



Universiteit Utrecht

CONTESTING DISCOURSES

Indigenous resistance contesting dominant discourses of powerful actors in the case of the Marlin Mine, Guatemala

“Personally, I don’t see that there has been any development, but the contrary: the project of mining has come to destroy what we have. While the company says it contributes to the development of the community, it is actually the other way around, because with what they are doing, with their way of working, they are destroying our lives.”

Rebecca Pol
Eva Bernet Kempers

Quote: Interview with Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

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June 2016



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Acknowledgements

Already two years before the actual start of our fieldwork, we were busy searching for possible subjects that we could focus our bachelor project on. Various ideas have passed in review, but with both of us having completed a minor in conflict studies, we soon came up with the idea of resistance against resource extraction in Latin America. In the beginning however, we were doubtful whether it would actually be possible to find a place where this would be a relevant yet safe subject to do research on. It was with the help of the Belgian NGO Catapa that we eventually got in contact with DIFAM, a local organization, supported and developed by Patrick Van Speybroeck. He was very welcoming and invited us to stay at one of the rooms he has for rent in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, San Marcos. Thanks to him, we were able to spend two months in the cradle of the resistance movement against the Marlin Mine, one of the most famous (or should we say notorious) mines in Guatemala.

Looking back, we are very glad that we had the opportunity to conduct our fieldwork in San Miguel Ixtahuacán. It is a great small village, and once people were accustomed to us, we felt very accepted in the community. Among the various persons we feel grateful for, we especially want to thank Enma for her hospitality and help when we needed it, Maudilia, with her efforts to always involve us in everything that happened in the village, Alondra and her family for their enthusiasm and the various simple but delicious meals we ate at her *comedor*, Facundo who accepted us with open arms and familiarized us with the municipality, Eric for the fact we could always visit his *parroquia* and church, and his family for their kindness. Also, we have a special thanks to Javier, who made visits to the other *aldeas* possible, Aniseto, who let us participate in meetings, and the employers of the Marlin Mine for their willingness to show us around and share their opinions with us. Last but not least, we of course want to thank our supervisor Kees Koonings for his professional guidance, involvement and the useful contributions he made to our research project. Our fieldwork has been a fruitful and once in a lifetime experience, which we will never forget.

Introduction

Over the last decennia Latin America has seen an exponential increase in resource extraction by multinational companies, due to its rich mineral deposits and profitable environmental regulations (Urkidi & Walter 2011). The largest investments were mainly directed to Peru, Brazil, Chile and more recently also to Central American countries. In almost every case, the mining projects created controversy, since the areas in which mining companies carry out their activities are predominantly inhabited by indigenous peoples. Consequently, these peoples, who have known a long history of marginalization by the state, are often forced to leave their communal lands, to which they ascribe great importance (Blaser 2004). Because the indigenous groups are hardly ever consulted by the state in the decision making process, this raises protest. In organizing these protests, the indigenous groups are supported by NGOs and often rely on the social construct of indigenous identity as shaped by the influences of globalization (Kuper 2003). In the struggle for self-determination they try to establish a narrative that contests the dominant discourse of the state and the large, transnational corporations.

This thesis looks into the issue of mining conflicts in indigenous areas, and in particular at the contesting discourses of the different actors involved. It focuses on the Marlin Mine, located in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, as a case study. The Marlin Mine is the first large mining project in Guatemala, which came into production in 2005 and is owned by the Canadian enterprise Goldcorp Inc., executed by the Guatemalan Montana Exploradora. Since the start, the mine has been a source of conflict. The indigenous population of the municipalities San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipakapa did not get the ability to consent in the mining project, and started to mobilize in resistance once they realized the impact that the nearby mine would have on the villages (Van de Sandt 2009). They were supported by national as well as international NGOs. Instead of giving support, the Guatemalan state has mostly tried to suppress these manifestations, pointing to the development opportunities the mining project would bring. The struggle is going on for over ten years now, and currently, the mine is in a process of closure, because gold and silver deposits are exhausted.

In this thesis, we analyze to what extent the discourse of indigenous communities contests the discourse of powerful actors in the case of the Marlin Mine, against the background of the broader upsurge of indigenous peoples against neoliberal resource extraction in Latin America. As powerful actors we regard in this case successively the Guatemalan state (national, regional and local) and Montana Exploradora, executor of the mining project. We critically look at the process in which the discourse is shaped, and include an evaluation of the role of NGOs in this process. The main research question is as follows: *To what extent does the discourse of indigenous communities contest dominant discourses of powerful actors in their resistance against a long-established mining project in San Miguel Ixtahuacán?*

Although a decent amount of research on contested foreign mining projects in Guatemala has been done already, we believe that there has been a lack of attention to the role discourse plays in these cases. It is important to realize that discourse triggers public reaction, and therefore can serve as a determining factor in this struggle. On top of that, research with regard to resistance to mining until now predominantly has been directed to the situation before and right after a mining project is established (Yagenova & Garcia 2009, Urkidi 2011). In these early years, resistance is often still quite active and NGO-involvement present. Although research on long-term effects has been done, it exclusively focuses on the environmental and socio-economic consequences (Kitula 2006, McMahan & Remy 2001) and fails to address the development of the indigenous resistance. Because the Marlin Mine has already been in place for over 10 years and is currently in a process of closure, our research will provide a unique insight in the long-term implications for indigenous resistance against large-scale extractive industries.

A broader relevance of this research is found in the fact that conflicts surrounding mining in indigenous areas have increased exponentially over the last decades throughout all of Latin America. It is highly probable that discourse is used in similar manners by like-minded actors in those cases. Therefore, our research has a wider scope than only the village of San Miguel Ixtahuacán and will be applicable internationally, especially because it will demonstrate the importance of discursive strategies in environmental conflicts which affect indigenous groups.

The thesis is based on qualitative fieldwork composed of observations, interviews and conversations, which was conducted over the course of eight weeks in March and April 2016 in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, close to the Marlin Mine. During this time, we participated in the daily life of the Miguelense people, joined in meetings and established good relationships with individuals. In this thesis, we anonymize our informants to protect their privacy. Because of the hostility between our two main subjects (the indigenous communities and the powerful actors), we decided that during the fieldwork, one of us would mainly focus on the mining company and the state, while the other spoke with indigenous communities and NGOs. Throughout the whole period, we kept an independent position, and were neither directly linked to the resistance nor to the mining company.

The thesis is structured as follows. In the first chapter, the theoretical background of the main concepts will be explored. On the basis of current literature, an analysis is given of the upsurge of indigenous groups in reaction to resource extraction in Latin America in the 20th century. Subsequently, in the context section, the particular situation in San Miguel Ixtahuacán will be looked into. In addition, a first glance on the use of discourse will be given. In the third chapter, the data will be analyzed. Lastly, in chapter four, we will discuss the main insights.

1. Indigenous identity, resource extraction and the use of discourse: a theoretical framework

In this first part, we will explain the theoretical background and relevant concepts with regard to indigenous resistance against resource extraction. In order to understand the complicated position of indigenous peoples in Guatemala, we will firstly analyze how globalization has influenced the context of citizenship and indigenous identity in Latin America, which eventually fostered the mobilization of indigenous peoples. Secondly, we will turn to the issue of resource extraction and discuss the rise in mining projects in Latin America, analyzing how and why indigenous people protest against mining and how they interact with NGOs in this process. Lastly, we will shortly introduce the concept of discourse analysis.

1.1. Globalization and indigenous identity

While multiple interpretations of the concept of ‘globalization’ are possible, we define it as the long-standing historical tendency towards an increasing interconnection of peoples, cultures and institutions that results from a variety of social processes. Over the last few years, globalization accelerated and has become increasingly complex (Mato 1998). Research shows that in relation to the global phenomena that globalization encompasses, significant changes are taken place in the social organization and development of mobility along local, national and transnational levels.

In Latin America, the process of globalization fostered an economic growth and has revived and reformed democratic rule (Warren & Jackson 2010). Over the last half of the twentieth century, the region has rapidly integrated into the world economy. At the same time, we have seen a growing amount of politically organized indigenous movements throughout all Latin American countries, often through international pathways (Warren & Jackson 2010). While global economic processes generated a pressure at the level of states, neoliberal social influences generated a shift in the notion of citizenship.

1.1.1. The changing context of Latin American citizenship and the rise of indigenous movements

In Latin America, there are now about 40 million indigenous people, in some countries they comprise even a clear majority (World Bank 2015). Since the early 19th century, indigenous identity has always been a source of stigma and disadvantage. Indians were characterized as backward and primitive, lacking literacy in Spanish, and with the emergence of nation-states, mostly perceived as an obstacle to progress (Roberts 1996). To the elites, indigenous communities posed a threat to nation-building in particular because they fostered local and regional cohesion instead of national. In these early years, most constitutions in Latin America did not make an explicit reference to indigenous groups, since they were simply seen as *campesinos* (farmers). In this context, being Indian meant being rural, and, in

the eyes of the ruling elites, being ‘backward’ (Roberts 1996:42). As a collective identity, indigeneity did not have real meaning; neither to the indigenous people themselves.

Yashar (2005) describes how, traditionally, these early Latin American regimes relied on corporatist forms of citizenship. This kind of citizenship assumes class groups as the important political unit. This stimulated the evolvement of labour and peasant associations and extended social rights through the extension of social policies. In this period, Indians were still mostly defined by their class as peasant, registered under peasant communities, and this fostered the illusion that indigeneity was assimilated into the *mestizo* culture. Nevertheless, in reality states were often weak and indigenous authority was preserved locally. After 1980, as argued by Yashar, neoliberal influences in Latin America brought a new kind of citizenship which emphasized individual liberties and universal suffrage (Yashar 2005). In contrast with the corporatist citizenship, these liberal citizenship regimes promoted the individual as primary political unit. Corporatist regimes began to disappear as elites were not willing to accept the rising power of class federations, and states began to respond to international pressure to open their markets. During this time, urbanization increased, although a lot of countries kept a predominantly agricultural society (Yashar 2005).

In the wake of the decline of the corporatist citizenship regime, we saw a proliferation of political movements that used ethnic identities as a means of identification in social conflict. Instead of ‘Indians’ they now referred to themselves as ‘indigenous’ (Quijano 2005). Those left at the margins of the new wave of democratization, discovered that indigeneity was a powerful language to mobilize the people and demand political change. Indigenous communities began to organize themselves, voicing their opposition to neoliberal reforms with different political symbols. Communities that once were totally separated and did not have something near a collective identity, were unified in the idea of an indigenous people. For example, they used the concept of land demands as ‘the symbolic glue that enables communities with diverse needs (...) to mobilize behind a common cause’ (Yashar 1998:36). Because indigenous identity is mostly defined by and embedded in the local dimension, trans-communal networks were needed, and those were formed through former peasant alliances, churches and non-governmental organizations. According to Warren (1998), the ultimate goal of the indigenous movements was to ‘expose the contradictions inherent in political systems that embraced democratic egalitarianism yet, by promulgating mono-ethnic, mono-cultural and mono-lingual images of the modern nation, epistemically excluded major sectors of their populations’ (1998:5).

While the liberal influences on the one hand made mobilization of indigenous people possible in the first place, according to some, these influences on the other hand restricted the political aims of these movements. Hale (2004) explains the concept of the ‘*indio permitido*’, the kind of Indian that was permitted. He emphasizes that in general, Indians were recognized as citizens by their governments as long as they did not threaten the sovereignty and integrity of the existing regime (Hale 2004:17). This means that incentives that focused on cultural inheritance or reducing poverty were generally supported, while land claims that would endanger international investments or free-trade

zones, disputed. In other words, the only kind of Indian that was permitted and rewarded was the Indian that would not threaten the base of neo-liberalism itself; at the cost of those who would fail to cooperate (Hale 2004).

1.1.2. The internationalization of indigenous identity

Since the 1990s, the emergence of indigenous movements quickly accelerated. Scholars began to identify social movements as ‘grassroots movements’, or globalization-from-below, as an alternative to the top-down, neoliberal globalizing factors. Warren & Jackson (2005:551) state that the indigenous rights movement itself was ‘born transnational’. Throughout the whole world, populations that were excluded from nation-building processes since the era of colonialism began to organize transnationally to reproduce representations of their identities and develop own agendas (Mato 2000:176). In general, those movements emphasized 1) their cultural distinctiveness; 2) political reforms involving a restructuring of the state; 3) territorial rights and access to natural resources, including control over economic development; and 4) reforms of military and police powers over indigenous peoples (Jackson & Warren 2005). In this process, several groups have turned to the international community because of lack of adequate institutional structures in their own countries (Rasch 2008). The indigenous movements of Latin America in this process followed an opposite path from the usual grassroots organizations. Instead of the slogan ‘act locally, think globally’, as presented by those, anthropologist Stefano Varese has characterized the indigenous rights movements of the Americas as ‘thinking locally, acting globally’ (Varese 1996). Through international participation, some of these local movements even gained access to their own governments (Brysk 2000).

As a result of this increasing internationalization, the struggles of indigenous groups have attracted the attention of large transnational organizations like the UN. From 1995 to 2004, the ‘Decade of Indigenous Peoples’ was launched and the Forum of Indigenous peoples established (Kuper 2003). Furthermore, several international conventions on the rights of indigeneity were signed, of which the most important is the ILO Convention 169 (1989) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. According to this convention, national governments should allow indigenous people to participate in the making of decisions and they should be able to set their own development priorities (Kuper 2003:389). Additionally, in 2007 the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples was adopted (Van de Sandt 2009). It was laid down that indigenous groups should be given back lands on which they traditionally had lived.

Although these conventions did at last recognize the rights of indigenous people, the far-going internationalization of indigenous identity is often seen as problematic by not at least anthropologists (Kuper 2003). The underlying assumption of the indigenous rights is namely that the original inhabitants of a country have some privileged rights over others, under which the right to its resources and lands. Immigrants are thus only guests and do not have such rights. On top of that, by describing identity as something concrete, these particular notions of indigeneity pose a very essentialist, almost

primordialistic account of ethnicity, something that is no longer accepted within the scientific community. Indigeneity is described as if it is a thing with clear and impermeable boundaries, a process within anthropology described as ‘reification’. Many scholars have found themselves in a dilemma about the ultimately essentialist character of indigeneity as used in the international discourse (Guenther et al. 2006). While such a primordialist notion is generally not accepted, and leads to stereotyping and allows commodification and commercialization by outsiders, it is still a crucial repertoire for the activist groups and indigenous movements themselves, whilst they are based on strict notions of cultural identity (Guenther et al. 2006). So, while the internationalized concept of ‘indigenous identity’ may not be a scientific one, it is a key notion for the indigenous movements itself, and therefore still relevant to the political reality of everyday.

Concluding, one could say that the influence of globalization on the indigenous people of Latin America is two-fold: on the one hand, it were globalizing factors that made it possible for indigenous peoples to organize themselves like they did, but as we will see in the next chapter, on the other hand it were globalizing factors as well which stimulated the territorial displacement of indigenous populations.

1.2. Extraction of resources and indigenous resistance

Prior to the 1980s, natural resources wealth was widely seen as a blessing for developing countries (Rosser 2006). More recently, advocates of the ‘resource curse thesis’ have expressed their concerns about the effect of mineral dependence on growth and development. They argue that countries in which there is an abundance of natural resources, stand a big chance to fall victim of the paradox of plenty: they tend to grow more slowly than other countries and often fall into chaos. Most authors nowadays agree on the fact that if institutional conditions are not right, minerals like gold should be left in the ground (Bebbington et al. 2008).

As we have seen in the previous section, globalization and internationalization have made it possible for indigenous movements to organize themselves and challenge the Latin American state. However, at the same time there are neoliberal factors that compromise indigenous livelihood in the first place. In this section, we will take a look at these factors by describing the increase in resource extraction in Latin America, and the growing resistance against this particular form of development. We will also give a theoretical explanation of the involvement of NGOs in the growing resistance.

1.2.1. *The new gold rush: mining in Latin America*

In the past decades Latin America has become the largest destination for international mining investments. From 1990 on, the world’s 25 largest mining investments were made in Latin America and according to the international Gold Symposium of May 2008, ‘Latin America is the region where most gold prospecting took place in the world, and this is set to continue’ (Urkidi & Walter 2011:683). This upsurge in mining activity is partly due to the increasing demand for metals from growing Asian economies combined with the discovery of local presence of rich mineral deposits. Another reason for

the popularity of mining in Latin American countries is the fact that strict environmental and labour regulations in other parts of the world make Latin America a more profitable choice (Urkidi & Walter 2011). The largest investments were mainly directed to Brazil, Chile and Peru, although Guatemala was also known to possess mineral deposits, principally gold, silver and nickel. Despite this fact, Guatemala attracted little mining investments until the late 1990s, because of the internal armed conflict. This all changed after the signing of the Peace Agreements in 1996 and the proclamation of the Mining Law (1997) by the government of Alvaro Arzú. This law was designed to create favourable business conditions which would attract more foreign investments, a neoliberal strategy to promote economic growth. The Mining Law states an unlimited use of local water supplies, duty-free imports for operation, 100 percent ownership for the foreign company, and a reduction of royalty payables from six percent to one percent. It formulates environmental regulations unclearly and makes no reference to the rights of indigenous people to be consulted as it does not give consideration to their collective land rights or cultural attachment to ancestral territories and natural resources in mining areas. This is a violation of ILO Convention 169 concerning indigenous and tribal peoples, which was, as explained in the first chapter, ratified by Guatemala in 1996 (Van de Sandt 2009:6).

1.2.2. Local resistance against mining projects

According to Blaser (2004), conflict over the issue of mining essentially revolves around different visions of development. Whereas governments, states and markets view development as neoliberal development in the form of mega projects, local communities disagree and promote alternative development on the basis of local identities. Blaser argues that indigenous communities use so-called life projects embedded in local histories to demonstrate their resistance against governments' development projects. These life projects encompass unique and locally situated visions of the world and the future, based on landscapes, memories, desires and expectations that are distinct from those embodied by projects promoted by the state. Indigenous communities are of the opinion that development stands in the way of these life projects. Development promoted by markets or state-backed agents is connected to claims to political necessities and market demands in the context of globalization and therefore not place-based. This is contradictory to indigenous life projects, which attach great importance to place in the form of local histories (Blaser 2004:26). Also, indigenous communities affected by mining all of a sudden find themselves in the middle of a transnational political playing field involving a large group of actors, such as multinational companies, nongovernmental environmental and development organizations, national governments, and indigenous peoples organizations. This change of suddenly being exposed to global actors has a great impact on indigenous people and is contradictory to their notion of place. Therefore, indigenous communities resist neoliberal development and seek alternative paths to create their future. Indigenous

communities demonstrate their resistance against mining projects in a context that is characterized by highly uneven power balances, rooted foremostly in a lack of dialogue (Van der Sandt 2009:8).

Downing, Moles, McIntosh and Garcia-Downing (2002) argue that local resistance to mining is based upon the fact that indigenous peoples are suffering a loss of land, both short- and long-term health risks, loss of access to common resources, loss of income, homelessness, food insecurity, social disruption, spiritual uncertainty and loss of civil and human rights (Downing et al. 2002:3). Furthermore, the authors claim the most serious sustainability risk from mining are those that challenge indigenous peoples' rights to their heritage and culture, which is described as degrading indigenous wealth and well-being. Indigenous wealth is not a matter of money, rather, it exists within indigenous peoples' understandings of their surroundings, both environmental and social, and in behaviors that have proven valuable in maintaining their culture and ways of life over the years. Indigenous wealth then includes income from traditional resources, access to common resources, spiritual certainty and social articulation. Displacement and resettlement as a result of mining are great threats to indigenous wealth (Downing et al. 2002:3). This also shows the great importance of the notion of place in indigenous communities affected by mining. Important to note is that endangering indigenous wealth is a violation of ILO Convention no. 169.

According to Medina (1998), indigenous peoples make a claim to 'native' identity, which connects people to place through intimate and ancient bonds. These aspects of intimacy and ancestry contribute to the legitimacy and moral imperative attributed to indigenous claims to resources and autonomy by international organisations like the United Nations and NGOs concerned with human rights or environmental issues. By claiming 'native' identity, indigenous people accord a certain moral priority with regard to political rights and economic resources (Medina 1998). In this way, indigenous people struggling against mining are able to use their identity to fortify and justify their resistance. In this process, they are supported by NGOs.

As explained by Hale (2004), the state views resistance against megaprojects as a threat to the state's sovereignty. In the case of Guatemala, violence is used as a means to silence, repress and intimidate the resistance movement. Members of the resistance are seen as 'standing in the way of development' (Pedersen, 2014a).

1.2.3. The role of NGOs in the struggle against resource extraction

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is a non-profit citizens' group and neither part of a government nor a business (NGO.org, 2015). NGOs provide public goods and services in developing countries, when governments are unable to do so due to a lack of resources. They strategically construct ideas and messages not only to modify behavior, but also to socially mobilize communities in promoting social, political, or environmental change. However, opponents question NGOs' supposed advantages, including their accountability and representativeness. They also question the rights of NGOs, especially Northern NGOs, to be involved in policy formulation and implementation

in the Global South, because they are allegedly part of a neoliberal and imperial paradigm (Shivji 2006).

In her critique on legitimacy of NGOs, Lister defines legitimacy as it applies to NGOs as ‘having the right to be and do something in society - a sense that an organization is lawful, proper, admissible and justified in doing what it does, and saying what it says, and that it continues to enjoy the support of an identifiable constituency’ (Lister 2003:176). Lister views the concept of legitimacy as socially constructed and given meaning by the normative framework within which it exists. She states that organizations identify with certain symbols in order to enhance their own legitimacy and argues legitimate organizations are those whose behaviour is seen to conform to dominant discourses and approaches to development. We then might consider that symbols used by NGOs, such as ‘the South’, ‘the local’ and ‘partners’ are defined by dominant discourses in the field (Lister 2003:188). Lister explains that an understanding of legitimacy as a mechanism through which discourses impact on organizations may be a first step to exploring issues of power within and between development organizations and their clients (Lister 2003:189).

NGOs try to shield indigenous peoples and their cultural environments from the negative impacts of the current global political economy, such as natural resource extraction by multinational companies. Despite the NGOs’ best intentions, they do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, they are embedded in the institutional structures of the wider economy and power relations (Fernando, 2003:56). As Fernando argues, NGOs use and may even produce indigeneity to multiply their funding, mainly due to worldwide interest in the protection of indigenous peoples (Fernando, 2003:59). Eventually the increasing need for funding has led to commercialization of indigeneity and placed it under control of local businesses and other external actors, thereby strengthening the existing power relations that NGOs mean to alter (Fernando 2003:60). Therefore, we should not consider NGOs as organizations insusceptible to external influences, rather, we should critically analyze their use of discourse in attaining their goals.

NGOs often fund local movements in their struggles against neoliberal impacts. It is important to realize that the dependence on funding also plays a role in this relationship. While NGOs are forced to adjust their discourse according to dominant international discourses, indigenous organizations are vulnerable to NGO-pressure to comply with their political and economic agendas. This dependence on donor funds affects their self-representation (Jackson & Warren 2005:555).

1.3. Identity politics and the use of discourse

‘Identity politics’ refers to political arguments founded in collective sensibilities and actions that come from a particular location within society, in direct confrontation with universal categories that tend to erase or suppress this particularity. In this sense, location refers to a distinctive social practice, memory, and consciousness as well as place within the social structure (Hale 1997). Identity politics include the ways in which people’s politics are shaped by aspects of their identity, such as race,

ethnicity or gender, through social organizations. Examples include class movements and post-colonial movements (Hale 1997).

Indigenous movements also build on identity politics. As we have seen in chapter 1.1, drawing on their ethnicity, in the last couple of decades, indigenous people in Latin America have taken to the streets to protest against government policy and demand political, economic and social reforms. Indigenous parties in Guatemala, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Colombia focused their campaign largely on ethnic issues and refrained from using populist rhetoric (Madrid 2012). Hale argues that since the 1990s indigenous peoples in Latin America have increasingly advanced their struggles through a discourse that links Indian identity with rights to territory, autonomy, and peoplehood, those rights that run parallel to those of the nation state itself (Hale 1997:571). In this section, building on the concept of identity politics, we will provide an introduction to discourse analysis.

1.3.1. Discourse as a subject of study: discursive analysis

Highly influenced by Michel Foucault (1972), the concept of discourse is generally used to designate the forms of codes, representation, conventions and habits of language that produce particular fields of historically and culturally located meanings. Foucault used the concept of discourse in his early writings to analyze specific institutions and their ways of constructing and establishing orders of truth, or in other words, what is accepted as ‘reality’ in a given society (Brooker 1999). Discourse thus basically entails the idea that there is much more going on when people communicate than solely the transfer of information. Discourse hereby can be used to indicate the modes of thought and vocabularies characterizing institutions or cultural practices, to distinguish different fields of study or to identify the language of different social groups. In this way, discourse can be studied as something separate from the individuals who write or speak certain language, rather, discourse refers to something that exists in society and upon which individuals draw to communicate with others. Discourse analysis then investigates what language exactly does or what individuals or cultures accomplish through language (Gee 2005). On top of that, it is built on the presumption that discourse stimulates action: Austin (1962) already urged us to remember that speaking is a way of acting and that narratives should be seen as a medium in which events are produced.

In this thesis, we will mainly use the concept of discourse in line with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). According to Van Dijk (1993), one of the important scholars in this discipline, discourse is often used in the (re)production and challenge of dominance: it thus plays a role in the exercise of social power by certain groups that result in social inequality. Critical discourse analysis is thus primarily interested in pressing social issues related to dominance and inequality, which it hopes to better understand (Van Dijk 1993). Dominance is hereby explained as involving control by one group over other groups, not only by physically limiting the freedom of action of others, but also by influencing their minds. In other words, their power is often enacted by persuasion, dissimulation and

manipulation of discourse (Van Dijk 1993:254). In the struggle of the indigenous population, the themes dominance and inequality are key concepts.

In the thesis, we also sometimes refer to ‘discursive strategies’. We speak of ‘discursive strategies’ when a certain discourse is employed to attain a particular goal, and when it represents the position of a group or institution. However, it should be noted that sometimes it is hard to make a distinction between a discursive strategy and an opinion of an individual. In our empirical section, we will explicitly make this distinction in order to evade generalization.

1.3.2. Expected discourses

Based on the literature, we will give a short overview of what kind of discourse of the indigenous population and the powerful actors you would expect and the role NGOs fulfil in this process, based on the current literature.

State

On the level of the state, the relevant discourse is probably derived from the development discourse: the idea that the allowance of mining by a transnational organization is advantageous for the country as a whole. In this discourse, the cultural tension between the global and local is articulated, in which the local level is depicted as primitive and backward, contrary to neoliberal globalization. We expect the main goal of this discursive strategy to be legitimization of the mining practices which benefit the government in the short time. According to current literature, the state often criminalizes anti-mining movements, and there has been a growing number of cases of deaths of anti-mining community leaders (Saguier 2012). Increasingly, violent clashes take place with police forces which often lead to casualties on both sides. As a result, the state will probably emphasize the criminal and rebelling character of these movements in its discourse. If the state does support indigenous movements in their discourse, we will critically evaluate if this is in accordance with the idea of the ‘*indio permitido*’: the kind of movement that does not threaten the neoliberal state.

Transnational mining corporations

On the level of transnational mining corporations, we expect their discourse to be derived from the development discourse as well. Most likely their discourse will include claims about the fact that mining contributes to local development, for example by offering job opportunities to the local population. Expectations are thus that with regard to the Marlin Mine, Montana Exploradora will have a very positive and sunny discourse, emphasizing development possibilities. Its discourse will probably be in line with the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This entails actions that appear to further social good beyond the interests of the firm, such as social and sustainability benefits, of which many large multinationals nowadays make use. At the same time, Montana Exploradora is a

profit seeking company with a certain responsibility towards shareholders. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the main focus of the company will primarily be profit-making.

NGOs

We expect that the NGOs will attempt to mediate between discourses employed on the international and local level, on the one hand trying to raise awareness and receive funding by using popular concepts, such as human rights, while on the other hand making an effort to retain legitimacy in the eyes of the local population by incorporating indigenous knowledge. In other words, it is expected that most NGO-discourse is influenced greatly by the international level and UN, and in its turn influences the discourses that exist on local level. In this process, NGOs may substitute the local discourse with their own internationalized concepts of indigeneity.

Indigenous communities

We expect the indigenous population to draw on their indigenous knowledge in their narratives about gold mining. Their discourse will entail a vision on development that is opponent to that of the state and Montana Exploradora. In general, it will presumably be characterized by notions of autonomy, entitlements and concerns about livelihood. The question is whether or to what extent this discourse has been influenced by various actors on the regional, national, and international levels.

2. Indigenous resistance in Guatemala: the case of the Marlin Mine

In order to give a good analysis of our data, it is important to have a thorough understanding of the context in which we conducted our fieldwork. In this chapter, we will set apart this particular context in which the shaping of discourse takes place in San Miguel Ixtahuacán. First, we will describe the situation of the indigenous peoples in Guatemala, and next, we will look into how the resistance against the Marlin Mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, San Marcos, developed in the early years after the arrival of the mining company.

2.1 Mobilization of the indigenous people of Guatemala

In Guatemala, indigenous identity is a complex subject. The population consists of an estimated 50 to 60 percent of 21 Maya groups, of which the majority lives in rural areas (Van de Sandt 2009). During the colonial and republican period, Mayan peoples were pushed away to smaller lands and were forced to perform wage labor through seasonal migration, a practice that nowadays finds new expression in labor migration to the Mexico and the US. The Mayan people were also most affected by the civil war between the army and the guerrillas between 1960 and 1996, during which hundreds of villages were completely destroyed and thousands of innocent farmers murdered. In this period, a large migration of Mayas into cities took place, which ultimately meant they would leave their cultural habits behind and abandon the indigenous culture, a process that was called ‘ladinization’ (Roberts 1996:43). The Guatemalan state, which was in that time dominated by the military, continued to suppress any form of independent organization, but could not prevent the strengthening of the collective Maya identity.

When the Peace Agreements were signed in 1996, hopes were high that this would offer more space for the recognition of the Mayan population. In 1995, the Guatemalan state had signed, as part of the peace process, the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous peoples (Sieder 2007). These rights included among others the right to bilingual education, recognition of indigenous customary law, protection for communal lands, and thus committed the government to implement a series of reforms that would guarantee these rights. In May 1999, a package of constitutional reforms was subsequently proposed to the electorate, but the private sector launched an anti-campaign, claiming recognition of indigenous rights would mean a ‘reverse discrimination’ against the non-indigenous, and the proposal was rejected (Sieder 2007:219). However, the state did ratify ILO 169, the international convention which was referred to earlier.

In the absence of any constitutional reform, the position of indigenous rights is still extremely weak in Guatemala. Nowadays, in the national discourse, indigenous peoples are mostly referred to as *campesinos*. Often, they also prefer to describe themselves as such. In spite of decades of repression by the state that the Maya in Guatemala have known, there has not emerged a strong, unified

indigenous movement and whereas in other Latin American countries, the indigenous groups have manifested themselves within the political spheres, in Guatemala they did not yet achieve political representation (Warren 1998). Mostly, the organizations are divided between the so-called Pan-Mayan organizations that emphasize their cultural identity (which comprise the majority) and some popular organizations that use a leftist, Marxist discourse. According to Warren (1998), the movements challenge the legacy of colonial and nineteenth-century state formations, which used forced-labor politics that associated *indígenas* with heavy manual labor. A big role is played by the so-called ‘public intellectuals’ who, ironically, would perfectly fit in the dominant mainstream because they are educated, fluent in Spanish and economically well off (Warren 1998). However, in general the Mayan organizations have been too fragmented to effectively organize themselves. Many assume that this fragmentation is the basis for the serious problems with representativeness and legitimacy that the movement has known (Sieder 2002, Rasch 2008)

Even though the Guatemalan state has ratified the ILO 169, legal representation of indigenous groups is currently extremely weak and political representation missing. Violations of indigenous rights are mostly ignored and recognition obstructed by conservative elites and the powerful business sector.

2.2. Indigenous resistance to the Marlin Mine

The first large mining project in Guatemala, the Marlin gold mine in San Marcos, came into production in 2005 and is owned by the Canadian enterprise Goldcorp Inc. and operated by Montana Exploradora. The Marlin project is an open pit gold and silver mine and is situated in the largely indigenous municipalities of San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipacapa. These municipalities are predominantly populated by Maya indigenous communities with their own language and distinct culture. Approximately 95% of the San Miguel Ixtahuacán inhabitants identify themselves as Maya Mam, the fourth largest indigenous language group in Guatemala. Most inhabitants of San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipacapa are peasant farmers and cultivate on land they hold individually, but which forms part of the collective property of the community as a whole. However, income from agricultural activities is not enough to feed a family year-round. In both municipalities, the majority of the population suffers from malnutrition, poverty, and illiteracy (Van de Sandt 2009:21-22).

Before granting the permits, the Guatemalan government did not consult the local Mayan indigenous population. Since the Marlin Mine came into production in 2005, state profits from mining have increased strongly and the government aims to further stimulate mining production in the coming years (Van de Sandt 2009:5-8). Mining-affected municipalities have a 50% share in the 1% royalties on gross revenues that are paid by Montana Exploradora to Guatemala (Van de Sandt 2009:20).

When Glamis Gold (Goldcorp since 2006) began exploring and constructing the mine through Montana Exploradora in 2003 and 2004, this invoked social conflict and led to a national debate with two opposing views (Van de Sandt 2009:12). Supporters of mining advocated in favour of mining projects, while opponents condemned the large scale excavating. Towards the end of 2004, civil

society and local communities increasingly began to mobilize. On the local level, Sipakapense and Mam community leaders soon concluded that mining and the additional community development controlled by the mining company, was completely at odds with their own visions of development. They demanded respect for their culture, authorities, system of justice, and territory (Yagenova & Garcia 2009). They started to articulate an alternative development plan that focused more on strengthening the agricultural sector, after they realized the number of jobs and benefits from the mine did not compensate for the loss of land. Following, the Sipakapense and Mam community leaders in Sipacapa and San Miguel Ixtahuacán demanded the government to cancel the mining license of Montana Exploradora (Van de Sandt 2009:22).

The state's response to the indigenous resistance against the Marlin Mine has not gone unnoticed. As mentioned before, the central government of Guatemala ruled that consultation processes are not legally binding, thus delegitimizing the efforts of the resistance against mining. From the point of view of the government, the consultation processes conspire against the sovereignty of the state and are a threat to its power (Vittor, 2014). Not only does the government repress the resistance in a judicial manner, it also responds to peaceful demonstrations in a violent way. In 2004, a highway blockade assembled by indigenous communities was forcibly ended by 1200 soldiers and 400 police officers, dispatched by former president Oscar Berger. In an effort to 'protect the investors', bullets and tear gas killed one protester and injured several others. Furthermore, in the media the resistance is discredited as well. In 2013, former president Pérez Molina promoted mining as positive for Guatemala economically and safe environmentally in his nationally televised show '*De Frente con el Presidente*' (Pedersen, 2014b).

2.2.1. *The development of the resistance movement in San Miguel Ixtahuacán*

San Miguel Ixtahuacán is comprised of approximately 60 *aldeas* (small settlements), of which San Miguel Ixtahuacán itself, in which we conducted our fieldwork, is by far the largest. The village gives the impression of a peaceful, harmonious village. Every Wednesday and Sunday people from many surrounding *aldeas* come to the center for the local market, and on these days the *cantinas* (small cafés) and the streets are full of men, drinking and singing. There is a big school, and the majority of the population seems to be under 12 years old. Only a minority of the people does not wear the traditional, indigenous outfit. In general, people look neat and there does not seem to be extreme poverty. There are no signs of the mine: if you wouldn't know the mine existed, you could spend a month in the village without finding out.¹

The catholic church, right next to the central square, is led by a Belgian priest, and together with his *parroquia* they have been important actors in the struggle against the Marlin Mine right from the beginning. Together with ADISMI, an organization for integral development, a cooperation of

¹ Based on field observations

teachers, and COPAE, they formed the Frente de Defensa San Miguelense from 2008 onwards, in order to bundle their powers. In these early years, they had an active strategy, blocking roads, writing complaints to the Canadian Court, searching an international audience to tell their story. However, in the years that followed, the problems they experienced were not as much created by the company, as well as by other groups of local people who were in favor of mining.² These groups (for a big part locals who worked in the mine) felt like the resistance movement existed of a couple of aggressive, conservative people who denied to see the economic development the mine brought to the village.

However, after a relatively successful start, the resistance movement got in a fight about money issues, and the catholic church decided to distance itself from FREDEMI, which was met with surprise and misunderstanding from the people, who did not know about money issues.³ The church searched for a way to continue, and formed a new group, ‘Kolol Q’nan T’xotx’ (Defending our Mother Earth), which had as main objective to raise awareness under local people about the importance of caring for Mother Earth. In fact, they integrated the message of how bad mining is in a broader discourse of caring and loving Mother Earth. They gave workshops, spoke about how one should not throw garbage in the nature, and in this way, fostered a peaceful way to speak about problems the mine created.⁴ No more roadblocks and manifestations, but talking was the new way to tackle mine related problems. This strategy did return peace to the village, but of course was not very effective in getting the mine out of the area. Unfortunately, personal problems made the group fall apart again. Since past January 2016, new women are head of Kolol Q’nan T’xotx and it is now again collaborating closely with FREDEMI.

2.3. Identifying the actors

In our research, we are analyzing the discourse of the indigenous population in contrast with the discourse of powerful actors. Therefore, it is important to first identify who we denote exactly with these descriptions. In this chapter, we will shortly introduce all different actors that exist.

The first powerful actor that is involved in the operation of the Marlin Mine is Goldcorp and its operator Montana Exploradora. In this research, we focus more on discourse of Montana Exploradora, because Goldcorp is solely the executor of the Marlin Mine and Montana Exploradora is more present in the region.

The second powerful actor is the state of Guatemala, which is involved in the extracting activities of the Marlin Mine on the national, regional and local level. On the national level, the central government granted permission to Goldcorp to start mining activities in Guatemala and in turn receives royalties. On the regional level, the department of San Marcos, including its governor, is involved, because the Marlin Mine operates on its territories. On the local level, the municipality of

² Interviews with members of KQT and FREDEMI, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

³ Interview with Christa, 23-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁴ Interview with Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

San Miguel Ixtahuacán, including the mayor and councilmembers, is an important actor, because of the royalties it receives and the mine's great impact on communities.

Because the Marlin Mine was the first large mining project in Guatemala, it also has attracted the attention of various international and national NGOs. The Canadian NGOs Mining Watch and Rights Action are regarded the most important international NGOs, and COPAE and Ajchmol the most important national organizations that have contributed in the struggle against the mine (Van de Sandt, 2009). The indigenous resistance movement is, as explained previously, mostly comprised of FREDEMI, supported by Kolol Q'nan T'xotx (KQT) and the catholic church. Of course, local people not involved in the struggle who are living in *aldeas* (small villages in the area of San Miguel Ixtahuacán) or in the center, are also regarded as the indigenous population.

3. “They say they come to support development, but actually, they come to destroy what we have” - an analysis of contesting discourses

In this chapter which is divided in five sections, we will categorize and order the data we obtained during our eight weeks of fieldwork in the region of San Miguel Ixtahuacán. We will focus on the four actors we mentioned before: the state, Montana Exploradora, NGOs and the indigenous communities. Our findings are based on qualitative interviews, informal conversations, observations and texts on websites, newsfeeds and newsletters. Firstly, we will expound the discourses on goldmining in general, after which we will analyze how actors regard the Marlin Mine and its impact on surrounding communities. Following this, we will elaborate on the indigenous resistance’s discursive strategy and how the resistance is perceived by the Guatemalan state and Montana Exploradora. Lastly, we will expound how distrust and ignorance characterize the relationship between the actors nowadays, and explain how these actors view the future for San Miguel Ixtahuacán.

3.1. Contesting discourses with regard to goldmining

In this chapter, we will analyze the discourses and discursive strategies we encountered with regard to goldmining in general, and set apart the advantages and disadvantages as identified by different actors.

3.1.1. *Montana Exploradora*

As expected and explained in chapter 2, Montana Exploradora legitimizes its mining activities by arguing that responsible mining can be seen as a tool for foreign investment and development. On its website, Montana Exploradora emphasizes that the Marlin Mine promotes integral development in neighboring communities and the company guarantees a balance between production and social engagement (Goldcorp Guatemala 2016). In talking to representatives of Montana Exploradora, they started off by referring to the proclamation of the Mining Law in 1997. According to these representatives, the Mining Law invited mining companies to start their extracting activities in Guatemala as a means to attract more foreign investment. Montana Exploradora legitimizes its mining activities by stating it is a great opportunity for Guatemala to establish a good relationship with foreign companies. The combination of a suitable regulatory and legal framework as well as a state sponsored push to attract foreign investment paved the way for the company to conduct mining activities in San Miguel Ixtahuacán.⁵ Furthermore, it legitimizes its extracting activities in San Miguel Ixtahuacán by

⁵ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 30-03-2016, Guatemala City

stating that they are not conducted in the regular way, but in a responsible manner. The representatives explain that, above all, the company has a vision of being sustainable and being responsible.⁶

The director of Sierra Madre, a foundation set up and funded by Montana Exploradora, told us that there have always been mining activities in Guatemala, but without modern technology, these projects often lacked in security. However, nowadays mining is more responsible as there is more surveillance, counselling, and protection of personnel. As an example he mentions that mining companies need to obtain special licenses and on site trucks are not allowed to go faster than 30 kilometers per hour. He states: “During the last years, mining activities have been conducted in a much more professional and strict manner, in contrast with decades ago.”⁷ In his opinion, mining companies now operate with much more caution than ever before.⁸ A representative adds to this that Goldcorp owns eight mines all over the Americas and that the Marlin Mine has been the safest two years in a row. For example, the mine is built in order to endure natural disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes. The representative mentions the Marlin mine is the most audited mine in Guatemala, by two ministers, but also international with regard to human rights, ethics and conflict prevention.⁹

So far, the mine has complied with all auditions. The mine has won several awards, among others a national award for working with and in communities, and an excellence award within Goldcorp.¹⁰ According to other representatives, Montana Exploradora not only considers its mining activities more responsible because of the safety measures, but, in their words, this responsibility “also has to do with people.” They state that the Marlin mine “brings employment in a part of Guatemala that has been traditionally and historically forgotten by the state.”¹¹ Montana Exploradora often states there was nothing in the area before they arrived and people were not really in touch with other parts of the country, let alone the world.¹²

3.1.2. *The state*

The discourses on mining of the different state officials do not turn out to be exclusively pro-mining, as we expected beforehand. The point of view of the central government, department, and municipality are not aligned with each other as there is some discrepancy visible. Even within the municipality, informants differ in their opinion. On the national level, the central government of Guatemala argues that megaprojects, such as mines and dams, bring the much-needed income for the state and development, such as job opportunities, for the impoverished communities. The central government argues that these projects are advantageous for Guatemala as a whole, because it generates an increase in income (Guatemala Human Rights Commission 2016).

⁶ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 30-03-2016, Guatemala City

⁷ Interview with director of Sierra Madre, 05-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 07-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

¹⁰ Idem

¹¹ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 30-03-2016, Guatemala City

¹² Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 07-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

However, on the departmental level, the governor of San Marcos is not in favor of mining in Guatemala, because the transnational mining companies benefit disproportionately. He mentions that transnational companies, such as Montana Exploradora, receive many benefits by extracting gold and silver from Guatemalan grounds, while the Guatemalan population does not benefit from the country's natural resources and should receive more. The governor also talks about contamination as a result of the use of corrosive chemicals, the damages around the mine, such as rupture of walls, and health issues.¹³ Interestingly, in contrast with the governor, the administrative manager of the Department of San Marcos does consider mining as something good and positive, because the state receives royalties and mining activities take place within the law. He also mentions that the Department of San Marcos does not benefit from the royalties, only the central government and the municipalities surrounding the mine, San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipacapa.¹⁴

On the local level, there is no univocal discourse on mining as the local state officials in San Miguel Ixtahuacán differ in their opinion on mining. The mayor of San Miguel Ixtahuacán in general thinks mining is something good. He mentions it brings along support and progress. But for mining to have a positive effect and be profitable not only for the mining company, but also for the population, mining activities should take place within the mining laws. These mining laws include agreements and requirements with regard to support, work, information, taxes, contamination, safety, and royalties. The mayor argues that the Marlin Mine does not operate within these laws, because Montana Exploradora does not comply with agreements regarding contaminated water nor regulations regarding support. He states: "The Marlin Mine has to comply with certain requirements, such as help fixing the damages to houses, but until now, they have done nothing."¹⁵ Therefore, he does not consider the Marlin Mine as a positive addition to his municipality. He denies the statement that many inhabitants from San Miguel Ixtahuacán work in the mine, arguing that nowadays more people from other parts of Guatemala are contracted.¹⁶

Furthermore, the councilmembers all explained mining projects in Guatemala have advantages and disadvantages. In addressing the advantages, the councilmembers mention the royalties the municipality receives from Montana Exploradora as well as the job opportunities for locals it brings along. In their vision, these opportunities improve their quality of life and also offer better perspectives for their children as a higher income makes it possible for them to go to university. In addressing the disadvantages, the councilmembers talk about the effects the mine has on the environment, contamination of water as a result of mining activities and the lack of consultation before the mine went into production. They worry about the lack of laws which protect people in Guatemala against mining activities without prior permission from the local population, and the lack of protection the people receive who are affected by contamination of water. Gold and silver is regarded as heritage

¹³ Interview with governor Carlos Cardona, 15-04-2016, San Marcos

¹⁴ Interview with administrative manager, 15-04-2016, San Marcos

¹⁵ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 28-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

¹⁶ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 09-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

of the municipality and therefore it does not belong in the hands of a foreign company. Besides, mining projects are only temporary and all councilmembers worry about what will happen after the mine closes. In general, local state officials, such as the mayor and councilmembers, refer to mining projects in terms of having both advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, while starting off with the advantages, they underline the disadvantages throughout the interviews.¹⁷

How can we explain the difference with our expectations? Before conducting our research in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, we expected all layers of the state of Guatemala to be pro-mining. However, we found that especially local state officials were very nuanced in their answers. This might be due to the fact that the mayor and his council took up office in January 2016. Since the mine is already eleven years in production, the mayor and councilmembers also experienced the negative effects, such as how it has changed the social fabric, which will be elaborated upon later. Besides, although the municipality still receives a large amount of royalties, these have decreased, because the mine does not make as much profit as it did in the early years. In contrast, the central government remains pro-mining. We argue this is because of the large amount of royalties it receives, to maintain and strengthen relations with transnational companies, and to further attract foreign investment.

3.1.3. *International and national NGOs*

More than we expected in chapter 2, most NGOs that are involved in the struggle against mining, national as well as international, focus on a political and juridical area. This means that instead of trying to fight the mining companies like Goldcorp, they are trying to foster a change or improvement of international or national laws regarding the exploitation of resources, which would force multinational companies to act in a more responsible manner, consulting with local populations. As do most members of the municipality, they regard the current mining laws as insufficiently protecting the indigenous population. The conflict that is referred to in the discourse of COPAE for instance, the national NGO that has been most involved in the case of the Marlin Mine, is not the conflict between the population and the company, but the conflict between the right to exploitation of resources and the right to integral development of Mayan villages.¹⁸ By making the problem with mining a juridical one, automatically the arguments against mining are found in the juridical area as well. The failure to consult the people before a mine begins its operations is considered the number one argument of why for example the Marlin Mine is an illegal operation, and a major violation of Indigenous Rights (as stated in ILO Convention 169). The objections made in this discourse are against this unlawfulness, not against mining per se. The director of COPAE stated for example that mining is perfectly possible in “deserted areas, where no people live, with strict measures and rules,” but that the problem is just that most Guatemalan mines operate without consent of the population.¹⁹

¹⁷ Interviews with councilmembers, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

¹⁸ Interview with director of COPAE, 10-03-2016, San Marcos

¹⁹ Idem

In national NGO discourse on websites and newsletters, the resistance against mining is, as expected, mostly placed within the current discourse on the struggle of indigenous peoples against exploitation by multinational companies.²⁰ Important concepts in this discourse are ‘indigenous rights’ and ‘human rights’. By defining indigenous villages as being territories of indigenous peoples, multinational activity in those areas is unacceptable per definition.

The international NGO discourse however (in the case of the Marlin Mine, the Canadian NGOs Rights Action and Mining Watch play the main part) is exclusively human rights focused.²¹ Consequently, in case human rights are violated (for example violence on the part of the government, trying to stop manifestations, or violence on the behalf of security organizations hired by mining companies), the international attention for the particular case is the greatest. Following the newsfeed of different international NGOs, you see almost exclusively reports of abuses or other violence directed at activists around mining areas.²² Because this kind of violence has been, as far as we know, rare in the last years, attention for the Marlin Mine has decreased enormously. Today, the mine is hardly ever mentioned in the newsfeeds of international NGOs that once were the first to support the resistance against it.

Why is the resistance against mining framed as a struggle about ‘human rights’ by NGOs? As we argued in the theoretical explorations, NGOs have to attain a certain degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. Lister (2003) argued that legitimate organizations are those that comply to dominant discourses in the field. We see here that the international NGOs involved in the case of the Marlin Mine do exactly this: they employ popular concepts like ‘human rights’ and focus on the violation of these rights. This is in line with our expectations. However, based on our fieldwork, we would say that the attempt to place the struggle against mining within the discourse on human rights, is a bit forced and artificial. During the qualitative interviews, it was rather the social divisions and the fear of contamination that came forward, not the violation of human rights.

3.1.4. Indigenous resistance

The indigenous resistance in San Miguel Ixtahuacán is, as already explained in the second chapter, mostly initiated by the organizations Frente de Defensa Miguelense (FREDEMI) and Kolol Q’nan T’xotx (KQT), supported by the catholic church and local parish. Because these local organizations are comprised of local people of whom most did not have juridical education, their discourse differs greatly from that of the NGOs. You could say that those organizations operate in a wholly different paradigm. In general, the incommensurability between this discourse and that on the local level lies in the fact that the informants of KQT regard mining as something inherently bad and unacceptable (as a violation of Mother Earth),²³ while NGOs consider mining something possibly beneficial, when done

²⁰ Textual analysis of www.calas.org.gt, www.copaeguatemala.org

²¹ Based on various documentaries, websites, newsletters

²² Newsfeed on Facebook of RightsAction and MiningWatch between 03-2016 and 05-2016

²³ Interviews with members of KQT and FREDEMI, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

rightly. Also, whereas the indigenous resistance regards the state and politics as collaborator of the mine, the representative of COPAE we spoke with considered politics to be an end to attain a solution to the problem.

Nevertheless, the discourse of these different organizations that work together in the resistance movement, cannot be defined as straight-forward or consistent. We found that arguments against mining are, even when an individual is member of a certain organization, quite personal. Unlike Montana Exploradora, the resistance movement has no clear ‘story’ on which everyone agrees. To people who had their formation at the parish, violations of *Madre Tierra* and the western vision on development that is forced upon the people are the main arguments against mining; “Mining is just a violation of Mother Earth”.²⁴ The director of FREDEMI mostly referred to the fact that the mine shares a too small percentage of the gains with the Guatemalan people; “[The people] just don’t realize the richness [gold] they have! They are glad with the little money they get for it!”²⁵ This lack of discursive coherence defines the fragmented character of the resistance movement of San Miguel Ixtahuacán.

To what extent has discourse on local level been shaped by the influence of NGOs? Based on the theory, you would expect the discourse on local level to be greatly determined by NGOs, who would introduce an international framework to wrap the message that the resistance is trying to tell. During our fieldwork, we found however that local discourse was mainly influenced by another institution: the catholic church. Its *cosmovisión* as presented in the educational program it provided, with its emphasis on *Madre Tierra*, was shared by many of our informants. As we pointed out before, in the case of the Marlin Mine NGOs do not seem to act in the same area nor aim at the same goals as local organizations do. They operate in a totally different paradigm, and therefore, in San Miguel Ixtahuacán most local resistance people do not feel like NGOs represent their voices.

3.2. Discourse on the impacts of the Marlin Mine

In this section, we will look at the way the discourse of the local population contests the discourse of powerful actors with regard to the impacts of the Marlin Mine.

3.2.1. Relation with development

Answers to the question whether the Marlin Mine has stimulated the development of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, differ from ‘yes, of course’ to ‘no, not at all’, but most lie somewhere in between. How can we explain the difference in opinions? Based on the assumptions made by Blaser (2004), we were initially searching for two main paradigms with regard to development and mining: a positive discourse of Montana and the state, as opposed to that of the indigenous population. However, it turns out that things are not this black and white, and that opinions about this are a quite personal matter.

²⁴ Interviews with members of KQT and FREDEMI, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

²⁵ Interview with director of FREDEMI, 04-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

Discourses differ between people. Therefore, we have tried to categorize all different discourses into five different opinions about whether the Marlin Mine has stimulated the development of San Miguel Ixtahuacán.

1. Yes, it did. Before the mine was here, there was nothing.

Firstly, representatives of Montana Exploradora emphasize the relationship between mining and development strongly. They stress the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and point to the visible signs of modern development in the area, a source of employment, and development in general as a result of the presence of the mine. A representative stated that the company has been employing CSR from the very start. He explained the company has a profound commitment and respect for human rights, for cultural differences, and for human needs. He argued that the company tries as much as possible to ensure that community leaders, municipal leaders, and mine representatives, usually from the sustainable development department and communal relations, have constant dialogue, open communication, and constructive feedback, so that whatever is done through development projects, funding, and joint projects, is as sustainable and as useful as possible. These development projects include building bridges, constructing buildings, and establishing access to education, health care, and water. According to Montana Exploradora, its projects have really changed the life of the local population living around the mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipacapa.²⁶

As already elaborated upon in chapter 3.1.1., representatives of Montana Exploradora are of the opinion that there was nothing in the area before the Marlin mine went into production and argue that they really made a difference. As one representative puts it: “You will see roads when before there were none, you will see schools where before there were none, you will see water, access to water, when before there was none.”²⁷ He argues there are now asphalted roads, access to water and health care, traffic lights, banks, and cell phones. According to him, these are all signs of modern development and an effort to urbanize and do things more in a 21st century fashion, connecting to the world.²⁸

Besides these signs of modern development, representatives explain that the Marlin Mine brings employment and high wages to a place where traditionally and historically people would migrate in order to find work to, for example, sugar and coffee plantations or in search of the American dream, exposing themselves to numerous risks. They argue migration would destroy families, because once the provider, which is usually the husband or the father, would migrate elsewhere to work, they probably would abandon their families.²⁹ A representative emphasized that 80% of the mineworkers at the Marlin mine are locals, while 2% is from outside Guatemala. These local employees have received training, because initially they did not have sufficient skills to work in

²⁶ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 30-03-2016, Guatemala City

²⁷ Idem

²⁸ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 30-03-2016, Guatemala City

²⁹ Idem

a mine. A representative gave an example of local employees who could hardly write in Spanish, but received technical training and now are able to use technical machines. He argued that the Marlin Mine has made a difference in education, which enhances the chances of the local population and gives them better employment perspectives when the mine closes.³⁰ On top of that, the Marlin Mine also has a nursery on site. As a representative explained, the nursery was built to promote women working in the mining industry, because it is culturally determined that women are not supposed to work. He explained that he observes a cultural change happening over time, since elder, more traditional people who would have never let their daughters work, nowadays stimulate them to pursue a job at the Marlin Mine.³¹

Additionally, the director of Sierra Madre argued that the improvement of infrastructure made travelling easier. Before, a trip to San Marcos would take the whole day, while now it will take three hours per bus. The fact that San Miguel Ixtahuacán is better accessible creates opportunities for the local population. People can buy different products on the market or sell their own products in other cities. The supply of transport has improved as there are now many taxis and *tuc-tucs* available, just as buses to the larger cities and small minivans to *aldeas*. The local economy has improved as there are more restaurants and *tiendas* (small shops) nowadays.³²

What does Montana Exploradora's stance on development imply? We argue that Montana Exploradora's stance reveals underlying power relations, between Montana Exploradora and the other actors involved. By stating there was nothing before the company arrived, Montana Exploradora uses a patronizing rhetoric in imposing a certain kind of Western development. While not stated explicitly, it seems Montana Exploradora characterized the local population as backward. As Roberts (1996) already noted, indigenous people are being characterized as backward and lacking literacy in Spanish by the ruling elite, in this case Montana Exploradora. The power relations not only entail this patronizing rhetoric, Montana Exploradora's development efforts are based on a vision of Western development and not per se in line with the local vision of development.

2. Yes, but only temporarily. The development it brings is not sustainable.

Secondly, there is a group of people who points to the fact that the development brought by the mine does not have a very long-term character. Those people do not deny that poverty has diminished and education improved, but point to the fact that, when the mine leaves, all these advantages will probably disappear. People who now work in the mine and gain money, or schools that are financially supported by the mine, will have a hard time surviving in the future. Remarkably, this is the discourse of COPAE,³³ but also many people of the municipality spoke this way. Also, because the mining company is only temporarily settled in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, it is not intended that Mayan people will

³⁰ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 07-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

³¹ Idem

³² Interview with Sierra Madre, 06-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

³³ Interview with COPAE, 10-03-2016, San Marcos

be dependent on their help. A result of the presence of the mine that a councilmember mentions is that Mayan people no longer do their traditional work of cultivating. He thinks the Mayan people of San Miguel Ixtahuacán need to learn how to self-sustain.³⁴

Another councilmember also does not consider the development as a result of the mine as sustainable, while Miguelense society exactly needs sustainable development. For example, he mentions the Marlin Mine gave the villagers seeds for cultivating potatoes, but these people were not qualified or capacitated to do this work. Besides, in his opinion Guatemalans in general do not wisely handle money as they spend their newly earned money all at once and do not save. Therefore, when mineworkers all of a sudden earn a lot of money, they spend all at once, while not looking ahead into the future. According to him, this is the problem and money should be spend on educating people about wisely handling money.³⁵

3. No, it only brought a certain kind of development, but not the right kind of development. People somehow connected or schooled by the parish, mostly emphasize the Mayan *cosmovisión*, the importance of living in harmony with nature, like they always did, and explain that the development the mine brings does not fall within this vision.³⁶ Infrastructure and money, which are the most important aspects of this Western idea of development, are just a small part of their holistic vision. In Mam culture, development is a holistic concept: infrastructure and wealth, what the company mostly offers, are just “one leaflet of the rose of development”³⁷ according to Emilia’s beautiful metaphoric comparison. Spiritual development plays an important role, as does the harmony with nature and each other. The municipality also mentions the development the Marlin Mine has brought about does not comply with the Mayan *cosmovisión*. The mayor thinks that Mayan people in San Miguel Ixtahuacán are not accustomed to the lifestyle the Marlin mine offers. He also was of the opinion that the people who work in the mine, mostly indigenous, are not used to a lifestyle in which they are able to spend this amount of money. According to the mayor, they are accustomed to a tranquil lifestyle in nature, while taking care of their cattle.³⁸ Thus, the development an international enterprise specialized in extracting natural resources brings to the local population is not the right development. One of the councilmembers mentions that the Mayan people are able to develop themselves with their own resources and do not need the help of an international enterprise.³⁹ A last reference is made to the fact that support of health institutions and health care would be preferable above the construction of roads.

The director of FREDEMI added to this that the development the mine brings might work in another place where people are academically educated and do not depend on their lands, but in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, where only traditional farmers live, it would never work. “Traditionally, they

³⁴ Interview with councilmember 1, 14-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

³⁵ Interview with councilmember 2, 06-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

³⁶ Interview with members of the parish, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

³⁷ Interview with Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

³⁸ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 09-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

³⁹ Interview with councilmember 2, 06-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

depend on their lands. But the mine came, took all that they had, gave them some temporal jobs. Now, they have nothing left. This is not the development one wants, is it?”⁴⁰

4. Yes, but only partly. Development is due to other causes.

Fourthly, we identify a discourse which points to the fact that the development in San Miguel Ixtahuacán is not solely the result of the Marlin Mine. The councilmembers we interviewed all mention the royalties the municipality receives, which are then invested in development projects, and the fact the mine functions as a source of work, thus as a source of income. However, while they all agree on the fact the mine brings about development in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, some put it perspective and question whether the way the municipality developed throughout the years is a direct result of the presence of the mine. One councilmember mentioned the mine is only responsible for 40 or 50% of the development in the municipality.⁴¹ In line with this, the mayor stated that the many *tiendas* and restaurants that popped up the last years are not a result of the mine, but the arrival of businesses from outside of San Miguel Ixtahuacán.⁴² Another councilmember stated despite the so-called development, the majority of the population of San Miguel Ixtahuacán still live in poverty and experience difficulties in finding a job.⁴³ According to Juan of KQT, the richness you see in San Miguel Ixtahuacán is mainly the result of money that is sent by people who migrated to the United States.⁴⁴

5. No, not at all. There is no relation between the mine and the development of the village. Lastly, there is a group of people who deny any positive developmental influence that the mine would have. They feel that the negative impacts of the Marlin Mine overshadow the positive impacts. For example, Juan, member of KQT and FREDEMI asked himself: “Why would we need schools that are supported by the mine when all our children are sick of the contaminated water?”⁴⁵ He was of the opinion that the mine did not bring development to the village, but development that was only for mining company itself. The company robbed them of their richness, he said, and left them with solely destruction. “They give us money, but they kill our cultural values, our human values, our dignity as community,” would an important spokeswoman of the resistance say.⁴⁶ “And therefore, I don’t see that there has been any development, but the contrary: the project of mining has come to destroy what we have. While the company says it contributes to the development of the community, it is actually the

⁴⁰ Interview with director of FREDEMI, 04-04-2016

⁴¹ Interview with councilmember 2, 21-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁴² Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 28-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁴³ Interview with councilmember 3, 12-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁴⁴ Interview with Juan, 29-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁴⁵ Idem

⁴⁶ Interview with Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

other way around, because with what they are doing, with their way of working, they are destroying our lives.”⁴⁷

The mayor of San Miguel Ixtahuacán also denies there is a relation between the Marlin Mine and development, may it be in a less extreme manner. Overall, he does not think the mine stimulates local development, because few locals work in the mine. He contradicts the assertion that local workers of the mine earn more money than usual which in turn is invested in the local economy.⁴⁸

3.2.2. Environmental impact

Remarkably, people living in the center of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, often do not refer to environmental impacts firstly when asked about the impacts of the mine. It seems like the social divisions and confrontations, which we will elaborate on later, are nowadays regarded a more important consequence of the Marlin Mine. Because in the center of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, people have hardly experienced any environmental destruction themselves since they live about 20 km from the actual mining area, we also got the impression that they are not aware of these kinds of impacts. Some of them came up with the word ‘contamination’ without knowledge of what this entails exactly.⁴⁹

However, the resistance movement (of which most people come from *aldeas* closer to the mine) does have a clear discourse on contamination and drying of rivers, which result, according to them, in death of cattle and health issues. Although these impacts were more present in the early years, we heard about some recent testimonies of dying cows and sick people. A few of the people living in *aldeas* also pointed to how their fruits and vegetables nowadays are much smaller and less tasty, due to minerals in the earth that had not been there before.⁵⁰

In the *aldeas*, people often spoke in a symbolic manner about the environmental impacts they suffered from. “The mine has taken my fresh air, my fresh water, and murdered my cattle,” told Diana from *aldea* San José.⁵¹ To her, the rupture of walls due to explosives used by the company is also seen as a big concern. “They promised to pay us the damage, but they don’t. They just deny it!” She was striving to get an independent researcher who would underline her accusations. Occasionally, people living in the *aldeas* would even refer to the diminishing of rains as a result of the mine. “They cut the trees and now the rains have gone,” said Marita, a woman living on terrain that belongs to the mine.⁵²

Montana Exploradora however, refutes any of these accusations. Representatives mention there is no actual proof for contamination and health issues as a result of the presence of the Marlin Mine, while it is the most monitored and audited mine in the Americas. For example, the Ministry of Health and Asociación de Monitoreo Ambiental Comunitario (AMAC), an independent group of community leaders, test and conduct studies in both municipalities, San Miguel Ixtahuacán and

⁴⁷ Interview with Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁴⁸ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 28-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁴⁹ Conversations with local people, 31-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁵⁰ Conversations with people from *aldeas*, 13-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁵¹ Informal interview with Diana, 14-04-2016, *aldea* San Antonio

⁵² Informal interview with Marita, 14-04-2016, *aldea* San José

Sipacapa. The Ministry of Health tests on blood and AMAC takes samples in the area surrounding the Marlin Mine. According to Montana Exploradora's representatives, these institutions do not find evidence for contamination or health issues. In their opinion, it is solely the perception of the local population, based on a lack of education and knowledge. The technical data on contamination and health issues contests the perception of the locals as it does not support their claims and accusations. Besides, a representative argued that the alleged contamination of rivers could be due to the use of strong detergent for washing clothes and locals relieve themselves in these rivers.⁵³ Based on our fieldwork observations, we indeed have to acknowledge that the nearby river looked very dirty since it was full of plastic garbage.

3.2.2.1. Discourse on *Madre Tierra*

According to Medina (1998), indigenous peoples make a claim to indigenous identity, which connects people to place through intimate and ancient bonds. During our fieldwork, we found indeed that a theme that was often mentioned by primarily members of the local parish and KQT when they told about the environmental impacts of the mine, is *Madre Tierra* (Mother Earth). For example, Carlos of the organization KQT explained: "In Mam, K'nan T'xotx means 'our mother earth'. For the multinational, Mother Earth doesn't exist, but for us she means a lot. We respect her."⁵⁴ He meant the notion of Mother Earth quite literally: "You don't punch your mother in her stomach, you don't pull out her heart, likewise you don't demolish our Mother Earth." Others pointed to the harmonious relation the Mam-culture historically had with their earth. Because they used to live self-sustainable, cultivating their crops on their lands, their relation to the earth was very important.⁵⁵

We found it quite remarkable that also in the municipality, remarks about *Madre Tierra* were often made. The local and regional state officials elaborate on the environmental impact of the Marlin mine, referring to *Madre Tierra* like people of the resistance do. A councilmember explained that mining activities do not line up with the Mayan *cosmovisión* of Mother Earth. "People are not the owners of nature and earth, but part of it. Therefore, we need to show respect and are not entitled to make alternations and start extracting gold and silver."⁵⁶ All the local officials agree with the Mayan *cosmovisión* and the ideas about *Madre Tierra*. They all understand the Mayan people's worries about *Madre Tierra*. This might be due to the fact that all these local officials are themselves indigenous, and belong to the catholic church, which promotes this idea of *Madre Tierra*. Interestingly, the administrative manager of the department of San Marcos does not understand the indigenous people's preoccupations about *Madre Tierra*. He legitimizes the activities of the Marlin mine by saying that for

⁵³ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 30-03-2016, Guatemala City

⁵⁴ Interview with Carlos, 22-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁵⁵ Interviews with members of KQT, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁵⁶ Interview with councilmember 2, 06-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

decades all over the world mining activities have been taking place, therefore, worries about *Madre Tierra* are negligible.⁵⁷

3.2.3. Social divisions and confrontation

Other than purely environmental impacts, people consider the coming of the mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacán as the cause of a severe social division within all the *aldeas* in the area, of which they still experience the results. It is important to understand how complicated this situation was in the years the mine arrived in the village. In every *aldea*, men were present who regarded the mine as a way out of the poverty they lived in. They were standing in lines to work in the mine. But in these times, the company was quite careful in deciding to which *aldeas* they would go, meaning that if there were people of the resistance living in the village, they would not go there because chance existed their vehicles would be set on fire. This particular *aldea* would not receive the development projects, clear drinking water, or other benefits, solely because of those few persons that spoke against the mine. Understandably, the young men who had longed to work in the mine, would blame the resistance people for denying the village those benefits, and often acted aggressively against them.⁵⁸ The fake eye of Diana from San José is a direct result of these aggressive actions: after her neighbours shot her in the head out of resentment of her reluctance to sell her lands, she spent six months in the hospital rehabilitating.⁵⁹

On top of that, we suppose that in the area of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, there are not many families of which no one works in the mine or in a place related to the mine, although this is contested by some of the councilmembers. But even the two brothers of one of the most active members of the parish made their money in the place their sister was striving against. Some of these families have fallen apart due to this irreconcilable difference in opinion, others just decided not to talk about subjects related to mining. “Most of all, the mine has caused social contamination,” Emma told us. “It divided the families. Many are in favor, some are against.”⁶⁰ As a result, the efforts of the resistance movement to raise awareness were sometimes regarded as provoking these tensions between people. The social tensions came to a height in 2011, when FREDEMI organized the last manifestations, which resulted in disastrous violent confrontations between the proponents and opponents of the mine. Many people of the resistance movement were mentally or physically injured, and decided to back off. Since then, conditions have improved, people increasingly speak with each other, but still, the subject of mining remains a sensitive one.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Interview with administrative manager, 15-04-2016, San Marcos

⁵⁸ Mostly based on interviews with Maria and Emilia, 23-03-2016 and 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁵⁹ Conversation with Diana, 20-04-2016, *aldea* San José

⁶⁰ Interview with Emma, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁶¹ Mostly based on interviews with Maria and Emilia, 23-03 and 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

3.2.4. Changing way of life

Apart from social divisions and confrontations, our informants on local level often spoke about the way life in San Miguel Ixtahuacán has changed over the years, due to the mine.

Factors that were often mentioned:⁶²

The cantinas:

Because of the mine, there are now over 70 *cantinas* (local pubs for men) in the municipality. Add the surplus of men who came to the village to work in the mine, who are all in the age of 20-40, and one can imagine the influence this has on a small indigenous village like San Miguel Ixtahuacán.

Especially mothers are concerned about this development, because they worry about their children walking the streets alone. We also experienced this ourselves: every day, men laid on the streets, looking intoxicated, and when they were not sleeping, they came after us, shouting.

Change in the way people regard money:

Especially informants of the catholic church point to the fact that people now think more in terms of money and attach more value to money. They buy cars, bigger houses, but mostly spend their money in *cantinas*. As already mentioned before, most are of the opinion that their culture is not a money-minded-culture and thus people do not know how to deal with big sums of money.

Change in the way of living:

Whereas before everyone was self-sustaining, had their fruits and vegetables and *frijoles* (black beans) on their lands, nowadays many have sold their lands to the mine and are buying their daily necessities in cities or other villages. “*Ya no hay harmonia con la naturaleza*”, there is no harmony with nature anymore, people said often.

Men abandoning their families:

As a result of the two changes mentioned above, people consider as a consequence of the mine as well, the fact that increasingly, indigenous men abandon their wives and children and search for a new and younger wife, because of their growing wealth. Although one would say that this is not really a direct result of the mine, some of the informants did regard it this way.⁶³

Arrival of outsiders:

Because of the mine, many people from outside San Miguel Ixtahuacán have made their entrance in the village. For example, young men came to work in the mine, but also shop owners arrived, who wanted to get into the ‘circle of big spending’, (academic) researchers from other countries (like us), organizations, and others.

*Disappearance of *saludar*:*

We found it beautiful how Emilia described how the ‘*saludar*’ (greeting) is disappearing.⁶⁴ Whereas before everyone knew each other and greeted each other extensively, now they only say a short *buenos*

⁶² All interviews and conversations between 01-03-2016 and 20-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁶³ For example, in interview with Emma, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁶⁴ Interview with Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

días, mainly because of all those outsiders that have entered, but also because of the tensions between different groups.

Disappearance of local language:

Another result is the disappearance of the local language Mam. In the mine, people only speak Spanish, and many of the men who came to work here also speak Spanish. Therefore, in the center of San Miguel Ixtahuacán increasingly approach each other in Spanish, and increasingly forget their traditional Mam' language.

Why would people mostly point to social impacts that seem quite indirect results of mining? When people spoke about the consequences we describe above, we sometimes had the feeling that it is not really the mine they speak against, but rather modernity. Informants mentioned that one does not need roads, because it is fine to walk for a day to get to the village, that gaining more money is a bad thing, and spoke in horror about how nowadays locals go to the gym to work out. It may not be the mine per se they speak against, but the very rapid introduction of another, modern way of life. As Urkidi (2011) already noticed, the people of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, really are in defense of their community. They are in defense of their old way of life, the harmony, the simplicity, the Mayan community. But it is to guess if it was not for the mine, modernity would have made its entrance anyway, may it be in a subtler and slower manner.

3.3. Indigenous resistance: contesting discourses

During our fieldwork, we found that the indigenous resistance itself is subject to contesting discourses as well. In this section, we will further look into this issue. Firstly, we will analyze the discourse that exists within the local resistance movement, and secondly we will evaluate how powerful actors portray the resistance in their discourse.

3.3.1. Important concepts employed by the resistance

As we already pointed out before, unlike Montana Exploradora, the resistance movement, which is comprised of FREDEMI and KQT with support of the catholic church, does not have one clear and consistent story regarding the Marlin Mine. We argue therefore that it is impossible to speak of an actual 'discursive strategy'. This is partly due to the fact that the movement is comprised of different organizations, but also because it seems that opinions on the mine are a very personal matter. However, we did identify four major themes that were often referred to by our informants of the resistance.

Madre Tierra:

A first theme that was often mentioned is the idea of Madre Tierra, which we already elaborated on in chapter 3.2.2.1. However, most informants of the resistance who speak about their Madre Tierra in this way, do realize that the awareness of this traditional mental legacy of the Mam culture, is not that

widespread anymore as it used to be.⁶⁵ Locals who did not receive sufficient catholic education (which are many) do not know the traditional cultural inheritance nowadays. The local schools do not give any attention to these ideas, and hardly anyone reads the Mam-books, nor Pop Wuj (the Mayan bible). As a result, you see that in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, like in every place in Guatemala, plastic garbage is thrown everywhere and when you see the destruction and mess surrounding the nearby river. But the people of the resistance realize this: “We are contaminating our Mother Earth ourselves as well,”⁶⁶ and are making every effort to raise awareness about caring for the environment, like organizing ‘*El día de la Madre Tierra*’ during the time we were there.⁶⁷ Their emphasis on sustainability, and responsibility when it comes to the environment and future generations, makes the resistance movement strangely similar to the many green environmental groups you see nowadays in the rest of the world.

Indigeneity and the continuation of the struggle for self-determination:

A third concept that was reflected in the discourse of some informants, was the idea that the struggle against mining companies could be seen as the continuation of the struggle of the indigenous people, that has been going on for hundreds of years. During the meeting of ‘Consejo de los pueblos Mam’ remarks like “we continue the struggle of our grandfathers and grandmothers” and “already since the Spaniards came, they are stealing our earth from us” were often made.⁶⁸ However, again people were not consistent in the way they perceived this theme: Emilia from the parish for example pointed to the fact that it is just a very small part of the population that is striving actively against the mine, and it is therefore impossible to regard it as a struggle of the indigenous people as a whole.⁶⁹ We think that for many, this high level of indifference and lack of active participation from the locals feels like a disappointment. They often attribute the low level of participation to a fear for repercussions, or the result of traumas from the civil war, which has taught people to keep silent. The representative of FREDEMI even put it this way: “Our village is just a conformist village,” he stated.⁷⁰

The mine’s dirty strategy:

Another theme most informants of the resistance agreed on, was the unethical way in which the mine has tried to establish itself in the community and win people over. According to them, the mine mainly used manipulation to acquire approval. The following two quotes about the mine, uttered by members of FREDEMI, give an illustration of this particular piece of contesting discourse:

“Today, they are in all the sixty-three communities. How did they do this? They manipulated the people. A great manipulation, deceiving the people, offering presents to the people.”⁷¹

⁶⁵ Interviews with members of KQT, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁶⁶ Idem

⁶⁷ Día de la Madre Tierra, 17-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁶⁸ Consejo de los Pueblos Mam, 30-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁶⁹ Interview with Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁷⁰ Interview with director of FREDEMI, 04-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁷¹ Interview with Juan, 29-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

“They have the capability to inform the people, and they bring presents. They bring bags with food, they bring whatever present to the people, and the people say: thank you, thank you, such a nice people at the mine!”⁷²

According to them, this ‘dirty strategy’ makes it quite difficult for the resistance movement to compete with the company in raising awareness, since they do not have the capability to give any presents or money.

In a personal conversation, Emilia once told us about one other way in which the mine tries to keep people quiet.⁷³ Her brother’s wife, who works in the mine in a quite dangerous area, had given birth to a dead baby, and Emilia was thinking about the possibility that her brother had perhaps become infertile due to the dangerous chemicals he worked with. She wanted to research the case, but before she did, her brother suddenly received the amount of 20.000 Quetzals (€2500, comparable to a good year salary) from his employer. He did not want to research the case anymore.

How can we explain this negative reading of Montana’s projects? We see here that efforts that are made by Montana Exploradora in line with their strategy of Corporate Social Responsibility, like building schools and distribution of water filters, are by the indigenous resistance depicted as efforts to bribe the population. They are contesting the idea of CSR in their discourse. Development projects and workshops are regarded a patronizing way of imposing a certain kind of development upon the local population. Although the company is probably acting with the best intentions, the population did not have a chance to consent in these development efforts, and therefore the resistance views the projects as a way in which the uneven power balances that exist between the two parties are being fortified. Therefore, we would say that the uneven power relations that existed since the day Goldcorp arrived, have made equal dialogue between different actors impossible.

3.3.2. *Indigenous resistance as perceived by the state and Montana Exploradora*

When the Marlin mine just went into production, the state’s response to the resistance was quite violent. The army and police troops would violently suppress manifestations by the resistance. In breaking up blockades shots would be fired from both sides, injuring both protestors and police officers. As the mayor stated: “Since the Marlin Mine went into production, there has always been oppression of the state against the resistance.”⁷⁴

Nowadays, on the regional level, we found that the governor of San Marcos is very neutral and politically correct in the way he refers to indigenous resistance. He recognizes there was and is resistance against the Marlin mine and stated in the interview that there is a governmental agreement about the right to demonstrate to whatever a person disagrees with in Guatemala. Therefore, it is the people’s right to demonstrate against the mine.⁷⁵ Additionally, the administrative manager of the

⁷² Interview with director of FREDEMI, 04-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁷³ Based on conversation with Emilia, 11-04-2016

⁷⁴ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 28-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁷⁵ Interview with governor Carlos Cardona, 15-04-2016, San Marcos

department San Marcos mentioned he understands the preoccupations from the opponents, because he neither agrees with the little 1% the municipalities receive from the mine as royalties.⁷⁶

On the local level, all councilmembers mention there used to be a lot of resistance against the mine in the past years, but now the resistance is not as visible as before. In general, the councilmembers all explain they agree with the concerns of the resistance, but vary in the degree of support they show to the resistance. The mayor of San Miguel Ixtahuacán in principal thinks the resistance is something good as the opponents are standing up for the poor people who are affected by the mine, such as people who live close to the mine and suffer from damages to their houses. According to the mayor, the resistance makes sure the voices of the poor people affected by the mine are heard. He understands the resistance' preoccupations about the lack of water, the contamination of water, and Madre Tierra.⁷⁷ The councilmembers also mention the resistance protects the poor people of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, because for local villagers it is difficult to fight against a company of that size. Or as a councilmember stated: "It is difficult to be against a monster that big."⁷⁸

Another councilmember mentioned that the resistance used to be strong and good, but unfortunately the opponents of the mine turned violent when they started insulting and harassing other people in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, for example, proponents of the mine, and wearing masks to cover up their faces. He argued that opponents of the mine should not wear masks, because "why would you cover up your identity when standing up for your own rights?" He believes these people have criminal intentions and create internal conflicts between the villagers of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, and therefore, he argued, the resistance did not act within a legal framework. He referred to the people of the resistance as criminals, and did not support the resistance anymore.⁷⁹

How can these divergent discourses on different state levels be explained? While the majority of the councilmembers expresses a discourse of empowerment, one councilmember expresses a discourse of criminalization, which fits the discourse of the central government. We argue that the central government criminalizes the resistance, because the former views the latter as a threat to the state's sovereignty. As Hale (2004) argued, resistance against megaprojects is seen as a threat to neo-liberal principles. Besides, we argue that the central government cannot fully grasp the resistance incentives., while on the other hand, the local councilmembers do understand what is going on in their municipality. Besides the fact they are themselves indigenous, they are able to fully understand where the resistance stands for, and thus express a discourse more focused on empowerment.

Representatives of Montana Exploradora draw a relation between the end of the civil war in Guatemala and the rise of NGOs, activism, and, ultimately, the resistance against the Marlin Mine. They argue that when the war was brought to an end, many people were left without an activity, without a purpose, without work. Activists who used to belong to the revolutionary movement found a

⁷⁶ Interview with administrative manager, 15-04-2016, San Marcos

⁷⁷ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 09-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁷⁸ Interview with councilmember 2, 06-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁷⁹ Interview with councilmember 1, 14-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

new way to make a living within the framework of the peace accords, through NGOs and activism. According to these representatives, these activists continued to promote their ideals, their philosophy of left versus right, East versus West, socialism and communism versus capitalism. And in so doing, they would oppose not only the Marlin mine but any large industrial project. When they opposed the Marlin mine in the beginning, they foretold an apocalypse by saying that the mine would contaminate everything, that children, cattle and other animals would die. As a representative stated: “They basically foretold the end of the world for San Miguel and Sipacapa.” According to them, this prediction proved to be false and the communities of San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipacapa turned around eventually. The representatives are of the opinion that the NGOs against the mine only have brought conflict between villagers, that they are activists who have instigated communities to set fire to entire projects, destroy millions of dollars of investment without accountability.⁸⁰ Furthermore, in line with this argument, according to the representatives of Montana Exploradora, is a lack of knowledge and information and a low level of education, which made it possible for the NGOs and opponents of the mine to easily persuade people and to spread horrible stories around. A representative told us a story that circulated among the local population which predicted that the company would cut off the local children’s heads and put them in the mine. According to him, the resistance was mainly based on fear. Because of this lack of knowledge and information and a low level of education people believed these kind of stories. After a couple of years, when people realized the mine did no harm and brought about many advantages and benefits, such as jobs, the majority of the people turned around and, according to the representatives, now even want the mine to stay and beg the company to drill on their land in search of gold. It turned out the fears of the people were unrealistic.⁸¹ The director of Sierra Madre also mentioned the resistance stems from a lack of information. He explained that the decrease of resistance is due to the fact that there is now more information available. The press has written a lot about the mine, both nationally as internationally, and the negative articles about the mine only stem from a desire to sell more newspapers. According to him, that is where opponents of the mine have gotten their concerns and accusations from.⁸²

3.4. Discourse as a reflection of distrust and ignorance

During our fieldwork, we noticed that a high level of ignorance among the local population existed with regard to the mine. Apart from that, discourses often reflected distrust between NGOs, the indigenous resistance, the municipality, and Montana Exploradora. In this section, we will expose the underlying praxis these discourses lay bare.

⁸⁰ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 30-03-2016, Guatemala City

⁸¹ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 07-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁸² Interview with Sierra Madre, 06-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

3.4.1. Local perspectives: distrust and ignorance

Before arriving in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, we had spoken to some people in cities like Quetzaltenango,⁸³ and noticed that generally, they were quite aware of the exploitation of multinational companies and spoke very passionately against it. It was therefore to our surprise that in the center of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, this disagreement was not that widely shared, and there were actually many people in favor of the mine. Of course this partly has to do with a lower level of education: most people did not study and do not know the concept of exploitation, nor follow the news. But also, in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, people of the resistance state that many inhabitants are losing sight of their cultural inheritance and, influenced by modern television-shows or ads, long for exactly the capitalist western perception of development.⁸⁴ These people may simply regard the mine as a way out of their traditional way of life, and a chance to get some kind of education and a rewarding job. While by the rest of Guatemala and the international community they are considered victims of the situation, we think thus that a lot of young men in the area actually consider themselves the lucky ones. A mineworker argued that working in the mine is a great opportunity and changed his life for the better, not only economically, but also mentally. He is no longer unemployed, but has a purpose in life.⁸⁵

It was however clear that there does exist a widespread feeling of distrust towards the mine, but also towards the municipality and state. The long history of marginalization and the civil war have made their scars, and the priest also emphasized that the local people do not trust anyone anymore. “They do not trust their government, they even do not trust their own, local government, while it is composed of Mayas.”⁸⁶

On the local level, another growing disparity is the one between members of the catholic church and members of the evangelical church. Whereas the catholic church from the beginning on has fulfilled an active role in the resistance movement, the evangelical church did not get involved at all. More than that; its pastors are in favor of mining. Despite the efforts of the catholic church to speak with its evangelical colleague, they did not change their opinion, and never held any information evening or awareness raising efforts with regard to the mine, nor do they have any indigenous elements or formation like the Catholics do.⁸⁷ As a result, in general, the evangelical population of San Miguel Ixtahuacán is far less aware of any arguments against mining.

3.4.2. Distance between indigenous organizations and NGOs

Especially over the last few years, in the case of the Marlin Mine, the distance between indigenous organizations and NGOs has grown. Financial support has dried up, and people feel like the NGOs are

⁸³ Based on conversations with people in Quetzaltenango, 02-2016

⁸⁴ Based on interviews with resistance people, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁸⁵ Interview with mineworker, 13-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁸⁶ Interview with priest Eric, 28-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁸⁷ Meeting of FREDEMI, 06-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

just “following their own interests” and do not act in the interest of the resistance people.⁸⁸ The indigenous organizations have the feeling the NGOs abandoned them, that they have to do it on their own now. This statement is remarkably similar to the way Montana Exploradora speaks about local activists and the decreasing presence of NGOs in the region: “Those who went to the forefront, the first line of attack, are left by themselves. Or left alone, abandoned.”⁸⁹ Communication with organizations that once were close (like COPAE) has ceased, and there is a widespread mistrust in NGOs. People of the resistance feel like activists working for NGOs are only “sitting in offices, writing plans and gaining a salary”, while they are the ones that actual fight the struggle.⁹⁰ Even the priest and the catholic church, who were the core of the resistance in the early years, nowadays have hardly any idea what their former partner COPAE is doing.⁹¹ This lack of communication makes coordination difficult.

3.4.3. *(Lack of) collaboration between municipality and mine*

In talking to the municipality, we noticed a lack of collaboration between the municipality and Montana Exploradora. The mayor and councilmembers of San Miguel Ixtahuacán often mentioned that since they took up office in January 2016, there never has been constructive communication with representatives of the Marlin Mine, let alone a meeting. The mayor mentioned that the only thing that connects the municipality to the mine is the royalties it receives monthly. There is no communication about reparation payments for the damages to houses nor what will happen after the mine closes.⁹² While the municipality is eager to sit around the table and engage in a dialogue, the councilmembers think Montana Exploradora does not seem to be like-minded. The mayor mentioned that in principle the relationship between the municipality and the mine is an unequal one, since the municipality is not only dependent on the mine because of the royalties and projects, but also in making plans for when the mine closes.⁹³ Interestingly, our informants mentioned that the former mayor and council used to be close to Montana Exploradora. The mayor criticized the current lack of collaboration, especially since the former mayor was very tight with Montana Exploradora and even travelled by helicopter from the center of San Miguel Ixtahuacán to the mine.⁹⁴ On top of that, he made certain agreements with the company and was constantly engaged in dialogue.⁹⁵

Although the municipality considers the collaboration with the mine as too little, under the resistance movement and the local people the idea is widely shared that the municipality and the mine are working closely together. More than once, informants spoke of the “matrimony between

⁸⁸ Consejo de los Pueblos Mam, 30-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁸⁹ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 30-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁹⁰ Consejo de los Pueblos Mam, 30-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁹¹ Interview with priest Eric, 28-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁹² Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 09-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁹³ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 28-03-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁹⁴ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 09-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁹⁵ Interview with councilmember 2, 06-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

municipality and mine” or that “municipality and mine are like husband and wife.”⁹⁶ This idea is strengthened by the knowledge that the mine gives money in the shape of royalties to the municipality. The opinion that the councilmembers are ‘contractors’ of the mine, was reflected in the discourse of many of our informants. Of course, this could be due to the fact that the current municipality has only been in office for three months, and the former municipality indeed was more close with the mine, but still it is remarkable that the new board has not been able to get across their moderate stance with regard to mining. And interestingly, on the basis of our interviews it seems the municipality and resistance are actually more on the same page than they would think as they both are critical with regard to the presence of the Marlin Mine.

3.4.4. Closure of the mine as subject to discourse

During our fieldwork, we found that, apart from expected concepts that were used in the discourse of all actors, the closure of the mine also turned out to be subject to discourse. One of the most returning issues during the process of data-gathering is the subject whether the mine would close or not.

Everyone we spoke with who was connected to Montana Exploradora, was very clear about this as they stated that the mine will close by the end of this year (2016), because there is simply not enough gold and silver left to make the operation profitable. A team that leads the process of closure has already been appointed (we met them during our tour), the pit is being filled with earth and transformed into a coffee plantation and pine tree site (we saw that with our own eyes) and the first employees are already being dismissed.⁹⁷ Even at the headquarters of Montana Exploradora it looked like they were moving out already.

However, remarkably enough, almost every person of the resistance movement as well as the local people or the priest do not for a moment believe that the mine is really closing. When we brought it up, they simply answered: “Well, yes, they said that every year, but they never did [close].”⁹⁸ Even the municipality was quite sceptic about the forthcoming closure. “We shall see if the mine closes,” they said often. The fact that none of the local people take the announcement serious, has a couple of important implications. First of all, FREDEMI is re-organizing at the moment, making new plans for manifestations and mobilizing people, which all is a bit useless when the mine would indeed leave this year. According to their information, the mine is not closing at all but already in secret buying new territories from people in the municipality. They believe that, since the contract which the company has with the government remains valid for some years more, they would never leave beforehand.⁹⁹ The priest even did not want to talk about ‘when the mine closes’ because he did not regard this a possible

⁹⁶ Interview with Enrique, 18-04-2016, and Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁹⁷ Tour through Marlin Mine, 07-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁹⁸ Based on many conversations between 01-03-2016 and 20-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

⁹⁹ Meeting of FREDEMI, 06-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

situation. “It is unrealistic to speak about the mine closing; they are investing so much at the moment.”¹⁰⁰

A second important implication is that because the closure is not taken seriously, no plans for the future are made. We will further look into this in the coming chapter.

Overall, this haziness about the apparent closure of the mine is quite typical for the discrepancies between the different actors that we came across.

3.5. The discursive perspective on the future

How far their opinion on mining may lie apart, all our informants agreed on one thing: they did not have a rosy picture of the future. Everyone is, justly, concerned about what will happen when the mine leaves.

3.5.1. *Blaming each other*

In addressing the future of San Miguel Ixtahuacán and what will happen after the mine closes, the municipality mostly blames Montana Exploradora for a lack of communication, collaboration and information. The mayor is very preoccupied about the situation the mineworkers will find themselves in after closure. He stated: “The mine has brought about poverty, contamination, and social problems, but what I am worried about right now is what will happen with the workers.”¹⁰¹ He went on to say that there is no plan for compensation or reconstruction and Montana Exploradora does not collaborate to make a plan. On the other hand, representatives of Montana Exploradora blame the state for a lack of participation and presence in the area. As a representative stated: “What happens after [the closure], should be something the government should have planned for from the very beginning.”¹⁰² Montana Exploradora argued that it has fulfilled its obligations by paying all taxes and carrying out a technical and environmental closure, but its presence always has been limited. Therefore, Montana Exploradora shifts the responsibility about what needs to happen after the closure to the central government: “The state has to have a clearer vision of how they will assign enough resources for these remote areas of the country.”¹⁰³

With regard to the resistance movement, some fear that, when the mine closes, they will get the blame for it from the local employees who will be left without work. Although during the years they have tried their best to make clear to the employees that “we aren’t fighting you, we are fighting the company,” Emilia told us that she is certain that the mine will make it appear like the opposition is the reason for the closure.¹⁰⁴ “That’s one of the ways in which the company is injecting poison in the

¹⁰⁰ Interview with priest Eric, 28-03-2016

¹⁰¹ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 09-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

¹⁰² Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 30-03-2016, Guatemala City

¹⁰³ Idem

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

hearts of our people of San Miguel.”¹⁰⁵ She fears that, when the mine leaves, it will be a disaster for all of them.

3.5.2. *Anticipating disaster*

With regard to the resistance movement, they all agree that especially for the workers in the mine, it will be very hard to survive when the mine leaves, since at once, they will not have a job anymore. Some of them also feel the same counts for the municipality, that has gotten used to the amount of free money they receive every year. Locals also foresee further contamination, and fear that most of the toxic chemicals will only be released after the closure. They think contamination will worsen and life will be increasingly hard for the Miguelense people.

The municipality neither foresees a bright future for San Miguel Ixtahuacán. As mentioned above, the mayor and councilmembers all worry about what will happen to the mineworkers and what this will mean for the local economy and development. They anticipate a rise in unemployment and poverty, because, as the mayor stated, “all people depend on the mine.”¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, Montana Exploradora is not as pessimistic about the future as the municipality. Montana Exploradora admits the situation will change drastically, but stated that it is preparing its workers for the future. A representative argued that Montana Exploradora provides trainings, creates job opportunities, also in other mines, and runs several projects for its workers. Since the workers finished an internal training, they now have technical knowledge which is of use in the search for another job.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Emilia, 11-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

¹⁰⁶ Interview with mayor Ramiro Soto, 09-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

¹⁰⁷ Interview with representatives of Montana Exploradora, 07-04-2016, San Miguel Ixtahuacán

4. Conclusion and discussion

In this chapter, we provide an answer to our main research question: *To what extent does the discourse of indigenous communities contest dominant discourses of powerful actors in their resistance against a long-established mining project in San Miguel Ixtahuacán?*

In general, we saw that the discourse of the resistance within indigenous communities contests that of the powerful actors in many ways. We categorized the contesting aspects in five different themes, summarized below.

Gold mining:

First of all, the discourse of the resistance contests that of Montana Exploradora and the central state in the way that they ascribe value to the concept of goldmining. Whereas Montana Exploradora mostly perceives it as a tool for development, and the state a way of attracting foreign investments, indigenous resistance describes it as a violation of Mother Earth. However; the resistance is not representative for the rest of the population, and one of its main goals is thus to make the local people aware of their cultural inheritance and the importance of caring for Mother Earth. In contrast with what we expected, the discourse of the resistance in this aspect is hardly influenced by NGOs. Because of their juridical focus, most NGOs operate in a totally different paradigm. We have also seen that NGOs shape their discourse to the background of popular international discourses of ‘human rights’ in order to maintain legitimacy.

Impact:

The discourse of the resistance contests that of Montana Exploradora, because it attaches a totally different meaning to the impact of the Marlin Mine. Whereas the resistance emphasizes the importance of Mother Earth and, above all, the negative effects on the social and cultural fabric of the Miguelense society, Montana Exploradora argues that the Marlin Mine has positive effects on the local development and made a significant difference in the region, because now there are schools, hospitals, asphalted roads and water access. We also have seen that, in contrast with the literature, not just two opposite visions on the impacts of the mine exist, but several different stances, which aren’t all exclusively negative about mining. With their testimonies about dying cattle and drying rivers, the resistance furthermore contests the image that Montana provides about the responsible and harmless manner of operating.

Resistance:

By powerful actors, the indigenous resistance movement is often portrayed as a threat to state sovereignty (although the municipality also employs a discourse of empowerment), and Montana

Exploradora argues that it builds their arguments against mining on wrong information and cultural myths. The resistance contests this idea by stressing the importance of their Mayan cosmovisión, and their struggle for self-determination, against the Western imperialism and capitalism. We argue that the discourse of the resistance may be characterized as a discourse against modernity in general. Their discourse furthermore exposes the importance of the underlying power relations that have made equal dialogue impossible from the beginning. It is remarkable that by the local population, the resistance movement is sometimes considered as causing commotion and social division, rather than representing the stance of the majority.

Closure:

We find it remarkable that haziness exists about the apparent closure of the mine. While the mining company is very clear about the fact they are leaving this year because of a lack of gold, none of the local people believes this story. All members of the resistance emphasize that this predicted closure has have been propagated every year, and is just a part of the mine's discursive strategy in order to undermine critiques and keep opponents calm. According to them, the mine is already buying new lands and building new parts. Even more remarkable is the fact that even the municipality does not know for sure whether the closure would take place.

Future:

Although the future is not an aspect the resistance contests in its discourse, it is interesting that it actually is the only aspect on which all actors agree: the future will not be rosy. You may expect the resistance, who strived against the mining company for so many years, to be delighted with the prospect of the mine leaving, but the opposite is true. They fear it more than others, afraid they will get the blame for it. The municipality worries about the future of the local mineworkers and the effect unemployment has on society, while on the other hand, fearing for the loss of royalties. Even Montana Exploradora is apprehensive about the future, but points to the projects it has set up for it employees and emphasizes the job opportunities in other mines in Latin America.

It is important to first point out that, in contrast with what one would expect on the basis of current literature, the indigenous communities do not express a univocal discourse, as we supposed it would. Instead of resistance of the indigenous population as a whole, in the case of the Marlin Mine we found that only a minority of the population is actively involved in the struggle. Furthermore, the discourse of the resistance is only one of the discourses we encountered: different kinds of groups exist, who all employ their own discourse, which is not exclusively negative about mining. By many, the Marlin Mine is actually regarded an appealing job opportunity. This insight is an important nuance to the current literature, in which this possibly positive stance of a substantial part of the indigenous population is not yet acknowledged.

In addition, while in the current literature the indigenous resistance is often portrayed as voicing a direct opposition to the disastrous environmental impacts of resource extraction, we found that in the center of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, the social impacts are mentioned most. People mainly describe the changes in the way of life that the mine has brought, hereby pointing to impacts that are quite indirectly the result of the coming of the Marlin Mine. This makes it seem like it is actually the very rapid introduction of modernity rather than resource extraction, that people are resisting.

Apart from that, we have seen that in the case of the Marlin Mine, the mining company actually makes an effort to act in the most responsible way, hereby trying to refute the assertion that mining always would have a disastrous effect on surrounding communities. It even does more than is asked of them by the Guatemalan law: it pays more taxes, fills up the open pit during closure, and designs elaborate educational programs. The fact that the company is making such efforts, is probably a direct result of the negative attention that other mining projects have gotten during the last decennium. While until now, literature often focusses on the shortcomings of mining companies, we argue that nowadays more attention should be directed towards the shortcomings of mining laws of Latin American countries.

It is further important to realize that the state, to which we ascribed the value of powerful actor, may not be that powerful at all on local level. The municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacán was not involved in decision making processes and considered an open dialogue with Montana Exploradora as non-existent. Therefore, it is important to make a distinction between the central government of Guatemala and the municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacán. Their discourses are not at all uniform and even contradict each other. Of course, in current literature, this distinction is already made and attention mostly paid to the central state. Apart from that, members of the municipality were quite critical about the mine, and in many aspects, their discourse turned out to be more alike to that of the resistance than that of the central state. Although they are nowadays still regarded by the resistance as close allies to the mining company, we think a constructive dialogue between the two will be possible and desirable in the future.

In conclusion, we argue that the main issue that from the beginning stood in the way of an honest dialogue between the main actors, has not been environmental destruction, contamination, or the method of working of the company, but the existence of uneven power relations between the mining company and other actors. From the beginning on, Goldcorp and Montana Exploradora regarded the communities in a patronizing way in their discourse, stemming from the historical marginalization of the indigenous population, and thus not taking their voices seriously. We argue that the company looked down on the municipality as well; they did not truly involve them in the decision making process, but made it seem this way for the sake of appearance.

Of course, transnational mining companies will always be a very powerful actor in developing countries, but we have seen that in the case of the Marlin Mine, their way of operating has become more responsible and, as a result, the population less hostile. However, to ensure that these companies

will not misuse their power, we argue that efforts should be directed to the improvement of mining laws, in order to establish rules that restrict this power and above all protect the indigenous communities in a more comprehensive way. It is unrealistic to think that the upsurge of resource extraction in Latin America will decrease in the nearby future, and it is clear that the tendency of academics to make an over-simplified representation of the harmonious indigenous communities against the neoliberal capitalist enterprise, will not get us any further. By looking at the reality as constructed through the contesting discourses of different actors, we have exposed the complex dynamics that made any constructive dialogue between the actors near to impossible. We argue that based on the innovative contribution of this thesis, this image should be nuanced, and shortcomings on the side of the company as well as on the side of the resistance acknowledged. Lastly, we recommend to include the aspect of discourse in future research with regard to resistance against resource extraction. As we have shown, by neglecting the discursive level, important implications will be overlooked.

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Attachment 1: Summary in Spanish

América Latina es una de las regiones del mundo con mayor abundancia de recursos naturales. En la última década ha vivido una etapa de expansión de industrias extractivas en los territorios indígenas. En muchas partes, estos proyectos han generado conflictos entre las empresas mineras y los pueblos indígenas. En este artículo, se centra en el uso de los diferentes discursos en esta lucha en el caso de la mina Marlin, uno de los más grandes proyectos mineros en Guatemala. Específicamente, se analiza cómo el discurso de las comunidades indígenas disputa el discurso dominante de los actores poderosos: el estado de Guatemala en nivel nacional y local, y la empresa minera. El artículo está basado en dos meses de investigación cualitativa en San Miguel Ixtahuacán, cerca de la mina Marlin. Da una perspectiva única de la situación alrededor una mina que está en el proceso de cerrado. El artículo muestra que los aspectos más importantes en que los discursos se disputan son: la minería en general, los impactos de la mina, el tema de la resistencia, el cerrado de la mina, y el futuro. También, muestra que la imagen que da la literatura actual de la lucha de los pueblos indígenas contra la minería es poco matizada. Primero, en el caso de San Miguel solo una minoría de la población participa en la lucha; mucha gente está feliz con el empleo que la da. Por eso, es imposible hablar de la lucha de la población indígena como un todo: diferentes discursos existen. Además, el discurso de la pequeña minoría que sí sigue luchando, explica sus argumentos contra la minería como argumentos contra la modernidad que la mina trae. Segundo, la municipalidad de San Miguel Ixtahuacán no se puede ver como un actor poderoso: en realidad, no tiene el poder para decidir alguna cosa sobre la mina. Su discurso también se parece más lo de la población que lo del estado central. Tercero, la empresa minera no se debería ver como un malhechor exclusivamente. Posiblemente al resultado de la atención negativa en la media, su método de trabajo ha mejorado y hoy en mente, la empresa hace más por las comunidades cercanas que la ley le pide. Las autoras concluyen que la existencia de las relaciones de poder desiguales es el problema principal. Argumentan que los proyectos mineros no desaparecerán, y entonces el esfuerzo primero debería ser el mejorar de las leyes nacionales para proteger la población en lugar de aferrarse de una imagen demasiado romántica de las comunidades indígenas armoniosas que luchan la mala empresa capitalista. Esperan que este artículo será un primer paso en esta dirección.