

# DEVELOPMENT OR DEVASTATION?

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## Epistemologies of Mayan women's resistance to an open-pit goldmine in Guatemala

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### Abstract

The Canadian corporation Goldcorp's Marlin Mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacán is the first open-pit goldmine in Guatemala. While Goldcorp depicts Marlin as a showcase for development and good business, many Mayan women express extreme distress at the multilayered destruction caused by the corporation. Under the guidance of the indigenous women's movement Tz'ununija', in May–June 2011 and July 2012, I held in-depth interviews with five Maya-Mam leaders and two workshops in San Miguel with more than 30 women opposing the mine. Analysing their visions and Goldcorp's public development discourse, I argue that the mine is decimating San Miguel's social fabric and environment. Although Goldcorp has created employment, infrastructure and injected money into the local economy, gains are short term in comparison with the long-term impacts of the mining venture on land and community. At heart, two fundamentally opposed visions are at stake: Western "development" versus tb'anil qchwinqlal, or quality of life.

### Keywords

Mayan women, goldmining, development, indigenous worldviews, Guatemala

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## Introduction

What has the mine brought us? Complete disruption.

This wasn't the case before, we lived peacefully.

Of course, there was poverty. Material poverty,

But there wasn't poverty in terms of land, trees, water . . .

(Luz, a Maya-Mam woman in her fifties, interview, June 2012)

Open-pit gold mining has become a contentious issue across the globe, creating vast profits for corporations and causing environmental, social and cultural destruction at the local level. Emblematic of today's neoliberal capitalism and extractive industries, the Marlin Mine has received substantial attention from scholars, development practitioners and social activists in relation to the complex issues surrounding the open-pit goldmine and its environmental, social and health impacts. This article explores the ways indigenous women who oppose the mine understand its damage and impact. First, I briefly set out some assumptions and criticisms about "development" as economic growth and progress. Indigenous intellectuals in Latin America in recent years have written extensively about what constitutes the "quality of life" (*buen vivir* in Spanish or *tb'anil qchwinqlal* in Mam). I contrast these with Western understandings of development and briefly contextualize the issue of mining in indigenous communities. I describe San Miguel Ixtahuacán as well as the arrival of the mining corporation and opposition to the mine, and explore some Mayan women's understandings of the impact the mine is having on land and community. Then I analyse Goldcorp's discourse on development and mining operations in indigenous peoples' communities. I end the article by highlighting the incommensurability between the different development paradigms put forward

by the extractive industries based on profit and Mayan women opponents who celebrate life.

I decided to study Mayan women's resistance to the Marlin Mine after long discussions with my close Mam friends, an extended family who fled San Miguel during the armed conflict but return frequently, bringing back updated news about the devastating effects the mine is having on environment and community. Accompanying Tz'ununija' (a national Mayan women's movement I had worked with before), I participated in their activities with women resisting the mine in San Miguel. They helped me to identify key activists in Ágel (where eight women had arrest warrants issued against them) and in the Catholic parish. After explaining the purpose of my research and gaining their consent, I held in-depth interviews with five of the local Maya-Mam women leaders in May–June 2011 and July 2012, organized a day-long workshop together with the Catholic parish Sister Mariana with the parish women's group (about 25 women) and a workshop with the group Women Fighting for a New Dawn (founded by the women with arrest warrants issued against them). I continued to have in-depth conversations with my Miguelense friends no longer living in San Miguel, recording one woman in particular various times over three years. I co-authored a life history with a leader who had two arrest warrants issued against her (Macleod & Pérez Bámaca, 2013), and organized a week-long tour with her in Mexico to disseminate information about the book and the impact the goldmine is having on San Miguel. I have maintained close contact with three Maya-Mam women in this article. My participation in an ethical health tribunal (<http://healthtribunal.org/>) in July 2012 allowed me to scrutinize testimonies from local men and women and contribute to condemning Goldcorp mining operations and their effects on the community in Guerrero in Mexico, Valle de Siria in Honduras and San Miguel and neighbouring Sipacapa in Guatemala.

## Development in the new millennium and mining

In recent decades, there has been growing criticism of the dominant concept of development understood as modernization, progress and economic growth that gained traction in the mid-twentieth century, in particular, as Shanin (2003) puts it, the arrogant—and misleading—view promoted in Western Europe and North America that “all societies are advancing naturally and consistently ‘up’, on a route from poverty, barbarism, despotism and ignorance to riches, civilization, democracy and rationality, the highest expression of which is science” (p. 65).

Although this linear idea of progress and development was partially questioned in the 1960s by dependency theorists (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979) who argued that third world countries were actively being “undeveloped” by the first world, through their gleaning of resources and cheap labour force, the dominant notion has remained remarkably robust. This anti-capitalist criticism was limited to the skewed distribution of wealth and exploitation of labour, and did not question the premises of modernity. This was to come later, through the linking of modernity to colonialism and patriarchy. Nandy (2003) thus comprehensively criticizes

a world-view which believes in the absolute superiority of the human over the non-human and the sub-human, the masculine over the feminine, the adult over the child, the historical over the ahistorical, and the modern or progressive over the traditional or the savage. (p. 169)

Others have been less inclusive, questioning patriarchy but not modernity, or colonialism and dominating nature but not patriarchy.

In Latin America, indigenous intellectuals and movements in this new millennium have increasingly questioned Western ideas

of development and are advancing ideas of *buen vivir*. Starting in Ecuador and Bolivia, ideas of *sumak kawsay* (quality or plenitude of life in the Kichwa indigenous language) and *suma qamaña* (quality or plenitude of life in the Aymara indigenous language) respectively have travelled through the continent. Other indigenous peoples’ movements and intellectuals share and add to these theorizations, creating a pan-indigenous corpus of ideas that counter modern premises of development, advancing a paradigm shift. Shared principles and values include reciprocity, service to the community, the interconnected relationship between nature and human beings, respect, and respect for the spoken word, amongst others (Hidalgo Capitán, Guillén García, & Deleg Guazha, 2014; Salazar Tetzagüic & Telón Sajcabún, 2001).

The process of documenting the notion of *buen vivir* involves recuperating and theorizing indigenous epistemologies, and resignifying concepts and values to adapt to present realities. It also means digging for meanings embedded in indigenous languages (López Intzín, 2013) and fleshing out these understandings. Maya-Tseltal López Intzín (2013) records the words of a Tseltal woman:

I don’t know what’s happening with me, I don’t know what I’m doing, but my loom doesn’t want to walk (move forward). Maybe it hears that my heart isn’t feeling even a tiny bit of the abundant bounty of the universe—earth, I am not living well, my life is unwell, I don’t feel plenitude or goodness. (p. 84)

The Maya-Tseltal woman has lost her harmonious connection to the universe; as a result, her weaving ceases to flow.

Open-pit goldmining epitomizes the criticism of modernist development by indigenous—and other—organizations in Latin America. In Ecuador, the president of the Kichwa indigenous organization Ecuador Runakunapak Rikcharimuy (Confederation of Peoples of

Kichwa Nationality, ECUARUNARI) succinctly states that with “open-pit mining, mountains are destroyed . . . destabilising peoples, nationalities; this does not constitute happiness” (Cholango, 2010, p. 242). While indigenous communities in Australia and Canada have more leverage to negotiate with transnational corporations (O’Faircheallaigh, 2013), “mining companies operating in developing countries still largely operate with effective impunity” (Coumans, 2011, p. 530). However, some companies are being challenged, particularly through international instruments, such as the United Nations International Labour Organisation Convention No. 169 (UN ILO C169) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Mining affects indigenous communities in particular ways, given the importance of territory for the survival of indigenous peoples: “The violation of the rights to lands, territories and resources is also a violation of the rights to development and to culture. The culture of indigenous peoples cannot be understood outside of their physical environment, resources and traditional livelihoods” (Tauli-Corpuz, Enkiwe-Abayao, & de Chavez., 2010, p. 54). Caxaj, Berman, Restoule and Varcoe (2014) highlight how local indigenous men and women who oppose open-pit mining are construed as “‘backwards’ and anti-development” (p. 827).

Mining is a highly gendered industry with greater negative impacts for women than for men (Lahiri-Dutt, 2012; Parmenter, 2011); however, Parmenter (2011) recommends that the resources industry adopt an intersectional analysis that “does not consider gender alone, but includes other intersecting identities and factors such as race, class and the local socio-political and cultural context of the women affected” (p. 82). Mining brings cashflows and the recruitment of men from other regions, often giving rise to binge drinking, domestic violence, precarious sex work and sexually transmitted diseases (Caxaj, Berman, Varcoe, Ray, & Restoule, 2014). Land, traditionally

registered in husbands’ names, is often sold to the mine without women’s consent.

Despite adversity, Jenkins and Rondón (2015) and Caxaj, Berman, Restoule, & Varcoe (2014) highlight indigenous women’s (and men’s) resistance to mining ventures. The former unpack the concept of “resilience”, while the latter address shared cultural identity, spiritual knowing and being, defence of individual and collective rights and the capacity of “speaking truth to power” (Caxaj, Berman, Restoule, & Varcoe, 2014, p. 827). However,

it was these same strengths that were profoundly threatened by the presence of the mining company. Thus, community resistance presented a wellness paradox; as key community health promoting mechanisms, erosion of these same strengths by local mining operations revealed sites of “entry,” or vulnerability. (Caxaj, Berman, Restoule, & Varcoe, 2014, p. 832)

Both texts point to the capacity of indigenous women (and men) to exercise agency in contexts of powerful mining corporations, overcoming framing indigenous peoples as simple victims. However, the authors recognize that they are also vulnerable, making the case that resilience and strengths are accompanied by vulnerability.

### **San Miguel Ixtahuacán and the Marlin Mine**

Nestled amongst hills and pine trees, San Miguel Ixtahuacán is in San Marcos in the northwestern highlands of Guatemala, near the Mexican border. About 98% of San Miguel’s nearly 40,000 inhabitants are Maya-Mam, and the majority live in rural areas. Most also speak Spanish, but some only speak Mam. According to the state planning secretariat, 86.39% of the population are materially poor and 32.84% live in extreme poverty (SEGEPLAN, 2010). To supplement subsistence farming—maize,

beans, potatoes, vegetables, wheat, coffee and barley—men and women seasonally migrate to the large coffee plantations on the southern coast and to Chiapas in Mexico. Women also work periodically as domestics in the cities. In recent years, many Miguelense have undertaken the perilous journey through Mexico to migrate to the United States.

Guatemala's internal armed conflict (1960–1996) reached San Miguel in the early 1980s. The army tortured, killed and disappeared suspected guerrilla sympathizers and community leaders (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, 1999), leaving a sense of fear and mistrust. During this period, Mayan spiritual practices decreased while the presence of first Catholic Action and then evangelism rose. However, San Miguel retained tight-knit community practices, with everyone participating in local festivities. It was unthinkable to walk down the street without greeting every passing person—this was to change with the advent of the mine.

Glamis Gold—later bought out by Goldcorp—arrived surreptitiously in San Miguel at the end of the 1990s. No process took place of prior consultation in good faith required by the UN ILO C169 Article 6(2), ratified by the Guatemalan government in 1996. The local subsidiary, Montana, organized some public events that they regard as consultations (Montana Exploradora de Guatemala S.A., 2004, pp. 65–66), “but in none of these meetings did the company ask us if we agreed [to the mine]” (Mariana, a Maya-Mam Catholic sister in her late thirties, interview, July 2012). By 2005, the Marlin Mine had started operations. In neighbouring Sipacapa, where 15% of the mine would be located, local leaders organized a community consultation. Sipacapenses overwhelmingly voted “no” to the mine (Sieder, 2007); this did not impede the mining company from initiating operations. In San Miguel, people were confused and divided about the mine. Some saw it as an opportunity for much needed jobs, while others held the mining project in deep distrust.

Over the following years, the open-pit gold-mine has had many impacts on San Miguel Ixtahuacán and its inhabitants. Caxaj, Berman, Varcoe et al. (2014) highlight numerous physical, spiritual and emotional manifestations of “embodied expressions of distress”, as well as community disintegration or “social unravelling” (p. 54). A thorough study of the impacts of the mine on the community and environment led Zarsky and Stanley (2011) to conclude that “local benefits are a tiny fraction of total mine revenues and earnings, the bulk of which flow overseas to the company and its shareholders” (p. 4). Although there may be substantial indirect benefits for Guatemala, “both direct and indirect economic benefits will cease abruptly when the mine closes because jobs, taxes and royalties will evaporate and because there is little evidence that mine revenues have been invested in building sustainable industries” (p. 4). Moreover, local communities bear all environmental risks. These are exceptionally high and likely to increase over the remaining life of the mine and into the post-closure phase. Gold mining poses generic hazards related to cyanide and heavy metal contamination of water from acid mine drainage.

### Mayan women resist Goldcorp

Opposition to the mine began to mushroom, at first around specific issues, including the inconformity of some villagers having sold their lands so cheaply, and a growing number of cracked houses near the mine. Villagers blamed the mining company's heavy trucks and use of dynamite, but Goldcorp and its subsidiary Montana dismissed these accusations. Women often spearheaded resistance to the mine in San Miguel: blocking roads while armed with hot water, pellets made from chilli and sometimes machetes. The successful community consultation in Sipacapa brought on an escalation of repression, including the arrest of protestors, two forced disappearances and the decapitation

of a local activist (Sibrián & van der Borgh, 2014, p. 78). Doña Cristina, a Maya-Mam woman in her early forties, had given permission to one of the companies working for the Canadian mining corporation to pass electric cables across her land, and was made to sign a blank piece of paper. Her dismay was great when the company placed a large electricity post next to her house: this presented a security risk for her children and was not what they had agreed. After fruitlessly taking the case to Montana and related companies, in June 2008 Doña Cristina, together with seven other women in their village, Ángel, pulled up the “anchors”, causing a power cut, and then did not allow the company to reconnect the electricity flow. As a result, they received arrest warrants (Macleod & Pérez Bámaca, 2013).

Over the following four years, the women’s movements were severely curtailed; Doña Cristina had to go into hiding for several months, but came back home to give birth. She was subsequently arrested; her brother, an employee at the mine, handed her over to the police. However, members of the mine resistance movement stopped the police pick-up truck and enabled her release. Finally, in May 2012, the arrest warrants were lifted, through legal support accessed by Tz’ununija’.

Another locus of resistance grew through the work of Maya-Mam Sister Mariana, and her work with the women’s pastoral in the parish. Sister Mariana was the first coordinator of the Frente de Migüelense contra la Minería (Miguelense Front against Mining, FREDEMI), formed in 2009. FREDEMI has close ties to Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements, and represents 18 communities in a strategic litigation case at the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) (Yagenova, 2012). The mine and its impact on the environment and on the Miguelense social fabric deeply trouble many Mayan women, though not all are organized, and the mine has been sorely divisive of community.

### *The open-pit goldmine as calamity*

Mayan women who oppose the mine are particularly concerned about the loss of land, and the health and wellbeing of their children, grandchildren and future generations. Pollution and scarcity of water also worries them; animals are dying and the avocado and fruit trees are drying up, even in communities not in the immediate vicinity of the mine. New illnesses are appearing, particularly skin diseases and rashes in children. Women complain of *tristeza* (sadness) and *susto* (shock):

Our sadness arises from all the water they use to wash [the minerals]. We see all that water . . . Where is it going? It’s polluting water sources, it’s affecting families and animals . . . as we all depend on water. This is something we need to ask: what’s happening here? The people who are doing this, are they feeling? [conscious of what they’re doing]? Or are they simply interested in simply extracting the gold, with no concern for what happens? This sadness is great, and it will be difficult to get over. It’s very deep, damaging your inner being; damaging families and their sentiments. The elders are very sad about what’s going on; nothing like this has ever happened here before. (Luz, interview, June 2012)

The sadness Luz described illustrates the interconnectedness between people and nature. What affects nature also affects the community, physically and spiritually. Luz also spoke with alarm about how people are losing the value of *q’ixkojalel* (the capacity to feel what the other feels) or what we might call empathy; people’s hearts are growing cold.

The women are also pained by the way the mine is ripping apart families and the social fabric of community life, and lamenting the way the mine has divided them. Not being listened to—not being taken seriously—is offensive to the women. Fear has also gripped a large part

of San Miguel, especially as people standing up for their rights are treated as criminals. Doña Cristina said, “I have an arrest warrant. Well, I am not ashamed of this as I haven’t stolen, I haven’t taken anything away from the company. What I’m doing is fighting for justice. Our grievances are fair, I’m defending a just cause” (interview, May 2011). During a workshop we carried out with the women’s pastoral, an elderly woman spoke in Mam, illuminating local aesthetics. Her language was ceremonial and richly rhetorical as she addressed the women in the meeting:

That is why, sisters, there will be more poverty, more misery will surround us, there will be more thirst, the trees will dry up, and water sources will dry up. And who will we leave to suffer? Whom will we leave in slavery? Our children. What shame! We have given birth to and raised our children. What example are we giving our grandchildren? It is such a disgrace that we are leaving our families to perdition, leaving them to slavery. This is such a source of grief and sadness . . . That is why we as women are rising up, we’re clarifying our vision, we’re awakening. We talk about this situation; we reflect on how our children will grow up. We need to give this great thought; we need to clarify our vision. We should leave the corporation naked, the way they are leaving us naked, without trees, without water, without vegetation. Our children will remain in poverty. What inheritance shall we leave them? Our ancestors, our parents left us a marvellous memory and a legacy: the land. They left land to us as they passed through this world. They thought wisely, they knew how to interpret the future of their children and their grandchildren. But now, what will we leave as a memory to our family? We will leave them in slavery and poverty. What should we do now knowing God’s word? There is division in our community and in our church. That is why, sisters, we need to place this in our hearts, we need to learn from this. These are my words,

thank you. (Doña Micaela, elderly woman, Workshop, May 2011)

This testimony reveals the deep suffering the mine has caused in many Miguelense women’s lives. It gives an insight into the way Maya-Mam women understand territory and patrimony, handed down from one generation to the next—the linking of past, present and future. The ancestors were wise and made provisions for future generations by leaving them land. Selling off lands for money is shameful; it shows no responsibility to future generations. The community is divided between those in favour of and those against the mine, and this lack of harmony is being handed down to future generations. Returning to the Maya-Tseltal woman’s reflection about her loom, in these circumstances, harmonious connection to the universe is shattered. Repeatedly, women expressed extreme grief and shame about leaving nothing for future generations. A woman who visited the closed down Goldcorp San Martin mine in Honduras continued:

What’s happening here happened in Honduras, where the mine also arrived; four of us went to learn from the experience. It fills me with sorrow. I was so sad coming back thinking: How can I interpret all that is happening? How can I really understand? When will we women rise up? This is most important to us as women; we value the land, as bringing up our children falls to us. What will we be able to give our children and our grandchildren after them? What will they drink? Where will they live? Where will they get their firewood? In Honduras, I saw that there is no longer water or vegetation, nothing. They say they don’t have food . . . there is so much poverty. (Doña Martina, elderly woman, Workshop, May 2011)

These reflections translated from Mam illustrate an immense feeling of doom, of trying to come to grips with something so great,

so overwhelming, so difficult to fathom and with its consequences on future generations. In conversation with some of the Maya-Mam women, I brought up the Native American and Canadian First Peoples' concept "Our Responsibility to the Seventh Generation". In my own words, I relayed the notion of "the sacred responsibility of Indigenous people to be the caretaker of all that is on Mother Earth and therefore that each generation is responsible to ensure the survival for the seventh generation" (Clarkson, Morrisette, & Regallet, 1992, p. 7). The notion immediately resonated with the women, and it was mentioned repeatedly during the interviews.

I also tried to get a sense of moments of *tb'anil qchwinqlal*. Doña Cristina talked about her childhood:

When I was little we had animals . . . when I was six I'd take them to graze with my mother; when I was bigger I'd go with my brothers. It was lovely; we would go out to herd the animals and the air was pure. It was delightful, getting together with cousins and friends to play. We were out herding until dusk, then we'd return home, happy and without a care. Now when I see them exploiting and extracting the gold, I start to cry, it hurts me so much. The company has destroyed the forest, there is no longer anywhere [for the animals] to graze, only the din of the company's machines. (Interview, May 2011)

The sense of impotence, frustration and dis-possession invades Doña Cristina, though her will to resist continues. She, as do many other women in San Miguel, hark back to a time when, although life was hard and poverty prompted seasonal coffee harvest migration, there was more harmony and peace in the communities. The women's close relationship with nature—with all living beings—is evident in many of the interviews. Their grief and concern is not solely for themselves and their families, but also for others who cannot speak out. Luz stated

indignantly, "What happens to the birds that drink from the lake? They turn up dead on the shores, as the lake is polluted . . . Who will speak up for the animals that die? We are witnessing that nature, and that the birds are dying. Who is going to speak up for those animals? Who is going to protect them?" (Interview, December 2010). Responsibility is not limited to other human beings; we are also responsible to nature.

Finally, Sister Mariana summed up the key differences she sees between the concepts of "development" promoted by the goldmine and the way Mayan peoples understand *tb'anil qchwinqlal*:

What is development? For the mining company it is "economic development", infrastructure. I see how cold this is; when I visit [richer] families, they live in such huge houses, there's no sense of warmth, of family. In contrast, for us "development" is when there's friendship, sharing, good food and health, education, all these aspects of life. They build schools, infrastructure, but what is the point of a fancy school if the contents of the education are poor? That's not integral development for the children. On the contrary, it's a kind of development that the system imposes which helps to blind us, to kill us off little by little as indigenous people. Our spirituality, our values are at risk. Our life as a people is in danger. Instead of life, they're slowly killing us off. This is what the transnational corporations and neoliberalism offers us with "development". Mam people don't have that kind of development at heart. For us it's about life, harmony, complementarity, our relation to God, balance and everything that contributes to life. (Interview, May 2011)

Far from material consumerism and individual advancement, this vision is relational, collective and life centred. Now let us turn our vision to the way Goldcorp envisions its contribution to the wellbeing of the local population of San Miguel Ixtahuacán.



### ***Goldcorp's corporate social responsibility***

Goldcorp has the difficult task of juggling, on the one hand, the attraction for its investors of making large profits and, on the other, fulfilling good practice principles in the communities where it works. I argue that it does so *discursively*. After hearing the bitter complaints made by local inhabitants, statements such as the following seem ironic: “We acknowledge the traditional cultures and knowledge that exist in Indigenous communities, and we seek to consult and partner with these communities to improve economic, environmental and social opportunities” (Goldcorp, 2010b) and “Transparency, trust and accountability. These are the guiding principles of Goldcorp’s social policy that underlines our commitment to the communities where we work, our employees, the environment and the protection of basic human rights” (Goldcorp, 2014).

Goldcorp makes vast profits from the Marlin Mine. According to the Observatory of Mining Conflicts in Latin America (Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros en América Latina, 2011), based on Goldcorp’s annual report, in 2010 the Marlin Mine produced about 300,000 ounces of gold, at an approximate cost of US\$200 per ounce, when the cost of gold on the market was US\$1,241 per ounce. This puts Goldcorp’s philanthropy into perspective; their Sierra Madre Foundation coordinates local socio-economic development projects. These include three-year scholarships for young people, greenhouses, coffee projects, a daycare centre, education projects, schools, medical campaigns and a medical care centre. The last, unveiled by Guatemala’s then president and retired general Otto Pérez Molina in March 2012, highlights the links between the upper echelons of national and transnational power. Environmentally, Goldcorp claims to reforest between 10 and 20 hectares annually, but fails to mention how many trees it chops down or the ecosystems it destroys. Their website states that Goldcorp’s

environmental technicians measure ambient air quality, noise levels, forest cover, ground resource quality, water quality and terrestrial biology, adding that water tests carried out by the Association of Community Environment Monitors “and government ministries have shown no negative impacts due to mining” (Goldcorp, 2011b, p. 17). This claim seems extraordinary given the mine’s vast consumption of water, use of lethal chemicals to extract gold and the inevitable leaching of sulphuric acid into groundwater (Slack, 2012), and it has been contested by independent expert reports (Comisión Pastoral Paz y Ecología [COPAE], 2008–2011).

Discursively, Goldcorp says the “right things” and it has adopted voluntary principles on sustainable development on security and human rights at the Marlin Mine. The latter were created in 2011 after the IAHRC issued precautionary measures requesting that mining operations be suspended until the effects of the mine on local indigenous communities were properly assessed. Goldcorp goes to considerable lengths to counteract local community grievances and international outcry. The article “Dispelling the Myths of Marlin” in Goldcorp magazine *Above Ground* features Flora Macario, a Maya-Mam industrial engineer from San Miguel and superintendent of sustainable development at Marlin. Macario was invited to Canada “to speak from the heart and set the record straight” (Goldcorp, 2011a, p. 18) about the Marlin Mine:

She speaks highly of the good that Goldcorp has done for her people. “I have never seen such high dedication to safety and concern for the environment. I am so impressed with the social infrastructure created, the training and opportunities for people today, and the income-earning potential that will last into the future”. (p. 18)

Photographed together with Native American leaders, Macario is quoted as saying she felt

“very comfortable” with Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come: “He spoke about community values, stewardship of the land, the interaction between humans and nature, and how Goldcorp stands for these principles and values” (p. 18). While local opponents to the mine face persecution for standing up for these values, indigenous movement discourse is here appropriated and divested of meaning and political content (Batliwala, 2008, p. 18).

This discursive move is echoed by the slogans on large billboards in Guatemala City: “Development=health=better quality of life” and “Development=work=better quality of life, for us at Goldcorp development is what is valuable”. Goldcorp is masterful at mobilizing discourse that masks actual practices, and puts “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 1990, p. 7). While Goldcorp’s development discourse is based on premises of economic growth, spillovers and jobs, when deemed necessary, it appropriates other actors’ demands and values.

Goldcorp moves in a terrain referred to by de Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito (2005) as “neoliberal governance”, which prioritizes the technical over the political, private over public, and experts instead of the active participation of the people, and affected communities. Principles are “voluntary” rather than binding, and good practice, in the form of corporate social responsibility (CSR), is encouraged rather than enforced. Oxfam America senior policy advisor Keith Slack, a firm supporter of CSR, in his article “Mission Impossible? Adopting a CSR-based Business Model for Extractive Industries in Developing Countries”, uses the case study of the Marlin Mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacán to exemplify the gap between Goldcorp’s verbal commitment to CSR and practice on the ground. Rather than implementing CSR principles, “it remains largely window dressing that serves a strategic purpose of mollifying public concerns about the inherently destructive nature of extractive industries operations” (Slack, 2012, p. 179).

Slack (2012) highlights that this is particularly the case in developing countries where there is weak government oversight of extractive industry corporations. Slack argues that for CSR to become meaningful rather than empty rhetoric; there needs to be an honest assessment of costs and benefits; social benefit should trump corporate profitability when deciding upon entering into ventures; community consent is crucial and needs to be respected; and there needs to be greater incentives and accountability for CSR performance (pp. 180–182). The Marlin Mine case study documents how these key indicators are not adhered to by Goldcorp. Slack concludes that this is illustrative of the “‘rhetoric vs. reality’ contradictions around CSR that are all too common in the extractive industries sector” (p. 182).

The University of Toronto’s International Human Rights Program director Renu Mandhane (2011) goes further in her criticism of Goldcorp’s human rights and CSR policies:

The policies appear robust at first blush: they reference all sorts of international agreements and bind their employees to respect them. However, beyond the lofty language, the policies are deficient in key respects. They do not require Goldcorp to assess the human rights impact of projects at the outset, obtain independent assessments of human rights performance, or remedy harm caused. The policies also omit any mention of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and make no clear commitment to the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent. (n.p.)

Mandhane highlights the omissions and slippery nature of Goldcorp’s commitment to CSR, and the revealing exclusion of indigenous rights.

On another note, Peter Utting (2005) from the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development considers that for CSR to be truly meaningful, it cannot be separated from structural and macro-policy issues and

perverse tendencies concerning labour flexibilization, taxation and pricing practices (p. 386). Utting is also sceptical of the global governance arrangements that bring together government, private enterprise and NGOs to work in harmony and criticizes the “commodification of activism” (p. 382), which tends to downplay structural issues and water down criticism. He cogently argues that “an influential discourse has emerged which suggests that confrontation, single-issue activism, and criticism that profiles specific problems rather than solutions is ‘ideological’ or passé and that NGO collaboration with business and engagement with the market is modern and savvy” (p. 382). By labelling local grievances and protests as “ideological”, these are simply disqualified.

Dominant development discourse, as Escobar (2003) argues, creates the terms of the debate where “the system of relations establishes a discursive practice that sets the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise” (p. 87). Goldcorp sets skewed rules of the game whereby technical aspects take on overwhelming importance and require expert reports. These include, amongst others, a human rights assessment of the Marlin Mine (Goldcorp, 2010a), yearly environmental and social performance monitoring reports (2004–2009), sustainability reports (Goldcorp, 2012–2014), competing evaluations on water quality (COPAE, 2008–2011; E-Tech International, 2010), and competing assessments on causes of cracks in houses (Comisión Interinstitucional, 2010; COPAE, 2009). While COPAE expert reports are critical of the mine, the importance attached to these reports contributes to excluding the vast majority of local indigenous inhabitants who lack Western expertise and economic resources to contend in this field. Instead, their lived experience and knowledge are rendered invisible, or what de Sousa Santos (2007) refers to as being actively “produced as non-existent” (p. 46). Luz illustrated the impact of this discursive erasure:

They hear but they don’t listen. They don’t recognise the problems; they say there isn’t sickness [resulting from the mine]. They don’t listen though we’re telling the truth; it’s not a lie. They’re the ones who benefit with everything they extract. How many millions do they make? The benefits are for them. They’re living on our lands. And what do we get from all this? Sickness, for us humans and nature. (Interview, December 2010).

When local Mayan women and men blame the mine for the skin diseases, particularly on their children’s arms and legs, they are told that this cannot be proved, as no baseline diagnostic medical study was performed prior to the mining corporation’s arrival. When local people denounce the cracks in their houses caused by the mine’s heavy machinery, vehicles and dynamite, they are told that the cracks are due to seismic movements.

## Conclusion

Goldcorp, in collusion with weak national and local government, affirms that these mining ventures bring “development”. The Maya-Mam women in this article eloquently illustrated the devastation open-pit mining has wreaked on San Miguel Ixtahuacán. This includes not only environmental destruction, but also the decimation of the Maya-Mam spiritual relationship with nature and all living beings, divisions in families and the community, and dispossession of territory, putting into jeopardy their very existence as indigenous peoples. Open-pit goldmining, with its focus on extraction and profit, is incommensurate with the *tb’anil qchwinl’al* mapped out in this article by Maya-Mam women.

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All translations from Spanish are by the author.

## Glossary

buen vivir	quality of life, in the Spanish language	Mam	a Mayan indigenous people and language in Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico
doña	a respectful honorific used for married and older women in the Spanish language	Miguelense	a person from San Miguel Ixtahuacán
Ecuador	Confederation of	q'ixkojalel	the capacity to feel what the other feels, in the Mam language
Runakunapak	Peoples of Kichwa	Sipacapense	a person from Sipaca
Rikcharimuy	Nationality	suma qamaña	quality or plenitude of life, in the Aymara indigenous language in Bolivia
Frente de Migüelense	Miguelense Front	sumak kawsay	quality or plenitude of life, in the Kichwa indigenous language in Ecuador
contra la Minería	against Mining	susto	shock, in the Spanish language
Kichwa	an indigenous people and language in Ecuador of Inca descent	tb'anil qchwinqlal	quality of life, in the Mam language
		tristeza	sadness, in the Spanish language
		Tseltal	a Mayan indigenous people and language in Chiapas, Mexico
		Tz'ununija'	a national Mayan women's movement; full name Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas Tz'ununija'

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