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Alexander Dunlap talks about his new book *Renewing Destruction: Wind Energy Development, Conflict and Resistance* with Professor Mariel Aguilar-Støen.

MAS: I would like to start by asking if you can tell us a little bit about you?

AD: Ouuuhhh… I am a dirty skateboarder turned academic who now has a post-doctoral position at the Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo. Where I am proudly a part of the Rural Transformations group, which you lead.

MAS: I found something you wrote in the book I would like you to explain. It is this adaptation of Michel Foucault, where you say: "How do you expect over a thousand wind turbines—operating, planned and placed in the lands of Mexico—to have survived, and to have established and actually maintained permanent power generation in the coastal Istmo? (p. 21)." How does this tie in to what the book's about?

AD: So, yes, this is a play on Foucault's words when he was giving a lecture on colonial conquest, meanwhile really raising the

question: How does a lesser number of people—a minority invader population—take over, settle and control another land and people? And this book really is asking the same question: How do a bunch of certain elite or business actors move into a territory, build this infrastructure and begin accumulating energy when there is a well-known and strong opposition towards these projects—at least near the Lagoon. This book really examines how the projects come to exist, how they continue to exist and generate power in a context where they are popularly opposed. It is really trying to look at the way how development projects—even if they are unpopular—can enter a region and begin to control the territory, make the population acquiesce to the project and start controlling land, but also harnessing the vitality of wind resources in that area. So, it is really looking at how megaprojects enter a region, but also the dynamics that begin to form. This includes the divisive tactics employed by companies that makes it more difficult for people to organize themselves to resist these projects adequately.

MAS: It is also interesting that you start your book with a critique of anthropology and that you mention ethics in relationship to anthropological research. Can you explain what you mean by this?

AD: Yeah… I guess the short answer is that in many ways I am embarrassed to be an anthropologist. The legacy and history of anthropological research is extremely negative by my account. Despite all the ”nuance” and ”reflexivity” in the discipline, structurally speaking I do not think much has changed in terms of the purposes of knowledge generation, the institutional control and privatization of that knowledge and the subjectivities—or the implicit socially accepted types of biases—that underline research design. Of course, there are exceptions, but radical critique regarding the statist forms of organization and the development of industrial infrastructures are not questioned to the degree that they should be. Modernist infrastructure and computational technologies still condition and dominate our academic lives, which is increasingly nor-

AD: Right now, I am looking at the formation of transnational energy super-grid between North Africa and the EU. I am examining this specifically through a ZAD in southern France that is resisting the construction of a mega-transformer on farmland grabbed through bureaucratic means. This energy transformer locally will lead to the rapid increase of wind and solar projects that have been colonizing the Aveyron region—even if the region is near energy self-sufficient through hydrological resources. The people are trying to resist ecological destruction for mass consumption—the expansion of green capitalism. They do not want wind turbines in this area if it continues alongside the expansion of nuclear and hydrocarbon consumption and development. Therefore, they are saying energy transition is a joke and they do not want to see their countryside colonized like the Isthmus in Oaxaca, even if it is already heading in that direction. The equally interesting part is that this transformer is part of a forming energy corridor bringing energy from North Africa to meet renewable energy benchmarks set by the Paris Agreement in 2015. There are other conflicts or land grabs taking place in other indigenous territories in North Africa and arising from environmental and climate change policy. So I will be examining what energy infrastructure and renewable energy systems are creating across continents. This is what I got ahead of me, and it looks tough.

MAS: Okay, thanks for sharing and I look forward to seeing what comes next.

malized and integrated into universities with little opposition. But also, a lot of the knowledge being generated—while there might be liberatory intentions for a lot of the researchers—I think a lot of the banal knowledge being collected and organized can benefit many different extractive companies, marketing agencies and repressive forces. Not to forget turning villagers into poster children in power point presentations. In the book, there is a subsection, responding to discussions in anthropological ethics, called "For Anthropologists Against Anthropology." The purpose is to really stress that, as anthropologists, we should be extremely critical of our discipline, but also ask ourselves why we are even researchers in the first place and what type of knowledge we want to generate. Because, as it says in the book, knowledge is a double-edged sword and it will often cut both ways. It is important to think critically in how one organizes their research.

A lot of this is a response to the norms in anthropology, because I ended up embedding in a *policia comunitaria* (Communitarian Police) who were more-or-less a lightly armed group of fishermen and farmers with slingshots, machetes and their hunting rifles. They organized themselves to keep out the wind companies and the politicians that they saw as grabbing their land and destroying their livelihoods and culture. My fieldwork would have been considered risky if I proposed what happened with an ethical review committee at most institutions, but I did not know I was going to fall into the situation this way, even if it makes sense given how the research started, which is narrated in the beginning of the book. At the end of the day, it is all fun and games for anthropologists to go work for the military and police; it's okay for anthropologists to go work for marketing agencies; it's okay for anthropologists to go work for resource extraction companies, which is surprisingly more common than I expected as the research presented in the book and elsewhere[1] demonstrates. But when it comes to an-

[1] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S096262981830341X

thropologists actually embedding and conducting observant participation in environmental struggles to try and get a better idea of what is going on at the frontiers of the green economy, where people are trying to protect their land and sea, then these things are often frowned upon.

MAS: I believe that goes beyond anthropology and anthropologists. As you present in your book, you mention the case where some geographers organized mapping indigenous communities (México Indígena[2]) to provide information to the Mexican state and paid by the US military, so perhaps it is an interesting reflection that goes beyond anthropology.

AD: Yeah, most certainly. It raises the wider question that we have to ask: What is the purpose of the university? What is the purpose of research? A lot of people might think it is to make the world a better and happier place, but these broad words have different meanings that can be used in different ways. For me this means that the soil quality is being enriched, there are higher qualities of food, higher qualities of water, air and social relationships. In actuality this "better," or worse "improvement," is usually designed around spreading market-oriented perspectives and values systems or affirming institutions that prioritize their own existence over the issues they claim to be concerned with or working to fix. The support offered by state institutions and corporations for example are often token and serve branding or purpose of market expansion. I think it is imperative that research is organized to address—in very honest ways—how "we," industrial humans, can have better relationships with our environments. How we can create environments that nurture and support life: the trees, the cats, the animals, the water, the air and everything around us. Governments, universities and people need to really start reconciling… I guess we can say, "climate debt." I do not really like that terminology, but the widespread ecological catastrophe that has been

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9xico_Ind%C3%ADgena

"rolled-out" as a "solution" to mitigating ecological catastrophe, is a job in itself. Really, it is just the repackaging of the same capitalist program, but now it is "green" with new technologies and justifications.

So when you hear Greta Thunberg and others dispensing great words—and they are great—but if you actually look at the people behind her or the different UN programs that are being "rolled out," then it is clear we are witnessing nothing more than the renewal of capitalist expansion. Consequently, green capitalist trap doors are being constructed everywhere—"climate infrastructure"—for people who genuinely want to see the restoration of ecological destruction and climatic patterns. Hopefully, this book is clear in demonstrating that what is the so-called "solution" is really not the solution it is sold to be, at least in the area of wind energy development. This extends very well, as you know very well from your over a decade of work[12], to conservation. There have been ideas of convivial conservation[13] and things like this reacting against these market-based programs. I guess now, as much as ever, it is important to imagine alternative futures—to do different things, to press the boundaries of how one thinks about subversion and resistance against destructive developments in the hopes to create spaces where people, animals, trees and everyone can co-exist without destroying each other and the planet. Supporting each other, instead of separated and alienated from each other. So maybe now we can start living better lives and not worry about rising water, erratic weather patterns, food shortages or the rapid spread of forest fires or our shitty jobs.

MAS: Thank you. What is your next project? What are you working on and how do you intend on using this idea of fossil fuel+ to expand your research?

[12] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08039410.2016.1276098

[13] http://www.conservationandsociety.org/article.asp?issn=0972-4923;year=2019;volume=17;issue=3;spage=283;epage=296;aulast=B%FCscher

MAS: Towards the end of the book, you quote Ivan Illich, referring to the crisis of imagination. I think this is an interesting point to consider, especially for environmental activists and all the people concerned about the climate catastrophe that we are experiencing. Do you have any thoughts about that?

AD: Yeah. I do not think there is a more important thing than to get creative with your political actions, or life for that matter. Get creative, do things differently—create new and different types of situations in which to stop these projects or to live a better way within your everyday life. We have to be more than this predictable civil disobedience movement that is organizing a data collection dream for authorities. As much as I appreciate it in some ways, a lot of it has been turned into corporate activism that is conditioning environmental movements.[11] There is a lot of big money trying to "roll-out" these kinds of green economic structures that people are not prepared to understand what they imply in practice, because people do not necessarily know the flaws or reductionism of carbon accounting. People do not necessarily know what carbon accounting is being used to justify. Therefore, the flowery and fiery environmental rhetoric from "youth leaders" sounds good, but they are not questioning the market-based mechanism and private sector profiteering that is implied with the internationally agreed upon climate change mitigation strategy. People are not aware of payment for ecosystem services (PES) and the environmental relationship it promotes, not to mention the land grabs—fast and slow—that are being executed under the banners of these programs. And the PES product diversifies with increasing complications, which keeps academics busy and in a job. The green economy requires an immense amount of bureaucratic and financial knowledge, becoming an academic specialty on its own. Understanding what is being

[11] http://www.wrongkindofgreen.org/2019/02/13/the-manufacturing-of-greta-thunberg-for-consent-the-new-green-deal-is-the-trojan-horse-for-the-financialization-of-nature/

spread by industrial development and capitalism. We really have to switch our priorities: our research priorities, our institutional priorities and our own lives in how we can make them better, but also address socio-ecological crises.

MAS: You book reads as a critique of the green economy, and you put forward this notion of "fossil fuel+"[3]. In my head I started associating it with REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation[4]), REDD+ and then REDD++, which is an indication of REDD saving the forest with money which was renegotiated, and then renegotiated and renegotiated... Is something similar happening with wind energy or "green" energy?

AD: Well, yeah. There are two topics there. First, I think it is an understatement to say that this book is a critique against the green economy - it most certainly is. Maybe it is even hostile towards it, instead of offering the care necessary for critique. Second, this comparison with REDD+ and Fossil Fuel+ are very different, even if they are both trying to communicate something regarding the environment. REDD+ is trying to implement a program that can control land and (indigenous) populations in each context slightly differently, but for the most part it is a land control and market based strategy designed to commodify the environment and prepare habitats for carbon banks and things like this. Fossil fuel+, on the other hand, was a term designed for my climate justice friends and other people involved mainstream environmental activism who believe in this dichotomy between fossil fuels and renewable energy. That dichotomy is false. It is a marketed one. It is one that is very surreptitious and manipulative. Because the fact is, every single aspect of renewable energy development, whether wind or other programs—and of course I am referring to industrial and utility-scale—is based on hydrocarbon extraction and var-

[3] https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3797-end-the-green-delusions-industrial-scale-renewable-energy-is-fossil-fuel

[4] https://www.un-redd.org/

ious industrial technologies. You need special types of coal to even smelt the metal for wind turbine towners or other steel infrastructures. You need to make the machines, that run on gasoline, that then do the mining. You need the factory to make those machines that do the mining, you need the transportation of these infrastructures, the processing facilities—every single aspect, I cannot stress enough—requires large-scale hydrocarbon and mineral extraction and processing. This distinction is misleading and it is a huge and undeniable weakness of environmental movements. It is paving the way for the new trap of "climate infrastructure" and other green economic schemes related to the inaccurate and reductive quantifications of carbon accounting that REDD+ and Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) are dependent and are metrics responsible for spreading conflict and ecological degradation[5], of which my book is another resource documenting this in detail. So, the term Fossil fuel+ is a way to say: "Hey, we really need to break this dichotomy if we are going to be honest about the situation facing the planet," because we are just drinking a repugnant old wine re-marketed in new bottles with green labels.

MAS: Don't you think there is some type of disconnect between the laywoman and all this knowledge you are talking about, because I see a lot of people with the best intentions —even climate engaged academics— buying their Tesla, putting solar panels on their houses or towards other "greener" and "cleaner" energies. Do you think your book could contribute to raise awareness as to how everything is interconnected?

AD: Yeah, the book is very specific case study that gets into three different phases of wind energy development revealing the different types of hopes people had and its impacts. I think the way large wind energy projects even gain some type of legitimacy in Oaxaca was through this kind of marketing of "green," that it is

[5] https://www.pdx.edu/econ/sites/www.pdx.edu.econ/files/DunlapAndFairhead2014_TheMilitarizationAndMarketizationOfNature.pdf

marketization of life. It is usually the exact same type of projects, but they are shaped by different cultural specificities and sociohistorical processes that make the current political contexts. People across the world are dealing with the same impositions. Some acts of violence are more politically feasible than others in certain contexts. Whether it is wind energy development in the Isthmus with different "soft" and "hard" forms of coercion deployed to pacify the population or in the Hambach forest[7] in Germany—which has a lower intensity of violence—but the same dynamic is in place with tons of surveillance, beatings and people being sprayed with water hoses in freezing temperatures. Or as you mention here in Norway, there are also attacks on indigenous territories with wind energy development here, with land grabbing that is displacing reindeer migration and habitation patterns, which our colleague Susanne Norman is investigating. Now as you mention, the call for culling raindeer based on claims of a certain biological carrying capacity,[8] which was imposed on the Sámi. A cull that is now being compared to the extermination of buffalo[9] during the plain wars in the US, which exemplifies this idea of the genocide-ecocide nexus. It's the same game of state control and divide and conquer in the name of economic development and market expansion, which recklessly disregards existing lifeways, other ways to live with ecosystems or, as they say in the post-development school[10], "alternatives to development". Can the state support reindeer herding and culture as opposed to other forms of development? It's the same game in different contexts. One is a more bureaucratic and dispense a type of epistemic violence like in Norway, another is a more overt political violence as in the Americas, yet there is a whole assemblage that makes this violence and the ecological catastrophe possible.

[7] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0962629817300835
[8] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00291951.2015.1031274
[9] https://journals.openedition.org/terrain/18051
[10] https://cup.columbia.edu/book/pluriverse/9788193732984

groups with distinct land-based cultures the means of subsistence—preventing them from accessing the land or sea—very much falls in line with the long-term and slower forms that hollows out the feelings and traditions of indigenous populations, all the while forcing them by various means into different types of jobs or ways of living. So yes, there is a lot to say that what is going on in the Isthmus and elsewhere in Latin America is a continuation of the colonial project, and that wind turbines are the latest intervention that are slowly hollowing out and pushing towards cultural extinction of Ikoot and Zapotec populations. Obviously, people are resisting in whatever ways they can, slowing down and subverting this trajectory mapped out for them, but this is a long struggle that indigenous people have been engaged in, since Spanish colonialism. Then it is more complicated than this, the Zapotecs were a colonizing imperial force in the Isthmus before the Spaniards. The point is, wind turbines are just the latest structure—among others—that are slowly trying to break indigenous cultures to the imperatives of the state and capitalist development.

MAS: Thank you. From what you write in the book and many chapters, there are a lot of things that are familiar or well known about extractive industries, let's say mining or oil companies—even palm oil. There are patterns that are recurring across all these different types of extractive industries. This has been discussed in different places all over Latin America, but what about other contexts? I am thinking specifically about violence, the way people are repressed and silenced. School kids on climate strike in France who were beaten by the police or the case of a Sámi reindeer herder who was forced to kill his animals. Of course, you cannot compare or say that the violence is the same, but there is some form of violence in forcing someone to kill half of their animals. Do you think there is a common thread in what we are seeing in all these different parts of the world?

AD: Yeah, yeah of course. And kind of what you asked before about global solidarity, it is a reaction to state control and further

sustainable and you will be "doing good." This really opened people up to the idea. Second, people thought that not only it was good, but that they would be able to make money in the northern part of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Therefore, this "green" marketing, state and elite support that organized and managed it—reflecting back on that Foucault adaption—allowed the companies to gain a foothold in the region. And this is precisely the issue when we talk about Tesla's in Norway as well, where they cannot stop subsidizing and importing them from California. And people buy what is sold, what is marketed. We live in a situation where consumer consent is structured and manufactured. The subjectivities of people—their dispositions and desires—are already accounted for and manipulated in a certain way—maybe with the help of marketing anthropologists and sociologists. Tesla are great for the consumer to minimize their paying money at the gas pump, but from an ethnographically grounded supply chain and life-cycle perspective they are nightmare: How are they getting the energy to charge the car; the minerals for the batteries, the mineral processing and manufacturing facilities, the various transportation of components and so on. People are not thinking—or feeling for that matter—they are buying what they are sold and it is disconcerting because there is not a single thing about the green economy—other than an ambiguous rhetoric—that actually suggests it wants to repair and restore the ecological degradation and serious ecocidal harm that has been created by industrial society. People in Oslo still love McDonalds, Starbucks' are popping up like mushrooms and I did not expect that before I moved here. People buy what they are sold and what is available, thus bearing serious responsibility on these businesses and the state institutions that structured human habitation this way.

So, instead of doing the right thing in the face of ecological and climate catastrophe, the state and its business associates are just intensifying and doubling down on this capitalist path of mass blind production and consumption. At face value it is making it less de-

structive, but if you look past the veil down the supply chain you will find extractive violence is just being exported to rural areas where black, brown and, most of all, materially poor communities face natural resource extraction and have less protections and opportunities than countries like Norway. Political and extractive violence are spreading at increasing rates in general and green technologies if they are not already central players they will be in a matter of years.

MAS: I think you do a very good job in your book presenting all these nuances [laughter] or "shades of grey" in terms of resistance, but also recognizing the people who are happy and what these projects to happen. Can you explain a bit more about that?

AD: Yeah, yeah. I do not think there is a more interesting topic—I guess I have thought this for a long time—than the idea of manufacturing desire. I guess you can link it to earlier stuff with Thorstein Veblen's "emulation," Edward Bernays's "engineering consent," Gills Deleuze, and Félix Guattari's "desiring-machines" or Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's "manufacturing consent." Ultimately a lot of people what to emulate and become what they are seeing on television. They want to be rich, they want to have the American Dream or, thinking of Escobar, the dream of development or, at the very least, survive any way they can in a capitalist system. People want to believe that the green economy is going to work, people want to believe that wind turbines (and their supply chains) are not that "bad," but the fact is that on so many levels: resource extraction and processing; land contracting: environmental impacts: energy use; and decommissioning these infrastructures are causing immense social dissatisfaction and ecological degradation. So yeah, there are definitely politicians and elites who are benefiting from this, and people allured by the marketed benefits. Even people who have collaborated with these wind projects have seen what they have done to the area. I remember speaking with a landowner who cared deeply for the mountain lions that would come onto his ranch. He observed

the way the wind turbines have affected their relationship with the mountain lions, with their habitats and travel patterns were completely altered and the area inhospitable for them. While this person had benefited from the projects, putting two of his sons through college, he also saw how nonhuman populations were affected and at least on some level regretted this to a point of tears in an intense conversation. This is a specific instance that is not mentioned in the book, but it was a very meaningful conversation. There are various shades of grey. There are plenty of people, however, that just want money and take what is offered, even if it disadvantages entire areas in the mid-to-long run. That said, in places like Oaxaca there are a lot more people who still have a connection with the land, sea and do not want to have this level of economic integration and dependence, but it is imposed on them in various ways.

MAS: You also draw a line from colonialism. From colonialism to wind energy development or "green" colonialism. Can you explain how you conceptualize this idea?

AD: I guess this leads into one of the more inflammatory aspects of the book. I knew the situation was not ideal before I went there, but I found myself in far more violent and conflictual situations than I expected. Talking with research participants, words and phrases like "genocide", "they are killing all of us", "this is ethnocide" and "this is ecocide" kept coming up. I didn't really know what to do with it at the time, but by the end of the project the words kept coming up in interview transcripts and I said: "Wow… What am I going to do with this?"

I really tried to honor this contention and embarked on a review of genocide studies to see how this was represented in the academic literature. It turns out that there is a long history of this in the "post-liberal" reading of genocide, which many argue[6] is closer to Ralph Lemkin's definition of the term. Preventing semi-subsistence

[6] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13642987.2010.512126