3. Oaxaca de Juárez

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3. Oaxaca de Juárez

September 6, 2012. For three months we have been searching for the person responsible for managing renewable energy development in the state of Oaxaca. It has involved several conversations, dozens of phone calls and online searches, and visits to nearly every major government building in Oaxaca City. All that has led to us waiting in an empty office in the Oaxacan Ministry of Tourism and Economic Development (STyDE). Not literally empty; there is a desk, a small table, three chairs, and a computer. But there is no evidence that this office has ever been occupied. No nameplate on the door, no books on the shelves, no intimate clutter on the desk. No blinds even to shield us from light and heat of the Oaxacan sun. It all seems a bit surreal, and we laugh nervously as we wait. In the regional news media, the governor and other political elites continue to praise Oaxacan wind development for the hundreds of millions, even billions, of pesos of investment it is bringing into the state economy. And on our previous visits to Oaxaca, Fernando Mimiaga Sosa and his allies left the impression that the Oaxacan state government was a major force in steering the course of wind development.

We wondered, From all that to a vacant office in less than three years? What had happened?

This chapter examines the relationship between the Oaxacan state government (particularly its bureaucratic apparatus and political parties) and wind development in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. In contrast to the potent and occasionally turbulent powers that we found at work both in the isthmus (chapters 1, 2, and 5) and in Mexico City (chapter 4), the capacities of biopolitical, capital, and energopolitical enablement within Oaxaca City
seemed limited, even absent. And yet we knew from our experience with Fernando that matters had been otherwise as recently as 2010. The apparent vacancy of state governmental engagement with wind power in 2012–13 presented us with an intriguing and often-frustrating riddle.

What we came to discover is that we had overestimated the influence of state government over istmeño wind development during our preliminary research trips in 2009 and 2010 because we conflated the work of Oaxacan PRI party networks with the authority of certain offices (particularly Fernando’s) in the state bureaucracy. Given Oaxaca’s history of more than eighty years of unbroken PRI governance, the mistake was understandable. At the time, and in the “institutional-revolutionary” logic of the PRI party-state,1 party-political influence and the charismatic power afforded to certain well-placed party members was fused as seamlessly as possible into bureaucratic authority.2 It was an unspoken truth that the party and its charismatic leaders governed the bureaucracy rather than vice versa. That is, until the period of 2006 to 2010, when the scandal-clouded governorship of Ulises Ruiz faced the rise of a strong anti-PRI social movement (APPO) spearheaded by the Oaxacan section of the Mexican teachers’ union (SNTE).3 The violent repression of APPO by the state police force helped to generate the urgency to finally bring a fragmented field of opposition parties and movements together behind the candidate whom Ruiz had defeated in 2004, Gabino Cué Monteagudo. Cué ran again for the governorship of Oaxaca in 2010 against PRI candidate Eviel
Pérez Magaña and narrowly won amid widespread accusations that the PRI had (again) attempted to rig the ballot boxes in their favor. As the apparatus of PRI governance (if not PRI influence) rapidly dissembled in late 2010, there were many political vacuums left in its wake, among them the state government’s involvement in wind power.

No One’s in Charge

Such is the opinion of Fernando Mimiaga Sosa and his sons. We meet them again in Oaxaca City in the summer of 2012 at a health food restaurant called 100% Natural on the southern end of Llano Plaza. Fernando generally seems well, perhaps a little thinner and more weathered than in the past, but in good spirits overall. We chat about the contemporary state of the wind industry and joke about our previous trips to the isthmus. He and his sons are now working on their fundación (see chapter 2) full time. “It’s become more of a business now, of course,” he mentions with a significant smile. After he leaves to attend another meeting, the younger Mimiagas, Júlio César and Fernando Jr., make a pitch to us to hire the foundation on as external consultants for our NSF grant.

We explain that our grant is not really of the scale to permit the hiring of outside consultants, but they go over the key points of the pitch anyway. The foundation remains very well connected, they say, both in the federal and state governments as well as with stakeholders in the isthmus. They can help us make those connections, and they have an archive of original documents related to the negotiation of land contracts. Those documents would be a gold mine from our perspective, but this is clearly a pay-to-play offer, which we politely decline.

Fernando Jr. speaks at length of how important the foundation has been to the organization of wind power development. “My father was really the first one to have a vision for what could be done with the wind there. And we put together the first plan on how CFE could expand the electricity grid in a way that would convince investors to come. We presented that plan in 2004 and 2006, and eventually the regulatory commission, CRE, adopted it and made sure that the plan, including the new substation in Ixtepec, happened.” The foundation, he says, even became involved with organizing the financing of projects, helping to ensure, for example, that standby letters of credit were available to help attract investors and developers.4

Leaning in over the table, Júlio César interrupts his brother’s rendition of their legacy to focus on the obstacles wind development faces now. “The
problem is that when my father left office, no one took over his portfolio. That is, his portfolio was spread out over, I don’t know, three, four, five, six people. And these people don’t coordinate with each other, so, basically, no one’s in charge. . . . There’s no common vision, and that’s a problem. Right now there seems to be a major push in the state government on solar energy. I applaud that, of course. They are doing various studies. But we hear it from reliable sources that this government is not very interested in wind energy. Why, we don’t know.”

It seems that the handoff between administrations was not particularly smooth, at least as far as wind power was concerned. And subsequently the Mimiagas have been almost completely frozen out by the Cué administration (or perhaps they felt it not in their interest to open their networks of influence too generously to the agents of another cluster of political parties).

Fernando Sr. tells us later that he feels he has been made a scapegoat for the incompetence of the current administration, particularly as political unrest around the wind parks intensified in 2013. He says, with a genuine tremor of injury, “Now people say that I’m the one who created all these problems down in the isthmus. But you two know that that simply isn’t true.” What is most striking to us in the summer of 2012, however, is that the Mimiagas seem honestly not to know exactly who took charge of Fernando’s portfolio after he left office.

Júlio César waves his hand at the question. “I’m sure you if you look at the [government] website you can find a list of the actors involved. What you really need to know is that they are coming at this with perspectivas muy particulares [highly particular perspectives]. They don’t have a general vision for the region of the isthmus or for the state of Oaxaca.”

Since the Mimiagas can no longer help us to gain access to the state government, we next try a friend of a friend, Gaby Blanco, who is one of Cué’s administrative assistants and works with him on a daily basis. We hoped she might be able to schedule us a meeting with Cué himself, but owing to the now-annual summer ritual of teacher’s union strikes, the Palacio del Gobierno on the Zócalo is being blockaded, and Cué is working from another location trying to resolve the situation. Instead, Blanco meets with us to share what she has learned in her two years working at Cué’s side.

Blanco epitomizes the young, professional cosmopolitanism that we come to recognize as Cué’s desired public image for his sexenio, in which he has made transparency and accountability—as far as we can tell, quite sincerely—the watchwords of his administration. She is flawlessly bilingual
and refreshingly candid about the hopes and impasses Cué faces in trying to undo the legacy of Oaxacan priísmo.

When we ask her to what extent she thinks wind power development is a specific priority for Cué, she says she can only recall one meeting the governor has had. A delegation from the lagoonal fishing town of Santa Maria del Mar visited Cué to appeal for his help in ending the road blockade of a neighboring community (San Mateo del Mar) over a territorial land dispute. To accomplish this, they asked that Cué publicly endorse the wind farm project whose developer had promised to build a new road to connect them to the mainland. Blanco is somewhat vague on the details, but she is describing what would later come to be known as the Mareña Renovables project.7

We ask whether the governor endorsed the project, and she equivocates slightly.

“On paper, they have an ideal model,” she says. “But then we also had complaints from San Mateo. This is a place where, let’s say, to receive a hundred dollars would be a big deal, and suddenly the company was giving the municipal authority thousands of dollars all at once. The problem was that since then, the authority has not shared with the community how they are spending that money. There’s a lot of mistrust and division. . . . The municipal authority and the agrarian authority are pointing fingers. But we later found out the agrarian authority was also receiving money from the company.” She shakes her head. “The governor’s attitude was, ‘Why can’t you just work this out? The project looks great. This other community needs its road. Let’s get it moving.’ I was thinking to myself: If this is just one case, then the whole situation down there has to be a disaster.”

And this was the only meeting the governor has had about wind development thus far?

“I’m aware of the list of projects that he has chosen to build his legacy. Wind energy isn’t on his list of legacy projects. He does dedicate some time to it. He does talk to investors about the wind sector, and we have agreements with USAID. But I think this topic is moving slowly.”

We then ask to what extent environmental projects as a whole are a priority for the administration. Blanco removes from a desk drawer a substantial binder containing the legacy projects and quickly pages through that.

“Originally there were over a hundred potential projects submitted by his ministers. Then he consulted with USAID and UNDP on feasibility and financing and finally narrowed the list down to thirty-two that we’re actually working on. The ministers were given a certain amount of time, around
six months, to settle into their positions. But by now, all thirty-two projects should have time lines, action plans, and be in development.”

The projects are color coded by their states of progress. She traces a finger along the relevant column. Only two projects are colored red, meaning they are stalled in the design phase, “no consultants or engineers hired, nothing.” One of them is titled “Desarrollo Integral del Istmo” (holistic development of the isthmus).

“I honestly just think this minister has dropped the ball.”

She locates three projects on the legacy list that involve sustainability issues, two of them focused on Oaxaca City specifically. The first is to make transportation in Oaxaca City cleaner.

Blanco says, “He’d like to improve air quality, but the real challenge is all the illegal taxi concessions granted by the previous regime. We have way too many taxi licenses here. You know they were political instruments, right? Every election year, the PRI would hand them out. . . . Then we also have a project aiming to clean up the two rivers in town and to create green spaces around them, and then there is the big dam project, Paso de la Reina, and that’s it in terms of sustainability-related projects.”

We say that we imagine it is difficult to balance sustainability demands against other pressing human needs for infrastructure and care. Still, wind development seemed to have a lot of momentum behind it in previous administrations, no?

Blanco agrees, and although she has little to say about the legacy of the Mimiagas, she also seems somewhat surprised at how little attention has recently been paid to wind power. In the end, she reasons that not only had the ministry in charge been lax in putting together a strategy but the official who had nominally been managing wind development was not entirely competent.

Our interview with Blanco ends on a somewhat wistful note—echoing the criticism of the Mimiagas—about the state government’s inability thus far to develop a comprehensive wind development plan for the isthmus. “Right now, the wind companies work with the federal government to get their permissions from the various ministries, and they work with the local governments [municipios]. But they should be working with us too. That is to say, we should have a plan, we should be helping them.”

She thinks there are others in the government who can tell us more about the state’s involvement with wind power development, more than the nameless renewable energy director who might or might not already be in the process of being relieved of his duties anyway. Blanco strongly recommends
that we speak next with Oaxaca’s director of public investment, Adriana Abardia, whom she describes as “one of the most experienced and skilled and competent administrators that we have anywhere in the government.”

We meet Abardia about a week later at a stylish, Spanish-run restaurant near Santo Domingo Cathedral, a huge tree dominating its partially covered courtyard. She laughs brightly and often during our two-hour meeting. She was born in Oaxaca but had long given up on Oaxacan politics before Cué came to power. The chance for fundamental reform lured her back after eleven years in Mexico City. Her job did not even exist before her appointment. Now she has been tasked with creating regulations and evaluation mechanisms for public investment in development projects.

“For example,” she says, “when I worked for the secretary of water, we were paying for one hundred wastewater treatment plants, but only twenty of them were operational. It was highly political. But that was an unacceptable burden on public finances.”

She says she has developed a reputation within the administration for being cutthroat with traditional entitlements. “They call me Kill Bill behind my back,” she laughs, “Like I’ve got a katana for them.”

Sipping on a beer, she says that being in government has been the hardest eighteen months of her life. “I love this city, and I’m a little romantic and believe some things could change. You know the saying: ‘Yo soy feliz, pero no estoy feliz’ [I’m a happy person, but not happy right now]. Many days are really bad. But at least the state now has the will if not the tools to improve things.”

The problem with wind power, she tells us, is that the state government essentially has no legal jurisdiction over it. “We have no direct investment in wind power at all. And what happens is that companies come to us, or more often, they just go straight to the municipalities, find partners, and settle there. It just leaves us out of the game.”

We ask what authority the state has to tax foreign wind companies.

“Essentially none, because we don’t have a state law yet to regulate wind power development. Currently, the payments all go to the municipalities for land use or to the federal government for permits.” In general, she explains, state governments have little authority to levy taxes in Mexico. “Ninety-five percent of our budget comes from a federal disbursement system, which makes us incredibly dependent upon Mexico City. And you only get more [funding] if you collect more taxes for them. So [tax collecting] is what we have to concentrate on.”
She supports wind power, she says, “but I also believe the parks are having a serious environmental impact. The oil the turbines use goes right into the soil. Can it be cleaned? Who’s going to pay for it?”

She speaks in terms of pareto optimal solutions and game theory. “I do believe in wind power. But what are the available games? Who’s the winner, the communities or the companies? Let’s measure it. You can think what you want about the people in the isthmus, that they’re lazy and just want money from the companies. But they are acting this way because they are in a game.”

She likes the idea of community-owned wind parks even more. “We need our people to own things and have their share, not just rent our lands. The government should put capital into it to remove risk. If we had public funds or credits, cheap credits, that would be good. But we can’t do a wind park entirely as a public investment; it’s not feasible and not right. We need the private sector’s sense of efficiency and profitability. We don’t have that here.”

She cites her own pilot program to give her staff performance-based pay as an example. “When they do something well and receive a check, they are very suspicious, ‘Why are you paying me more all of a sudden?’”

She likes the idea of Oaxaca entering the industrial supply chain of wind power most of all. “We have to get into the supply chain. Otherwise we are just land providers and rent receivers. No more than that.”

At nine o’clock, Abardia has to return to work for a couple more hours before going home for the day. We express admiration for her dedication. Before parting, she leaves us with two further impediments that the state faces in developing a better wind power strategy.

First of all, there is a trust issue. “Many people think we are the same corrupt government as before, and to be honest with you, I’m not sure that we’re not. I’m not sure we’re not corrupt anymore.”

And second is the problem of administrative competence. “The coordinator for renewable energy we appointed was a complete disaster. He’s gone now, but we have nobody on it.”

Logical Creatures

The vacuum surrounding renewable energy in the state government endured a while longer. Another round of phone calls in August finally revealed that a new Coordinador de Energías Renovables (coordinator of renewable en-
ergy) had been appointed, Sinai Casillas Cano. That information led us to the aforementioned empty office.

Casillas had no background in government, and we could find no publicly available information about him beyond his Facebook page, which was dominated by pictures of his wife and children and testaments to his Evangelical faith. It featured status updates like “Love for Christ is not everything, it’s the only thing” and “My identity comes from God.” But he had also posted, “Blockade a store, a government office, a street, etc.? No! That is a union strategy of struggle. It is blockading the future of our children and the future of Oaxaca. Anyone who can’t see that is an enemy of Oaxaca.”

In the midst of the fiercely contested Mexican presidential election of 2012, Casillas’s social media also made no secret of his distaste for the PRI and their candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, whom he assailed with various posts accusing him of corruption, lies, ignorance, and disinformation.

When Casillas finally arrives, he apologizes for having kept us waiting, squints at the vacant desk, and then motions us over to the small table. Casillas is friendly and speaks frankly, although he relates later that his ten years working as a journalist have left him cagey about making public statements and having those misinterpreted. Like the other members of Cué’s government we have met, Casillas seems somehow too young for his position. Nonetheless he demonstrates a good grasp of the difficulties facing him in his job, in particular the need to address in some way the mounting conflicts surrounding wind power in the isthmus. It is a situation, he says, “that cannot be denied.”

Shaking his head, he laments the ignorance (desconocimiento) surrounding renewable energy in general in Oaxaca and specifically wind energy. “This ignorance affects all segments of society. That is, it’s not just an ignorance of less educated people, it’s a general state of ignorance. And what has been lacking, obviously, is work by the state government and the companies, timely and strategic work, to raise awareness and create knowledge about what this form of energy could represent for people living in the region.”

We have heard such sentiments before and will hear them many times again from different voices representing the state and federal governments. Any resistance to wind power is rooted in a lack of understanding or awareness of its potential benefits. Once experts inform the people as to the beneficios (benefits), they will inevitably come around.

Yet Casillas is also not an apologist for the status quo. He is not naïve, for example, about inequities in the distribution of benefits in the autoabastecimiento...
model. On another occasion, he admits to us quietly that the Yansa-Ixtepec model is “probably the best possible scenario” even if he is doubtful that it can ever be realized. For now, he assures us that STyDE has a plan to set things on a better path, to get the state government more actively involved in managing wind development in the isthmus.

As he explains the plan, he picks up a piece of paper and sketches out three squares in a triangular pattern. In one box, he writes the names of actors in wind development (academics, municipios, ejidos, companies, NGOs). In a second box, he writes themes that matter to various stakeholders (social development, legal framework of land tenancy, environmental impact). And in the third box, he writes the names of state and federal government agencies that should be involved in managing wind development (CFE, STyDE, SEGEGO, SAI).\textsuperscript{10}

The objective is to create a new state-level \textit{reglamento} (regulatory framework) for renewable energy development whose content would be developed through an \textit{esquema participativo} (participatory scheme). But it quickly becomes clear that the only participants in this scheme will be the government and academic researchers. \textit{Los académicos}, Casillas explains, are the specialists in the themes that matter. “It’s not going to revolve around the other groups of actors. That is to say, we don’t want debates. We’re not interested in more debate because they already debate a lot and in a very disorderly way.”

Order is a recurrent theme in Casillas’s narrative, as is the \textit{puntual} (fast, efficient) use of time. A Protestant ethic, Oaxacan style.\textsuperscript{11} Giving various stakeholders the opportunity to further debate one another, he opines, would only waste time. In order to undertake meaningful action, the government needs facts, presented in an orderly way.

“We have to do very timely content work. The academics will obviously have their opinions about these themes, as do all the other actors. Those opinions will result in adjustments to our laws and to the formation of this reglamento. This isn’t going to be some kind of forum promoting renewable energy; this is going to be trabajo muy puntual (very efficient work), whose objective is a carefully structured regulatory policy whose contents will be developed in an orderly participatory way, with a proper structure.”

Still, Casillas is convinced that all these academics will be able to channel the various interests and perspectives of different stakeholders in such a way as to allow the government to develop a regulatory framework with broad legitimacy. If the reglamento does not have legitimacy, he says gravely, there is no point at all in going through the exercise.
“We cannot silence those people who are opposed to the project [of wind development]. They are opposing it for some reason, for better or for worse. And likewise, we can’t simply listen to those who support the project because they only represent half the story. Those who are in favor have a truth that is very clear and precise to them, but those who are against also have a truth that surely has a razón de ser” (reason to be).

He speaks glowingly of the documentos (documents) that the esquema will generate, each of which will bring those reasons for being into comprehensible and actionable truth forms; after a while, the plurality of documentation fades, and Casillas shifts to speaking of a single documento, a compendium of truth that begins to sound a bit like another sacred text.12

“Right now there are some who are only negative, negative, negative, without a real justification, no? Then there are those who are strictly in favor but never think about the problems. The document we want to generate will have all of this balanced. Honestly, not everyone will like it, this document, this reglamento, but it is the only way that investment will take place in an orderly fashion, that communities will receive benefits and understand what these benefits really consist of.”

Casillas even reiterates the Mimiagas’ vision of a city of experts rising from the arid plains of the isthmus, a biopolitical vista of white-collar professional opportunities extending the horizons of Oaxacan children. “We can imagine how within twenty or thirty years, the important human resources of these companies, the technicians, will be Oaxaqueños. Even if right now we don’t occupy those positions, it’s our vision.”

The one wrinkle—not an insignificant one—that emerges toward the end of the conversation is that the state government has no funding to undertake its plan of action. Casillas says STyDE is discussing possibilities for funding the plan with USAID, with IADB (the Inter-American Development Bank), and even with the World Bank. “Honestly, it’s not just the state administration of Oaxaca that lacks funding. None of the state governments in Mexico would have sufficient resources to take on this type of project.”

Still, Casillas ends the interview on an optimistic note. Even though locating funding may be challenging, he thinks that their plan is sound and necessary. Only the regulatory role of the state government can guarantee that community interests and developer interests will be balanced in the long run. Tension will be reduced, benefits will spread to all. Again, his idiom reaches for the divinity of reason and order: “We aren’t demigods, but we are logical creatures after all. This is a logical plan and one that we think will work.”

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Sinaí Casillas Cano exudes conviction and seriousness. We leave his office sympathetic to the spirit of the intervention but also wondering whether the change, if it comes, will be too little too late. With so many wind park projects already contracted and under construction, with the evacuation capacity of Ixtepec Potencia nearly filled, with no funding or actual timeline for the participatory esquema confirmed, could a new state governmental reglamento really combat ignorance let alone retroactively address the tensions that have emerged from existing conocimiento (knowledge) of experiences with wind developers, their contracts, and the turbines proliferating across the Oaxacan landscape? Could state governmental regulation truly undo the capitalcentric logic of autoabastecimiento wind development? Could it transform the energopolitical enablements of grid infrastructure and electricity provision in such a way as to allow the government’s biopolitical aspirations to flourish?

And more than this, Casillas’s hands are tied by the character of Mexican federalism itself, which, as Abardia noted, allows its states precious little financial autonomy. A Mexican political analyst estimated in 2005 that the Mexican federal government collected 95 percent of the total revenue in the country even though state and local governments made 48 percent of public expenditures, leaving “state and municipal governments with a very small margin of action and flexibility for the future definition of their expenditures.” Without the right to levy corporate taxes to support their regulatory efforts, for example, Mexican state governments had to either beg Mexico City or, in this case, international aid organizations for the right to proceed.

Casillas, though himself a native of Ixtepec, admits that he has not had the opportunity to personally travel through the isthmus, to the towns affected by wind development, to hear about expectations, experiences, and concerns firsthand. His directorate seems to consist only of himself, which doubtless makes the image of a host of externally funded academics bearing truth to his door so attractive. Even as Casillas speaks of the widespread ignorance of the promise of renewable energy, he struggles against his own ignorance as to what is unfolding in the isthmus, a lack of knowledge evidently owed less to lack of interest than to lack of resources and perhaps to lack of status within the administrative hierarchy.

Having made the rounds of the state bureaucracy, we saw clearly that Cué’s government had a relatively weak grasp on the administration of wind power. There were good intentions in Oaxaca City, a commitment in principle to renewable energy generation and distant visions of prosperity associated with wind power. There was also considerable desire to claim jurisdiction over the harvesting of the isthmus winds, to play a salvational role in unit-
ing communities and companies in a common purpose, to exert balance, purpose, and design over a process that seemed particularistic and chaotic from the vantage point of the Oaxacan Valley. It was a tantalizing developmental opportunity, perhaps the best one the isthmus had ever seen. Yet the Oaxacan state, through a combination of legal, financial, and spatial impediments, had scarcely any role in governing it.

Since, however, “the state” has many elements in Mexico as elsewhere, we thought it would make sense to return to the PRI party, whose networks had so successfully brokered the autoabastecimiento development scheme in the first place. To what extent had Oaxacan PRIismo and its PRIistas been able to maintain their hold over wind power even after the rupture of their party-state?

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This question pointed us to the PRI party headquarters in Oaxaca City, an unassuming tangerine-hued compound in the upscale Reforma neighborhood. We are able to meet with the current and former chairs of the Oaxacan state congress’s Comisión Permanente de Fomento de Energía Renovable (Permanent Commission to Promote Renewable Energy), Rosia Nidia Villalobos and Francisco García López, both PRI representatives of isthmus constituencies. We know that both Villalobos and García are powerful and controversial political figures who are frequently accused of corruption by opponents, yet they remain resilient in their high-ranking positions within both state-level and regional PRI networks. García acts also as the coordinator of the PRI delegation in the state congress; a little over a year later, Villalobos will become mayor of Salina Cruz, the largest city in the isthmus. Beyond this, the Permanent Commission is the most obvious sign of Oaxacan congressional attention to renewable energy.

Large glossy prints of presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto on the campaign trail greet visitors to the party headquarters. We are given bottles of water labeled “61st State Congress” and are asked to wait in a conference room. A short while later, Villalobos, García, and three of their deputies join us. The meeting begins with a slight edge of wariness, but once coffees have been distributed and our intentions clarified to their satisfaction, the conversation becomes friendly and lively.

They explain to us that their commission has existed since 2010 to make sure that the state congress maintains a strong focus on renewable energy development. It has not been easy, however. Villalobos blames the Cué
government for a lack of coordination and communication with the congress and federal government and for assigning renewable energy a low priority in the ministry of economic development. This lack of coordination has left developers unsuccessfully trying to inform comuneros and ejidatarios about the benefits of their projects and allowed NGOs focused on “social conflicts” to enrich themselves by “generating inconformity for no reason at all.”

It quickly becomes clear that their knowledge of the local political nuances of wind development is considerably greater than that displayed by our other interlocutors in Oaxaca City. One of their deputies, Joaquin, seems particularly well informed. He explains that there are a variety of problems in the isthmus related to wind development that have to be addressed. How sorghum production is declining as agricultural lands are being fallowed in favor of wind turbines is one issue. Discrepancies in rental contracts are another. Joaquin discusses how the first rounds of land contracts set rental rates at less than half of what they are now, which has led to protests and highway blockades.

“So we feel that our initiative has to seek to normalize this. We also have to normalize the kind of assistance that companies give communities. It’s been the case that some just give money to the mayor, to the commissariats, maybe ten million pesos in some cases. What they do with the payments is up to them, and some do good things, and some don’t. That has generated a lot of inconformity as well.”

García interrupts to praise the former governor, Ulises Ruiz, for having done more than any other government in Oaxacan history to help regularize land tenancy, offering to waive fees for land registration to help accelerate the process of defining private-property ownership. The problem, in his view, is that the current government has not taken this area of development very seriously; it has dissolved the powerful position occupied by Fernando Mimiaga Sosa (“not often credited, but a real visionary”) and fractured it among several other offices.

García says he is strongly in favor of wind development for how it has brought new wealth to the isthmus. “Look at someone like Porfirio Montero. He bought land left and right, rented it to the companies, and now he is very successful. He even has built his own company, Poder Istmo.” But he is willing to admit that there were problems in the early days with land speculation, with foreign companies like Preneal “coming in like coyotes, hoarding land, acting like monopolists, then later selling to other companies.” That led to a lack of trust with some communities who did not know with whom they were really dealing.
And, Villalobos weighs in, there have been problems with the distribution of benefits beyond the landowners. “This so-called second conquest that one hears easily and often in the isthmus, it describes encountering Spaniards in the restaurants, in the gas stations, all the effort that has been expended to renovate houses for them, to build new houses and hotels. There is another side, of course. In La Venta, for example, this was essentially a forgotten town. Now it has a main street that has been paved, the schools have benefitted, the new houses and cars, there are people with means now. But not everyone. That is the problem, that it has not been possible to translate those benefits beyond those who own land. The beneficio comunitario [community benefit] is still very small. And it is worth noting that the mayors make a good business off the permits for change of land use and construction.”

Truly an istmeño priista at heart, García singles out the former COCEI mayor of Juchitán, Héctor Sánchez López, and his network as a group that allows itself to be purchased by companies. “They have an obtuse vision of their role. Instead of using those funds for social development in the community, such ‘leaders’ just keep the companies’ payments for themselves.”

Joaquin, echoing Abardia and Casillas, mentions that the question of payments also raises the question of the limits of state authority: “An important issue is that any contract concerning the production of electricity is under federal authority. It’s a national question, involving CFE. So we have to be careful not to interfere.”

On the other hand, any agreement (convenio) regarding social development would be made with the municipios and thus falls under local authority. “[In the state government] we’re in a very delicate position, we can’t be seen to be invading la competencia federal [federal jurisdiction]. So we are looking carefully at federal law, particularly the law on renewable energy, to see whether there are lineamientos jurídicos [legal guidelines] under which the state government would have jurisdiction, frankly, the power to promote more wind development in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. This is still under discussion.”

Villalobos informs us that the Permanent Commission has in mind to organize its own set of forums, three of them over the next year. “One to hear from academics, intellectuals, and students; another from comuneros, ejidatarios, and mayors; and then finally a third forum for developers and companies.” The first forum will be sponsored by a university; the third by a wind company, possibly Iberdrola; and the second will be organized by García himself and will take place in Juchitán. “These forums represent three distinct visions, and we want them all to participate and to speak with us.”
Our interview ended with a warm invitation to attend all three forums. In the months that followed, we bumped into García from time to time in Oaxaca City, and the invitations were repeated. However, none of the forums ever took place. We were curious why until we interviewed another Permanent Commission member some months later, Margarita García García of the Citizen’s Movement Party, who let it slip that the Permanent Commission had never even held a single meeting.

For her, the commission “unfortunately did not have a real agenda,” nor did it have any funding. She believed that forums would help a great deal, but she doubted the leadership of her fellow diputad@s.

“It’s a huge problem that we have so little contact with the citizens there [in the isthmus]. There is so much ignorance, . . . but my sense is that those in the PRI don’t really want to know anything, because they are the ones said to be selling the lands and helping the companies to enter without explaining to anyone what benefit the people will get. It’s the same everywhere. . . . In the isthmus, more than anything, they lie about how long the contracts are for. These are humble people. And when they see a little money, they want to take it. But it’s not until a year or two later when the [turbine] towers go up that they really begin to understand the finality of what has happened.”

Highlighting the inefficacy of the Permanent Commission is not to doubt that the PRI party continued to exercise considerable authority over Oaxacan wind development. In the isthmus anyway, the PRI networks were potent, and their caciques and operators were capable of creating and removing roadblocks (sometimes literally) to project development (see chapter 5), especially when they worked in concert with their subsidiary construction and transportation unions. We had also witnessed the efficacy of the Muniagas’ organization at work in 2009 (see chapter 2) and knew that several of their operatives in the isthmus had later been rewarded with important positions in regional government or had gone to work for wind developers. The PRI had been playing the game of corporatist patron-clientage in the isthmus for decades and, even in the face of impressive oppositional networks like COCEI and PRD, they remained skilled at it. Indeed, across the isthmus, Francisco García López, known often by his local nickname “Paco Pisa,” was considered an important political promoter and fixer for the wind companies. In the heat of the Mareña Renovables conflict in late 2012 and early 2013, a journalist told us his sources were telling him that García was receiving one to two million pesos monthly to help the developer defuse the mounting resistance to their project.
What is doubtful is that, in 2012 anyway, PRIismo found institutions of state government to be their most efficient vehicle for the exercise of political authority over wind power development. Fernando Mimiaga had occupied a position in the Oaxacan governmental bureaucracy, but it is notable that he also exerted significant authority through party and personal alliances in the isthmus. That said, his bureaucratic position had obviously meant a great deal, because he faded into the background relatively soon after being forced from his office in 2010. So perhaps it was the broader rupture in the PRI party-state organization in 2010 that caused his patronage network to fall into disarray. Without the existence of stabilizing transregional party-political channels, the extant legal frameworks, as Joaquin put it, left state government in “a very delicate position,” navigating between federal and local jurisdictions concerning electricity, corporate income, and land. The delicacy of state political and financial authority within Mexican federalism only reinforced this condition.

One could interpret the existence of vacant renewable energy offices, curiously ghostly participatory schemes and permanent commissions, and proliferating speculative forum proposals simply as symptoms of transitional or neglectful governmental practice, but they suggest also an important mode of political theater. These seemingly hollow political practices resonate with the destabilization of late liberal political ontologies elsewhere in the world.19 And in this respect, they say something not only about the structural effects of Mexican federalism and the hallucinatory character of pretensions to sovereignty absent the right of taxation but also about a broader phenomenon that Michael Bobick terms in another context “performative sovereignty.”20 Bobick argues—building upon his analysis of the “unrecognized state,” Transnistria—that sovereignty is “not simply an attribute of a state, but a process that is performative in nature . . . . Performance is the defining feature of statehood.” One might add that where normative, “legitimate” politics is restricted or limited, the performative dimension of sovereignty becomes all the more intensified. As we have seen, Oaxacan state sovereignty was also phantasmatic in this way, at least in terms of its doings and sayings with respect to wind development.21

As wind development accelerated from 2009 to 2012, the weakening integrative capacity of PRIismo revealed just how little sovereign authority the Oaxacan state actually possessed, how little capacity it had to govern what its political functionaries generally agreed was a wonderful opportunity for the second-poorest state in Mexico to make good on biopolitical promises of development in one of its poorest regions. As things stood, if prosperity came,
the Oaxacan state would scarcely be credited with it; if alienation and conflict ran rampant, the state would be blamed for its failure to mediate contentious politics and to maintain the rule of law. There was a palpable sense of paralysis that hung over our interviews and conversations in Oaxaca City. From that paralysis came the distinctive proleptic fantasies of sovereign authority discussed above, overcoming “so little contact” with the citizens of the isthmus, generating truthful documents, constituting legitimate rule through the veridicality of expert authority, making sure that la comunidad finally saw benefits equitably distributed. Aeolian politics, in other words, had become a pivotal site for the imagination and performance of Oaxacan state sovereignty in 2012–13.

A particularly fine example of such performative sovereignty in action was the one forum on renewable energy that did take place in Oaxaca City during the period of our field research, the Segundo Foro Internacional de Energías Renovables (Second International Forum on Renewable Energy, or FIER). This event was not only a testament to the state government’s efforts to project its “ordering” capacity over the rising tensions in the isthmus—seeking thereby to supplant these with a carefully orchestrated image of inexorable and beneficent technocratic achievement—but also of how the unruly turbulent forces associated with istmeño wind could shred such sovereign performance and lay its fundamental artifice bare.

Of Smoke and FIER

The courtyard behind the sixteenth-century Templo de Santo Domingo de Guzmán is buzzing with activity. Young men in suits dodge around purposefully carrying binders. Young women in silk blouses and slacks chat in small groups nearby. There are perhaps 150 people, many of them well-dressed university students, sitting on folding chairs under a large white tent, casually looking at programs or holding them up to deflect the oblique light of the morning sun. The setting, Oaxaca’s Jardín Etnobotánico, is stunning, a magnificent celebration of the botanical diversity and civilizational depth of Oaxaca by artists Francisco Toledo and Luis Zárate and ethnobiologist Alejandro de Ávila. The jardín contains more than seven thousand plant specimens, representing the full climatological spectrum of the state; the garden’s design and installations reference the cultural diversity of Oaxaca’s indigenous peoples and their pre-Columbian heritage. The imperial heritage of Oaxaca is indexed as well, particularly the stands of Opuntia cacti used
traditionally to cultivate cochineals, beetles that were ground to release their carminic acid, the basis of a prized scarlet dye. In centuries past, Oaxacans were forced to offer that dye as tribute to Aztec emperors and the Spanish crown. Not far from the tent, Toledo’s sculpture La Sangre de Mitla drips cochineal-dyed red water over a large slab of Montezuma cypress. As part of the iconic templo complex, the jardín materializes—as much as any one space could—the biotic, historical, and cultural texture of Oaxaca as an entity, sovereign and singular.

Everyone is awaiting the imminent arrival of Governor Cué to inaugurate the Second International Forum on Renewable Energy (fIER). When he and his entourage of functionaries are seen rounding the corner of the templo, the organizers quickly begin to assemble into an informal welcome line, which Cué dutifully zigzags across, shaking hands and exchanging greetings. Cué is, as befits his public image, dressed a little more casually than some, in a navy blazer and tan slacks, a light-blue shirt open without a tie. He spies Eduardo Andrade, the director of Iberdrola Mexico, standing next to Porfirio Montero and engages them briskly but warmly. Montero slaps Cué on the back, and after Cué turns away, Andrade slaps Montero on the back. Brotherly affection fills the air. Cué works his way to the front of the audience, several photographers on his heels. Some in the audience hold up their tablets and smartphones to capture an image as he passes by.

There are several short speeches of welcome before Cué’s. The governor is introduced by the rector of the Universidad Tecnológica de los Valles
Centrales (utvco), Julián Luna Santiago. The utvco is the primary organizer of fier and, though a partnership with University of Freiburg in Germany, received daad support to help fund the event. Luna Santiago proudly announces to the governor that they are welcoming experts in renewable energy from Germany, Brazil, China, Colombia, the Philippines, and Romania. Perhaps seeing double, he informs the governor that the audience is composed of three hundred university students who are studying careers in various aspects of renewable energy. Luna Santiago then speaks of the moral imperative of the Kyoto Protocol, of the looming dangers of climate change, of a planet that has warmed 0.76 degrees Celsius in only a decade. Becoming more animated, he gestures to the assembled international experts in the front row, inventing an entirely new adjectival lexicon for renewable energy.

“We have to listen to our older brothers in adapting to tender energy [energías blandas], to healthy energy [energías saludables]. Today we work together with youths with new ways of thinking. Above all, we are analyzing this potential that we have around La Ventosa, how we can adapt what we have in the waist [cintura] of Mexico. Above all, I want us to stop talking only about how Oaxaca is one of the five states with the greatest solar irradiation and to start saying also that we have this favorable wind, above all, for friendly energy [energías amigables], for energy that will not contaminate. We stand here today in the very cradle of Oaxaca de Juaréz to change, to set the foundation, to place a new rung on the ladder of development of this country.”
Brisk applause follows, and Cué advances to the podium, radiating his own friendly energy.

After thanking the organizers and assembled dignitaries, Cué launches into a brief prepared speech. Here is the heart of it:

My dear friends, since the beginning of the industrial revolution, humanity has confronted the degradation of natural resources to the point of risking the equilibria of ecosystems and the future of our next generations. It is thus of the greatest importance that society transitions to the generalized use of clean, renewable energy. In Oaxaca, as others have already mentioned, we are putting great force behind developing the multiple advantages and benefits of wind energy in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a geographic zone of world-class strategic importance in terms of wind energy production and development. We are opening new opportunities for investment and employment within a framework of legality and consensus, respecting the restrictions of local ecosystems and the decisions of local communities themselves.

To date, the wind corridor in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec generates more than 938 megawatts across eleven parks, and seven companies have installed 685 turbines covering an area of eight thousand hectares, having invested close to $1,900 million. There are currently four further parks in development that will begin operating in 2013 and contribute a further capacity of 462 megawatts, via 339 turbines, on a surface area of three thousand hectares, with an additional investment of $864 million.

Cué goes on to speak of his government’s commitment to respecting all Oaxaca’s cultures and identities and traditional ways of life as well its natural resources and biodiversity. In closing, he pauses, looks at the audience for a moment, and then decides to go off script to underscore where his government stands on wind power.

“I know that this is a very sensitive topic in Oaxaca right now. We have discussed it, and the government of this state would do nothing, it would promote no project at the expense of our naturaleza [natural environment] if it were to put our communities at risk or our environment or our biodiversity.” He pauses again, then continues, “We know that there are certain concerns in some sectors of the population, but we will be the first to be vigilant that this type of investment will contribute to the struggle against climate change and that it will be generous to the welfare of our communities. And obviously we will make certain that it doesn’t go against our
environment or against our good communal coexistence” (*nuestra buena convivencia comunal*).

More applause follows. Cué has testified to the biopolitical and ecopolitical commitments of the state government; he has offered a portrait of lossless flow between the attraction of foreign investment, the planetary struggle against climate change, the preservation of natural biodiversity, and the improvement of communal welfare. Above all, he has performed the legitimacy and sovereignty of the post-PRI Oaxacan state; the state that listens, reflects, respects; that operates consensually, transparently, and vigilantly. The audience responds. Most seem to want to believe him. We want to believe him.

Cué departs before the panels begin, stopping briefly to hold an impromptu press conference at the side of the tent before waving to the assembly and leaving the jardín quickly. In his absence, something feels lacking, and cracks quickly start to become visible in the image of progress, unity, and legitimacy that the governor so ably conjured.

First of all, an announcement is made that due to the nonappearance of several speakers, the three panels will be condensed into two. The first panel, “Challenges of Renewable Energy in Emergent Economies,” bears little resemblance to what has been promised in the program. The representatives from CFE and ENEL Green Power are not there, and the minister of STyDE has sent Sinaí Casillas to read a prepared statement in his place. They are joined by a German professor of management studies, a state diputado for the PAN party (the National Action Party), Isaac Rodríguez Soto representing the Pochutla district of the Costa region of Oaxaca, and Mayor Daniel Gurrión Matías of Juchitán. The surprise guest on the panel is Jonathan Davis Arzac, the executive chairman of the Macquarie Mexican Infrastructure Fund, who is in Oaxaca City to launch an aggressive public relations campaign in support of Macquarie’s embattled Mareña Renovables project in San Dionisio del Mar.24

The talks begin well, with the German professor saluting Mexico’s initiative and assuring the assembly that they are making wise investments in their future. In Germany, with all its renewable energy, he notes proudly, electricity prices are declining.25

Casillas then reads from his sheaf of papers, adding more statistics but otherwise staying very close to Cué’s inaugural narrative. He laments that only 24 percent of electricity in Mexico currently comes from “air, sun, and water,” compared with 76 percent from fossil fuels. “The government of this state considers the development of renewable energy to represent a great opportunity for corporate investment but also a great possibility for many
communities in this state who can reach a better form of social and economic development. . . . Renewable energy represents the best possibility for many communities to develop their capacities. . . . The beneficiaries are three: the communities, the companies, and our environment.”

Everything about Davis Arzac, from his name to his suit, is chilango. But he speaks softly, reverently, almost pleadingly, so that the Oaxacan audience will accept the legitimacy of his project. He identifies the investors, the various permissions the project has received, the many successful negotiations with landowners that have already taken place. He thanks every level of government for “incredible support, indispensable support.” He notes the one million tons of carbon dioxide that the project will offset each year. But he reserves his most impassioned commentary for the communities who will benefit through direct and indirect employment, whom his company views as partners, who will also benefit through the sale of energy.

“We are a company that understands that success for a business like ours truly depends on the population feeling comfortable [with us] and that we are respectful of the environment. That is, it would be suicide to try to do something other than this. We wouldn’t last even two years in operation! . . . What we need to have is the community by our side, and we can, all of us, live together in peace and in a harmonious manner. We can achieve a common good and make an important leap forward in terms of development in these communities.”

So far, so good, but with Mayor Daniel Gurrión’s speech, differences of interest become amplified. Gurrión, the scion of a powerful Juchitán construction empire and one of the most powerful PRI clans in the isthmus, is smooth and charming. Although trained as a dentist, there is something about his way of speaking that is reminiscent of a boxer: he embraces, feints, darts, hits, moves on.

He says this is a time when entrepreneurs and people in government need to be talking more about “responsibility.” Gurrión gestures to Davis Arzac and says that Macquarie is one of the responsible companies, and he enjoys working with them, even with all the problems they are facing. But what bothers him, he says, is that no one is talking about what municipalities are paying for electricity service. “I am paying, what, a million and a half for public lighting in Juchitán? And everywhere you look around town you see wind turbines. Something is wrong with that.” He says that el tema social (the social question) has been neglected under the government of Calderón, and he hopes it will be a priority for the next government. “I’ve been trying to convince the Ministry of Energy to let us have two turbines just for the
city to help solve this problem. Can you imagine what it’s like having to pay CFE a million and a half? Every month! But talking with the government goes nowhere. So far, they are deaf to us.”

Diputado Rodríguez speaks next, and he responds somewhat defensively to Gurrión. In addition to the federal legislation promoting renewable energy development, he says, the state of Oaxaca actually has a regulatory law dating from the final months of the Ruiz administration (in 2010), a law of coordination for the promotion and sustainable use of renewable energy sources. Unfortunately, he says as he throws up his hands, this statute has not been effectively implemented, in part because as a law of coordination, it requires voluntary participation from the companies, the federal government agencies, and the local government, which is difficult to organize, especially when all these partners are thinking solely in terms of their own interests. “But what is certain,” he says, “is that we have to create an equilibrium between private enterprise, all three levels of government, [and] society, with individuals, with the commissariats of bienes comunales and bienes ejidales, [and] with local authorities.” To this end, he thinks that wind companies’ current federal and municipal payments need to be redesigned so that the state receives payment as well “since, in the end, it is us who is responsible for keeping the peace when something goes wrong.” He also criticizes the companies for headquartering in Mexico City, which drives all the local tax revenues toward the capital, meaning “all the economic growth is happening there and not in municipalities that need it.”

The question-and-answer period becomes a lightning round of further indictments of the government and the companies. Porfirio Montero—who is, aside from Gurrión, the only istmeño involved in FIER in any formal capacity—comments from the audience that the government presence is so little that it “could drown in a teacup” in the isthmus, that despite all the money going to la federación, as he puts it, the poor municipios receive next to nothing. Looking meaningfully at Gurrión, Montero mentions that no part of what is paid to the municipios for change of land use ever makes it back to private landowners like him. Calderón is to blame, but so is the mayor of Juchitán.

Gurrión fires back at Montero that it is the law in Mexico that companies have to pay their tax to the municipality in which they are operating, simple as that. But Gurrión then takes advantage of having the microphone to go on the offensive again against the companies, wondering why they do not pay an annual license fee to the city, as a bank or even a poor street vendor would.
Rodríguez speaks up in defense of the government, saying that all these “bad vibes and resentment” about the government are really misplaced. The government is trying, and the Oaxacan government in particular has been innovative with their coordination law, given that they lack real jurisdiction under federal law.

In the next round of questions, people wonder why this fier event was never advertised in the isthmus and why so few representatives from the isthmus have been given a place on the program. Carlos Beas, the firebrand leader of ucizonti—a Magonista istmeño activist organization that has been fighting cfe, wind power, and other megaproyectos in the isthmus for years—says that “something smells rotten in the isthmus.” After ten years of wind development, what benefit are these communities really receiving? Their electricity bills are still very high. “In La Venta there are two hundred turbines, but the school doesn’t have reliable electricity. The ejido of La Venta has ceded land to wind turbines that used to provide thousands of tons of food for the region. Now a transnational cement maker gets the benefit of their productivity.” His voice rising, he warns of ethnocide against indigenous peoples in the isthmus, particularly the Huaves. He warns of spreading misery. “This is a moment when those of us in Oaxaca, in the isthmus, need to ask ourselves whose interest the generation of wind power is really serving.”

A Huave leader of the San Dionisio opposition movement then stands to denounce the Mareña contract as a document signed by their mayor behind the pueblo’s back without consultation.
A second Huave man stands, his voice trembling, to ask Davis Arzac exactly how much money he is giving to the federal government, to the state government, to the municipal government of San Dionisio and how much to el pueblo ikojts (the Huave people).

The mood is getting anxious, and the bright young men and women organizing the event are flitting around, shuffling paper, and attending to their smartphones with greater intensity. The side conversations erupting throughout the crowd rise to a level that makes it a challenge to hear the speakers. But Davis Arzac answers at length and in measured tones.

He assures the second speaker, Pedro Orozco, that the community will receive 1.5 percent of the net profits of the sale of electricity and that the company has worked together with “community leaders” to develop a plan of infrastructural enhancements of health, sanitation, and transportation that will benefit the entire community. “This is much more, fifteen or twenty times more, than what could be done for the pueblo without our investment.”

Orozco does not seem satisfied. “But to conform with the laws would mean that we would have had to have signed a contract. Is there no hope of stopping this? Do you intend to proceed by force if necessary, bringing violence to our pueblo?”

Davis Arzac says, more forcefully than before, “I cannot agree with the way you are describing the situation. And I can assure you that we have never had, and will never have, the intention to proceed with force.”

By now a pall has fallen over fier; the performance of unity has fully dissolved into accusation, suspicion, and a sense of injury on all sides. Cué’s discourse is revealed to be a mirage. Even the supporters of wind are turning on each other, looking for positional advantage, testing strategies for extracting more resources from the others. FIER is perhaps the most authentic representation of the turbulent istmeño wind anywhere in the sunny plains of the Oaxacan Valley. Late in the day, the German professor drily jokes to no one in particular that he is “learning a lot about the politics of energy in Mexico today.”

Casillas says little, but shifts frequently in his seat, wincing; the man whose cargo (office) it is to oversee wind power development in the state government seems unwilling or incapable of bringing order to its unruly participants.

Over the next few days, the Oaxacan news media that covers the FIER forum publishes accounts that focus on the governor’s statement, on the development statistics offered by various experts, and meanwhile wholly ignore the tensions that emerged both among the speakers themselves and between the speakers and the audience. This is not unusual for political
coverage in Oaxaca, but against the backdrop of spiraling conflicts concerning wind power in the isthmus, it reminds me of my days studying the East German press, when successful governmental action was the ever-reliable “news from another planet.”

Governing the Ungovernable

In front of the civil hospital in Oaxaca City, there is another remarkable sculpture, the *Fuente de las Siete Regiones* (fountain of the seven regions), commissioned by Oaxacan governor Alfonso Pérez Gazga and created collaboratively by architect Octavio Flores Aguillón and celebrated artist Carmen Carrillo de Antúnez, which was inaugurated in 1957. The overt purpose of the fountain followed the logic of the annual Guelaguetza festival, a manifestation of both the deep time of cultural heritage and the unity-in-diversity of the indigenous peoples within a superordinate cultural entity, “Oaxaca.”

But also like the Guelaguetza, it is hard to ignore the spatio-political message of the *Fuente*. On a central pedestal is a bronze male dancer from the Danza de la Pluma—which is, not incidentally, the closing performance of the Guelaguetza, representing the war of conquest between the Spanish and Aztecs—who towers above six bronze female figures placed equidistantly along the edges of the fountain, each representing in her garments and accessories one of the regions of the state (Cañada, Costa, Istmo, Mixteca, Sierra, and Tuxtepec). The *danzante* (dancer) materializes the political imagination of the Oaxacan Valley, a (masculine) survivor of the deadly conquest, who is still indigenous (Zapotec) to the core and whose cultural power has brought the rest of the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca into an orderly political constellation. The figure resonates with the Oaxacan state we have encountered in this chapter, doing its best to dance its desires into being. Interestingly, though, the feminine figure representing the istmo is lifting her skirt and walking, head held high, out of the fountain, her back turned toward the danzante, as though she is done with his performance. This, too, resonates.

In bringing this chapter to its conclusion, it is important to recognize that however hollow or performative the bureaucratic, gubernatorial, and congressional dimensions of Oaxacan statecraft proved to be, there were other Oaxacan governmental entities involved in the politics surrounding istmeño wind development, although in less visible and often half-willing ways.

For example, in February 2013 we met twice with the Oaxacan minister of the interior, Jesús Martínez Álvarez, whose ministry, *segego*, had
been tasked with trying to resolve the conflicts associated with the Mareña Renovables project, which at that point were reaching peak intensity in several communities around the Laguna Superior. We heard from the minister the by-now-familiar theme of how state government was caught mediating between the jurisdictions of federal and local authorities. It was fairly clear that Martínez found such mediation to be an unfortunate waste of his time. His chief aide pulled us aside to explain that the situation was “very delicate, very complicated,” and exhausting for the minister, given that all sides of the conflict “were telling a different story” about what was really going on. In our conversations, Martínez was clearly still working through his own feelings on the Mareña case. He blamed the company for a number of stupid moves, but he felt generally favorable about wind power as a developmental tool in the isthmus, and he expressed his opinion that the environmental and social risks raised against it were being overblown.
Martínez attributed most of the blame for the troubles in the isthmus to two organizations, UCIZONI and APIIDTT (the Asamblea de Pueblos Indígenas del Istmo en Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio), an organization whose leadership was closely connected with the radical wing of the Mexican teacher’s union CNTE 22 (Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, section 22). These NGOs, as the minister described them, were led by outsiders to the region and existed more or less to intensify social conflicts. Martínez returned to the NGOs several times in our conversation; they were clearly roving constantly on the edges of his thinking. At once an obvious opponent and a scapegoat for the growing resistance to wind power in the isthmus, the NGOs’ militancy and their popular resonance (which was not insignificant) both troubled the mediating work of the state government and served as yet another reminder of the limits of its legitimacy to govern. Both UCIZONI and APIIDTT claimed to support indigenous interests and sovereignty against the mestizo party-political order. As such, they sought to patrol and police the limits of valid political intervention by Mexico City and Oaxaca City into the affairs of the indigenous communities of the isthmus. And given that, in some communities that were opposed to the Mareña conflict, the constitutional recognition of indigenous communities’ right to govern themselves under traditional law (according to usos y costumbres) was either being actively exercised (e.g., in San Mateo del Mar) or forcefully proposed (e.g., in Álvaro Obregón), the question of the limits of the sovereign authority of mestizo representational politics and liberal democratic order was unavoidable. The constitutional capacities for indigenous autonomy created a political infrastructure that allowed not only indigenous municipios but also activist organizations like UCIZONI and APIIDTT to challenge the authority of Oaxacan political elites.

Martínez did not seem personally suited to spectacular displays of sovereignty; his performativity was low key and circumspect. He wondered whether convincing the company to help clean up the raw sewage problem in the lagoon would help to appease angered fisherfolk; he wondered whether investing resources in cleaning out the irrigation canals from the 1960s would create enough jobs to siphon away support from the resistance; he mused above all about how to outmaneuver the NGOs to bring seemingly intractably opposed sides together for real negotiations. The NGO leaders had no legitimacy in his mind, although he seemed to respect their tactical acumen. To paraphrase Sara Ahmed, Martínez viewed the NGO leaders as having “too much will,” and he frequently accused them of opposing projects.
simply for the purpose of “being oppositional.” He seemed entirely certain that without the blockages created by external interests, he was capable of finding a resolution in which everyone would receive some clear benefit from the project, which would allow it to advance.

Yet, over the next few months, it became clear that SEEGO’s experiments were no more capable than local authorities and party-political networks of convincing the resistance to remove their blockades. As the standoff between the government and the resistance became more intractable and sporadically violent in March and April 2013, it was rumored that the state police chief was advocating for greater use of force to remove blockades and to jail protestors. Martínez, on the other hand, was rumored to be committed to pursuing further negotiations. We knew that the company wanted to avoid bloodshed at all costs, especially now that the conflict was receiving international media attention. This left different ministries within the state government at cross-purposes and seemingly undermining each other.

In the end, the stalemate cost Martínez the second-most-powerful office in the state. He resigned in mid-April 2013 and, in what was likely a parting gesture of frustration, his resignation letter to Governor Cué was published by the news organization Noticias. In it, Martínez Álvarez suggests that he no longer has Cué’s full confidence, highlighting his experience that “issues already solved had been reactivated by internal interests, many of which sought to injure me but worse still . . . [and] are damaging to the government and the population. I do not wish to serve as the excuse why many problems that have solutions are being left unresolved.”

That same spring, a Oaxacan political magazine featured a cover image of Gabino Cué boiling in a vat labeled “Oaxaca,” which is fired by anarchy and corruption and stirred by an obscene savage, whose loincloth lists, among other affiliations, “CNTE 22” and “parque eólico.” In the background, a field of wind turbines can be seen rising out of a distant jungle. The crude caricature offers the other side of the colonial danzante and his mistresses. Here, we find “ungovernable” masculine indigeneity resisting and stultifying the good governmental and developmental intentions of the Oaxacan Valley. The image has many overdeterminations: the centripetal forces of federalism, the infrastructural inadequacies magnifying spatial and cultural distance, the constitutional guarantees of indigenous autonomy, the persistence of communal land regimes, the fierce networks of political loyalty and rivalry, and perhaps even the climatological comforts and serene colonial inertia of Oaxaca City. All these forces contribute to this portrait of the Oaxacan state government as a sacrificial victim to anarchic, corrupt forces beyond...
its control. Somehow these turbines rising from the jungle transmogrify wind power into a wild indigenous weapon, a further mysterious instrument through which the eternal indigenous other can taunt a beleaguered, failing mestizo state.  

These were the aeolian politics of the Oaxaca Valley, and their oscillation between sovereign desire and absent efficacy added yet more question marks to the win-win-win calculus being put forward by the agents of bio-power, capital, and energopower during the main period of our field research. In the end, despite brief cameos at events like fier, capital preferred to reside in Mexico City and, to a lesser but still-significant extent, in the isthmus itself. Those who plotted the futures of fuel, energy, and electricity in Mexico also gave Oaxaca City a wide berth. Even those with the resources to bring development, health, and rights to the isthmus found little purpose and traction in the Oaxaca Valley. That left Oaxaca’s statecraft very much in the mode of stagecraft, at least as far as wind development was concerned. It
was certainly not impossible that with the PRI’s return to the governorship of Oaxaca in December 2016, Fernando Mimiaga Sosa, or another like him, would ascend to a position that, in a reformed PRI party-state, would be able to exert more influence over the aeolian politics of the isthmus.36

But since that story has yet to unfold, we must now follow the main trunk line of Mexican electrical infrastructure northwest to another valley, Anáhuac, also known as the Valley of México, and to the federal capital, Mexico City. In a national politics largely defined by centralized political authority, we seek the knot of capital, energopolitics, and biopolitics that understands itself to govern the development of Mexican wind power in the isthmus and elsewhere.