# “¡Agua, Vida, y Maíz! ¡Minería Fuera del País!”: A Praxis Project in Solidarity with Communities Resisting Canadian Mining in Guatemala

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Carried out on Q'eqchi', Sipakapense, Mam, Xinka, and Kaqchikel land in what is commonly called Guatemala, as well as in Tkaronto, on land often referred to as the territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, which is also the ancestral territory of many other nations including Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe, and Algonquin.

# Foreword

This major portfolio has allowed me to delve deeper and broaden my knowledge and experience within the three main components of my plan of study: building practical skills for creating change; understanding environmental (in)justice; and contributing to environmental justice.

Through the various components of this portfolio I have worked to examine –and act in order to help transform– the current situation of mining projects tied to Canadian companies in Guatemala. First I developed a contextual base for my work with sections focusing on the Canadian mining industry, the extractive context in Guatemala, environmental justice as a framework and movement, praxis and the production of social justice media, and considerations on doing Indigenous solidarity work. I then spent two months of fieldwork in Guatemala carrying out interviews with communities impacted by Canadian mining companies, especially surrounding the Marlin, Escobal, and Fenix mining projects. This context and fieldwork formed the first part of the reflection-praxis cycle that this portfolio is centred on, and thus served to inform the action components of the portfolio, which consisted of a variety of forms of media, direct action, and artistic projects carried out in solidarity with the Guatemalan communities I met with. These actions have in turn been reflected upon and analyzed to inform future actions and organizing. This reflection has especially focused on the use of the legal system and on the intersections between disability justice and environmental justice organizing.

# Contents of this Portfolio

Through the various components of my portfolio I have worked to examine –and act in order to help transform– the current situation of mining projects tied to Canadian companies in Guatemala. Centering this portfolio on a reflection-praxis cycle, I gathered information and developed analysis that informed and helped to structure my praxis project work, which consisted of a variety of solidarity actions. These in turn have been reflected upon and analyzed to inform future actions and organizing.

This portfolio is made up of the following sections:

# 1. Context

In this section of my portfolio, I will share context on a variety of themes that all fundamentally support my core praxis project work, including the Canadian mining industry, the extractive context in Guatemala, environmental justice as a framework and movement, praxis and the production of social justice media, and considerations on doing Indigenous solidarity work. This contextual base formed the first part of the reflection-praxis cycle that this portfolio is centred on, and were necessary precursors to the action components of the portfolio which followed.

### 1.1 Canadian Mining

Canada has an enormous presence in the global mining sector. Canadian financial markets in Toronto and Vancouver are the world's largest source of equity capital for mining companies undertaking exploration and development (Holt-Giménez & Spang, 2005). Mining and exploration companies based in Canada account for 43 percent of global exploration expenditures, and in 2008 over 75 percent of the world's exploration and mining companies were headquartered in Canada. These 1293 companies had a stake in approximately 7809 properties in over 100 countries around the world (DFAIT, 2009).

Of all Canadian companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX), 17% are mining companies operating in Latin America (Mining Association of Canada, 2006). As of March 2009, Canadian mining companies had invested about $41 billion in Latin America, including Mexico (DFAIT, 2009). Despite its size and power, the industry has not escaped criticism. In fact, many Canadian mining companies have faced nothing but fierce opposition in communities where they are located (Rondon, 2008). Backed by a number of research studies, these communities have accused Canadian mining companies of supporting repressive governments, subverting democratic processes, displacing hundreds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, enabling violence at varying scales, and contaminating or completely destroying sensitive ecosystems, often with significant impact on human health (Blas, 2007; Imai et. al., 2007; Godoy, 2007). The Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts (OCMAL) has reported more than 130 large mining-related conflicts in the region since 2000 (OCMAL 2010).

In response to the environmental, social, and political damage wreaked upon citizens of the Global South by Canadian mining companies, a number of Canadian organizations have joined in to resist these abuses. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Rights Action, MiningWatch, Amnesty International, and Breaking the Silence, as well as a multitude of university, religious, and community groups have articulated demands to the Canadian government and the companies headquartered in the country. The government of Canada has responded to these demands in various ways, most notably through initiatives such as: the *National Roundtables on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the Canadian Extractive Industry in Developing Countries;* the release of *Building the Canadian Advantage: A Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Strategy for the Canadian International Extractive Sector;* and the instatement of an Office of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor.

Residents of Latin American communities resisting Canadian mining projects have attempted to hold Canadian mining companies accountable through a plethora of means, including: blockades and other

forms of direct action near the mine site; mobilizing civil society transnationally; documentation of grievances through media, art forms, research, and other publications; the use of human rights litigation nationally and internationally; legal cases in criminal courts; appeals to international institutions, such as the International Labour Organization, or funding agencies such as the World Bank; and voluntary protocols and other forms of corporate social responsibility. Thus, these movements can be understood as multiscalar, meaning that they are "composed of actors in different geographical locations, [acting] simultaneously in various political spheres, and influenced by a combination of international, regional, national, municipal and communitarian social processes and regulations" (Urkidi, 2011).

Over the past decade a number of scholars have argued that the proliferation of laws, corporate social responsibility processes, and regulatory regimes at local, national, and international levels relating to mining conflicts have actually served to weaken processes of accountability and justice:

> In a climate in which national governments exercise less, not more, ability to regulate financial flows and the operations of corporations in their territory, this proliferation of laws and lawlike principles creates a set of shifting authority structures and subjective norms. Without clear directives as to how and when they are to be implemented, more mechanisms for accountability have only added to the confusion, creating a haphazard collection of lawlike artifices that ultimately amount to a Rorschach "inkblot" test of social responsibility, in which the meaning of laws shifts according to the onlooker's subjective perception. (Fulmer, Snodgrass Godoy, and Neff, 2008)

Amidst this confusion, an important underlying debate concerns the scale at which decision-making on mining should rightfully occur. This debate is at the core of mining conflict in Guatemala, the country where my research is centered. Urkidi (2011) argues that within anti-mining organizing in Guatemala, the 'community' is understood as the scale at which such decisions should take place. 'Community' has come to be defined as: "a) the scale where mining impacts happen, and therefore the scale at which final consent or rejection should take place; (b) the place for reconstructing the Maya understanding of nature–society integrity; and (c) an historically marginalized sector of the population that should be empowered in order to achieve more participative and fair decision-making processes". This understanding of community within mining resistance in Guatemala has deeply informed my own use of the word in my fieldwork in Guatemala.

### 1.2 The Fenix, Marlin, and Escobal Projects

While in Guatemala I met with communities actively engaged in resisting three different mining projects with strong links to Canadian companies. The first is the Marlin mine, a large open-pit gold mine owned by Canadian company Goldcorp that has been the source of much controversy since exploration of the site began in 1999. The second is the Fenix project, a nickel mine that has been owned by a series of companies (almost all Canadian) and been in varying stages of production and development since the 1960s. In response to violence that occurred under the Fenix project's most recent Canadian ownership, Hudbay Minerals is currently being sued in Ontario courts. The third mine is a new project called the Escobal mine, which is owned by two Canadian companies – Tahoe Resources and Goldcorp – and has faced staunch opposition. I also visited with community resistance to the El Tambor mining project, first owned by Canadian company Radius Gold and later sold to the US-based Kappes Cassidy and Associates. I have indicated the locations of these four mining projects on the following map:


As described earlier, mining projects are frequently met with resistance from communities on which they are being imposed. Javier Arrelano-Yanguas (2010) describes mining conflicts as largely belonging to a series of categories. The first involves conflicts in which the local population opposes mining on the grounds of its negative impact on the environment and their livelihoods. While no community can be understood as homogeneous in its perspective on mining, the three cases on which I focus in this research project and in my solidarity work are overwhelmingly conflicts in Arrelano-Yanguas' first category – they are essentially anti-mining movements in which peasants and sectors of the urban population unite to oppose mining activities.

### 1.3 A Brief History of Canadian Mining in Guatemala

In the territory known today as Guatemala, Indigenous people had been mining metals long before colonization began in order to produce tools, weapons, bartering items, and ornaments (ASALI, 2004). Under early colonial regimes, mining was carried out through the exploitation of Indigenous people in the production centres, though little is known about most of these centres (Castagnino, 2006).

After Guatemala became recognized as an independent state in 1821, political unrest led to a decline in mining activities (Castagnino, 2006). In the century that followed, reforms opened up Guatemala's borders to more extensive trade and the level of mining activities fluctuated in the 19th and 20th centuries alongside the price of metals on international markets (ASALI, 2004).

Despite the constant presence of at least minimal mining activity since Guatemala's independence, as explained by President Alvaro Colom at the United Nations in February 2010, Guatemala was never a mining country and lacks an adequate regulatory framework to address the impacts of mining activities relating to the economy, the environment, and Indigenous rights (Urkidi, 2011). The speed at which the mining industry is growing is evinced by the statistic that, as of 2004, 95 percent of the existing extractive licenses in the country had been granted after 2000 (Defensoría Q'eqchi, 2004). As of 2005, over one tenth of Guatemala had been covered by mining concessions and licenses, the majority of which are located on Indigenous territory (Cuffe, 2005). As of the beginning of 2014, 100 metallic mining licences were in operation in Guatemala, including 67 for exploration and 33 for exploitation (MEM, 2014).

Guatemala has become a particularly important site for mineral exploration and exploitation by Canadian mining companies, and resistance to such operations has grown significantly among local communities (Gordon and Webber, 2008; Imai et al., 2007; Holden and Jacobsen, 2008). Mining has developed a reputation within Guatemala as a sector rife with conflict and contention. Canadian mining companies operating in the country have been criticized for their social and environmental record, including a failure to properly consult with and obtain consent from communities located near mining projects (Sagebien et al., 2008; North et al., 2006). Based on the argument that these communities never gave consent for mining projects, over 60 community referendums – called 'consultas' – have been organized at the local level in which almost a million people have voted against the presence of transnational mining and hydroelectric companies on their territories. As a result of these consultas, there are entire zones in Guatemala that have been declared 'mining-free zones'. One instance of this is in the department of Huehuetenango, where in 2008 entire linguistic regions were denoted Mining Free Zones, including the Huista, Chuj, Akateco, Mam and Q'anjob'al regions. Geglia (2012) explains that "while legal in nature, the declarations are also political tools on which to base the communities' organized resistance to these territorial threats." Communities resisting mining activities often appeal to ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous Peoples and the Guatemalan Municipal Code and have organized innumerable public protests, road blockages, demonstrations, informational talks and events, and legal complaints at municipal, departmental, national, and international levels (Arévalo 2006; Yagenova 2006).

Recently, Guatemala has also taken centre stage in discussions of Canadian mining companies' operations globally, since the first two sets of cases to be admitted to Canadian courts concerning the actions of Canadian companies overseas both concern Guatemala. One set involves three lawsuits filed in Ontario courts against Canadian mining company HudBay Minerals over the murder of Adolfo Ich Chamán, the gang rape of 11 women from Lote Ocho, and the shooting of German Chub – abuses alleged to have been committed by mining company security personnel at their Fenix mine in Guatemala. These cases are being widely proclaimed as "precedent-setting," "revolutionary," "historic," "landmark," "a breakthrough" and "a stunning victory for human rights" (Hill, 2011; Williams, 2011; Mills, 2013; Bourgon, 2011).

The history of the Fenix mine, Guatemala's first major mining project, serves as a useful lens to examine the broader history of Canadian mining in Guatemala, as well as to begin exploring the complex relationships that have developed between the industry, those resisting mining projects, and a series of Canadian and Guatemalan governments. Every period of the Fenix project's history has been controversial and strongly linked to local conflict. Since their arrival in El Estor in the 1960s, the

Canadian-based International Nickel Company (Inco) and its local subsidiary Exploraciones y Explotaciones Metalicas de Izabal, S.A. (EXMIBAL) – the first mining companies to have ownership of the Fenix mine – are alleged to have “infringed upon the rights of the local indigenous Maya-Q'eqchi' peoples” in a variety of ways (Nolin and Stephens, 2010).

In 1960, Inco began negotiations with successive military governments regarding the construction of an open pit nickel mine near El Estor (Bradbury, 1985) and received Canadian government support for the project (McFarlane, 1989). Klippensteins (n.d.a.) states that “both Canada’s ambassador to Guatemala and Canada’s Department of External Affairs greet the proposed Inco project with enthusiasm, and begin pushing Inco’s cause in Guatemala. Around this time, Canada greatly strengthens diplomatic ties with Guatemala”.

In 1965, as the internal armed conflict which raged for over three decades in Guatemala was beginning to intensify, mining companies – including, in particular, Inco and its subsidiary EXMIBAL – played an active role in drafting a new national mining code (Tomuschat, Cotí, & Tojo, 1999; IIES, 1979; Castagnino, 2006; Swift, 1977). The circumstances under which this code was substantially changed have been called into question (Nolin and Stephens, 2010). According to a report published by the University of San Carlos, at the end of 1962 Inco proposed that the Guatemalan regime enact a new mining law, arguing that this would stimulate investment in the industry (IIES, 1979). A number of people have raised suspicions about the government actions that followed, notably the Peralta Azurdia administration's suspension of the constitution (which prohibited open-pit mining), disbandment of Congress, and subsequent passing of a new mining code (Decree 342) that allowed for open-pit mining (Klippensteins, n.d.a; Driever, 1985; Castagnino, 2006). These changes left Guatemala far more open to foreign investment (Driever, 1985), and a number of links have been drawn between Inco company executives and how this code came to be drafted (Swift, 1977; Nolin & Stephens, 2010). Swift (1977), Bradbury (1985), and Castagnino (2006) suggest that this code was, in fact, largely written by the Peruvian engineer Emilio Godoy, an expert in mining legislation, who was hired by Inco. It was in the following August that EXMIBAL received their 40-year concession in the El Estor region. McFarlane (1989) asserts that Inco’s agreement with the military dictatorship included both extensive tax concessions and an understanding that the Guatemalan government would provide ‘stability’ in the area surrounding the concession.

Four months after the new code was passed, EXMIBAL was granted 385 square kilometres in a 40-year exploitation concession on Q'eqchi' territory near El Estor, thus making it one of the major land holders in the region (Driever, 1985). EXMIBAL was registered as a Guatemalan company jointly owned by Inco (70 percent ownership) and the Guatemalan government (30 percent ownership) (Bradbury, 1985). In 1974, EXMIBAL was given a $17.25 million loan by the Canadian Export Development Corporation (Swift, 1977).

Strong opposition to the Fenix Project emerged shortly after EXMIBAL was granted this exploitation concession in 1966 (Imai, Mehranvar, & Sander, 2007). A group of professors from the School of Economic Sciences at the University of San Carlos in the capital formed a commission in 1969 to investigate the matter (Bradbury, 1985). The commission concluded that the Guatemalan government had not negotiated enough compensation from EXMIBAL (Imai, Mehranvar, & Sander, 2007).

Public protests against the mine soon followed, to which President Arana responded by suspending the constitutional right to assembly, arresting a large number of people, and eventually sending the army in

to occupy the University of San Carlos in November 1979 (Imai, Mehranvar, & Sander, 2007). Two law professors and members of the commission investigating EXMIBAL, Julio Camey Herrera and Adolfo Mijangos Lopez, were assassinated by state death squads (Ball, Kobrak, & Spirer, 1999; Bradbury, 1985; Driever, 1985). A third member of the four-person commission, Alfonso Paíz Bauer, was wounded in an attempt on his life in the same year, and the final member, Rafael Piedra Santa, was forced to flee into exile (Bradbury, 1985). The United Nations-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification concluded that these crimes were violations committed in complicity with the Guatemalan state as reprisals for opposing President Arana's policies, especially the granting of the EXMIBAL mining concession (Yat, 2004).

While the repression described above took place in the capital city, the connection between Inco and violence in the El Estor region that took place during the height of the internal armed conflict, which happened during the same time period as when active mining at the Fenix project took place, has been widely noted (Astritis & Rights Action, 2003; Bradbury, 1985; Imai, Mehranvar, and Sander, 2007; Nolin and Stephens, 2010). This very recent history of genocide and internal armed conflict looms large over all current political struggles in Guatemala. The internal armed conflict lasted for 36 years and resulted in the death of over 200,000 people, including an estimated 40,000 who were subjected to forced disappearance (Tomuschat, Cotí, & Tojo, 1999). Countless others suffered torture, including sexual violence. The United Nations-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification reported that over 83% of those killed were Indigenous Mayan people, that the Guatemalan government was responsible for 93% of all human rights violations and violent attacks, and that in certain regions this violence constituted an act of genocide on the part of the state (ibid). The report also explained that a culture of racism had led to Indigenous peoples being understood as ‘the enemy within’ (CEH, 1999).

To this day, an overwhelming majority of the crimes committed during the internal armed conflict remain unaddressed, with only a few perpetrators of violence having faced any form of formal accountability or legal process. In the majority of the cases where convictions have been secured, only lower-ranking soldiers and officers have been brought to justice. In the area around El Estor, varying reports indicate that between 3000 to 6000 people were killed in the military’s “reign of terror” (Debray, 1978; Time, 1970). The Commission for Historical Clarification report notably included a number of incidences linking EXMIBAL personnel to serious human rights violations and collusion with repressive military, paramilitary, and police forces (Yat, 2004; Tomuschat, Cotí, & Tojo, 1999). For example, Case 9401 in the Commission's report describes an “arbitrary execution” of four people – including Francisco Salan Ical, identified as an EXMIBAL worker – by military commissioners and EXMIBAL employees that occurred in June 1978 in the village of Santa María Cahaboncito (Tomuschat, Cotí, & Tojo, 1999; Castagnino, 2006).

Many have also pointed to evidence highlighting a strong link between EXMIBAL and the Guatemalan armed forces who carried out the 1978 Panzos massacre, which is often considered to have inaugurated the country-wide campaigns of massacres and ultimately acts of genocide that were carried out during the internal armed conflict (Nolin and Stephens, 2010; Grandin, 2000).

This earlier history of Canadian mining in Guatemala forms an important part of the context within which the Fenix project, as well as the two other Canadian projects I have investigated, have continued to operate during the three decades since. In many ways, the social and political context of Guatemala has scarcely changed – Indigenous peoples remain socially and economically marginalized to an enormous degree (UN Office of the High Commissioner, 2012); no major land redistribution has taken

place and, as of 2000, 1.5 percent of the population claimed ownership of 62.5 percent of the land (Amnesty International, 2006); approximately 30 percent of the population lives in extreme poverty (UNDP Guatemala, n.d.a); crime levels remain incredibly high, with Guatemala being recognized by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2012) as one of the most violent regions in the world, with one of the highest impunity rates; and the already elevated rate of violence experienced by environmental and social justice activists is on the rise, with UDEFEGUA, the Protection Unit of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (2014), recognizing 657 incidents of aggression in 2013 alone, representing an increase of 46% over the previous year. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (2013) noted that:

The risks faced by human rights defenders [in Guatemala] working in the context of development projects are extremely serious. Very often, defenders receive threats, including death threats that are then followed by attacks. Moreover, defenders working on these issues are arrested and detained and their activities are criminalized, including when they are carried out in accordance with the exercise of fundamental rights, notably the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of expression.

As of the beginning of 2014, 100 metallic mining licences were in operation in Guatemala, including 67 for exploration and 33 for exploitation. A further 355 metallic licence requests had been made to the authorities (MEM, 2014). In the summer of 2013, the current Guatemalan government acknowledged the existence of problems with the mining legal framework currently in place and proposed a two-year moratorium on the awarding of new metallic mining licences (MEM, 2013). A series of reforms to the national Mining Law are also being discussed in Congress. Amnesty International has suggested that the proposed moratorium and the intention to reform existing laws present “a window of opportunity for the government to strengthen human rights protections while bringing current mining regulations in line with Guatemala’s international obligations” (Amnesty International, 2014). However, while the proposed reforms address some of the prominent issues that have arisen in mining conflicts, including the issue of royalties, an obligation that health studies be conducted, and a stipulation regarding the negative impacts of company water usage on local communities, they don't address the core issue of consent and decision-making around whether a mine should be allowed to proceed in a given location in the first place (Congreso de Guatemala, 2012). In fact, the only way the proposed reforms touch on community consent, or even on processes of consultation, is by adding further barriers to these processes by reducing the time period in which communities may register opposition to new licence applications to only ten days.

### 1.4 Environmental Justice

The lens of environmental justice has been fundamentally important to my portfolio work. Environmental justice serves to examine how the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, environmental decision-making, and even the defining of words such as ‘environment’ and ‘environmentalist’, all serve to reinforce societal inequities (Gosine and Teelucksingh, 2008; Agyeman, Cole, Haluza-DeLay and O’Riley, Eds, 2009). The environmental justice framework asserts that the norms and dynamics that are reinforced by such patterns play out along lines of race, class, sex, and other societal intersections of power and oppression. This field of study and movement also seeks to examine and redefine concepts whose meaning is often taken for granted. For example, many involved in the environmental justice movement choose to define ‘the environment’ as encompassing "where we live, work, play, and eat”, a definition which helps to bridge the frequent divide between social justice

and environmental movements.

Environmental justice is a framework that has only recently come into prominence within academic literature and analysis. Unfortunately, discussions of environmental justice globally have a tendency of stating or implying that “environmental activism, education, and policy is a story that began in the wealthy industrialized North and has since traveled to nearly every other part of the world” (Carruthers, 2008). Carruthers (2008) goes on to explain that, “in actuality, there have always been myriad forms of environmental consciousness, practice, and mobilization in most parts of the world, even if they have not always appeared in forms familiar to Western eyes”. While many recognize the birth of environmental justice in organizing that took place in racialized communities in the US in the 1980s, it is certainly not a movement or theoretical framework that was exported to Latin America. Regardless, there is a long history of environmental justice struggles in Latin America, though the phrase is not as commonly used. The presence of Indigenous peoples at the forefront of these movements is especially clear across Latin America. As Carruthers (2008) explains, “not only are Indian [sic] leaders and their environmental allies revaluing the inherited ecological wisdom of their ancestors, struggles for indigenous recognition and autonomy are often inseparable from environmental and resource claims”.

In this portfolio, I have especially drawn from environmental justice literature that expands beyond a local or North American analysis, and which instead centres understandings of how environmental injustice can manifest both internationally and between settlers and Indigenous peoples, thus reinforcing colonial and imperial North-South relationships. Within this literature, environmental injustices are understood far outside of the realm of local community-based struggles, but as “symptomatic of systemic tendencies of globalization” (Byrne, Martinez and Glover, 2002). Dependency theory, which emerged in Latin America in the late 1950s from the work of Raúl Prebisch, explains dependence as a condition in which the economies of countries in the Global South are conditioned by the development and expansion of economies in the Global North (Dos Santos, 1970; Frank, 1967). It specifically asserts that the development of the Global North – termed the “core” – took place at the direct expense of the Global South – termed the “periphery” – through the exploitation of resources, labor, and unequal exchange in global financial systems. Environmental injustices can thus be understood to be imposed on periphery states by the core through this system of global stratification. Wimberley (1990) highlights the role that multi-national corporations, including extractive industries, can play in “distorting development” in the periphery by slowing economic growth, promoting income and land distribution inequality, and obstructing democratic political processes, among others.

Struggles that are centred and grounded at local levels have often been seen as a hallmark of environmental justice. The Guatemalan mining projects I have looked at stand in contrast as examples of transnational, multiscalar struggles, given that the movements resisting these mining projects are comprised of actors in different states, take place simultaneously in a variety of political and legal spheres, and, as Urkidi (2011) describes, are “influenced by a combination of international, regional, national, municipal and communitarian social processes and regulations”.

These environmental justice struggles can be understood as fundamentally concerning land rights, and as clashes between distinct notions of property, territory, and collective/individual ownership. In mid-nineteenth century Guatemala, Indigenous communities were “framed as obstacles to progress when white and ladino elites identified coffee production as Guatemala's ticket to economic development and progress” (Sundberg, 2008). Liberal elites within the Guatemalan government routinely represented

Indigenous peoples as lazy, unwilling to work, and wasting their communal lands. One political leader in 1875 wrote: “It is a pity to see such great areas of uncultivated lands in the hands of the natives, who neither cultivate them nor let them be cultivated” (Sundberg, 2008). Over 130 years later, in 2006, the Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala Kenneth Cook commented that the land that Inco first gained in concessions – the future Fenix project – in the 1960s were “barren lands, depopulated, and of no cultural significance” (Nolin and Stephens, 2010). This evocation of *terra nullius* is an exact repetition of earlier colonial discourses, and reveals the ways in which Q’eqchi’ peoples continue to be constructed by Canada's official state agents in Guatemala. Conflicting ideas of development also come to a head as mining companies promise to supposedly “offer [Guatemalan communities] a better future,” insisting that communities around El Estor “need to move beyond subsistence farming" (Cuffe, 2007). Questions of what this “better future” should look like emerge alongside differing assertions about where decision-making on this matter should take place, and who should participate.

**1.5 Praxis and the Production of Social Justice Media**

At the heart of my portfolio is a praxis project, in which I have attempted to take up Freire's call to use praxis as a process of "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970). Kieffer (1984) defines praxis as “the circular relationship of experience and reflection through which actions evoke new understandings, which then provoke new and more effective actions. [...] Involvement generates insight which in turn promotes more knowing participation”. In social work theory, praxis is understood similarly, as “a spiral in which research and practice contribute to new theories and refine old ones, as well as direct interventions for purposes of social change” (Hesse-Biber, 2011).

For my praxis project, a good deal of my work included gathering and publishing testimonies, largely in video form, from community members impacted by Canadian mining projects in Guatemala. Videos have played a significant role in the struggle for mining justice in Guatemala and transnationally. For example, in 2007, the important role of video documentation came into the limelight when Canadian student and filmmaker Steven Schnoor made a short documentary depicting the violent eviction of a community located near the Fenix mine. This developed into a conflict involving the Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala, who was ultimately found guilty of slander in a Canadian court for insisting that this documentary footage was faked (Balkissoon, 2010).

A number of longer videos have also been used to document and bring attention to Canadian mining in Guatemala and across Latin America. I have helped to organize screenings for many of these videos, including: Gold for Life; Sipakapa no se vende; Gold Fever; Tambogrande; Defensora; The Devil's Operation; and Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth.

Much of the literature that I have encountered on videos and social justice have named these projects “human rights documentaries” or “social movement films”, and characterized them largely as communicative political tools (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). The goals of films characterized as human rights documentaries seem to revolve around eliciting the attention and response of people not directly impacted by the human rights issue to help institute punishments for those responsible for the abuse, or to serve as a deterrent for future incidents. Hinegardner (2009) argues that this model characterizes such films as “information conduits from communities that have experienced abuses to the ‘outside world’”. This complements many solidarity work approaches, including the Boomerang Theory (Tarrow, 2005), which explains how local groups share local information with actors – often in other

states – who can then use this information to bring about action targeting parties in the original state from a different angle. Tarrow (2005) also references the role that videos and other media can play in bringing previously unengaged people into a movement and supporting the development of transnational activist networks. These perspectives approach filmmaking as a communication tool, rather than an action in and of itself. The social justice action would be perceived as coming as a result of the communication.

Hinegardner (2009), in their exploration of the use of film in resistance to state violence in Atenco, Mexico, examines the frequently alluded-to divide between action and communication, arguing that such models imply that true political action is limited to "formal political steps within institutions," whether government or NGOs. This is clearly a very limited characterization of action for social change, ignoring essentially all grassroots, community-building actions. This is a perception I have been confronted with many times in my life, as friends or family members have wondered aloud why I didn't 'go into politics' (meaning run for political office) or 'become a lawyer' if I was 'so serious about bringing about change'. Hinegardner proposes a different approach to understanding videos as political action, quoting two of the videographers involved in responding to the conflict in Atenco:

> Little by little we are making a small space, a new imaginary, a new conception of reality, a different kind of common sense.
>
> I believe that what [our work] deals with is to generate our own media, our own networks, our own channels, our own professional codes for our information, for our own information needs.

Thus, Hinegardner portrays political filmmaking as an action unto itself, and not simply a tool to incite action. They explain that while media can indeed sometimes play a useful purpose in inciting an outside audience to act, even where it does not do so it can "create and reshape fields of action in locally contested social and political fields". They articulate that "picking up a camera is a direct action against the virtual reality of mass media and a bodiless political class that is untouched by changes in laws or the punishment of individual officials" and further assert that while many film projects do not change institutional actions or policies, they represent political work that is often "more productive than acting through formal pathways" (Hinegardner, 2009). This can occur in part due to the change in political culture that such films can help to bring about, which can result in more profound societal shifts than those brought about through modifications of law or government.

An important consideration in the development of videos concerns assumptions of neutrality. Video and photographic media is often assumed – whether the viewer is conscious of this assumption or not – to represent a situation more objectively than other media forms. In Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag (2003) argues that photographs are often perceived as authoritative evidence of truth, generally understood to be authentic, neutral, independent, and objective. She says that this is especially true of photos taken by amateur photographers, whose work is considered less staged, more 'true'. I expect that similar assumptions are made of video materials.

Of course, no images can be understood as objective or existing independently from their producer or the context in which they are shared. As McLagan (2003) articulates, "the truth status of moving images has always depended on critical contextualization; images do not accomplish meaning without framing". I have tried to understand this concept of framing by looking at Foucauldian ideas of discourse and discourse analysis, which emphasize the power inherent in and created by different

discourses. Poster (1994) describes Foucault's discourse analysis as emphasizing that every description also regulates what it describes. Thus, in addition to discourse reflecting power relations, it also serves to promote and reinforce specific types of power relations. In order to understand these power relations, Foucault argues that it is crucial to understand any text as part of a larger framework of texts, institutions, and practices (Poster, 1994). This allows for an understanding of how a particular text and its creator advance, complicate, or challenge dominant societal discourses. It is clear that certain discourses can develop to the point of dominance in society through a sort of naturalization process, ultimately coming to be understood as 'common sense'.

If no image or text can be truly considered neutral, then it follows, as Freire frequently asserts, that a neutral educational process is similarly nonexistent (1993). He explains that "education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration [...] into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world". With the media work I have done as part of my portfolio I have sought to consistently acknowledge that there is nothing neutral about it, and my aim has been to actively develop discourses in my work that disrupt societal notions of common sense. Working within a praxis model has supported my continued reflection on what discourses my decisions as a media-maker are reinforcing, in the spirit of Foucault's assertion that "in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things" (2006).

Throughout my portfolio work, I attempted to remain vigilant so as to avoid repeating an unintentional outcome I have witnessed before where groups of people are 'othered'. My work has involved trying to bridge communities and strategies between Canada and Guatemala through using textual and visual documentation of different types to share with Canadian audiences issues of mining injustice impacting Guatemala. Such work can often take the form of publicizing the suffering of the victims of injustice. This practice has brought up difficult questions and dilemmas for me around how I can support some of the urgent and short-term goals that mining-impacted communities and I may agree upon, such as getting a political prisoner released from jail, or shaming the government out of sending military in to disband a blockade, without reinforcing larger dynamics of imperialism, global white hegemony, and the supremacy of a 'Canadian gaze'.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) says that creating an 'Other' is part of creating an identity that allows white people, or people in 'developed' countries to see themselves as helpers who are generous and giving at the same time that they construct 'those less fortunate' in 'developing' countries as beings who 'need our help'. Whether intentionally or not, discourses of mining injustice often depict Guatemalan mining sites as foreign places where foreign people live. This de-emphasizes the Canadian aspect of this problem, focusing instead on otherness. This discourse is fundamentally different from notions of solidarity, or of sharing a problem in which people in both Canada and Guatemala are implicated. I know from experience that it can be very difficult for me to resist falling into this discourse while trying to appeal to Canadians to join in on campaigns. Even setting the discourse of a campaign aside, the simple act of structuring solidarity actions intended for Canadian audiences can often mean severe compromises between long- and short-term goals. For example, solidarity activists frequently choose to call on Canadians to get in touch with the Canadian embassy in Guatemala and urge them to put pressure on the Guatemalan government to take, or refrain from taking, a specific action, even as they may know that such actions reinforce imperial and colonial relationships. This reinforcement is clear when looking at the situation in the reverse and considering how little sway the

Guatemalan embassy in Canada could hope to exert if it called on the Canadian government to stop its complicity in the human rights abuses taking place against the indigenous people of Canada.

Edward Said's Orientalism (2003) provides for an understanding of geographic places as human constructs that are comprised of socially-produced knowledge. This lens has allowed me to look critically at not only my representation of Guatemalans, but at which 'Guatemala' I am reinforcing and reproducing through my documentation, and to think through the real impacts of the various ways of discursively 'creating' this country.

Documentary filmmakers often try to to minimize the distance between an 'us' and a 'them' in their films. Mahrouse (2008) explains that while this task can be important, it can also mean "interceding, arbitrating and interpreting" in any attempts to provide this mediation, which is ultimately a "deeply racialized role" to play. Often documentation takes on meaning for its audience based primarily on its position as the creation of a fellow member of 'us', who is someone similar to the audience, and who serves as witness and interpreter. When I referenced a 'Canadian gaze' earlier, it was to this that I was referring – the expectation that meaning, truth, and deep analysis can only happen through the gaze of 'someone like me'. Mahrouse points out that such dynamics often result in Canadians feeling compassion for their fellow Canadian – in this case, the situation's witness – while their feelings for those directly impacted by the situation at hand more closely resemble pity. The difference between compassion and pity is not incidental in this case, for as Elizabeth Spelman (1997) articulates, "insofar as pity, unlike compassion, is not a matter of cosuffering, it heightens rather than erases differences between the nonsuffering and the suffering". Thus, the 'who' behind the production of media is fundamental. Mahrouse explains this further:

> The practice of showing [your media] and narrating them as a white/Westerner [...] perpetuates and reinforces notions of victimhood and vulnerability of Other. It also inscribes morality to the noble white/Western activist telling the story. If the ability to elicit compassion among bystanders depends on a white/Westerner mediator, such activists' practices are far from counter-hegemonic in their effects. Assigning humanity to the Other is, after all, whiteness in its finest form. (Mahrouse, 2008)

One common way in which activists have attempted to respect and build on individuals' and communities' lived knowledge as well as to avoid this process of 'othering' is through avoiding the role of translator and instead facilitating that people share their own experience(s). Adams (1999) points out that this can often take the form of storytelling in popular education work, and that this approach can be used to "honour the history and experiences of diverse groups" and to "act as a means of resistance to dominant narratives - such as racism and classism". They point out, however, that this approach is not without problems, and that, when used and prioritized uncritically, it can actually serve to homogenize power within groups. Further, it can reinforce the 'us/them' mentality which it was ostensibly seeking to avoid, such as when individuals are called upon to share their experiences as an assumed representative of an othered group.

This approach can also reify certain types of – often popular, experiential – knowledge over other, often more 'official', research-based, scientific knowledge. Adams argues that this approach can actually minimize our ability to think critically because stories are assumed to be "suppressed knowledge", meaning that to challenge them is to undermine solidarity.

Talking about experience operates within an ideological construction that not only makes individuals the starting point of knowledge, but that also naturalizes categories such as man, woman, black, white, heterosexual, or homosexual by treating them as given characteristics of individuals. [...] experience is at once always already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation. (Adams)

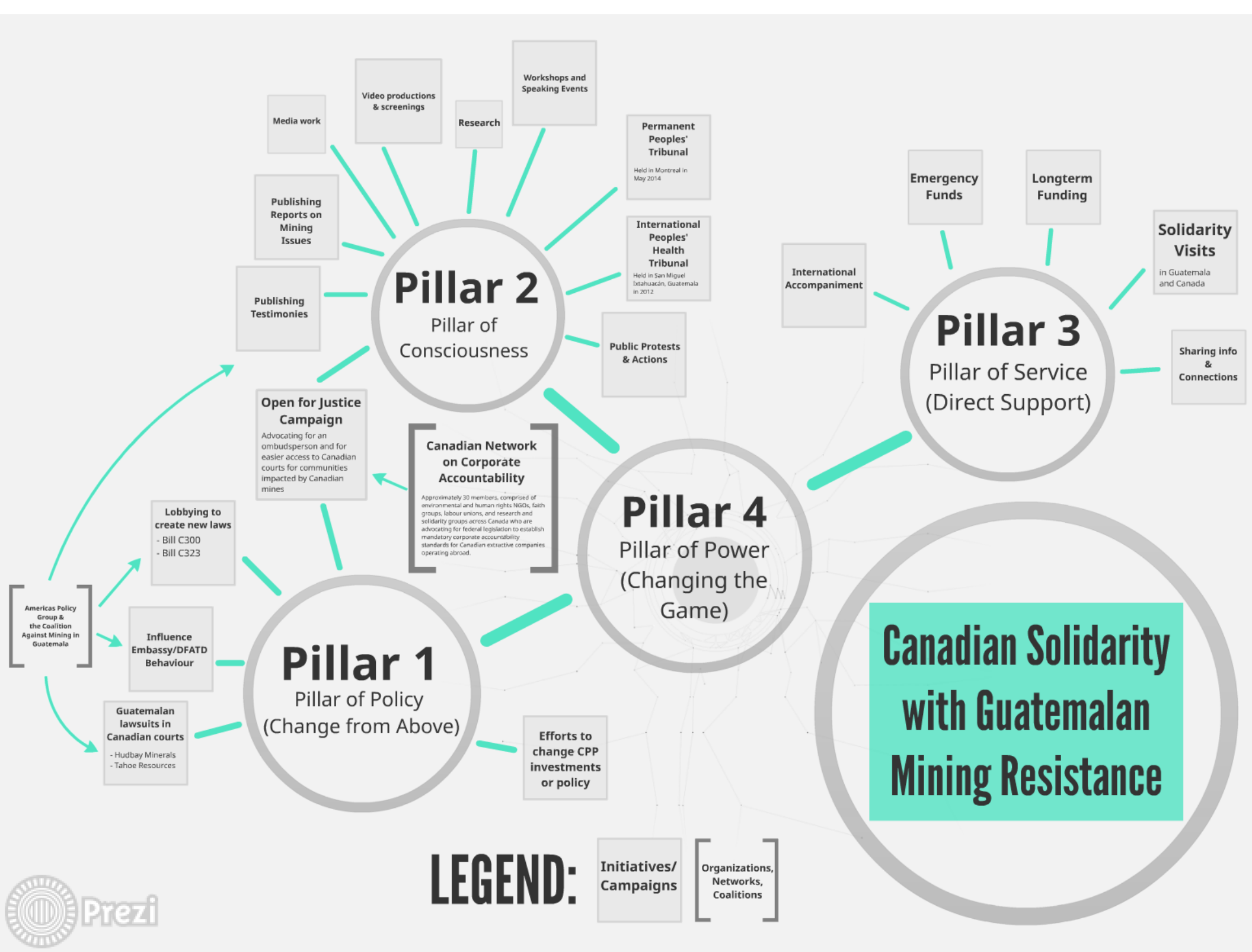
I have strived to stand on an elusive middle ground throughout this project wherein I value individual and community knowledge and experience and try to present these things with minimal mediation on my part, while simultaneously remembering that stories also represent discourses that not only relay but produce knowledge.

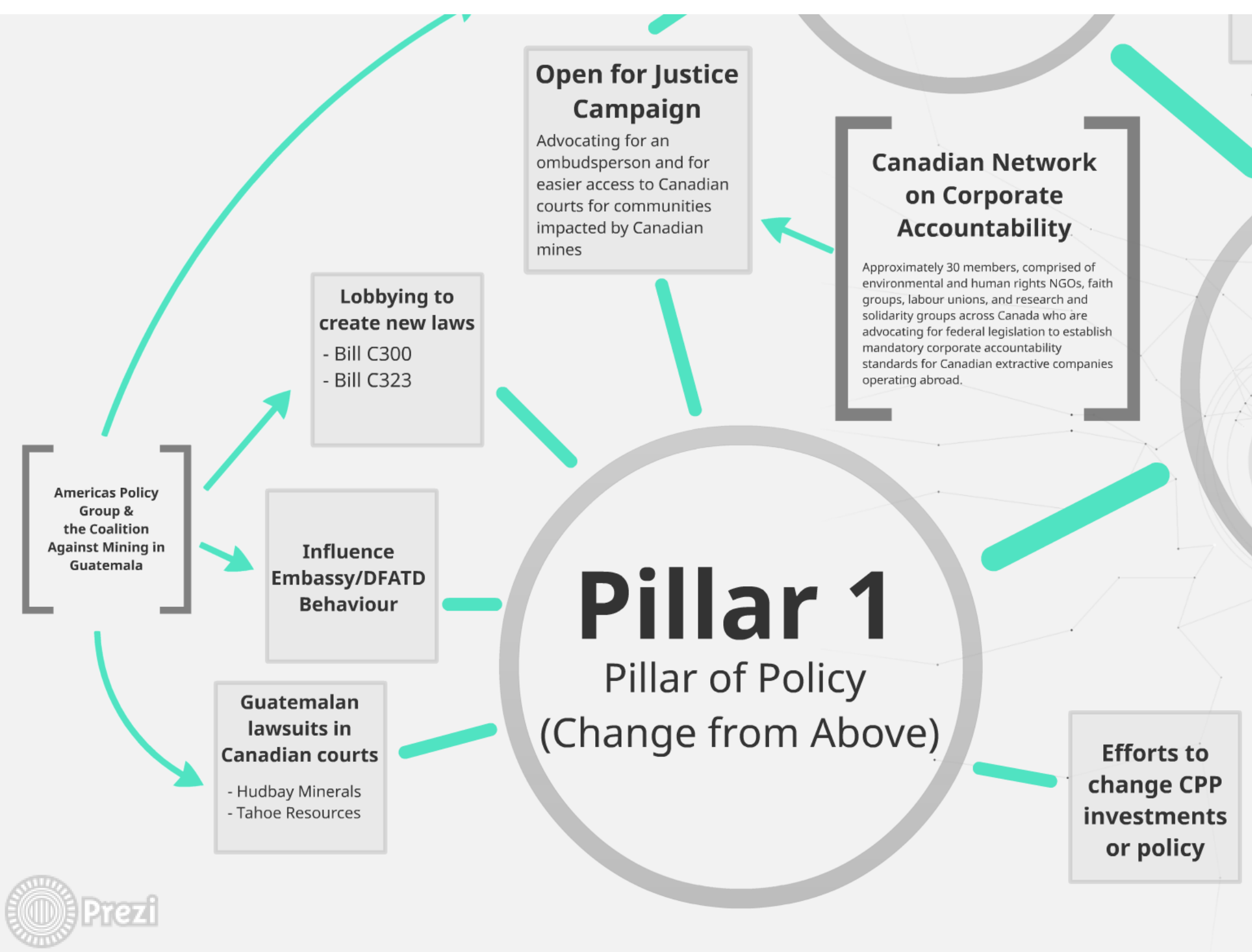
It has also been helpful for me to conceptualize this portfolio within a model called the 'Four Pillars of Social Justice Infrastructure', which I first encountered in a speech made by Dean Spade. This model has also been featured in Mananzala and Spade's *The Nonprofit Industrial Complex and Trans Resistance* (2008). This model outlines various strategies for social justice work, identifying four pillars: the Pillar of Policy, the Pillar of Consciousness, the Pillar of Service, and the Pillar of Power. Much of my portfolio work fits clearly within the Pillar of Consciousness, which includes "work that aims at shifting political paradigms and altering public opinion and consciousness, such as media advocacy work, the creation of independent media, and public education work" (Mananzala and Spade, 2008). However, a large purpose of using a pillar model of understanding social change strategies is to highlight that these pillars are all-too-often isolated, with disparate organizations working within each, when these different types of work are, in fact, "intertwined, complementary, and essential" (Mananzala and Spade, 2008). Spade and Mananzala assert that while public education is an important component of bringing about social change, it is most effective if it is taking place in conjunction with other strategies, which in turn requires resisting the pressure exerted by the non-profit industrial complex to act competitively and in isolation from others.

This model also emphasizes that all strategies should contribute to the fourth pillar: the Pillar of Power. They describe this pillar as focusing on "achieving autonomous community power through building a base and developing leadership: building membership organizations with a large scale and influence (quantity) and developing the depth and capacity of grassroots leadership (quality)" (2008). In terms of how the other three strategies should inform and support the fourth, my interpretation is that the 'how' of all work for social change should serve to disrupt dominant and oppressive power relationships and paradigms, even as we pursue other more immediate goals. My hope is that, in holding myself accountable to revisiting and evaluating my project in terms of my commitment to contribute not only to the Pillar of Consciousness but that of Power as well, I have been able to carry out a project that works to avoid some of the pitfalls of being siloed in only one strategic approach.

### 1.6 Canadian Solidarity with Guatemalan Mining Resistance

In order to illustrate the broader context of resistance that my portfolio work falls into, I have created a systems map, using the four pillars model as a framing device. On the following several pages, I have included an overview of the map as well as a zoomed in shot of each pillar. This demonstrates some of the key branches of solidarity work being carried out in this field, and how they contribute to one or several pillars. Pillars one through three have direct links to specific activities; pillar four, on the other hand, is a result of the ways in which other solidarity actions are carried out. For example, as I will discuss in my reflection at the end of this paper, consciousness-raising can happen in ways that fundamentally challenge ableism or in ways that reinforce it.


Media work
Video productions & screenings
Research
Workshops and Speaking Events
Permanent Peoples' Tribunal
Held in Montreal in May 2014
Publishing Reports on Mining Issues
International Peoples' Health Tribunal
Held in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, Guatemala in 2012
Publishing Testimonies
Pillar 2
Pillar of Consciousness
Public Protests & Actions
Emergency Funds
Longterm Funding
Solidarity Visits
in Guatemala and Canada
International Accompaniment
Pillar 3
Pillar of Service (Direct Support)
Sharing info & Connections
Open for Justice Campaign
Advocating for an ombudsperson and for easier access to Canadian courts for communities impacted by Canadian mines
Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability
Approximately 30 members, comprised of environmental and human rights NGOs, faith groups, labour unions, and research and solidarity groups across Canada who are advocating for federal legislation to establish mandatory corporate accountability standards for Canadian extractive companies operating abroad.
Pillar 4
Pillar of Power (Changing the Game)
Lobbying to create new laws
- Bill C300
- Bill C323
Americas Policy Group & the Coalition Against Mining in Guatemala
Influence Embassy/DFATD Behaviour
Pillar 1
Pillar of Policy (Change from Above)
Guatemalan lawsuits in Canadian courts
- Hudbay Minerals
- Tahoe Resources
Efforts to change CPP investments or policy
Canadian Solidarity with Guatemalan Mining Resistance
LEGEND:
Initiatives/ Campaigns
Organizations, Networks, Coalitions


Open for Justice Campaign
Advocating for an ombudsperson and for easier access to Canadian courts for communities impacted by Canadian mines
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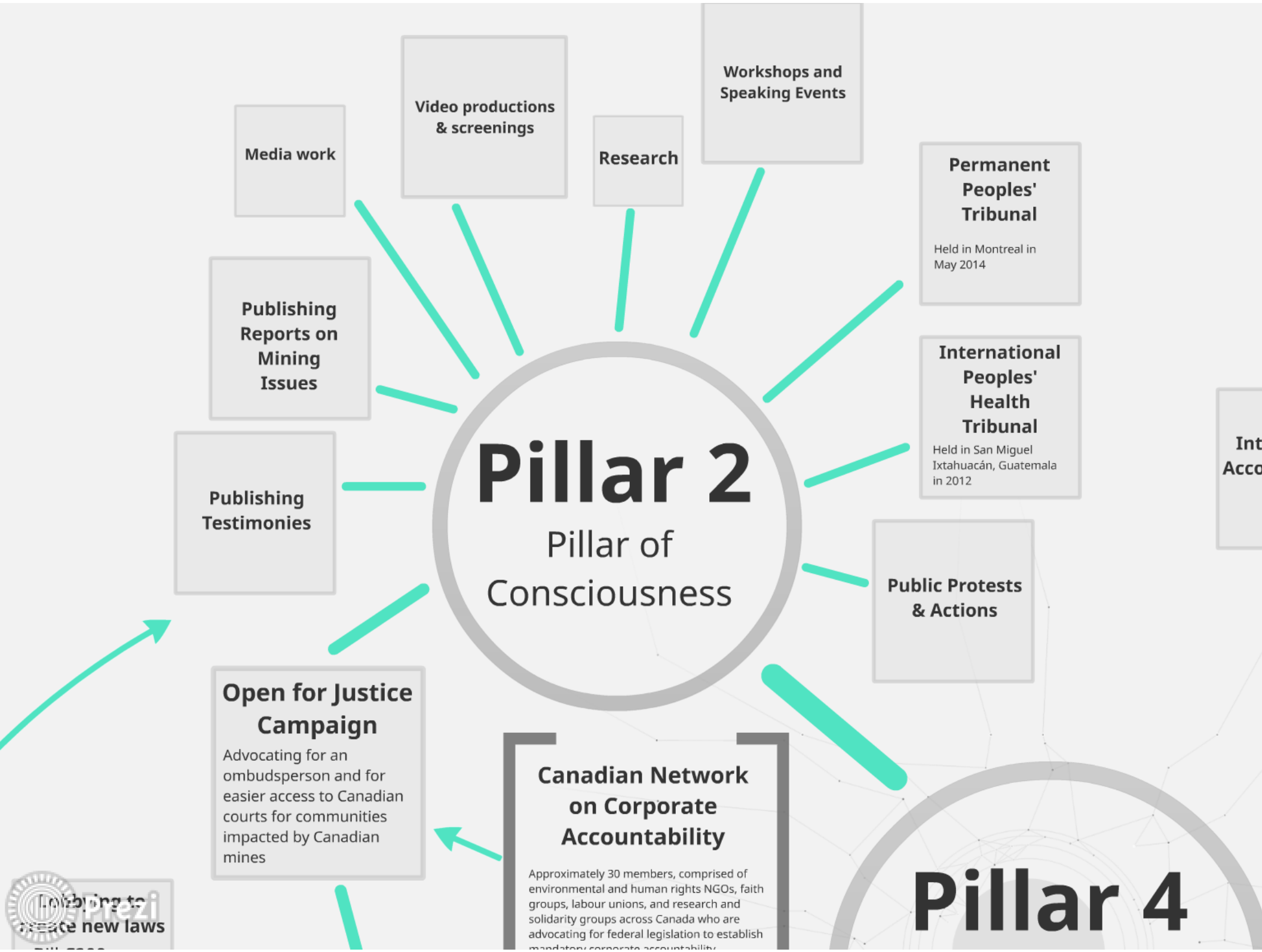
Efforts to change CPP investments or policy


Media work
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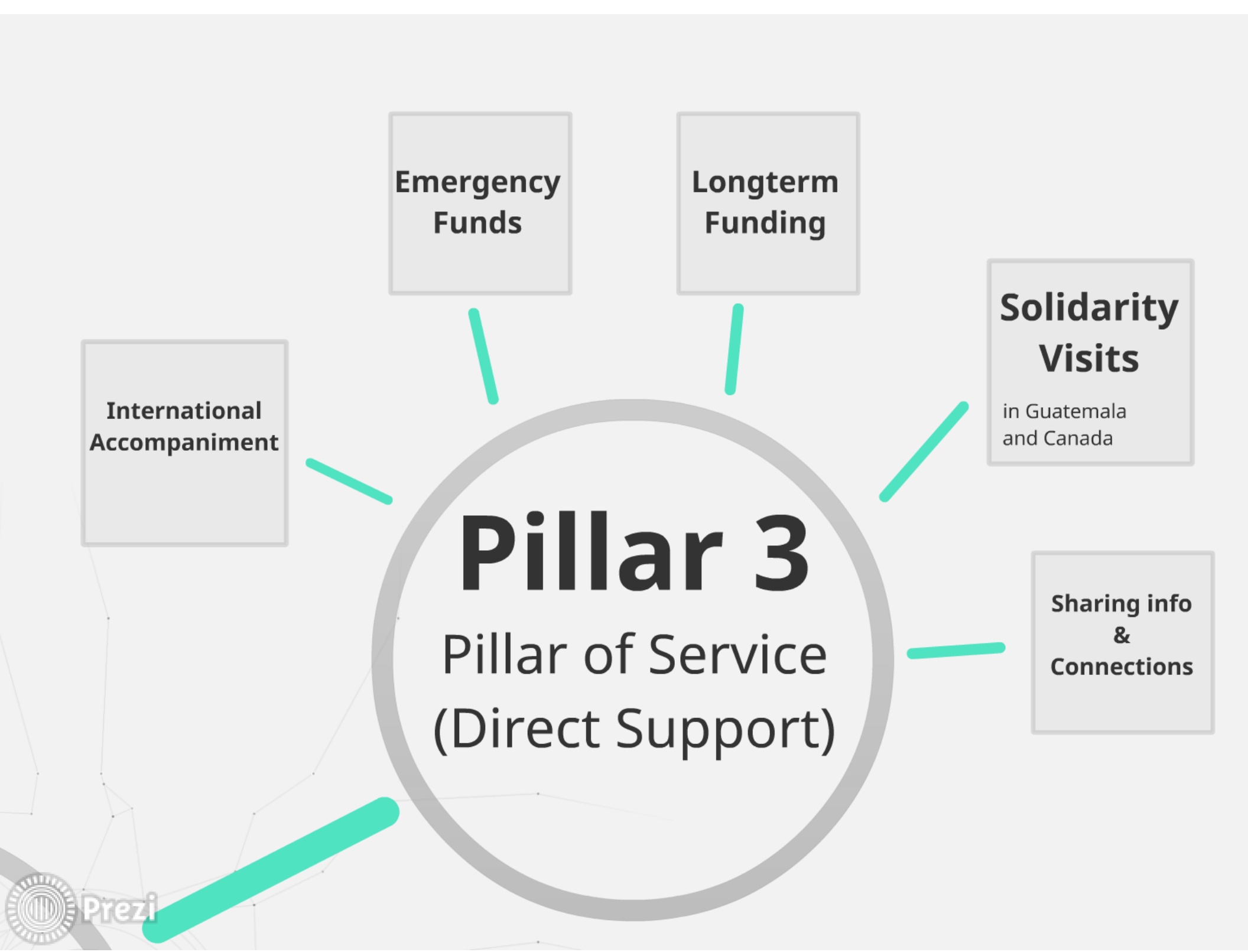
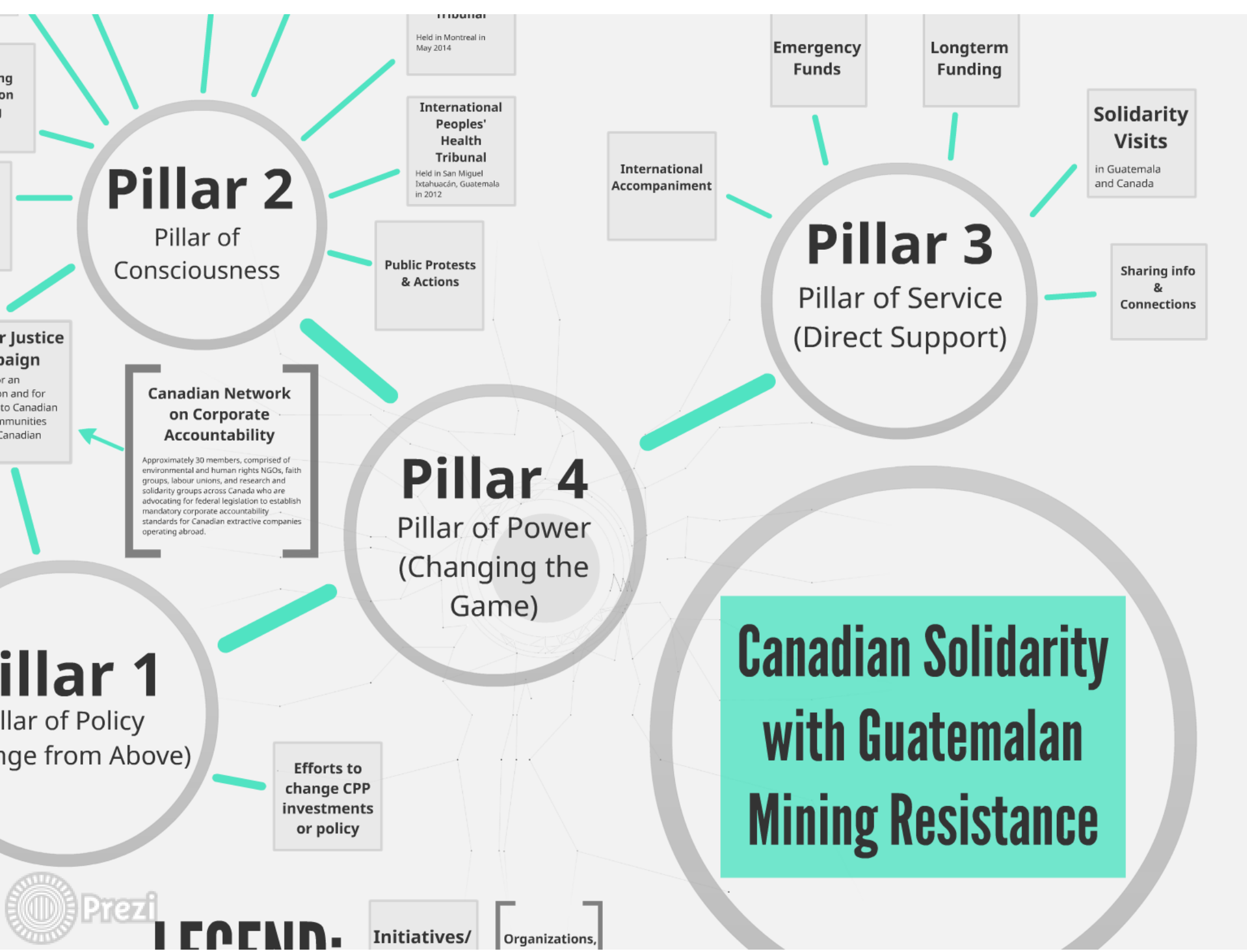
Pillar 4


Emergency Funds
Longterm Funding
Solidarity Visits
in Guatemala and Canada
International Accompaniment
Pillar 3
Pillar of Service (Direct Support)
Sharing info & Connections
Prezi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Pillar 4
Pillar of Power (Changing the Game)
Efforts to change CPP investments or policy
Canadian Solidarity with Guatemalan Mining Resistance
Prezi
LEGEND:
Initiatives/
Organizations,

### 1.7 Considerations on Doing Indigenous Solidarity Work

In addition to completing the specific objectives relevant to each stage of this portfolio, I have committed myself to the overarching objective of operating within established principles of solidarity for settlers working with Indigenous groups. Lynn Gehl's “Ally Bill of Responsibilities” (n.d.a), The Lakota Solidarity Project, and Deep Green Resistance provide particular models of solidarity principles and guidelines I strove to honour in this portfolio (ACTION, 2013). I have included a number of such lists of principles and guidelines in the Appendix.

These lists converge on a number of common points and principles, including: an emphasis on listening over speaking; deferring to Indigenous leadership; being trustworthy; avoiding cultural appropriation; special protocols on demonstrating respect to elders; participation in ceremonies only with explicit invitation; understanding the privilege you walk with; and operating from a place of joining with and struggling with instead of helping or saving, or from a place of guilt.

It is just as important for me to honour these principles in my organizing in Toronto (or Tkaronto, the name an increasing number of Indigenous people have reclaimed for the area), as in Guatemala – to recognize Bay Street as sitting on stolen Indigenous land as much as Goldcorp's Marlin Mine. Walia (2012) argues that “cultivating an ethic of responsibility within the Indigenous solidarity movement begins with non-natives understanding ourselves as beneficiaries of the illegal settlement of Indigenous peoples’ land and unjust appropriation of Indigenous peoples’ resources and jurisdiction.” This is certainly true for myself through both the colonization of Tkaronto, and the ways the colonial state of Canada (and myself as an extension) have benefitted through their ongoing imperial actions and colonization of Guatemala. Walia (2012) elaborates on the natural extension of this understanding: “Given the devastating cultural, spiritual, economic, linguistic and political impacts of colonialism on Indigenous people in Canada, any serious attempt by non-natives at allying with Indigenous struggles must entail solidarity in the fight against colonization”. For me this has meant working not only in solidarity with particular struggles, but grounding this work within a broader stream of decolonization work, such as by making efforts to not reify or legitimize the Canadian state in my writing or organizing.

In my attempts to ensure that my solidarity work is supporting decolonization, it is crucial that I approach the word decolonization carefully and critically. In “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” Tuck and Yang (2012) demonstrate the ways in which the word is increasingly being used as a metaphorical term and the forms of evasions, or “settler moves to innocence” that this metaphorization enables. These moves to innocence “problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity”. They can be understood as an 'easy way out' from the harder but more necessary solidarity work that will actually support decolonization. One such settler move to innocence involves the choice to focus on decolonizing thought or theory and thus “to allow conscientization to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land” (Tuck and Yang, 2012). In this portfolio, I have made efforts to refer to thoughts or action that *may support efforts towards decolonization* as such, and to only use the stand-alone term decolonization/decolonizing to refer to concrete measures that actually serve to decolonize the land.

The question of who to take direction from when doing solidarity work can be complicated. It is easy to suggest that settlers working alongside Indigenous struggles should take leadership “from the community”, but it is never exactly clear where to draw the boundaries of what precisely a community

consists of, nor is it likely that any community – clearly defined or not – will have anything close to a homogenous political analysis. Personally, through this portfolio I have decided to take leadership from and offer my support to work in solidarity with grassroots communities, alliances, and groups (mostly Indigenous, but in some cases not) who are opposing corporate “development” on their land from decolonial and community self-determination standpoints. This is not an indictment of other movements, but a recognition that strong alliances are usually based on shared values and analyses. I have also especially sought to work with women and youth organizers, as these groups face the additional burden of fighting sexism, ageism, and having their perspectives and resistance discredited at every turn. While I have chosen particular people to take direction from, I have also made strong efforts to remove myself from internal political debates and conflicts as I believe these are for community members themselves to discuss and resolve. I wholeheartedly agree with Walia's argument (2012) that “allies should avoid trying to intrude and interfere in struggles within and between communities, which perpetuates the civilizing ideology of the white man’s burden and violates the basic principles of self-determination.”

## 2. Methodology

The bulk of my portfolio consisted of a four-stage cyclical praxis project:

Stage 1 – Solicit testimonies from communities directly impacted by three mining projects tied to Canadian companies in Guatemala and document them in both video and interview transcript form.
Stage 2 - Produce and publish writing and media that contains these testimonies, also adding background information, context, and analysis of these three mining projects and the community resistance to them.
Stage 3 - Plan and implement meaningful solidarity actions in Canada that are informed by my interactions with – and take direction from – those directly impacted by Canadian mining projects in Guatemala.
Stage 4 – Reflect on these actions and provide recommendations for future solidarity work.

This process was informed by ASPIRE, the Tatamagouche Model of Education, Design & Leadership. This model is centred on a belief that “to become more fully human, we must take part in the humanizing process of both action and reflection on our actions, both as individuals and collectively.” In order to support personal and social transformation, the ASPIRE model describes a six-step, cyclical process: Assess and Analyze; Setting Objectives; Plan; Implement; Reflect; Evaluate. I was fortunate to participate in an intensive week-long training in applying this model, and the stages of my portfolio have been designed to loosely follow these steps.

Since the first stage of this project was the portion that involved primary research and the majority of my fieldwork, I will outline my methodology for this stage here.

I spent two months in Guatemala from February to April of 2014, meeting with members of communities located near three mining projects. The interviews I conducted were semi-structured, using broad and open-ended questions focused on the following themes:

- Community narratives of the nearby mining project(s), from initial contact with the company/project to the present day;
- Understandings of the mining project(s), including perceived benefits and harms associated;

- Community understandings of land, decision-making, and sovereignty;
- Canadian-based solidarity movements, including directions for short-term and long-term work, messages Canadian activists should emphasize, and strategic considerations.

In addition to conducting interviews, I also sat in on a number of public events concerning mining projects, where I took notes and/or recorded discussions with the consent of participants.

I relied heavily on my current relationships with a number of Canadian organizations that work in solidarity with Guatemalan organizations and social movements resisting mining operations, including: Rights Action; the Mining Injustice Solidarity Network (MISN); MiningWatch; Projet Accompagnement Quebec-Guatemala (PAQG); the Network in Solidarity with Guatemala (NISGUA); and Breaking the Silence (BTS). While working with the Guatemalan organization Ceiba from 2011 to 2012, I also built contacts with some of the key Guatemalan organizations that have been formed in communities in resistance to Canadian mines, including: Consejo de los Pueblos Mayas y Xinca de Guatemala; Comisión Paz y Ecología (COPAE); Consejo del Pueblo Maya de Occidente (CPO); Frente de Defensa de San Miguel (FREDEMI); Madreselva; Movimiento M4; y Waqib' Kej.

While I am fluent in Spanish, I required translation to some of the Mayan Indigenous languages that are spoken in the communities I visited, particularly Q'eqchi' and Mam. Participants were asked to decide whether they wanted their contribution to my research to be anonymous, or whether they consented to being identified in any of the published materials that became part of this portfolio.

I looked for participants to interview who self-identified as all of the following:

- Active in organizing for mining justice;
- Working in resistance to either the Escobal, Marlin, or Fenix mining projects;
- Living in or being from a community close to the current or proposed location of any of the above mines.

I used a purposive sampling strategy starting with my personal networks, as well as the personal networks of allied Canadian and Guatemalan organizations. Through these channels, I contacted several people who I knew fulfilled the above criteria. If they showed interest in participating in my research, I provided them with more detailed information and invited them to meet with me.

Snowball sampling outreach strategies find one person (the “source”) who has characteristics that are desired for the research and “uses the person’s social networks to recruit similar participants in a multistage process. After the initial source helps to recruit respondents, the respondents then recruit others themselves, starting a process analogous to a snowball rolling down a hill” (Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010, p. 370). While my research process was more informal than the initial idea behind snowball sampling, it depended on community “sources” that “have an appreciation of the value of spreading program and research information to their community members” (Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010, p. 371), and who were willing to use this influence to pass on information about my research. Ultimately, I focused on capturing a diversity of experiences and perspectives within the target groups.

I took participants' risk very seriously in all of my interactions with community members resisting mining in Guatemala. In many cases in Guatemala, people who have spoken out publicly in opposition

to mining projects have faced violence, criminalization, stigma, and repression. I had extensive conversations with each participant about whether or not they wished to remain anonymous in all published materials that emerged, or if they would like to be identified and/or have their image, voice, or name used. Ultimately, the majority of interviews or quotes I have published that are not anonymous feature individuals who have established a security strategy for themselves arising from the fact that they are *already* in the limelight and are already recognizably associated with mining resistance beyond the scope of this research. In all cases, I had a thorough discussion with participants around risks associated with publication to assess their comfort with varying types of exposure, especially as it pertains to whether their image, voice, name, or any identifying features would be used in published materials. I made sure, at all phases of the research, that any consent was fully informed. There is always risk associated with any form of resistance activity in Guatemala, and the individuals and organizations engaged in this work have, for the most part, developed deliberate strategies towards mitigating this risk. I have strived to contribute towards, rather than complicate or challenge, individuals' and groups' security strategies so that my research has not added to the risk participants already experience through their involvement in resisting mining operations.

I also worked to follow many of the protocols developed and used by ACOGUATE (La Coordinación de Acompañamiento Internacional en Guatemala), which are designed to ensure the safety of the individuals and groups they accompany, including many of the same communities with whom I interacted.

## 3. My praxis project work

I have thus far shared the contextual base for my portfolio, as well as introduced my fieldwork in Guatemala. This context and fieldwork formed the first part of the reflection-praxis cycle that this portfolio is centred on, and were necessary precursors to the action components of the portfolio which followed. These consisted of a variety of forms of media, direct action, and artistic projects carried out in solidarity with the Guatemalan communities I met with. These components will be introduced and presented in this section, and are included on the attached disc.

Stage 2 and 3 of my portfolio have comprised the “action” components of my praxis project work, and both occurred over the same period of time. The second stage of my portfolio involved publishing materials that include community testimonies, background information, context, and further analysis of community experiences of Canadian mining projects in Guatemala. My work was intended in part to help provide up-to-date information on mining projects as provided by those most directly impacted by them. Two of the mines I have focused on are well-studied (the Marlin and Fenix projects, though there is a dearth of updated and timely information available which reflects changes to the mine which have occurred over the past few years) and a new project that had barely received any attention at the international scale when I began this portfolio work (the Escobal project). The information I made available through the second stage of my portfolio work was intended to contribute to the pool of knowledge that supports global mobilizations in solidarity with those impacted by extractive projects. As such, with this writing and media the goal has been not only to make information and community accounts of mining projects available to those already engaged in these issues, but to publish (or support the publishing, such as through sending out press releases) in other venues where Canadians who are new to the concept of mining injustice may encounter these issues.

The third stage of my portfolio involved planning and implementing solidarity actions – mostly in Canada – that operated in solidarity with the communities in proximity to Canadian mines that I visited. These actions were planned in response to the expressed desires of the Guatemalan communities directly-impacted by these mines.

Rather than organize these pieces by portfolio stage, or chronologically, I have organized them by mining struggle, which I think better demonstrates why I chose to publish certain pieces and to organize particular solidarity actions, and how the praxis cycle played out with respect to each case. I have also included media pieces where I played a major role in writing or otherwise contributing to their production. I have numbered each piece and included, in brackets, the type of document that the numbers correspond to. The documents are included on the attached disc labelled in the same way as in the lists below.

*Resistance to the Fenix Mining Project:*

I spent a week in February with communities around El Estor who have been resisting a series of Canadian mining companies – INCO, Skye, and Hudbay – for over four decades. A number of shorter visits also took place during my remaining two months in Guatemala. Below are the publications and actions I carried out in solidarity with these communities:

Fenix 1 – Published a full-length piece in Alternatives Journal to give a background on the conflict surrounding this mining project, and to explain the interconnected webs of solidarity between Q'eqchi' communities in Guatemala, the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation in Guatemala, and my organizing with the Mining Injustice Solidarity Network in Toronto. (Article)
Fenix 2 – On January 28, 2014, myself and a fellow organizer infiltrated a formal luncheon attended by major players in Canada's mining industry and distributed our own materials. I published an article for the Media Co-op (Article)
Fenix 3 – In time for International Women's Day, I prepared a short video highlighting the struggle of one woman from the region, Fidelia Caal, and her message to fellow women (and especially allies in Canada) struggling for land, community, and justice. (Video)
Fenix 4 – When it was announced that the criminal trial for the murder of Adolfo Ich and shooting of seven others would finally begin, five years after the initial crimes had taken place, I published a communiqué in English and Spanish. It was sent out across a number of listservs and networks across Guatemala and Canada. (Communiqué)
Fenix 5 – Launched an online call for solidarity, which was signed by 1682 people (Petition launch memo) (Petition)
Fenix 6 – Translated hundreds of support messages to Spanish, and coordinated delivery of signed solidarity statement (Blog post)
Fenix 7 – I issued a press release regarding criminal trial delays in English and Spanish (Press Release)
Fenix 8 – Once back in Canada, I developed and recorded a spoken word piece in order to discuss the violence experienced by Lote 8 in a different way, and to explore connections to Canadian colonization (Audio)
Fenix 9 – Organized and spoke at a screening of a new film Defensora (Film Screening Poster)
Fenix 10 – Organized and scripted a People's Trial outside of Hudbay's AGM, wrote an article, and supported the production of a video (Article) (Video)
Fenix 11 – Coordinated sharing documentation of the Hudbay AGM action with the community of Lote 8 (photos)

Fenix 12 – Organized a memorial outside of Hudbay's office to mark the fifth anniversary of Adolfo Ich Chamán's murder (Press Release)

*Resistance to the Escobal Mining Project:*

Over the course of February-March I carried out a number of visits to eight different communities near the Escobal project. Below are the publications and actions I carried out in solidarity with these communities:

Escobal 1 – Worked with others to develop a timeline of the Escobal project (interactive timeline available online at www.tahoeontrial.net ("Timeline" is in the menu bar at the top) or at the following link: http://tinyurl.com/tahoetimeline
Escobal 2 – Published video testimony of community resistance leader Celeste Gutierrez (Video)
Escobal 3 – Published video testimony of President of Xinca Parliament, Roberto Gonzalez Ucelo (Video)
Escobal 4 – Published video testimony of Juan Samayoa (Video)
Escobal 5 – Published a short announcement following death of Merilyn Topacio Reynoso (Blog post)
Escobal 6 – Organized a memorial to Topacio outside of Goldcorp's office on the day of their Annual General Meeting, and a connected May Day action. The article I wrote on this was published in *The Brief*, the Media Co-op's monthly print publication. (Article)

*Resistance to the Marlin Project:*

In March, I spent a week visiting with community leaders in the two municipalities where the Marlin mine is located – San Miguel Ixtahuacan and Sipakapa. The majority of the work I did in solidarity with these communities is not publishable, as it involved supporting with internal documentation needs.

Marlin 1 – Helped to convene a meeting for 70 community leaders in Sipakapa, distributed posters, and gave a presentation on international solidarity efforts over the past decade (Photo)
Marlin 2 – Photographed the mine; recorded video testimonies and shared these with community resistance leaders; translated internal documents; helped draft a funding proposal on behalf of Sipakapa; and convened a meeting between Sipakapan community leaders and a variety of potential allies in the capital (no documentation)
Marlin 3 – Organized a stop outside of Goldcorp's office in Toronto (and gave a speech) during a march opposing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (Rabble article about the march, not written by me)
Marlin 4 – Organized an anti-Goldcorp action in response to a specific solidarity call from communities near the Marlin mine, following the memorial to Topacio (see Escobal 6)
Marlin 5 – Coordinated delivery of solidarity banners from May Day protest action to impacted communities near the Marlin mine (Photos)

*Other:*

Other 1 – Developed and published a photo-essay on resistance at La Puya (Photo-essay)
Other 2 – Supported presentation of Guatemalan case at Permanent People's Tribunal on the Canadian Mining Industry in Latin America, including providing video testimonies for two claimants. Organized and facilitated the Tribunal's trilingual Movement Assembly with 100 participants (Outcome document, which was sent to all participants)

Other 3 – I supported the facilitation of a Mining Justice Assembly at the Peoples' Social Forum and also ran a workshop on radical mapping for mining justice (Report-back from Assembly)

Other 4 – Gave a lecture to 100 students studying International Studies at Humber College (no documentation)

Other 5 – I solicited media attention from VICE magazine, and did a lengthy interview with them that was published almost in its entirety (Media article)

Other 6 – I gave an interview to CKUT radio station on Topacio's death

Other 7 – I gave an interview in Spanish for Radio-Canada International about Topacio's death

# 4. Reflection

In his prologue to the edited volume Speaking for Ourselves, Robert Lovelace (2009) describes a “four-pronged strategy of research, community education, legal action, and direct action” used by an Ardoch community to resist the encroachment of uranium mining on their territory. He explains that this approach was needed in order not only to stop the uranium exploration, but to ensure that in the longer term legal precedents would be strengthened and the larger struggle for acceptance of Aboriginal rights and title would be advanced.

My portfolio work followed a similar four-pronged approach, though I did not pre-determine how much of my work was to take place through each particular prong or around each particular mining case. The distribution of my work was thus far from even; however, this allowed me to be responsive to particular community requests and situations as they emerged.

Instead of examining each individual element of my praxis project work, my reflection process has focused on two broad themes. First I will reflect on the use of the legal system in organizing, and some of the pitfalls of resistance struggles centered on legal interventions. The second theme I will explore concerns the intersections between mining injustice – and broader environmental justice – movements and disability justice.

### 4.1 Reflections on the use of the legal system

Earlier in this portfolio, I discuss the Four Pillars model and commit myself to reflecting on this project in terms of my commitment to contribute to not only the Pillar of Consciousness but that of Power as well. In particular, I have persistently questioned whether or not the aspect focused on the legal system can be understood as contributing to the pillar of Power.

As an imperialist settler-colonial state, I recognize that Canada possesses a fundamentally illegitimate and immoral legal system, in which laws are structured in order to maintain and reify systems of oppression. As such, it follows that litigation strategies that strive to hold corporations accountable for violence – or even those seeking to challenge the laws in place – are severely limited in terms of their potential to address core relations of power.

Razack (1998) explains how, when the violence of the law is carried out, it is largely lawyers who play the role of interpreting and recounting the stories of marginalized people, which judges in turn transform into 'facts', which set precedent and are ultimately used to further build the norms of the legal system**.** Even before a case faces its day in court, lawyers can often be understood to reproduce imperialism within the lawyer-client relationship, including where white social justice lawyers act in the position of  – or are recognized as – saviors of legally marginalized people of colour (Spade, 2012).

This dynamic has been clearly evident to me in the Hudbay cases that so much of my praxis work has surrounded and supported. Another problematic dynamic I have observed is the way that a focus on legal strategies pulls energy away from other forms of resistance. Calpotura (1995) argues that the proliferation of legal strategies intended to 'win' environmental justice fights has been to the detriment of direct-action, community-oriented strategies because it “takes the fight away from arenas in which people can have some direct influence [...] to a place where they don't.” He posits that such a strategy

“does not facilitate the building of a cohesive, imaginative, and militant base of people willing to employ various tactics on the opposition.” In “From White Knight Lawyers to Community Organizing: Citizens for a Better Environment-California”, Toshiyuki Drury and Chu similarly describe the role that litigation can play in environmental justice struggles as “a disempowering tool that transfers power from community members who are directly affected [...] to a handful of lawyers speaking for the community.” Spade (2012) explains that legal education in fact purposefully trains law students to accept “a dynamic of lawyers as autonomous saviors of communities unconnected to meaningful collective struggle and unaccountable to the communities they serve”.

Despite these issues, I believe there are valuable gains to be made through engagement with the legal system, so long as such efforts are understood as a small piece in a larger, community-led struggle. Furthering this, Smith (2012) pushes for a shift from the understanding of legal strategies as being consistent with morals, since colonial law is inherently immoral, but instead suggests “an alternative framework for pursuing social justice through the law, to employ it for its strategic effects rather than through the moral statements it purports to make” (page 76). This would mean a move away from framing legal struggles as determining 'what's right' or as a means of having justice served, and towards a framework that recognizes legal battles as nothing more than a strategic tool, and one among many others.

The mock trial I organized outside of Hudbay's Annual General Meeting was an attempt on my part to bridge the gap between the grassroots solidarity organizing happening in Canada and the legal strategies taking place, and to engage with this tension. At the same time, I intended to highlight the absurd theatricality of litigation and the court. Upon reflection, however, I believe that while this action successfully brought the stories of those impacted by Hudbay's mines to a corporate gathering where they were unwanted, it may have actually served to further lionize the ongoing litigation and minimize the over fifty years of resistance that has been led by Q'eqchi' communities.

### 4.2 Reflections Through a Disability Justice Lens

While there are numerous intersections that are worth exploring between mining injustice and other justice-oriented movements, connections between mining injustice and disability justice emerged most frequently for me, and seemed the least explored and discussed in the activist communities in which I organize. I have thus chosen to dedicate the following section to exploring two inter-connected but distinct threads of reflection that fall under the umbrella of disability justice. First, I will investigate how understandings of disability justice shed light on the ableism woven into the mining injustice work myself and allies have been engaged in. Second, I will use a disability justice lens to reflect more personally on the impact that this work has had on me, and to explore different ways of organizing in the future.

Note: some of this section was handed in as coursework for ENVS 5106 – Feminist Perspectives in Environmental Studies.

#### *4.2.1 Ableism and Environmental Justice Organizing*

The realization that I needed to seriously think about how disability justice intersected with the mining injustice work that I do came at a protest two years ago. A group I organize with had helped to organize the action and a larger crowd than we’d expected had turned up. We were in downtown Toronto,

outside of the Annual General Meeting of Barrick Gold, the world's largest gold mining company. We were trying to highlight Barrick's history and ongoing practice of human rights and environmental abuses at its many mines around the world.

Someone I didn't know had shown up with his own protest sign, a poster-sized version of the following image, with no text added:


I wondered if I had missed something – were people asked to print and bring photos of those impacted by Barrick's mines? Evidently not; this poster was the only one. I found myself increasingly uncomfortable with this man and his sign. Where was the context? What was the name of the person pictured? Where was the photo taken? Did he have permission to use this photo in this way?

I didn't know what to do. I wanted to ask him to put away his poster, we had others on hand he could carry. But I didn't feel like I could explain convincingly and persuasively enough in that moment what was wrong with him carrying that image, without context, at this protest.

Upon investigation, I learned that the name of the perosn pictured is Wilson Manuba. He was a fisherman living in Calancan Bay in Marinduque, Philipines, where Canadian company Placer Dome (which was later bought by Barrick) used to dump its mine waste. Between 1975 and 1991, the mine was estimated to have dumped some 200 million tons of mine waste into the shallow coral-rich bay despite vocal opposition from the community. Many years ago Wilson went out into the bay with a small cut in his leg. As a result, he suffered from mercury poisoning which necessitated the amputation of both of his legs. The president of the company, John Dodge, continues to maintain that the fishermen of Calancan Bay "have not suffered in any way because of the tailings disposal." (Ilagan, 2008)

I remained somewhat conflicted; to hold up anyone's body as evidence of injustice – apparently without any context or explanation needed – was highly problematic, but wasn't it an important role for environmental justice movements to highlight the ways in which environmental injustices have harmed people's bodies? And what if Wilson had indeed consented to have his photo used in this way, to have his body held up as a testament to the harms brought about by corporate contamination of his land?

Despite the fact that environmental justice movements are directly centred on experiences of disability, and on how disablement occurs in racialized, gendered, and colonial ways, the groups I have organized with have spent shockingly little time actually talking about disability. We certainly evoke it often enough, alluding to, or proving the presence of contaminants, the health impacts on individuals. But we don't usually analyze, dig deeper. Disability becomes yet another proof of the evil, the harm of an environmental injustice.

In this section, I will explore some of the thinking and learning that I have done since this moment of confusion. While I was initially focused on unpacking for myself the narrower question of how to better approach depictions of the impacts of environmental injustice on our bodies, I have shifted into broader explorations of the links that are and aren't present between environmental justice organizing and disability justice values.

Models of Disability

Disability justice is an emerging social justice analysis that incites people to think about the way they embody their liberation and about the possibility of living in a world that recognizes interdependence as necessary for survival. It is a multi-issue political understanding of disability and ableism, moving away from a rights-based equality model, to a framework that centres justice and wholeness for all disabled people and our communities.

Here's a chart I created in order to briefly summarize some of the basic features of two other ways of understanding disability that are more common than a disability justice framework:

| **Medical Model of Disability** | **Social Model of Disability** |
|---|---|
| Grounded in medicine and science | Grounded in social conditions |
| Individual | Collective and systemic |
| “Body is wrong” | “World is wrong” |
| Whether one is “disabled” is based on whether one has physical impairments | Whether one is “disabled” is based on whether one is oppressed and denied access on the grounds of one’s physical embodiment |
| “The disabled”, “Handicapped”, “Physically/ mentally challenged”, etc. | “Handi-capable”, “Differently-abled”, etc. |

My understanding of Disability Justice is as a framework that straddles and builds onto these two models. On one hand, it’s a way of thinking about how the world we live in is built such that people are

disabled by their environments. As such it's a move away from the medical model of disability that frames peoples' impairments as flaws in their body, as it instead places the onus of responsibility on disabling environments and disabling social worlds.

But disability justice is also a move away from the social model of disability (often called liberal disability organizing), because it recognizes that in this model's attempt to demonstrate how disability is a social construction, in its attempt to talk about the ways in which environments are built to actively prevent people with diverse embodiments from participating in society, it can sometimes erase the ways in which bodies can actually have an impairment, can cause pain, can be difficult, can be challenging.

Disability justice is about finding a justice oriented space in the middle that allows people to talk about the realities of their bodies while also talking about the ways in which they wish the social world would change. It centers the lived experiences of people with disabilities. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2010) explains that “disability justice versus the mainstream disability rights movement is similar to the difference between the environmental justice movement and the mainstream environmental movement. What a lot of us in disability justice are working against is a mainstream movement that’s very white, very straight, very middle class. ”

I have developed the following chart in order to summarize the ways in which groups or individuals working within different frameworks address ableism:

| Disability Services | Disability Rights | Disability Justice |
|---|---|---|
| ▸ Access to medication, assistive devices<br>▸ Not working on roots of the needs<br>▸ Usually run by able-bodied people<br>▸ Heavily state-funded<br>▸ Goal is access: having things in place (material, social, and attitudinal) that make it possible for people to fully participate | ▸ Advocacy, changing policy<br>▸ Largely led by white people, men, straight people, etc.<br>▸ Goal is equality, assimilation: “We’re just like you” | ▸ Not single-issue, doesn’t stop at “access”<br>▸ Centers traditionally marginalized voices<br>▸ Less about logistics, more about politics<br>▸ Goal is justice and liberation, anti-assimilation, understanding wellness in ways that aren’t rooted in ableist notions of bodies and what is considered “normal.” |

On September 30th, 2013, I was fortunate to attend a talk by Nadia Kanani in which she set out the term disablement, which I believe to be a crucial term for all discussions of environmental justice.

Disablement is the process of acquiring a disability. It's a term that opens a space for historical and material conditions leading to disability, and that centers racialized people, immigrants, refugees, Indigenous people. This can happen through environmental injustices and colonization (e.g. limited access to water having big health impacts, or vaccine testing happening primarily in indigenous communities, or the way characterizations of intellectual inferiority are racialized and played a big role in colonization). This allows us to unpack how, for example, disability and race are mutually constituted through the settler-colonial state.

It seems to me that in the same way that Disability Justice models complicate the social model of disability, the notion of disablement creates a space to talk about people who are experiencing violence. And what that looks like. And that this violence could be prevented if we change the way that the world works.

Applying these frameworks to my praxis work: a case study

One instance of violence I have investigated through my solidarity work with Q'eqchi' communities in northeastern Guatemala resisting Canadian mining companies took place on September 27, 2009. On this day it is alleged that the former head of security at the Fenix mine murdered a community leader, Adolfo Ich Chamán, and shot at least seven other community members. One of these people, German Chub, was seriously injured. He explains, “I have suffered devastating and permanent injuries because of the shooting. The bullet badly damaged my spinal cord, so I am now a paraplegic. The bullet also punctured and collapsed my left lung. My left lung no longer works.” (Chub's statement of claim, 2012)

Those impacted by the acts of violence that took place on that day are involved in two separate court proceedings – a civil case in Canada directed against the Canadian company and the local subsidiary, and a criminal case in Guatemala against the alleged shooter – as well as other activities aimed at curbing ongoing mining activities, intimidations, evictions, and violence. In all of these actions, they have called on international allies to support them and to disseminate information on their struggle.

In the communiqués, media articles, videos, and other outreach materials that have been created, much attention has been focused on German.

In an article published in The Dominion, German's struggle is described as follows:

> “The same day Ich was brutally murdered, German Chub was shot by mine security, permanently losing the use of his lower body. [...] “I’m going to Canada with high spirits, in hopes that [Hudbay Minerals] recognizes the harm that they have done to me,” Chub told The Dominion. “I want justice.” Not only has Chub been confined to a wheelchair since 2009, but he still feels threatened by company workers who park in front of his house and monitor his movements. When he wheels himself onto the plane to Canada, it will be his first time leaving Guatemala.” – Paley, 2012

In Defensora, a film made by Director Rachel Schmidt on this struggle, which I screened as part of my praxis work, German is quoted as saying: “My life before was so beautiful...my life is so painful and overwhelming now because I'm in this chair.”

An excerpt from an open letter written by Rights Action, the international NGO that has worked most closely with German:

> "The suffering of some of these victims continues today, particularly that of German Chub, now paralyzed from the chest down, wheel-chair bound, a bullet still lodged dangerously close to his spine, and suffering on-going health complications. (Victim of a crime, German has received no formal compensation whatsoever. With funds from caring North American donors, Rights Action is regularly channeling emergency relief, humanitarian funds, just to help keep German barely healthy, and surviving. He is not remotely close to having his life-long health and economic survival needs resolved.) – Rights Action, 2012

In the section that follows I will examine these depictions through a disability justice lens.

Effects of Truth

The notion of "truth effects" is derived from Foucault's conception of truth as unattainable and embedded in systems of power. He states that emphasis should instead be placed on "the discursive processes through which discourses are constructed in ways that give the impression that they represent true [...] pictures of reality" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 14). In looking at the "effects of truth" created in depictions of German, I am thus seeking those messages that audience members or readers of a text emerge from it holding, but that are likely not explicitly stated.

The first emotion that hit me when I read back over these depictions of German is that of pity. It seems clear that these texts are meant to evoke an audience's pity for his "suffering", for him being "bound" or "confined" to a chair, for the loss of his formerly "beautiful" life. This initially surprised me, because in remembering ways that I've seen German's story – and himself – presented during public talks in Canada or Guatemala, it seemed as though the opposite were true – he was presented as a hero.

Upon further reflection however, it occurred to me that these are not in fact such contrary depictions. Whether German is set up to be the object of pity, or an inspirational hero, these depictions are flattening. It is difficult to be seen as fully human when trapped between the binary of such caricatures or archetypes. And are they not both ways of othering him, of distancing him from the audience based on either his perceived heroic or pitiable qualities?

Further, it seems to me that this depiction fits within a broader narrative of people looking at individuals who are injured, traumatized or scarred in various ways by violence and imagining the resulting impairment as a giant tragedy. This can clearly then serve to further marginalize disabled people generally, and perhaps especially those disabled people who have lived with that embodiment for their entire lives, who may be forced to confront the notion that their body is perceived as a tragedy to others.

But of course this is complicated by the fact that what happened for German is precisely a case of disablement. The impulse in the social model of disability towards empowering disability and asserting that there is "nothing wrong with your body" thus rings a bit hollow in this case. It is clear that we shouldn't ignore the violence German and his community have suffered from just because we're trying not to stigmatize disabled people or people with chronic illness. Instead, the work of environmental justice movements, among others, to prevent that violence from happening is vital and comes to the

fore.

And so the question becomes how can we do this important work, do this one kind of advocacy without marginalizing another group of people (or in this case a group of people that German is now a part of)?

Moving towards poignancy; other ways of sharing this story

I am remembering what Nadia Kanani said in a lecture I attended: "Pity never incites meaningful action." She expanded by saying that the evocation of feeling sorry for people actually serves to help an audience deal with their own guilt far more than it serves to productively support the individual one is pitying. I would suggest that the same is true for depictions which place an individual on a pedestal, or depict them as a disabled hero. Nadia uses the word poignancy as a flipside of this evocation of pity and shock, as a way that an individual or community's experience can resonate with audiences without falling into the same destructive patterns.

In Chen's “Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect,” they explain:

> “Disability itself is a critically important axis of difference. Scholars such as Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear point out the dangers of being both black and disabled; the authors suggest that within critical race feminism, while disability is sometimes recognized, it can often analytically function for scholars as a “nuance” of intensity rather than its own structural difference, leading to a loss of complexity in the reading: “the omission of disability as a critical category in discussions of intersectionality has disastrous and sometimes deadly consequences for disabled people of color caught at the interstices of multiple differences.” These are just some ways in which criminality, race, and disability can be mutually produced and reproduced. ” – Chen, 2012

I believe environmental justice movements have fallen victim to the same habit that Chen describes. And in German's case, I wonder whether what's happening in the texts that are currently out there is a narrow focusing of the lens on him and his wheelchair. I wonder whether instead we can widen out the lens and place him, his wheelchair and his body in context and look at what his experiences of ableism look like.

As an initial approach to doing this, I tried to briefly apply some of the various models of disability to German's case. From the perspective of a medical model, it is clear that yes, German is facing real medical problems, and things that are “wrong” with his body and that cause him pain. From a social model perspective, it is clear that being in a wheelchair is immensely difficult for him because of a lack of paved roads in his community, accessible transportation, or access to healthcare. From a disablement perspective it's important to highlight that he was in fact shot as part of a coercive and violent colonial project.

Moving outward from this, I believe that in order to evoke poignancy, rather than pity or being placed on a pedestal, it is vital to place the subsequent barriers that German has faced and will face within the context of a global and political economy, where German's disablement will be impacted not only by the violence he has faced but by his own positionality (which will also change).

I think one way of doing this is to emphasize both health consequences as well as his new experiences of oppression due to disability. So focusing on what it looks like now for German, whose pre-existing

experiences of oppression are now compounded by experiences of ableism. This likely means looking more specifically at his social and structural circumstances, and at what the material consequences of his disablement may be. For example: what does this disablement mean for his ability to make an income? Further, we could explore the ways in which his access to male privilege is now altered because of the way that men with disabilities are seen. And we could give context as to how disability as an enshrined identity is or is not a thing in Guatemala, especially for Indigenous peoples and within his specific Q'eqchi' community, how people with disabilities are generally treated, and what rights, services, and support he has access to.

Exploring and raising awareness with these types of questions which look at the situation structurally rather than portraying German and his life as a tragedy can in turn benefit other disabled people. This way we're not throwing disabled people under the bus but raising awareness of specific concerns that face people with disabilities.

And while it may fully be German's personal experience that this has been a tragedy for him, where solidarity activists like myself are producing discourse this doesn't have to be the rhetoric that we use. This is not to negate or delegitimize that it may be the case that German's experience is that using a wheelchair and being disabled is a source of trauma. Nor to limit his opportunities to share his experience as he understands it. But I believe that where solidarity movements are constructing our own narratives about German, it is possible and necessary for us to be conscious about how we are choosing to frame this. The evocation of shock and pity at the expense of other disabled people doesn't have to be the strategy that our movements continue to lean on in advancing our claims and our demands for change.

*4.2.2 Learning from Disability Justice: Beyond Access, Towards Interdependence*

Lately, I have observed social movements I am part of beginning to think about access more and more. And in ways that go beyond "can a person using a wheelchair get into our event space?" (which is important, but not the end of accessibility) and move into broader attempts at ensuring access across ages, classes, gender identities, sexual orientations, languages, etc.

I think it has sunk in for many people how in the environmental justice movement especially, to have the people who should be at the center of the movement – that is, those most impacted by environmental injustice – not have access to it is a special brand of absurdity. However, while I feel as though we may in some cases be doing a better job of building access, I don't think we're doing it from a space of trauma awareness or from a belief in interdependence. And I think that this is an area where environmental justice movements have a lot to learn from disability justice movements.

<u>Some personal musings on the weight of this work</u>

I've struggled with depression for a long time.

And, without trying to pathologize a movement, I feel like I've seen depression deeply embedded within environmental justice movements.

And sometimes I find myself wondering – how could that not be the case? How can one engage with environmental disaster, suffering on such an enormous scale, the overwhelming injustice all around,

and the individual stories of people whose lives, families, and communities have been destroyed, without taking on some of the crushing weightiness?

To be clear, I am not trying to say that the weight of this work is interchangeable with being a person with mental illness/disability/psychological impairments. But for me, personally, I know that everything can blend together. And for me, it's hard to know just how much any downward spiral of depression and insomnia and migraines and delusions is tangled up with the heavy weight of the work I am doing or is about my own impairment in some separate sphere.

And I also know that people involved in environmental justice work are not some special breed of people dealing with issues any more difficult than anybody else. And in many cases we are dealing with issues far less difficult than others, for those of us with the immense privilege to have chosen to take on this work, who have not been forced to by environmental injustice we ourselves have directly suffered from. This is of course also not true for many involved in environmental justice struggles who have been directly impacted.

That said, I wonder whether environmental justice movements generally avoid talking about disability, engaging with it because of the nature of calling this work our own, and the weightiness, the feeling-close-to-the-edge-of-despair-ness that can come with that. The feeling that if we give in we might just give up. I don't think this is a feeling that only I have.

I wonder whether we sometimes resist collective care and push each other towards self-care because we worry that if we feel the weight collectively we risk bringing down the whole group. Or swamping everyone with despair. So we encourage each other to take our problems away from the group.

I have not yet figured out how to hold the facts, the stories of the fuckedupness of the world in my hands and still stand up. But also not to close off, to continue to feel it.

I wonder how everyone (anyone?) else does this.

*Don't break down. Don't let it hit you. Don't you care about the work? Don't stop.*

I always feel too close to the edge. But is there another choice besides doing this work? Doing it means confronting what is terrible in this world. Turning away means denying my own humanity. I know that even being able to ask myself this is a privilege. That I can even consider turning away, retreating into a safer, sheltered, more secure life.

Every time I come to Guatemala to meet with communities who have faced immense violence from Canadian mines, I get back to Canada depleted, deflated. And there's always someone who was convinced I was on vacation, who can't grasp that I was doing work that I chose to do, yes. Work that is not my own struggle but is about choosing to engage in the struggle of others. Yes. But work that nonetheless is traumatizing to me.

> “How do we become whole – again, or perhaps for the first time – after experiencing traumas that threaten to splinter our souls? How do we collect the shards of our broken selves that have been flung far and wide by the impact of life’s blows? How do we process individual and collective pains that have ripped apart our cores? Where do we find wellness, and to whom, or to what, do

we turn when relief seems illusory?" – Liberator Magazine, 2011

On vicarious trauma

I thought I knew about trauma, through what I had learned about dealing with my own. It wasn't until much more recently however that I began to understand other, less direct, forms of trauma that were also impacting myself and my friends.

In environmental justice movements, as community organizers and activists, we are often working with survivors of trauma, and working on a daily basis to unpack the impacts of trauma and violence. Many of us play important roles in bearing witness to the suffering of others, helping to carry others' stories while supporting them in their journey towards healing and resilience building. But in that process we, too, are impacted.

Often referred to as "secondary" or "second degree trauma," "compassion fatigue," or "burnout," vicarious trauma refers to the transformation that occurs at an individual level in those who work with trauma as a result of empathic engagement with others as they recount their traumatic experiences. In essence, vicarious trauma describes the process whereby hearing the traumatic stories of others remarkably changes our world view, disrupts our spirituality or our perception of meaning and hope, and prevents us from continuing in compassionate ways in the work we are involved with (Gangsei, 2011).

These changes are not necessarily bad. Similarly to the critiques of post-traumatic stress disorder, this transformation can result in seeing the world more clearly. It speaks to our capacity to be greatly impacted by the pain of others, which can be seen as an incredible strength in crafting a more understanding and peaceful world. This resilience building can only happen, however, if we recognize the impacts of vicarious trauma, the common coping strategies that we call upon, and work to establish spaces whereby we can process these impacts as a community.

Building resilience

Over the last 20 years, many organizations in Canada and around the world have developed self-care plans – mostly tips and ideas for maintaining a healthy work-life balance, with the idea of keeping people in their jobs longer. Much of this literature focuses on taking time off, resting, eating well and getting exercise, with little recognition of the real impacts of vicarious trauma and the political, economic, and social realities that both impede this type of self-care and make these suggestions incredibly insufficient.

Although being able to advocate for oneself and express one's own needs and boundaries is an important part of resilience building, I and many other advocates for interdependence and collective care would suggest that many of these step-by-step self-care plans put enormous pressure on individuals to heal themselves, and are deeply embedded with ableist assumptions. The result is that it is up to the person dealing with the impacts of vicarious trauma to remove themselves from their community or develop extensive self-care plans in the midst of feeling the greatest impacts. We often victim-blame for coping mechanisms that are used that can be isolating or seen as dangerous, particularly when the people that are employing them are typically those counted on to support others.

Many of these self-care plans ignore the extra burden that is placed on already marginalized people including disabled and racialized peoples, or, for example, on women, who form a big majority of those in helping professions, and who in a patriarchal society are expected to be naturally compassionate and able to carry the pain of others. Few of these plans explore the nature of intergenerational trauma, meanwhile the helper-victim duality ignores the impacts of societal trauma that promotes state and corporate violence, attacks against the earth and assaults on our bodies. Further, the overt (or at times unstated) goal of getting back to normal is fundamentally ableist, and also fails to recognize that our sicknesses are representative of a sick society, and that resilience building can be more about strengthening us as we try to change sites of ongoing trauma rather than just being able to handle more of it without burning out.

Personally, I know I once had the experience of trying to tell a group I organized with – and this was a tough thing for me to do – that because of the way in which where I was at psychologically at that point interacted with the way the group was structured, I needed to step back. I thought I was asking the group to consider changing, to make space for different types of involvement, so that I could continue to be involved. I only realized later that they had understood me as saying that I needed to take space because of my mental illness. They didn't internalize at all the message that the group should (or even could) change to help me stay involved. I think that many of the skills towards building more resilient and interdependent movements can be learned through greater collaboration with disability justice movements, which are fundamentally about moving away from a 'myth of independence' which assumes that everyone can and should be able to meet their own needs. Mingus (2011) explains this: “I am not fighting for independence, as much of the disability rights movement rallies behind. I am fighting for an interdependence that embraces need and tells the truth: no one does it on their own and the myth of independence is just that, a myth.”

In the prologue to *Speaking for Ourselves* (2009), written while Robert Lovelace was in jail after being criminalized for his defense of Ardoch Algonquin territory from uranium exploration, he explains:

> As long as democracy and colonialism can exist hand in hand, human life for the vast majority of human beings will be a misery. Even when fighting against colonialism and in favour of environmental protection, the costs are high. Although individual victories are cause for celebration, the price in community resources is extensive. Fractures in social relationships and the traumatic effects of isolation and abuse and exposure to political injustice remain long after success. Community healing needs to be a core principle for education and action in communities that engage in the struggle to restore their independence and culture. The warriors' responsibility is to encourage and protect the healing process in their communities.

To look at some concrete changes that can be made within environmental justice spaces, I think we ought to begin by reframing accessibility entirely so that it is not understood as a checklist that can be followed, but as a constant process. And one that is never going to be perfect, because sometimes people's access needs are going to be at odds with each other. And so it becomes a process of finding creative ways around that, finding creative solutions to make sure everyone is getting what they need. And I think that disability justice absolutely contradicts dominant understandings of self care and the elevation of the activist who runs themselves into the ground. Instead we need to reconceptualize what it means for people to contribute to our movement, what valuable work, dedication looks like. And what kinds of labour can be understood as activism.

Further, I think we need to build the understanding that people will back out of commitments (because of their own needs, because of urgent things that come up, etc) into our processes from the beginning so that there is fluidity in how work gets shared and how labor is assigned. This also involves knowledge sharing. If there's only one person in a group that knows how to do a thing and they have to back out, then there's a serious lack of resiliency. Instead we need to build in resource sharing and knowledge sharing from the very start, so that peoples' participation can vacillate depending on where their body/family/life is at that week or that year.

## Afterword

This portfolio represents one cycle of reflection, action, and reflection, in which I have attempted to carry out meaningful work in solidarity with Guatemalan communities harmed by Canadian mining projects. Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that “solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict.” While the work I've shared here sits in that unsettled space, my hope is that this portfolio can serve as an opening, as a tool for myself and others to further continue this praxis cycle towards mining justice, and as a set of concrete examples of organizing, action, communication, and art-making that are relevant to a broader context of environmental justice work.

# Appendix A: Guidelines for Settlers Doing Indigenous Solidarity Work

*My Ally Bill of Responsibilities*

As per Lynn Gehl's request, I have posted only the first two points of her Bill here; the rest are available at the following link: http://www.lynngehl.com/my-ally-bill-of-responsibilities.html

1. Do not act out of guilt, but rather out of a genuine interest in challenging the larger oppressive power structures;

2. Understand that they are secondary to the Indigenous people that they are working with and that they seek to serve. They and their needs must take a back seat;

*Tips for Effective Solidarity Work*

From the Lakota Solidarity Project's Solidarity Principles (accessed from http://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/allyship/)

**RECOGNIZE** – If you are non-Native, recognize your place as a settler on occupied Indigenous lands that are still under active and ongoing resistance.
**SOBER** – Respect the destructive influences of alcohol and drugs on Indigenous communities. Always work sober within Indigenous spaces and projects. NEVER bring drugs or alcohol into Indigenous spaces. LSP is a sober project and any person under the influence will be asked to leave.
**CULTURAL RESPECT** – Working as an ally to Indigenous people does not entitle you to their spirituality. Leave your own cultural and spiritual baggage at the door. Cultural appropriation destroys opportunities for Indigenous solidarity.
**ELDERS** – NEVER speak over an Elder who is talking. Be patient during pauses in their speech. Make sure they are fed first. Assist them when they ask. Defend them from harm.
**CEREMONY** – Only participate in Indigenous ceremony if you are specifically invited. It is not traditional to participate in another Nation's ceremony unless it is intended to be open.
**PROTOCOL** – DO NOT take pictures or video of Indigenous ceremonies unless given the approval to do so. NEVER photograph or video sacred objects like pipes, medicine bags, masks, totems, etc. If in doubt, ask! If there is no one to ask, don't do it!
**LEADERSHIP** – Defer to Indigenous leadership, decision-making and priorities. Follow their lead.
**MAKE SPACE** – Suppress enthusiasm for your own ideologies, beliefs, ideas and solutions to further empower problem solving and decision making among Indigenous people. You are not here to "save" Indigenous people but to be allies in a struggle for survival.
**PATIENCE** – Work patiently at the speed of Indigenous leadership, reflection and decision-making. Deadlines are usually less important than acting in the most thoughtful (effective) way.
**INTEGRITY** – Always do what you say you are going to do. Always. Work with integrity. When given a task, do it to the best of your ability. When you mess up, apologize earnestly.
**ACCOUNTABILITY** – Be accountable to the communities you serve, including traditional Elders and warriors who are the customary leaders or defenders of their people.
**COMMUNICATION** – Expand opportunities for Indigenous people to speak for themselves.
**PREPARE** – Emotionally prepare yourself for solidarity work including the ability to deal with

criticism. Solidarity work is a chance to learn and grow new skills and perspectives.
**DECOLONIZE** – Decolonization repatriates Indigenous lands and lifeway for both the colonizer and the colonized. Decolonization is the key to effective long-term solidarity.

*Unsettling America's points of unity to guide our allyship and activism:*

- All people not indigenous to North America who are living on this continent are settlers on stolen land. We acknowledge that Canada, the United States of America, Mexico, and Central & South America were founded through genocide and colonization of indigenous peoples–which continues today and from which settlers directly benefit.
- All settlers do not benefit equally from the settler-colonial state, nor did all settlers emigrate here of their own free will. Specifically, we see slavery, hetero-patriarchy, white supremacy, market imperialism, and capitalist class structures as among the primary tools of colonization. These tools divide communities and determine peoples' relative access to power. Therefore, anti-oppression solidarity between settler communities is necessary for decolonization. We work to build anti-colonial movements that actively combat all forms of oppression.
- We acknowledge that settlers are not entitled to live on this land. We accept that decolonization means the revitalization of indigenous sovereignty, and an end to settler domination of life, lands, and peoples in all territories of the so-called "Americas." All decisions regarding human interaction with this land base, including who lives on it, are rightfully those of the indigenous nations.
- As settlers and non-native people (by which we mean non-indigenous to this hemisphere) acting in solidarity, it is our responsibility to proactively challenge and dismantle colonialist thought and behavior in the communities we identify ourselves to be part of. As people within communities that maintain and benefit from colonization, we are intimately positioned to do this work.
- We understand that allies cannot be self-defined; they must be claimed by the people they seek to ally with. We organize our solidarity efforts around direct communication, responsiveness, and accountability to indigenous people fighting for decolonization and liberation.
- We are committed to dismantling all systems of oppression, whether they are found in institutional power structures, interpersonal relationships, or within ourselves. Individually and as a collective, we work compassionately to support each other through these processes. Participation in struggle requires each of us to engage in both solidarity and our own liberation: to be accountable for all privileges carried, while also struggling for liberation from internalized and/or experienced oppression. We seek to build a healthy culture of resistance, accountability, and sustenance.

*Deep Green Resistance Indigenous Solidarity Guidelines:*

(accessed from: http://www.deepgreenresistance.org/en/what-we-do/deep-green-resistance-indigenous-solidarity-guidelines)

1. First and foremost we must recognize that non-indigenous people are occupying stolen land in an ongoing genocide that has lasted for centuries. We must affirm our responsibility to stand with indigenous communities who want support and give everything we can to protect their land and culture from further devastation; they have been on the frontlines of biocide and genocide for centuries, and as

allies, we need to step up and join them.
2. You are doing Indigenous solidarity work not out of guilt, but out of a fierce desire to confront oppressive colonial systems of power.
3. You are not helping Indigenous people, you are there to: join with, struggle with, and fight with indigenous peoples against these systems of power. You must be willing to put your body on the line.
4. Recognize your privilege as a member of settler culture.
5. You are not here to engage in any type of cultural, spiritual or religious needs you think you might have, you are here to engage in political action. Also, remember your political message is secondary to the cause at hand.
6. Never use drugs or alcohol when engaging in Indigenous solidarity work. Never.
7. Do more listening than talking, you will be surprised what you can learn.
8. Recognize that there will be Indigenous people that will not want you to participate in ceremonies. Humbly refrain from participating in ceremonies.
9. Recognize that you and your Indigenous allies may be in the minority on a cause that is worth fighting for.
10. Work with integrity and respect, be trustworthy and do what you say you are going to do.

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