



## RECENSÃO

*Energopolitics. Wind and Power  
in the Anthropocene*, de Dominic Boyer,  
and  
*Ecologics. Wind and Power in the Anthropocene*,  
de Cymene Howe,  
por Luís Silva

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BOYER, Dominic

*Energopolitics. Wind and Power in the Anthropocene*,  
Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2019, 257 pp.  
ISBN 9781478003779

HOWE, Cymene

*Ecologics. Wind and Power in the Anthropocene*,  
Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2019, 250 pp.  
ISBN 9781478003854

Luís Silva

Between 2009 and 2013, Dominic Boyer and Cymene Howe conducted 16 months of fieldwork in southern Mexico in order to understand what happens in the transition from fossil fuels to wind power, who sets the agenda, who is affected, and what are the political forces that shape the possibilities for environmentally cleaner energy futures. Their research has resulted in an interesting and novel form of collaborative ethnographic writing, the “duograph”, that is, two single-authored books (with a joint preface and a joint conclusion) that draw on shared field research experiences and archives of empirical material. These include interviews and informal conversations with *campesinos*, fisherfolk, politicians, engineers, bureaucrats, conservationists, journalists, activists, bankers, industry lobbyists, and NGO staff as well as observant participation in meetings and protests against wind farms in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Through three case studies – Yanasa-Ixtepec, a failed community-based attempt to build a 102 MW wind farm

on communal agrarian land; La Ventosa, a city surrounded by wind turbines owned by a public-private partnership; and Mareña Renovables, a 396 MW wind park financed by transnational capital that was not built – Dominic Boyer and Cymene Howe show that although renewable energy is necessary to combat global warming, how it is implemented and who participates matters. In their own words, “[r]enewable energy matters, but it matters more how it is brought into being and what forms of consultation and cooperation are used” (p. XII).

In his volume, *Energopolitics*, Dominic Boyer proposes a new anthropological theory of political power in the Anthropocene grounded on what he calls the “conceptual minima” of “capital”, “biopower”, and “energopower” (his neologism). And he argues that understanding the contemporary politics of wind power development in the isthmus demands attention to such conceptual minima and the “ethnographic maxima” of the contested history of land tenure, *caciquismo* (boss politics), and diverse

opposition movements specific to the region; the phantasmatic status of state sovereignty; the clientelist networks and corporatist machinations of the Mexican political parties; the legacies of settler colonialism; a petrostate anxious about climate change; and a vulnerable parastatal utility company.

Boyer's argument, outlined in the introduction, is developed throughout five chapters, which focus on: the Zapotec community's aspirations and desires regarding the Yansa-Ixtepec project as well as the actors and infrastructures that have hindered its implementation (Chapter 1); the logics and history of the wind farms around La Ventosa (Chapter 2); the efforts made by the Oaxacan state government to regulate and profit from wind energy uptake in the isthmus (Chapter 3); the agents of the Mexican federal government, finance, and industry more actively involved in planning and enabling wind parks in the region (Chapter 4); and the history of indigenous resistance to both the Oaxacan and Mexican authorities and how it influences support for and rejection of these energy infrastructures in the context under study (Chapter 5).

In her volume, *Ecologics*, Cymene Howe examines the Mareña Renovables mega project in order to understand the relations between humans and other-than-humans entailed by wind farm development(s). Over six chapters and an introduction she mobilizes feminist theory and more-than-human analytics to argue that we cannot capture the present-day dynamics of energy and environment

without understanding how human aspirations for energy articulates with non-human beings, technomaterial objects, infrastructures, and the geophysical forces that are at the heart of wind power.

Howe's chapters oscillate between the chronological telling of events – from wind power anticipated, including the economic, political, and policy conditions of the Mareña Renovables project's emergence and the intentions and machinations of their developers (Chapter 2), to the project's interruption due to standoffs and protests against its construction made by the mestizo and indigenous Zapotec and Huave communities that inhabit the isthmus (Chapter 4), and the project's suspension on account of political and economic deadlocks as well as communicational issues (Chapter 6) – and the examination of three other-than-human forces and entities closely linked to such events – wind (Chapter 1), trucks (Chapter 3), and species (hares, birds, bats, mice, fish, turtles, plants) (Chapter 5).

Together these two books give a comprehensive, in-depth, and ethnographically rich examination of the political, social, and ecological dimensions of wind power development in the isthmus. They also demonstrate that the transition toward a more sustainable electricity generation system that is needed to achieve the Paris Agreement's target could either counteract or maintain and reinforce the structures of power, inequalities, and injustices underwritten by fossil fuels. As the authors put it in the joint conclusion, where they also

appeal for more collaborative work in the pursuit of better futures for both humans and nonhumans on this planet, “we need not just new energy sources to unmake the Anthropocene, we need to put those new energy sources in the service of creating politics and ecologies that do not repeat the expenditures, inequalities, and exclusions of the past” (pp. 197-198).

The issue is that the corporate investment-based model of wind farm development that is presently dominant in the isthmus (and in many other places in the world) reproduces the logics and ethos of resource extraction while reinforcing the local political elites as well as the hierarchies and inequalities among the local communities. The La Ventosa and the Mareña Renovables case studies illustrate the point, and they “resulted in failures, both human and other than human” (p. 194). The good news is that there are alternative models of wind power development that may well favor local or indigenous autonomy and sovereignty while promoting environmental justice, “even if they are being actively resisted in Mexico” (p. 194), as the Yansa-Ixtepec case study shows.

The main research findings and policy recommendations given by the authors to achieve more positive development results in Mexico’s transition to a low-carbon electricity generation sector in the future are the following:

“(1) The dominant development model prioritizes the interests of international investors and developers and

local Isthmus political elites over other stakeholder groups, especially the regional government and non-elite Isthmus residents. (2) The dominant development model has reinforced hierarchy and inequality in Isthmus communities through unequal distribution of new resources like land-rents. (3) The development model has generated significant polarization in Isthmus communities regarding wind parks and undermined trust in government and industry. (4) The financial benefits from land rents are currently primarily being directed toward luxury consumption by elites. (5) A majority of Isthmus residents appear to favor wind power development were its financial benefits to be more equally distributed. (6) Project findings suggest that the Mexican government needs to re-evaluate its development model to guarantee (a) that entire communities and not simply elites are involved in project design and implementation, (b) that mechanisms be developed to guarantee that wind power development yields consistent and significant public benefits, and (c) that regional governments receive sufficient federal funds to develop a regulatory agency with the authority to guarantee that wind power development is truly transparent and beneficial to all stakeholder groups” (pp. 196-197).

Despite the specificities of the context/case under scrutiny, most of these findings and recommendations are also valid for the contemporary energy transition in other countries worldwide, including Portugal.

To conclude, *Energopolitics* and *Ecologics* demonstrate the relevance of anthropological approaches to energy transitions. They are well written, easy to read and, at the same time, highly recommended to students, researchers, academics, governments, policymakers, and the general public interested in the ongoing change toward lower carbon futures, especially regarding electricity generation. They are available open access at the Rice University Digital Scholarship Archive.

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