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“It Was Wartime”

eco-anarchist struggle against Nestle’s
water-grabbing & state-sanctioned hit squads in
Mexico

anonymous

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this: “fuck you we will fight to the death,” but once the adrenaline exhaustion sets in, after six hours of fighting, then everyone is like, “holy shit, we made it this far... fuck!” And then the military comes, and people realize this is the time... pfff. Real quick, in that town we were talking about there was an anarchist who was killed (Salvador Olmos García) and the way I heard it, it was an extra-judicial unit that came in and disappeared him.

It was the Ministerial Police (*Polícia Ministerial*).

Q: And did this happen after the barricade for retribution?

He was more. He was a punk. He had a punk ideology, but was one of those punks who really believed in self-organization (*autogestión*) and he had his own place in the market and was famous in the market because he did not seek profit. What I mean is that he got his living out of selling fruit, but he would also help the people in the market and was organizing people, but like being with them and living with them. Many people in Oaxaca knew him because he was always helping others, if there was like Tekio [*ed. – volunteer forestry service*] or community work to do he would go do it and help. He was also a voice on the community radio, so he was on the radio when he saw movement and the Federal Investigation Police. People said that there were cars of the ministerial police around and he went to go help his friends at the radio station, but he never made it there. He walked into their trap and they did an execution.

Q: Why do you think they went after him?

I am not from that village, I am not sure, but it was murky times and there was a lot of violence going on – it was wartime.

Q: Because they took police and Gendarmería prisoner?

Yes, and the military acted as an intermediary to exchange the prisoners. The police handed over villagers that were captured and the villagers handed over their people. It is not a village, it's a city, Huajuapán de León, it's the main artery... it's the *camino real* which the Spanish used [*ed. – during initial colonisation*] to move resources on to the capital. It's the old road. The military is being used to act as an intermediate between civilians and Federal forces... you see this is a balancing act. There are tractor-trailers blocking the highway on fire and the military are not intending to enter the town, instead acting as a neutral intermediary force and that is how the people view them as they were not engaged in combat with them. If the soldiers had intended to enter by force, they would have also been met with resistance and all of this was against the education reform.

Q: Am I sensing that you are frustrated that this barricade fell because people started negotiating with the military?

Not necessarily, because I think it served its purpose. Yes, the counterinsurgency afterwards was terrible, but I do not think it would have been possible to sustain that barricade as an autonomous zone forever.

Q: Totally.

I think the barricade served its purpose and the fact that there was a negotiation... I do not see it badly in those terms, there was no re-election.

Q: No, no, the only reason why I ask is I thought I heard that. I know that in my head, if you can make it to that point when the military is negotiating hostage exchanges then that is the time when people are normally like: "Okay, it is not going to be much longer before the tanks roll in, let's try to ride this out." Everyone has the state in their mind, they know what is going on. There is

This interview was conducted more than two years ago from when it will be read. The delay in publication has more to do with the appropriate publication outlet than security or, more so, concerns for providing feedback on how an action group was "effectively halted." The proliferation and intensification of violence in Mexico against anarchists, and especially organized women, has only increased since this interview.

The actions and concerns animating this interview are fueled by the acknowledgment that the world's capital can appropriate territory anywhere, on top of not only the water, hills and jungles, but also discipline and absorb the people of the region as an almost-free labor. The Mexican government thus articulates the art of violence which has only been on the rise since 2011, where subjugating the environments has become a prerequisite to break local inhabitants and to establish networks of profit. The Mexican government articulates its own version of the "Shock Doctrine." Meanwhile, the people from across the different territories saw this militarization and ecocide demanded a reply. Some people (named "indigenous" by the state) who generally view industrial development as the continuation of White invasion, which is a war shared by many anarchistic beings always watchful of attempts to build walls around them. The following shares experiences for this struggle, from this war.

When the middle-term Federal elections were coming up in June 2015, some Indigenous communities – well, let us say communities that are against development projects – these communities are the only communities that are not peddling the same official discourse. Because all of the people and organizations that are carrying the flag of struggle...they have the same discourse as the enemy, but with makeup and dressed up as resistance such as 'Energy for Everybody'¹ and Human Rights – it's the same shit. So the only people that have a discourse against this, are organizing and picking up weapons against

¹ See un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/energy/

this discourse of [capitalist] progress are Indigenous communities. One of the concerns that we had as anarchists here was that all those communities had autonomous initiatives or self-determination projects and that they were going to be hit by the machinery of the state if they were not helped in some way. It was declared illegal to try to convince someone not to vote or participate in elections in Mexico that June.

Q: So Peña Nieto made it illegal.

Yes, not to participate in elections.

So all of these communities were boycotting elections in their territories, they were all doing something that was declared illegal by the government. And this is the reason why some anarchists thought that they could aid them somehow by creating noise and disruption in some other places during the elections periods so those communities would not be the sole target of the media being labeled as ‘opponents of democracy’ or being targeted by soldiers or armed forces to harass them. So many anarchists thought, if there was noise and disruption made somewhere else they would draw the fire that way and away from people who had autonomous projects.

Q: Wait, so what you are telling me is that the idea for the declared Black June that year [ed. – anarchist call for actions all month] was actually based on this idea of indigenous solidarity to protect the autonomous communities fighting?

Yes, that was one of the main ideas. I talked to the people that called for the Black June and we were discussing this. That is why many of the things written for it and various actions² had references to communities that were fighting for self-determination in the names of their environments like

² es-contrainfo.espiv.net/2015/06/03/mexico-a-provocar-el-junio-negro/

native corn and beans.... The Zapatistas are one of the few peoples that have the native corn to give as a gift. While there are over fifty varieties in Mexico, the majority of the communities do not have enough corn for their whole diet and it is necessary to mix their diets with corn that the government gives them through social programs or the Secretariat of Social Development (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social*), or SEDESOL. It is genetically modified hybrid male and people have to mix it into their diets, but the Zapatista’s, even though the weather there is pretty harsh, they have enough for them and enough to give out.

Q: They have a surplus.

They have a surplus of native corn and they have many varieties in those mountains, they have many colors of corn. They are like bees that are keeping alive the genetic diversity of all of these plants. It is not just corn, it’s an ecosystem that they make with a log of fungi and a lot of things interacting there. They had a surplus in 2016 and I know I know people who were in the central valley fighting and I heard firsthand accounts from many of the anarchists who were involved in fighting on the frontlines and, even though I talked with them at different times, their stories match about the level of violence, the level of wounded cops.

Q: During the time of the uprising in the Central Valley, there was also an anarchist murdered, Salvador Olmos García,¹⁷ in one of the villages.

In that village there was an eight-hour battle where the town first defeated the Federal Police and they retreated, then came in the Gendarmería, they were defeated and retreated. Then came in the army and the soldiers approached the barricade at the entrance of the town and they told them that they came to negotiate prisoners.

¹⁷ itsgoingdown.org/assassination-anarchist-salvador-olmos-goes-court

were sustaining heavy losses they took over and occupied all the public hospitals in Oaxaca. They kicked out all the doctors and the nurses and brought in their own military doctors and nurses and the police and the military took over the hospitals and was arresting any wounded person that would go to a hospital and they were only accepting wounded police officers as patients. And they took over many hospitals and filled them with wounded police officers, what does this tell you about their losses? They were filling up hospitals and kicking out patients. Normal people were kicked out to give their beds to police officers.

Q: This could be a way for the state to invoke collective punishment against the region, in hopes making people turn on each other, to divide the people in those areas.

Also many of the doctors that were angry about it, they hijacked their ambulances and they went to the other side and gave medical services to the people who were fighting the police.

Q: Do not answer anything you feel uncomfortable with, but where were you, how do you know this?

I was in a village and in that village, the nearest battle against the police happened a few kilometers away...

Q: This was 2016, and so this was again against elections?

There was discontent about politics in general, but the main reason was the Education Reform Act. They had blockades all over the country, but on those blockades normal people were able to pass, the only thing that was being stopped were commercial trucks. So bus passengers could pass.

Q: But commercial ones not?

Not commercial ones.

Q: Like every Oaxacan road blockade.

And that was 2016 and the Zapatistas [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg39*] were going to have an event, of art – it was called Comparte – and they cancelled it. Then they donated tons of

Cherán in Michoacán,³ the Yaquis⁴ and the fruit pickers of Baja California⁵ were the big strike happened, it was pretty big. The police who were sent to pacify them were using live ammunition, they were not using rubber bullets, they were using 12 gauge shotguns and AR-15s. All of those workers are Indigenous and many of them....

As you will remember on June 1st there were many actions taking place everywhere. And in Xalapa [Veracruz] one of the main things was the water basin (*Cuenca*), because it was one of the main water sources and Nestle had the plans to build a damn there and promoting deforestation for cattle grazing. You know they are Nestle: Nestle was using The Zetas, as a name (and I see it as a name because it is not a real organization any more; the Cartels in Mexico are just random names from a list that represent different protocols that they are running and they could put any name to it, but that protocol has many levels of operation and organization)⁶ to break the social fibers, to control every little corner form of organization that might escape the state. People that do not actually threaten the state, they don't, but their organization naturally encrypts and transports information that escapes the grid of the state. So to prevent that it uses the Cartel as a protocol to get into all of those spaces, and with Nestle it was pretty clear. Nestle employed these protocols for protecting their investments and began searching for actors that could be a threat to their investments. This was also what happened in Bolivia [Cochabamba

³ pvangels.com/news-mexico/5021/self-determination-and-self-defense-in-cheran-michoacan

⁴ mexicovoices.blogspot.com/2015/03/sonora-mexico-new-war-against-yaquis.html

⁵ theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/25/mexico-baja-california-farm-workers-strike

⁶ For a deeper conversation on this see Oswaldo Zavala's (2018) *Los cárteles no existen: Narcotráfico y cultura en México*.

Water War]⁷ with the water and the loss of investment would not happen again. That was a lot of money to lose, so they construct a map of actors and locate the groups that are opposing them.

The Groups that were making the most noise about Nestle were groups in the University. So they were targeted; not necessarily because they were a threat to the state, but because they were a threat to the project investments.

Q: And therefore could be a potential threat if they did not stop them there.

Because water is a primary resource, it's a primary resource for war right now. All the governments have announced this.

Q: According to counterinsurgency, the logic is that they see insurgency in three phases: preparation, non-violent and insurrection. It sounds like this is going towards a typical pre-emptive, kind of preparatory period counterinsurgency approach.

Exactly... They used the Zetas and an organization of highly trained military-policemen with a fascist name, the Civil Guard (*Guardia Civil*). I saw them, they stopped me in the street. They were like the Marines (*Marina/Navy*) – they were dressed like Marines, they were as tall as Marines because they were from the Northern part of the country (where there are tall Mexicans), they were equipped like Marines. They were dressed like Marines, but called the Civil Guard and the first municipality where they were tested out was in Coatepec, which is the same municipal where Nestle has its [coffee] facility.⁸

Q: This is in the state of Veracruz?

Yes, it's in the state of Veracruz. So that is where Nestle has its facility and it's situated next to a river and it's taking tons

⁷ The Cochabamba Water War was a series of protests that took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia's fourth largest city, between December 1999 and April 2000 in response to the privatization of the city's municipal water supply company SEMAPA.

⁸ enlaceveracruz212.com.mx/nota.php?id=77839

forces came on the 16th it was violent.¹⁵ It was not like ten years before that, because ten years back, during the last days of the Commune the police used helicopters with gas and armored transport (*tanquetas*), as well as live ammunition. While in 2016, the whole thing began with the helicopters raining down tear gas, and after a few clashes live ammunition was being used on both sides. The level of violence was the highest that had been seen in many, many, many years. The teachers ran at the first sign of conflict, but many Oaxacan people, many natives from the Mixteca region (where Nochixtlán, the town where the combat began), and all of that, who were pretty upset that there were armed forces marching around their towns, going after whoever. They were annoyed that armed forces were marching around shooting people. So they took out their guns, small caliber – hunting rifles – that are legal to have for a farmer (*campesino*), and started hunting the armed forces in their towns from corners, underneath cars or on rooftops. Because the armed forces have high caliber weapons they made a lot of noise when they shot, but low caliber does not make much noise. So they were not able to hear where they were being shot from and they sustained heavy, heavy, heavy losses.

Q: How many people do you think were shot, wounded or killed?

On the day?

Q: In the 2016 insurrection.

Counting both sides?

Q: No, when you say the indigenous were hunting military forces, how many do you think were wounded on that side?

Uhhh, I would say somewhere between 30–50 policemen died¹⁶ because one thing that also happened was that once they

¹⁵ telesurtv.net/news/8-muertos-22-desaparecidos-y-decenas-de-heridos-en-Oaxaca-20160620-0014.html

¹⁶ cnn.com/2016/06/20/americas/oaxaca-mexico-clashes/index.html

Yes, so this happened two days after the hit squad attacked. This move, and what resulted from, effectively halted the group that was actively doing something about Nestle. The other group that remained and took over were the Reds – the Marxist-Leninists. Who consider this a victory... they acknowledged that the anarchists did the hard work, therefore they got the biggest blow, but then they took over just like in the Russian Revolution.

Q: And in Spain.

Yes, and that is what they are boasting about right now. So that happened, then one year later in the summer of 2016, ten years after the Oaxaca Commune¹⁴ that was on June 14th. Then on June 16th, 2016 Oaxaca was invaded by the Gendarmería and the police to break the blockade of the teachers. While I was in a taxi in Oaxaca, I heard a woman talking with the taxi driver, and they were saying that “It is pretty clear that there is going to be fight with the Federal forces, any day soon.” None of them were teachers, but they said:

Well let’s be honest about it, the teachers are the only organized group doing something about all the bullshit that the government is doing. If we think about it really, their struggle is our struggle because if they lose right now the gap is going to close and the government is going to do whatever they please, so we have to help out the teachers to stop this gap from closing, so we have a bigger window of action.

Q: They are talking about control.

Yes... so they all agreed and none of them were teachers, you could say they were “normal people,” but they all agreed that the state would have more control over their lives if they did not help the teachers win that battle. So when the Federal

¹⁴ ed. – Sparked by a teacher’s strike before generalising, leading to authorities being ejected wholesale from the capital: the state was declared “ungovernable” by the national government, and only crushed after many weeks of self-organisation and battles with government forces.

and tons of water and they want to build a dam ten minutes away, half an hour away and they want to flood many towns.

Q: Ouuuffff.

Nestle has its bottling facility there. And in Coatepec and San Pedro in Monterrey, where there are all the corporate headquarters, those were the two municipalities where the Civil Guard were tested out.

Q: So in Monterrey and Veracruz...

San Pedro also has big neighborhood with a lot of gangs and all the headquarters of the companies: Bancomer, HSBC, City Bank.... The thing was water, because Coca Cola, Nestle and Odebrecht, the Brazilian giant, those three bought the concession for that whole basin and it is one of the last mountain rainforest environments. So that is there where Nestle, Coca Cola and Odebrecht....

Organizing State Extra-judicial Repression

In May, 2015 we were training, doing martial arts with the *compas*,⁹ and a guy that was working out with us warned us that he was training in a gym, a Muay Thai Dojo, and a huge cop approached him, razor-shaved head. The cop complemented them on their fighting and told them: “There is a job offering for people like you, who are very good at martial arts. The job is about protection, it’s about forming a security group to protect businessmen and politicians, it’s a security group for them, it’s to give them protection.”

So, this guy first thought it would be a body guard thing because of offering security for businessmen, as you could imagine, but the guy continued to talk and told them: “One of the first things the group is going to do is to take out a group that

⁹ *Compas* is short for *compañeros* that translates directly into companions [ed. – though not with the same meaning as the English; see **23 Theses Concerning Revolt**].

is led by the *Bore*.” So that was going to be the first task of this group that he was invited into.

Q: So what is this group they are targeting? Is it some type of university group, non-profit or some type of left-ist or even anarchist group?

“I do not know if you have seen them,” the guy told them, “but you might have seen them around the city. They are always protesting in the Universities, making disturbances and making noise about things. So if you are interested, it is with the police forces, but you will not have a uniform, you will not be a policeman,” he told them, “but the job is with the police force. They work side by side, but you will not be police officers. You will be a new group, but you will not have formal recognition.”

Q: So ultimately they are talking about forming an extra-judicial hit squad?

Yes. *[awkward laughter]* And this guy was eighteen years old. While this policeman was pretty tall, like a 1.93 meters.

Q: Let me make sure I am hearing this right. So you have a friend training in a Muay Thai Dojo and this tall police captain type guy is coming in to recruit people out of the Dojo?

Yes, and he told them he is going to many gyms and looking at the fighters, looking at who has talent and he is hand picking them, he told them. And that was in May 2015.

Q: Before we go on, I am familiar with the *Bore*, but what is this group he targeting, who are they going after?

They are going after mostly university students or people who graduated university recently.

Q: Okay, I will quit fucking around. If whom I think the *Bore* is, they are not someone necessarily associated with a group. I believe that their politics is about not having a group necessarily or an organization. The *Bore* is an anarchist, so this cop is blatantly coming into gyms and

so his problem is not with the government officials, but with hooded figures so go ask them about their murder.” So he blamed it on hooded figures, implying anarchists.

Q: So the journalist killed in Mexico City worked in Veracruz?

Yes, because he fled Xalapa because he knew the government was after him. And that is why they got him, because he activated all the security protocols for the journalist that the government setup, but those protocols are also for Human Rights defenders. They put security on you, and security always has to do with control, about you letting them know and so they can help care. He filled out all of the forms, and he did the whole procedure for journalists.

Q: He got the button you press on your cell phone?

Yes, he got all of that and he was executed days after that. So it was rough times as you can see. People were being killed, groups were being attacked at birthday parties, boycotts were happening and anarchist were being executed outside community radios in Oaxaca.

Q: Yes, in Chiapas, Guerro, Oaxaca, Michoacán and Veracruz.

Yes, and so that happened and the police tested its new force *Gendarmería Nacional*¹³ was tested out on that day, it was like their first action day. It was a huge day because the national forces were overwhelmed, there were not enough police in the country to suffocate the resistance against the elections. They were overwhelmed and they lost in many places around Oaxaca and Guerro, they lost 6–8 hour long battles with big truck trailers burnt being used as barricades by the people in those towns boycotting those elections.

Q: Yes, I think I saw some run their car into a line of police.

¹³ Founded August 22, 2014

tively helped out Nestle because the group of people making noise about it was neutralized.¹²

Journalist Murders & 2016 Oaxaca Insurrection

That girl that was murdered in Mexico City, Nadia Vera. She was murdered in the Navarte with a journalist with a photographer from *Processo* [ed. – *Leftist news magazine of Mexico*]. It was big news because it was a downtown neighborhood and they were executed along with a Colombian girl. That Nadia girl, she had a tattoo on her arm with a phrase from Ricardo Flores Magon, the anarchist. So she was an anarchist and that photograph revealed a lot of stuff about the government and did coverage for the Black Bloc when they were active.

Q: In 2013?

In 2014, 2013, 2015...

Q: When things were kicking off strong here?

Yes. His pictures never revealed the faces.

Q: He took a photos at respectful angles?

His photos would reveal the police violence as opposed to the vandalism of the Black Bloc and he was executed, I believe it was the 31st of July or August 1st of 2015. It was Black June, June 5th when the group was assaulted, the elections, and then a month later an anarchist and sympathetic journalist were executed in Mexico City. Then the governor of Xalapa (Eduardo Jolate) blamed it on the anarchists, he said, “Robin Espinoza had an argument with the “hooded figures” (*acapuchados*) and that was the day he left Xalapa and he went to Mexico City,

¹² ed. – In June 2020, during riots in Mexican cities after killings by police there (and also in solidarity with the concurrent anti-police and anti-racist insurrection north of the border; see **Siege of the Third Precinct**), the house this infiltrator organised the ambush in was dealt an incendiary barrage during the chaos, plus anti-police tags.

trying to recruit fighters for an extra-judicial hit squad to go after anarchists. Is that what is going on?

Yes, it is.

Q: Is there any specific reference for going after anarchists?

Well, he did not mention the word anarchist to him when he approached him at the Dojo. He just mentioned it was a group of youngsters who make noise and who protest. He did not use the term, but yes that group was mostly comprised of anarchists and it wasn't really one group, it was informal.

Q: The fact is it was a bunch of people who wore similar clothes and would protest and are willing to vandalize property or break shit and tear things down.

Exactly, and paint and redecorate the city. They did lots of city redecoration, yes.

Q: This is crazy, this a bit odd to me that he would come in and even mention the Bore, because the Bore is a very kind and normal fellow. How we are talking about them right now in this conversation is already positioning him as some type of mastermind, with some evil anarchist conspiracy or really some type of vandal conspiracy – this is fucking crazy.

And he used the name of the *Bore*, they did not use his nickname. He used his first name.

Q: Do you think they had his last name?

Yes.

So that was in May and on June 1st the Black June took hold all around the country. On June 5th, many of the students who were celebrating a birthday party one block from the Humanities Faculty at the University [of Xalapa], they were attacked by a group that fits the description that this guy mentioned. Because there were people wearing masks or wearing black hoods, similar to what the anarchists wear, but the main person, who was in front, had a mask of a clown.

Q: The extra-judicial group that was attacking them?

Yeah, and they tore down the door and they attacked them with machetes and sticks with nails.

Q: Holy fuck... So what happened? They raided it with a clown mask, baseball bats with nails coming out of it, what happened?

They beat them.

Q: Like broken bones and bloody?

Yes... machetes.

Q: Did people lose limbs or [need] stitches?

Stitches, a lot of stitches and gouges..... Yeah they attacked a mixed group of men, women, youth and old. There was even an old guy passing and walking in front of the house when the group attacked the birthday party and they saw him, and because he was a witness, they pulled him in the house and they beat him as well even though he was an elder who had nothing to do with the scene. That scene and that operation was a protocol the Mexican Government calls *mando único* (single command),¹⁰ which combines all levels of the security forces under one central jurisdiction for specific actions so you have all sorts of people interacting in state actions.

Q: In the military they call it “unified action”¹¹ were they have all the different institutions, and all the different security agencies working together.

This eliminates jurisdiction and it was the same protocol that killed the Ayotzinapa 43 [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.4 pg61*]. It was a *mando único* operation. So they [the public] always says: ‘Was it the police, was it the military, was it the Narco, who was it?’ It was a combined action of all the forces, of all of them. And that was the same protocol that was operating that night when that group attacked the birthday party full of people who you could roughly identify as being sympathetic to anarchists.

¹⁰ news.vice.com/en_us/article/j59a8x/mexicos-efforts-to-tackle-police-corruption-are-failing

¹¹ FM3-24. (2014) Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies. Available at fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf

Q: Ahhh, this was a way to try and take away their support base.

Yes, and some of those people at the birthday were accused of being anarchists. This happened the June 5th, 2015, so on the 7th there was election day. There was a big boycott of the elections, countrywide.

Also there was a girl, she was at the party and after the group left, she came in running and was screaming how it was terrible and that she went for help and that she could not find anybody... but she was an undercover agent and she was training that same day when that *compa* told us that there was a group recruiting and she heard that guy talk to us about that group, she was there training because she was an undercover agent. So she knew, so the security forces knew that the anarchists were aware that the group was being formed to go after them, because the girl heard the warning and she was an undercover cop. On the day of the party, she was inviting everyone there, saying: “Hey, you have to come, you have to come.”

Q: So she organized the birthday party?

No, but once she saw it she used it as an opportunity to set up the trap.

Q: What’s this woman’s name?

Soledad.

Q: Is that her real name, the name she went by or the code name you are giving here?

I think it’s her real name, I do not remember her last name. And she was a pedagogy student.

Q: Is she still in Xalapa or did she move?

The last time they saw her it was at the carnival of Veracruz and she was wearing a police officer uniform and she was one of the security personnel at the carnival. People took pictures of her with a police uniform on. My guess is, she did not have that uniform when she was undercover and that she won that uniform by what she did, that is what I believe and that effec-