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Subjectivity and Wind-energy Projects in Mexico: the Case of Arriaga, Chiapas

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Abstract:

This paper examines subjective responses to the installation of wind-energy farms in Mexico. In keeping with the critical tradition, our paper analyzes the tension between domination and resistance in light of the categories of power and anti-power. According to critical thought in sociology and history, the imposition of modernity results in tension between power and anti-power that leads to conflict and confrontation. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews as well as direct observation were employed as qualitative approaches to our research in the municipality of Arriaga in the state of Chiapas, Mexico.

Keywords: *wind energy policy, power, anti-power, Mexico.*

1. Introduction

This article is a product of the “Socio-economic and Juridical-Institutional Study on Comparative Perspectives on the Development of Wind Energy in the Isthmus-Costal Region: the Cases of Ixtaltepec, Oaxaca and Arriaga, Chiapas,” a research project financed by the Program to Strengthen Academic Departments, PRODEP, 2013. This paper examines the tension between power and anti-power as a response to the development of wind-farm projects in Mexico. We consider how this tension affects the social dimension of communities in Mexico, particularly in the municipality of Arriaga, located in the state of Chiapas in southeastern Mexico. With the aid of the critical tradition and John Holloway’s political theory of power and anti-power (Holloway, 2002 and 2011), we present a dialogue that examines the tension between domination and resistance in relationship to the implementation wind-farm projects in Arriaga, Chiapas. Fundamentally, our research has three foci: (1) the effect that tension between power and anti-power has on the social dimension of a community, (2) social tension as a response to wind-farm projects and (3) the use of qualitative methods to understand the critical juncture at which the inhabitants of Arriaga find themselves in their confrontation with modernity imposed as wind-energy policy.

2. Social Dynamics, Power and Anti-Power

Based on Holloway’s premise that social reality is unstable (Holloway, 2011), this study employs critical sociology and history to analyze the social effects of wind-energy policy. Additionally, we employ the thoughts of Theodor Adorno, who asserts that the task of sociology is to “understand the incomprehensible by seeing through the opacity of an automatized society that seems to exist independently of people and their relationships. Today, more than ever, sociology must understand the incomprehensible and assist humanity’s passage into the truly human” (Adorno, 2001, p. 12). Accordingly, our research focuses on collective practices of social tension. Also within the critical tradition, we follow Carlos Aguirre, who affirms that history is also “a vital science of society is attuned to the perpetual historical change of all things in a thousand and one ways in direct relationship to the numerous and varied aspects of the present and past of our social lives” (Aguirre, 2005, p. 22). As history unfolds, collective practices emerge in the present in contradiction with anterior forms.

Seen from the vantage point of critical sociology and history (Adorno, 2001; Aguirre, 2005), a social dimension is made up of an interactive field of *subjectivities* (González and Hernández, et al., 2014) that are the core of tension between power and resistance. According to John Holloway (2011), social dimensions are discursive fields in which insubordination arises in dialectical opposition to dominant private and public institutions that impose order through linguistic and extra-linguistic discourse (Laclau, 2010). To understand a given social dimension, this study assumes that society is in a state of tension, and that it is unstable. Based on this premise, we can examine insubordination as a social process in which “there is a world of struggle that at times says no more than

‘NO!’ However, often in the process of saying ‘NO!’ forms of auto-determination develop and alternative concepts are articulated on how the world should be” (Holloway, 2011, p. 2).

Submission is a visible trait of a social dimension that manifests itself in the conscious acceptance of practices of domination imposed by financial capital, government and business. Social insubordination at times lies in latent silence. It is sometimes no more than a muted voice on the periphery of social discourse. However, at other times, it emerges as a political movement that openly confronts power in a relationship of constant contradiction. Holloway affirms that “we cannot accept equilibrium as our point of departure. We don’t need to begin with dominance, but with insubordination, disequilibrium, not with power, but with anti-power” (Holloway, 2011, p. 2) Holloway develops the concept of anti-power in the following terms:

Anti-power is found in the dignity of everyday existence. Anti-power is ever present in all of our relationships: love, friendship, companionship, community, cooperation, etc. Obviously, given the nature of the society in which we live, power permeates these relationships. Love friendship, companionship, etc. are both the means and the ends by which we constantly struggle to establish our relationships, not based on power, but on mutual dignity for all those involved (Holloway, 2011, p. 10).

For Holloway (2011), anti-power is embedded in personal relationships that seek a free and inalienable subjectivity, one that is aware of domination not as a mere abstraction, but as a reality of everyday life. The confrontation between power and anti-power creates fractures within which social practices break away from power. As a socio-historical construction (Aguirre, 2005), anti-power momentarily transcends the standardization and hegemony of domination and breaks free from the capitalist logic imposed by the State and the market (Scott, 2000; Ceceña, 2012).

Power is woefully inadequate in its ability to truly objectify the potential of human creativity. Power excludes and dispossesses. Anti-power departs not from objectification but from subjectivity, power’s antithesis. Anti-power resides within social interstices of exclusion and dispossession, where it thrives by “distancing itself from dominant institutions” as it pursues “resistance as a process for the construction and reconstruction of forms of social organization” (Ceceña, 2011, p. 130).

3. The Tension between Power and Anti-Power and Wind-Farm Projects

Anti-power emerges at numerous places and moments in society. This means that it is not just a formal political struggle, but also a part of our everyday lives. Wind-energy projects as expressions of power exist in communities in developing countries. Sometimes this has had adverse consequences that have motivated people around the world to organize themselves in order to confront international wind-energy policy. How are communities defending themselves? What kind of resources do they have? Against whom and what exactly is their struggle? Their struggle is against the dominant public discourse of companies that ostensibly embrace the cause of clean and renewable energy as a means of combating climate change in the name of progress, companies whose true motive is profit (Foucault, 2002a). In its official discourse, power promotes solutions to problems that capitalism itself has created. One such solution is the huge wind-farm projects that have been developed at strategic points of capitalist geography. Investors in wind energy maximize their profits by dominating and exploiting the communities where they establish themselves; the greater the accumulation of capital, the greater the domination in the form of expropriation projects for renewable resources (Hernández, González and Cordero, 2015).

Through legally constituted practices, power solidifies wind-energy policy that extols its economic, environmental, and social benefits. It does so within a normative framework of entrepreneurial concepts that delineate what a socially responsible business is supposed to be. Anti-power, on the other hand, takes form invisibly in everyday social interactions among those who struggle to protect their rights and property.

The dominant episteme (Foucault, 2001) that permeates energy policy at national and international levels is one that creates diverse discursive forms that have essentially the same motive: the control of energy production. In global discourse, this translates into social, financial and ecological factors (Mendoza, 2007): energy security, economic efficiency, and the environment (Comisión para la Cooperación Ambiental, 2010). In Mexico, in order for an energy business to be profitable “markets are created by establishing the elements of energy and environmental policies as well as those of socio-economic development” (Borja, 2010, p. 9). Furthermore, “methodologies of measuring economic, social, environmental and health externalities, both positive and negative, are involved in production and consumption” (Secretaría de Energía, 2012, p. 69).

The social dimension of energy policy fragments subjects (Holloway, 2002) by insisting that they conform to normative standards of planetary awareness that are juridically established through environmental protection laws (Leff, 2010). Japan, for example, in order to increase its use of wind energy and other renewable sources, has created an energy policy that has allowed it to reduce the importation of fossil fuels. Concomitantly, “citizens and businesses, as consumers of energy, must understand the meaning of new sources of energy in order to fully implement them and to be ready to assume necessary additional costs” (Mendoza, 2007, p. 366)

The expression of “capitalism’s power permeates everything” (Holloway, 2002). It is a hegemonic force that imposes itself from the top down. Anti-power, on the other hand, allows us to perceive and understand social dimensions from the bottom-up, from the perspectives of the everyday lives of those affected by wind-farm projects. Accordingly, we believe it is necessary to start at the bottom of social dimensions, where forms of insubordination among the oppressed are forged as hidden discourse (Scott, 2000) that seeks to break through the modern logic of power:

Anti-power is not evident on the surface of society. Television, newspapers and political discourse do not reveal its existence. For them, policy is the policy of power. Political conflict is about gaining power. Political reality is the reality of power. For them, anti-power is invisible (Holloway, 2011, p. 2).

Focusing on anti-power (Holloway, 2011) permits us to understand that the transformation of nature is a constant capitalist struggle; dominating nature and substituting it artificially with commodities (Ceceña, 2011) is global capitalism’s supreme economic

imperative. By aligning ourselves with anti-power, we become part of a struggle against the auto-destruction of humanity itself. According to Holloway, adopting forms of organization that seek inclusion in a system that excludes is not an alternative. Anti-power takes form when local knowledge that has been excluded by dominant discourse asserts itself within the internal space of social relationships (Foucault; 2002b). Anti-power begins with knowledge as an expression of people in the “un-market” (Ceceña, 2011). The confrontation between power and anti-power in social dimensions exists within individual subjects. Sometimes the reaction is fear, but this same fear can inspire efforts that seek to prevent exclusion, dispossession and extinction. The following table summarizes the differences between power and anti-power: (see Table 1).

Power	Anti-Power
The capitalist state and its instruments of coercion.	Amorous relationships, familial affection, companionship, community and cooperation
Relationships of power and strategic games to exclude the other.	Anti-power relationships that respect human dignity.
Episteme of domination and dispossession.	Rupture and fragmentation as a form of struggle
Instrumental rationality: natural resources.	Subjectivity: reversal of human alienation.
World view of cost- benefit analysis.	A vision of the world through the historic construction of social spaces that break away from the market and the State.
Public wind-energy policy promoted through economic and juridical-institutional mechanisms.	Novel concepts and methodologies that construct and remake society.

Table 1: The dialectical relationship between power and anti-power
 Source: Elaborated based on Holloway, 2011, 2001; Ceceña, 2012, 2011, 2006.

4. The Tension between Power and anti-power in Arriaga, Chiapas

It is essential that an open and critical theory carry out qualitative investigations that are equally open and critical, from the bottom up (Denman and Haro, 2000; Adorno, 2001). Empirically, this study was carried out via semi-structured and unstructured interviews as well as direct observation. We used semi-structured interviews with different local authorities: municipal agents and the Communal Property Commission. The unstructured interviews were employed with local inhabitants who had resided in the same location for at least five years. We examined ten localities of the municipality of Arriaga, Chiapas: Emiliano Zapata, Azteca (La Punta), La Gloria, Lázaro Cárdenas, Punta Flor, Nicolás Bravo (El Hondo), Villa del Mar, Oaxaquita, Cinco de Mayo, Arriaga (municipal seat).

According to the Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (Sedesol, 2015), although El Diamante has no households that are regularly inhabited, it is considered to be a community because it has four residents that engage in some kind of gainful activity (Sedesol, 2015). It is here that the first wind farm was established. It has 16 wind generators and began operation in 2012 as energy source for the Salinas Group's (Grupo Dragón, 2014; AMDEE, 2012.) own needs. Because it is directly in charge of the wind-energy project in the municipality of Arriaga, Chiapas, Grupo Dragón is the business that is located on land in El Diamante.

The State's social discourse is oriented toward the benefits that the wind-farm projects in the state of Chiapas offer: increased investment, job creation and the reduction of environmental contamination:

The Arriaga wind farm, in the state of Chiapas, was constructed with an investment of 1,100,000,000 pesos, and it will have a productive capacity of 28.8 megawatts, equivalent to the energy consumed by 40,000 households. During the inauguration of this park, the first of its kind in the state of Chiapas, Governor Juan Sabines, indicated that the generation of wind energy would benefit 38 municipalities and would reduce the annual cost of electricity by 371.5 million pesos. The state as a whole would save 89.2 million pesos on electricity per year, explained Sabines. Likewise, carbon-dioxide emissions would be reduced by 45 thousand tons every year, thereby contributing to the balance of the country's alternative energy production. It is worth mentioning that the construction of these wind generators took seven years and directly employed 200 people in the municipality of Arriaga. The wind farm has 16 wind generators that produce 1.8 megawatts each. Their height is 130 meters. The rotational diameter of the blades is 90 meters, equivalent to the height of a 25-story building. It is noteworthy that this was the first wind farm to be installed in the state of Chiapas. Prior to this, only the state of Oaxaca had been a pioneer in this field. The governor commented that the wind farm would take advantage of the region's wind potential to produce renewable electrical energy as a means of reducing fossil-fuel dependency. The investment is 100% private and was made by the Salinas Group and Grupo Dragón, a Mexican firm dedicated to the generation of energy through renewable sources in cooperation with Vestas, a company that develops wind projects and generators. As a consequence, the electricity generated will also satisfy the energy needs of businesses that belong to the Salinas Group (Newspaper *Crónica*, March 15, 2012).

The business responsible for the wind-farm project views the social dimension of Arriaga through an optic of economic calculation and compensation:

The Grupo Dragón Accord's notion of social responsibility focuses on 1. Education: Schools are remodeled and furniture is donated. The group participates in the academic community by presenting a series of conferences on renewable energy and environmental care. School vehicles are reactivated and repaired. 2. Health: Donations are made that directly benefit public health. 3. Sports: Playing fields are refurbished to promote sports and physical activity among both children and adults. Grupo Dragón also donates balls, other equipment and uniforms for soccer and baseball, 4. Culture: Toys are donated to children in the community with the help of *Juguetón Azteca*. We also donate teaching material, furniture, musical instruments, computers and audiovisual equipment. Infrastructure: We support communities with donations for infrastructural investment, for example, to create parks and install playground games in

addition to donations for multiple-use athletic courts, gravel, sand, road repair, public areas, etc. 5. The Environment: We work together with the community in the Let's Clean up Mexico Project, *Limpiemos México* (GrupoDragón, 2014).

The quantification of the wind began in Arriaga with its potential to generate clean energy, but the wind has always been an important feature of the community. The wind's nature, its temperament and moods, has always been a topic of conversation. The wind is no stranger to the inhabitants of Arriaga. It has been very much a part of their lives, past and present (Aguirre, 2005). The wind allows them to predict the weather and, accordingly, plan the day's activities. They know what the wind can do, both good and bad. A 56-year-old woman in the community of Lázaro Cárdenas explains that "the wind is natural, and I have grown up with it" (Int. 1). Don Pedro, a self-employed worker, affirms that "the wind is very bad because it dries up the ocean, and there are no shrimp" (Int. 2). The inhabitants of Arriaga have conflicting views on the wind. Although it refreshes, it causes problems as well. It makes work more difficult. It damages houses and causes power outages. "Here when the wind blows, it scares us because it pulls up metal roofs. The electric goes out, and trees are knocked down. We can't go out. We can't do anything," says Doña Lenor, a housewife in the community of La Gloria (Int. 3). A campesino in the community of Villa del Mar says that "it is difficult to plant and harvest. To know what to do, you have to wait for the weather. You find a way" (Int. 4). "*Campesinos* are farm laborers and the owners of small family farms that are not capital intensive. They raise crops for their own consumption and occasionally produce a small surplus for the market. The term is sometimes translated as *peasant*" (Translator's Note).

Reading diverse *points of view* (Bourdieu, 1999) allows us to realize that the struggle of insubordinates favors the environment because they do not attempt to alter their relation with nature. Their struggle is not against nature, but against the dominant environmental discourse of capitalism on natural resources and development. One version of modernity calls local customs into doubt and creates alternative perspectives that upset traditional world views. Arriaga is an example of this. Its inhabitants feel the social effects of political and economic measures that have been implemented through sundry social programs and investments, such as wind-energy projects. Some interviewees approved of the installation of projects such as Bachoco's because they create jobs. Nevertheless, at the same time they are not sure about welcoming wind-energy projects. Particularly, they are afraid of losing their land and the conflicts that may arise. They also have doubts about wind-energy investment as a means of improving living standards in the community.

The wind-energy companies located in Arriaga, Chiapas view social dimensions as means of furthering the implementation of the rational mechanisms of power (Foucault, 2002a). That is, these companies assume that social dimensions should conform to the legal and business criteria that the State and the market demand. Operationally, they limit the social dimension to the dictates of their own canon on what they think socially responsible business practices should be. This is an ideological tour de force that allows them to justify and hide practices of dispossession while they promote a renovated discourse of cost-benefit rationalism. So then, how can modernity be confronted as it voraciously imposes its depredation? Community members generally lack knowledge about the wind-energy generators currently in operation. They do not receive transparent information on the social cost of wind farms. Instead, deliberate disinformation on the part of the Mexican government predominates (Cordero, González and Hernández, 2014). This does nothing to improve the lives of the people of Arriaga. On the contrary, it is just another way of perpetuating a historically inveterate pattern of vassalage that has paralyzed their ability to organize and act.

Arriaga, Chiapas – With an investment of more than 200 million pesos, the government of Chiapas inaugurated the first six chicken farms of a GrupoBochoco complex in the municipality of Arriaga. Representing the governor, Manuel Velasco Coello, the Secretary of Economy, OvidioCortazar Ramos, thanked the general director of Bachoco, Rodolfo Ramos Arvizu, for their confidence in investing in new infrastructure that would benefit not only for Arriaga, but also the entire coastal region of the Isthmus while creating 250 jobs... With this, Bochoco has joined other companies that have found opportunities for economic development supported by the state government...Almost three billion pesos of private investment have been attracted to Chiapas and more than four thousand four hundred jobs have been directly created there (Instituto de la Comisión Social del Estado de Chiapas, 2015).

Disinformation among community members on the prospect of new wind-energy projects is a means of imposing social discipline (Foucault, 2002b); and is, therefore, a form of power. A housewife who lives in the municipal seat of Arriaga, Chiapas explains that I don't know much about the towers...I don't know anything about what you are telling me (referring to the arrival of the wind-energy company). No one has informed us, but I think it is a good thing, but I haven't seen them set up yet (Int. 5).

The power of modernity has placed community members at a crucial juncture in which they will have to decide whether or not to accept additional wind-farm projects. One way or the other, whether they do or not, the market will not lose. The ultimate problem is not whether a particular community decides to accept a wind-energy project or not, but how to confront constant depredation. Although it may be true that Arriaga has not yet articulated alternative concepts to face wind-energy projects, its inhabitants are constructing them in the course of their everyday lives in terms of what the wind has meant to them traditionally and what it means now as an imposition of modernity and source of conflict.

Anti-power does not exist solely in the visibly open struggles of insubordinates. It also exists in a problematic and contradictory form (but all struggle is problematic and contradictory) in everyone's everyday frustrations, in the continuous struggle to maintain our dignity before power, in the everyday struggle to retain and reaffirm control over our lives (Holloway, 2011, p. 4).

Examples of this can be found in various communities where communal landowners face stressful situations in which attempts are being made to install new wind farms:

A community member from Villa del Mar commented: "If some of us accept the wind-energy project and others do not, we will take the necessary steps to come to an agreement because I want to be able to enter my land later...if this benefits us, in other words, if it is good for us" (Int. 6).

On the other hand, another community member affirms that

I don't want any projects on my land. It's my children's only inheritance. We don't have anything else. In this we are content, and we don't need a lot of money to live on... (Int. 7).

The challenge for the communal assembly is to negate and construct, to express anti-power as an articulate discourse of communal struggle against the imposition of modernity. Simply denouncing misinformation that justifies the implementation of wind-energy policy is not enough. It is also necessary to transcend institutional language. In order to "reaffirm control over our lives, our greatest challenge is the construction of social alternatives among uncertain struggles that arise within the social ruptures than power continuously creates" (Holloway, 2011:4). This, however, is a matter for future studies that will allow us to understand how the inhabitants of the communities of the municipality of Arriaga, Chiapas will have responded to wind-energy policy.

Whether or not some local residents in the localities of Arriaga are in favor, against, undecided or worried depends at least in part on the loci of enunciation because "power resides in the fragmentation of social relations" (Holloway, 2002):

Both *comuneros* and *ejidatarios* hold land in common. However, there is a difference. Due to a recent constitutional amendment, *ejidatarios*, unlike *comuneros*, can sell their tracts of land individually to a party or parties outside the community (Translator's Note).

Municipal agent and member of the Assembly of Communal Property: Well, it is good that this kind of project comes here, but we don't know how we are going to benefit as a community. It is something that we are discussing with our companions. That's what the meetings are for (made in reference to the meeting of the Assembly of Communal Property that takes place the first Saturday of every month). We are waiting for the authorities from Tonalá to inform us (referring to the Agrarian Attorney's Office) (Int. 8).

Housewife and member of the Assembly of Communal Property: I like green, and I can't imagine leaving my town. Those who know full well if the projects are coming or not are the *comuneros*. Now the *ejidatarios* have no problem in deciding because they are not in the community (referring to the fact that *ejidatarios* do not belong to the Assembly of Common Property). You tell me (she addresses the interviewer). Since I got married to my husband, we have lived from his work as a *campesino*. In this way we have learned to live and make ends meet. This is the way it is with most of us that live here (Int. 9).

Campesino and member of the Assembly of Communal Property: We are waiting for them to tell us what the project is going to be like because we did not find out how the one we have now would be. It's in our best interests if they pay us well. Maybe it's to our advantage, but we, the members of the community, do not know (Int. 10).

Uncertainty may inspire community members both to reject new wind-energy projects in the region and to construct alternative plans with which to confront national and transnational policies. They will have to consider that "subversion is not possible if it does not involve thought, if new names and methodologies are not invented, if cosmic sense and common sense are not transformed in collective interactions to make and remake society" (Ceceña, 2006, p.14).

5. Final Considerations

The open analytical categories of the critical tradition in the social sciences have allowed us to reflect upon ruptures and possibilities for change that open up with the impetuous pace at which modernity imposes self. The case of the wind-energy project in Arriaga, Chiapas is a tangible example of how power coalesces in the form of transnational clean-energy megaprojects. Nevertheless, modernity is not an impenetrable monolithic totality. It fractures and within the ruptures of modernity itself arises the potential for individual and collective resistance. The struggle of anti-power against modernity emerges from the dreams, desires, hope and love that human beings have for each other and for nature. As part of the general development of renewable-energy policy, the implementation of wind energy policy in Mexico is gradually dispossessing inhabitants of the communities in which wind-energy projects are being installed. However, at the same time, capital investment is creating fractures, spaces for "the force of the repressed" (Holloway, 2011), an invisible yet tangible force. Within the tension between power and anti-power lies the recognition of the capitalist domination and dispossession that has fostered both conflict and resistance as its own contradiction.

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6. Interviews

- i. (Int. 1) Interview of 56-year-old married woman from the locality of Lázaro Cárdenas, Arriaga, Chiapas. Interviewed by Juquila Araceli GonzálezNolasco. July of 2014.
- ii. (Int. 2) Interview of Don Pedro, a self-employed worker from the locality of Azteca (La Punta), Arriaga, Chiapas. Interviewed by Juquila Araceli GonzálezNolasco. July of 2014.
- iii. (Int. 3) Interview of Doña Leonor from the locality of La Gloria, Arriaga, Chiapas. Interviewed by Juquila Araceli GonzálezNolasco. July of 2014.
- iv. (Int. 4) Interview of a campesino from the locality of Villa del Mar, Arriaga, Chiapas. Interviewed by Juquila Araceli GonzálezNolasco. July of 2014.
- v. (Int. 5) Interview of a housewife from the municipal seat, Arriaga, Chiapas. Interviewed by Juquila Araceli GonzálezNolasco. July of 2014.
- vi. (Int. 6) Interview of comunero from the locality of Villa del Mar, Arriaga, Chiapas. Interviewed by Juquila Araceli GonzálezNolasco. July of 2014.
- vii. (Int. 7) Interview of comunero from the locality of Punta Flor, Arriaga, Chiapas. Interviewed by Juquila Araceli GonzálezNolasco. July of 2014.

- viii. (Int. 8). Interview of amunicipal agentandmiembro de BienesComunalesfrom the locality of Villa del Mar, Arriaga, Chiapas.Interviewed by Juquila Araceli González Nolasco. July of 2014.
- ix. (Int. 9). Interview of a housewife andmember of Bienescomunalesfrom the locality ofPunta Flor, Arriaga Chiapas.Interviewed by Juquila Araceli González Nolasco. July of 2014.
- x. (Int. 10). Interview of campesinoandmember ofBienescomunalesfrom the locality of Villa del Mar, Arriaga Chiapas, 2014. InterviewedbyJuquila Araceli González Nolasco.July of 2014.

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