live. This is confusing people and their feelings. So this combines with all the other approaches promoting wind parks that we can see operating against the whole environment [see Dunlap 2018a, 2019]. The government knows that people are a part of the environment, so if you want to destroy the people you have to attack the environment itself—to weaken it—so the people will be weakened, sick and therefore be easier to take over.

AD: I guess when people talk about divide and conquer strategies, the message from the families and the schools books are a key example: you can see that the messages in schools are really trying to divide people straight down their own centers; dividing people's hearts from their minds and that is a crucial intervention, no?

Yes, it is very crucial.

AD: And so on top of all of this, and getting back on track, now Jorge Alonso is the guy who runs the errands?

Yes, he is the driver—it's surreal.

AD: The reality of conflict and how things really works, that is the one thing Mexico taught me, especially in Gui'Xhi'Ro. One day somebody is your friend, the next day they are a cop or a politician.

Or one day they are not the want-to-be politician in town and they are running errands driving around the Communitarian patrol car.

AD: So if the police were to invade would the Communitarian Police be prepared?

Yes, many people who are there are ready for a fight. The Community Police might not exist as an institution anymore, but people will fight. I got a phone call in October or November [2018] saying that the Navy told them that if anyone is fishing Mullet fish—a sacred fish for the Zapotec during its reproduction cycle—that they would arrest them. There was a consensus that if the Navy retains someone, they were going to treat the Navy the same way they treated the police when they invaded Gui'Xhi'Ro in 2013.

¹³ Lois Meyer and Benjamín Maldonado Alvarado's edited volume (2010) dedicates a significant amount of space to the struggle to promote community education in Oaxaca and serves as an important resource for discussing culturally appropriate forms of education (see also Illich 2002/1970).

¹⁴ The counterinsurgency field manual FM-3-24 section on "generational engagement" serves as an example to substantiate this position (Dept. of the Army 2014: 10-3; see also Brock and Dunlap 2018; Dunlap 2018a). Yet another interpretation might be that schooling is social engineering, but once rebellion takes hold and the engineering of subjectivities breaks down, more explicit methods of counterinsurgency are applied in schools (see Dunlap 2016; Henderson and Platt 2015). These interpretations, however, are not exclusive and instead self-reinforcing and/or variegated based on socio-historical context.

AD: Ouuuhhh, the Navy is serious.

Yeah, well two months ago people were saying this. So there may not be a Communitarian Police, but the people are still organized and prepared to defend their land and sea. Things have changed a bit, you know, its natural. When you start to live your life day-after-day keeping a *cabildo* becomes a waste of energy, and you start to realize it is wasting your energy. The fact that there was no municipal agent now and that they could live their lives without that, people like that because they are saying: "We use to argue about who was going to be the municipal agent, but now that there is no municipal agent, nobody is arguing about that." [Laughter] You know? I hear these sorts of comments: "Yeah... there is no municipal agent anymore, who knows what will happen?" People are not like, "We need to get a municipal agent soon." Instead the situation is like, "Yeah we do not have one, who know what will happen. We do not care; we will live our lives."

AD: Damn this is good, I wrote a drafty working paper reflecting on my experience with the Communitarians and thought this was a direction to consider and it seems to have naturally unfolded in this direction (see Dunlap 2018c).

Yes! And it's true. Well people send their kids to school because they wish their kids to make money and to take them out of poverty¹⁵ and things like this, that is there you know. Also, there is a friend Pamala, you remember her?

AD: Yes.

She is the best. She took a position in the *cabildo* in 2016 and it was her worst experience in life and now she cut bonds with them, but she is doing her own thing and organizing workshops for traditional music and dancing for children in Zapotec. The classes are free and that did not exist there before now and there are shit loads of kids learning the traditional songs and dances, and they voluntarily go there. I see this and Pamala is the one organizing this in the kiosk with all the murals—that is where the classes are. So there is like an artistic shift, and all of those kids who are singing and dancing are doing things they did not used to do. The municipal agent who quit, he supports these classes. So Pamala showed him this project and he bought instruments for all of the kids. He bought ten guitars, clarinets, trumpets and he bought expensive instruments for the classes. So he is financing these cultural activities.... We wanted to make a communitarian art studio made of palm leaves and with trees, we want to plant a lot of fruit trees and things like that, but life here is tiring. The more you are [in numbers], the easier it is, but if you are alone or only two of you, then most of your day is spent getting food for yourself, hunting, fishing or working the land—it is very energy consuming. To write my ideas, to write my stuff I use to wake up at 3am because that was the only time of the day that I had time, because at 5am I had to go fishing. So at 3am I use to wake up to write. Because if we did not go fishing, we would not eat! So we use to plant and harvest squash, pumpkins, beans, Jamaica [hibiscus] and that is how we were eating, we were eating our own food. We were eating our own squash, beans and our own fish, but it was very energy consuming, we were experimenting with the bioremediation of the soil. We were doing it slow, because we were doing it with the resources that we had.

AD: I have two more questions before we end it for the day. First, why was the Pamala's experience so horrible in the *Cabildo*? Was it dealing with some condescending patriarchal shit? What was going on?

Uhhmm... it was... I think the *cabildo* being an instrument of politics in general and politics as a method of waging war without swords, I think *cabildos* create conflicts between their members, because it is designed as a weapon of conflict. It is a bloodless weapon, because you do not see blood, but it is a weapon nonetheless and I believe that and money being involved causes conflict and Pamala was in a position of money management, so they accused her of stealing money for herself.

¹⁵ Banda does not want people to be in poverty, but does not see this dependency as a particularly fruitful socio-ecological avenue that leads to out-migration and, more often than not, cocaine and methamphetamine habits.

AD: Which was not true I imagine. I remember Pampa, she did not strike me as someone who would do that.

No it was not true. So that hurt her feelings.

AD: This is interesting what you just said. The *cabildo* was originally a Spanish colonial technology to administer ruling at a distance, it was a Spanish technology of social control that has been absorbed by Indigenous peoples, but this is another conversation.... The last question, could you tell me about the recent murder of Rolando Crispín López in July 2018?

Yes. When the Dragon went to pick a fight that night the Panther, who won the duel, asked Rolando, "Hey, come with me. Let's go after him", but Roland chickened out when he saw the Dragon. While he did fire a gunshot, he did not hit the Dragon and he ran, but after the Dragon died and he was getting drunk, he started to boast that he killed the Dragon, but it was not true—he chickened out. So the guy who really killed the Dragon, kept silent and this guy was like: "Oh yeah, I killed the Dragon and I can kill anyone... yeah I killed him." So it was somebody seeking revenge for the Dragon. Because, Jessica Sánchez put up a bounty for the Dragon's killer, so if you killed somebody who killed the Dragon, she was going to pay, rumor had it, 1 million pesos. [US\$ 52,000]

AD: Wow.

Rumor had it. This guy who killed Rolando was after this bounty.

AD: Was he from Gui'Xhi'Ro?

Yes.

AD: Was he on the *Contras* side?

Yes.

AD: So it's kind of playing on this conflict fault line still, but the *Contras* were always the opportunistic ones in the village trying to get the money. Even if they wanted to protect the sea they were always going for the money [offered by the politicians and/or wind companies].

Yes, but the thing with this guy was that even the other *Contras* police did not approve of him. The guy who killed him, his nickname is "*Escarda*." And the *Contras* told the Communitarians: "*Escarda* is rouge, he is crazy. He is like the Dragon and we are not backing him up. We are *Contras*, we do rounds together, but if he does anything, that is him and not us."

AD: And [the *Contras*:] we will not seek revenge if the Communitarians do something about it.

Yes. And they openly said that, and they considered going after the bounty of the Dragon's killer was pointless. People there do not want more conflict; they want to live their lives. And they say, "If this guy wants to claim a million pesos to kill this guy, this is only going to make his family go after this guy." It's just more conflict... So even the *Contras* were saying it's too much, "He is acting as a rouge." The expression somebody told me was, "He is alone against the world" (*está solo Contra el mundo*), not even his family supported this move.

AD: It's funny the news article posted by the ATTIPD (2018) and then reposted in English by an anarchist website (IGD 2018), the way they pitch it is that a communitarian was assassinated. I have reproduced this as well with a recent article that was attempting to keep track of how many people who have died in this conflict...

But he still was a Communitarian police.

AD: But yes, why was he killed? For killing [The Dragon] who was once second in command of the Communitarian Police three years ago, you know? Who then later went crazy on cocaine?

And for a bounty.

AD: And a bounty sent out by a politician who has been key...

Jessica Sánchez

AD: To even categorize Jessica Sánchez in this conflict is kind of difficult.

Yeah, and I never told you about this before you left, but the Sánchez's hit every house with propaganda papers saying how they won the struggle against wind energy and that they, Jessica and Hector Sánchez are against wind energy, because... they... I do not remember why.

AD: Because their negotiations and deals that they wanted did not work out the way they wanted them to.

And they said, in that paper that they were demanding that hospitals would be built and people [in town] were like: "Look at that shit, they do not have shame." They hit every house with this propaganda and they are the same ones who put the bounty, and that bounty ended up with more killings. The thing here is that this is what white people's money is doing. They donate because they feel bad and that they are going to wash their conscious, because they feel bad about everything and they think to themselves: "Oh I am going to donate money to a green industry because I feel bad about my existence." Whether it is people directly donating money or not, the fact that people directly support these industries and think they are a "solution" when in actuality they are making Indigenous people shoot each other.

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