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WIND FUTURES:
INDIGENEITY, AERIAL POLITICS, AND THE MAKING OF RENEWABLE ENERGY IN
COLOMBIA

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For my mother, Dulce Orellana.

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Introduction

Wind's Entanglements

In October 2019, I was invited to the ANDREC forum of renewable energy in Bogotá, Colombia. The meeting was organized by Green Power Global (a British firm that promotes international conferences on energy), who publicized it as the “most important renewable energy event of the year.” The forum took place in the conference hall of the Sheraton Hotel in Bogotá’s northside. With over 200 attendees and 80 presentations, it brought together a mix of corporate executives from renewable and fossil fuel companies, state bureaucrats from the Ministry of Mines and Energy, and a slate of energy consultants and investors from Colombia, Europe, and the U.S.

This wasn’t my first time at an event of this kind, as they’ve become a regular part of Colombia’s wind energy industry (with at least a dozen or so organized each year). Irrespective of their location or animating theme, such meetings always share a similar sensorial feel: they take place in large cities and within secluded, quiet, and air-conditioned dark rooms, decorated with techno-utopian images, which contrast radically with the rural, windy, sunny, and sonorous landscapes where the wind is harnessed. For organizers, these forums are crucial for showcasing *el recurso* (“the resource,” corporate lingo for the wind) to investors, but also for reinforcing the aura of economic potential and aeolian profit that pervades the ongoing renewable energy rush. Indeed, in these events wind energy is always presented as an untrammelled good that brings universal benefits, uniting the interests of local communities, states, and global corporations in the pursuit of “clean” energy and climate stability. They are thus sites used for circulating utopias about the seemingly untapped possibilities of wind, a kinetic force that is viewed as

lacking the risks of so-called dirty forms of energy extraction (i.e., pollution, dispossession, and ecological harm).

At the forum, speakers talked one after the other about Colombia's wind, highlighting the unparalleled possibilities it offered for the country's economic growth and future energy needs, but also for the Wayúu Indigenous communities living in La Guajira peninsula. The peninsula is one of the windiest places in South America and the site where 57 wind farms are currently being designed, licensed, and built. Crucially, this is the territory of the Wayúu, the largest Indigenous people in Colombia and Venezuela (with a population of over 600,000), who claim sovereignty over the sites of existent and projected wind farms. While the region's inhabitants have contributed minimally to global warming, in the last decade they have been assigned the national task of spearheading Colombia's transition to carbon-neutral electricity.

According to the speakers in the room, harnessing La Guajira's wind would unleash a chain of radical transformations. It would address the climate emergency, attract foreign capital, create thousands of jobs, reduce the price of electricity, amend years of infrastructure disinvestment in rural areas, supersede coal extraction (and its legacy of toxic pollution) and even fix the epidemic of child malnutrition, chronic poverty, and exclusion that affects the Wayúu (even though, as it is frequently the case, Indigenous people were not at the event). While wind had been harnessed for centuries for moving sails, grinding grain, or pumping water from the subsurface, it has now been endowed with the "salvational" purpose of reverting the effects of petrochemical modernity (Howe 2019).¹

¹ Yet, as Howe aptly argues, the wind partially created the conditions of the Anthropocene as the trade winds connecting Europe and the Caribbean – which are the same wind currents I analyze in this dissertation – propelled the era of colonialism, the slave trade, and the rise of capitalism (Howe 2019).

The forum ended with a presentation by Santiago Villegas, the head of planning at EPM (Public Enterprises of Medellín), the third largest company in Colombia and the owner of the Jepirachi wind farm – the first project of this sort built on Wayúu land.² An electrical engineer in his early 50s, Santiago spoke candidly about the challenge of Colombia’s burgeoning wind energy industry. Rather than adhering to the celebratory tone of most presentations, Santiago described how in 2010 his company had identified three fundamental “obstacles” for the future of wind power: 1) a technological barrier (i.e., turbine towers were not competitive without heavy subsidies); 2) an infrastructural barrier (i.e., the lack of high-power connection lines that would link wind farms with the national electric grid), and, more importantly, what he called 3) “sociocultural issues.” By this, he was alluding to the fact that wind farms were going to be assembled on “Indigenous land” and would thus have to grapple with the “social, cultural, and economic conditions of the Wayúu people.”³

Villegas minimized the first two aspects, assuring that they were in the process of being “fixed.” For him, the biggest hurdle was “sociocultural,” especially as it related to the Wayúu. He narrated how EPM arrived at this conclusion the hard way. In the Jepirachi wind farm, he told the audience, “We had a strike, a blockade by the communities. They shut down the machines and the operation was suspended. And they gave us back the wind farm after nine months –totally dismantled. This shows the sociocultural sensibility that is needed.” Villegas reminded attendees that La Guajira’s wind moved above the territory of the Wayúu people,

² All names in the dissertation—excluding those of public figures and organizations—are pseudonyms.

³ The Constitution of 1991 created a set of Indigenous rights and formally recognized Indigenous lands (called *resguardos*) as entities that cannot be privatized, expropriated, or rented out, and where Indigenous peoples have jurisdiction.

giving them limited but substantial control over wind power.⁴ Thus, he warned everyone, “The potential (of wind) is very large, but we can waste it all... if we don’t do things in the right way.”

At the same time, however, Villegas spoke of the Wayúu through their “unique heritage that ought to be protected and respected,” remarking that they had been victims of colonialism, corruption, and the drug economy. As many others in the industry, he framed wind as the keystone of a “clean” energy regime that could be more compatible with Wayúu notions of territoriality, value, and culture. Views like Villegas’s that wind energy and indigeneity could somehow reinvigorate each other were commonly captured in posters used to publicize these events (Fig. 1). Such images often collapsed techno-futuristic blades alongside Indigenous bodies, aesthetics, and landscapes, tying the atmospheric with Indigenous worlds. But how is Wayuu culture apprehended by the wind energy industry? And how do Wayúu people respond to interventions not only onto their land and eolian resources, but also to their sociocultural lifeworlds?

⁴ Unlike previous forms of fossil fuel extraction – such as coal mining and natural gas – wind energy is taking place in a peninsula where Wayúu people have land-based jurisdiction supported by Colombia’s multiculturalist legal apparatus. The country has also ratified all international conventions on Indigenous rights (including the ILO’s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 [No. 169] and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [2007]). This means that corporations must carry out legally mandated processes of consultation with Indigenous communities before building and operating wind farms.



Figure 1. Poster for the 2nd Forum of Renewable Energy in Riohacha (Source: Photo by Author)

A few months before the forum, I was in the *Ishoshinka* Wayúu cemetery, located in the rural community of Kasiwoulin and less than a mile away from the Jepirachi wind farm, which Villegas referenced in his talk. I had been invited to attend a secondary burial (called *jipü*). In these events, the bodily remains of matrilineal kin buried in other cemeteries of the peninsula (or in other parts of Colombia and Venezuela), which are usually located where the deceased person

lived, are exhumed, transported, and reburied for a second and last time in their ancestral cemetery, which belongs to their matrilineal clan.⁵ As is usually the case, the secondary burial went on for several days as hundreds of Wayúu and non-Indigenous guests visited from all parts of the peninsula and beyond to spend a few days together in the cemetery, reconnecting with kin and friends, remembering the deceased, and talking about current affairs, from upcoming municipal elections to the economic crisis in Venezuela.

As the most visible built structures in the arid peninsula, Wayúu cemeteries share the vast landscape with white wind turbines and black wind-measuring towers. But the social life of wind power was visible in other myriad ways during the funeral, such as through the baseball caps of renewable energy companies worn by Wayúu guests, the presence of non-Indigenous workers from these companies mingling with guests, or the occasional rumors about the sudden proliferation of Toyota SUVs prospecting the peninsula or the arrival of a new Spanish company offering attractive deals in exchange for leasing windy land.

But, as I came to discover during my time in La Guajira, cemeteries were entangled to wind energy in other, more deeply political ways. These sites are not just repositories of bodily remains, but also crystallize the connection between networks of matrilineal kin and land—what is then *marked* as their ancestral land, the land of their ancestors' final resting place. Wayúu communities thus rely on the location and identity of those buried to make territorial claims. But this fundamentally cultural practice has acquired a new meaning with the emergence of wind energy as a new capitalist frontier that requires *mapping* windy land and ascribing to it some

⁵ When someone dies, they are first buried where they lived (which is usually not their ancestral land). Between three and 20 years after this first burial, their remains are exhumed and taken to their ancestral land (where their matrilineal cemetery is located). These two burials have important ritual significance. The first burial marks the conversion from a human into *yolüja* (an individualized soul) who dwells in Jepirra (the land of the dead). The second burial signals the transition from an individualized to a collective soul (*wanülü*), occupying a space-beyond-death, joining the rest of the deceased Wayúu.

form of property-like relation. As several friends told me that day, cemeteries are thus critical for demonstrating *who* (i.e., which matrilineal extended family) has authority over portions of the peninsula. Therefore, the act of placing the bodily remains, during second burials, is a sovereign-making act.

Yet, the circulation of bodily remains is not determined in advance. Decisions to place deceased kin in a place different than their ancestral cemetery are not uncommon, a situation which renders these spatial relations fluid and somewhat unpredictable. In the secondary burial I attended, while some believed that the deceased relatives belonged to another cemetery (called *Pusheo*, located about 50 miles north), the community of Kasiwoulin had decided deliberately to have their kin buried in a cemetery adjacent to the wind farm. When I asked about this decision, Manuel – one of the hosts – told me that it was “because of the recent conflicts around wind energy.” “A weakness of ours,” he added, “is not having enough relatives here. But this is the most important thing: to have our relatives here and retain control over our land.” Since disputes over wind energy often involve cemeteries, for Manuel and others it was crucial to populate this cemetery and have their kin buried close to the areas of current and future wind farms. Cemeteries thus bring to light Wayúu norms and practices for ordering land, power, and wind. They also reflect many of the unexpected entanglements of indigeneity and wind power that I explore in this dissertation.

Both scenes –in the hotel in Bogotá and in the secondary burial in Kasiwoulin—capture the mixture of hope and apprehension over Colombia’s new eolian frontier. Given the Wayúu’s jurisdiction over land, these moments also illuminate how corporations must navigate and embed themselves in Wayúu indigeneity to harness wind. And, importantly, they signal the Wayúu’s power in delineating or even foreclosing the futurities that are crafted in spaces like the

ANDREC forum. In short, these moments make explicit that Colombia's wind rush, as I will examine below, is predicated upon a fragile and contested calibration between corporate and Wayúu modes of accountability, authority, and futurity.

This dissertation examines how renewable energy technologies intersect with Indigenous peoples' environments, practices of resistance, and political and economic life in Colombia. At the same time, it traces how Indigenous cultural, epistemic, and ontological worlds come to shape energy transitions and open new possibilities for climate justice. Based on over 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork, my dissertation describes how Indigenous Wayúu communities, energy experts, and state bureaucrats experience, negotiate, and mutually inflect the shift from coal mining to wind farming in La Guajira. By tracking these entanglements, the dissertation offers a critical analysis of wind energy capitalism, an undertaking that recruits Indigenous culture to convert wind and the atmosphere into a site of accumulation and climate change mitigation.

In the following pages, I approach wind power as sites of struggle where global discourses about decarbonization exist in uneasy tension with Indigenous cultural, political, and material worlds. Thus, this ethnography examines the multiple actors, practices, entanglements, and speculative futures that animate Colombia's wind energy rush, a nationwide effort to cut carbon emissions and shield the electric grid from climate crises. It looks at what it means to live alongside massive infrastructures that are meant to counter the effects of global warming. And it does so by focusing on moments of encounter, such as in both scenes above, where the bodies, practices, aesthetics, and knowledge of the Wayúu become entangled in the large-scale

production of carbon-neutral electricity – an undertaking that is modulated by the Wayúu people in crucial ways.

As Latin America becomes a testing ground for new models of the “green” economy and climate governance (Acosta 2013, Howe 2015, Mendoza 2018), this dissertation sheds light on the sociopolitical contradictions that ensue during the shift to a carbon-neutral future, such as the extensions and contestations of settler-colonial domination over bodies, landscapes, and the atmosphere. It also offers a glimpse of the future dynamics that might ensue in a post-petrochemical world, as the replacement of fossil fuels continues to push the global expansion of wind turbines.⁶

Indeed, according to the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2022), to stabilize the climate and avoid the 2°C rise in global temperatures above pre-industrial levels by 2100, countries must end carbon emissions by 2050. Global consumption of fossil fuels has increased dramatically since the industrial revolution (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016) and over 75 percent of global greenhouse emissions are caused by hydrocarbons.⁷ Tackling the climate emergency entails not just phasing out fossil fuels entirely (and replacing them with renewable sources, Hughes 2021), but also undertaking the most rapid energy transition in history. Yet while Europe, China, and the U.S. are responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions, much of the solar, wind, and hydrological resources needed to decarbonize the planet are in the Global South, often within the territories of Indigenous peoples.⁸

⁶ According to one estimate, about 1.6 million turbines by 2050, occupying one percent of the global landmass. See Hughes (2021, 12).

⁷ <https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/energy-and-the-environment/where-greenhouse-gases-come-from.php>

⁸ In fact, Indigenous peoples globally claim sovereignty or have land tenure rights over one quarter of the earth’s surface (across 87 countries). See Nichols (2020, 151).

Wind power has been lauded as one of the most effective and universally beneficial tools for cutting carbon emissions (Hawken 2017).⁹ However, while scholars across disciplines have unearthed the forms of Indigenous dispossession, (settler-) colonial violence, and ecological harm tied to hydrocarbons, there has been less attention to how Indigenous actors actively engage with the global rise of renewable energy. What is the relation between energy transitions and Indigenous livelihoods? And, relatedly, who benefits from the global expansion of wind energy?

In the following chapters, I show how wind energy companies design and operate their projects in close, though uneasy, alignment with Wayúu modes of ordering land, airspace, and power. Since the prime location for wind energy is inside Wayúu sovereign land that cannot be privatized, it is only in accordance with Indigenous legal, political, and social orders that Colombia's goal of reaching zero carbon emissions by 2050 can be achieved. Such conditions, I argue, create a new form of green, racialized, and low-carbon extractivism that actively recruits and transforms – rather than obliterates – indigeneity as a crucial scaffolding for clean energy production and capital accumulation. The recruitment of Indigenous worlds is not merely a visual or affective appropriation for fashioning corporate identities (drawing on a long-standing imaginary of Indigenous peoples as environmentally sustainable subjects; see Cattelino 2008, Conklin and Graham 1995). It is central to *producing* renewable energy. As I describe, global energy companies enlist Wayúu kinship ties, moral economies, land tenure norms, environmental knowledge, aesthetics, and legal concepts to claim property over wind (Chapter 1), move machinery, cars, and workers across the peninsula (Chapter 2), ensure the long-term functioning of wind turbines (Chapter 3), and shield energy infrastructure from the imagined geographies of

⁹ According to one estimate, wind turbines can reduce the largest amount of Co2 compared to other “green” technologies (such as sustainable agriculture or electric vehicles). See Hawken (2017).

danger and risk along the Colombia-Venezuela border (Chapter 4). In short, given wind's fuzzy legal, conceptual, and political status (see below), companies rely on Indigenous logics that connect people, land, and wind to serve the temporal, economic, and material needs of wind power.

At the same time, the dissertation attends to the conditions under which Indigenous actors productively engage with wind energy infrastructures and generate decolonial ideas about energy transitions. As I explain in the chapters below, while Wayúu communities partake only minimally in the economic benefits reaped by wind farms (from jobs to royalty payments), the wind energy rush has sparked a resurgence of grassroots struggles over wind by which Indigenous actors advance their sovereignty, collective rights, and futures. Put differently, the recruitment of Indigenous worlds for sustaining Colombia's green energy futures has opened unforeseen possibilities for designing an Indigenous energy politics. Indeed, the dissertation traces the rise of aerial struggles, which are delineated by past and new political grammars as well as human and non-human agencies. These range from spectacular and highly visible interruptions of entire wind farms to more quotidian acts of refusal (Simpson 2014) and insistence (Richland 2021) in everyday encounters between corporations, Indigenous communities, and state institutions. Such aerial struggles, I claim, have the power of shaping Colombia's carbon-neutral futures.

Drawing on insights from political ecology, environmental and economic anthropology, and critical Indigenous studies, this dissertation makes the case that indigeneity and wind power in Colombia are co-constitutive. It unearths how wind power exceeds the domains of infrastructure, techno-politics, and atmospheric science and brings to the fore questions about indigeneity, settler-colonialism, and decolonization. As such, the chapters that follow seek to unsettle taken-

for-granted assumptions about renewable energy that dwell on its assumed positive qualities and universal benefits and disentangles the local contradictions and unexpected possibilities that arise when planetary scale problems caused by petrochemical modernity place Indigenous people at the forefront of environmental policy. At the same time, the chapters that follow seek to go beyond a critique of natural resource-based development and its violent legacy and into an exploration of the political possibilities and emergent environmental relations of carbon-neutral industries, especially for Indigenous peoples that experience them firsthand. I do this by attending ethnographically to the spaces of encounters where the possibility of wind energy futures is negotiated, transformed, or refused. If energy transitions offer a chance for rethinking “dominant political, economic, and social institutions” (Howe and Boyer 2016, 218), ethnographic attention to wind power’s entanglement with indigeneity in La Guajira invites us to think of decarbonization as a process that is also reordering the relation between Indigenous sovereignty, state power, and capital.

The remainder of this introduction is divided into three parts. First, I will discuss some of the conceptual debates and analytic questions that animate this project. Subsequently, I will offer a brief overview on the La Guajira peninsula, focusing on several historical moments that have shaped the interactions between the Wayúu people, (settler-) colonial institutions, and energy-related industries. I then track several important realignments in Colombia’s energy policy that underpin the current wind energy rush. Lastly, I briefly reflect on my methodology and present an overview of the chapters.

Theorizing Indigenous Energy

A range of interventions have recently theorized about the effects of climate change on human and non-human ecologies, political formations, and economic life, including how climate

mitigation efforts often reinscribe previous forms of colonialism, racialized labor, and imperial power (O'Reilly et al. 2020; Vaughn, Guarasci, and Moore 2021). Ongoing debates on the Anthropocene – as an analytic that seeks to diagnose the current planetary condition (Crutzen 2006) – have inspired renewed attention on energy, largely because fossil fuels are entwined with the advent of this geologic age (Howe 2019) through the so-called Great Acceleration – i.e., the intensification of human activity starting in 1750 that is responsible for destabilizing earth systems (Masco 2021, Steffen et al. 2015, Yusoff 2013). But petrochemical modernity has also been a key element of the colonial and settler-colonial experience of Indigenous peoples globally, especially those living at the sites of fossil fuel extraction, through waves of land dispossession, militarization, toxic exposure, and environmental violence (Anthias 2018, Bebbington and Bury 2014, Cepek 2018, Estes 2019, Svampa 2015). This is why critiques of the Anthropocene have led to other articulations that attempt to account for the uneven distribution of harm and responsibility in creating the conditions of the present (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016, Escobar 2020, Haraway 2016, Malm 2016, Moore 2015) by, for instance, making more explicit connections with Indigenous dispossession (Davis and Todd 2017, 763; Todd 2015, 243).

The growing interest in energy also stems from the fact that the shift away from fossil fuels is interpreted as an antidote to the conditions and consequences of the Anthropocene (Howe 2019). Indeed, for some, the technical qualities of renewable energy carry the potential of crafting decentralized, equitable, and locally-based energy systems (Scheer 2012). Yet, for others, it all too often reenacts extractive legacies (Franquesa 2018; Powell 2018), either because the property arrangements are analogous to those of fossil fuels, because the global demands for low-carbon energy come at the expense of local environmental, social, and economic concerns (Dennison

2017), or because it perpetuates comparable militarized and toxic ecologies (Montoya 2022). The transitions away from fossil fuels thus depend on how it is imagined and enacted (Howe 2019).

This dissertation focuses precisely on how energy transitions are experienced, negotiated, and materialized on Wayúu land, a landscape affected by centuries of extraction and pollution and now put at the center of Colombia’s climate solutions policies.¹⁰ By showing how Indigenous knowledge, kinship, value, spatiality, and law *mediate* Colombia’s wind futures, I thus push for a more encompassing understanding of renewable energy as a potentially *generative* process—enabled by, among other things, the presence of jurisdictional, infrastructural, and territorial conditions by which Indigenous aspirations, claims, and futures may be enacted in concrete and unexpected ways.¹¹

A second set of conversations animating this project pertains to the rise of “green” capitalist frontiers (Mendoza 2018; Mendoza, Greenleaf, and Thomas 2021). How does wind become a space of accumulation? And what forms of dispossession and racialization ensue in the shift toward decarbonization? This dissertation intervenes in these debates by offering an anatomy of Colombia’s wind energy rush, tracking how the movement of air becomes—with crucial limitations—an object of enclosure, accumulation, and surveillance.

While extraction has been commonly defined as the “forced removal of raw materials and life forms from the earth’s surface, depths, and biosphere” for the reproduction of capital

¹⁰ Since the second half of the 20th century, numerous interventions in anthropology and related social scientific fields have traced the enduring effects of hydrocarbons in shaping political power (Apter 2005, Jobson 2018, Mitchell 2013), bodies (Wylie 2018), environments (Appel et al. 2015, Peluso and Watts 2001), citizenship and belonging (Coronil 1997, Huber 2013, Rogers 2015), and futurities (Weszkalnys 2016). Yet, the centrality of fossil fuels as *the* form of energy in capitalist modernity (Malm 2016) has often limited conversations about how collectivities come to conceptualize, engage with, and make sense of other energy sources (and their distinct rules of management, distribution, and access).

¹¹ This contrasts with works in Latin America that show how fossil fuels erase Indigenous life, environments, and human-nonhuman attachments through forms of territorial dispossession (Lu, Valdivia, and Silva 2017), disavowal of ontological relations (Cepek 2018), or the dismissal of Indigenous jurisdiction and law (Farthing and Fabricant 2018).

(Mezzadra and Neilson 2017, 1), this project is inspired by interventions that push for an *expanded* notion of extraction – beyond the literal removal of materials from the biosphere (Gago 2017; Mezzadra 2019).¹² I thus approach wind and the atmosphere as frontiers of value, capture, and enclosure. By ethnographically attending to the relations and affective fabrics built *through* atmospheres (Choy and Zee 2015, 216), I critically analyze how the wind –a seemingly global common– is made the object of property claims via Indigenous kin genealogies and webs of social relations across time and space.

Additionally, the dissertation follows the emergence of Colombia’s wind energy economy as it develops *without* the legal possibility of privatizing land (as the Wayúu’s territory is legally inalienable). As I explain below, while Wayúu communities in La Guajira have political rights over land and the Colombian state exercises sovereignty over the subsurface and airspace (above 300 meters),¹³ the aerial space in-between that will be occupied by turbines is perceived as devoid of state jurisdiction though claimed *de facto* by Indigenous dwellers. As a result of Wayúu jurisdiction over the peninsula, some of the relations between corporate and Indigenous actors take the form of gift exchanges (animated by Indigenous ethics and forms of obligation). Hence, the wind energy rush is at the center of multiple, socially embedded, calculative agencies that exceed the heuristics of cost, benefits, and risks, which are most often associated with energy markets. So, rather than the epistemic and physical erasure of indigeneity, Indigenous

¹² Although Marx (1976) considers “primitive accumulation” (a key heuristic for theorizing extraction) as an initial phase in the history of capitalism, subsequent contributions have argued how this process is necessary for “the continual expansion of the field of production of capitalism” (Harvey 2003, Luxemburg 2003).

¹³ Per the Chicago Convention (1944), nation states exercise exclusive sovereign control over their airspace. In the U.S., however, Indigenous legal scholars have made the case that tribal sovereignty also grants control over airspace and air traffic. In fact, several Tribal Nations have asserted such rights in their constitutions (Haney 2015). One example is the Osage Nation Constitution, which claims jurisdiction over “the “air, water, surface, sub-surface, natural resources and any interests” (Dennison 2017, 694).

theories of value, materiality, and reciprocity configure the design and unfolding of Colombia's energy transition in critical ways.

A third set of conversations that animate the dissertation concerns the politics of indigeneity and the ecological dimensions of settler colonialism. In the following chapters, I consider indigeneity – as the “conditions, theories and values of being Indigenous” (Cattelino 2008, 3)—vis-à-vis struggles over natural resources, land, and rights.¹⁴ In particular, I explore the conditions that enable Wayúu actors to claim jurisdiction over La Guajira's wind and, in so doing, analyze the ethical and social contours that drive Wayúu visions of energy transitions and climate justice.

Similarly, the dissertation engages debates on Indigenous sovereignty amid late settler liberalism (Povinelli 2016). I draw critical attention to the politics of recognition of “neoliberal multiculturalism” (Hale 2005), a philosophy of governance that promises to protect the rights and cultures of ethnic minorities (Povinelli 2002) and which has been, as I discuss below, heavily embraced by the Colombian state to modulate Indigenous-state relations in places like La Guajira (Jaramillo 2011, 2014).¹⁵ This ethnography shows how Colombia's multiculturalist apparatus (which regulates access to natural resources) is crucial for the expansion of wind energy, but also becomes the object of refusals.¹⁶ Such acts consist in (re)drawing the connection between people, land, and wind in ways that trouble and exceed the modes of relationalities

¹⁴ Indigeneity is thus not a primordial form of identity, but is rather constituted through “articulations” (Clifford 2013) with non-Indigenous worlds (de la Cadena and Starn 2007; Richland 2008).

¹⁵ As many critics have noted, multiculturalism as a framework for Indigenous-state relations frequently leaves racial hierarchies and settler-colonial structures untouched, while creating barriers for Indigenous self-determination (Coulthard 2014, Moreton-Robinson 2015, Richland 2008, Simpson 2014, Wolfe 2006). Under these frameworks, Indigenous people live under conditions of “entangled” (Dennison 2017) or “nested sovereignties,” in which their modes of self-assertion are always “within and apart from settler governance” (Simpson 2014, 11).

¹⁶ According to Simpson, refusals constitute “a political and ethical stance that stands in stark contrast to the desire to have one's distinctiveness as a culture, as a people, recognized” (Simpson 2014, 11). As such, they are a viable alternative for disrupting the legitimacy of nation-states in shaping the terms of Indigenous political action.

imagined by the Colombian multiculturalist state. For example, as I describe in chapter 3, Wayúu actors often disavow Colombia's legal and bureaucratic apparatus of ordering Indigenous land and resources. In response, they mobilize attachments to land by way of ancestry, materialized in cemeteries, forcing companies to acknowledge alternative Indigenous claims over airspace as legitimate. I claim that such forms of refusal – centered around Wayúu burial practices and the agencies of ancestors – serve as the groundwork for advancing decolonial theories about what a just transition should look like.

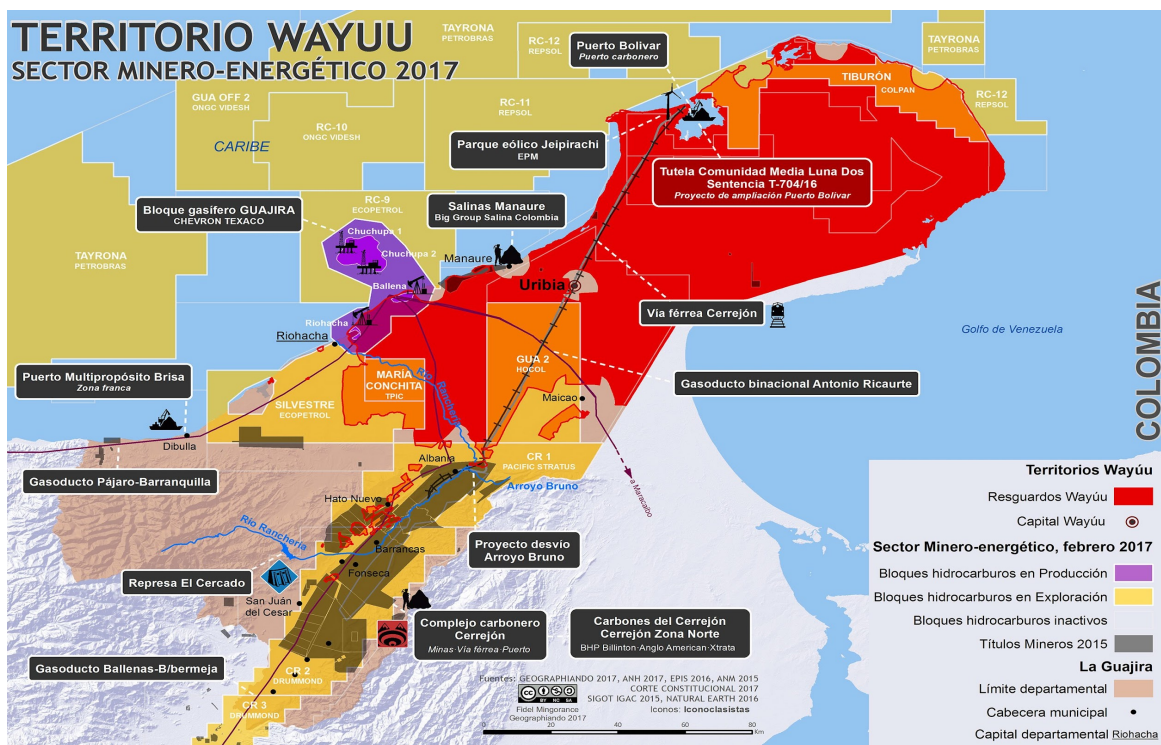
La Guajira and the Politics of Wayúu Indigeneity

La Guajira is an arid and sparsely populated coastal department of about eight thousand square miles (or the size of Massachusetts), located in the northernmost tip of Colombia. Most of the peninsula falls within the territory of the Wayúu, the most numerous Indigenous people in Colombia and Venezuela (with over 600,000 members), who claim sovereignty on both sides of the border. La Guajira is known for its multifaceted history of resource extraction, from the colonial removal of pearls, dye plants, and salt to more recent investments in coal mining and offshore natural gas drilling, all of which have left a trail of territorial dislocation, ecological harm, and physical and structural violence. Even though colonial and early Colombian governments described the region as an “empty,” disorderly, and lawless borderland, La Guajira has been, as Wayúu anthropologist Weidler Guerra Curvelo notes, a space of protracted (settler-) colonial utopias.¹⁷

Currently, the peninsula is a key node of resource extraction, providing 66% of Colombia's natural gas (Sánchez Jabba 2011) and over 40% of its coal exports (González Posso and Barney

¹⁷ As he writes, “La Guajira has been a land appropriated to stimulate the creation of utopias, in part because it is viewed as a region rich in natural resources, but also marked by a kind of constitutive violence, in part because it is viewed as an empty and unconquered territory” (Guerra Curvelo 2007, 34).

2019, 38), sustaining Colombia’s deep reliance on natural resource exports (Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, and Gómez López 2017). This extractive legacy is visible in the private railroad that traverses the peninsula, its offshore platforms and industrial ports, its high voltage power lines and mining camps, and the thousands of wind turbines that will dot the peninsula in the coming decade (see Map 1). It is also noticeable in its more violent traces, particularly in relation to Cerrejón Corporation (the largest open-pit coalmine in Latin America), a project that has instigated the forced relocation of Wayúu communities, polluted the region’s main river (Ranchería), and been a flashpoint for physical violence against environmental activists and trade union members (Ruiz Ruiz, Castillo de Herrera, and Forero Niño 2018, 249-262).



Map 1. Extractive Landscape of La Guajira (Source: CENSAT)

Note: The image shows mining, oil, natural gas, and wind energy infrastructure. The area in red displays the extension of the Wayúu’s recognized territory (*Resguardo de la Alta y Media Guajira*).

Histories of Extraction and (Settler-) Colonialism

Although lacking a centralized political authority, the Wayúu were able to resist foreign control over the peninsula even after the consolidation of the Spanish colonial government (Ardila 1996; Polo Acuña 2012, 231-232).¹⁸ In fact, they were highly autonomous throughout the colonial and post-colonial period. The extraction of pearls prompted the establishment of the first colonial settlements (such as the town of Nuestra Señora de Los Remedios del Cabo de La Vela, founded in 1538). Indeed, the coastal regions that are now cherished for their wind were vital sites for the capture of pearls, which relied on the labor of Indigenous pearl hunters.¹⁹ Yet, already by the end of the 16th century colonial authorities reported how the Indigenous dwellers were actively trading pearls with Dutch, British, and French merchants, disregarding Spanish commercial rules (Guerra Curvelo 2007, 2015; Orsini Aarón 2007).

The Wayúu's ability to forge political alliances with European merchants across the Caribbean disrupted subsequent "pacification" and evangelization campaigns from Spanish colonial and religious authorities (Barrera Monroy 2000, Grahn 1997). For the Spanish colonial government, La Guajira was haunted by the itinerant presence of British and Dutch pirates, as well as by the "rebelliousness" of the Wayúu (Orsini Aarón 2007, 5). Between 1700 and 1800, colonial and religious authorities were able to create a few permanent settlements (*pueblos de indios*), as spatial units that would facilitate evangelization plans, increase military control over the peninsula, and cut the illicit commercial relations with English and Dutch merchants. Yet, the

¹⁸ The Wayúu view themselves as autochthonous to the region. Archeological research has found that the Wayúu occupied the peninsula in the early 1500s along with other Indigenous peoples like the Guanebucanes, Coçinas and Caquetíos, which later dissolved as socio-political entities (Ardila 1996)

¹⁹ The pearl economy led to the first *capitulaciones* (or colonial contracts that authorize expeditions and the formation of early settlements in the New World). By 1550s, over 900 Indigenous pearl hunters lived near the so-called "pearl settlements" (*rancherías de perlas*), alongside African slaves and European settlers. See Guerra Curvelo (2007, 18-22).

settlements were destroyed by the Wayúu in 1701, 1736, 1742, 1769 and 1775 (Guerra Curvelo 2007, 24). Between 1769 and 1772, Wayúu communities fought against and eventually defeated the last major military occupation of the Spanish colonial government.²⁰

Between the 16th and early 19th centuries, the introduction of cattle transformed the economy of the Wayúu, which shifted from hunting, fishing, and gathering to one dominated by pastoralism. European cattle were widely integrated into Wayúu socioeconomic, ritual, and mythical life (Perrin 1987a), becoming a companion species connected to a multitude of ends, from a ritual good gifted during key episodes of life, to a form of subsistence, and an index of wealth and social prestige. Cattle also formed new patterns of seasonal mobility and migration (between dry and rainy seasons), which are at the heart of contemporary aerial struggles (as I describe in Chapter 3). Wayúu communities kept expanding their influence in the Caribbean through the commercialization of salt, natural dye plants, and cattle northward to the Antilles in exchange for textiles, weapons, and ammunition (making it harder for Spanish military authorities to subdue them). The control of natural ports and contraband routes was essential for the Wayúu's autonomy. As I describe in Chapter 1, Wayúu families established kinship relations with European merchants, not only as a mechanism for expanding trade relations, but also as a strategy for strengthening their political control (Barrera Monroy 2000, Polo Acuña 2012). The dominant presence of the Wayúu on the peninsula was reflected in the widespread use of Indigenous legal norms and practices for solving disputes among Indigenous and non-Indigenous dwellers (Guerra Curvelo 2002, Orsini Aarón 2007).

²⁰ Spanish colonizers turned their attention to other areas along the Caribbean coast such Cartagena and Santa Marta. Ironically, the strong trade winds (which prevented boats from moving easily from Cartagena and Santa Marta to La Guajira) also contributed to making the Guajira peninsula challenging to police (Orsini Aarón 2007, 33).

Owing largely to this history, the Wayúu became a socially heterogeneous and deeply decentralized group, with profound differences in status, wealth, and influence (Perrin 2003, Goulet 1981, Saler 1988). Kinship was at the heart of many of these sociopolitical differences. A person's identity – and their self-identification as Wayúu – is largely defined by their being part of a matrilineal family (*apüshi*) and a clan (*eirrukü*), which are in turn tied to a specific territorial area in the peninsula. Matrilineal kin share forms of obligation, accountability, and rights that are activated during crucial moments in life (e.g., funerals, marriages, and internal disputes). But kinship also configures the norms and practices of inheritance, exchange, land tenure, and political authority (as I describe in Chapter 1).²¹ For this reason, dismantling Wayúu matrilineal extended families into patriarchal, nuclear, and monogamic units was a crucial colonial and settler-colonial project (Gutiérrez Pineda 1985, 218). The use of kinship charts by wind energy companies, as I describe in Chapter 1, constitutes the latest iterations of external attempts to police Indigenous intimacy.

After Colombia's independence from the Spanish empire in the early 19th century and until the second half of the 20th century, La Guajira was slowly incorporated into the sphere of national political, religious, and military institutions (Serje 2005). The Colombian government relied on similar colonial tactics to dismantle illicit trade (which it deemed a threat to its national sovereignty).²² But in the early 1900s, it also created new military outposts, expanded the agricultural frontier (pushing Wayúus to the arid and most windy parts of the peninsula), founded new border towns (like Uribia, where most wind energy companies are now based), and

²¹ Typically, the eldest maternal uncle (*alaula*) has authority to rule over issues concerning land and resources.

²² The opening of the Panama Canal (1914) and the first oil boom in Venezuela (1920-1935) intensified the illicit flows across the peninsula, incorporating new commodities (liquor, cigarettes, fresh water, and eventually marijuana), actors (the Lebanese and Palestinian diaspora), and geographies (connecting the broader Caribbean with inner cities in Venezuela) See Britto (2020).

authorized new evangelization campaigns (led by Capuchin missionaries).²³ Yet, attempts to integrate La Guajira into the Colombian nation were sporadic and uneven, driven by the gradual accretion of infrastructure (roads, hospitals, schools) and the irregular expansion of government reach. At the same time, the Wayúu continued to fashion themselves as a “border nation” that preceded, and existed alongside, the sovereign claims of the Colombian and Venezuelan states, refusing at times the validity of their political borders, legal regimes, and national ideologies.

Indeed, throughout the 20th century, and despite government efforts, illicit flows swelled considerably in La Guajira. After WWII and the spectacular growth of Venezuela’s oil economy, Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian migrants settled in La Guajira, which led to a resurgence of illicit trade with the broader Caribbean (of liquor, cigarettes, and appliances), in close partnership with Wayúu communities. Crucially, Wayúu men worked not just transporting goods from the ports to small border cities near Venezuela, but also as security guards (Orsini Aarón 2007, 89). In the 1970s and 1980s, the marijuana bonanza (Britto 2020) brought about a wave of spectacular wealth and violence to La Guajira, amplifying the demand for Wayúu security workers. As Guajira historian Orsini Aarón notes, Wayúu men were largely sought after by non-Indigenous actors due to the public imaginaries that cast them as fierce and defiant to authority, but also because of their insertion in Wayúu kinship networks and forms of legal accountability. Wind energy companies now draw on this same line of Wayúu security workers to protect their carbon-neutral infrastructures.

The marijuana bonanza of the 1970s and 1980s reinforced stereotypes of La Guajira as a border pervaded by the drug trade and illegality, provoking more aggressive efforts to push La Guajira into more licit “development” paths. In the second half of the 20th century, Colombia’s

²³ This led to the establishment of boarding schools (*orfanatos* or *internados*), which sought to assimilate Wayúu children into Colombian society (Guerra Curvelo 2007, 32).

shift from a coffee-based economy to one heavily dependent on natural resource extraction led to the rise of coal and natural gas investments in La Guajira (Orsini Aarón 2007, 149). A key turning point was the opening of Cerrejón (1982) –the largest open pit coalmine in Latin America – and Chevron’s offshore gas projects.²⁴ The opening of the fossil fuel frontier was part of a nationwide strategy that resonated with undertakings in other Latin American countries (Gudynas 2010, Svampa 2015). Such expansion was followed by a greater presence of right-wing paramilitary actors (Morris 2021a), who regularly threatened, persecuted, and attacked environmental defenders, including Wayúu activists that protested against extractivism (Ramírez Boscán 2007).

Fossil fuel extraction emerged at the same the Colombian state crafted a multiculturalist legal and bureaucratic apparatus, shifting its policy toward Indigenous people from a paradigm of assimilation to one of recognition (Correa Rubio 2019). The Constitution of 1991 recognized a slate of Indigenous rights, including the legal recognition of Indigenous lands (called *resguardos*) as entities that could not be privatized, expropriated, or rented out, and where communities would exert their own jurisdiction. The new multiculturalist apparatus gave a renewed impetus to Indigenous grassroots organizations and social movements (Jaramillo 2014), but also established new audit cultures and imposed state-sanctioned ways of ordering Indigenous land and political authority.²⁵

²⁴ Initially established as a state-run enterprise, Cerrejón was sold in 2001 to a conglomerate of global mining corporations (BHP Billiton, Glencore, and Xstrata). Despite intense opposition from neighboring Wayúu and Afro-Colombian communities (Banks 2017), Cerrejón has expanded its operations, which have continued to pollute and destroy critical water and land resources.

²⁵ One example was Decree 1088 of 1993 that created a new controversial figure (the “Indigenous Traditional Authority”) which, among the Wayúu, led to a growing antagonism between perceived kinship-based modes of political authority and those sanctioned by the Colombian state (see chapter 2 and 4).

In La Guajira, state-sanctioned ways of ordering Indigenous land – as I describe in Chapter 3 – conflicted with the Wayúu paradigm of collective land property that privileges ancestral cemeteries as markers of temporal continuity and matrilineal inheritance. Indeed, Wayúu cemeteries and burial practices continue to challenge the epistemic and legal logics of the Colombian state and resource extraction companies. As I described in the opening vignette, building a cemetery or the act of burying kin in a specific location is a political and creative act: it makes a claim over a specific territory and, increasingly, over the wind itself (Goulet 1981, 131, 373). It creates a homeland (*woumainpa*). Yet, for the Colombian state (and, more recently, wind energy companies), cemeteries have an elusive quality: they resist mapping, as the bodily remains of Wayúu kin move between first and second burials, shifting their meaning and political implications.

Today, while a growing number of Wayúu live in nearby small cities in Colombia or Venezuela (like Riohacha, Uribia, Maicao or Maracaibo), most of the population resides in the hundreds of smaller, rural communities (called *rancherías*) that overlap with the areas of current and future wind farms. In these spaces, Wayúu residents secure their livelihoods through a wide array of forms, from pastoralism (especially of goats), fishing, small-scale agriculture, artisanal salt mining and cross-border informal trade to salaried positions in the state bureaucracy, the tourist industry and, increasingly, energy companies – as translators, social workers, and logistics personnel.

Despite contributing minimally to global warming, La Guajira has suffered its effects intensely through prolonged droughts, land erosion, the destruction of its dry tropical forest, and the sharp decline of fresh water sources – critical for sustaining human populations, goat herds, and small-scale agriculture. Since at least 2013, La Guajira has also been undergoing a protracted

humanitarian crisis, manifested in an epidemic of child deaths from malnutrition. In 2017, Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled (in sentence T-302) that the situation affecting the Wayúu people was unconstitutional and ordered the state to make substantial investment in healthcare, food security, and water infrastructure (a mandate that, at the time of writing, the state had failed to deliver, see Barney 2021c). La Guajira also has the second highest poverty rates in the country and alarming levels of food and water insecurity, a situation that the emergent wind economy promises to amend.²⁶ Analogously, the refugee crisis in Venezuela (2016-) has resulted in frequent closings of the border and added new restrictions on the flow of food and water from Venezuela to the northern regions of the peninsula. Under such conditions of humanitarian emergency, human rights NGOs argue that prior consultation procedures regarding future wind farms cannot take place under fair terms (Noriega 2020).

Even amid a wind energy rush, more than 85% of Wayúu households lack connections to the electric grid. Most communities spend their evenings in pitch darkness, except for a fraction of houses that can afford expensive solar panels or diesel generators, which only provide intermittent power for cell phones and small appliances. This reinforces the skepticism that many Wayúu communities have toward the “New Energy” – as the Colombian government has labeled the large-scale investment in wind power, to which I turn next.

The “New Energy”

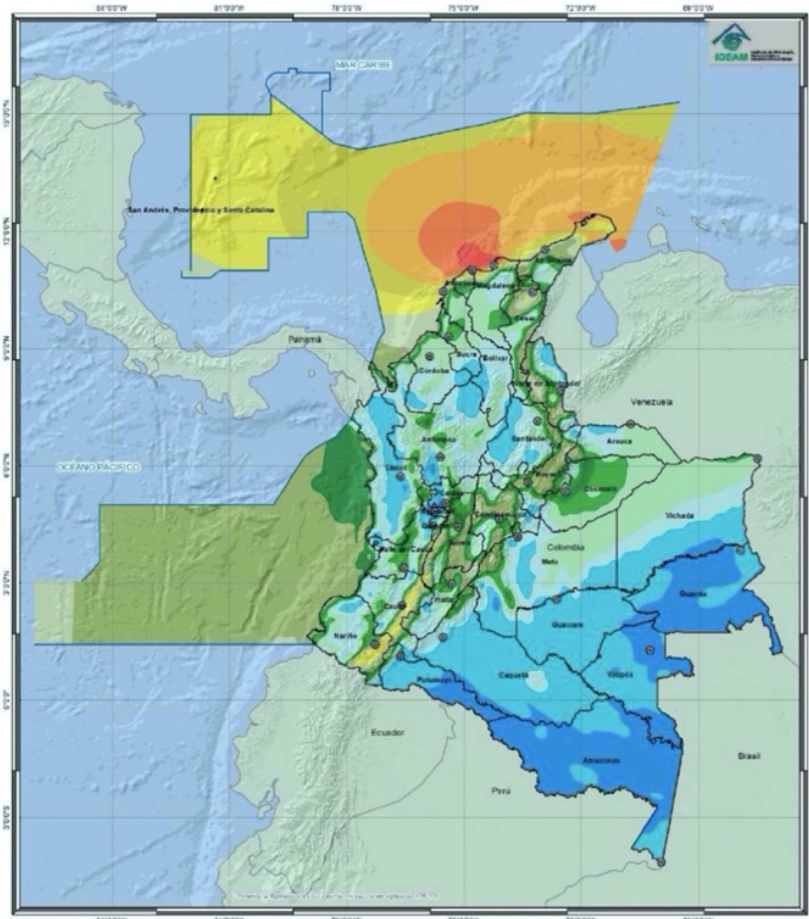
Until recently, an overlooked aspect of La Guajira was its wind flows (see Map 2). Due to their speed, unidirectional movement, and low turbulence year-round, they are considered of the highest quality in Colombia and Latin America (Unidad de Planeación Minero Energética 2015,

²⁶ In the municipality of Uribia, where I conducted the bulk of my research, almost 93 percent of residents (most of whom are Wayúu) are deemed to be living in “precarious conditions” – either below the poverty line or lacking at least one basic service (Noriega 2020).

38).²⁷ Government reports emphasize how such winds have the capacity of fulfilling the country's energy demand 1.2 times over (or about 18 GW) and meeting its carbon emissions targets.²⁸ Tapping into the wind would also safeguard the national electric grid, as over 70% of the energy supply comes from hydroelectric sources that are vulnerable to droughts caused by El Niño (Unidad de Planeación Minero Energética 2013, 22). During these episodes, the lower energy output drives up energy prices and sparks fears of nationwide blackouts—which, in fact, happened in 1992 and 1993. Severe weather events, however, intensify the winds along La Guajira, turning them into a practical solution to the disruptive potential of climate-related crises (Ruiz Murcia, Serna Cuenca, and Zapata Lesmes 2017, 127). For this reason, the Colombian state has pushed to increase wind energy production from 20 to 3,200 megawatts by 2031.

²⁷ Between January and September, wind speeds stay consistently at around 9 meters per second (an ideal speed for wind turbines), with a small drop between October-December (during the rainy season) (González Posso and Barney 2019, 43). Wind is caused by the uneven heating of the earth's surface vis-à-vis the Coriolis forces triggered by its rotation. Thus, wind's speed, turbulence, and directionality can vary tremendously from one place to the next. These factors are also susceptible to variations by the time of the day, seasons, and meteorological conditions. Since turbines harness wind moving in the surface layer of the atmosphere (below 300 meters), natural or built objects like trees or buildings can also alter its characteristics (Veers et al. 2019).

²⁸ Although Colombia has contributed minimally to climate change (accounting for 0.46 percent of global carbon emissions), the country signed the Paris Accords and committed itself to cutting emissions by 51 percent by 2030. Meeting these targets would require phasing out the remaining coal plants in the country (Ministerio de Minas y Energía 2021, 27). In 2017, the country published the National Policy on Climate Change, which laid out rules for environmental protection, mitigation, carbon financing, and forest protection. Prior to the COP-21, Colombia also ratified most international conventions on the environment, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) and the Kyoto Protocol (1997).



Map 2. The Wind of La Guajira (Source: Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales)

Note: Average annual wind speed at 10 m of altitude. The orange and red colors indicate speeds of 8 to 10 m s⁻¹. Reproduced with kind permission of the Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales.

The rapid ascent of wind energy is not unique to Colombia. Given its reputation as a low-carbon, “free,” and inexhaustible resource that can help to stabilize the climate, wind power is the fastest-growing source of electricity in the world (Malm 2016). And Latin America is incidentally the global leader in renewable energy production.²⁹ As the global demand for energy escalates (from 25,000 terawatt-hours in 2017 to about 38,000 by 2050), low carbon or carbon-neutral electricity will likely expand. According to the International Energy Agency, wind energy will probably generate between one quarter to one third of all global energy by 2050. At

²⁹ Though mostly concentrated in hydropower, as 65 percent of the region’s electricity comes from this source (Howe 2015, 232).

this pace, wind will become the main source of electricity in the future (increasing ten-fold in the next three decades) (Veers et al. 2019, 1).

Colombia’s right-wing president, Iván Duque (2018-2022), has dubbed its insistent push for wind power as the start of a self-proclaimed historical era of “New Energy” (Fig. 2). During Duque’s tenure, renewables have gone from accounting for less than 1 percent to nearly 12 percent of the national electricity consumption. His platform has also designed a business-friendly regulatory framework to lure foreign capital, offering commercial incentives, tax breaks, public funding, and long-term electricity contracts (Ministerio de Minas y Energía 2021). And the Ministry of Mines and Energy has rolled out an intense media campaign, seeking to position Colombia as a global leader in renewables and climate policy, even though fossil fuel investments and deforestation have not subsided (Barney 2021c).



Figure 2. The “New Energy” (Source: Colombia’s Ministry of Mines and Energy)

Note: The text reads “The New Energy. A legacy for the present and the future of Colombia.” Source: Colombia’s Ministry of Mines and Energy

The wind of La Guajira is key for materializing Colombia's era of "New Energy." In the last decade, a mix of 19 national and global corporations have been designing, licensing, and building 57 wind farms, valued collectively at over US\$6 billion. Most of the 2500 wind turbines will sit on Wayúu land, becoming a quotidian presence for over 290 communities across a third of their entire territory (González Posso and Barney 2019). To connect the massive wind farms to the national grid, the government is licensing three high-voltage lines (Línea Colectora 1, 2 and 3), stretching between 70 and 130 miles.³⁰ Only one of the 57 wind farms is community-owned (though it is years behind schedule and struggling to secure financing). The remaining projects are privately owned and adhere to a model in which companies give payments to landowners (in this case Wayúu communities) for using their land and to compensate them for environmental impacts.

The Plurality of Wind

For corporate workers I met, the wind was not just an antidote to the climate emergency but was imagined – as we saw in the opening scene – as being more compatible with Wayúu land rights, economic hopes, and cultural values. Wind energy workers continually tout their infrastructure as benign, lacking the destructive capacity of polluting the air or nearby water sources, destroying Wayúu cemeteries and other sites of cultural significance, or triggering forms of displacement (Jaramillo 2013).

One example of this is Jemeiwaa Kai,³¹ the company where I embedded myself as an ethnographer between 2018 and 2019. Founded as a small startup in 2010 by a group of German and Colombian engineers, it attracted enough investors to design and license six wind farms (Irraipa, Carrizal, Casa Eléctrica, Apotolorro, Apotolorro 2, and Jotomana). In 2019, Jemeiwaa

³⁰ At the time of writing, the government had approved 16 wind farms and two high-voltage lines (Martínez 2021).

³¹ The name translates as "rising sun" in Wayuunaiki, the language of the Wayúu.

Kai was bought by AES, a U.S. Fortune 500 energy conglomerate.³² When completed, Jemeiwaa Kai will operate a total of 498 turbines with the capacity to generate 723 MW (enough energy for 120,000 U.S. homes). The founders of Jemeiwaa Kai always spoke in public forums and community meetings as advancing a post-extractive energy model – one where Indigenous lifeworlds would coexist with renewable energy production. Rather than merely additions to a corporate ideology, Wayúu concepts were meant to inform multiple dimensions of the project, from the design and specific location of the turbines to the terms of work contracts and royalty payouts. As I show in the dissertation, Jemeiwaa Kai relies heavily on Wayúu kinship norms and practices (Chapter 1), ethics of obligation and gift-giving (Chapter 2), and aesthetics and forms of legal accountability (Chapter 4). A similar approach is found in Jepirachi, which was designed and built in ways that were meant to coalesce with presumed notions of the Wayúu’s “forms of life,” as I describe in Chapter 5.

But this imaginary about wind – as a climatological good or revitalizing cultural force that would seamlessly align with Indigenous worlds – is not singular or settled. In fact, as my Wayúu interlocutors frequently told me, before the renewable energy rush the wind was perceived in mostly negative terms. In Wayuunaiki, the harsh dry season that runs from January until late September is called *joutkai jamü*, which translates as “wind and hunger.” In part, this is because the strong trade winds are responsible for eroding the soil, drying up water reservoirs, and destroying the vegetation for grazing goats. Throughout my research, Wayúu interlocutors always signaled the wind’s damaging force. Although it offered some relief from the high temperatures, its presence was deemed a nuisance. Its erratic force moved coal particles from the mining company’s trains onto their land, damaged roofs, and covered everything with dust (cars,

³² AES owns energy projects in 15 countries, including two medium-scale hydroelectric plants in Colombia (Central Hidroeléctrica Chivor and Tunjita in the department of Boyacá).

laptops, hammocks, and clothes). It was also a threatening force at sea since it often made navigation too risky or prevented it altogether (decreasing daily meals and cash incomes).

On a cosmological level, the wind is a multiple, nonhuman being that possesses some of these same predatory qualities. In some instances, it is seen as an agent responsible for climatological injustices (Paz Ipuana 2016, 44-45; Perrin 1987b). As Wayúu anthropologist Ramón Paz Ipuana writes, *jamü* – a mythical being that stands for hunger – is related by kin to *wanülü* (vengeful spiritual forces) and *pulowi* (a being that inhabits subterranean or submarine areas associated with hunger, droughts, and death) (Paz Ipuana 2016). Yet, wind also appears in other accounts as a caring and affectionate being that invites human sensorial engagement (Guerra Curvelo 2015). As Guerra Curvelo writes, Wayúu fisherpersons identify more than eight types of wind, which are “endowed with agency, consciousness, and intentionality” (2015, 94–95).³³ This requires different sensorial dispositions for reading its movement and intentionality in the land-and-seascape. Given wind’s multifaceted quality, enmeshed in a varied web of meaning and relations, the idea that it can belong to someone, akin to property claims over goats or land, was for my interlocutors unthinkable until the wind energy rush. The self-proclaimed era of “New Energy” has thus prompted a transition in the way the Wayúu make sense of and orient themselves to wind, adding new layers of meanings to it, including a potential for material prosperity.

In addition to being a climatological solution and polyvalent non-human being, there is a third layer of ambiguity surrounding its legal status. While the Colombian state exercises

³³ The northeastern trade winds (*jepiralujutu*) that come from *Jepirra*; winds that originate in the sea (*palaapa'ajatü*); in the northwest (*palaaijatu*); west (*wopujeejatü*); southern mountains (*uchaajatü*); southeast (*aruleechi*); and east (*joutai*) (Guerra Curvelo 2015, 58). While *jepiralujutu* (the trade winds from the northeast) are linked with prosperity, kin, and care, *jouktai*, or the warm flows from the east (typical of the dry season), are associated with danger and malevolence

sovereignty over the subsoil, it does not have the same jurisdiction over the wind. Thus, there is uncertainty regarding who is entitled to “wind rights,” including questions about whether private property over land automatically extends into vertical space or whether Indigenous land-based jurisdiction legally encompasses wind. Such ambiguities are not unique to Colombia.³⁴ The fact that wind is a kinetic movement of air that cannot be contained amplifies this legal fuzziness (Howe 2019). Hence, as Amilkar Acosta, a renowned energy expert in Colombia told me once, the wind in Colombia is legally “up for grabs.” The Wayúu do not have legal rights over the wind either, but they exercise *de facto* power over it, given the land’s protected status and the fact that wind currents can only be harnessed via technologies on the ground. This dissertation shows precisely how wind’s legal, political, and conceptual fuzziness leads to flexible, ad hoc, and experimental articulations between energy corporations and Indigenous sociopolitical worlds.

An Uncertain Bonanza

The rise of wind power has also raised concerns about future forms of violence, displacement, and disavowal of Wayúu political autonomy. For many Wayúu interlocutors, a wind future means a world of radical transformations to the landscape; of added noise and light pollution interrupting people’s sleep and dreaming practices; disruptions to the mobility of people, birds, and goats; and the continual deforestation of the fragile dry tropical forest (Martínez 2021; Rubiano 2021). For others, it is a future defined by inadequate consultation practices,³⁵ either because they are rushed, not inclusive enough, not done in good faith or simply

³⁴ In Spain, there are ongoing conversations on whether ownership over land gives automatic rights over wind currents (and thus corporate payments) or if “wind rights” ought to be extended to those that live across the areas where wind flows (benefiting residents of windy regions and not just landowners). See Hughes (2021).

³⁵ Given the land’s protected status, third parties must attain the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous communities living close to energy projects. Indigenous peoples do not have veto power, but their consent is necessary for the issuing of an environmental license (Barney 2021c).

fail to recompense for all the material, cultural, and environmental damages that ensue during a wind farm lifespan (Barney 2021c; Ministerio de Minas y Energía 2021, 44).³⁶

Other anxieties center on how the wind rush might spark conflicts among Wayúu extended families, triggering a wave of “wind wars” over the material benefits that stem from the projects, or that energy companies will deliberately or indirectly prompt the (para-) militarization of Indigenous land (Martínez 2021). And for others, there is a deep skepticism that the promises of prosperity from wind energy will ever materialize for the Wayúu – as the legal percentage of energy sales that must be allocated to communities for offering their windy land is just one percent (Ministerio de Minas y Energía 2021, 44).³⁷

This dissertation attends ethnographically to this plural eolian condition and unexpected entanglement mediated by wind, as it is recruited for a constellation of ends, meanings, and practices: a “salvational” force for averting climate crises (Howe 2019), a novel and profitable atmospheric commodity, a composite more-than-human being, and a fuzzy entity whose legal status is ambiguous and open-ended. Through this ethnography of aerial relations, I seek to illuminate the fraught process of reconciling global calls for environmental responsibility, national aspirations of carbon neutrality, and Indigenous sovereignty and futurities.

An Ethnography of the Wind

As the Colombian government began pushing for a “New Energy” rush to reach carbon neutrality by 2050, I embedded myself as an ethnographer for over 16 months (between 2018-2019) in La Guajira to investigate how energy experts, state bureaucrats, and Indigenous

³⁶ In fact, the Colombian judiciary recently suspended the construction of the high-voltage line (Colectora 1) until the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous communities was properly attained (Barney 2021c). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Mines and Energy also launched an initiative (called *Guajira Consulta y Actúa*), aimed at shortening the consultation’s timeline by moving to an online format, even though internet connectivity rates in La Guajira are among the lowest in the country.

³⁷ Hydroelectric projects divest up to six percent of energy sales to local communities, while thermal energy plants provide four percent.

communities experienced and negotiated the shift from coal mining to wind farming. This multi-sited research meant attending dozens of community workshops, reviewing corporate archives, doing dozens of in-depth interviews and participatory mapping exercises, and living in a Wayúu community located near Jepirachi wind farm (Chapter 3).

I decided to carry out a critical ethnography of wind power, largely focused on corporate and Indigenous entanglements, based on conversations and relations I had built up with Indigenous and Afro-descendant scholars and researchers affiliated with the Universidad de la Guajira, which I visited for the first time in the summer of 2016. Yet, my relationship with La Guajira dates to 2010, when I lived in Venezuela and worked for an NGO (*Grupo de Estudios Antropológicos*) in a nationwide research and policy project (called Indigenous Health in Venezuela), funded by the Ministry of Health. During Hugo Chávez's leftist presidency, the government invested heavily to reform the public health care system to better respond to the needs of rural Indigenous communities, including in areas close to Wayúu and Añú communities on the Venezuelan Guajira. Between 2010 and 2013, I visited La Guajira peninsula multiple times and became a close friend of Alí Fernández, a Wayúu professor of anthropology at the University of Zulia and a collaborator in the public health project, who introduced me to Wayúu kin and contacts (in Venezuela and Colombia). While I was initially interested in continuing my ongoing research on gasoline black markets across the Venezuela-Colombia border (Schwartz 2021), the deteriorating political situation in Venezuela and escalating violence near the border – between 2016 and 2018 – forced me to focus exclusively on Colombia. Rather than delving into the environmental activism against coal mining (Banks 2017), which I was considering as an alternative research plan, I was told time and again to focus instead on the “wind issue,” as

scholars and concerned residents alike felt there was too much opacity surrounding this new bonanza.

The bulk of my research took place in two sites. The first was the Office for the Empowerment of Wayúu Communities of Jemeiwaa Kai – a small office in the town of Uribia mostly staffed by Wayúu professionals who were responsible for coordinating the licensing work. The office defied any clear-cut division between the “company” and the “community.” Most of the work – such as community workshops, regular visits to repair wind meters, data collection field trips, etc. – was undertaken by a team of Wayúu workers who had extensive kin relations across the areas of future wind farming sites and were deeply committed to a just energy transition.

Being a Venezuelan helped me to build rapport with my interlocutors since, as I explain above, the Wayúu claim sovereignty and have extensive personal ties on both sides of the border. Our shared connection with that country shaped my positionality in the field, making our interactions fluid and familiar—often finding in Venezuelan politics, cuisine, humor, and popular culture a common space. My research also took place during the influx of more than 1.5 million Venezuelan refugees into Colombia (the total number of Venezuelans that have fled the country is close to 6 million, or about 22 percent of the population). Our shared concern for kin and friends experiencing the violent unraveling of Venezuela’s oil economy (through spectacular hyperinflation, acute shortages of food and medicine, and prolonged interruptions of electricity and water services), made this country a space of mutual connection.

If my Venezuelan identity shaped my engagements with Wayúu interlocutors, the fact that I lived in the U.S. and attended a prestigious private university (all too often associated with free market ideologies) perhaps facilitated my access to Jemeiwaa Kai, whose founder and manager

(Diego Patrón), I met in 2017 as I was doing preliminary fieldwork in La Guajira. After months of interaction, Diego granted me permission to observe community-corporate relations, with little formal restriction. Yet, as in most corporate settings, many aspects of Jemeiwaa Kai's operations – especially after it was sold to AES – were inaccessible (such as numerical wind speed data, which is proprietary knowledge). From the outset, I situated myself as an independent researcher, unaffiliated with the company, allowing me to navigate corporate, community, and para-ethnographic sites with relative ease.

The second part of my research was focused on the Wayúu communities of Kasiwoulin and Arujkajui, which encircled the Jeparachi wind farm. During this time, I stayed in the home of Nancy Gutiérrez, where she lived with her 5-year-old son (Emmanuel) and where she hosted an unending flow of visitors (nieces and nephews, neighbors, friends, workers from EPM, researchers, and state bureaucrats). An accountant by training, she led a small development organization (Anna Watta Kai) and was known for being a vocal critic of wind energy projects (as I describe in Chapter 3). During this time, I conducted dozens of in-depth interviews, participatory mapping exercises and other forms of media elicitation. I also observed numerous meetings between EPM (the owner of the wind farm) and community members, went on multiple excursions to visit key landmarks of their territory, and was invited to fishing trips, meals, celebrations, and secondary burials (as the one I describe above). All of this allowed me to learn about the competing evaluations of wind power, the manifold ways it connects and disconnects people, and how it aligns or fails to animate people's futures. Yet, as in corporate spaces, my ethnographic engagements in Kasiwoulin and Arujkajui meant encountering forms of refusals, as well as being in the service of my collaborators for projects that advance Indigenous

sovereignty that benefit from my anthropological expertise, but do not make it into the space of a dissertation.

The dissertation also draws on shorter research stints in Bogotá and Medellín, where I interviewed government officials dedicated to overseeing energy policy in Colombia, corporate executives, industry lobbyists, bankers, Indigenous rights advocates, and environmental NGO staff. In Medellín, I conducted 13 in-depth interviews with senior and retired staff involved in designing and constructing the Jepirachi wind park between 1999-2003 (Chapter 3). I also consulted corporate archives, including audiovisual materials, held in EPM's public library. Lastly, I attended several forums on renewable energy in Riohacha and Bogotá (as the one I depict in the opening scene) and conducted extensive research in the Biblioteca Hector Salah Zuleta in Riohacha, the Centro de Información sobre Grupos Étnicos of the Universidad de La Guajira, and the Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango in Bogotá.

Chapter Overview

Wind Futures consists of four chapters, which are structured around both material and cultural qualities of the wind in La Guajira. Chapter 1 –*Cleanness: Wayúu Kinship, Wind Enclosure, and the Making of Indigenous Energy*– examines how the production of carbon-neutral energy entails building kinship genealogies and territorial histories of Wayúu communities. Through the drawing of hundreds of kinship charts – and the networks of living and deceased kin they contain –wind energy companies seek to convert the complexity of Wayúu sociality into uncontested visual and bureaucratic objects that can establish *who* has rights over land – and, by extension, over the wind itself – and who does not. As they aspire to create private property relations over wind, the kinship charts are drawn with the hopes that they will enable renewable energy production.

Chapter 2 – *Flows: Gifts, Obligation, and the Production of Wind Power’s Renewability*—centers on the moral economies that bind corporate and Indigenous actors, and the forms of accountability and obligation they create. By focusing on a gift giving system (called *solicitudes*), I analyze how the intimate, reciprocal, and meaningful social exchanges that take place between Jemeiwaa Kai and Wayúu communities produce and maintain the conditions for harnessing wind without interruption. Since these exchanges acknowledge the power of Wayúu communities hosting future wind farms to disrupt their operations and infrastructures (in the absence of contracts enforceable by the state), they also enable recipients to carve out a space of accountability by entangling the corporation in long-term relationships of obligation.

Chapter 3 – *Interruption: Cemeteries, Infrastructures, and Wind Struggles at Jepirachi*—analyzes a 9-month strike by Wayúu residents against the Jepirachi wind farm, spurred by EPM’s failure to properly calibrate competing Indigenous paradigms for ordering airspace. While the first two chapters reveal how notions of kinship and value configure corporate-Indigenous engagement on the ground, here I look at the infrastructural crises that ensue when such engagement breaks down. It analyzes the long series of stoppages as caused by a set of disagreements that had long involved two Wayúu clans. I describe the unfolding and aftermath of the blockade against EPM, attending to the multiple, ambiguous versions of what triggered it and its implications for the wind energy industry. Rather than being a failure of technical and engineering-based expertise, I argue that this interruption was a crisis centered on competing Wayúu paradigms of ordering airspace, which sustained the project’s operation. In this analysis, the chapter brings to light how Wayúu spatiotemporal domains, as well as human and nonhuman agencies, are forces that sustain but can potentially unravel Colombia’s wind energy rush.

Finally, Chapter 4 –*Turbulence: Criminal Underworlds and the Indigenized Security of Wind Energy* – dissects how wind energy corporations rely on Wayúu knowledge, law, and sensibility to risk to protect themselves from the windy geographies of La Guajira, reputed as a dangerous borderland haunted by a perceived criminal underworld and a long history of illicit flows. Following from the previous chapter’s discussion of infrastructural interruption, here I analyze how wind energy corporations rely on Wayúu aesthetics and navigational tactics to craft a security apparatus that mobilizes indigeneity – and the layers of immunity and accountability it offers – to shield infrastructures, cars, and workers. I describe how wind energy corporations imagine Indigenous men (since security implies tasks coded as masculine) as those that can attune themselves more perceptively and capaciously to future risks, given the Wayúu’s century-long occupation and sovereignty over the peninsula. Rather than relying solely on forms of militarized and private protection, producing “energy security” in this context entails camouflaging the corporation within Indigenous law and aesthetics – i.e., local cars, residents’ bodies, landscapes, and language. It is through these forms of indigenized security, though fragile and failure-prone in crucial ways, that companies aim to keep Colombia’s wind energy future alive.

The dissertation ends with a short epilogue that calls for greater ethnographic attention to the emergent environmental relations and alternative political horizons that are being imagined in relation to wind in La Guajira and that point to other, decolonial projects of energy transition and climate justice.

Chapter 1

Cleanness:

Wayúu Kinship, Wind Enclosure, and the Making of Indigenous Energy

Mapping Kin, Enclosing Wind

We left at dawn from Jemeiwaa Kai’s office en route to Jotomana, a rural Wayúu community located at the northwestern edge of Colombia’s Guajira coastal region. The site was inside one of the company’s six “polygons” – perimeters that delimit the boundaries of future wind farms.¹ The team of mostly Wayúu staff was scheduled to conduct a socio-economic workshop (or *taller socioeconómico*), a standardized meeting intended to explore whether the community would be willing to provide their land for the installation of wind turbines and other infrastructure (such as high-voltage lines or electric substations). Such events are critical for attaining the required permits and the free, prior, and informed consent from Indigenous dwellers to start a wind farm’s construction and operation in Colombia.²

After our arrival, the team quickly arranged dozens of white plastic chairs inside a small house made of wood and tree branches (*enramada*), installed a large TV screen and audio equipment, and turned on the electric diesel generators as men, women, and children trickled in and grabbed some roasted goat for breakfast for the daylong event. Gustavo, a white and non-Indigenous Bogotan lawyer in his late 50s, who coordinated most of the licensing work, grabbed the microphone and explained to attendees that they had come to “socialize” their plans for the Jotomana project. The workshop, he said, marked the formal beginning of the relations between

¹ Jemeiwaa Kai is a subsidiary of AES – a U.S. Fortune 500 energy conglomerate – that is developing six wind farms in the heart of Wayúu land.

² For this reason, as I discuss at greater length in Chapter 1, the licensing phase – prior to construction and operation – is the most critical episode in a wind farm’s biography, since the Wayúu can delay the required permits or refuse to host the infrastructure. This stage often takes several years to complete since it requires collecting data on wind speeds, preparing several environmental impact studies, and carrying out dozens of consultation meetings with prospective Wayúu hosts.

the company and Wayúu residents, who lived in one of the prime areas of wind power development on the peninsula. The meeting would allow Jemeiwaa Kai to “get to know the community better,” he concluded, and engage in a frank, open dialogue about the future.

Following Gustavo’s brief remarks, the team presented a five-minute video that displayed the design of the future wind farm, including the massive scale of its infrastructure, its construction process, and the changes it would bring to the surrounding landscape. Subsequently, Carolina – Jemeiwaa Kai’s Wayúu social worker – started the main task of the meeting. She pulled out a large, white piece of paper, placed it on the wooden wall, and told everyone that the most crucial thing on the agenda was to draw a family tree (*árbol genealógico*). Carolina said that it was essential for the corporation to know first and foremost the community’s kinship relations. In a cordial tone, she started asking about the first known relative that had lived and been buried in Jotomana, as well as their matrilineal descendants and clan affiliations.

Attendees initially expressed skepticism over Jemeiwaa Kai’s rapid questioning about their deceased kin. Juana, a politically prominent resident, grabbed the microphone and told Gustavo that they didn’t understand why the company wanted to know about their ancestors, considering that “the negotiation [of the wind farm] was with *them*, the living, who are all present here.” Others concurred with her unease, adding that deceased kin could not be talked about in public,³ or that it was irrelevant considering other more pressing issues, such as the scale of the wind farm itself, its socioenvironmental impacts, or the share of revenues from energy sales that would

³ This is described in several ethnographies of the 1980s (e.g., Goulet 1981; Perrin 1987b), but pertains mostly to relatives who died violently. In such cases, speaking carelessly about a deceased member can spark a demand for material or monetary compensation from relatives due to the emotional distress caused by the unwelcomed recollection of a tragic episode. But in other social instances, such as secondary burials, Wayúu interlocutors talk profusely about the past, recounting tales of marriage, migration, and inter-clan conflicts that reinforce their claims over land and resources.

be distributed to the community. Carolina struggled for a while to convince attendees of the need of drawing a kinship chart, pointing out that it was a corporate standard for initiating any kind of consultation with Wayúu communities regarding wind farming ventures. She also added that, as a Wayúu herself, she was proud to speak about her ancestors and her clan's history in public. After about 45 minutes, attendees gradually provided some answers. Carolina managed to compile over 25 names on the white document, connected by horizontal and vertical lines and arrows, tracing at least four generations of ancestors. She wrote the name of the community and the date in the top corner. And, before wrapping up for the day, she pulled out her iphone, photographed the chart, and folded the paper carefully as it would be later digitized and stored in the company's online database (Fig. 3).

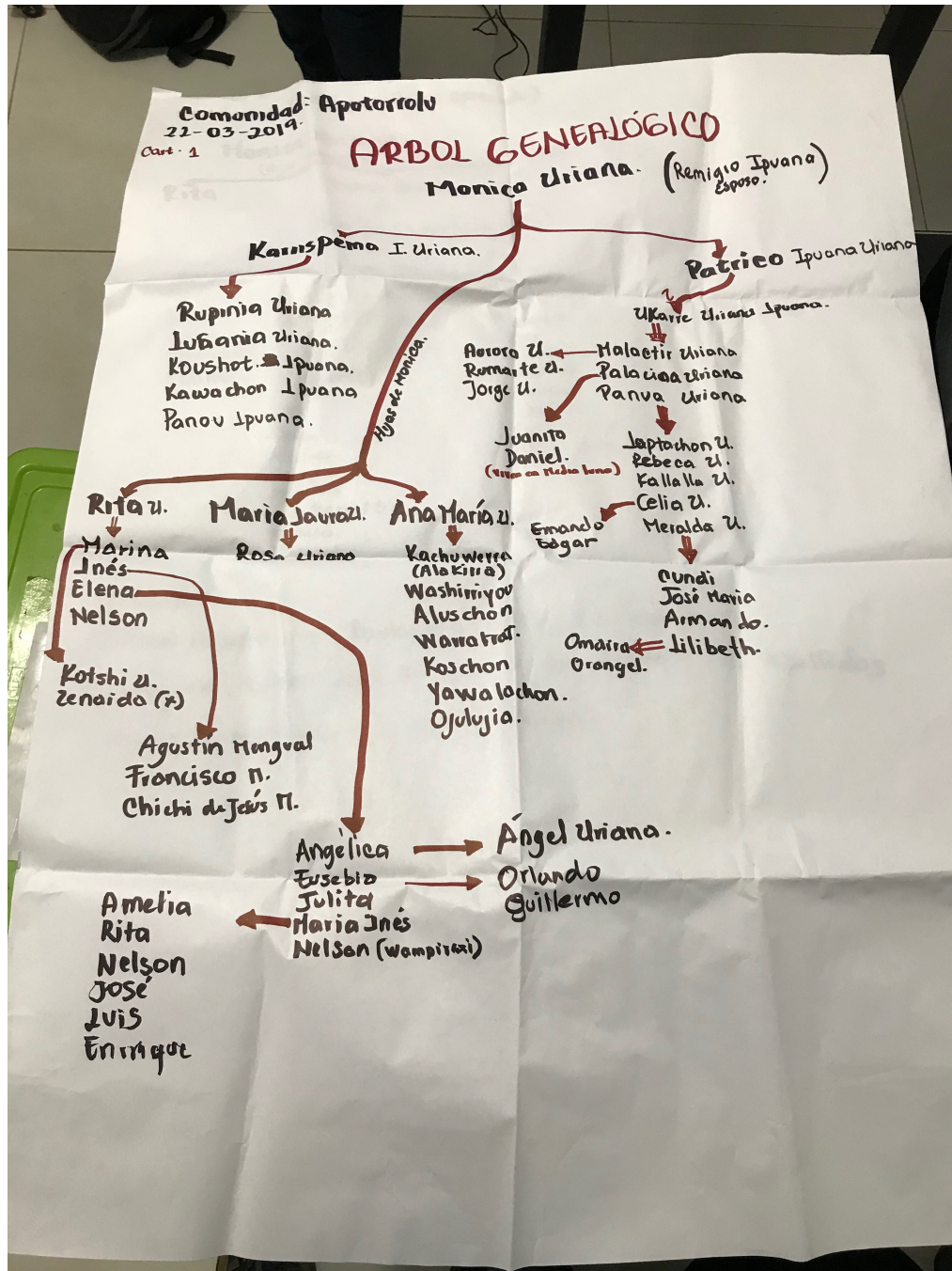


Figure 3. Kinship Chart Drawn by Carolina (Source: Photo by Author)

Note: To preserve the anonymity of Jotomana's residents, the image shows the names of a different Wayúu community, located near a different wind farming project.

Kinship charts, and the networks of living and deceased kin they visualize, are an unexpected yet ubiquitous artifact in the burgeoning wind energy industry in Colombia. While corporations spend years and invest hundreds of thousands of dollars conducting a wide array of research

prior to a wind farm's construction (from lengthy environmental impact studies to secretive, year-long wind speed measurements), a key part of their work is also centered on reconstructing Wayúu kinship relations. But why do wind energy corporations care so much about Indigenous kinship? What is the relation between the drawing of a kinship chart and the construction of a wind farm? And what does this say about the relation between indigeneity and wind power?

This chapter describes how the making of renewable energy in La Guajira is intimately related to the production of ethnographic knowledge about Wayúu kinship. Despite their relative obsolescence in the discipline of anthropology, kinship charts have been revived by Jemeiwaa Kai, and other wind power companies, as technologies for mapping Indigenous sociopolitical worlds in time and space. Through these charts, energy corporations seek to convert the complexity of Wayúu sociality and land tenure norms into transparent and uncontested visual objects that congeal the relation between people and windy geographies. Yet, as I will show, rather than reflecting the totality of social relations of Wayúu communities, the charts only represent a *portion* of names and spatiotemporal relations, which serve to identify certain individuals – strictly those connected by matrilineal ties – as those who can legitimately engage with the corporation for the next three decades (the standard legal lifespan of wind farms in Colombia). Kinship charts thus seek to domesticate multiple and open-ended histories of living and deceased kin, human and more-than-human attachments, into a form of bureaucratic knowledge that can objectively and indisputably establish *who* has collective property rights over land – and, by extension, the wind itself – and who does not.

Kinship charts, as I will argue in this chapter, are mobilized for three crucial ends in Colombia's wind energy rush. First, the charts operate as anticipatory instruments that can authorize a set of Indigenous actors as being the “rightful” owners of windy land. While the

charts lack legal recognition from the Colombian state or Wayúu communities themselves (who refuse their validity and concretize kinship differently, as I discuss in the final part of the chapter), they are used to provide tools for the corporation to avoid future inter-family, inter-clan disputes that have the potential of disrupting wind energy production (as it occurred in the Jepirachi wind farm, see chapter 3).⁴

Second, the charts enable a form of soft “enclosure” over wind. As I noted in the introduction, the wind in Colombia inhabits a legal, conceptual, and political gray area – for many, it is an aerial common that is “up for grabs.” Such legal framing also coexists with Wayúu perspectives in which wind is a plural, more-than-human being with ontological significance and agentive force. The charts, as ethnographic tools entangled in genealogies of empire and colonialism (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Said 1979), allow the company to epistemically transform the wind from an aerial common and more-than-human entity into a natural resource. Through the charts, the free-flowing movement of air that belongs to “nobody” now appears as belonging to “someone” – that is, a stable group of Wayúu individuals. By fixing Wayúu kinship relations, the charts are thus a means of establishing property-like relations over wind in ways that are quantifiable, predictable, and exchangeable. Despite the material impossibility of enclosing airspace and privatizing Indigenous land, the function as “deeds” over portions of airspace.⁵ In fact, as I describe later, the charts not only accrue economic value, but are regularly

⁴ These forms of anticipatory knowledge and “risk distribution technologies” are found across other extractive industries. See Appel (2012, 702) and Ferguson (2005).

⁵ This aligns with the new property legal school of thought, whose main premise is that property consists of social relations of exclusion. As Robert Nichols argues, “Most often, to assert property in something is to make an enforceable claim to exclude someone from access to some thing” (2020, 28). Making property is thus about the creation of a conceptual and juridical object that becomes the “repository of an enforceable claim against others” (2020, 31).

traded among wind energy corporations in La Guajira.⁶

Third, the charts allow companies like Jemeiwaa Kai to frame wind power as a culturally attuned and post-extractive model of energy production and corporate relationality. They highlight the proficiency of its workers on Wayúu sociopolitical life, land tenure rules, and cultural values. As such, they convey to Colombian regulatory authorities and Wayúu and non-Indigenous residents of La Guajira that harnessing wind is somehow more benign than the violent history of coal, natural gas, and oil extraction, reasserting the company's image of moral virtuousness, environmental accountability, and cultural responsiveness.

Yet, Wayúu communities contest numerous aspects of this strategy. In both explicit and indirect ways, they refuse the legitimacy of the charts insofar as they erase many dimensions of Indigenous life, from competing tales of ancestry and the multi-locality of Wayúu persons to the unpredictable patterns of inheritance of land and political authority across generations. Borrowing from Mary Douglas's theory of pollution as disorder (1966), the charts deliberately exclude kin that are viewed as "out of place": those who, based on a rigid interpretation of matrilineality, are viewed by the corporation as being politically inconsequential (e.g., affines or *kerau*, paternal kin or *oupayu*, or descendants who have other clan-based identities or *achón*).⁷ Kin that end up being "out of place" – and left out from the charts – are more likely to be sidelined during corporate-community engagements, barred from the material benefits of the project (e.g., jobs, scholarships or annual royalty payments), or simply ignored on the grounds that they are not maternal kin (or *apüshi*), even if they live on the same windy geographies. The

⁶ This process is similar to other forms of commodification that center on human attention or social cooperation. See Mezzadra and Neilson (2017).

⁷ As I explain in the next section, Wayúu kinship terminology follows the Crow type – associated with societies that have a strong emphasis on matrilineal descent.

potential epistemic violence and property-making impetus of the charts reside precisely in how they *solidify* matrilineal rules into law-like mandates, stripping them of the inherent flexibility and contingency of Wayúu life in the futures that they project.

All this might explain the reluctance of Jotomana's residents to convey this kind of information in the opening scene, as the seemingly trivial act of writing names and lines on a white piece of paper has the potential of defining, in concrete and enduring ways, who can dream about the future forms of prosperity, power, and the good life attached to the wind energy rush. Yet, what makes the kinship charts generative also makes them provisional. What affords their capacity to order the Wayúu worlds also lays them subject to the disordering claims by those who contest them. Largely through ancestral cemeteries (*amouyuu*), as I describe in the final section, Wayúu actors posit *multiple* and more open-ended forms of articulating the relation between people, land, and wind.

Before moving on, I want to clarify my approach to kinship as an analytic. As patterns of social relationship that bind human and non-humans across time and space, kinship has been at the heart of the discipline's conceptual apparatus. Yet, unlike anthropology's long tradition of kinship studies (which draws heavily on a reproductive and biological imaginary of relationality), here I focus on the corporate uses of kinship charts and their conversion into commodities. Specifically, I focus on how Wayúu kinship – alongside other forms of Indigenous sociality – are crucial nodes for the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy. Hence, I draw on interventions that theorize how kinship has been a key target in processes of Indigenous dispossession, as well as a tool for projects of native resurgence and self-determination.

Settler-colonial states have often sought to transform Indigenous kinship relations as a way of exerting political domination (Simpson 2014, 48, 57). Audra Simpson illustrates how

Mohawk sociopolitical membership, which was grounded in matrilineal ties but admitted more flexible and open-ended forms of racial mixing and belonging, was substituted in the late 19th century by a European-based, patriarchal structure through Canadian legislation. This resulted in the exclusion of women from property holding and a decline in their political power within native bureaucracies.⁸ In a similar vein, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui has depicted how settler ideologies of blood quantum transformed Hawaiian identity into something that could be carefully measured and diluted, standing in stark contrast with Indigenous epistemologies and practices of identification, which are inclusive, expansive, and open-ended (Kauanui 2008, 3). The blood quantum, as she notes, has constrained the possibility of making claims to land by those that do not meet a certain measure of “native” blood. As a result, settler colonial intervention over Hawaiian kinship has undermined Indigenous sovereignty through land alienation, dispossession, and cultural and biological assimilation in the service of whiteness.

Other scholars have also noted how European colonialism was a gendered process animated by fantasies of masculine power that took up a variety of manifestations, from the circulation of imaginaries that framed the intimate worlds of colonized subjects as chaotic and menacing (see Brownell and Besnier 2013; Fanon 1965; Stoler 2002) to systematic attempts to reform intimate worlds (e.g., through the creation of patriarchal, nuclear family units). Yet, while kinship has been a target of (settler-)colonial governmentality, it can also operate as an “active principle of peoplehood” that can underpin modes of sociopolitical identification and animate projects of Indigenous self-determination (Rifkin 2011, 10).

Drawing on these debates, this chapter shows how Wayúu kinship is recruited by and

⁸ As Audra Simpson describes, after the passage of the Indian Act in 1876 women who married non-Indigenous men were viewed as “polluted” individuals who had “gone outside the conceptual and legal borders of the reserve and, in doing so, had acquired the stigma of betrayal” (2014, 61).

becomes essential for wind energy capitalism and climate governance in Colombia, with unexpected effects. It illustrates how energy companies seek to domesticate these relations for the purpose of ordering airspace, thereby inserting wind into capitalist modes of value production. Indigenous kinship is thus a crucial scaffolding of wind power, a move that is contested by Wayúu actors who pose other, more open-ended forms of concretizing kinship.

In the next section, I begin by exploring the reasons why Wayúu kinship has come to occupy such a central place in the ongoing wind energy rush. To do so, I map the multiple ways of visualizing and enacting Wayúu kinship that converge in the peninsula: 1) the colonial and multicultural projects that have shaped Indigenous intimacies; 2) Wayúu definitions (and refusals) that expose kinship on their own terms; 3) and the kinship orientations that are put forth by the corporate charts. Subsequently, I examine Jemeiwaa Kai's rationale for drawing and archiving hundreds of kinship charts. I show how this ethnographic knowledge shapes their corporate plans, infrastructural designs, and everyday engagements with Indigenous actors. Specifically, I disentangle how kinship charts work as technologies that produce a kind of "enclosure" over blocks of airspace by *crystalizing* the relation between people, land, and wind (through matrilineal ties). I conclude by reflecting on the limits of this undertaking and highlight instead how Wayúu interlocutors concretize the entanglement of kinship and wind in ways that refuse the fixity and timeless quality conjured by lines, arrows, and names on white paper.

The Plurality of Wayúu Kinship

I met Orangel in the backyard of his home in Riohacha – the capital city of La Guajira. A specialist in Wayúu law (or *Pütchipü'ü*), he was famous for having skillfully mediated countless

internal disputes (among matrilineal families),⁹ as well as conflicts opposing Wayúu communities and extractive companies like Chevron and the Cerrejón coal mine. When I asked what these latter conflicts had in common, he grabbed his *warara* – a wooden cane – and started drawing a map of La Guajira in the sand (Fig. 4). “I have advised many companies that come to La Guajira and who make the same mistakes because they’re simply unaware of how the Wayúu are organized,” he explained. After drawing the contours of the peninsula, he sketched its most iconic extractive infrastructures: the long coal mining railroad, the binational natural gas pipeline, the Jepirachi wind farm, Chevron’s offshore natural platforms, and the coal mining shipping port.



Figure 4. Orangel’s Map of La Guajira (Source: Photo by Author)

⁹ Clan-based conflicts are an indelible part of Wayúu’s history. These conflicts are often resolved through a system of compensation based on customary law (called *Sikuit’pa Wayúu*) or can spiral into long and often inter-generational wars. See Perrin (2003) and Guerra Curvelo (2002).

“Before all this was Colombia,” he said while circling the map, “the Wayúu were here.” On top of the extractive infrastructure, he started outlining symbols that identify Wayúu matrilineal clans (or *eirrikü*):

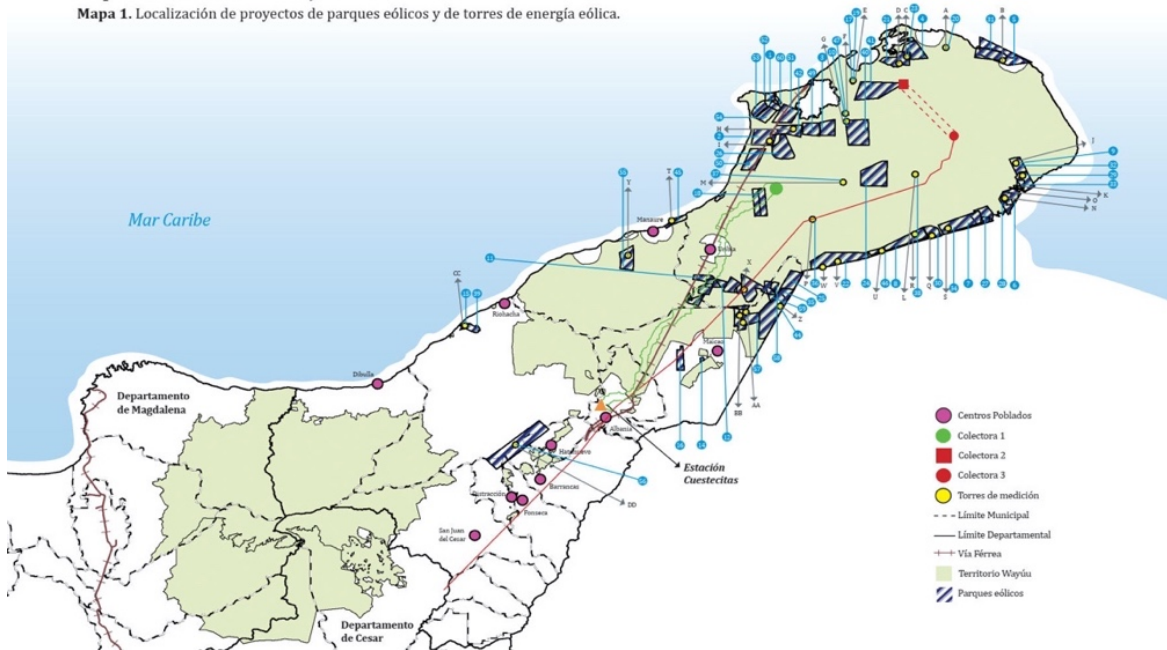
Our organization is through the *eirrikü*. This is what you guys call clans.¹⁰ I am a *Wouriyuu* so I have an iron mark [used for livestock marking] that identifies me. The Wayúu territory belongs to different clans... each of which has its own iron mark, which identifies and delimits each territory through an imaginary line. We don’t have barbed wire or a fence. In each territory, everyone knows who the dominant clan is... And everyone knows its limits.

After finishing the map, Orangel explained that things were more complicated in practice: folks migrate, get married and split up, live in multiple locations (often moving back and forth between Colombia and Venezuela) or have their bodily remains moved from one cemetery to another after their death. The “imaginary lines” he alluded to are thus not always neatly divided, as centuries of engagement with colonial, state, and corporate actors have rearranged the Wayúu’s sociopolitical worlds in myriad ways. And yet, his map underscored the role that Wayúu kinship plays vis-à-vis the region’s extractive industries. In contrast to maps that portray Wayúu land as a homogenous and undifferentiated block (see Map 3), his drawing emphasized the uneven, patchy, and opaque layers of matrilineal extended families (*apüshi*) and clans (*eirriküs*) that envelop extractive infrastructures in ways that are not readily visible to others. It is precisely these intricate relations between extended families (*apüshi*), clans (*eirriküs*), and land that has prompted an intense production of knowledge about Wayúu kinship by outsiders, from colonial administrators and missionaries to state bureaucrats and wind energy experts.

¹⁰ *Eirriküs* literally means “flesh” in Wayuunaiki – the language of the Wayúu. In their theories of procreation, the body’s flesh comes from the mother. This is also the term used for clan, a unit comprising loosely related people that claim a shared mythical ancestry. A Wayúu person always inherits their mother’s clan affiliation (Jaramillo 2014, Guerra Curvelo 2015).

Departamento de La Guajira.

Mapa 1. Localización de proyectos de parques eólicos y de torres de energía eólica.



Map 3. Map of La Guajira with the 57 projected wind farms (Source: Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, INDEPAZ)

Note: While the green area shows the extension of the Wayúu's territory in the north (*Resguardo de la Alta y Media Guajira*), it fails to capture the intricate and patchy subdivisions of matrilineal extended families and clans across the peninsula mentioned by Orangel.

Kinship configures in countless ways the sociopolitical worlds of the Wayúu (Goulet 1981, 38; Watson 1967; Wilbert 1970). A person's identity – and their self-identification as Wayúu – is largely defined by their being part of a matrilineal family (*apüshi*) and a clan (*eirrukü*), which are in turn tied to a specific territorial area in the peninsula. In verbal, everyday interactions, people often point to their extended matrilineal families in connection with a certain region to situate themselves socially (e.g., a “Sijona of Aremashain”). Wayúu kinship terminology makes a crucial distinction between uterine (*apüshi*) and paternal relatives (*oupayu*).¹¹ Matrilineal kin share forms of obligation, accountability, and rights that are activated during crucial moments in life (e.g., funerals, marriages, and internal disputes), which differ from the obligations that bind

¹¹ More specifically, their father's uterine relatives.

paternal kin (Jaramillo 2014, 15; Goulet 1981, 110). Kinship also connects, and shapes the actions, of cosmological beings, many of whom are embodied in atmospheric phenomena, from rain and thunder (as manifestations of *Juyá*, a mythical being associated with vitality) to the wind itself (*Jouktai*), a destructive agent responsible for climatological injustices.

Kinship also shapes the norms and practices of inheritance. When a person dies, valuable goods (such as their goat herds) are mostly inherited by matrilineal kin. Land, water sources, and certain forms of political authority are also passed down following matrilineal relations. Nonetheless, while inheritance norms and practices privilege matrilineal kin, the way these processes unfold is deeply situational and molded by fluctuating interests, needs, and affective attachments (Saler 1988, 85). Wayúu extended families can, and often do, break the rules of inheritance in ways that unsettle the collective expectations of matrilineal kin – as I discuss in the final section.

Matrilineal extended families are highly autonomous when it comes to making decisions concerning their land, resources, and futures (Perrin 1987b, Polo Acuña 2012, Saler 1988).¹² This decentralized mode of sociopolitical organization has enabled the Wayúu to exert political control over large tracts of La Guajira peninsula since the 16th century, as I describe in the introduction. The Wayúu's dominant presence was indexed in the widespread use of Indigenous law (Guerra Curvelo 2002) and the reliance on kinship-based forms of obligation and accountability for mediating the economic exchanges and everyday interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous dwellers (Orsini Aarón 2007).

¹² The bonds connecting clan members, on the other hand, are more diffuse and often do not entail forms of mutual obligation. See Saler (1988, 30) and Goulet (1981, 169).

Given the centrality of Wayúu kinship in organizing land in La Guajira, colonial and state actors led numerous attempts to reshape matrilineal extended families or mobilize genealogical knowledge in ways that would advance Indigenous dispossession. These ranged from the creation of pan-Wayúu political entities that would co-opt the autonomy of matrilineal families to efforts that promote monogamous, patrilineal, and nuclear units (largely through evangelization campaigns and the forced enrollment of children in boarding schools run by Capuchin missionaries between 1870 and 1910; see Jaramillo 2014).¹³ Such efforts also targeted the culturally-sanctioned practices of polygamy of powerful Wayúu men, which was viewed as a pathological practice that at once explained the region's "backwardness" and justified their violent assimilation (see also Rifkin 2011).¹⁴ Nevertheless, such colonial and early republican steps to transform Wayúu kinship norms and practices were largely ineffective but were followed by other, more consequential tactics.

Rather than dismantling matrilineal extended families altogether, one strategy that gained traction during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was centered on actively embedding non-Wayúu persons within Indigenous kinship networks. Marriages between non-Wayúu men and Wayúu women belonging to powerful matrilineal extended families were common during the European colonial presence (16th-19th centuries), but became a generalized, institutionalized practice promoted by the Colombian state by the early 20th century (Jaramillo 2014, 48). While La Guajira was largely disconnected from the influence of political, religious, and military institutions from Colombia's independence (1810) until the early 1900s, following the discovery

¹³ Such efforts resonate with other interventions in colonial Latin America, specifically in regions where kinship and ancestral Indigenous lineages were used to recognize or disavow local claims to authority and property. See Martínez (2008).

¹⁴ According to Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson, the constitution of white patriarchal sovereignty in settler colonial contexts frequently operates by imagining native kinship relations as pathological (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 155).

of strategic natural resources— such as salt mines, oil, and later coal deposits – the incorporation of the peninsula became a national priority (Palacios 2006, 4). The figure of the *cacique* – often a wealthy and powerful Wayúu maternal uncle (*alaula*) with a long network of kin– became a crucial interlocutor between the state and Wayúu communities, an interaction that was largely mediated by kinship relations established between his daughters and nieces and Colombian military officers (Jaramillo 2014, 49). Such alliances became so widespread that concepts of nobility slowly pervaded how non-Wayúu actors spoke about and imagined these powerful matrilineal extended families.¹⁵

Such top-down marriage alliances in La Guajira were not necessarily documented through kinship charts, but they triggered other forms of knowledge production centered on Wayúu sociality, including early ethnographic descriptions and government reports.¹⁶ For example, the geographical dictionary of La Guajira, edited by the General Staff of the Military Forces in the early 1910s, had an entry for Wayúu maternal uncles which, rather than defining that term itself, listed the most prestigious extended families and their territorial jurisdiction in the peninsula. The production of knowledge and the deliberate embeddedness of military officers into Indigenous kinship networks became a mode of intervening in Wayúu land and, over time, creating a mixed raced elite (*guajiros*), viewed by the Colombian state as those who would

¹⁵ One example was the term “Wayúu princess,” which alluded to the daughters and nieces of powerful maternal uncles who married non-Indigenous men (Jaramillo 2014, 52).

¹⁶ This move resonates with other instances in Latin America. In Colonial Andes and Mexico, Indigenous leaders were recognized as having jurisdiction over certain regions, which enabled colonial authorities to collect taxes while leaving native political structures relatively untouched (Martínez 2008, 108). Yet, in many cases, colonial officers struggled with the problem of validating native authorities. Petitioners had to provide extensive genealogical information to colonial authorities, often going back to the early 1500s or before. Since the colonial recognition of pre-Hispanic dynasties and legal norms gave Indigenous leaders an important share of political and economic power, these actors became invested in reconstructing their genealogical past. In the case of colonial Mexico, these practices ended up altering notions of Indigenous “property, inheritance, gender, family, and kin” (Martínez 2008, 112-113), which often led to either an oversimplification of Indigenous kinship worlds or the slow imposition of patrilineal principles of inheritance and authority, based on the nuclear family as a moral and social unit.

ensure external governance over the peninsula. In short, the Colombian state imagined Wayúu indigeneity as constricted by kinship and, as such, it strove to make legible – and ultimately act upon – those webs of relations.¹⁷

A second major intervention around Wayúu kinship came in the 1990s, following Colombia's neoliberal turn and its multiculturalist makeover. Among many things, this shift led to the widespread recognition of Indigenous peoples as political subjects with culturally based rights (Bocarejo 2015). The Constitution of 1991 gave Indigenous peoples the legal right to manage resources and land on their own terms, including the possibility of collecting royalties from extractive projects established on their territories. The Colombian state created a new legal figure for distributing these royalties: the “Indigenous traditional authority” (*Autoridad Indígena Tradicional*). Such legal concept was meant to be applied broadly across over 90 Indigenous peoples in Colombia, regardless of their own sociopolitical specificities. In practice, municipal governments were given the power to arbitrarily name any person as an “Indigenous traditional authority” (having fulfilled certain bureaucratic steps). The practice of granting this status quickly became instrumentalized by non-Indigenous elites for short-term political goals (especially during election cycles). As Orangel explained to me, bureaucrats “will name you as an [Indigenous traditional] authority, because you helped them in getting votes, even if you're not owner of that territory.” For many Wayúu persons, attaining this status was a necessary and highly desired avenue for gaining access to public funds and royalty payments.

¹⁷ Such form of rearranging, policing, and reordering Indigenous intimacies, as a way of advancing dispossession, is also found elsewhere. Settler-colonial laws in Canada, as Sherry Pictou notes, promoted nuclear, patriarchal relations that were, and continue to be, “internalized in Indigenous politics in multiple and violent ways” (Pictou 2020, 373). As a result, Indigenous men in Canada have been able to cultivate stronger ties to settler bureaucracies and institutions, thereby gaining greater control over resources and recognition than their female counterparts. See also (Barker 2011).

Over time, this led to a proliferation of thousands of “Indigenous traditional authorities” in Wayúu land, often comprised of younger leaders whose power now overlapped and competed against elderly maternal uncles (*alaula*), who typically exercised decision-making power in their communities. While in some cases the status of “Indigenous traditional authority” was given to a Wayúu elderly authority (*alaula*), and somehow matched Indigenous kinship logics with the state’s multiculturalist apparatus, in most cases Wayúu persons that lacked kinship-based rights over land were certified by the state. Thus, rather than imposing exceedingly narrow criteria of recognition (Povinelli 2002), the Colombian state endorsed an artificial and exceedingly *broad* criteria of recognition – it granted the status of “Indigenous traditional authority” indiscriminately, creating what Orangel and other specialists in Wayúu law consider a sociopolitical disorder. These forms of “settler manageability” (Simpson 2014, 10) not only regulated how Indigenous communities used public funds, but it ended up transforming Indigenous governance structures.¹⁸

The key point of this multiculturalist realignment is that, while the Colombian state did not intervene *directly* in Indigenous kinship relations in the late 1990s, it did impose an extraneous legal concept (the “Indigenous traditional authority”) that added a layer of indeterminacy around the connection between land, people, and wind. Rather than being solely defined by matrilineal extended families, the state slowly instituted a new form of Indigenous political organization. Therefore, the companies that are partaking in the ongoing wind energy rush must grapple

¹⁸ In this sense, Colombia’s multicultural reforms led to some of the same contradictions found in other settler-colonial contexts. An abundant literature has found that multiculturalist policies rarely acknowledge Indigenous decision-making and self-determination, while giving states an aura of virtuousness (see Bruyneel 2007; Coulthard 2014; Povinelli 2002; Richland 2021, 145; Simpson 2014). As a result, they enact forms of settler-colonial domination, as states retain control over the criteria of Indigenous recognition and can decide what counts as native norms, relations, and ways of life (Wolfe 2006).

precisely with both sociopolitical dynamics: 1) an Indigenous territory where kinship has connected people and land in long-lasting but flexible ways, and 2) a history of external attempts to intervene and rearrange those same kinship relations for advancing Indigenous dispossession or extending forms of governmentality over Indigenous populations.

But wind energy corporations must also contend with other ways in which wind intersects with kinship beyond political membership. In Wayúu cosmologies, as I describe in the introduction, wind is a multiple, non-human being that is at once responsible for climatological injustices and exerts forms of care (Guerra Curvelo 2015; Paz Ipuana 2016, 44-45; Perrin 1987b).¹⁹ For some Wayúu interlocutors, such ontological condition makes it nonsensical to attribute a measure of economic value to wind. In addition, companies like Jemeiwaa Kai must navigate the epistemic conundrum of *who* has rights over the wind. On a material level, this disorientation around wind's "ownership" stems from the fact that, as Cymene Howe argues, it is a more-than-human force that "evades enclosure" and is seemingly free and accessible (2019, 12). On a legal level, this same elusiveness is also present. Unlike the management of other resources, like coal or oil, over which the Colombian state exercises sovereignty and can give concessions to third parties for their extraction, it lacks the same jurisdiction over wind (though it claims national sovereignty over its airspace). So, for some energy experts like Amylkay Acosta (the former Minister of Energy and Mines),²⁰ the wind moves across a sort of *aerial nullius* (akin to *terra nullius*), a legal figure that, as critical Indigenous scholars have argued, has regularly been used to devalue and colonize Indigenous spaces (Pictou 2020, 374).²¹

¹⁹ While these cosmological beings play a minimal role in corporate-Indigenous engagements, much of the corporate branding of current and future wind farms relies on the names of these mythical ancestors, such as the Jepirachi Wind Farm (built in 2003) or the Joutkai Wind Farm (built in 2021) (González Posso and Barney 2019).

²⁰ During an interview he said that "there is no reference to wind as being the property of the nation."

²¹ One recent example is Australia's reticence to recognize Indigenous sovereignty over waterscapes by alluding to a principle of *aqua nullius*. See Marshall (2017).

The Wayúu do not have legal rights over the wind either, as I described in the introduction, but they exercise—unlike in the cases of coal or natural gas—*de facto* power over it, given the land’s constitutional status and the fact that wind can only be harnessed via technologies on the ground. Therefore, Indigenous authority (which is most often, but not always defined by matrilineal ancestry) regulates access to La Guajira’s wind.

Considering these conditions, a fundamental and recurrent anxiety that haunts wind energy companies is the concern that legal contracts (such as land leases) may be inadvertently made with the “wrong people” – i.e., Wayúu persons that do *not* have uncontested, kinship-based rights over windy geographies. As Gustavo (the Bogotán lawyer in the opening scene) once explained to me, interacting with the “wrong” folks means that the “right” claimants can show up five or ten years later, accusing the corporation of dealing with the wrong families and immersing the wind farm in long and costly dispute that will likely paralyze their entire operation (see Chapter 3). For this reason, the question of *who* has rights over wind is crucial for Colombia’s energy transition. And kinship charts, as I discuss next, are meant to precisely address this puzzle: they promise to make indisputable and durable the connection between Wayúu persons, airspace, and wind energy infrastructure.

Indigenous Energy

A few weeks after the workshop in Jotomana, the staff of Jemeiwaa Kai met in the Office of Empowerment of Wayúu Communities for their annual retreat. For over 10 hours, the team of eight workers gathered in a small, air-conditioned room in the town of Uribia, going over the details of the licensing bids for the next four years and reflecting on the company’s overall engagement with Wayúu communities.

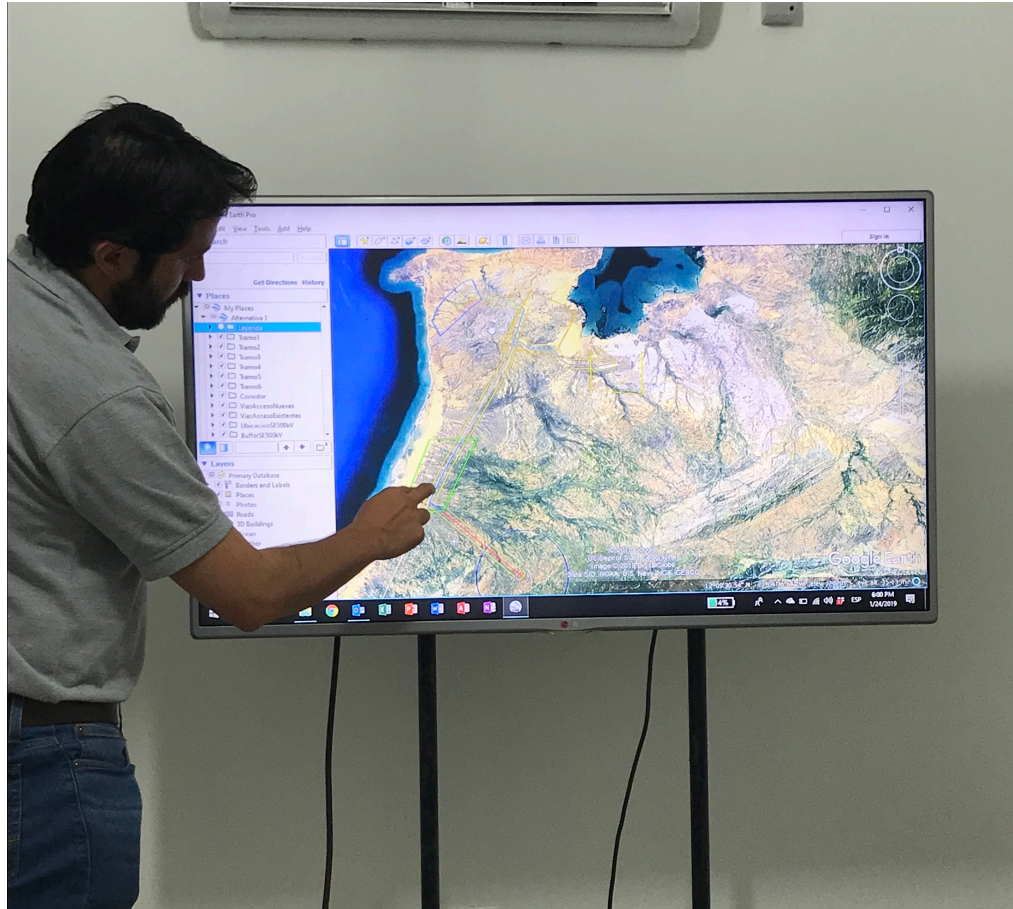


Figure 5. Diego Pointing at the Jotomana Polygon during the Annual Retreat (Source: Photo by Author)

Diego – the CEO and founder of Jemeiwaa Kai – flew in from Bogota and started the session with a PPT presentation of numerous satellite images of the peninsula and their polygons marked in different colors (Fig. 5). “A key part of our work here,” he said, “is to meet certain milestones [in terms of our permits and legal requirements]. But our job is much more complex. If we carry out a series of consultations to build a wind farm, say in Irraipa [one of their project sites], we must first make sure that we’re talking with the *right* people and that they’re giving us the necessary security and tranquility so that the [the project] can be done...” To make sure those goals are met, Diego added, the corporation requires a “territorial strategy:”

Our projects are necessarily territorial. They will have a territorial occupation; they will be visible and exposed, and they will occupy a sizeable fraction of land... So, we

must think clearly about how we are going to address the territorial aspect since it opens a Pandora's box in terms of Wayúu conflicts.... [The people who manage] our projects must have the ability to understand which institutions represent the [Wayúu] community... If this weren't an Indigenous *resguardo* [constitutionally protected land], it would be a lot easier. We would go to the mayor's office, consult cadastral maps, etc. But here we must think about the institutions that govern this territory.

Antonio, a Wayúu who led the everyday work of the office, agreed with Diego. "We have to keep in mind," he told folks in the room, "that we're working with a culture that is different from the rest of the country... And the key thing here is the maternal line. I have a territory because of my mother. So, we must keep digging into who is the *apüshi* [matrilineal extended family] and who is *achon* [descendants of a different clan], because each of them has limits... especially regarding territorial issues."

After this brief exchange, Diego reminded everyone that this was the main task of the office: to dig deep into the minutiae of Wayúu kinship relations vis-à-vis land. "We need to have a system of information that works," Diego insisted. "And we must start by reviewing [the kinship charts] one by one, since this will be critical for establishing order and coercive force in the future." Rather than physical power (though forms of policing or private surveillance), the "order and coercive force" desired by Diego appeared to be connected to the knowledge provided by the charts, especially their usefulness in rendering visible whom to engage and disavow during a wind farm's lifespan.

The kinship charts were deemed by Diego as aligning with Jemeiwaa Kai's broader corporate ethos. In public forums and consultation meetings, he constantly spoke of the company as exemplifying the convergence of, on the one hand, the dream of a post-carbon electric grid where "clean" energy could avert climatological crises and, on the other hand, a profitable

corporation where energy capital would potentially invigorate Wayúu indigeneity.²² Indeed, Jemeiwaa Kai's ethnographic approach to wind energy was animated by this corporate ideology, but also driven by the need of building ongoing and intimate relations of trust and obligation with Wayúu communities, to the point of imagining the corporate form itself through the idiom of kinship (see Chapter 2; cf. Yanagisako 2002). Jemeiwaa Kai's workers thought that this contrasted with coal mining and oil corporations' models of Corporate Social Responsibility (Banks 2017), which were evaluated as hierarchical, distant, and culturally foreign interactions.

For Carolina – the Wayúu social worker we met in the opening scene – this strategy was indispensable for overcoming the generalized mistrust around natural resource extraction in La Guajira, which has a history of physical and environmental violence against Wayúu communities. Carolina was part of a growing class of anti-coalmining and environmentally conscious Indigenous professionals hired by renewable energy firms. A social worker and community-based researcher by training, her input had been instrumental in broadening Jemeiwaa Kai's cultural proficiency on Wayúu kinship, drafting reports where she unpacked kinship terminology for engineers and lawyers based in Bogotá and sharing her own opinion on ongoing and potential land conflicts.²³

But, to return to our initial question, what is the relation between the drawing of a kinship chart and the construction of a wind farm? In what follows I will unpack how the charts are mobilized by Jemeiwaa Kai in three fundamental ways: 1) as technologies to render visible *who* has rights over land and wind; 2) as risk aversion strategies that seek to prevent disputes

²² This corporate ideology resonates with global environmental movements in the 1980s in Latin America, which viewed Indigenous populations as idealized partners in projects of conservation and sustainability. See the critique of the so-called “ecologically-noble savage” (Conklin and Graham 1995).

²³ Indeed, the kinship charts themselves grew out of year-long conversations between Wayúu and non-Wayúu workers since the company's founding in 2010.

regarding Indigenous land inheritance; 3) as property-making instruments (i.e., deeds) that create a form of soft enclosure over La Guajira's wind.

Mapping Rights over Land and Wind

The kinship charts used by Jemeiwaa Kai seek to find the oldest ancestor that residents can remember who is buried in that area. That person is considered to have *founded* a Wayúu community, and only those who are connected to this ancestor through matrilineal ties can speak for that windy land (e.g., negotiate with the company or sign leasing agreements). For this reason, the charts were always drawn in public meetings –as the one I describe in the beginning– by Wayúu workers who spoke Wayuunaiki. While the meetings were open to everyone, Jemeiwaa Kai's management always insisted on having certain attendees always present, especially the maternal uncles (*alaula*), who had authority and decision-making power over their matrilineal families' land. Indeed, Jemeiwaa Kai would often call off meetings if those maternal uncles were absent or left abruptly.²⁴ The meetings were also heavily documented with video, photographs, attendance sheets with ID card numbers and signatures, and audio recordings that were meticulously translated into Spanish – partly to avert future legal challenges.

After these meetings, the charts were transcribed in a digital format and stored in an online database (Fig. 6). Such documents were never disseminated to Indigenous communities living in the corporate perimeters, who had little interest in seeing them, largely due to their irrelevance outside of the context of wind power negotiations and because they were so extraneous to Wayúu forms of narrating and experiencing kinship in everyday life. Yet, for Diego, as he reminded the staff during the retreat, the goal was to eventually create a “book of authorities” – a

²⁴ Their presence gave a certain legitimacy to the charts themselves and shielded the corporation from future complaints, especially those brought up with the state government, the National Environmental Licensing Authority (ANLA), or human rights NGOs regarding accusations of poor consultation practices.

master digital database that would compile and systematize all the genealogical knowledge accrued over the years in an easy-to-read format, a move reminiscent of the epistemic power of colonial archives (Burns 2010). “All the information [that we’ve gathered],” he insisted, “is so important that not even the Ministry of the Interior has it.”

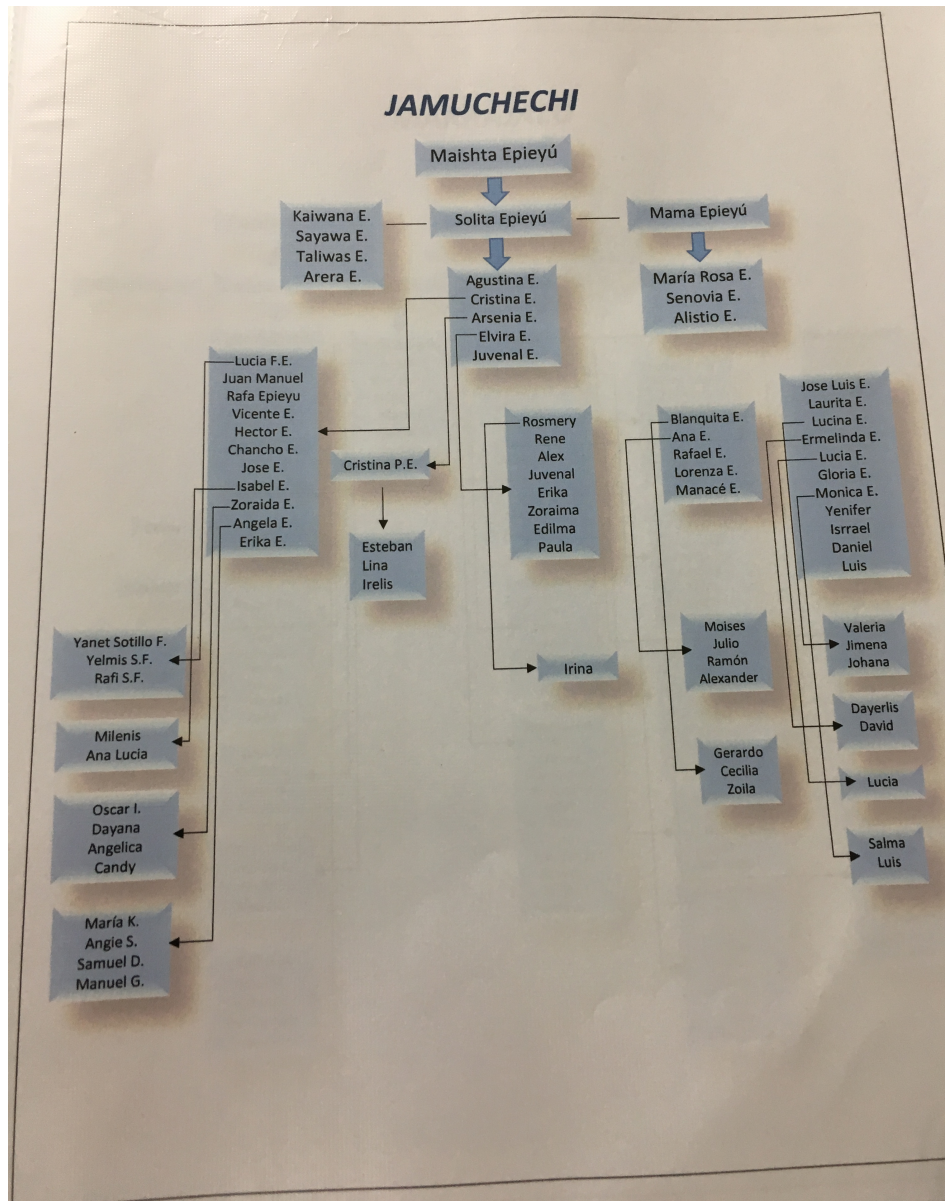


Figure 6. A Digitized Kinship Chart (Source: Photo by Author)

One of the puzzling aspects of Jemeiwaa Kai’s charts is how they were always spoken about as a “spontaneous invention,” disconnected from anthropology’s broader conceptual and

methodological investment in genealogical knowledge.²⁵ Indeed, despite being around for nearly a year conducting fieldwork, I was never asked by workers of Jemeiwaa Kai what I thought, as a trained sociocultural anthropologist, of their kinship charts as a mode of knowledge production. To some degree, this signals that such kinship mapping was designed to exclude other competing interpretations.

Jemeiwaa Kai's kinship charts, in fact, differ in substantial ways from the ones designed and widely disseminated by anthropologists, including those found in classical ethnographies of the Wayúu, which follow an abstract, geometric, egocentric design, packed with the conventional icons that index women and men, living and deceased kin, and relations of marriage and descent (Fig. 7). The wind energy charts lack explicit references to gender, affinity, and marriages. They focus almost exclusively on matrilineal descent, artificially amplifying relations among maternal kin as if other relations were irrelevant to social life. In fact, when I asked Gustavo about paternal kin engaging the corporation or voicing complaints on the project, he told me: "The descendants of an authority by paternal line have no right in the territory. They're *achon*: they have rights in their mother's territory [of a different clan]." Therefore, while the charts seem to be enacting a form of ethnographic knowledge that would ideally mirror Indigenous social

²⁵ The cross-cultural comparison of kinship had been a foundational object in the discipline since the late 19th century. Following the Cambridge University Expedition to the Torres Straits in 1898-99, W.H.R. Rivers proposed the "genealogical method" as an approach for understanding social and political institutions in non-Western societies. Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877 [1964]) also explored the linkage of kinship forms and property, placing kinship types on an evolutionary scale. The cusp of civilization was equated with the monogamous and patriarchal family, which was in turn correlated with the rise of private property (Morgan 1964). In the 20th century, British structural-functionalists developed the concept of "social structure"—which encompassed kinship—as the backbone of political systems, forms of exchanges, and ritual life (e.g., Radcliffe-Brown 1952). In his classic ethnography, Bronislaw Malinowski also argued that "all departments of tribal life, religion, magic, economics are interwoven, but the *social organization* of the tribe lies at the foundation of everything else" (Malinowski 2014 [1922], 69). As the social structure of non-Western societies was viewed as overdetermined by kinship relations, kinship charts quickly became a vital tool of ethnographic inquiry, often echoing or explicitly aligning themselves with European imperial ends (Bouquet 1996, 43). Although some subfields in anthropology still rely on charts, the critique of kinship studies starting in the 1970s (discussed below) relegated them to a marginal position (Schneider 1984)

worlds, they erase everything but matrilineality, connecting certain people to wind while also disconnecting others. Hence, analogous to bureaucratic documents like passports or ID cards (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Hull 2012), the charts *produce* the social persons that can legitimately interact with the company.

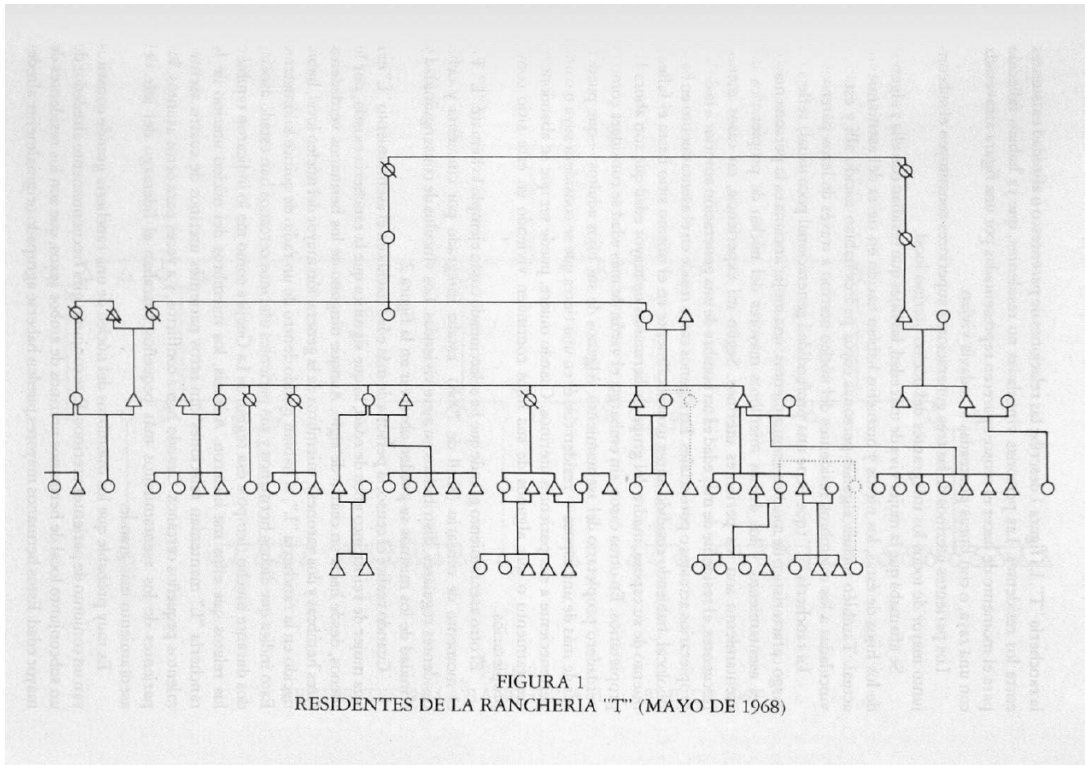


Figure 7. Residents of a Rancheria [Wayúu rural community], May 1968 (Source: Goulet 1981)

Navigating Conflicts of Land Inheritance

Second, the charts also operate as risk aversion strategies that avoid –or allow the company to act upon – conflicts of Indigenous land inheritance, a strategy that was considered potentially monetizable in the future. Adriel – a Wayúu journalist who had freelanced for Jemeiwaa Kai for years – told me after a workshop: “With [the diagrams] we avoid conflicts. That’s why we draw them. In the past, we have had people who say that they are the owners [of the land] but they really weren’t.”

This view echoed a story shared by Diego during the corporate retreat. “If we have order in the land,” he told the other workers in the room, “then we can exert pressure or have people back us during a stoppage.” He recounted an episode a few years back when a Wayúu family wanted to dismantle one of Jemeiwaa Kai’s wind meters, claiming that it was installed without proper consultation. The charts, Diego claimed, made it possible to identify the “true” owners of the land, who incidentally supported the wind farming venture. They “gave us the weapons for saying ‘the elderly authority has spoken, and his word is firm’” As Diego’s account displays, the kinship charts back up forms of action.

The idea that kinship charts could help avoid Indigenous disputes was based on the structural-functionalist imaginary that animate Jemeiwaa Kai’s ethnographic approach to wind power. Jemeiwaa Kai’s diagrams connect names through lines and arrows in ways that disentangle a person’s rights and obligations from the habitual, emotional, and deeply situational nature of kin relations – or the “mutuality of being” (Sahlins 2013, ix).²⁶ In doing so, they elide how these latter dimensions inflect decisions around land, property, and political authority. Such omissions of the creative, unstable, and affective texture of Wayúu sociality exemplify what Elizabeth Povinelli calls the *autological subject* and *genealogical society*. By autological subject, she refers to the “discourses, practices, and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom associated with the Enlightenment project of contractual constitutional democracy and capitalism.” By contrast, the genealogical society is made up of the “discourses, practices, and fantasies about social constraints placed on the autological subject by various kinds of inheritances” (Povinelli 2006, 4). While both notions are imbricated, settler

²⁶ For Sahlins, kinship is largely about how people “participate intrinsically in each other’s existence,” that is, how they “partake of each other’s sufferings and joys, sharing one another’s experiences even as they take responsibility for and feel the effects of each other’s acts” (Sahlins 2013, 27).

colonial regimes see them as radically opposed to each other. And Jemeiwaa Kai's diagrams precisely uphold and reproduce this artificial binary. They materialize corporate "discourses, practices, and fantasies" about how the genealogical past constrains Indigenous life – past and future. They place descent as an inescapable force –opposed to the "self-making" and sovereign individual – that configure Indigenous social worlds, overriding alternative forms of agency that exceed the ones prescribed by genealogy. In short, they represent Wayúu people as overdetermined by kinship (making the charts into tools for visualizing their sociopolitical interactions).

Jemeiwaa Kai's attachment to this genealogical imaginary is especially palpable in how the team views the charts, and the entire wind energy rush, as a way of returning to a form of Wayúu cultural life that seemed more authentic. During our numerous conversations, Gustavo was always vocal in deriding cultural changes that had been taking place for decades in La Guajira, such as the growing number of congregants at evangelical churches, the decline of shamanic practices, or the expansion of the state's bureaucratic apparatus in the peninsula. The Colombian state, he told me once at the office, "created a dent; it somehow broke the Wayúu's social organization." For Gustavo, Jemeiwaa Kai's potential to reinvigorate the Wayúu relied not on its Corporate Social Responsibility policy, or the use of Indigenous imagery, but rather in strengthening what he saw as the "traditional," kinship-based form of sociopolitical organization. In other words, turning back the clock on atmospheric pollution meant nurturing a kind of indigeneity "unpolluted" by modernity, colonialism, and environmental decay. The diagrams – he thought – were completely aligned to this end.²⁷

²⁷ Furthermore, Jemeiwaa Kai's bid to associate clean energy with a precolonial and unpolluted world implies that contemporary Wayúu communities are also seen as ideal representatives of that world (Fabian 1983). The epistemic violence of this move is reflected in Jemeiwaa Kai's reliance on ethnographic accounts and imaginaries of past Wayúu forms of life as unproblematic truths and, more importantly, as models for the future.

Such an idyllic return to a primordial and atemporal Wayúu way of life served other instrumental ends. On one level, it allowed Jemeiwaa Kai to push back against what they perceived as younger, educated, and bilingual interlocutors who demanded larger and more ambitious payouts but lacked the kinship positionality to speak on behalf of matrilineal extended families. On another level, it allowed the company to accrue anticipatory knowledge and maneuvering power over conflicts that could jeopardize wind energy production. This strategy resonates with the work of feminist Indigenous scholars who theorize how the study of Indigenous kinship enables pernicious forms of governance over intimate spaces as part of colonial and settler-colonial regimes (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). As Audra Simpson describes, “Knowing and representing people within those places required more than military might; it required the methods and modalities of knowing – in particular, categorization, ethnological comparison, linguistic translations, and ethnography” (Simpson 2014, 95). Analogously, this move also evokes colonial histories of taking possession through acts of bureaucratic documentation (Burns 2010),²⁸ or the deployment of ethnographic methods to aid U.S. imperialist ends – such as the Human Terrain System during the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (Forte 2011).

In short, the ethnographic knowledge produced by Jemeiwaa Kai not only potentially averts infrastructural disruptions (which would have immediate and long-term economic effects), but also, and more importantly, congeals the relation between people, places, and wind – enabling a form of enclosure over airspace itself

Enclosing Wind

Third, Jemeiwaa Kai’s charts not only map Indigenous territorial relations but seek to

²⁸ For example, in the Andes, colonial litigation became a form of ethnographic practice through which officers produced knowledge about Indigenous customary practices and sociopolitical configurations (Mumford 2008, 6).

vertically project those matrilineal ties to specific blocks of airspace. Since land and wind in La Guajira are materially and legally inalienable, the kinship bonds that grant corporate *access* to these milieus are subjected to a kind of fencing off – as if they guaranteed private and enforceable rights over certain wind paths of the peninsula. Through the charts, the elusiveness of wind – that seemingly belongs to no one – now appears as belonging to someone – in this case, a legible and delimited set of matrilineal extended families.

Furthermore, these kinship relations – crystallized in the charts – were viewed by Jemeiwaa Kai as transferable to third parties (akin to wind speed measurements that are regularly sold by smaller developers to larger corporations with enough capital to build and operate the actual wind farms). In fact, when Jemeiwaa Kai was sold for several million dollars to the U.S. corporation AES halfway through my fieldwork, I asked Miguel – a financial analysts at Jemeiwaa Kai, based in Bogotá – where the value of Jemeiwaa Kai came from, since their wind farms were years away from being up and running. He said that it was mainly two things: clearly delimited perimeters with optimal wind measurements and a history of accrued social relations with Wayúu hosts. “The *accumulation* of social relations with the Wayúu has value. In the event wind farms get paralyzed, if a company has strong relations and avoids a situation like that, then that obviously produces value. So, beside the value that comes from measuring wind, we must add the most intangible elements, like good relations.” Franco, a young Wayúu worker in La Guajira, shared a similar reflection after learning that the company was sold to AES. “We don’t have wind turbines now, but we have *agreements, relations, and promises*. It’s the work and relations established with communities that was sold.” In short, the knowledge produced by kinship diagrams accrues a form economic value that can be quantified and exchanged.

The kinship charts, I would argue, thus seek to create private property relations over wind

flows. And such attempt to convert wind into a commodity occurs *without* incurring in overt forms of displacement and physical enclosure. This process resonates with Robert Nichols’ theory of “recursive dispossession.” Rather than separating producers from their means of production (as in Marx’s theory of dispossession), the charts are transforming something *into* property (Nichols 2020, 31).²⁹ Kinship charts aspire to transform the trade wind of La Guajira into a deed that stakes a claim over wind (aimed at excluding others) and which can thereby be tradeable to third parties.

This enclosure of genealogical knowledge signals a mode of extraction that seems to operate in more expansive terms, *actively* intervening in sociocultural milieus (Mezzadra and Neilson 2017). Rather than physically enclosing land, it centers instead on solidifying “patterns of human cooperation and social activity” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2017, 194). Amidst a kinetic force that is widely view as unrestricted (an aerial common), kinship knowledge enables Jemeiwaa Kai to imagine La Guajira’s wind as something that can be harnessed in predictable, quantifiable, and privatized ways (and as such inserted in green capitalist forms of value production).

This is perhaps why the charts fail to contemplate the possibility of ruptures and disagreements, or alternative ways of (re)arranging land, people, and wind. Indeed, they ostensibly exclude Wayúu connected through other forms of relationality that are meaningful and consequential. The charts make those entanglements “unrecognizable” (Richland 2021). In fetishizing descent, they ultimately overlook other – and potentially destabilizing – ways of concretizing kinship, to which I now turn.

²⁹ For Nichols, dispossession involves a two-step process: “it transforms nonproprietary relations into proprietary ones while, at the same time, systematically transferring control and title of this (newly formed) property.” Dispossession thus merges commodification and theft (2020, 8).

Conclusion: Reimagining Wind and Kinship Entanglements

Several months after the opening meeting – described in the introduction – the plans for the Jotomana wind farm had advanced very little. Jemeiwaa Kai had shifted its attention to other, more promising perimeters that were closer to finalizing all the paperwork and starting construction. When I asked Gustavo about the delay, he said that Jotomana was a “complicated place.” Their kinship chart and further internal conversations with Wayúu staff led them to conclude that residents had sharp disagreements over land rights and thus lacked consensus over whether they wanted to embark on the wind farming venture. For Gustavo, this explained the residents’ early trepidation about speaking openly of their ancestors. Jotomana’s wind farm was thus placed on the back burner, since it wasn’t possible to draw a clear and durable line between people, land, and wind. While Gustavo regretted this outcome, he felt optimistic that the wind farm could be resuscitated down the line. The wind near Jotomana “is just too good to let it go,” he told me. He reasoned that perhaps, after many more months or even years of community engagement, he could eventually strike a deal. Rather than unwieldy atmospheric conditions – like turbulence – or the tecno-material vulnerability of turbines and electric grids, it was the seeming opacity of Jotomana’s social relations that had disrupted corporate plans for now.

In this chapter I have examined how the kinship charts designed by Jemeiwaa Kai seek to convert the complexity of Wayúu sociality and territoriality into indisputable visual objects that can establish who has rights over land – and, by extension, the wind – and who does not. Insofar as they reify kin relations, the charts reject the possibility of ruptures and disagreements or affection and care (which are absent from the charts and their mode of attuning to them) in shaping social and environmental relations. In so doing, these instruments foreground an

atemporal, primordial imaginary of indigeneity as one in which genealogy overdetermines Indigenous life.

Since land and wind cannot be legally alienated, the charts also aspire to crystalize the relation between people, land, and wind in ways that can be traded – as deeds. In other words, mapping Indigenous social relations is tantamount to mapping – and seeking to create private property relations – over wind itself. Hence, what looks like culturally appropriate consideration by Jemeiwaa Kai is a mode of enclosing portions of airspace. Such a move underscores how wind energy corporations can at once recognize Indigenous rights, and even operate under the normative and epistemological coordinates of Wayúu social life, and at the same time lock down via the charts a legally defensible right to negotiate with specific individuals and to disallow counter or competing claims. Indigenous kinship thus affords the sociopolitical terrain over which wind farms can run without interruption. The charts illuminate how indigeneity is recruited as a scaffolding for making renewable energy in Colombia.

The charts' effects in the world, however, are more ambivalent as they remain deeply aspirational and devoid of legal force. Stoppages, strikes, and protests against wind energy are a regular occurrence, despite the charts' aim of bringing order. Thus, the efforts of making Indigenous sociopolitical worlds legible do not always succeed in attaining the desired conditions of predictability demanded by wind energy capital. Hence, what affords their capacity to order the Wayúu worlds also lays them subject to the disordering claims by those who contest them.

How did Wayúu subjects recast the kinship charts into a viable political device to further their own visions of the future? Wayúu residents not only refuse to speak about their ancestors in public and reject the epistemic soundness of the charts, as we saw in the opening scene, but also

concretize kinship in other ways. One example is their ancestral cemeteries (Fig. 8). As I describe in the introduction, ancestral or secondary cemeteries (*amouyu*) are not just repositories of bodily remains but serve to condense histories of migration and fluctuating territorial relations. When someone dies, they are first buried where they lived (which is usually *not* their ancestral land). Between 3 and 20 years after this first event, their remains are exhumed and taken to their ancestral land (where their matrilineal cemetery is located). While, in principle, a Wayúu's' remains should rest in their clan's matrilineal cemetery, this is not always the case. People often decide to bury their kin, or ask to be buried themselves, in specific cemeteries that belong to their non-matrilineal families as a way of reasserting sovereignty over geographies to which they are not entitled through kinship relations. In other words, the movement of bodies is not set in stone. Individual decisions to have their second burial in a place different from their ancestral land are not uncommon, which renders this spatial relations fluid and somewhat unpredictable.



Figure 8. *Ishoshinka* Cemetery of the Pushaina Clan with the Jepirachi Wind Farm in the Background (Source: Photo by Author)

Ancestral cemeteries, and the bodily remains that move between them, display how the rigidity of kinship relations implied in the charts is in fact experienced: as constantly subject to challenge and change. Cemeteries thus defy the condition of being “out of place” put forth by Jemeiwaa Kai. They are shaped by the deceased’s and their kin’s will, even if it requires breaking kinship rules. Therefore, rather than being an unalterable domain, the subterranean spaces inhabited by Wayúu bodily remains are subject to an ongoing (re)drawing of kin relations that can shape the future in unexpected ways. They condense an *expansive* and open-ended idea of relationality, as opposed to the restricted social worlds abstracted in the charts. As such, they work as *counter-charts* – sites that are not subsumed by external epistemologies.³⁰ And they

³⁰ The indeterminacy of inheritance was reflected in a story I learned about in a community adjacent to Jotomana (called Kasiwoulin), near the Jepirachi wind farm (see Chapter 3). Their primary cemetery, called *Ishoshinka*, was created in the early 1900s by a man called Kasoyuanca (Fig. 8). He migrated to this coastal region, leaving behind his maternal extended family (of the Epiayúu clan) and marrying Irma, who belonged to a different clan (Pushaina), from

instantiate the force of Indigenous people to bring their “authoritative logics to contemporary sociopolitical moments” (Richland 2021, 11). This is probably why companies choose to use kinship charts instead of delving into the social life of cemeteries: the charts convey a sense of predictability and fixity that cemeteries could never possess.

The forms of futurity that place wind power as a profitable investment and a resource that will shield Colombia from the perils of climate change require the labor-intensive, but always potentially fraught, efforts of mapping Indigenous kin. This practice illuminates how Indigenous concepts, agents, and temporalities can have ripple effects beyond their local scale. It shows that moving from “dirty” to “clean” energy entails a complex process of visualizing past and future forms of Indigenous life. Sketching kinship and Indigenous intimacies is hence not marginal to Colombia’s post-carbon future, but its condition of possibility.

In this chapter I have traced how wind energy companies mobilize kinship charts for making property claims over wind (a foundational moment that inaugurates a wind farm’s design, construction, and operation). In the next chapter, I will explore how sustainability of wind farms also requires an array of gift-giving practices and forms of obligation that produce relations of mutuality and accountability between corporate actors and Wayúu communities. I will ethnographically analyze how the intimate, reciprocal, and meaningful social exchanges that take place between Jemeiwaa Kai’s workers and Wayúu residents are critical for the renewability of wind energy itself, as they create and maintain the conditions for harnessing this resource

which most current residents descend. Kasoyuanca built a new cemetery for himself and his children (who weren’t part of his maternal kin). When I asked current residents why Kasoyuanca made this decision (against the seeming cultural convention), they invariably pointed to his affection for his affinal kin and disdain for his matrilineal relatives. Rather than the weight of genealogy, it was Kasoyuanca’s emotional connections that animated his decision to leave his bodily remains to his children, which a century later continue to serve as a testament to the Pushaina’s rights over the land. Yet, his bodily remains are open to other interpretations. In fact, his estranged maternal kin (of the Epiayúu clan) take the location of his remains as giving them instead rights over that zone – and the material benefits tied to that wind farm (see Chapter 3).

without interruption. In doing so, I will reflect on how Wayúu moral economies have emerged as key nodes for mediating the relation between green energy capital and indigeneity.

Chapter 2

Flows: Gifts, Obligation, and the Production of Wind Power's Renewability

The Turbulent Bonanza

On March 15, 2019, the Second Forum on Renewable Energy was held in the city of Riohacha, the capital of Colombia's department of La Guajira. More than six hundred attendees—from corporate executives to longtime residents—gathered in the Anas Mai convention center, located along the city's beachfront. The forum was organized by *Diario del Norte*, a popular newspaper of Colombia's Caribbean coast. The interim governor at the time, Wilmer Rojas, inaugurated the forum in front of a packed room, surrounded by screens that displayed the logos of corporate sponsors interposed with images of wind turbines.

Rojas explained that La Guajira had the largest “reserves” of wind energy in Colombia and was on pace to become a *potencia energética*, or “energy power,” thanks to “Maleiwa, the god of the great Wayúu nation.”¹ But he warned that these projects risked becoming another bonanza—emulating previous cycles of abundance and ruination related to the extraction of pearls, marijuana, coal, and natural gas. For this reason, he urged attendees to think of the aspirations of the Indigenous communities that will live beneath the wind turbines expected to populate the peninsula in the coming years. Wind energy corporations, he concluded, need to compensate the Wayúu people fairly. “We have to stop thinking that compensations should be only in goats.² We want compensations in the form of water, energy, education, and jobs.”

¹ Maleiwa is a cosmological being that created the Wayúu—dividing them into clans, unevenly allocating wealth, and providing them with tools and cattle (Perrin 1987b, 68-69).

² Goats are critical for the subsistence of Wayúu communities and circulate as valuables for dowry and conflict resolution payments. But they are often associated with rurality and poverty by non-Wayúu people.

At the forum, investors, corporate executives, and state bureaucrats took to the stage to praise La Guajira's wind in ways that resonates with the opening scene of the introduction. While coalmining has left a trail of dislocation and ecological degradation in La Guajira since the 1980s (Banks 2017, 62-64), wind energy was depicted time and again as a remedy for impending climatological crises, an instrument for poverty alleviation, and a resource that could underpin a new energy regime that would be more compatible with Wayúu land rights, economic hopes, and cultural values (Ledec, Rapp, and Aiello 2011, 70).

During a restricted Q&A after the presentations, Orlando Cuello, a leader of the coal mining workers' trade union of Cerrejón Corporation, SINTRACARBON, told the audience that they backed an energy transition but wanted a "community-oriented model" that would amend the disparities caused by coal and avoid repeating the same mistakes. "Beware! We cannot accept the same thing that Cerrejón has done for thirty years, where the Guajiros' coal is shipped to Turkey and Asia, and we are left with nothing. We must do something now before we realize that multinationals have privatized our wind and sun."

Cuello's intervention, which was heavily applauded, echoes a widespread sentiment that wind energy projects are secretive and elusive. Indeed, halfway through the day-long event, a black-and-white photocopied pamphlet, written by Orlando Esaú Vidal, president of the Academy of History of La Guajira, circulated covertly among attendees. With an image of a wind farm in the center, the pamphlet read: "They took the gas and the royalties from coal from La Guajira for the country's benefits [...] Now, they intend to take away renewable energy from our wind and sun for the progress of other departments, with the tacit complicity of our leaders, who remain silent [...]" (See Fig. 9).

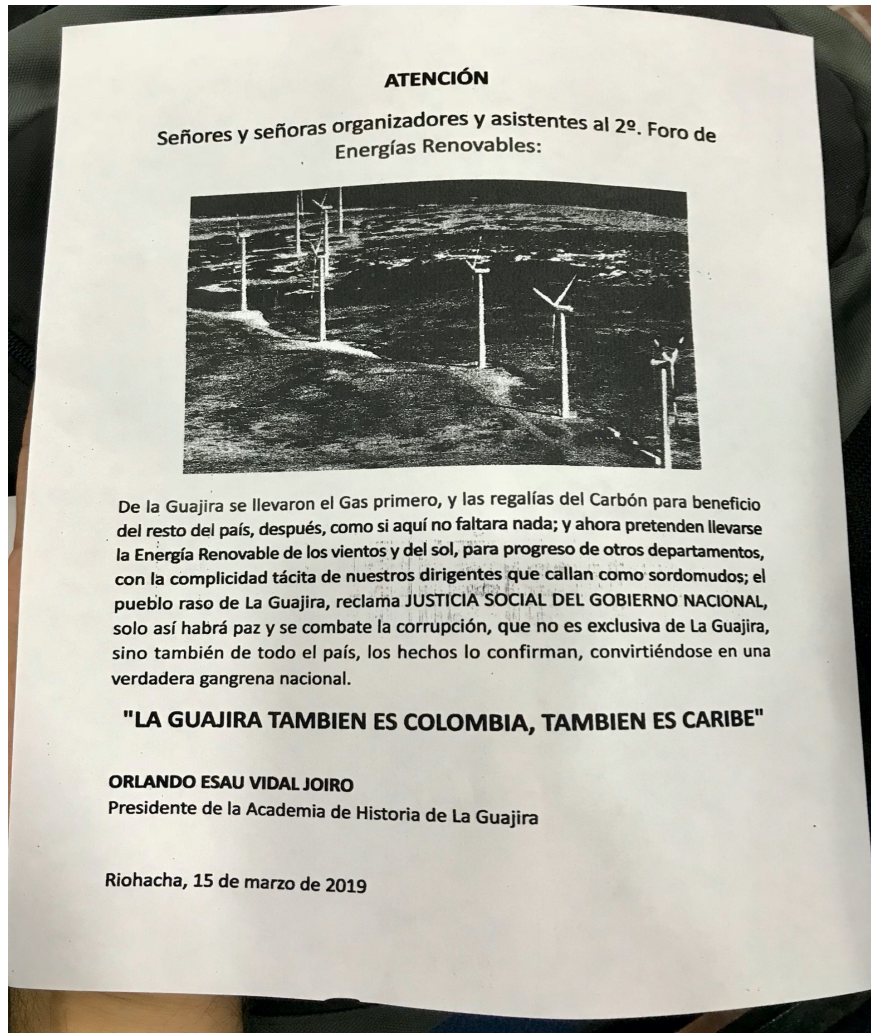


Figure 9. A Pamphlet that Circulated on March 15, 2019, during the Second Forum on Renewable Energy (Source: Photo by Author)

Note: The text reads: “Attention. Ladies and gentlemen, organizers and attendees of the Second Renewable Energy Forum: From La Guajira they took the gas first, and the royalties from coal for the benefit of the rest of the country, as if they weren’t needed here. And now they wish to take the renewable energy from the winds and the sun, for the advancement of other departments, with the tacit complicity of our leaders who remain silent. The common people of La Guajira demand SOCIAL JUSTICE FROM THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. Only then will there be peace and corruption be combated, which is not exclusive to La Guajira, but exists in the entire country. The facts confirm it, as it is becoming a true national gangrene. La Guajira is also Colombia, it is also the Caribbean.”

Given the mass scale and corporate ownership of the projects, public criticism against wind power has intensified in the public sphere (Barney n.d, 2021b, 2021c; González Posso and Barney 2019, 34; Noriega 2020; Rubiano 2021). “These are totally clean projects, I get it,” I was told by Nelson, a founding member of the NGO Nación Wayúu, when I asked him about wind

energy shortly after the forum. “But they are coming to steal energy from our department’s wind, from the wind of the Indigenous territories, and they’re coming to take it all and leave nothing”. From obscure deals to the forced displacement of the Wayúu, most of these accusations highlight, in one way or another, that the wind is on the verge of being “stolen” through practices that resemble previous episodes surrounding coal and natural gas.

Why is wind energy’s capture and conversion, reliant as it is on the seemingly unrestricted access and inexhaustibility of wind, nonetheless evaluated by some as a form of theft? What kinds of relationships are being established between corporate and Indigenous actors on the ground that might trouble this characterization? And what do these interactions reveal about corporate and Indigenous entanglements amid Colombia’s wind energy rush? This chapter explores the circulation of gifts and the ethics of obligation that bind dozens of Wayúu communities and Jemeiwaa Kai. I analyze how a system of gift giving, called *solicitudes* (or requests), is framed by Wayúu staff workers of Jemeiwaa Kai and Wayúu recipients as a way of remedying the negative effects of coal mining and chronic state abandonment, but more importantly as performances of *ounuwawa*—moral expressions of solidarity offered by Wayúu kin and friends in times of need, particularly during funerals or internal disputes (Perrin and Uliyuu Machado 1984, 88).

By engaging in forms of *ounuwawa*, Jemeiwaa Kai recruits Wayúu practices of gift-giving and forms of obligation to render itself as a local actor—connected as if it had kin ties to Wayúu groups. That is, in addition to mapping Indigenous kinship (as in the previous chapter), Jemeiwaa Kai actively recruits Wayúu moral economies, including its norms and practices of exchange and value-making, to forge stable relations with persons that are represented in the charts (and which are viewed as having indisputable political authority over portions of windy

land). For this reason, the circulation of gifts, and the relations it invokes and produces, is critical for the renewability of wind energy itself, as it creates and maintains the sociocultural conditions for harnessing this kinetic movement of air without interruption. Since these practices acknowledge the power of Wayúu communities living by future wind farms to refuse to host infrastructure or even disrupt their operations (as is described in Chapter 3), they also enable recipients to carve out a space of accountability and entangle the corporation in long-term relations of obligation that can advance their own aspirations and political ends.

By engaging the corporation not from a contract-based logic of market relations, or through global frameworks of corporate social responsibility (Shever 2012; Welker 2009, 2014), but within Wayúu moral economic worlds, recipients can alter the radical asymmetry that often defines interactions between corporations and Indigenous peoples. Operating in the realm of Wayúu value and ethics of obligation allows communities to ameliorate—in exchange for the use of wind—their immediate needs for food, water, and medical care, which the state has historically failed to provide even though the region has undergone a perennial humanitarian crisis (Barney 2021b). Rather than focusing on the monetary value of these gifts, which pale in comparison to the scale of investments devoted to infrastructures and technologies of future wind farms (Guerra Curvelo 2021), I am interested in tracing how this ongoing flow of gifts creates a distinct kind of corporate and Indigenous entanglement. Indeed, as I argue in the following pages, the system of requests – and the demands of obligation and accountability they elicit – allow the Wayúu to intervene, however minimally, in setting the terms for harnessing wind in their land.

A copious literature has illuminated the ways resource extraction rearranges Indigenous territories, political struggles, and human and nonhuman relations (Bebbington and Bury 2014;

Sawyer and Gomez 2012). Wind energy, as I describe in the Introduction, has garnered a positive reputation among certain publics as a low-carbon resource that serves climate change mitigation. For advocates, wind energy's technical qualities endow it with a "superior social value," reflected in its potential to build grassroots models of energy management (Scheer 2012, 2, 36, 103). Yet, others have found that low-carbon energy often reenacts, or maps onto, previous extractive relations, either because property arrangements are analogous to carbon-based interventions or because global demands for low-carbon energy come at the expense of local environmental, social, and economic aspirations (e.g., Dracklé and Krauss 2011, 9; Howe and Boyer 2019; Powell 2018, 106). Still others have posited that, instead of a radical rupture, low-carbon energy regimes bring about "varying degrees and forms of change and continuity with the existing energy system," which, at given times, can "open possibilities for new social arrangements" (Franquesa 2018, 9; see also Powell 2018, 4).

In focusing on the moral economies that are emerging in Colombia's energy frontier (as novel social arrangements), I do not suggest that extractive relations are absent from low-carbon energy regimes (Howe and Boyer 2016, 218) or that wind energy in La Guajira is entirely withdrawn from violent practices reminiscent of mining (González Posso and Barney 2019; Jaramillo 2020), oil extraction (Gill 2016), and agribusiness (Taussig 2018). Nonetheless, the still open-ended relation between wind and state power in Colombia (contrary to other instances of contemporary resource extraction in Latin America),³ and Wayúu sovereign claims over their land, helps illuminate some of the limits of this analytic. Here a tension and space of possibility

³ One example is the region's turn to the so-called "New Extractivism." Adopted in the early 2000s, this development model was put forth by left-wing governments in Latin America (such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil, among others), who sought to expand oil, mineral, and monocrop revenue to boost social spending and support progressive policies. Yet, its heavy reliance on natural resource extraction prompted a wave of Indigenous mobilization over land and resources, including around renewable energy (Acosta 2013, 62, 71; Howe 2019; Veltmeyer and Petras 2014, 26-27).

open up between potentially extractive practices of wind harnessing and the capacity to negotiate its use through Wayúu theories of value and obligation. By ethnographically tracing such tension, I thus echo Powell's (2018, 6) call for theorizing Indigenous energy activism beyond any rigid dichotomy of global domination and local resistance.

As I show throughout the chapter, seizing wind in La Guajira requires harnessing social relations through intimate, reciprocal, and meaningful exchanges with those living amid this resource. To build their wind farms and maximize their utility over time, Jemeiwaa Kai must secure the ongoing consent of Wayúu residents of the corporate-delineated perimeters, which demarcate the project's territorial scope—all located on inalienable Indigenous land, enabling their occupants to refuse, disrupt, or block energy infrastructure. The requests (*solicitudes*) thus enable wind energy companies to attain this contingent consent (from those identified by the kinship charts), but also afford recipients the power of demanding new forms of accountability. Attending ethnographically to these value-making exchanges sheds light on the unexpected social entanglements of green energy economies and the possibilities of Indigenous actors, partly through their land-based sovereignty, of shaping energy transitions in the Global South.

In the next section I outline some of the sociopolitical challenges of licensing future wind farms in the *Resguardo de la Alta y Media Guajira* of the Wayúu – a constitutionally protected territory that cannot be privatized, expropriated, or rented out. Subsequently, I explore the gift giving practices of Jemeiwaa Kai, uncovering some of the social effects and frictions afforded by these forms of obligation. Finally, I reflect on how the flow of gifts, and their centrality for the uninterrupted harnessing of wind, hints at the variegated interactions, ethical valences, and forms of value production that permeate green energy futures.

Licensing Wind

As I described in the introduction, the wind in La Guajira is imagined as shielding Colombia from the perils of the Anthropocene, even though it is not entirely clear who has rights over the wind itself. The Wayúu do not have legal rights over the wind either, but they exercise—unlike in the cases of coal or natural gas—de facto power over it, given the land’s legal status and the fact that wind currents can only be harnessed via technologies on the ground. Since the state cannot grant concessions for use of the wind, nor can it privatize or lease Wayúu land, the prospects of building a wind farm depend heavily not only on mapping social relations (as we saw with the kinship charts), but also on building and cultivating those relations over time, in ways that can translate into a successful consultation and environmental license.

The licensing phase, prior to construction and operation, is the most critical episode in a wind farm’s biography, since the Wayúu can delay the required permits or refuse to host the infrastructure. It is “the choke point of wind energy development” (Franquesa 2018, 172). In La Guajira, this phase entails various steps. First, a wind energy company receives a permit from the regional environmental agency (CORPOGUAJIRA) to explore a specific perimeter. Over a period of several years, the company collects data on wind, prepares an extensive environmental study (outlining the project’s impact on the surrounding human and non-human ecologies), and surveys the Wayúu communities living in the perimeter (through kinship charts, census data, participatory mapping exercises, and ethnographic research).

The second step is the consultation, a several-months long process supervised by the national government in accordance with a constitutional mandate for projects concerning the “extraction of natural resources” in Indigenous land (Article 330). These formal sessions involve hours of dialogue in which communities and corporations negotiate the monetary and nonmonetary

dimensions of the project. The nonmonetary features can include construction and operation rules, reforestation plans, and grievance mechanisms in the event of work-related injuries. But the most crucial parts are the compensations for environmental impacts and monetary agreements. These range from the number of local jobs and community investments the company will fund (i.e., school repairs, desalinization plants, or housing projects) to yearly payments for land use. In one consultation I followed, Jemeiwaa Kai agreed to pay US\$125,000 per year to eight Wayúu communities for the “land use and occupation,” in addition to 50% of carbon credits. The agreement indicates that “all resources will be managed by the communities through a fiduciary ... [and] Jemeiwaa Kai is obligated to deposit the funds, regardless of the economic performance of the company.” In exchange, the Wayúu communities agreed, among other things, not to charge fees to the company for or block them from entering their land.

The final agreement—called *protocolización*—must be signed by all parties. Although other bureaucratic documents are required—including access points to the national grid and construction permits—the consultation is the most crucial step, as in wind energy ventures elsewhere (see Franquesa 2018, 171). The *protocolización* acts as a legally binding agreement. Yet, it does not always ensure uninterrupted access to wind. After years of operation, communities can disavow its legitimacy, alleging procedural errors. They can also force a renegotiation of terms, seek a *tutela* (constitutional protection) to invalidate it, or strategically mobilize Wayúu law or ancestral cemeteries to reject the validity of the project (see Chapter 3).

After the *protocolización*, a wind energy company can formally petition for an environmental license from ANLA (Autoridad Nacional de Licencias Ambientales or National Environmental Licensing Authority), which assesses the environmental impact study and the *protocolización*. A delay or failure in securing Indigenous consent often results in a rejection, delaying for years or

derailing the wind farm entirely. Although Indigenous communities cannot formally veto a project, the ANLA has rejected applications arguing that the *protocolización* reveals community opposition or serious concerns about the project. If the environmental license is granted, the wind farm can start construction and eventually begin operations.

While an environmental license may be issued, the risk of communities interrupting or disrupting energy infrastructure as an idiom of political action is always present. Wayúu communities, as I describe in Chapter 3, can pull to pieces turbines and other infrastructures (as occurred in 2016-2017 in the Jepirachi project) due to disagreements over consultations conducted many years earlier. For this reason, Jemeiwaa Kai's workers insists that the engagements with Wayúu communities must precede and go beyond the formal space of the consultation, often through more experimental strategies. One such effort is a gift-giving system called *solicitudes* (or requests) which I explore next.

The Renewable Power of *Solicitudes*

I met Franco and Antonio in Jemeiwaa Kai's office in Uribia one morning as they were getting ready to deliver numerous *mercados* (food gifts) for a community located in the Carrizal perimeter. We picked up the thirty *mercados* from a store in the town of Uribia and drove seventy-five miles in the company's Toyota 4x4 along the unpaved road. We arrived at the community, where the company had installed a wind meter several months before (see Fig. 10). Juan and I unloaded the *mercados*, placed them at the center of an *enramada*—a shed made of tree branches—and, as the wind blew against us, waited as a couple dozen people slowly showed up and sat around in plastic chairs for the meeting to begin.



Figure 10. Jemeiwaa Kai's Wind Meter in the Carrizal Perimeter (Source: Photo by Author)

Antonio, a Wayúu who led the everyday engagement of the company in La Guajira, kicked off the meeting. His job consisted in overseeing the company's relations with Wayúu communities living inside the six perimeters. He was profoundly skilled in navigating the intricacies of Wayúu social life, a faculty he acquired in his previous career as a municipal political representative. He knew how to treat residents of the perimeters, the relevant histories of territorial occupation, the networks of matrilineal extended families, and the minutiae of current

affairs. He started off with a few jokes before announcing that Jemeiwaa Kai was there to deliver thirty mercados for the elderly as gifts (Fig. 11)



Figure 11. Antonio Reads Aloud the Names of the Recipients of the *Mercados* (Source: Photo by Author)

Holding a stack of papers, he started calling the recipients by name, who, one by one, came to pick up their bags, worth about US\$7 each in groceries, including rice, pasta, beans, and coffee. After the delivery, he asked the eldest maternal uncle (*alaula*) to sign receipts for a little more than US\$200 and announced that they would come back the following month. After the brief event, people greeted Antonio and asked him about other requests (including school supplies, water, and medicine). For all of them, Antonio would invariably respond, “Just come to the office and submit a *request* in writing.” The request (*solicitud*) is the procedure by which residents of the perimeters solicit material contributions from Jemeiwaa Kai. Such requests are

received, decided upon, and delivered by the company's Office for the Empowerment of Wayúu Communities, which is mostly staffed by Wayúu workers.

Most of the work of preparing, submitting, and deciding upon the requests takes place in this office. Located in a white concrete house in the town of Uribia and lacking any obvious sign of housing a wind energy company, the entrance greets visitors with a banner bearing the company's logo alongside an image of a Wayúu woman performing a *yonna*, a dance that is emblematic of the public imagination of Wayúu indigeneity.⁴ The banner has a "charter of rights" stating that Jemeiwaa Kai "respects and recognizes the Wayúu people" and its "matrilineal social structure," "territorial autonomy," "economic system," and "system of social solidarity." In addition to the office's decor (with artisanal ceramics and curtains with clan imagery) and the use of traditional attire by female staff (who frequently wear Wayúu mantas, which again are emblematic of indigeneity in La Guajira), the mission statement that is printed on the wall states that Jemeiwaa Kai's goal is to "create value for the Wayúu" in ways that will promote "progress, development, and empowerment in their territories" (see Fig. 12 and Fig. 13).

⁴ The *yonna* is typically performed following a female coming-of-age ritual or other critical life event—such as a shamanic initiation, illness, or the start of the rainy season (Paz Ipuana 2016, 296-297). It is also conducted in other settings, such as government meetings and ethno-tourism services.

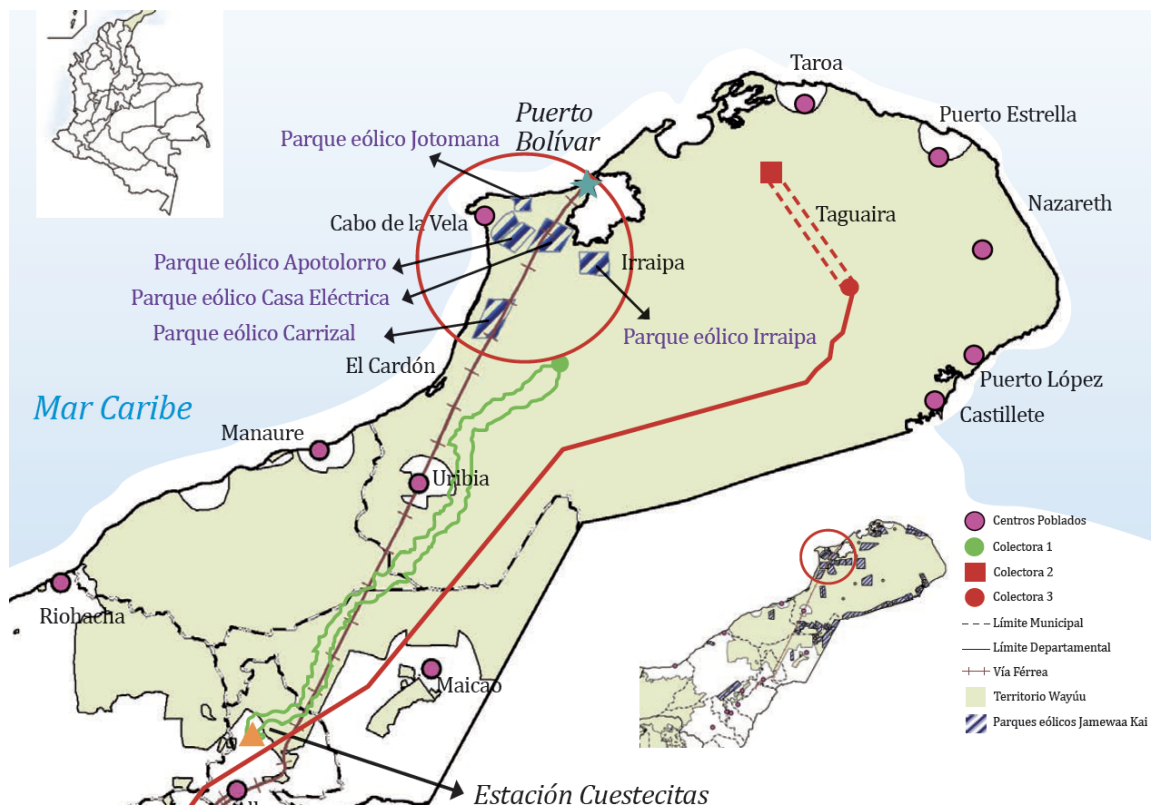


Figure 12. A banner with Jemeiwaa Kai's "Charter of Rights" (Source: Photo by Author)



Figure 13. Jemeiwaa Kai's "Office for the Empowerment of Wayúu Communities" (Source: Photo by Author)

Diego, the CEO—who we met in the previous chapter—prided himself on leading the only wind energy corporation with a permanent office in La Guajira, which, as I was told by Antonio, had the goal of implementing a politics of “total approximation” (*acercamiento total*) with all the people in the perimeters (see Map 4). This entailed the recruitment and reimagining of Indigenous culture for structuring corporate engagements with the Wayúu. Gift-giving practices, viewed as traditional and rooted in a deep past, were thus a crucial mechanism for engaging residents of future wind farming sites. Such exchanges were framed as radically distinct from Cerrejon’s top-down corporate social responsibility program, which delivers humanitarian aid irregularly to communities affected by coal mining.



Map 4. Location of Jemeiwaa Kai’s Perimeters (Source: Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, INDEPAZ).

Note: the company’s perimeters are marked inside the red circle.

The system of requests grew out of discussions between Wayúu and non-Wayúu staff a few years after the company was founded in 2010. Gustavo—the lawyer from Bogotá that we met in

the previous chapter—was instrumental in structuring the system. Prior to Jemeiwaa Kai, he had worked for years in La Guajira with Wayúu leaders and politicians to promote the so-called Life Plan (*Plan de Vida*), a policy model that emerged in the 1990s and that sought to articulate development interventions in ways that aligned with Indigenous autonomy and culture (see Gow 1997). Drawing on the Life Plan principles and methodologies, Jemeiwaa Kai launched the system of requests as a way of securing the legal consent and paving the way for a successful consultation process later, but also, as the staff reminded me, as a mode of delivering, however minimally and in culturally sound ways, the material promises of wind years before energy sales could be made (as the projects would be connected to the grid in 2022 at the earliest).

Every weekday, dozens of Wayúu who lived in the perimeters of future wind farms visited the office in Uribia to submit their requests for numerous goods: food for funerals, barbed wire for goat pens, school supply kits, compensation payments for internal disputes, and so-called “water tanks” (or *carrotanque*) – regular shipments of fresh water for domestic use, especially during the dry season that runs from January until late September (see Fig. 14)



Figure 14. A *Carrotanque* Hired by Jemeiwaa Kai to Deliver Water (Source: Photo by Author).

But they also included costlier requests, such as cancer treatments or per diems for visiting hospitalized relatives in distant cities like Santa Marta or Barranquilla. The office received five to ten requests per day, which, even if they were orally made, were always written on paper in a bureaucratic prose, signed by the elderly authority of the petitioner's community, matched with her ID card number, and subsequently uploaded to a digital database accessible to the staff in Bogotá. One request, for example, read as follows (see Fig. 15):

I, Josefina Gutiérrez, I.D. number XX.XXX.XXX from Uribia, La Guajira, in representation of the traditional authority of the community of La Brisa requests your collaboration in the form of provisions (*mercados*), since we are commemorating the exhumation of my mother-in-law's remains, Mrs. Maria Gutiérrez, on the 18th of the present month and year. As dictated by Wayúu custom and tradition, we will be gathered in our cemetery, joined by family and friends. We will be grateful for your generosity. We will be waiting for your prompt and positive response. Kindly, Josefina, Traditional Authority.

A second one read,

I write respectfully, as the ancestral authority of Süusi, of the sector of Carrizal. My Epiayuu clan, in a kin group to which I belong, has committed a social fault to the Sijona Clan, from Cabo de la Vela. I am requesting social solidarity (*ounuwa*) to compensate for this crime and cover my entire clan with peace ... Kindly, Mariana, Traditional Authority

Solicitud # 10.

Empresa : Jemeiwa Kazi

09 Julio 2018

Aprobado
Extraordinario
\$ 1300.000

Recibido: Javier Ortega
Fecha: 09 Julio 2018
Hora: 03:32 pm.

Yo [redacted] identificada con el número de ciudadanía № [redacted] con [redacted] la boqjira en representación de [redacted] la autoridad tradicional de la comunidad [redacted]. Solicito a ustedes la colaboración en provisiones (mercado) ya que se estará conmemorando el retiro de los restos de mi suegra la señora [redacted] el día 18 del mes presente y año.

como costumbre y tradición wayu estaremos en nuestro cementerio reunidos en familia y con sus amistades, por esta buena generosidad de ustedes estaremos bien agradecidos.

En espera de una pronta respuesta y deseando que sea positiva.

ATT
[redacted]
de [redacted]:
Autoridad tradicional

Figure 15. A written *solicitud* (Source: Photo by Author)

The requests were approved or rejected by a committee—comprised of Wayúu and non-Wayúu staff—that met every month at the office. Based on my estimates, approximately 75% of the petitions were approved, resulting in the disbursement of US\$4,000–\$7,000 per month (averaging about US\$150 per request). According to the company, the requests had to fulfill a “future-oriented collective purpose,” as specified in the guidelines posted on the waiting hall of the office. “We do not give private aid,” Diego and Antonio always insisted, implying that the request needed to reinforce a nonindividualistic notion of Wayúu indigeneity. Requests that were asking funds for expanding a restaurant or purchasing a motorcycle were denied, often with notes such as “inadmissible,” “extemporaneous,” “lacks a collective purpose,” or “needs more information.” The committee took several hours to review all requests. During these meetings, Antonio and other Wayúu staff usually provided detailed background on each petition, assessing its “validity” (i.e., if the petitioners lived inside the perimeter) and sharing their impressions on whether it was in the company’s best interest to approve or reject the request. The committee considered whether the petitioner – and their extended families – had been cooperative with them before, whether they had a reputation for being belligerent, or if the company needed to strengthen its social relations around specific areas of the perimeter (in preparation for future wind speed, soil or geological studies or the installation of another wind meter).

Carolina, the company’s Wayúu social worker, explained to me that this system resembles the circulation of gifts that “takes place between Wayúu families.” Such exchanges allowed the company to “build a good relationship with the communities” in ways that were culturally sound. For engineers in Bogotá, the requests were critical for the wind farms to move forward. Gustavo reiterated to me that building a wind farm in La Guajira was “80% social and 20% technical”. By social, he meant the strenuous labor of navigating kinship rules (Chapter 1), abiding by Wayúu

law (Chapter 4), and dealing with the unpredictable processes of consultation and their aftermaths (Chapter 3). These negotiations had to satisfy both parties beyond the consultation process itself, since Wayúu residents of the perimeters could disrupt the plans and future infrastructure of Jemeiwaa Kai and, therefore, their agreements allowing their functioning had to be constantly renewed in ways that exceeded the bureaucratic parameters and temporalities of signed contracts.

In fact, these exchanges have taken place, in some form or other, since 2010 (when Jemeiwaa Kai was founded) but are expected to continue after the wind farm is up and running. While Jemeiwaa Kai's strategies are illustrative of a common mode of engaging with Wayúu communities amid the wind energy rush, it is not the only one in La Guajira. Given the current competitive moment when most corporations are in the licensing phase, other actors are experimenting with other forms of community engagements to secure the consent of Indigenous residents, from pegging monetary compensations to when the wind farm starts operating to disbursing yearly funds per generator or giving out anticipated cash payments (González Posso and Barney 2019). All projects, however, offer a range of side investments in water infrastructure, scholarships, and especially cultural initiatives that draw, to some degree, on the idiom of Wayúu indigeneity.

Due in large part to accusations made by critics of bribing the Wayúu with gifts (Barney 2021a, 2021b), or manipulating impoverished rural communities in exchange for their legal consent to lease their windy land to private corporations (Guerra Curvelo 2021), Jemeiwaa Kai was invested in making the requests heavily bureaucratized, with their own evidentiary standards. Workers in Uribia spent a great deal of time simply documenting these exchanges by making photocopies, scanning forms, and taking photographs. The office also had an aversion to

handing out monetary payments. A sign in the waiting area said, “It is legally prohibited to give out cash. That is, if the application is approved, it will be delivered in kind (food, construction materials, among others).” Money was always avoided as it made it seem, as Antonio once told me, that they were “buying people off.” The circulation of cash also limited oversight on how corporate funds were being distributed and ignited rumors of corruption (which, in La Guajira, has long pervaded local politics, see (Orsini Aarón 2007). Although these forms of bookkeeping were meant to create accountability with regard to Wayúu communities, dissuading accusations of favoritism, recipients’ complaints over Jemeiwaa Kai’s practices were still abundant (see below).

Notwithstanding their bureaucratic texture, Jemeiwaa Kai’s requests are deeply interpersonal exchanges that take place at critical junctures of recipients’ lives, including death, illness, interclan conflicts, personal emergencies, or episodes of food scarcity. They do so while following the major aim of advancing corporate goals and keeping wind energy’s ‘renewability’ as a priority. As Marcel Mauss (1925, 4) argues, gifts are always a combination of moral obligation and interest, of being “constrained and self-interested.” In fact, when Antonio notified recipients by phone of their approval, he would remind them of upcoming meetings with engineers or state entities or of repairs that needed to be made to wind meters in the coming weeks. For Antonio, the goal was to leave “the ground ready” for when the turbines arrive in the port in 2021 or 2022. A key step for achieving this end was crafting and renovating the networks of social relations – visualized initially in the charts – so that they could endure into the future.

The requests not only help enable successful consultations but also—and crucially—have other long-term effects. For staff workers, they will tacitly encourage communities in the future to exercise a form of informal surveillance and help secure the multimillion-dollar infrastructure

(in what is a borderland imagined as crime-ridden and with minimal state security presence, see Chapter 4). For others, these long-term entanglements will help dissuade Wayúu residents from disrupting or dismantling the turbines in the future, or simply ensure that engineers will be able to work unreservedly in their land. While Jemeiwaa Kai never explicitly demands anything in return, there is always an expectation of reciprocation in practices and agreements that would keep the wind farms up and running. In fact, Antonio often reprimands petitioners who solely focus on gifts and disavow their reciprocal duties toward the project. In short, these gift-giving practices enable in critical ways the renewability of wind energy itself.

To some degree, Jemeiwaa Kai's approach resonates with practices of corporate obligation found elsewhere. In Indonesia, mining companies "nourished local patron–client relations by relying on elites to keep the peace" and secure extractive infrastructure through the circulation of development goods (Welker 2009, 144). Yet, by operating within Wayúu moral economies and ethics of obligation, the gift-giving practices put forth by Jemeiwaa Kai unexpectedly create grounds for Indigenous demands for other forms of corporate actions (see also Kirsch 2006, 129). For recipients, the requests are meaningful and politically consequential, as they concretize long-term relations that simultaneously open an array of future possibilities. As the renewable energy rush has made wind into a valuable resource that has the potential of begetting money, jobs, and the promise of the good life, the requests become a channel for trying to materialize such promises. Living in the perimeters gives residents the right to make a day trip to Uribia and make claims to a powerful actor that has an ethical obligation to respond, per Wayúu understandings of *ounuwawa* (unlike the indifference of local governments or the Cerrejón Corporation; see Banks 2017, 68). They thus create social relations that can broaden, however minimally, their access to services, goods, and infrastructure that had been until then out of reach. In short, the requests

have gradually produced a new kind of “aeolian subject,” composed by heterogeneous aspirations animated by the movement of air (Howe 2019, 24).

In fact, the language of the requests appeals to Jemeiwaa Kai’s kin-like obligation toward the Wayúu. Many requests revolve around situations that are culturally meaningful and politically salient, such as funerals and compensation payments based on Wayúu law (those partaking in these events often belong to Wayúu networks of kinship). During funerals, and especially second burials, hosts are expected to distribute large quantities of food, alcohol, and gifts (especially goats) to hundreds of guests for several days. These enormous demonstrations of generosity—as in the first request above—require gifts from kin that in turn reflect the host’s standing. Similarly, Wayúu internal disputes—such as in the second request above, in which an Epiayúu petitioner explains that a family member has committed a fault against a Sijona clan member—are often resolved through a compensation (*maiina*) in the form of cattle, necklaces, and money. The compensation seeks to restore the value (*ojutu*) lost by the injury or offense (Guerra Curvelo 2002, 177) and is often paid collectively by the aggressor’s matrilineal family (*apüshi*). These material expressions of solidarity or *ounuwawa* are meant to be reciprocal, as the members of the *apüshi*—including the aggressor—are expected to make contributions in future disputes involving their kin. All these practices are widely regarded as inherent to Wayúu social life, taking place since time immemorial.

The requests thus produce value for the recipients since they allow them to construct and expand relations across social time and space via the funds divested by the corporation (Munn 1986, 9). While they keep up the flow of vehicles, equipment, and permits (critical for the wind farm), they also enable recipients to amplify their social worlds and their reputation by relying on corporate funds to carry out forms of gift giving in scenarios such as funerals or internal

disputes. In this sense, the gifts of Jemeiwaa Kai contribute to creating a kind of “communal value,” that is, “the value a community regards as essential to its viability” (Munn 1986, 3). “Communal value” does not point to an egalitarian social order without internal differentiation (which would diverge from the deeply hierarchical and heavily decentralized arrangements of the Wayúu, as I describe in the introduction). Indeed, Munn’s analysis implies that a person can augment or reduce their universe of social relations through the production of positive or negative value. Here I suggest that recipients seek to attain goods from Jemeiwaa Kai that create positive value, which heightens their maternal kin’s social standing in ways that have nothing to do with profit or maximized utility, but rather with social status and political influence. Access to these goods is thus a marker of distinction for extended matrilineal families that can either cement already existing inequalities or rearrange them in surprising ways (since the windiest areas do not easily align with the territory of the most powerful matrilineal families).

The recipients’ power is visible in their regular and harsh complaints about their rejected applications: the accusations of cheapness regarding some gifts, the lengthy wait times, or the needless bureaucratic rigor. Recipients are almost always active in voicing their discontent and exerting their power to make Jemeiwaa Kai come forward with their requests. Unhappy recipients often threaten to stop corporate vehicles from entering their land or to remove wind energy equipment – actions that delay or derail key components of the project. In extreme cases, which spark panic in Uribia and Bogotá, recipients have called Antonio telling him, even after years of ongoing conversations and exchanges, that they are no longer interested in the wind farm. For workers in Bogotá, disgruntled residents are viewed as a menacing force – even more so than atmospheric turbulence or financial risk – one that can put the project in jeopardy. Thus, rather than a “free” and homogeneous resource that can be always tapped in to, access to wind in

La Guajira is thus precarious, depending on the fragile calibration of potentially unstable relations with Wayúu communities living underneath it.

The strong critiques concerning the requests not only disclose their limits and imperfections. They also sustain them as legitimate modes of ongoing engagement. It is precisely because the Wayúu threaten and, on occasion, stop corporate work entirely that the gifts remain almost always in circulation, ensuring the commercial flow of energy stemming from the wind. The gift of *their* wind, and abeyance in tearing down energy infrastructure or stopping access to their land, is what is exchanged for these requests. This hints at how wind energy projects can be socially “productive” and activate new “forms of politics” (Powell 2018, 37) that take place within the realm of capitalist forms of value production but rather in the moral milieu of *ounuwawa*.

Operating in the domain of gifts and obligation does not mean that the relations between Jemeiwaa Kai and Wayúu communities are devoid of power asymmetries. Still, the norms and practices that animate the system of request offer a “relational ground for militant demands for aid,” ultimately opening the space to “reconfigure extractive relations” (Winchell 2017, 161-162). To some extent, this resonates with the qualities of *compadrazgo* in Latin America, a tradition of “spiritual” kin that often binds socially unequal actors and enables certain kinds of care and mutual assistance (Gudeman 1975, 225; Mintz and Wolf 1950, 342). While Jemeiwaa Kai’s corporate interests and its desire to commodify the wind are at the center of the requests, there are other Wayúu value-making possibilities that stem from these exchanges. As Weiner argues (Weiner 1976, 203), self-interest is not antithetical to gift economies but is rather “paramount” to them. This self-interest, however, is not the utilitarian rationality of the homo economicus, nor is it grounded in a Catholic-laden idiom of *compadrazgo*; instead, it is centered

on rearranging social relations in meaningful and politically strategic ways for Wayúu recipients (Graeber 2001, 44-45). This unearths the existence of multiple, socially embedded agencies that shape the wind energy rush, complicating dichotomous understandings of global domination and local resistance, or rigid accounts of capital's entanglement with "cheap nature" (Moore 2015) that often proliferate in accounts of extraction in La Guajira.

Ultimately, the requests constitute an active terrain for conveying the ethical standards that ought to shape the harnessing of wind in La Guajira. In their criticism of corporate unwillingness to engage in proper forms of gift-giving, recipients insist on keeping a "socially thick" form of energy production, as opposed to the "socially thin" modes of profit maximization that define the capitalist ethos of extraction in many locales (Ferguson, as cited in Winchell 2017, 174). The concept of social thickness is helpful for understanding the Wayúu's demand for building relations embedded in their frameworks of value and obligation. For James Ferguson (2006, 197), social thickness alludes to a preceding model of resource extraction that pursued a "social project" of development, materialized in investments in housing, schools, and hospitals. In contrast, contemporary forms of resource extraction appear as "socially thin," that is, "depend ever less on wide societal investments" (Ferguson 2006, 36). Requests can be read as an attempt to avoid making wind energy into a "socially thin" enterprise. A vital part of this social thickness is that these ever-unfolding sets of obligations are not supposed to end once the consultation agreements are signed or the wind farms are built, but are expected to extend far into the future.

For critics of wind energy, however, the requests continue to be evaluated as disingenuous and predatory bonds that seek to appease Indigenous opposition, or as deeply disproportionate acts by which companies can accumulate profits from the wind in exchange for what is often characterized as humanitarian aid (food, water, and medical care), which the Colombian state

fails to adequately deliver (see introduction). In fact, a constellation of NGOs, journalists, teachers, union members, anthropologists, human rights activists, and Wayúu leaders living alongside current and future wind farms identify similar risks arising from the wind energy rush, from poor consultation practices and unfair payments for the harnessing of wind to indirect forms of displacement and a resurgence of internal, clan-based disputes (see Noriega 2020; Rubiano 2021). Many of these critics posit that, through these gifts, Jemeiwaa Kai is breaching the imagined division between the corporation and the community, one that needs to remain delimited to have transparent, objective, and free consultations. From this angle, the requests are a form of forced indebtedness or implicit coercion that seeks to secure consent in a starkly unequal setting (see Taussig 1997, 60-73).⁵

While many of the criticisms against wind power in La Guajira are important, profoundly legitimate, and capture a widespread sentiment of skepticism (Barney 2021b, 2021c; Guerra Curvelo 2021), what is equally reprehensible for Indigenous communities living in corporate perimeters is the refusal to distribute gifts, embrace an ethics of obligation, and keep a rigid separation between corporate and Indigenous worlds through due diligence principles and audit cultures. On one occasion, I went with a Wayúu friend, Pablo Epiayúu, to a perimeter of the Jouktai wind project (see epilogue), owned by different corporation (ISAGEN). When we arrived, he was shocked to find acquaintances experiencing food scarcity. Before leaving on his motorcycle, he disappointedly told me, “I can’t believe it. They’re planning to put a wind farm here and they can’t even bring a few *mercados*.” The meaning of wind theft, for Pablo at least,

⁵ As Robert Nichols theorizes, dispossession can be achieved through many forms, from violent coercion to peaceful interventions that are based on consent (Nichols 2020, 88). Some of these peaceful strategies, especially in the context of contemporary multicultural regimes, constitutes what he calls “rituals of antiwill” – as acts and mechanisms that “register the will and consent of racialized and colonized subjects through acts of self-abnegation” (Nichols 2020, 118).

resided in the moral failure of engaging in unreciprocated exchanges: the act of harnessing wind in exchange for nothing. This does not mean that Pablo, or other Wayúu interlocutors, thought that donations of food, water, and medical care were sufficient for creating a just transition. For many interlocutors, the distributions of gifts did not override the fact that the wind energy rush is deeply speculative, unequal, and tilted in favor of corporate and state actors. Yet, the system of requests does render visible the new terrains of action that are arising in La Guajira, revealing how the “meaning and practice of transition and sustainability is far from self-evident or settled” (Powell 2018, 9). Here, questions about energy and climate change have to do not only with wind speeds and atmospheric conditions, nor just with kinship charts that try to map and enclose wind, but also with Indigenous frameworks of obligation and value.

Conclusion: The Ambivalent Reciprocity of Wind

The circulation of gifts that binds Jemeiwaa Kai and Wayúu communities shows how wind corporations in La Guajira seek to build long-term relations that strive to align themselves with Wayúu social expectations and cultural forms. The everyday labor of keeping these gifts circulating has similar stakes than building power lines or assembling wind turbines in the middle of the desert. As such, they are the condition of possibility of the uninterrupted harnessing of wind. By engaging with Jemeiwaa Kai through the Wayúu ethics of reciprocity, residents of the perimeters are in turn capable of shaping the wind energy rush and negotiating—however partially—what a carbon-neutral future might look like.

Such exchanges take place even while wind energy is evaluated by many Wayúu as a form of extraction that mimics prior extractive moments: “socially thin” investments driven by foreign capital and disconnected from local development needs, whose gift-giving practices operate as coercive strategies. To be sure, despite the state’s intent of increasing renewable energy

twentyfold by 2022, there are no plans to electrify La Guajira or substantially expand other basic services. All of this continues to reinforce the notion that wind energy erases Wayúu collective aspirations (Noriega 2020).

Nonetheless, the cultural meaning and social entailments of gift giving highlight that extraction, as a concept for theorizing wind energy in La Guajira, falls short of fully accounting for the range of interactions that surface around carbon-neutral energy regimes. It leaves aside what Gómez-Barris (2017) has called the “submerged perspectives”: the social worlds that lie *within* extractive spaces. Such perspectives expose the requests as practices that produce “communal value” (Munn 1986, 20), expanding a person’s universe of social relations in ways that exceed the language of growth, capital, and environmental compensations. Requests thus disclose the variegated interactions, ethical predicaments, and forms of value production that take place on the ground between those who live alongside the wind and the outsiders who now aspire to harness its force.

Finally, the *solicitudes* demonstrate that land-based jurisdiction—which de facto regulates the airspace immediately above Wayúu land—is critical for Indigenous contestations around renewable energy. As Arturo Escobar (2008, 30) has demonstrated, place is a “crucial dimension of the making not only of local and regional worlds, but also of hegemonies and resistance to them.” Place-based sovereignty can become a standpoint for thinking of alternative models of energy transition that exceed those animated by capital reproduction and state governmentality (see epilogue). Indeed, for the Wayúu, their constitutionally protected land enables a certain kind of power, even under highly unequal conditions. And this territorial configuration has the potential of entangling wind to Indigenous aspirations, rights, and positive futurities.

While this chapter has analyzed how Indigenous moral economies configure corporate-Indigenous engagement on the ground, the next chapter focuses on the dynamics and risks that emerge when the entanglement between indigeneity and wind power breaks down. It will analyze a 9-month strike by Wayúu residents against the Jepirachi wind farm, attending to the multiple, ambiguous versions of what triggered it and its implications for the wind energy rush. Rather than being a failure of technical and engineering-based expertise, this interruption, I will show, was a crisis centered around Wayúu paradigms for ordering airspace (including the failure of kinship charts and gift-giving practices to sustain the wind farm's operation). In so doing, it will bring to light how Wayúu spatiotemporal domains and human and nonhuman agencies, materialized vividly in their ancestral cemeteries, are forces that can unravel the utopias of wind energy capitalism.

Chapter 3

Interruption:

Cemeteries, Infrastructures, and Wind Struggles at Jepirachi

“There was Nothing but Wind”

Héctor Pana’s funeral was held on a sweltering afternoon in his native *rancheria*¹ Karakachon, or Little Caracas, a rural community named after Venezuela’s capital city. Héctor, who was in his late 50s, had passed away unexpectedly from a stroke a few days after I had visited him outside his home. The funeral was attended by hundreds of guests, ranging from Héctor’s extensive kin of the Epiayúu clan² (who had travelled from different parts of Colombia and Venezuela) to local politicians, state bureaucrats, and business owners. A few minutes before his burial, I greeted Maria, Hector’s sister, who pulled out her phone and showed me a picture of our meeting the week before. Together we recalled how Héctor, wearing his *Ray-Ban* sunglasses and Wayúu hat, used his *warara*³ to draw in the sand and recount his version of *el paro* (or the stoppage) against the Jepirachi wind farm, a 9-month occupation that opposed two Wayúu clans (the Pushaina and the Epiayúu) and Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM, or Public Enterprises of Medellín), the owner and operator of the project. Between 2016 and 2017, this stoppage threatened to undo the first wind energy project in Colombia.⁴

According to Héctor, in the early 1900s an Epiayúu man crossed paths with an enemy in a remote trail of the peninsula, near Bahía Honda. Armed with a smuggled Winchester rifle from

¹ This is a local, Spanish term for a rural Wayúu community.

² As I describe in the introduction, the Wayúu have about 22 matrilineal clans (*eirriküs*), which are deeply hierarchical in terms of political and economic status.

³ A wooden cane frequently used by elders and specialists in Wayúu law or *pütchipü ü*.

⁴ While the interruption was called a strike (drawing from the idiom of labor politics), it was not a conflict started or sustained by Wayúu workers of the wind farm, but rather by communities who claimed political authority over the land where the project was located, either by virtue of living near the infrastructure (Pushainas) or by having an ancestral cemetery nearby (Epiayúu).

the Dutch Antilles,⁵ the Epiayúu impulsively decided to kill his enemy. Fearing vengeance from the deceased's kin,⁶ the Epiayúu and his kin migrated to an unoccupied coastal area, where a century later, in 2003, the Jepirachi wind farm would be built (see Map 5). The Epiayúu group lived there until the 1940s and established an ancestral cemetery (*amouyuu*) – the most substantial marker of clan-based sovereignty over land.⁷ Yet, they left this coastal area since the land was inhospitably windy. “There was nothing but wind,” Héctor told me that afternoon, decrying its lack of groundwater, rain, and vegetation – necessary for sustaining their abundant goat herds.⁸ The Epiayúu thus migrated 80 miles southward and finally settled in Karakachon – a more forested, watered, and windless place where Héctor's remains now rest. The Pushainas (the other clan involved in the dispute) came to occupy the coastal area left behind by the Epiayúu (since they lack large goat herds) and, nearly a century later, would become the main beneficiaries of the Jepirachi wind farm (inaugurated in 2003).⁹

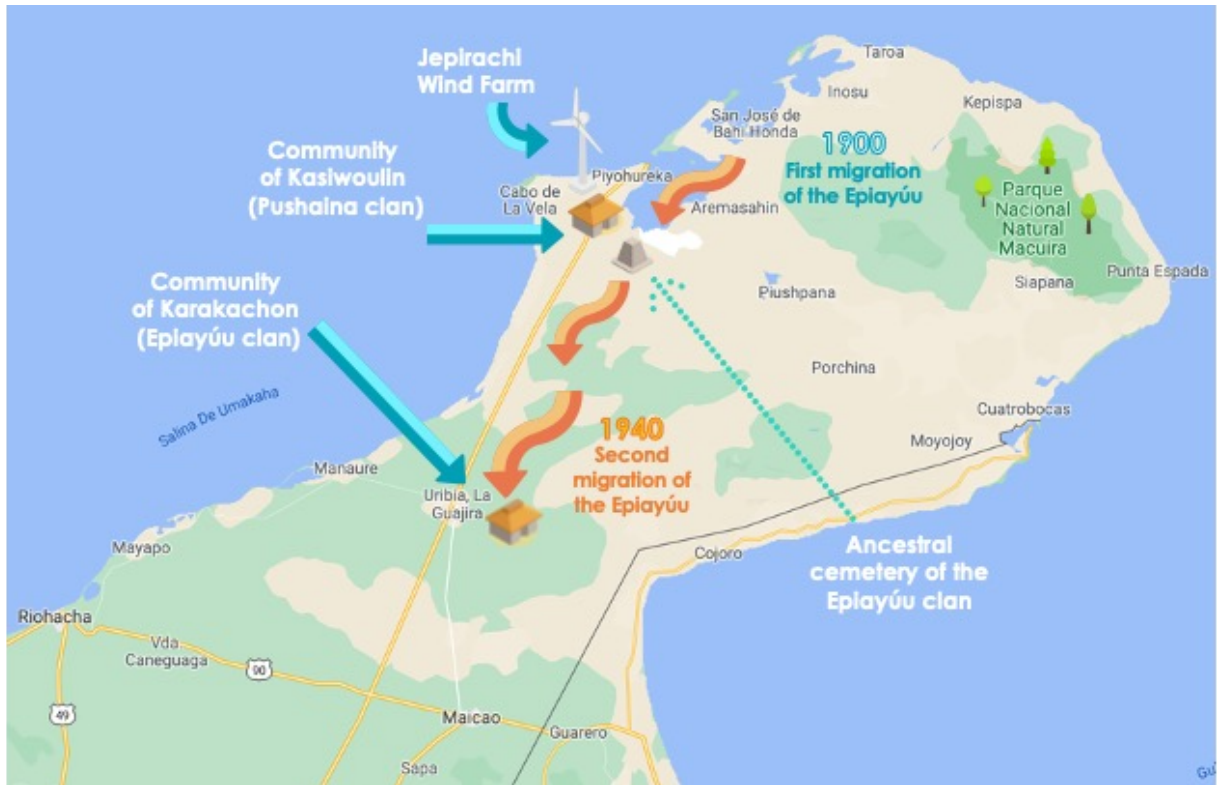
⁵ As I note in the introduction, the Wayúu have long held commercial relations with the neighboring islands of Aruba and Curaçao and the broader Caribbean.

⁶ Clan-based conflicts are an intrinsic part of Wayúu history. These disputes are regularly resolved through a system of compensation based on customary law (*Sükuait'pa Wayúu*) but, in some cases, they can spiral into long and often inter-generational wars. See Guerra Curvelo (2002).

⁷ These are cemeteries used for second burials, where a person's remains are placed a few years after their death and which are in their clan's ancestral land (unlike cemeteries used for primary burials, which have minor political significance) (Goulet 1981).

⁸ As a result of the European colonial presence, the Wayúu heavily embraced pastoralism (especially of goats), which currently shapes many areas of their everyday life, from patterns of seasonal migration to gift giving practices. See Introduction.

⁹ Ironically, the wind's hostility, which prompted the Epiayúu to leave the coastal area in the 1940s, would in the early 2000s attract Colombian capital seeking to harness those same conditions with the aim of producing renewable energy



Map 5. Location of the Communities of Kasiwoulin (Pushaina clan) and Karakachon (Epiayú clan) and the Jeparachi Wind Farm (Source: Google Maps)

Why did Héctor explain the stoppages that took place between 2016-2017 in the Jeparachi wind farm by telling of a century long succession of armed altercations, migration, and burial practices that far preceded the ongoing wind power rush? I start with Héctor's account precisely because it posits an alternative narrative about the longest and most consequential renewable energy conflict in Colombia's recent history – an episode that brought to light how the Wayúu's networks of living and deceased kin can radically inflect the infrastructural operations of wind energy. The Jeparachi stoppage was a 9-month protest by which the Pushaina and Epiayú clans, at different times, shut down the wind farm's 15 turbines, occupied the main electric substation, and blocked the entrance of staff and corporate vehicles from EPM. The stoppage paralyzed energy production for nearly a year. Yet rather than a crisis triggered by techno-material or atmospheric conditions, or by social movements against neoliberal resource extraction (Kirsch

2014, Sawyer 2004), Héctor's account lays bare how the stoppage must be situated within longer histories of clan-based conflicts and cemetery-based epistemologies that ultimately helped define who could claim authority over the territory where the Jepirachi wind farm rested.

More importantly, the fact that my conversation with María occurred at Hector's gravesite raises further questions about the place of cemeteries as sites that configure a mode of ordering land, and ultimately, wind in La Guajira. As Wayúu anthropologist Weidler Guerra Curvelo argues (2002), rather than mere repositories of bodily remains, cemeteries operate as chronotopes: they are spatiotemporal domains that condense memories, histories of migration, and genealogies of kin that delineate the past and future. Cemeteries are, to some degree, infrastructural, since they enable the circulation of bodily remains across time and space (between primary and secondary burials), which, at the same time, modulates the circulation of people, goats, resources, gifts, and power. Since deceased kin are felt to preside over actions and collective decisions even after their death, cemeteries often lay the groundwork for forms of political contestation that seek to reimagine how wind energy ought to work and to what ends. By noting the creation of an ancestral cemetery in the 1940s, Héctor made explicit why his clan (the Epiayúu) had a right over the land of the Jepirachi wind farm in a way that radically departed from state-based and corporate understandings of Indigenous territoriality—which outsiders commonly apply to the Wayúu and which, in this case, had privileged the Pushaina (the other clan involved in the dispute). It was the friction around competing paradigms of connecting people, land, and wind put forth by the Pushainas and the Epiayúu (and EPM's arbitrary shifts in their criteria of recognition) that triggered the near destruction of Colombia's first renewable energy project.

This chapter explores the multiple and contrasting versions of what triggered the stoppages at Jepirachi and what they mean for the broader wind energy rush. It analyzes how the stoppages opposed two Indigenous paradigms for claiming authority over land and wind. The first was based on present-day occupation of land (relied upon by the Pushainas, who live near the Jepirachi wind farm) and enshrined in Colombian multiculturalist law, which shapes state and corporate engagements when it comes to Wayúu territoriality. For the Pushainas, decision-making power is contingent on the actual occupation of land and attendant forms of bureaucratic recognition. The second paradigm was grounded in Wayúu social, political, and cultural relations that revolve around cemeteries. From this perspective, cemeteries operate as indexes of autochthony, signaling a prior occupation evidenced in the graves of ancestors (and the bodily remains of deceased kin occupying those sites). While they currently live over 80 miles away from the wind farm itself, the Epiayúu relied on this paradigm to lay claims to the land of the project, as Héctor recounted in the beginning. Both paradigms posited a different answer to the question of what it means to be “from a place,” as a source of legitimate ownership over land and wind.

The breakdown of Jepirachi brought to light the competing ways in which Indigenous authority over land, and its elevation into the sky, are being articulated and reimagined as Colombia aspires to increase renewable energy production. Although these stoppages are not uncommon in a region with a violent history of carbon-based extraction,¹⁰ the Jepirachi breakdown was unprecedented not only in its duration and the degree of infrastructural damage it caused, but also because it highlighted the role of cemeteries as spatiotemporal and epistemic milieus that animate this novel wind struggles in La Guajira.

¹⁰ From frequent interruptions of trains carrying coal from the Cerrejón mine to more quotidian blockades of roads by individuals denouncing corruption, meager salaries for public workers, and political decisions. See Banks (2017)

A copious literature has illuminated how episodes of breakdown reveal the circulatory ideologies, socioeconomic foundations, and political ends of infrastructures (Anand 2017; Appel, Anand, and Gupta, 2018; Chu 2014; Star and Ruhleder 1996).¹¹ For example, the failure of an off-shore drilling rig might expose how its architectural design and everyday operations are predicated on producing *distance* between oil drilling and any onshore social and political contingency (Appel 2012, 703). Breakdowns not only stem from contradictions already inscribed in the material and semiotic design of infrastructures (Von Schnitzler 2016), but also from the multiple and unforeseen ways these objects are used, rearranged, and signified in social life (Barry 2013, 119). Episodes of breakdown can also accentuate the hierarchies instigated by infrastructure (e.g., the tampering of electric meters can lead to more stringent forms of surveillance, see (von Schnitzler 2013). But they can also engender alternative modes of sociality that move past them (Schwenkel 2015, 522). That is why infrastructures are fertile grounds for conceptualizing the relation between people, things, and environments. In this chapter I draw on the analytic of infrastructure insofar as the Jepirachi stoppage was primarily centered on the location of the wind turbines, electric substations, and high-voltage lines, as opposed to labor conditions, the share of revenue distributed by EPM to local communities, or the socioenvironmental consequences of wind power (though these remain highly contentious issues, see Barney 2021a, 2021c; Noriega 2020; Rubiano 2021).

The breakdown of Jepirachi, I argue, was less a disruption of the technical and engineering-based expertise of wind energy infrastructure than a crisis centered on Wayúu paradigms of ordering airspace that sustained in fundamental ways the project's operations. Far removed from the corporate logics of calculation and anticipation, the interruption was provoked by EPM's

¹¹ In Brian Larkin's classic definition, infrastructures "are things and also the relation between things" (2013, 329).

inability to calibrate multiple Wayúu and state-recognized temporal and spatial domains and human and nonhuman agencies vis-à-vis wind energy. But the interruption also served to “shake up common presuppositions of who and what counts, what measures and exchanges matter” (Chu 2014, 353). It thus unsettled Colombia’s multiculturalist apparatus and its capacity to seamlessly regulate land and wind across Wayúu land, a framework that was relied upon by EPM since the moment it built Jepirachi in 2003. And, in so doing, it brought to light other unexpected ways of claiming rights over wind –grounded in the spatial politics of Wayúu cemeteries.

In the next section, I offer a brief history of the Jepirachi wind farm, a pioneering venture credited not only for having “discovered” the wind flows of Colombia in the 1990s, but also for founding the model of energy production that sought the intimate articulation with Wayúu indigeneity (an approach that was later adopted by Colombia’s green energy industry, including Jemeiwaa Kai, as I discuss in the introduction). Subsequently, I describe the series of stoppages that took place between 2016-2017, opposing the Epiayúu and Pushaina clans and EPM. I then discuss the aftermath of this conflict for Jepirachi and the remaining 57 wind farms that are being licensed, designed, and slowly built in La Guajira. I conclude by reflecting on how the interruption of Jepirachi offers a unique vantage point for rethinking the relation between infrastructure, resource sovereignty, and indigeneity.

The “Experiment”

Jepirachi was designed and built by EPM, a state-owned utilities company that generates nearly a quarter of Colombia’s electricity, mostly through a network of 25 hydroelectric plants. Formally created in 1955, EPM is owned by the city of Medellin (the second largest urban center in Colombia) to which it provides energy, gas, water, and telecommunication services. Currently,

it is the third largest corporation of Colombia with investments and projects in Panama, Guatemala, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, the U.S., and Spain.¹²

The history of EPM goes back to the late 19th century, as the city of Medellín launched publicly owned enterprises that would build, manage, and modernize the urban electric grid, the tram, and telephone and water infrastructures. By the early 20th century, the slate of public enterprises that would later be consolidated as EPM boosted Medellín's industrial development, especially its textile industry.¹³ The industrial boom prompted a strong demand for electricity. Indeed, in some cases, textile corporations provided loans and technical support to EPM to finish key hydroelectric projects in the state of Antioquia (e.g., Riogrande and Guadalupe II) to avoid interruptions in their energy supply. The top managers of EPM in the 1950s also had close ties to the private sector. Yet, as a municipal entity, EPM was charged with the task of delivering affordable services and accessible public infrastructure to Medellín's growing urban population, including its poorest sectors (Empresas Públicas de Medellín 2000, 45-46).

Beyond its impact in Medellín and the department of Antioquia, EPM became a key agent for meeting Colombia's energy demand. In the 1960s and 1970s, they built a series of large-scale hydroelectric plants (e.g., Guadalupe III and IV, Peñol-Guatapé, Riogrande I and II), which laid the groundwork for establishing the National Electric Grid (Sistema Interconectado Nacional). Such works fashioned EPM as a technocratic and depoliticized entity, concerned with devising engineering solutions for the city's service provision and responsible for the careful management of Antioquia's abundant hydrological resources. The headquarters of the company in Medellín,

¹² <https://www.epm.com.co/site/epmmexico/home/conoce-nuestra-casa-matriz/historia-de-epm/historia-energia#undefined>

¹³ By the 1920s, 11 out of the 13 biggest Colombian textile companies were based in the Medellín area, including La Compañía Antioqueña de Tejidos, the Fabricato in Bello and Rosellón in Envigado (Empresas Públicas de Medellín 2000, 14).

the Smart Building, or *Edificio Inteligente* (Fig. 16), reflects this corporate ethos of technological efficiency vis-à-vis environmental stewardship.¹⁴ But EPM’s image of an environmentalist corporation was enacted in other ways. As part of its Corporate Social Responsibility policy, the company invested heavily in cleaning up the Medellín River, carried out reforestation plans, and funded the construction of several ecological parks (e.g., El Peñol reservoir or the ecological park Piedras Blancas) (Empresas Públicas de Medellín 2000, 72-73). It also developed more stringent environmental standards for their current and future energy projects.



Figure 16. The “Smart Building” in Medellín, EPM’s corporate headquarters (Source: Photo by Author)

Yet, as a hydropower giant, EPM also accrued a negative reputation due to the environmental destruction and social dislocations caused by their dams. One example is the Punchiná Dam, which displaced nearly 800 people from Guatapé and flooded an entire town (El Peñol)

¹⁴ Built in 1997 in ways that mimic Lloyd’s building in London (where ducts, elevators, and other circulatory elements are on the exterior side), the concrete, steel, and glass structure contains numerous outdoor fountains and vertical gardens. The headquarters was also classified as the first “green” office building in Colombia.

(Empresas Públicas de Medellín 2000, 61). More recently, the Hidroituango Dam (a project that will supply 20 percent of Colombia’s energy when finished) has already impacted surrounding ecologies along the Cauca River (Torres Sierra 2021, 10), from forced displacement of communities and damages to the riverine ecosystem to the threat of extinction of plant and animal life.

In the late 1990s, EPM began exploring the unfamiliar field of wind energy as the company drafted its expansion plan for the next decade. After researching turbine technology and business models, EPM concluded that, while wind energy would not be profitable in Colombia until 2010, local opposition to dams would swell over time. It also determined that climate change-induced droughts –through lengthier El Niño events– would gradually jeopardize their hydropower network (heightening the risk of prolonged nationwide blackouts, as occurred in 1992-1993).¹⁵ Wind power – their research determined – would sooner or later become a critical option for EPM’s financial survival, as Colombia’s electricity market became increasingly deregulated in the 1990s and the government sought to break its dependence on hydropower.

Jepirachi was launched as an “experimental” project that would prepare EPM for a future wind energy economy. But its experimental condition, as several EPM staff members recounted to me, also derived from the fact that it spearheaded the “discovery” of wind in Colombia. It not only pioneered research on the legal and infrastructural chokepoints for wind power, but also visualized for the first time the country’s wind flows through numerical data (see Fig. 17). Drawing on anecdotes, airport data, and photographs of sloping trees, EPM began collecting information on wind speeds through dozens of meters on the Caribbean coast, which yielded

¹⁵ The blackout and subsequent electricity rationing that took place between 1992-1993 was also triggered by several hydroelectric projects that had been delayed for years. As a result of the blackout, the government pushed for greater investment in energy, deregulating the electric sector and pushing for a greater diversification of energy sources (beyond hydropower).

ample quantitative evidence. The meters made legible *el recurso* (the resource), as corporate workers usually refer to the wind, and confirmed La Guajira as the most optimal site for wind energy development in the country. The quality of the wind stemmed from its speed, unidirectional flow, and low turbulence year-round. Though most wind farms must cope with abrupt oscillations of speed and turbulence that affect their functioning and output, the wind of La Guajira proved to be both strong and yet controllable: it could be harnessed at large scales with minimal or no risk of interruption. Such numerical visualization of wind, as a movement of air that was predictable and quantifiable, differed from the phenomenological experience of wind in La Guajira. On an everyday level, as the opening scene with Héctor reveals, the wind was often evaluated as a predatory force that dried up the land, destroyed vegetation and houses, threatened the survival of goat herds, and forced Wayúu residents to migrate south – in search for less windy and arid areas. It also diverged from the Wayúu ontological frameworks that situate wind, and other atmospheric phenomena, as more-than-human beings with agency, intentionality, and emotional temperaments (see Introduction). Yet, for EPM, the wind, as a novel energy resource, was primarily a set of numbers that conveyed geometric variations in speed, directionality, and turbulence.¹⁶

¹⁶ Wind speed measurements are proprietary knowledge and tend to be highly confidential datasets. In fact, despite repeated attempts, I was never given permission by EPM or Jemeiwaa Jai to peruse their numerical wind speed data.

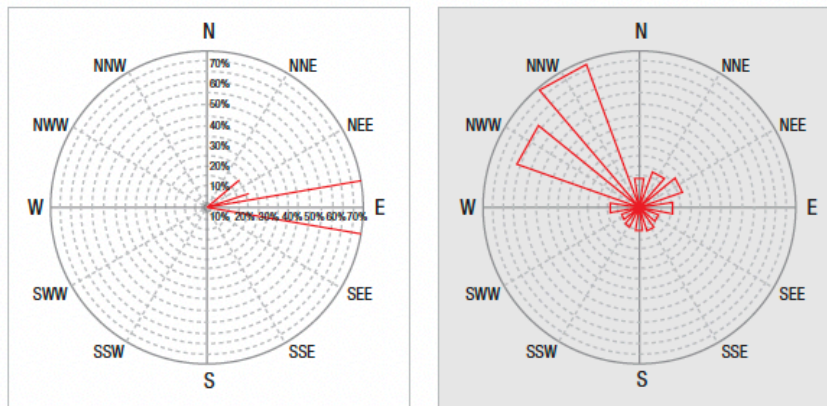


Figure 17. Wind Rose Graphic Displaying the Speed and Direction of the Wind in La Guajira (left) and a Site in Germany (right) (Source: Aristizábal Guevara 2004)

Note: As the image shows, the direction of wind in La Guajira comes exclusively from the east, which makes it more predictable in terms of turbine design and operation.

Jepirachi was dubbed an experiment since it was also the first time that EPM had developed a project within an Indigenous *resguardo* – a constitutionally protected territory that cannot be privatized, expropriated, or rented out. For EPM, the inability to privatize the land surrounding Jepirachi meant navigating a complex field of Indigenous jurisdiction. The densely forested mountains and agricultural communities that supported EPM’s hydropower network in Antioquia also contrasted with the dry tropical forest and arid landscapes of La Guajira– a borderland notorious for its absence of roads and basic services, rampant political corruption, intermittent geopolitical tensions with Venezuela, and cross-border illicit trade. The minimal state presence and Wayúu de facto sovereignty over the windiest areas of the peninsula made EPM skeptical about the entire viability of Jepirachi.

There was also uncertainty about the legal qualities of the wind as a new resource. Despite its abundance and being technically “free,” wind has an indeterminate legal, material, and political status, as I describe in the introduction. At the time, it also occupied a grey area in terms of Colombia’s tax legislation, which contrasted with the ample regulations of hydrological

sources.¹⁷ In La Guajira, however, air flows that seem to belong to no one are controlled *de facto* by the Indigenous actors living on the land below (since wind can only be harnessed via technologies on the ground.) Thus, the prospects of building and operating Jepirachi depended heavily on the willingness of Wayúu communities to provide their windy land for the installation of turbines and high voltage lines, which meant that interruptions could arise less from adverse atmospheric conditions or technical failures than from those living alongside energy infrastructure. Hence, unlike EPM's hydropower infrastructure, which required a careful calibration of human and non-human ecologies, water, and consumer demand (see also Carse 2014; Folch 2019), Jepirachi called for a type of calculus centered around indigeneity, especially around Indigenous sociopolitical paradigms that connected people, land, and wind.

Just as EPM's team of engineers surveyed the peninsula's wind, another team led by a young anthropologist from Medellín, Ana María, evaluated the sociopolitical conditions that would ensure a feasible and low-risk project. After working in the Urabá in her early 20s – a region of Antioquia heavily affected by Colombia's armed conflict– on peacebuilding and development initiatives, she was hired by EPM to assess whether Wayúu communities would provide their land for the Jepirachi wind farm. She became deeply knowledgeable of the intricacies of Wayúu law, kinship, and land tenure rules. And she established long-term, intimate relations with dozens of Wayúu families in La Guajira. “It was almost like an ethnography”, she told me during an interview in her office in Medellín. “We had to build trust and learn about their culture... This was a gradual process. And since corporations lack a face, we kind of embodied EPM on the ground.” Her rapport set the groundwork for an unprecedented three-year consultation process,

¹⁷ For example, hydropower companies must contribute 6 percent of all energy sales to the municipalities where their projects are based. Such contributions are meant to support environmental conservation efforts, development plans, and municipal budgets (Empresas Públicas de Medellín 2000, 98).

aligned with the principle of Colombia's multiculturalist constitution (1991), which contained many of the provisions of international Indigenous rights frameworks (e.g., ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989), such as the right to cultural and linguistic diversity, land tenure systems, political participation, and free, prior, and informed consent. The consultation with Wayúu communities was the first attempt to apply Colombia's multiculturalist apparatus in the realm of wind power.¹⁸ After 25 meetings marked by intense debates, the wind farm was approved by two Wayúu communities that, according to the Ministry of the Interior, had territorial jurisdiction over the area (the Pushainas of Kasiwoulin and the Epiayúu of Arujkajui).¹⁹

EPM made an alliance with the German Development Agency (GTZ) and wind turbine production company NORDEX to start building Jepirachi. About 18 months later, the project was inaugurated with great fanfare by then President Álvaro Uribe Vélez in 2003, making national and international headlines that celebrated the beginning of Colombia's transition to "clean" energy. The US\$28 million wind farm, made up of 15 turbines (each about 20 stories high), was divided into two rows across 75 acres (see Fig. 18). Jepirachi only produced 19.5 megawatts (barely 0.4 % of Colombia's wind energy potential), but it quickly became branded as Colombia's flagship project for climate change mitigation, even though it barely altered hydropower or thermal energy production.²⁰ The wind farm was labelled as a "technological innovation" by the Administrative Department of Science, Technology, and Innovation

¹⁸ Morris (2021a) and Lyons (2020) track a parallel process as Colombia's post-conflict legal architecture was extended into other domains such as soil and subterranean space.

¹⁹ The community of Arujkajui remain largely neutral during the 9-month stoppage, as the conflict opposed the Epiayúu of Karakachon who were contesting the rights of the Pushainas of Kasiwoulin.

²⁰ In fact, wind energy executives speak less of a clear-cut movement away from fossil fuels or hydropower than about forms of complementarity –where wind energy is meant to support the current energy matrix (i.e., an "addition" rather than a transition, (Bonneuil and Frescoz 2016, 101). In fact, most of the investments animating the wind energy rush come from Colombian hydropower companies, such as Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM), Celsia, and ISAGEN.

(COLCIENCIAS) and was also publicized by the World Bank (who provided funding) as an encouraging example that could be replicated elsewhere (Ledec, Rapp, and Aiello 2011).

Following Jepirachi, the Colombian government became slowly invested in attracting domestic and global “green” energy capital, granting fiscal and regulatory concessions for future projects.



Figure 18. The Jepirachi Wind Farm (Source: Photo by Author)

During its first decade of operation, Jepirachi transformed the lives of the surrounding Wayúu communities, radically shifting local valuations of wind. Beyond a multiple, more-than-human being that was responsible for climatological injustices (Paz Ipuana 2016, 44-45; Perrin 1987b), or an erratic force that moved coal particles from the nearby mining company’s trains onto their land and covered everything with dust (bodies, clothes, hammocks, motorcycles, cars, and cell phones), the wind came to signal the promise of material benefits and future forms of prosperity.

This promise was most vividly materialized in jobs, the provision of basic services (especially drinking water), and EPM-funded development programs. About two dozen Wayúu were hired full- and part-time as security personnel as well as cleaning and maintenance staff. These stable, salaried jobs sparked a sudden influx of money and consumer goods, from motorcycles and outboard engines for fishermen working on the nearby seaside to cell phones and diesel electricity generators. Jepirachi's promise was equally manifested in EPM's investment in water infrastructure. The wind funded a million-dollar desalinization plant and local aqueduct, both built by EPM, which delivered drinking water to people's homes (in a region where 90 percent of residents have no running water). EPM also sponsored housing programs, renovations in schools and health centers, and the construction of fishing infrastructure. Rather than remaining in the background, Jepirachi's infrastructure was meant to be hyper-visible, serving both as proof of corporate virtue and as actions that would ensure EPM's continual access to the wind above Wayúu land.

In addition to these interventions, EPM fashioned Jepirachi as a project that would enable a certain flourishing of Wayúu indigeneity. The wind was not just a space for devising utopic futures, where energy crises instigated by severe weather events are technically contained, but also an atmospheric force that was vested with a certain aesthetic dimension. According to corporate documents, Jepirachi was designed in ways that would articulate atmospheric resources, infrastructures, and Indigenous culture.²¹ Indeed, a promotional booklet of EPM published a few years after the project was completed, underscored how “the construction and development of the project did not displace the population... [and that] EPM sought not to interfere in the everyday activities of the Indigenous communities...” Besides minimal noise and

²¹ For similar examples around oil's entanglement with national and regional identities see Coronil (1997), Rogers (2015) and Apter (2005).

bird route disruptions, the booklet emphasized that Jepirachi had a benign presence in the landscape. Rather than an impediment to the growth of wind power, Jepirachi's developers viewed indigeneity as central to its operations.

Borrowing from *Jepirra*, the “land of the dead” in Wayúu cosmology (Perrin 1987b), the name and location of the project already made explicit reference to Indigenous notions of the afterlife. Jepirachi also diverged from the spatial arrangements of neighboring extractive infrastructures, such as the Cerrejón coal mine and Chevron's offshore natural gas platforms, marked by their enclosed, barbed wire, and highly securitized environments. The wind turbines were placed in ways that would coalesce with cemeteries, sites of mythical significance, water reservoirs, agricultural plots, and people's homes.²² The site remained open and accessible to cars, people, and goats. “The wind turbines [of Jepirachi],” the promotional booklet read, “are not enclosed, thereby the traditional land use (goat grazing and traditional agriculture) was not affected.”

In promotional billboards, EPM also depicted the tall and white turbines – in the middle of the dry tropical forest – alongside Wayúu people (see Fig. 19), conveying a certain sense of shared intimacy and mutual rootedness in La Guajira. These kinds of images foregrounded Indigenous subjects as vital, adorned in bright textiles and fabrics with the infrastructure fading into the background. Rather than an older modern/traditional juxtaposition, this aesthetics emphasized the compatibility of indigeneity and wind energy, downplaying claims that new infrastructures always carry foreign value systems and cultural logics. Instead of Wayúu communities, the intended audience for these sorts of images was for the most part national or international publics. On an everyday scale, EPM profusely funded dozens of projects aimed at

²² This was a notable shift considering that Cerrejón, which was founded in the 1980s without any consultation with local actors, destroyed or unilaterally relocated numerous Wayúu cemeteries.

“revitalizing” Wayúu cultural practices, including programs on weaving techniques, *Yonna* workshops,²³ and ceramics and ethno-medicine trainings. EPM even funded a women’s foundation (Anna Watta Kai, or Wellbeing for the Future) that was meant to serve as a grassroots, ethno-entrepreneurial development agency.

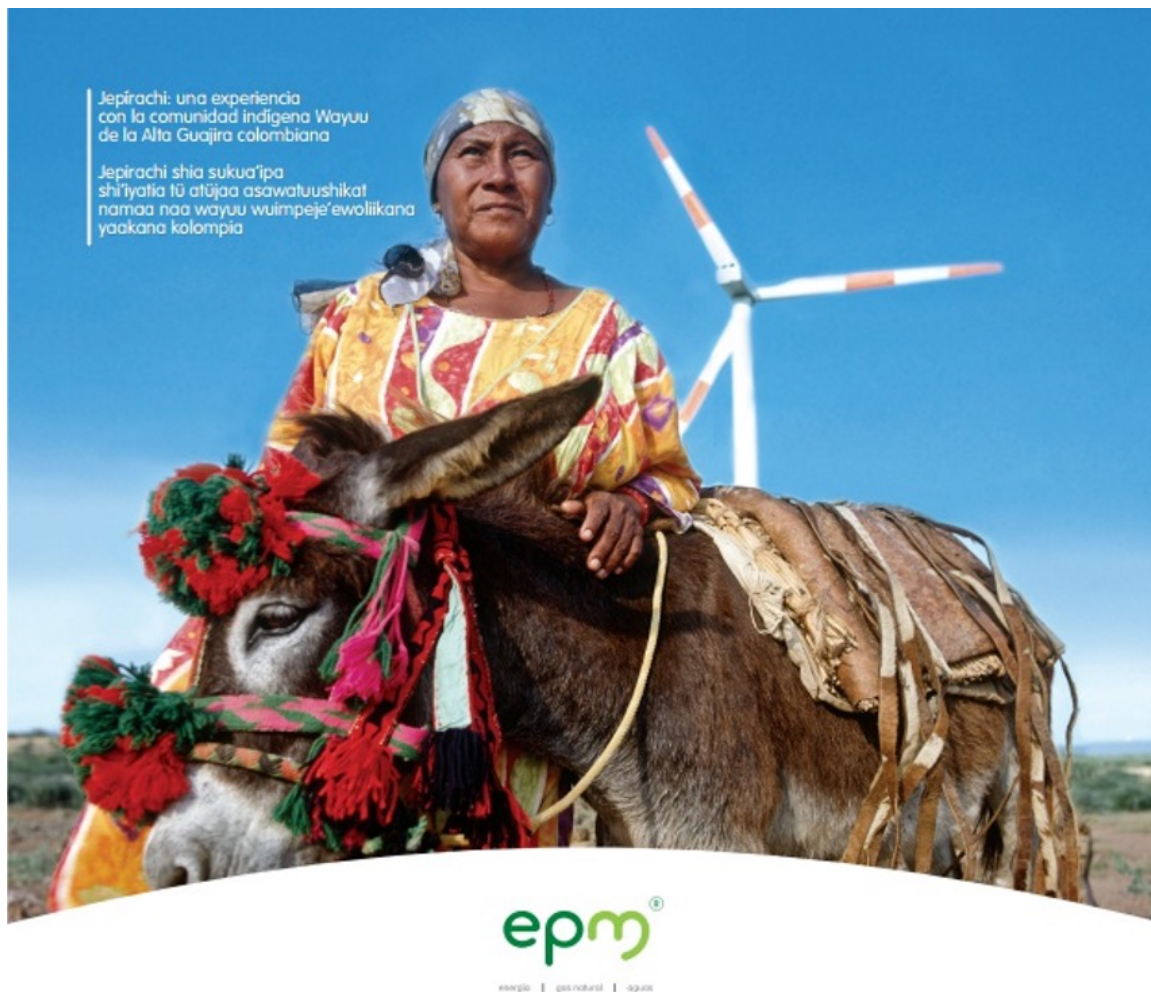


Figure 19. EPM’s Promotional Material (Source: EPM)

Note: The text reads “Jepirachi, an experience with the Wayúu communities of the Upper Guajira.”

²³ A dance that is typically performed following a female coming-of-age ritual or another critical life event—such as a shamanic initiation, illness, or the start of the rainy season (Paz Ipuana 2016, 296-97). *Yonnas* are also conducted in other settings, such as government meetings and ethno-tourism services, thereby being emblematic of the public imagination of Wayúu indigeneity.

EPM's articulation with indigeneity was part of a global transformation in corporate governance since the late 1990s, which saw the rise of regimes of corporate social responsibility as direct responses to decades of public criticism, grassroots mobilization, and calls for greater regulation (Kirsch 2014, Shever 2012, Welker 2014). Corporate social responsibility regimes sought the creation of voluntary regulatory principles that were meant to replace public oversight and depoliticize conversations about corporate practices (Welker 2014, 12). The rise of corporate social responsibility afforded a set of discourses, images, and affects that contributed to fashioning the corporation as virtuous and responsible agents in the public sphere (Shever 2012, 185). This had the aim of deflecting criticism and opposition to their practices (Kirsch 2014, 3).

Jepirachi pursued the dual goals of harnessing the wind *and* shaping the atmosphere of Indigenous social life – i.e., its “qualities, rhythms, forces, relations, and movements” (Stewart 2011, 452). Indeed, during its first decade, Wayúu communities living near the project gained from the national relevance brought about by their relationship to Jepirachi, from jobs and funding for cultural initiatives to political contacts with government institutions and revenue from a new influx of tourists who came to visit the first and only wind farm of Colombia. “Suddenly, we appeared on the map,” I was told time and again by numerous Wayúu residents describing the “before” and “after” impressions of Jepirachi. This alluded quite literally to their sudden presence in tourist, school, and road maps in La Guajira (see Fig. 20). But it also indicated a kind of political salience, one that made them noticeable to government institutions, including to the higher echelons of the Colombian state. The wind farm offered unforeseen possibilities that contradicted the narratives of domination and erasure that frequently pervade analysis of resource extraction. At the same time, however, EPM's framing of the Wayúu as communities inherently compatible with wind power carried its own contradictions. As I discuss

in the next section, it envisioned Wayúu rights to land and wind as predicated on the state’s politics of recognition and liberal configuration of Indigenous rights, which privileged actual occupation of land. This approach foreclosed other possibilities, such as the cemetery-based epistemologies and practices that were later put forth by the Epiayúu during the 9-month stoppage.



Figure 20. A Tourist Map in La Guajira (Source: Photo by Author)

Note: the map names the Jepirachi wind farm as a “tourist interest site.”

As an experiment, Jepirachi also gained a negative reputation and for many was deemed a failure in terms of advancing a just energy transition. For some critics, the project was plagued by legal inconsistencies. For example, in exchange for US\$13,500, the initial contract gave EPM “unlimited” occupancy rights over a portion of Wayúu land—contradicting to some degree the constitutional definition of a *resguardo* and mirroring the unending temporality of a colonial occupation (González Posso and Barney 2019). For others, Jepirachi’s shortcomings were

manifested most vividly in the fact that host communities, after 15 years of operation, still lacked electricity in their homes. The Pushaina residents spent their evenings in pitch dark, while EPM's turbines rotated endlessly, extracting energy and delivering it to major Colombian cities or to the nearby coal-mining port. Over time, EPM's infrastructure also became beleaguered by decay. The water plant suffered periodic breakdowns that lasted for weeks, the school funding shrank, and the fishing infrastructure was slowly corroded by the sea. When Wayúu hosts complained about EPM's eroding presence, the management would say that Jepirachi was, after all, only an "experiment" that allegedly made no profit and therefore warranted no further funding. Rather than keeping the experimental quality of Jepirachi a secret (as, for example, in the HPV vaccine trial scandal in India, see Sunder Rajan 2017), the rhetoric of experimentation was used time and again by EPM's management to dissuade Wayúu communities from demanding more jobs, corporate funding, and investment in the community's infrastructure.

Yet, while Jepirachi was meant to be a technological and corporate experiment, between 2016 and 2017 the site would unexpectedly become a space of another kind of political experimentation, enveloping EPM in a long and unexpected conflict (opposing two Indigenous property paradigms for claiming authority over land and wind). The stoppages I describe below not only interrupted the desired flow of energy from the Caribbean trade winds to Colombian homes. It also ignited a crisis around the parameters for ordering land and wind in La Guajira, which had sustained Jepirachi's operation for over 15 years, but whose instability threatened to derail EPM's wind farming venture.

The Stoppages

On an early morning in March 2019, we left for a day-long hike along the windy coast to visit several artisanal water wells (*cazimbos*) that had been used by Pushaina residents before

EPM built the water plant. For weeks, Nancy had wanted to give me a sense of the strenuous labor of fetching water from a specific well, located over two miles away from her home. She led the way with her five-year old son and a handful of young relatives who worked on the EPM-funded foundation that she managed. Nancy had a reputation for being a tenacious leader and a vocal critic of wind farming ventures. She had studied accounting in the state's public university (Universidad de La Guajira) and, as a single mother, had been able to build from scratch a small restaurant that sold meals to Jepirachi's staff. She also offered laundry services and, occasionally, rented out a small room for EPM's security personnel. As we walked across the first line of turbines, Nancy started telling stories about the stoppage as she pointed at the places where they slept, cooked, and waited for weeks. She pointed at black plastic debris left on the ground from the turbine's copper wiring and the brown welding on their doors that EPM sealed to avoid future trespassing after the stoppage ended in 2017.

As we went on, we walked past the electric substation – Jepirachi's control building (see Fig. 21). As I was about to photograph the façade, a Wayúu security guard abruptly stepped out and shouted that photos were not allowed. Nancy immediately recognized him as belonging to the Epiayúu clan –the opposing side in the conflict that had taken place two years before– and replied that the Pushainas had the final say on what could be done on *their* land. Nancy told me explicitly to take the photo, shouting back again that he was nothing but an intruder. While the exchange lasted minutes, it illuminates the Pushainas' reading of the stoppage: a deceitful attempt by the Epiayúu to claim rights over land that did not belong to them and a move to seize on the material benefits of Jepirachi – including those same highly-coveted security jobs.



Figure 21. Jepirachi's Electric Substation (Source: Photo by Author)

The conflict Nancy alluded to consisted of four successive stoppages that took place between 2016 and 2017 in which the Pushaina and Epiayúu clans occupied and blocked the entrance to Jepirachi's electric substation and control room, forcing EPM to shut down the turbines. The first stoppage took place in December 2016 and was led by the Epiayúu, who drove 80 miles in several Ford pick-up trucks with over 60 relatives from their community Karakachon, including Héctor Pana (whose funeral I described above), evicting EPM's workers from the substation. Given Jepirachi's location on Wayúu land, EPM had instructed their non-Indigenous technicians and engineers to avoid any direct confrontation with the Wayúu and to let the management in Medellín handle all disputes. Hence, once the Epiayúu arrived in the early evening and demanded to shut down everything, the operators activated the emergency brakes of all turbines

and left the building. The Epiayúu called EPM's head of planning (Santiago, who we met in the Introduction) and demanded a share of the project's compensation plan.

The first stoppage lasted a few hours, though it required a substantial amount of labor, money, and logistical planning, as I describe below. To quickly restart the turbines, EPM scrambled to find a solution and told the Epiayúu protestors over the phone that they would analyze the issue. Following this episode, the Pushainas, led by Nancy, quickly responded with a second stoppage the following week, which lasted 24 hours. Nancy was not just offended by how the Epiayúu had driven 80 miles to disrupt the operation of *their* wind farm, but even more so by the fact that EPM had agreed to potentially recognize their demands. Nancy had spent long evenings reading on her laptop about Colombian law, Indigenous rights, and wind energy policy, all of which she mobilized strategically during the entire conflict.

Up to this point, EPM had adopted a withdrawn stance around the two interruptions. For management, the stoppages were a transient Indigenous dispute that needed to be resolved à la Wayúu, as it did not yet pose a long-term threat to Jepirachi. EPM staff believed that an ostensibly neutral position would shield the wind farm from future stoppages and negative publicity (even though the company had formally sided with the Pushainas since 2003). Yet, for the Pushainas, EPM's neutrality fueled even greater discontent. After 15 years of hosting the wind farm, the Pushainas were outraged by EPM's openness to revise the consultation agreement (which did not originally include the Epiayúu) to avoid additional interruptions in their infrastructure, potentially redistributing jobs and benefits to actors that had been absent until that moment.

As they learned about the Pushainas' firm rejection to give away some of their prerogatives, the Epiayúu gathered funds and vehicles, driving once again for hours to interrupt the wind

turbines for a third time. Driving to the turbines, blocking the entrance to the ancillary roads, and preventing corporate workers from accessing the Jepirachi complex were needed for interrupting EPM’s infrastructure. The third stoppage in March 2017 – led by the Epiayúu – lasted nearly six weeks, and, this time, they explicitly demanded that EPM pick a side. In response, EPM decided to fund an ethnographic study (a so-called *proceso de caracterización*), in which a team of Wayúu *Pütchipü’ü* (specialists in Wayúu law) would analyze the claims of both parties. The team conducted interviews, sketched kinship charts, gathered oral histories, and visited the critical markers of territorial occupation (such as house ruins, defunct water wells and, more importantly, cemeteries). After two months, the team submitted a final report (Fig. 22). It concluded that the Epiayúu had, in fact, full rights over the land of Jepirachi. “Based on our research,” the conclusions read, “there is no doubt that the Pushaina clan, despite living and remaining in the territory of Kasiwoulin [the land adjacent to Jepirachi], does not have demonstrated ancestral ties.”



Figure 22. Cover of the report “Territorial Verification Process of Kasiwoulin, Center of Operations of the Jepirachi Wind Farm” (Source: Consejo Superior de Palabrerros)

The 100-page report indicated that EPM had consulted with the *wrong* actors (the Pushainas), who for over 15 years had wrongfully received corporate funds and other economic benefits. The *Pütchipü'ü* argued that Wayúu land rights were determined not by the present or recent occupation of a place (the principle held by the Pushainas and reflected in the state's multicultural apparatus), but rather by clan-based matrilineal kin ancestry (see Chapter 1). "What determines territorial rights are the graves" – I was told time and again by Orangel, a specialist in Wayúu law that we met in Chapter 1 and main author of this report. Living on a piece of land – even for generations – could not override the sovereign rights deriving from matrilineal kinship relations, materialized most vividly in ancestral, secondary cemeteries (*amouyuu*). For the Wayúu, the report concluded:

Toumainpa'a, is not just land or a patrimonial good, but it is our ancestral mother, a symbol of existence and dependence toward her... which is demonstrated through the *amouyuu* (ancestral graves), as emblems of life and death, of our mothers and of existence. And this precious heritage is passed down from generation to generation to the members of the same maternal clan, regardless of time, permanence, or abandonment

The Pushainas vetoed the report, claiming it was disproportionately tilted in favor of the Epiayúu. For Nancy, the most outrageous part of the report was that it concluded that, as she recounts, "we had to give all the good things to them [the Epiayúu] and subordinate ourselves to their will." The Pushainas requested a second ethnographic report, which EPM felt pressured to fund to restart the wind farm. To their surprise, the second report reached the opposite conclusions: the Epiayúu had *no* rights whatsoever over Jepirachi and the Pushainas's claims were correct. The reports thus fail to restart wind energy production.

Up to that point, the conflict was entering its fifth month. Anxious over the prolonged stoppages to Jepirachi, EPM slowly came to accept that the recognition of the Epiayúu was inevitable. Through rumors and internal contacts in the company, the Pushainas learned that

EPM was designing a plan to re-start energy production and redistribute the jobs and corporate funds by half with their opponents, triggering the fourth and final stoppage.

Nancy and her Pushaina kin led this final stoppage, which lasted over four months. As wind energy production was paralyzed, EPM unilaterally cut all wages, contracts, and services, blocking the monthly flow of thousands of dollars to the Pushainas. The state-like services that EPM managed were also suspended, including basic maintenance of the water plant. As Nancy relied on meal and lodging contracts, EPM thought that it would just be a matter time before economic pressure would creep in.

The fourth stoppage required an even greater investment of time, energy, and money. Nancy spent all her savings, used up her pickup truck until it broke down, spent countless nights sleeping in EPM's control room away from her son, and struggled to collect money from friends and relatives to purchase food, gasoline, water, and tents (see Fig 23). Though tense and uncertain, the occupation was social and lively – involving long stretches of waiting, playing dominos, going on occasional trips to the beach, and engaging in endless hours of conversation under the intense heat and strong trade winds.



Figure 23. Protesting Outside of Jepirachi’s Substation (Source: Manuel Mejía Ramírez, *Diario del Norte*)

Note: Nancy appears on the right side of the image. The text behind reads: “EPM: We live here,” “Less conflict, more benefits.”

After months of inaction, 12 out of 15 wind turbines were slowly dismantled. Over 10 miles of high-quality copper wiring was disconnected, torn down and then re-sold in the black market of Maicao (a nearby commercial town bordering Venezuela). The loss of expensive copper wiring left Jepirachi virtually inoperable. Since EPM had cut all wages, services, and contracts, leaving people in an economic limbo, some occupiers felt they had no other choice but to climb atop the 20-story high turbines, cut the cables, and sell the copper to survive. For the Pushainas, the destruction of Jepirachi was ultimately EPM’s fault.

While the turbines were privately owned by EPM, they lay atop an Indigenous territory that had special legal protections. Because of this, EPM had limited legal options for soliciting police or military support. Yet, even if legally viable, EPM staff feared that advocating a violent

solution of this sort would forever tarnish the company's relation with the Wayúu, forcing them to leave La Guajira entirely and abandon more ambitious plans for three much larger wind farms on the peninsula.

The Pushainas articulated their right to the land and, by extension to the wind, partly drawing on the discourse of the Colombian state. The constitutional reform of 1991, which fashioned the country as a multiculturalist state, put forth the term "Indigenous traditional authority" as a homogenous concept that collapsed the diverse political arrangements and territorial configurations of Colombia's Indigenous groups into a unique, state-legible figure (see Chapter 1). "Indigenous traditional authorities" had political rights over a fixed, bounded territory that was occupied by an equally legible community (identifiable through census data and ID card numbers). For the Pushainas, EPM had legally consulted and engaged with their "Indigenous traditional authority" for 15 years, adhering to the Colombian legislation regarding Indigenous peoples. Thus, by altering these terms, EPM would be breaking the law and going against the multiculturalist discourse that they had heavily embraced in the first place. They would also arbitrarily render "unrecognizable" the Pushaina's sovereign claim over their land (Richland 2021).

The Pushainas have not only lived in Jepirachi for several generations (the criteria of occupation of the state) but also bore the environmental impacts of the project (for which EPM compensated with jobs, infrastructure, and development funds).²⁴ For this reason, they condemned the utilitarian impetus of the Epiayúu. If it weren't for the wind farm, Nancy and other Pushainas told me repeatedly, the Epiayúu would have not returned to the same dry and hostile land they left behind in the 1940s.

²⁴ Since the land cannot be formally leased or purchased, the figure of environmental impact is commonly used by wind energy corporations as a way of disbursing funds from the project to Indigenous actors.

The end of the fourth and final stoppage took place after Nancy visited the headquarters of EPM in Medellín (the “Smart Building”) and was informed by Santiago that the Epiayúu would be formally added as beneficiaries. Infuriated by EPM’s unilateral decision, Nancy returned to Jepirachi and threatened to set the substation on fire. In light of the rumors, the governor at the time (a Wayúu himself) eventually sent a contingent of the ESMAD (Colombia’s anti-riot police), requested support from the army, and alerted the fire brigade of the Cerrejón coal mine port. At the same time, he asked another *Pütchipü’ü* to ask for a last time the Pushainas to put an end to the stoppage. The fire never happened, and the anti-riot police stopped short of entering Jepirachi. Yet, as Nancy told me jokingly, “we did burn some tires and debris around the building just to get them scared.”

The interruption ended after a meeting in La Guajira’s capital city of Riohacha. Against Nancy’s advice, her elderly uncle (Isaías), whose seniority grants him authority among the Pushaina group, conceded to the demands of the Epiayúu. The end of the nine-month stoppage made regional headlines with photographs of the elders of both sides, alongside the Wayúu governor, shaking hands. Nancy, who had sacrificed her savings, time, and kin obligations, remembers this moment with deep frustration. For them, EPM betrayed the initial consultation agreement and arbitrarily shifted their politics of recognition through which access to wind had been defined for the past 15 years – from the paradigm of actual occupation to one based on cemeteries.

In sum, the Pushainas mobilized Colombian multiculturalist law as a way of authorizing their claims over land and the benefits connected to the harnessing of wind. They alluded to their recent and ongoing residence on the land as well as the state’s recognition of their Indigenous authority to substantiate their claims. It was this reading of Wayúu indigeneity that had

legitimacy, and which was, in their view, being torn apart by EPM and the Epiayúu. As this section shows, the infrastructural breakdown of Jepirachi had less to do with technical design, but rather with the less visible paradigms of Indigenous property that sustained the functioning of Jepirachi. In other words, the conflict centered on the more abstract question of which Wayúu modes of ordering land and wind flows count and *who* benefits from such political choices. In the next section, I explore the Epiayúu's perspective on the stoppage and their reliance on the role of ancestral cemeteries in creating attachments to land and wind. By describing the claims of the Epiayúu, I will show how ancestral cemeteries brought to light an alternative paradigm for ordering wind energy production in La Guajira, which EPM was forced to contend with.

Cemeteries, Deceased Kin, and Subterranean Claims to Wind

A few weeks before my hike with Nancy (described in the previous section), I met Yomar Epiayúu at the security guard post of Jepirachi's substation. Yomar had secured a part-time job through EPM's new compensation plan, which included the Epiayúu. In his mid-20s, his security guard uniform²⁵ and radio equipment were an emblem of his clan's victory after the 9-month stoppage.

Yomar recounted how the Epiayúu's occupation was largely orchestrated by his cousin Freddy Epiayúu, who had wanted to "return to the land of his grandparents." In the early 2000s, Freddy had worked briefly during the construction of Jepirachi, but was fired after it started operating, as the number of jobs shrank and were taken up by the Pushainas. For Yomar, the Epiayúu knew that Jepirachi was being built on *their* land, but a deceased leader of theirs had allegedly receive a cash payment back in 2003 to remain quiet, instead of taking a tougher stance against EPM. Because the Epiayúu lived near the Venezuelan border, they were also more

²⁵ In the wind energy industry in La Guajira, security guard positions are the main source of employment for the Wayúu. See Chapter 4.

invested in the lucrative cross-border trade of goods, and many of them even migrated to the neighboring country as its oil economy boomed in the 2000s. As a result, they remained absent and relatively silent about Jepirachi for over 13 years.

After being fired, Freddy met and married Erika (also of the Epiayúu clan). And both got involved in the Venezuelan gasoline smuggling business, which supplies fuel for most of the region (Schwartz 2021). Over time, they became key players in the trade (earning several thousand dollars per month). With the gasoline income, they bought several houses and apartments in the nearby town of Uribia, which they rented out. Yet the gasoline business came to an abrupt halt after a police raid confiscated thousands of gallons from other traders around 2014. From that point on, they decided to quit and started focusing on Jepirachi as a viable economic option for their kin. Freddy often heard his uncle Héctor and other elders narrating how Jepirachi's land belonged to them. Over time, Freddy and Erika learned the minutiae of their clan's migration history and of the deceased kin who inhabited the secondary cemetery.

A few months before the occupation in 2016, Freddy and Erika made unsuccessful attempts to reach out to EPM's management. The company would always respond saying that, based on Colombian law and the official registry held by the Ministry of the Interior, the Epiayúu had no rights over Jepirachi. The unresponsiveness of EPM was reinforced by the unwillingness of the Pushainas to engage in any form of dialogue. The tipping point came in late 2016, when the Pushainas refused to share water from EPM's desalinization plant with the Epiayúu, who were holding a funeral at their secondary cemetery (called *Warepepo*). The refusal was read as a violent act, not just because of the cultural significance of these events, but because it was a demonstration of the Pushainas' power over what the Epiayúu considered to be *their* land. Following the incident, Freddy and Erika convinced their kin to move forward with what they

saw as the only option: make a stoppage. Relying on funds from Freddy and Erika’s gasoline venture, and personal loans from family members, the Epiayúu interrupted the operation of the wind turbines twice in 2016 and 2017— as I detailed in the previous section.

The Epiayúus’ argument was that the Pushainas were their *achon*—that is, kin on the Epiayúu’s *paternal* line—which explained their presence there, but did not make the area their ancestral land, and thus the place to which they had political rights. Paternal kin have secondary rights with respect to the *apüshi* (the maternal kin) (see Chapter 1). After the Epiayúu left the land of Jepirachi in the 1940s, as Héctor recounted in the beginning, Pushaina members lived and looked after the land under a condition called *ounüshi* (which translates as “guests”).²⁶ This allows for the use of resources (such as water and vegetation) but precludes them from making political decisions (including negotiating with a wind energy corporation). Despite the Epiayúu’s migration, and the fact that they had not lived anywhere near Jepirachi for almost a century, their land rights could not be overwritten – they claimed. “The Wayúu territory will always be there. One can leave for one or two thousand years, but everyone will always identify you by your maternal land. This is what happened to us: we abandoned our land because of the droughts and our animals who were dying, but our [secondary] cemetery is still there” – Freddy told me once in his home in Uribia. By disavowing their claims, the Pushainas were going against “traditional” Wayúu understandings of territoriality and embracing a foreign, non-Indigenous concept put forth by the Colombian state.

The Epiayúu relied almost exclusively on their secondary, ancestral cemetery to legitimize their rights over land and wind. As I was told by Freddy, a Wayúu person not only knows where

²⁶ This is due to the mobility of the Wayúu, who frequently resettle in areas with more abundant water and vegetation to keep their goat herds alive, but also due to urban migration to major cities of Colombia, Venezuela, and other countries.

their remains ought to rest at their secondary burial, but the act of exhuming their kin after a prescribed number of years after their first burial and re-burying them in their ancestral land is a deeply political act. The secondary cemetery of the Epiayúu configured a mode of ordering land and wind that aligned differently—for them *appropriately*—with Wayúu legal and political regimes. In short, it was the cemeteries, and *not* actual occupation of land, that mattered for the Epiayúu.²⁷ The cemeteries, and the claims to autochthony they authorized, gave them the rights to negotiate with EPM and receive the material benefits of the wind farm.

Unlike the Pushaina’s claim—where notions of actual occupation and state-sanctioned boundaries grant access to wind—the Epiayúu posited an alternative paradigm in which the subterranean milieu of cemeteries, deceased kin and matrilineal genealogies *authorized* the right to harness wind from the airspace above (see Fig. 24). And it was these human and nonhuman agencies of cemeteries and deceased kin that came to define whether EPM’s turbines could harness wind in the future. In sum, the Epiayúu’s cemeteries were ultimately a framework for rethinking legitimate authority over renewable energy infrastructures.

The cemeteries’ disruptive force vis-à-vis wind energy derived not just from the fact that it upended EPM’s long-standing arrangement with the Pushainas and its reliance on legal principles validated by Colombia’s multiculturalist apparatus, but also stemmed from the fact

²⁷ From a cemetery-based perspective—i.e., the right to land stemming from their maternal ancestors’ buried remains—the Pushainas also defended their rights over Jepirachi. Their primary cemetery, called *Ishoshinka*, was founded three generations earlier, in the mid-20th century, by a deceased Epiayúu kin (*Kasoyuanca*), who married a Pushaina woman (called Irma), from which all the Pushainas of the area descend. He deliberately established this cemetery so that the Pushainas could remain undisturbed in this land. Kasoyuanca’s remains are a testament of his will of granting sovereignty to his Pushaina descendants over the region. Kasoyuanca’s remains were never exhumed by the Epiayúu, which is interpreted as a violation of Wayúu practices or simply their kin’s indifference toward him. The *Pütchipü’ü*’s first report and the Epiayúu themselves disavowed this cemetery as being a *primary* cemetery—that is, the site where deceased Pushainas are buried immediately after their death, and not the second, and definite burial place, located in the clan’s ancestral land. But for the Pushainas the *Ishoshinka* cemetery was politically salient and unequivocal in reasserting their sovereignty.

that cemeteries, as I describe in Chapter 1, resist any easy legibility and quick incorporation into the state’s biopolitical knowledge. For outsiders, the cemeteries are epistemically murky: due to their constant changes, and the ongoing mobility of bodily remains across time and space, they resist attempts at mapping, visualization, or bureaucratic documentation. In this sense, they can be read as “fugitive” infrastructures that subverts the logic of state knowledge and capture (Harney and Moten 2013), or as “nested” spaces of Indigenous claim-making within layered forms of national sovereignty (Simpson 2014).

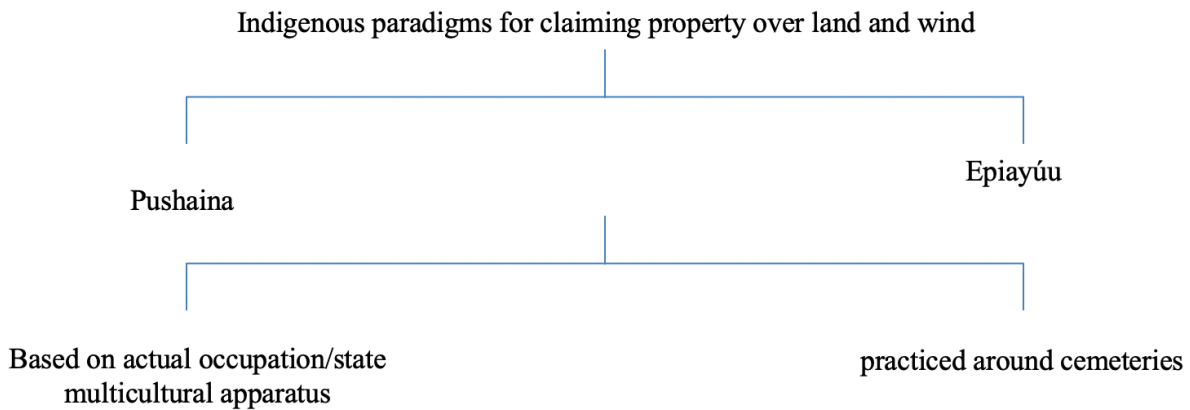


Figure 24. Wayúu Paradigms for Claiming Authority over Land and Wind during the Jepirachi Stoppage.

In sum, the Epiayúu’s cemetery-based claims departed radically from state-based and corporate understanding of Indigenous spatiality. As indexes of autochthony, these milieus signaled a prior occupation evidenced in the graves of ancestors which, in their view, reasserted de jure rights over the Jepirachi area. The end of Jepirachi’s stoppages was thus marked by a corporate reckoning of the potential of cemeteries for altering or interrupting the utopias of green energy capitalism that are being imagined for La Guajira, to which I turn next.

The Aftermath

After the interruption, EPM redistributed the compensation package in two halves, between the Pushaina and the Epiayúu. It also repaired and eventually re-started Jepirachi. The conflict

ignited a wave of public criticism that led to important realignments in the wind energy industry, placing the potential of infrastructural interruptions at the center of its optimistic, positive futurities. For energy experts, Jepirachi became a menacing reminder of the power of Wayúu communities to block or dismantle infrastructure as a way of navigating disagreements around wind energy. It also disclosed that energy infrastructures always rely on certain kinds of political, economic, and ontological groundwork that can become easily and suddenly undone. In fact, following Jepirachi's stoppage, the wind energy rush saw a proliferation of smaller yet more regular interruptions, from the destruction of wind meters to the obstruction of cars carrying engineers throughout the peninsula (Barney 2021b, 2021c). Interruption, drawing on Antina von Schnitzler (Von Schnitzler 2016), has thus become an idiom for doing politics and reimagining the energy transition. Yet, the disputes I depict above were not against the infrastructural violence exerted on human and non-human ecologies. Instead, they center on which Indigenous property paradigms (and, in this specific case, which clan groups) can legitimately claim the material promises that stem from massive turbines and high-power lines. Such disputes – which take place in a register distant from corporate logics of anticipation and risk calculation and that unsettle Colombia's multiculturalist frameworks regarding indigeneity– can nonetheless stop the regular functioning of energy infrastructures.

The near destruction of Jepirachi sparked a range of theories within EPM, from those that derided it as a form of vandalism or extortion to those that read it as symptomatic of the failure of the project of Indigenous energy devised by the company in its early years (described earlier). Some EPM staff also pointed the finger at the geopolitics of the border as part of the mix. Santiago, EPM's head of planning, told me that the stoppage was triggered in part by the collapse of the Venezuelan petro-state and the ensuing economic crisis that expelled millions of

Venezuelans, including tens of thousands of Wayúu, who resettled in La Guajira. Among those were dozens of Epiayúu who arrived jobless and heavily politicized by the discourse of resource nationalism that had defined the *Chavista* state for over two decades (Schiller 2018). For Santiago, it was partly Venezuela's defunct oil industry, leftist politics, and porous border that, as he said, "swallowed" Jepirachi in this month-long conflict.

Surprisingly, Santiago minimized the material damage caused to the turbines or the loss of energy (claiming that insurance policies covered most of it), and rather stressed with awe how the stoppage had produced a new layer of knowledge for EPM. Jotting a few kinship charts and Wayúu kin terminology on a piece of paper, he told me in his office overlooking the city of Medellín: "Jepirachi taught us... that all situations, absolutely *all of them*, are manageable. We just need to *know them* (the Wayúu) a lot, a lot better." Santiago still believed that kinship charts, and other forms of ethnographic knowledge, were powerful tools for averting future infrastructural breakdowns. Yet, as he opened a PowerPoint slide in his laptop, showing me the blueprints of a 250 MW wind farm that was being licensed in La Guajira, called *Ipapure*, he told me that Jepirachi's breakdown had made the future bleaker or less optimistic. New projects like *Ipapure*, Santiago confessed, were threatened in large part by the opacity of century-long kinship genealogies – materialized in the cemeteries – that resisted state and corporate perceptibility.²⁸

The image of having million-dollar projects being slowly dismantled and then re-sold by parts in the black market, with little or no state help, continues to haunt the wind energy industry. "It is the biggest fear of all," an EPM contractor once said to me. Despite robust insurance policies, an interruption of this sort, he went on, on wind farms operating on 15-year-long

²⁸ While EPM and other energy companies have had to deal with attacks from armed groups, such as the leftist guerrillas like the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional), the threats posed by Wayúu interruptions defied EPM's strategies and procedures for averting attacks on their infrastructure.

electricity delivery contracts, could create such a liability that it could risk a company's financial survival. For EPM's workers, the coexistence of competing frameworks for ordering land and wind added a layer of uncertainty and risk that could not be easily mitigated. Hence, while in corporate forums, as I describe in the introduction, the future of wind energy is still celebrated as one of profit, the ghost of Jepirachi always lurks in the background. If such a crisis happened around a small, "experimental" project, I heard time and again among industry workers, what will occur with the other 57 large-scale, commercial projects that are underway?

The Jepirachi stoppage also situates wind not as a stable, physical resource but as dependent on a set of relationships that must be upheld and continually renewed. As wind is weighed down by things we usually take to stand outside or below it (such as land-based sovereign claims, cemeteries, or state bureaucratic practices), its harnessing is thus unstable and precarious. Rather than a "free" and homogenous force that can be easily tapped into, the stoppages made explicit how wind energy is enmeshed in, and depends on, the calibration of Indigenous frameworks for claiming authority over land and wind. Alongside notions of Indigenous territoriality that were sanctioned by the state, Jepirachi's stoppage saw the emergence of cemeteries as entities that can sustain or disrupt Colombia's wind energy capitalism.

In fact, the opacity of the cemetery-based form of claiming rights is now taken as a permanent feature of wind power in La Guajira. "What happened in Jepirachi will happen in every wind farm," Ana María, the anthropologist who steered the project in the late 1990s, told me once in 2019. And avoiding this fate was, in her view, nearly impossible. "How can we really avoid another Jepirachi? Drawing kinship charts for the past 500 years? But even then, you can't be so sure: a Wayúu can always show up (like the Epiayúu), five or ten years into the project, and say that this is their land and shut everything down." Under this scenario, EPM can only

strive to navigate this uncertainty hoping that things will not break down. Unlike Santiago's cautious optimism, Ana María was more pessimistic about the companies' long-term ability to manage what she saw as the radical indeterminacy of Wayúu past and future kin relations, contained in the cemeteries. As such, she was also doubtful that La Guajira would become the renewable energy hub that Colombia's government was pushing hard to achieve.

As an experiment, Jepirachi was scheduled to be dismantled in 2023. Yet given the ongoing bonanza, its continuity is for EPM more a matter of public image than energy outputs.²⁹ In fact, both my Pushaina and Epiayúu interlocutors agreed that it was puzzling that EPM decided to reinvest and re-start a wind farm that was allegedly unprofitable. "Why continue an experiment that has been ongoing for almost 20 years?" – I heard time and again. But, as Santiago explained to me that day, "we couldn't let Jepirachi be seen as a failure, and that it failed *because* of a Wayúu conflict." Shutting down Jepirachi would simply send the wrong signal to taxpayers, investors, foreign companies, and the Colombian public: it would reveal the fragility and incompetence of EPM, raising doubts about its capacity to operate larger wind farms in La Guajira or abroad (at the time of fieldwork, EPM owned and operated a wind farm in Chile called *Los Cururos*). But it would also shatter the "resource affects" (Weszkalnys 2016) that suffuse the wind energy rush – of hope and exhilaration over a profitable resource frontier.

Conclusion: The Breakdown of Indigenous Energy

In this chapter I have examined the series of stoppages against the Jepirachi wind farm that took place during nine months between 2016 and 2017, ignited by disagreements between two clans' claims over land and the air above it. I demonstrate how the near destruction of Jepirachi was triggered not by the failure of the technical and semiotic design of its infrastructure, but

²⁹ For example, EPM's most recent hydropower project, Hidroituango, will produce almost 1000 times more energy.

rather by the friction and equivocation between Wayúu and state-recognized temporal and spatial domains and human and nonhuman agencies which surfaced around the question of *who* matters when it comes to distributing material benefits tied to wind power (from jobs and service contracts to water infrastructure and corporate funds). As such, the stoppage offers a different vantage point for thinking about the relation between resource extraction, infrastructure, and indigeneity. Rather than an erasure of Indigenous life, the stoppage reveals how wind energy infrastructure in La Guajira hangs on a close, though uneasy, articulation with Wayúu modes of ordering land, airspace, and power. For this reason, wind energy companies must recruit and actively rely on indigeneity as a scaffolding for clean energy production and capital accumulation. To some extent, Indigenous norms and practices function as the human and non-human infrastructure of wind power (Simone 2004). And when such entanglements between infrastructures and Indigenous norms and practices break apart, the aspirations of producing carbon-neutral electricity are equally suspended.

Rather than a “free”, unpropertied, and inorganic force that is meant to save the world from the climate emergency (Howe 2019), the wind seen in the context of the stoppages rendered visible how Indigenous orientations to this kinetic force, grounded on the material and cultural worlds through which it moves, give rise to alternative imaginaries of resource sovereignty and aeolian property. These Indigenous orientations to wind, as I analyze, are not just heterogenous, but also unsettled and unsettling. As such, they trouble how we often think of resources as unvarying forms of “cheap nature” (Moore 2015), devoid of thick sociality, historicity, and human and nonhuman entanglements. It also challenges frameworks of resource sovereignty, deeply ingrained in Latin America, that privilege the state as a crucial mediator between citizens and nature (Coronil 1997; Folch 2015, 2019; Gustafson 2020). The entanglements I explore in

this chapter –connecting cemeteries, bodily remains, legal concepts, and state policies– not only make wind an indeterminate and fluctuating thing; it also makes it a force that cannot be epistemically contained either within frameworks of national resource sovereignty or Western property. Indeed, the cemeteries were and continue to be an unsettling presence for the wind power industry insofar as they interrupt the desired predictability, enforcement, and legibility inherent to private property (Nichols 2020). The future-oriented temporalities of white and tall turbines, engaged in the construction of modern, liberal, and carbon-neutral futurities, is suddenly submerged within Wayúu history, migration rhythms, and temporal scales. Therefore, this chapter shows that, unlike other natural resources like coal and oil, the wind is subjected to a form of Indigenous resource sovereignty that subverts the logic of state knowledge, capture, and sovereignty.

Theorizing wind from La Guajira allows us to see what Macarena Gómez-Barris calls the “submerged perspectives” of resource extraction, that is, the unexpected social and political orientations that lie within extractive spaces and that “do not exhaust difference, but instead proliferate it” (Gómez-Barris 2017, xx). Such proliferations around wind echo how soil and the subsurface in Colombia also become the “subject of fictions” (Morris 2021a, 89) and a milieu for reordering of peace and property in the wake of a post-conflict future (Lyons 2020; Morris 2021b). In fact, the divergent theories put forth by the Epiayúu and Pushaina illustrate that there is not a singular Indigenous property paradigm vis-à-vis wind. Rather than being a homogenous entity, the stoppages reveal how wind is connected to human and nonhuman agencies in plural ways, often cohabiting in an ongoing and unresolved tension.

To conclude, Héctor Pana’s funeral might seem like an unexpected place for thinking about the breakdown of infrastructure, given its distance from Medellín’s “Smart Building” where

engineers design and manage places like Jepirachi. Yet, the social life of cemeteries— and the clan-based rights to land they materialize and animate – decenter the conversation from the register of corporate expertise and risk assessments to the richly-layered milieu of century-long kinship genealogies of living and deceased Wayúu kin. Ultimately, this highlights that realizing Colombia’s carbon-neutral energy future cannot be disentangled from the practices, concepts, and imaginaries of Wayúu indigeneity.

While this chapter has shown the tensions and risks that emerge when wind corporations fail to properly calibrate their infrastructures with Indigenous lifeworlds (and its modes of ordering airspace), the next chapter focuses on how wind energy corporations rely on Wayúu knowledge, law, and sensibility to risk for crafting a security apparatus that mobilizes indigeneity – and the layers of immunity and accountability it offers – to shield themselves from the windy geographies reputed for their criminal underworld. It is these forms of indigenized security, though fragile and failure-prone in crucial ways, that aim to keep Colombia’s wind energy future alive.

Chapter 4

Turbulence: Criminal Underworlds and the Indigenized Security of Wind Energy

Turbulence
Noun

1. great commotion or agitation;
2. irregular atmospheric motion especially when characterized by up-and-down currents

The Kidnapping of an *Alijuna*¹

On a quiet Saturday evening in March 2019, Gustavo was kidnapped minutes after we returned from a daylong meeting in a Wayúu community of the Guajira peninsula. The kidnapping took place in the Office for the Empowerment of Wayúu Communities in the town of Uribia, as Gustavo finished some paperwork before heading off to Bogotá. A Bogotan lawyer by training, Gustavo coordinated much of the licensing work of Jemeiwaa Kai. Since 2010, he had diligently forged relations with over 70 Wayúu communities across the peninsula, who would potentially host Jemeiwaa Kai's wind turbines, electric substations, and high-voltage lines in their land. He was the only non-Wayúu professional working in the Uribia office, hired for his robust knowledge of Colombian legislation on Indigenous rights and his network of contacts with Wayúu leaders that stretched back to the 1990s. Though Gustavo was a waged employee, on the ground he embodied the face of the corporation, often remaining for long stretches of time in La Guajira and becoming a familiar presence in the Wayúu's territory (colloquially known as *el doctor*, the doctor, an honorific typically used for lawyers). Yet, in less than a minute, four armed captors violently stormed the office, dragged Gustavo into a black Toyota SUV without

¹ This translates as non-Wayúu in Wayuunaiki.

license plates, and drove out into the vast arid expanse of the peninsula, where he would disappear for almost four months until his rescue.

Gustavo's kidnapping immediately made local and national news. The morning after, his Wayúu co-workers circulated numerous posts on Facebook and WhatsApp groups, soliciting information on his whereabouts and demanding his immediate release (see Fig. 25). His kidnapping abruptly altered the everyday operations of Jemeiwaa Kai in La Guajira, including my own ethnographic engagement. As I was a firsthand witness to Gustavo's kidnapping, my routine shifted dramatically, from joining the team on their field trips to future wind farming sites to making regular and uncanny visits to the police's anti-kidnapping division (GAULA).² I was required to give multiple statements about what happened to different officers (as individuals who were closest to the victim are typically suspects of being involved in the crime, I was told) and receiving desperate calls from Jemeiwaa Kai's management to see if I had any connections with the National Guard in Venezuela, as some speculated that his captors had crossed the border with him (at the time Colombia had severed all diplomatic ties and police cooperation with that country). Many of my friends in La Guajira said it was best to "disappear" from Uribia for weeks, until things got sorted out (which I did). The busy and vibrant office that I had come to know intimately as an ethnographer, and where most of the corporate-community exchanges took place, was shut for months, enfolded by yellow tape and covered in dust as the police launched their investigation. Due to the uncertainty regarding the motives behind his kidnapping and Gustavo's whereabouts, all workers were placed on indefinite leave. The planning of the large-scale wind farms that Jemeiwaa Kai had been working on since 2010 came to an abrupt halt.

² Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal

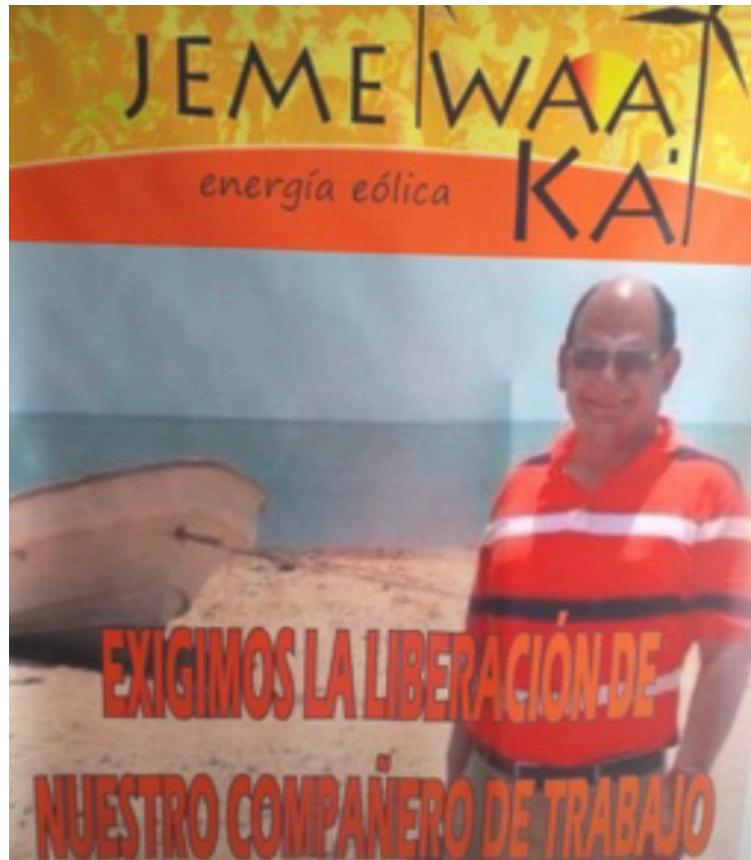


Figure 25. An Image that Circulated on WhatsApp about Gustavo’s Kidnapping (Source: Photo by Author)

Note: the text reads “We demand the release of our co-worker.”

Gustavo’s kidnapping ignited countless rumors across the peninsula regarding his captors’ identity, their motives, and the long-term impact of this event on the wind energy industry. Some of my interlocutors and fellow anthropologists in La Guajira speculated that his abduction had been orchestrated by either the ELN,³ or other energy companies seeking to sabotage Jemeiwa Kai’s licensing bids.⁴ Others believed that the Venezuelan government was behind it – seeking to harm Colombia’s private sector in retaliation for the country’s decision to cut diplomatic ties with Maduro’s administration the previous month. Others sensed that it was simply an

³ *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, the most powerful insurgent guerrilla group in Colombia, widely known for its attacks on energy and mining infrastructure.

⁴ Colombia’s private sector has a long history of being complicit or actively supporting paramilitary groups to advance their interests; see Morris (2021a), Lyons (2020) and Taussig (2018).

economically motivated kidnapping commanded by a loosely organized criminal organization, or so-called “common crime” (*delincuencia común*), operating along the porous and heavily transited Venezuela-Colombia border.

The only consensus that linked this wide array of theories was that Gustavo’s kidnapping had something to do with his non-Indigenous identity. Alfredo, a Wayúu retired security supervisor who worked for the Jepirachi wind farm for almost a decade (Chapter 3), told me in his house a few days after the kidnapping that, in his view, Jemeiwaa Kai had failed to properly “embed” Gustavo among the Wayúu. More specifically, he referred to the failure to provide him with knowledgeable Wayúu workers, with the proper linguistic skills, navigational tactics, and anticipatory knowledge to detect and respond to potential threats.

By doing this, Alfredo reasoned, Gustavo would have been slightly more protected by Wayúu sensibilities to danger and by the forms of accountability that stem from Indigenous legal norms and practices (which almost exclusively apply to Wayúu people). For Alfredo, Gustavo’s condition as a non-Indigenous person meant that he experienced a double form of vulnerability: he often navigated alone a borderland infamous for its criminal underworld⁵ and negligible state security presence, while at the same time lacking the Indigenous social embeddedness that could have deterred his aggressors. Although wealthy and politically influential Wayúu individuals had been victims of kidnappings before, for Alfredo and other Wayúu interlocutors there was something too risky about Gustavo’s identity— his bodily comportment, distinct Bogotan accent, whiteness, and clothing aesthetics— which had impeded him from camouflaging properly with his

⁵ As I describe below, rather than presence of armed guerilla insurgents (from the FARC or similar groups) or organized paramilitary armies (which formally but not in practice demobilized in 2006), my interlocutors often pointed at so-called BACRIM (*Bandas Criminales*, an acronym for criminal gangs) as the main concern. These are former paramilitary organizations which have been accused of participating in the cross-border trafficking of people and illicit commodities, extortions and kidnappings, and the drug trade.

local surroundings: he was an all-too-visible outsider (unprotected by Wayúu law, lacking any kinship connections with Wayúu extended families, and unable to speak Wayuunaiki).

As the weeks went by, Gustavo's kidnapping – as it was talked about in newspapers articles and in my everyday conversations –brought to light the inability to disentangle the utopian aspirations of turning La Guajira into Colombia's renewable energy epicenter from the enduring genealogies of illicit flows, criminality, and minimal state security control that have shaped the peninsula since European colonization (see Orsini Aarón 2007; Polo Acuña 2005, 2012).

Crucially, it also shifted how (in)security is imagined in relation to wind power. In corporate and institutional spaces, as the ones I describe in the introduction, the wind is commonly imagined as a free and abundant resource that will “secure” Colombia's national electrical grid from severe weather events and waning oil and natural gas reserves (Ruiz Murcia, Serna Cuenca, and Zapata Lesmes 2017; Unidad de Planeación Minero Energética 2013). In other words, the wind is vested with the goal of “protecting” the country's electric grid from the perils of the Anthropocene. From this angle, adverse weather conditions, especially turbulence, are among the forces that can disrupt wind's potential– alongside regulatory chokepoints, financial risks, or community interruption.

Indeed, these up-and-down currents can destroy or seriously damage wind turbines and high-power lines or lead to highly unstable energy outputs that can threaten the financial survival of a wind farm. Hence, in corporate forums (as the one I describe in the introduction), energy security – as the ability to respond to or prevent future threats – is thus tied to the capacity to develop expert knowledge about and technical solutions for managing these atmospheric fluctuations, which are viewed as entirely disconnected from any social and political contingencies on the ground. The kidnapping, however, radically shifted the focus to the parallel meaning of

turbulence – outlined in the epigraph– of “great commotion or agitation.” It brought to light other risks and forms of insecurity stemming from what can equally, and even more decisively, disrupt the wind energy rush. While in Colombia’s recent history extractive companies have harnessed the power of paramilitary and criminal organization to protect their infrastructure and economic interests, thereby blurring any clear distinction between licit and illicit practices (Morris 2021b), Gustavo’s kidnapping showcased the complexities of transforming La Guajira into Colombia’s green energy hub vis-à-vis its layered history of illicit trade and the informal sovereignties (Hansen and Stepputat 2006) of illicit groups that move across the prime areas of wind energy in Colombia.

This chapter explores how wind energy companies attempt to stabilize these unwieldy conditions by hiring Wayúu security personnel (guards, drivers, and logistics workers) for protecting their staff, infrastructure, and equipment. By relying on Wayúu knowledge, kin relations, and sensibility to risk, energy corporations seek to craft a security apparatus that actively mobilizes indigeneity – and the layers of immunity and accountability it offers – to shield themselves from the turbulence of danger that manifests itself in events like Gustavo’s kidnapping. Here I approach turbulence not in terms of financial, atmospheric, or political instability (Cooper 2010), but in terms of opaque and unpredictable illicit forces that, as I saw happen with Jemeiwaa Kai, can radically halt wind energy futures.

Rather than relying solely on forms of state-based, paramilitary, or private protection, managing and averting future threats in this context entail disguising the corporation within Indigenous aesthetics – i.e., which are perceived to be embodied in local Venezuelan cars and in Wayúu individuals who can speak Wayuunaiki, have the skills to navigate the peninsula, and who can invoke and potentially be protected by Indigenous law. For example, as I describe next,

this means relying on Wayúu men know *how* to drive the web of thousands of labyrinthine dirt roads of the peninsula, notice signs of danger in the landscape like suspicious cars or objects, verbally disguise non-Indigenous corporate workers as friends or relatives, or mobilize their own kinship positionality within matrilineal extended families to seek assistance from passersby. For these reasons, they are thought to be ideal security workers in the wind energy rush. By recruiting Indigenous men into these highly coveted positions (due to their steady salaries and social capital), corporate actors aspire to minimize the risk of hypervisibility (i.e., camouflaging the fact that their cars, equipment, and personnel belong to a powerful and foreign U.S. corporation). Through this, they seek to stabilize the social turbulence stemming from illicit threats – like Gustavo’s kidnapping – at the margins of the state security’s control. In a scenario where turbulence cannot be avoided, rather than financial innovations or risk distribution technologies, the corporate embeddedness in Indigenous worlds is what provides a means of “managing” uncertainty (Cooper 2010, 167).

Security has been a central theme across scholarly debates concerning the politics of resource extraction. Since Marx’s (Marx 1976, 915) classic theorization on “primitive accumulation,” extraction has been conceptualized as a process that requires direct and implicit forms of securitization, from state-sanctioned and imperial violence (Harvey 2003; Luxemburg 2003) to regimes of private security (Appel 2012, Shever 2012, Watts 2015, Welker 2014) and modes of paramilitary protection (Taussig 2018) for safeguarding resource-rich geographies. Though always partial and incomplete (Maguire, Frois, and Zurawski 2014), the project of averting future threats includes a range of disciplinary techniques, infrastructures, and affective formations (Masco 2014). In Colombia, these dynamics are palpable in the military’s long-standing involvement in protecting energy-related and extractive infrastructure, as well as in the

covert recruitment of paramilitary actors for fighting insurgent groups, union leaders, and anti-extractivism activists (Ávila and Guerra Ariza 2012; Ramírez Boscán 2007).

While the wind energy rush is not devoid of these violent entanglements (Barney 2021a, Jaramillo 2014), in this chapter I claim that Gustavo's kidnapping brought to light a peculiar security apparatus that supports the green energy economy. Since the wind and land of La Guajira cannot be physically enclosed in any way, corporate actors must devise other ways of avoiding turbulent events (like Gustavo's kidnapping) *without* relying on conventional forms of state-sanctioned or private violence, spatial fortification, and surveillance.⁶ For this reason, I argue, wind energy companies actively *recruit* indigeneity to this end.

If security is an affective state (Masco 2014) that calls on subjects to respond to “endangerment” – as a “general condition of being threatened”⁷ (Zeiderman 2020, 65) corporations thereby imagine Wayúu men (since security tasks, like driving the rugged terrain or manipulating firearms, are regionally coded as masculine) as those that can attune themselves more capaciously to future risks. These forms of commodifying security and recruiting local population for the service of corporate protection are not new (Welker 2009). But what is distinctive here is how Wayúu indigeneity, in the forms of Wayuunaiki linguistic skills and cultural knowledge about the landscape, is relied upon precisely because it provides “predictive knowledge of dangerous aberrations, as well as the material and symbolic systems developed to anticipate and respond to deviance” (Ghertner, McFann, and Goldstein 2020, 5). For companies, Wayúu indigeneity is thus viewed as an accurate framework for aiding companies to navigate

⁶ Rather than a specific set of worries, the dangers imagined by wind energy workers comprise a wide array of events and situations, from extortions and kidnappings to attacks on their infrastructure by guerrilla groups (like the ELN) or an unexpected military conflict with Venezuela.

⁷ Unlike the notion of danger which refers to concrete and temporally delimited threats, endangerment refers to a condition that is “durative and open-ended” since “the possibility of injury is endured indefinitely” (Zeiderman 2020, 65).

future risks and establish, in their view, a more precise division between friend/enemy or local/foreign. As a result, securing wind in La Guajira is viewed as an everyday, highly decentralized, and embodied practice: a job that local, Indigenous communities are best equipped to undertake. These forms of indigenized security, though fragile and failure-prone in crucial ways, aim to keep Colombia's green energy future alive. By exploring how the securitization of wind also depends on embodied Indigenous practices, legal norms, and navigational knowledge,

In the next section, I discuss wind energy's ambivalent in La Guajira. On one level, it is a technological fix for securing Colombia's energy transition and addressing climatological uncertainty. On another, it demands working in, installing infrastructure, and navigating windy regions that sit alongside the Venezuela-Colombian borderland – a politically contested territory marked by genealogies of illicit worlds, drug trafficking organizations, paramilitary groups, and other forms of lived insecurities. I then ethnographically focus on the labor of Wayúu driver and security guards – called *vigilantes* in Spanish⁸ –, who are hired to protect infrastructure, equipment, and non-Wayúu staff. I analyze the precarious nature and material aspirations attached to this line of work, as well as their security aesthetics – including the Venezuelan cars they drive or their skillful interactions during potentially risky encounters. I conclude by returning to Gustavo's rescue after four months and the way his kidnapping hints at the limits of this mode of indigenized security for the wind energy rush.

Dangerous Winds

In public forums, op-ed pieces, and government reports, La Guajira's wind is portrayed time and again as an ecological force that will provide long-term “energy security” to Colombia. As I discuss in the introduction, at least 70 percent of the national electrical grid currently depends on

⁸ This translates as security guards. It does not have the same connotation of vigilantism in the U.S. – i.e., self-appointed groups that conduct law enforcement tasks without authority.

an intricate hydropower network. During the rainy seasons, this network is capable of meeting up to 95 percent of the country's demand, but during weather phenomena like El Niño –which are cyclical yet largely unpredictable– the entire system can be on the verge of collapse. Between 1992-1993, the system did in fact collapse, with Colombians facing regular blackouts, a month-long power rationing, and a change in the country's time zone (dubbed the *hora gavia*) to take advantage of daylight. During the 2000s – when the prospect of developing wind power was being debated in Colombia – similar tipping points also occurred. When hydropower outputs drop, emergency coal and natural gas plants are switched on, increasing carbon emissions and spiking consumer prices. Yet, since the wind flows of La Guajira are not only immune to, but intensify during events like El Niño, they are widely considered – among the experts and state bureaucrats – as an ideal, techno-atmospheric solution to the climatological vulnerability of hydropower: such winds can avert future blackout threats and the political fallout of rising electric bills or power rationings.

This mode of understanding “energy security” resonates with the notion of a “vital system of security” (Collier and Lakoff 2015). At its most basic level, unlike the biopolitical management of populations, this mode of security seeks to shield systems – such as the electric grid – which are viewed as essential to the basic functioning of society. It assumes, alongside parallel analytics like “resilience,” that good governance is partly about absorbing any kind of dangerous event and continuing to operate. Yet, as a regulatory state concept that mutates over time, it also invites discussions of which infrastructures are considered “vital” at any given time and what dangers are ascribed to them. Hence, on an ethnographic level, the analytic of “vital system of security” allows us to trace what matters, to whom, and under what conditions of risk or threat.

When referring to Colombia's energy grid, experts and state bureaucrats often take security as a process of calibrating a network of infrastructures, natural resources, and atmospheric conditions in ways that don't break down, that operate "without events" – i.e. where unpredictable rain patterns, dwindling waterways, or severe weather events have no possibility of disrupting the intended flow of energy (see Masco 2014, 33). Imagining wind as something that can bring security to the grid, however, elides how this force is also enmeshed in other forms of (in)security beyond atmospheric phenomena (vividly captured in Gustavo's kidnapping). In fact, as I was told repeatedly by interlocutors and fellow researchers in the field, the places where the wind blows more strongly and steadily are incidentally the same corridors where other (illicit) things circulate profusely (from stolen vehicles and smuggled gasoline from Venezuela to cigarettes, whisky, and cocaine to/from the Caribbean). In sum, while wind is meant to produce "energy security," it is equally enveloped in other "atmospheres" of danger (Anderson 2009) that exist in tension with the dream of carbon-neutral capitalism.

Despite these risks, the anticipated high financial returns, attractive fiscal incentives, and long-term delivery contracts to the grid have encouraged dozens of Colombian and transnational companies to compete in seizing Colombia's wind flows. The wind is almost always visualized on maps that identify the prime areas for wind energy development (see Map 3). Yet, these representations, as Sarah Wiley (2018) points out in relation to fracking maps in the U.S., occlude what is underneath the airspace, especially the infrastructures, forms of labor, and everyday risks that come in the way of producing this new resource. This type of wind-centric *ethos* drives workers – like Gustavo – to follow the wind no matter where it takes them.⁹

⁹ This evokes the rationale that animates the rise of climate-related financial instruments – like weather derivatives or catastrophe bonds – that aspire to push for continued forms of accumulation regardless of meteorological, financial or political turbulence (Cooper 2010, 184).

La Guajira's insecure reputation is attributed to a *longue durée* of trans-regional illicit flows and the tenuous monopoly of violence by colonial and national authorities (see introduction), which radically contrast with Indigenous perspectives on cross-border flows (Schwartz 2021). In fact, during the 20th century, La Guajira was a region partially and unevenly connected to national institutions (Serje 2005), which resulted in chronic state abandonment, radical absence of basic infrastructure, and marginal political interest in the outlook of its Indigenous inhabitants. In part, these conditions led to the flourishing of the marijuana trade (Britto 2020), the arrival of paramilitary armies in the late 1990s (Ramírez Boscán 2007),¹⁰ and a variety of cross-border illicit flows that continue to support the livelihoods of thousands of Wayúu and non-Indigenous dwellers. This history reinforces the public imaginary – especially salient in digital media ecologies – that La Guajira is a lawless and crime-ridden borderland. Yet, this framing ignores how cross-border trade was a form of Indigenous self-determination, as I note in the introduction. It also elides that for Wayúu and other Indigenous peoples living near the border (like the Añú) there is a sense that their sociopolitical life precedes, and exists alongside, the legal regimes and borders separating Venezuela and Colombia.

Such illicit worlds, however, often exist in tension with fossil fuel industries and wind energy. In fact, the foundation of the Cerrejón coal mine in the 1980s – the largest open pit mine in Latin America - was justified in the press as an anti-narcotic strategy that would dissipate other illicit practices (Orsini Aarón 2007, 149), even though the company has been accused of supporting paramilitary organizations to attack union activists and community leaders who oppose their operations. Among wind energy staff, there is a similar hope that wind turbines

¹⁰ In the 1990s, as part of Colombia's decades-long armed conflict, the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) began taking control over Wayúu smuggling with deadly effects. Though the AUC officially demobilized in 2006, their presence still haunts the peninsula with rumors about their mutation into equally powerful criminal organizations.

placed in the middle of the arid peninsula will help “bring back” the state and the rule of law. Patricia, a non-Wayúu worker who was licensing projects for Empresas Públicas de Medellín (owner of the Jepirachi project; see Chapter 3), told me that wind farms were an indirect way of reasserting Colombia’s sovereignty (and truly “incorporating” the peninsula to the nation). She anticipated that wind energy would help militarize the border, as some of the turbines would likely be placed at least a quarter mile from Venezuela (dotting the line that divides the two nations and forming a kind of wall). As the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela has intensified, and close to 1.5 million Venezuelan refugees have crossed into Colombia in the last five years, there has also been a resurgence of conspiratorial and xenophobic discourse that portrays refugees as potential or actual criminals.

On the ground, however, the lives of wind energy workers were haunted by danger. During my fieldwork, I encountered a popular genre of insecurity talk among wind energy workers, filled with tales of armed robberies, stolen equipment, camouflaging techniques, protection rituals, or chilling encounters on the road. It was these layers of rumors, speculation, and everyday talk about past experiences that consolidated the threats as real and menacing (Luna 2018; Aretxaga 2005).

On one level, this genre of insecurity helped to recast the corporation as the vulnerable entity, neglecting other forms of violence and lived insecurities that impact Wayuu Indigenous communities (see introduction), or the potential waves of structural and ecological violence that will go alongside the wind energy rush (Barney 2021b), from armed disputes among clan groups and attacks against anti-wind activists. Rumors of insecurity often corporate workers as persons deserving added state protection and public sympathy. On another level, the insecurity talk reproduces long-standing imaginaries of La Guajira as a violent border, inhabited by a Wayuu

population that is complicit or indifferent to criminal organizations or that is defined by a “culture of illegality.” In other words, insecurity talk tends to codify the Wayúu as occupying the place of the enemy that needs to be subsumed by the state. An immediate byproduct of these public discourses is to call, in one way or another, for greater and more comprehensive forms of militarization and policing, despite the potential abuses and Indigenous rights violations this would entail. Yet, the insecurity genre, at least among wind energy workers, created modes of intimacy and solidarity (as they would often circulate accrued knowledge and techniques to stay safe in the field, from GPS tracking devices to Wayúu rituals of bodily protection).

The most vulnerable in the industry, as Patricia told me, were not the managers or engineers working in insulated and highly securitized office buildings in Bogotá or Medellín, but rather the topographers, anthropologists, lawyers, drivers, and social workers collecting data, engaging Wayúu communities, or fixing wind meters. They moved around with limited or no protection (nothing more than a cell phone with a patchy signal) and, as Patricia complained, ended up sacrificing their own personal security for the sake of the eolian resource.

But in accounting for these layers of illicitness and danger, what is often neglected is how the Wayúu themselves have produced forms of protection and accountability at the margins of state control. Their hegemonic presence on the peninsula has long made Indigenous customary law (*Sükuait'pa Wayúu*) and kinship the idioms for regulating social relations, serving at several points as the *de facto* mechanism for solving disputes in lieu of colonial and later Colombian legal authorities (Guerra Curvelo 2002; Polo Acuña 2012), 101. For this reason, security can mean radically different things for Wayúu and non-Wayúu persons. On a national scale, security is often viewed as a gradual extension of law enforcement into areas where the state had previously been deemed “absent” (Zeiderman 2016, 9), owing perhaps to Colombia’s protracted

armed conflict and drug trafficking violence. By contrast, given the Wayúu's territorial autonomy, security here is intertwined with Indigenous legal and kinship-based forms of accountability, which conceptualize crime and risk in ways that have nothing to do with policing and state law.¹¹ It is precisely this layer of accountability, embedded in Wayúu indigeneity, which has become a valuable resource for wind energy corporations, albeit with certain limits.

To be sure, these forms of protection apply almost exclusively to Wayúu people (who belong to networks of matrilineal kin, see Chapter 1).¹² Non-Wayúu people like Gustavo are thus outside its jurisdiction. For this reason, wind energy companies like Jemeiwaa Kai rely on Wayúu kin relations, knowledge, aesthetics, and legal accountability mechanism to somehow harness and camouflage corporate workers within this system. Crucially, as I shall explore below, they do so by hiring Wayúu men themselves, who are already within and can mobilize these networks of protection in cases of danger. This camouflage thus does not aspire to mimic the state security forces (as in Jusionyte 2015; Taussig 2003). Rather, it is a form of embeddedness in Indigenous social life and aesthetics in order ensure the corporation's safety. As Patricia told me, "A community knows 'who is who,' and often when these events happen (like the kidnapping), they can immediately *know* who was behind it..." The Wayúu are thus regarded as having a heightened faculty for becoming attuned to (in)security, carrying not only the accountability of customary law, but also cultural forms of sensibility for identifying and averting future threats – a form of anticipatory knowledge and risk-averting ethos.

¹¹ This legal system operates in many situations of everyday life, from territorial and inheritance disputes to cases of physical aggressions. This system is built on the principle of restorative justice, which seeks to produce a mutual agreement that can reestablish social relations, territorial peace, and reconciliation.

¹² While *alijunas* can be accused and be demanded a compensation for an aggression committed *against* a Wayúu, they can rarely demand a compensation as a victim (in large part because the arrangements are made not among individuals, but rather matrilineal extended families, which *alijunas* in most cases lack).

In short, even while the Wayúu are commonly stigmatized as prone to criminal practices or possessing a “culture of illegality” (Orsini Aarón 2007, 250), for the wind energy industry they are essential for capturing eolian resource and making wind power uneventful and profitable. But even if this line of work promises a regular income in a region with mass unemployment and rampant poverty, it often comes at great risk for Wayúu people themselves, as I discuss next.¹³

Indigenized Security

A few months before Gustavo’s kidnapping, Pedro and Felipe were in the office in Uribia looking at various satellite images on a laptop and figuring out the best route to take for their upcoming field trip. Pedro and Felipe were two long-time Wayúu employees of Jemeiwaa Kai. Their work involved a range of tasks, from driving the company vehicles and offering logistical support for community meetings (such as setting up the diesel generator or videotaping the event) to making minor repairs to wind meters distributed across the peninsula. For the next few days, they were tasked with visiting two of the company’s perimeters and photographing 38 spots of the landscape. Engineers in Bogotá had made this request since they needed to confirm that these areas were in fact “empty” – i.e., did not overlap with water reservoirs, agricultural plots, old houses, or sites of cultural significance (which by law cannot be adjacent to wind energy infrastructure). During the trip they would also check in on two wind meters placed on the peninsula. Both practices – mapping the landscape and gathering data on wind speeds – were essential for designing and licensing future wind farms.

Gleaning from the map sent from Bogotá, Pedro was mostly concerned with taking the *safest* possible route. He was a skillful driver in his late 40s, who became an expert on navigating the

¹³ Such security apparatus is also the byproduct of wind energy’s spatial dynamics in La Guajira, as critical infrastructure is meant to sit across a vast expanse of land without the possibility of relying on architectural forms of fences, barbed wire, and surveilled enclosures.

peninsula from visiting his network of kin and friends, his previous work at the Cerrejón mine, and – as he humorously recalls – his lucrative stint during the marijuana bonanza in the late 1980s (Britto 2020). Indeed, his professional background reveals how licit and illicit worlds of resource extraction are blurrier and more interconnected. Indeed, it was the marijuana economy that taught him the driving skills, the ability for sensing danger (e.g., suspicious cars, strange actions, and geographies of risk) and the spatial attunement for becoming a good *trochero* (i.e., someone who can move across the hundreds of dirt, labyrinthine, and fluctuating roads or *trochas* that crisscross the peninsula).

Pedro got hired precisely because of his territorial knowledge of the peninsula, his linguistic skills, and social etiquette to engage Wayúu communities. Although the satellite data they examined on the laptop provided a bird's-eye view of the rugged terrain, including its dry vegetation, roads, and endless chain of scattered Wayúu settlements, Pedro saw the image in ways that were unavailable to non-Wayuu engineers in Bogotá, since it could only be interpreted with local knowledge. He was concerned with how the company's SUV would be read by onlookers (a tourist? a politician? a criminal or paramilitary group?), if it made sense to drive through a certain portion of the peninsula (especially if recent rumors had made it as especially risky), or even what time of the day would be best to take a road that had a negative reputation for robberies or kidnappings. While his son Felipe – who was in his 20s – was eager to get going and move through the 38 spots as fast as possible, Pedro was more cautious in his planning. A dirt road badly chosen, an unexpected delay, or moving through a region at the wrong time, he told me, could put the company's cars, equipment, and workers at risk.

After grabbing some water, food, and the GPS equipment, we drove on the gravel road for 75 miles to start photographing the spots. We left in a Venezuelan SUV, listening to a recording by

vallenato superstar Diómedes Díaz. As the dust started creeping in the car, Pedro and Felipe complained about the sharp difference in the kinds of work in Jemeiwaa Kai. “In the cool weather of Bogotá,” Pedro said, “it is easy to open Google Earth and move from spot to spot, but here in this deadly heat, with bad roads and dry vegetation... it’s complicated. It’s not only exhausting, but dangerous...” The road from Uribia to the Alta Guajira, where the wind farm perimeters were located, is dotted by traffic signs and billboards that alert Wayúu pedestrians and drivers to the risk posed by the coal mine train (responsible for dozens of goat and human injuries and fatalities every year). Such signs were another layer of the atmosphere of heightened surveillance, which prioritizes extractive infrastructure as elements that require protection (see Fig 26). But rather than occupational hazards or roadside safety, Pedro and Felipe were more attuned to the minutiae of tales and rumors about recent thefts and kidnappings, stories about newly formed or extinct criminal groups or inter-clan conflicts that can devolve into armed violence. Attending to these forms of danger – imperceptible through Google Earth and to non-Wayúu persons– was essential for their job and for wind power more broadly.



Figure 26. Cerrejón Security Signs across the Cerrejón Railroad (Source: Photo by Author)

Note: The text reads “if the train is coming don’t cross.”

After we made several stops and photographed the first few spots, the GPS directed us to a slim and inaccessible passage, where the car was suddenly blocked by chains and surrounded by several armed men from stepped out from the bush with their faces covered (a scene reminiscent of Gustavo’s kidnapping). Pedro quickly lowered the tinted glass and immediately identified himself in Wayuunaiki in a friendly way and smiling, spelling out his surname, his clan and the *rancheria* (or rural community) where he resided (see Chapter 1). After a few minutes, the men lowered the chains and gave us permission to collect the data after Pedro clarified that we were part of the wind farm crew. As we drove by, Pedro explained to me in a calm tone that the men’s reaction was predictable, as he figured out that their community was tangled in some sort of inter-clan dispute that had gone violent (and hence armed individuals were guarding the

surroundings). In this context, he reasoned, the sudden appearance of an unknown car with dark windows – as the one we were in – was highly suspicious and could be misinterpreted as carrying their enemies. After quickly parking the car, Felipe rushed to collect data with me. As we went to find the spot, he couldn't contain his frustration that, amidst an inter-clan conflict, he had to walk a few miles into the dry forest and take a photograph for engineers that were secluded from danger (Fig. 27). After we exited the site and drove away, we all felt relief, and Felipe told me (the only non-Wayúu in the vehicle): “This is why you *always* need to be with a Wayúu over here. If you come to this place alone, nobody knows you, you have no family, and therefore no one will respond if something happens to you.” For Felipe, a strange car – with non-Wayúu occupants – could signal a multitude of things, from a group of tourists that had lost their way or a public health official to more sinister presumptions (such as a criminal gang, a paramilitary group, or simply their enemies in the conflict). As Pedro nodded, he added: “You always have to be with Wayúu people... They know exactly if you're in danger and if it's safe for you to work here or not. If you're alone, you never know. But a Wayúu will not easily mess around with another Wayúu.”



Figure 27. Felipe Looking for the Coordinates on his GPS in the Casa Eléctrica Perimeter (Source: Photo by Author)

Both were conscious that dangerous encounters could arise unexpectedly and were an ordinary part of the job. But they were emphatic in explaining to me that their social positionality as Wayúus offered a crucial degree of protection that I as a non-Wayúu lacked. While they wore shirts with the logos of Jemeiwaa Kai, in these encounters Pedro and Felipe invoked and highlighted their indigeneity by quickly referring to their clan-based identity, their ancestral territory, and signaling their embeddedness in Wayúu social life. This recourse created a form of immunity, of added protection or deterrence, that allowed them to keep the licensing work going.

While Pedro and Felipe's Indigenous belonging, linguistic skills, and spatial attunements were a central part of the indigenized security apparatus mobilized by Jemeiwaa Kai, an equally important dimension of the security aesthetics of wind power was the cars themselves. One overlooked aspect of the wind energy rush are the dozens of vehicles that maintain the flow of

workers, goods, and equipment in constant circulation. Such fossil-fuel technologies are critical for visiting prospective Wayúu hosts, carrying out community workshops and consultation meetings, and marking points on the GPS for future maps. Wind energy is intimately dependent on these cars: they are, to borrow from Cymene Howe, “unlikely nonhuman collaborators in the development of renewable energy” (Howe 2019, 74).

Yet, the cars that Pedro and Felipe drove had a peculiar aesthetic quality: they were Venezuelan, which was visible in their license plates—distinguishable by their white background and blue letters or the Venezuelan states from which they originated (see Fig. 28). Most of the Venezuelans cars in the Colombian Guajira have an illicit past: they were either stolen in Venezuela, or fraudulently reported as stolen to insurance companies, and then resold in the Colombian black market. According to one estimate, about 70 percent of all cars in the Colombian Guajira are Venezuelan (Benjumea Brito 2006).¹⁴ Most of these illicit cars live relatively undisturbed due to a peculiar legal exception, which allows them to circulate legally, but *only* within the department of La Guajira (or close to the Venezuela-Colombia border).¹⁵ If they leave for the interior of Colombia, the cars will likely be detained. Ironically, the cars cannot circulate in Venezuela either, since owners fear that if they cross the border, the police in that country might confiscate them (since they remain reported as stolen). Neither fully Venezuelan nor Colombian, these are authentically *guajiro* (or “local”) vehicles that are only owned by border dwellers – many of whom Wayúu – and occupy a liminal space.¹⁶

¹⁴ For many residents in La Guajira, the main appeal of these vehicles is their price. They can cost between 10 and 30 percent of the market price of a Colombian car (thereby making cars with Colombian license plates a sign of distinction).

¹⁵ Per numerous regional decrees, starting in 2003, these vehicles can go through a bureaucratic process—called *interning* or *internación* – that gives them such legal immunity.

¹⁶ Since the 2000s, state governments in La Guajira have periodically attempted to legalize all Venezuelan cars, through the *interning* processes, yet new cars keep arriving. At several moments, they have also announced measures to suspend their legal immunity and thus curtail the binational black market in stolen vehicles. Yet, these measures have been temporary and have almost always been met by protests (e.g., El Tiempo 1993, 1995). Interned



Figure 28. An “Interned” Car from Venezuela Used by Jemeiwaa Kai (Source: Photo by Author)

Interned cars are emblematic of the binational dynamics that have come to define La Guajira. The cars are both licit and illicit, their owners periodically persecuted by state regulatory agencies, and yet a pillar of people’s mobility and everyday life. But more importantly, in the context of wind energy, they are heavily sought after insofar as they signal locality and autochthony. Since these cars can’t leave the department of La Guajira, only local residents drive and own them. By using these illicit cars that lacked logos or other forms of corporate

cars are such an essential part of the social fabric of La Guajira that blocking their movements would disrupt the entire region: it would keep children from going to school, people from going to work or to the doctor, tourist from reaching hostels, and kin and friends from visiting each other. Mobility in La Guajira is deeply intertwined with these Venezuelan cars.

identification, Jemeiwaa Kai sought to camouflage itself – and its non-Indigenous occupants – as local *guajiros* and, in this sense, convey to onlookers that the occupants were a Wayúu family, driving across the peninsula to visit kin and friends, rather than a crew of engineers from Bogotá repairing wind meters and meeting with communities to secure the permits to build a wind farm.

The Legal Immunity of Security Guards

Skillful drivers and Venezuelan (il)licit cars make up a substantial part of the security apparatus of the wind energy industry. But an equally significant segment is comprised of male security guards (*vigilantes*). Unlike drivers who are constantly on the move, security guards are stationary and charged with looking after infrastructure for long hours and reporting unusual events that may potentially disrupt their regular functioning.

Alfredo – who we met in the opening section of the chapter –made a career as a guard and then as a security supervisor of EPM’s Jepirachi wind farm (see Chapter 3) (Fig. 29). He was responsible for leading a crew of 15 Wayúu security guards from the nearby communities of Kasiwoulin and Arujkajui. As a Wayúu, he quickly adapted to the rural life of a *ranchería*, residing in a small house in one of the Wayúu communities. He cultivated close ties with residents, partaking in highly significant social events (such as secondary burials) and becoming a source of constant help – driving people to the hospital when needed or pulling his strings with EPM’s management to solicit aid at critical junctures. In 2011, his tenure ended abruptly due to a traffic accident, which left him with injuries that prevented him from keeping his job. He retired and, after almost 10 years, was still in a legal battle with EPM to collect a monetary compensation and disability pension from his accident.



Figure 29. The Jepirachi Wind Farm (Source: Photo by Author)

As a supervisor, Alfredo taught Wayúu security guards how to detect and report any dangerous activity such as a strange car or motorcycle driving by or unexpected lights or sounds at night. Amid a complex mix of paramilitary groups, drug trafficking activity, and occasional insurgent attacks during the 2000s, his crew had to cultivate a sensibility to a wide mix of risks that could jeopardize Jepirachi. For Alfredo, that his team of guards were from the host communities made his job easier. They thoroughly knew their territory: the intricate network of roads, the daily routines and movements of neighbors and kin, the cars and motorcycles that would normally move along roads at specific times, or the exceptional events (like tourist holidays or political campaign acts) that would prompt an inflow of strangers into the vicinity. In other words, they had a sensibility for detecting anything that disrupted the flow of everyday life.

The labor of security guards was particularly critical since Jepirachi was not spatially enclosed (see Chapter 3). This open design devoid of fences, barbed wire, and militarized security was – and continues to be – mobilized by wind energy corporations to convince Wayúu communities of their post-extractive and environmentally friendlier qualities. Yet, this means that the wind turbines were always exposed to residents and goats (something desired by corporate and Indigenous actors), but also to outsiders that could disrupt them. In fact, Alfredo’s main goal was to produce a secluded environment *without* resorting to conventional tools like fences, walls, and cameras associated with police-based, military, or private security. To achieve this, security had to be made into something “domestic” (Low 2019, 146-147) and communal (Welker 2009).

Most security guards work grueling 12-hour shifts, alternating days and nights throughout the week. After a 10-minute debriefing at the start of a shift, the guards spend the rest of the time sitting alone under a tree to get some cover from the blazing sun during the day or the cool winds at night, staring at the landscape and the rotating turbines for hours. “Most of the time you just have to be aware of people that are not from here, strange folks, who aren’t from the community, who aren’t known,” Francisco, a longtime guard, once told me sitting at his post. “Thieves could steal many things, but mainly copper from the electric wiring. That’s why one must remain alert. If one falls asleep, someone could come and cut a piece.” Indeed, as I describe in Chapter 3, copper is one of the chokepoints of wind turbines, as the damage to the wiring can leave a wind farm inoperable. As illicit copper markets exist near the border, such connections are constantly surveilled by guards.

The guards almost always described their work to me as physically strenuous and boring. “The late shift”, Francisco, who was part of Alfredo’s crew said, “is the hardest. Even if you’re not doing anything, it’s exhausting. I would rather be sleeping with my family and not there

alone, but one gets used to it.” Some guards brought a small radio and listened to music for distraction. If they were lucky enough to be placed in an area with enough phone signal, guards would scroll their phones incessantly on Facebook and YouTube. Some security posts were more desirable than others, such as patrolling the wind farm on a motorcycle or bicycle or being stationed in the electric substation, which gave guards some company for the long shifts.

These regimented 12-hour shifts took a toll on people’s bodies, leading to acute fatigue, sleep disorders, and pain. Guards not only observed and protected infrastructure but became to some degree an infrastructure in themselves (Simone 2004) that assisted in maintaining the cyclical and uneventful surround of wind farms. This monotonous, gendered, and low-paying work was widely criticized by Wayúu activists and NGOs. In their view, the overrepresentation of Wayúu men in security guard roles was a sign not only of narrow professional horizons and limited educational opportunities, but also of the extractive nature of the wind energy rush. “I’ve been doing security work for 15 years,” Francisco said, “But there is nothing else besides *vigilancia* jobs. And even those positions are not [numerous] enough. In Jepirachi, there are only 12 positions for three communities.”¹⁷ After the short-lived low-skilled positions that arise during the construction phase, security guards are the most common roles that remain once the turbines are up and running.

In fact, while high-skilled and highly-paid jobs – like engineers or lawyers– were almost always filled by non-Wayúu individuals from urban and middle-class backgrounds (like Gustavo), the exhausting, precarious, and risky roles of drivers and vigilantes were the only option for the Wayúu. “[Wind energy] companies,” a member of the NGO *Nación Wayúu* told me during an interview, “only offer *pala* [shovel] *y machete*” – tools that are reminiscent of

¹⁷ With over 300 members combined.

rural, manual, and grueling labor. Security guards not only have limited options for professional mobility but are also exposed to countless risks. Indeed, the traffic accident that almost took Alfredo's life and prematurely ended his career came while he was driving after midnight, overworked after days of long shifts looking after the wind turbines and foreign technicians that had come to make some special repairs.

Despite their precariousness and repetitiveness, these forms of guard labor are highly desired by Wayúu men across the rural peninsula. They offer, however minimally, a source of economic security in a region with negligible levels of formal employment and the second highest poverty rate in Colombia (over 53 percent, DANE 2020). A security guard job promises a stable income (slightly above minimum wage, or around \$600 a month), social security benefits, and health insurance. Working as a guard has the potential of putting one's family on a slightly higher socioeconomic scale, a trend that is detectable in their access to consumer goods, the construction material of their homes, DirectTV antennas, and new Venezuelan motorcycles. Alfredo, for instance, frequently pointed to his large house, his children's college education, and his Venezuelan Toyota SUV as material signs of his labor as security supervisor for Jepirachi. As in other contexts of resource extraction, employment in wind energy – even in these low ranks – brings about new forms of mobility and social capital. It also created possibilities for dialogue and peace between communities and wind energy corporations, as guards often mediated the interactions between corporate offices and Wayúu communities and had the skills for navigating conflicts with the discretion and cultural soundness that non-Wayúu military, police or private security agents lacked. This dual sense of dependence and disdain over the conditions of guard labor mirrors other experiences of wage laborers in extractive zones (Nash 1979, Taussig 2010).

As these highly coveted jobs are open to anyone with a high-school diploma and require no previous experience, they often ignite internal frictions within communities over who will fill those positions. It also amplifies gendered divides, as this line of work – due to the need to manipulate firearms and be potentially engaged in physical disputes (which are invariably coded as masculine) – overwhelmingly favors men, leaving a reduced number of roles (such as social work or translator) to women. “When there is a job opening, there is a fight,” Francisco said. To comply with compensation agreements made during the licensing phase, wind energy companies tend to create a higher-than-needed number of security guard openings. This is viewed as a strategy for keeping corporate-community relations friendly, dissipating local discontent and potential interruptions (Chapter 3) and conveying to regional and national publics that wind energy can indeed bring about stable jobs and local development. But as the number of fixed positions almost always exceeds potential candidates, communities struggle in designing arrangements (where all candidates get to work full-time for three or six months at a time) or distribute the roles based on clan-based hierarchies, privileging the *apüshi*¹⁸ and excluding paternal kin. Conflicts around *vigilante* roles can devolve into strikes and disruption against wind farms or spiral into violent clan-based conflicts – such as the one Pedro and Felipe encountered on the road, ironically creating situations of insecurity.

Despite this, corporations rely heavily on Wayúu security guards because of the widespread assumption that they are the best remedy for protecting infrastructure and corporate workers from other Wayúu and non-Wayúu actors. Security guards, borrowing from Golub and Rhee (2013), offer a kind of “traction” – i.e. the ability to articulate global/national aspirations with local idiosyncrasies. It was this embodied value that made indigeneity a critical component for

¹⁸ Those belonging to a matrilineal extended family.

the job – a form of Indigenous expertise that could be exploited. In fact, during my research I met only a few non-Wayúu security guards who were part of the wind energy industry, whose tenure was short-lived, affected by frictions that led to their firing or resignation, or who relied intensively on the assistance of other Wayúu co-workers to perform their basic duties. Hence, it wasn't just locality but indigeneity that mattered. In fact, Alfredo always insisted that he thrived in EPM in part for being a Wayúu – i.e., his ecological knowledge, bodily comportment, moral demeanor, fluency in Wayuunaiki, and a sensibility to distinguish danger in ways that were imperceptible to non-Wayúu. What in other contexts is performed through biometric systems and technologies of surveillance, here was done through Alfredo's and Francisco's embodied knowledge, which ultimately allowed the corporation to “mak[e] people visible, readable, and intelligible” (Low and Maguire 2019, 23).

Crucially, Wayúu men were also hired due to their immersion in networks of matrilineal kin and their adherence to the jurisdiction of Wayúu law, providing them with a certain degree of protection in case of dangerous events. Rather than a formalized code of written laws, these are a set of norms and practices of retribution that contemplate the right of victims (or his or her matrilineal kin) to receive a material compensation for damages inflicted by others. It puts forth a form of restorative justice as it seeks to produce a mutual agreement that can reestablish social relations, reinstate territorial peace, and foreground reconciliation. Such a system is sustained by the labor of *Pütchipü'üs*, who are intermediaries that try to reach an agreement regarding the appropriate compensation for the victim and their families.¹⁹ The action of a *Pütchipü'ü* is called

¹⁹ These are typically an experienced elder that belongs to a clan *different* from the ones involved in the dispute – mediates during several weeks or months through a careful deployment of dialogue, persuasion, negotiation, and ongoing evocation of moral principles, mythical references, local history, and traditional knowledge with the goal of reaching a peaceful resolution and avoiding the long cycles of revenge and inter-clan belligerence that can typically ensue after an aggression.

upon during conflicts that erupt from land disputes, inheritance disagreements, violation of water rights, cattle theft, and forms of physical aggression (which are widely recognized as crimes).

Since Wayúus' roles as security guards were inseparable from their affiliations in matrilineal extended families and clans—which implied that certain forms of compensation and retribution would come into play in case of a situation like Gustavo's—corporations consciously enlisted and extended Wayúu legal concepts, layers of accountability, and practices for averting conflicts onto their infrastructure and non-Wayúu staff. A potential aggressor, I was told once by a non-Indigenous technician of the Jepirachi wind farm, would be less inclined to affront a Wayúu guard or driver knowing that such an action could unleash complex, inter-clan conflicts automatically involving his maternal kin. In other words, the guards' professional and Indigenous identities were blurry and inseparable from each other. Both the aggressors and the victims, per Wayúu law, would bring in other members of the relevant clans, turning an individual dispute into a collective one (Guerra Curvelo 2002; Perrin 2003; Perrin and Uliyuu Machado 1984). Indeed, Alfredo told me how during his career as a security supervisor his Wayúu identity served as a deterrence for persons that might have wanted to attack him in any way. When during his early tenure some of his radio equipment was stolen, rather than relying on the police, he recovered the equipment by relying on the norms and practices of Wayúu law, speaking directly to the person's matrilineal extended families and threatening to demand a compensation (*maiina*) for the fault.

Furthermore, given their knowledge of what is considered a crime (*ainjarra*) and what kind of compensation it requires according to Wayúu law, Indigenous guards can also be prudent enough—as opposed to non-Wayúu guards, who do not possess this knowledge—when responding to a potentially dangerous situation, shielding the corporation from accusations of

wrongdoing by Wayúu communities or from becoming susceptible to future demands for compensations. In sum, Wayúu guards were viewed as knowing *how* to protect the wind farm in culturally sound ways.

These layers of protection deriving from matrilineal extended kinship and Wayúu law have been historically mobilized in La Guajira, as I describe in the introduction, from relations of polygamy put forth by powerful Wayúu men during colonial times to extend their networks of kin and protection across the peninsula (Orsini Aarón 2007) to more recent attempts by paramilitary armies to marry into Wayúu matrilineal families and thereby co-opt Indigenous smuggling routes (Ávila and Guerra Ariza 2012). Wind energy is the latest iteration in a chain of attempts to actively recruit the layers of accountability afforded by Wayúu indigeneity to produce security for outsiders (from colonial pearl mining camps to renewable energy projects). At a corporate level, this meant framing security as an everyday, communal task (Welker 2009, 144). In doing so, it eclipsed the corporation's foreignness, as if wind energy could harmoniously amalgamate with Wayúu environments and social life in ways that required no violence, surveillance, or control.

Nonetheless, as with all forms of security, this indigenized apparatus carries its own vulnerabilities. Some corporate executives I spoke to fear their infrastructures may become *too* embedded in Wayúu social life, inadvertently entrapping non-Indigenous workers within Wayúu conflicts that are unpredictable, illegible for outsiders, and often unrelated to the wind farms themselves. During fieldwork, it was common to hear stories of vehicles carrying non-Wayúu staff that had been attacked on the road, not with the aim of stealing them or kidnapping the foreign occupants, but rather to confront the Wayúu drivers who were involved in inter-clan disputes unrelated to wind power. Likewise, others – like Patricia – were hesitant about hiring

Wayúu guards and providing them with training. This, she told me, made wind energy extremely liable (even potentially with international repercussions). It could be read, she explained, as a story of wind energy companies relying on extra-legal forms of violence to ensure their profitability – bringing back precisely the ghost of paramilitarism and resource extraction that Colombia’s wind energy industry has sought to circumvent.

But perhaps the most obvious shortcoming for corporations was its security apparatus’s inability to counteract the menacing force of organized crime, moving across or exercising control over portions of the Venezuelan-Colombian border. The Wayúu’s kin relations, legal accountability and sensorial and affective capacities were, to some degree, powerless to contain events such as Gustavo’s violent kidnapping. Such forms of criminal power and geopolitical uncertainty exceeded the Wayúu’s realm of action. Hence, these forms of indigenized security would gradually coexist, and remain in tension, with parallel forms of private security that rely on armed bodyguards, military trained personnel, GPS-tracked bulletproof cars, and modes of affective attunements akin to policing. Gustavo’s rescue, which I discuss in the next and final section, thus reveals the limits of recruiting indigeneity as a way of securing Colombia’s green energy future.

Conclusion: Living with Turbulence

After almost four months of being held in a remote location near the border with Venezuela, Gustavo was rescued by the army’s anti-kidnapping team (GAULA). The news circulated quickly on local newspapers, radio, and social media, with videos and photographs showing him sitting down while two members of the national police cut the chains attached to his leg (Fig. 30). Shortly after, the police announced that they had arrested one suspect, though the remaining

kidnappers escaped. The GAULA was able to reach his location through cell phone calls as the captors negotiated for weeks with Gustavo's mother over a US\$200,000 ransom.



Figure 30. Gustavo with a T-shirt that Reads “GAULA: Rescued” (Source: RCN Noticias)

A few weeks after his rescue, I was surprised to see Gustavo again in La Guajira, getting ready to hit the road and preparing several consultation meetings with Wayúu communities. Gustavo was eager to get back to work and continue the licensing negotiations. While he had lost weight and was struggling with post-traumatic stress, he kept a somewhat optimistic outlook. The kidnapping, Gustavo told me as he invited me to the meetings, made him even more aware of how organized crime and the tenuous diplomatic relations with Venezuela could jeopardize wind farms. It also made him more cognizant of the precarity of La Guajira and more skeptical of wind energy's potential to revert these forms of structural violence.

But the kidnapping did alter substantially his 14-year career of unhindered work in La Guajira. Although Gustavo was still a part of Jemeiwaa Kai and coordinated part of the company's social engagement with Wayúu communities, he was now based almost exclusively

in Bogotá – in an office in an upscale and secured neighborhood in the northern part of town. His engagements and positionality in the field also changed radically. In fact, as the Office for the Empowerment of Wayúu Community reopened its doors and the licensing work resumed, Gustavo was assigned a bulletproof, GPS-tracked SUV – a Toyota vehicle with yellow Colombian license plates that mimics the cars that transport Bogotá’s political and business elite– and an armed escort (a non-Wayúu, retired member of Colombia’s army) (Fig. 31). Rather than the Venezuelan, (il)licit, and autochthonous cars, driven by local Wayúu dwellers, the car ecology that gradually came to define Jemeiwaa’ Kai’s security aesthetics evoked the genealogies of lived and imagined insecurities of Colombia’s violent history (Zeiderman 2016). Jemeiwaa Kai thus shifted to a more hybrid arrangement that combined indigenized protection with forms of private security.



Figure 31. Colombian Bulletproof Cars Parked during a Consultation Meeting (Source: Photo by Author)

While Gustavo recognized that AES – Jemeiwaa Kai’s parent company – did not want to take further risks, he felt that this new hybrid scheme created an insurmountable distance between him and Wayúu interlocutors. The adoption of a more private security model made Jemeiwaa Kai, in his view, akin to fossil fuel industries, something that Gustavo had struggled to move away from. As we rode, he confessed that he felt a certain embarrassment about arriving escorted by an armed, military-trained, and hypervigilant stranger in a bulletproof car. It made it seem, Gustavo reasoned, that the company distrusted the Wayúu, or that Jemeiwaa Kai needed armed protection from the very communities that were offering their land to build colossal wind farms. The thickness of the impenetrable black glass, the armed escort camouflaging his gun in a colorful Wayúu handbag, and the affects of suspicion that came to be a part of Gustavo’s routine disrupted the ongoing, meaningful exchanges that were considered – as I discussed in Chapter 2 – to be crucial for maintaining the conditions to harness wind without interruption.

Gustavo shared these impressions as we were driving to a community meeting, like the one he attended before being kidnapped. Diego, Gustavo’s boss, and the head of Jemeiwaa Kai, rode in the vehicle as well. Despite the kidnapping, I was surprised to encounter the same “resource affect” (Weszkalnys 2016) of wind-centric hope, optimism, and confidence that I had witnessed in the early days of fieldwork. As we moved along the unpaved and heavily potholed road, I asked Diego if the wind’s turbulence in La Guajira could – in the near or long-term future – end up being too severe or erratic to affect their infrastructure. As he confidently shook his head no, Diego explained that the physical motion that causes turbulence could in theory disrupt Jemeiwaa Kai’s turbines. Yet, “the wind of La Guajira,” he said, “is like driving a Ferrari on a straight, perfectly paved, five-lane highway. It’s extremely smooth. That’s the type of turbulence we have here.” Ironically, while Diego alluded to the smooth movement of a luxurious car, we

all grabbed firmly on the handles to avoid hitting our heads and bodies on the roof as the armed escort drove over 80 miles per hour through the dangerous gravel road, one hand on the wheel and one on his gun. The turbulence we all experienced in this moment was terrestrial rather than atmospheric, emanating from the agitation that derives from the perception of criminal insecurity and which, in a split second, could suddenly disrupt wind farming plans for months, as it happened with Gustavo's kidnapping. While the wind in La Guajira moved calmly "as a Ferrari," the up and down commotion of the bulletproof car vividly captured the other disturbing forces that come in the way of building and sustaining green energy capitalism in Colombia. And it was the insulated and bulletproof environments, precariously shielding its occupants, that now offer an added – yet ultimately partial – layer of protection for harnessing the eolian resource above us.

In this chapter, I have explored how wind energy companies seek to stabilize and respond to forms of endangerment by hiring Wayúu security personnel for protecting their staff, infrastructure, and equipment. By relying on Wayúu knowledge, kin relations, legal norms and practices, and sensibility to risk, corporate actors aspire to build a security apparatus that actively mobilizes and embeds itself in indigeneity – and the layers of immunity and accountability it offers – to shield themselves from the terrestrial turbulence brought about by illicit worlds. Though one may read these practices as a neoliberal strategy of delegating to communities the responsibility for protecting themselves and others (Goldstein 2004; Low 2019), wind energy corporations in La Guajira rely on Indigenous norms and practices for regulating social life that precede and exist alongside state security epistemologies, infrastructure, and practices. This implies enlisting forms of law, sociality, aesthetics, and territoriality that are viewed by the Wayúu as originating from time immemorial to securitize the utopian futures of clean energy.

The kidnapping, however, exposes the limits of this project. Relying on Wayúu drivers and security guards, as Gustavo's case demonstrates, does not always, or in all circumstances, ensure the imagined ends of safety and uneventfulness. As with security systems elsewhere, failure is an inherent part of their existence (Maguire, Frois, and Zurawski 2014). The kidnapping, in fact, underscored the impossibility of Wayúu workers to counter forms of danger that derive from geopolitical dynamics or criminal organizations that span beyond Wayúu jurisdiction. Yet, relying on Wayúu indigeneity remains a key requirement for harnessing wind in Colombia and mediating the labor relations between corporations and Indigenous communities. This ultimately highlights that the wind energy rush in La Guajira is less a transition from "dirty" fossil fuels and carbon-base extraction and more of a delicate, complex balance with a range of illicit worlds that inhabit La Guajira's borderland, especially across its windiest areas. And, while for some the wind energy rush will eventually "colonize" the border or "bring back the state," on an everyday level corporations see in the mimetic embeddedness in Indigenous lifeworlds – and in some cases with the aesthetic of illicit worlds, as in the Venezuelan cars – the only option to keep the dream of carbon-neutral capitalism alive.

Epilogue:

The Elusive Futures of Wind

On January 21, 2022, nearly two years after I ended my long-term fieldwork, Colombia's president, Iván Duque, inaugurated the Joutkai Wind Farm in La Guajira (Fig. 32). In his televised speech, Duque reiterated the shifting valuation of wind that I have traced in this dissertation, from an ecologically destructive force to a virtuous resource capable of stabilizing the climate and drawing foreign capital. "In La Guajira," he said, "for many years, the sun was not necessarily a blessing. It created so many deserts that it affected other productive activities. Others thought that the wind was also a force of adversity that made it impossible to grow certain crops or for other conventional industries [to develop]. But we now realize that Colombia can dream of a new form of energy. And that we can connect this new form of energy with the country's desire to reach carbon neutrality." Duque celebrated once again how "Colombia has the best incentives in Latin America to generate non-conventional renewable energy" and was proud to know that "investors see Colombia, and La Guajira, as the most attractive site [to invest]." The inauguration of Jouktai – a 34 MW project with 14 turbine towers – reflected the ongoing growth of renewables, which, as he explained, will increase from accounting for 0.2 percent of the electric grid to nearly 20 percent by 2023.



Figure 32. Iván Duque Delivering a Speech near the Joutkai Wind Farm, 2022 (Source: Cablenoticias)

While Duque underscored that Joutkai had been built with the “unconditional support of [Wayúu] communities and in dialogue with them,” the wind farm was almost derailed due to numerous protests by Wayúu communities that erupted months and days before its official inauguration. Initially scheduled to last six months, the project took two years to assemble and was continuously interrupted by such demonstrations. These acts were driven by a wide array of grievances. For some, ISAGEN – the company that owns the project – failed to consult communities who had cemeteries close to some of the turbines, and thus territorial rights over them, like the case I describe in Chapter 3. In other instances, the interruptions had to do with who was included or excluded from consultation meetings, and the kinship-based criteria used by ISAGEN to decide *who* matters for conversations about wind power (as in Chapter 1). Even days before Duque’s arrival in La Guajira, the roads that led to the wind farm were blocked and were opened only after a last-minute negotiation that allowed the formal inauguration to move forward. Such chains of events reveal, on the one hand, the fragile quality of the futures that are

being cultivated by the Colombian state around wind power. On the other hand, they signal the forms of Indigenous insistence (Richland 2021) that are shaping Colombia's green energy future. These events, and those analyzed throughout this dissertation, illuminate how Wayúu communities living in the windy Guajira peninsula can rearrange or refuse the self-proclaimed era of "New Energy", advocated by Duque's government, especially when it fails to align with their rights, aspirations, and futures.

In this dissertation, I have traced how wind power intersects with Indigenous peoples' environments, practices of resistance, and political and economic life in Colombia. At the same time, I have shown how Indigenous cultural, epistemic, and ontological worlds come to shape energy transitions and open new possibilities for climate justice. Through this ethnography of corporate and Indigenous entanglements, I have dissected some of the contours that define wind energy capitalism in Colombia, a project that seeks to convert the kinetic movement of air into a novel frontier of accumulation and climate solution *through* the recruitment of Wayúu indigeneity (an undertaking that is modulated by Wayúu people themselves in critical ways).

In the previous pages, I have endeavored to show how wind energy companies design and operate their projects in close, though uneasy, alignment with Wayúu modes of ordering land, airspace, and power. Since wind farms like Jepirachi or Jouktai are inside Wayúu land that cannot be privatized, it is only in accordance with Indigenous legal, political, and social orders that Colombia's goal of reaching zero carbon emissions by 2050 can be achieved. Such conditions, I have argued, give rise to a new form of green, racialized, and low-carbon extractivism that actively recruits and transforms – rather than obliterates – indigeneity as a crucial scaffolding for clean energy production and capital accumulation. From kinship charts

and practices of gift-giving to ancestral cemeteries and concepts of Wayúu law, I have ethnographically disentangled how the recruitment of Indigenous worlds is not merely a visual or affective appropriation for fashioning corporate identities. It is central to *producing* renewable energy. For this reason, wind energy companies like Jemeiwaa Kai and EPM enlist Wayúu kinship ties, moral economies, land tenure norms, and environmental knowledge to claim property over wind (Chapter 1), move machinery, cars, and workers across the peninsula (Chapter 2), ensure the long-term functioning of wind turbines (Chapter 3), and shield energy infrastructure from the imagined geographies of danger that surface along the Colombian-Venezuelan border (Chapter 4). In short, given wind's fuzzy and incipient legal, conceptual, and political status, wind energy companies rely on and articulate to Indigenous logics that connect people, land, and wind to craft Colombia's green energy future.

At the same time, the dissertation has attended to the conditions under which Indigenous actors productively engage with wind energy infrastructures and posit alternative frameworks regarding how wind power ought to be socially organized and which futures it should nurture, from expansive ideas about kin relationalities and ethics of obligations to the agency of cemeteries and Wayúu practices of accountability. The wind energy rush has thus sparked grassroots struggles over wind and over the meaning of energy transitions. Such aerial struggles, as this dissertation shows, are delineated by past and new political grammars as well as human and non-human agencies.

While this work analytically privileges corporate and Indigenous entanglements, there are other projects unfolding in La Guajira (and not discussed in depth here) that are designing and enacting alternative visions of just energy transition, which run counter to the imaginaries put forth by the Colombian state and companies like Jemeiwaa Kai and EPM. Such alternative

practices address the crucial question of what kind of energy futures are desired by the Wayúu. The dissertation touches tangentially on the conditions that would make the wind energy rush just for the Wayúu, such as its alignment with land-based sovereignty, its expansive inclusion of human and non-human kin, its capacity to create decent work beyond guard labor, or its ability to resolve the material precariousness and humanitarian emergency that ravages the peninsula. A just transition for the Wayúu, as many of my interlocutors reflected, would also involve territorial reconstruction (from the damages of coal mining and other forms of toxic extraction) as well as community models of energy production that benefit territories and collectivities that have already been impacted by global energy production.

Yet, there are several Wayúu spaces and organizations that are taking up this question in creative and more visible ways, from modes of legal activism and Indigenous human rights (e.g., the work of the NGO *Nación Wayúu*) to decolonial alternatives that seek to foreground other kinds of relationality with wind (or, as decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo [2018] calls it, *vincularidad*). I would like to end the dissertation by highlighting one such example: the working group *Mujeres Amigas del Viento* (Women Friends of the Wind), which brings together feminist scholars, educators, activists, and Indigenous leaders to reimagine new ways of relating to wind. In their most recent meeting in November 2021, the collective gathered wind energy activists from Mexico and Colombia to share and rethink strategies for territorial defense but centered on the concept of relationality.



Figure 33. Event for the *Mujeres Amigas del Viento* (Source: Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu)

Jacqueline Romero, a seasoned activist and long-time leader of the NGO *Fuerza Mujeres Wayúu*, opened the meeting explaining that “Women Friends of the Wind is a process that we have initiated with Wayúu women who are very concerned with what is happening in our land. The president of this country”, she continued, “prides himself on carrying the flag of climate change mitigation, but we see the opposite in both of our countries [Colombia and Mexico]. We have lived in historically impoverished regions [referring to Oaxaca in Mexico and La Guajira], but now we are the focus of the production of this kind of energy that is said to be renewable, green, and friendly. But what we are seeing is *far from friendly*.” The event was an attempt to challenge and reimagine the notion of compatibility and friendliness put forth by companies like Jemeiwaa Kai and EPM. “What is the wind for us, the Wayúu?” Romero asked the audience.

“Jouktai [the word for wind in Wayuunaiki] is the owner of the trade winds. But we are not harmonizing with Jouktai...”

Spaces like *Women Friends of the Wind* that bring together Latin American wind defenders, and which I will keep exploring in the future, tackle precisely what energy justice is and means for Indigenous Wayúu people, who have lived in landscapes affected by centuries of extraction and pollution and are now put at the forefront of climate solutions by having their land used for Colombia’s transition to wind energy. Events like this are opportunities for imagining a post-carbon world that opens a space for Wayúu epistemologies and practices in a way that company-led efforts of Indigenous articulation do not. What would it mean if an energy transition predicated a different kind of relationality with *Jouktai*? How would this unsettle and exceed the forms of climate justice enacted by the entanglements between companies and Wayúu communities explored in this work? This working group, to borrow from Arturo Escobar (2020), could be seen as articulating an epistemic and political praxis in “radical interdependence” (a shift that would align with other interventions in Latin America and the Global South such as Postdevelopment, Good Living, or Postextractivism). In short, their work tries to activate post-extractive imaginaries by nurturing and creating a different mode of relationality with wind beyond eolian wealth. By attending to these forms of interventions in Colombia’s energy transition, as the present work moves forward, it will encompass a more multivocal, and perhaps indeterminate, field of possibility around wind power.

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