

‘Development Partners’?: The marginalisation and radicalisation of Latin America’s Indigenous rights movement in the era of the ‘extractive imperative’

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This paper draws on on-going research in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, a Maya-Mam mine-affected community in Guatemala. It documents how the extractive industry’s efforts to become ‘development partners’ of impoverished but politicized Indigenous communities in this country both marginalize and radicalize Indigenous rights movements.

An agreement was signed between some executives from the municipal government of San Miguel and the mining company Goldcorp in 2003, and operations began in 2004. However, the exploitative nature of the land acquisition process, the mistreatment of local mineworkers, and the detrimental environmental and health impacts of the mine soon provoked an increasing number of people in San Miguel to oppose its activities (Urkidi 2011). Goldcorp has attempted to offset this opposition through corporate social responsibility (CSR) measures. These include the formation of a community relations group that works on the ground with affected communities, the creation of a Public Attention System to collect and record community problems, and partnership with local NGOs to provide health services to mining workers.

While some of the Indigenous residents of San Miguel have welcomed employment in the mine in addition to these CSR measures, others continue to decry the mis-development of their territory, the contamination problems they are faced with, and the violation of their Indigenous right to self-determination. Drawing on this ethnographic case, we reflect on the general impacts of the CSR measures mining companies deploy on Latin American Indigenous rights movements.

Bios

Karine Vanthuyne (PhD, EHESS, Paris), is an Assistant professor of Anthropology at the University of Ottawa, Canada. Her research focuses on memory, identity and Indigenous political mobilization in Guatemala and Canada. In Guatemala, she has examined how the Mayan-Chuj have engaged with genocide court cases coordinated by a human rights organization. In Canada, she has examined how the Quebec James Bay Crees have participated, or not, in the reparation programs that the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement has given birth to. In collaboration with Indigenous partners and other Canadian researchers, she is now currently documenting how the colonial history and decolonization processes of the Mayan-Mam and the Quebec Crees are differently encoding their practices of engagement with, or opposition to, mining projects. She is the author of a monograph, *La présence d'un passé de violences* (Presses de l'Université Laval, 2014), an edited volume (*Re-Storying Indian Residential Schools in Canada*, University of British Columbia Press, under contract and in review) and articles in various journals such *Social Science and Medicine*, *Ethnologie française* and the *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*.

Esma Mneina is an Anthropology MA student, at the University of Ottawa, Canada. She pursued her fieldwork within the communities of San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipakapa surrounding the intensifying Marlin Mine conflict in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. Her research focuses on corporate-indigenous relations and the need to reconcile private power and public interest for conflict resolution and inclusive and democratic engagement of Indigenous communities. In San Miguel Ixtahuacán, she has examined the political imaginaries that mobilize Indigenous resistance against mining as well as the how the emergence of 'corporate citizenship' and other corporate social responsibility tactics are understood in Mayan Guatemala.