

New Conceptions of Development in Guatemala: A look at the Escobal Silver Mine and a
History of Colonialism, Neoliberalism, and Extraction

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For centuries, Guatemala's story has been defined by the domination of Indigenous peoples and the environment in service of economic gain. This history reveals a profound lack of tolerance for the diverse ways of life and worldviews that define human experience. From the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadores to the modern expansion of Canadian mining operations, the country has faced periodic cycles of conquest that have prioritized resource extraction above human life. This model of development has time and again undermined the goodwill and amity necessary for a stable global society. This paper will examine the history of the Escobal Silver Mine to reveal how modern extractive policies continue the same legacies of colonialism, capitalism, and intolerance persistent throughout Guatemala's history. Through the examination of the conflict between the Guatemalan state, foreign corporations like Tahoe Resources, and the Indigenous Xinca people, it is evident that tolerance and goodwill are inseparable from the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty. To combat environmental disaster and systemic inequality fueled by capitalist accumulation, Guatemala must shift its developmental paradigm from the neoliberal philosophy of exploitation to one based on environmental and social respect. By recentering Indigenous cosmovisions that place humans as a part of nature rather than masters over it and by upholding international standards of human rights, the state can move beyond mere toleration to actively embrace a new perspective of development that prioritizes the protection of both nature and people.

Historical Foundations of Extraction

Guatemala's current land crisis finds its roots in the 16th-century arrival of the Spanish, who utilized superior military technology and the manipulation of pre-existing political tensions between rival Indigenous groups to conquer the Maya (Grandin et al., 2011). Spanish colonialism oversaw the subjugation of local Indigenous populations to newly established

plantation economies for the production and shipment of commodities like cotton, tobacco, and chocolate back to Spain (Sheehan et al., 2018). Following independence in 1821, little changed for Guatemala's indigenous populations who faced relentless prejudice and remained subservient to the new nation-state run by the Creole elite (Itzamná, 2023). The "Liberal Revolution" of the late 19th century further accelerated the theft of Indigenous lands to facilitate the Coffee Revolution, in what is sometimes referred to as the Second Conquest (Sheehan et al., 2018). In 1877, the Mandamiento Decree stripped Mayan communities of their traditional territory and transformed their old homes into large coffee plantations where many of them were forced to work, resurrecting the same labour regimes of the colonial era (Grandin et al., 2011). By the early 20th century, Guatemala's economy was transformed by export-focused agriculture and foreign corporate interference, most notably by the US-owned United Fruit company (Sheehan et al., 2018). This systematic dispossession was the result of an economic strategy that regarded Indigenous peoples as inconveniences and cheap sources of labour, as the state acted upon the belief that Indigenous land use and cultural sovereignty were obstacles instead of rights to be respected.

Civil War and the Rise of Canadian Mining

The October revolution of the 1940s brought a wave of "spiritual socialism" through the work of the Arevalo and Arbenz governments to consolidate constitutional rule, establish state-run security and health care, and most importantly, implement land reform (Grandin et al., 2011). However, these reforms threatened the great monopoly established by the United Fruit Company, who at that point controlled up to 42% of the country's land (Chomsky, 2021). Guatemalan dreams were cut short by a US-sponsored military coup in 1954, which reinstated a focus on petroleum, mining, and timber concessions. A 36-year-long civil war ensued that resulted in the

deaths of 200,000 people, the disappearances of another 50,000, 1 million internally displaced, and at least 200,000 refugees forced to flee this state-sponsored terror and genocide (Pedersen, 2018). Amidst this backdrop of violence, in the 1960s, the Canadian mining giant INCO was granted a 410 square kilometre concession from the government and began to forcibly remove Indigenous populations in the area to make way for their El Estor nickel mine (Howse, 2022). This period of Guatemala's history represents the climax of state intolerance for Indigenous peoples and the extreme violence and terror that can result from the prejudice inherent to colonial and capitalist ideology.

Throughout the mid-20th century, huge deposits of petroleum, nickel, and gold were discovered in the Indigenous territories of Guatemala, areas that coincidentally experienced the most brutal violence during the civil war (Quemé-Chay, 2023). The El Escobal mine was originally owned by Goldcorp, another prominent Canadian MNC with a thorough history of human rights violations (Howse, 2022). In 2010, Goldcorp sold the mine to Tahoe Resources, a Canadian company headquartered in Nevada to benefit from US trade agreements with Guatemala (Chomsky, 2021; Pedersen, 2018). In 2013, the Guatemalan Ministry of Energy and Mines under Pérez Molina granted Tahoe Resources' their exploitation license in the Santa Rosa and Jalapa departments for the Escobal silver mine, despite fierce local opposition (Nolin & Russell, 2021). The mine received a \$406 million USD investment and Tahoe Resources expected the project to become one of the largest and most profitable silver mines on earth (Pedersen, 2018). The El Escobal operation, located about 70 kilometres away from Guatemala City, provoked both Indigenous Xinca resistance and non-Indigenous campesino opposition from rights-based organizations and journalists in urban centres (Pedersen, 2018). The Xinca, who share similar experiences of racial and cultural suppression as the Maya, argued that they were

not consulted prior to the distribution of the licenses (Pedersen, 2018). In the context of broad opposition, Tahoe Resources and the Guatemalan government developed a militarized security strategy to put the mine into operation from 2014 until mid 2017, illustrating the disrespect and contempt of the state towards these communities (Earthworks & Institute for Policy Studies, 2025).

State Violence and Human Rights Violations

Since then, the Escobal mine has hosted a mass of violent attacks, kidnappings, the attempted murders of six community members, and the murders of four others (Earthworks & Institute for Policy Studies, 2025). On January 12, 2013, two private security guards at the mine were killed during a late-night assault, although there appeared to be no connection to local anti-mine protests (Pedersen, 2018). On March 17, three Xinca leaders were kidnapped, and one was killed by a group of armed men (Granovsky-Larsen & Weisbart, 2021). Regardless, on April 3, the MEM granted the El Escobal exploitation license to Tahoe despite 200 official resident complaints and concerns about the mine's potential health and environmental impacts, with about 98% of local communities voting "no" to the proposed mine (Howse, 2022; Pedersen, 2018). On April 27, 2013, security guards at the San Rafael mine shot seven unarmed men with rubber bullets who were gathered by the entrance of the Escobal silver mine in Southeastern Guatemala for a local community protest (Granovsky-Larsen & Weisbart, 2021). Video footage of the shooting displays peaceful protestors being gunned down by guards, with some sustaining lifelong injuries (Granovsky-Larsen & Weisbart, 2021).

In response, the government declared a siege and martial law in three municipalities around the Escobal mine, suspending the constitutional rights of Xinca citizens (Nolin & Russell, 2021). This declaration came from the same General Perez Molina responsible for the various

massacres of Mayan and Xinca populations during Guatemala's civil war (Howse, 2022). Molina deployed 8,500 military personnel, suspended constitutional rights, and allowed for the detention of anyone without due process, despite never receiving authorization from the Guatemalan Congress (Pedersen, 2018). By meeting peaceful protest with military force and the suspension of legal rights, the state demonstrated a violent intolerance for dissent, effectively signalling that the protection of the nation-state does not extend to its Indigenous citizens.

For years following these incidents, several community leaders have been shot or killed (Granovsky-Larsen & Weisbart, 2021). Civil and criminal cases were filed against Tahoe Resources in 2013 and 2014, and a legal injunction finally led to the mine's temporary suspension in 2017 by Guatemala's Supreme Court of Justice (Granovsky-Larsen & Weisbart, 2021). However, on September 10, 2017, the court reinstated the suspended license to Tahoe's subsidiary, Mineral San Rafael, on the condition that a formal Indigenous consultations process be carried out (Pedersen, 2018). In 2019, the Vancouver-based company Pan American Silver purchased Tahoe Resources (Pedersen, 2018).

This fourth wave of conquest through extractivism for gold, silver, rare earth, lithium, and other minerals in Indigenous territories has continued the century long legacies of violence, racism, and hatred familiar to most Guatemalans (Quemé-Chay, 2023). During the mines operation from 2014 – 2017, the Escobal project reduced the surrounding area to unlivable conditions and subjected local communities to intimidation and physical violence (Granovsky-Larsen & Santos, 2021). For example, the residents of the nearby town, La Cuchilla, were forced to leave when mine blasts cracked the walls of their homes and intensive water use left their water supply contaminated by arsenic and lead, reaching 700% above safe consumption levels (Granovsky-Larsen & Santos, 2021). While Tahoe Resources attempted to gain licensing for the

project, they insisted that no Indigenous peoples lived in the area, despite the land around the mine being the traditional territory and home of the Xinca Indigenous people as well as many Ladinos (Granovsky-Larsen & Santos, 2021). Furthermore, the “Canada Brand” report revealed that between 2012 and 2013, seven people were murdered, 29 were physically injured, and 50 community members were arrested at the Escobal mine (Pedersen, 2018). These statistics affirm the shift of state violence away from police-military-private security towards targeted assassinations following the turbulent 2013 period (Granovsky-Larsen & Weisbart, 2021). In mid-2017, community members organized two ongoing twenty four hour encampments and blockades to enforce the mine’s license suspension, despite the real threat of assassination and murder that many faced between 2013 and 2018 (Granovsky-Larsen & Weisbart, 2021; MiningWatch Canada, 2025).

In 2018, the Constitutional Court of Guatemala mandated a new formal consultation process concerning the Escobal silver mine and the Xinca people in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, adopted by Guatemala in 2007 (Earthworks & Institute for Policy Studies, 2025). However, the consultation process has brought on more conflict and violence for many in the community, with several families enduring harassment, threats, attacks, and some even forced to flee outside the country (Earthworks & Institute for Policy Studies, 2025). Nevertheless, the court’s decision has obliged the Guatemalan government to uphold International legal standards by seeking the free, prior, and informed consent of the Xinca people, who have since withheld their consent and continued to lobby for the permanent closure of the Escobal mine (MiningWatch Canada, 2025).

Canada dominates the global mining industry, with 57% of the world’s public mining companies listed on the Toronto Stock and Venture Exchanges, which generate 70% of the total

equity capital raised from the entire global mining industry (Nolin & Russell, 2021; Wanless & Klippenstein, 2021). The Canadian government works to encourage and facilitate mining operations in Guatemala, despite the obvious violence and harms that these activities produce (Nolin & Russell, 2021). Investments in the Canadian Pension Plan have provided millions of dollars to Goldcorp and Tahoe Resources, despite both companies alleged human rights abuses in Guatemala (Pedersen, 2018).

While Mayan and Xinca populations in Guatemala are robbed of their traditional territories and are denied access to the basic resources required for survival, Canadians retire on their investments and stocks all tied into mining, directly benefitting from and exacerbating Guatemala's history of exploitation, corruption, and racism (Nolin & Russell, 2021). It has become nearly impossible for Canadians to divest from mining, with the country's entire financial system constructed around the success of extractive industry (Pedersen, 2018). Canadian political processes and domestic laws make it easy for companies to carry out human rights violations abroad, offering them a haven of impunity while our consular services promote and support mining operations that propagate systems of repression and corruption (Laplante, 2021). In South America alone, Canadian owned mines have been connected to 44 deaths and 400 injuries between 2000 and 2015, as well as 709 cases of criminalization against peaceful protestors by 28 companies (Nolin & Russell, 2021; Wanless & Klippenstein, 2021). Despite these numbers, the Canadian embassy continues to push the "mining is good for development" brand of capitalist imperialism while ignoring and denying reports of repression and harm linked to Canadian companies (Nolin & Russell, 2021).

The practices promoted through the Canadian and Guatemalan governments have had catastrophic impacts on community life for opposition groups who are routinely targets of

violence and intimidation (Pedersen, 2018). The government continues to promote the “Canada Brand” through CSR codes, the proliferation of pro-development and nationalist duplicity, and the dismissal and delegitimization of opposition (Pedersen, 2018). The Guatemalan government has openly embraced neoliberal policies, granting 367 mining licenses between 1996 and 2014 without any requirement for Indigenous consultation. Canadian companies like Tahoe Resources often utilize corporate social responsibility codes as a form of diplomacy, while simultaneously benefiting from local militarized security to ensure project operations. The Guatemalan government’s strategy of growth has placed the promotion of extractive industries and the free market at the centre of its vision of development, which has only entrenched dependencies and exploitation further into its economic and political order (Aguilar-González et al., 2018).

Canada has failed to hold MNC’s accountable for their practices and has seemingly embraced the global imperialist system by fostering a permissive tax environment, legal regimes, and foreign policy to nurture aggressive company expansion (Gordon & Webber, 2016). In this way, the same cycles of exploitation and discrimination repeat, with companies and owners accumulating mass swaths of revenue from Latin America’s mineral wealth while further entrenching the legacies of dislocation, environmental deterioration, and violence common to the global south. In 2012, Canadian mining companies earned a total of 19.3 billion while aid expenditures from Canada to Latin America added up to a mere 187.7 million (Gordon & Webber, 2016). The level of impunity and security at which these companies operate, as well as the unwavering support they receive, has put into question the very fundamentals of democracy and law that are meant to underline the liberal international order (Gordon & Webber, 2016). For the past two decades, mining companies have used IBAs, FIPAs, and international arbitration panels to demand compensation from foreign governments for any policies implemented that are

perceived as reducing the value of the company's investment (Gordon & Webber, 2016). Furthermore, these companies avoid any legal responsibility for harms they cause by self-organizing through a labyrinth of corporate structures and hundreds of subsidiary companies to confuse legal processes and redirect blame (Gordon & Webber, 2016). For example, Tahoe Resources subsidiary company, Mineral San Rafael, was used to reinstate the company's suspended license during the 2017 dispute.

Guatemala has never possessed a meaningful form of democracy. Since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, six out of eight Guatemalan presidents have faced allegations of corruption (Nolin & Russell, 2021). Although we have been taught that liberalism and democracy go hand and hand, the free market has repeatedly and consistently resulted in support for coercive, corrupt, and authoritarian regimes (Klein, 2007). Extraction is just the latest form of systematic oppression and violence inherent in neoliberal ideology, explaining why private companies often use militarization, the criminalization of opposition, and the deployment of violent legal and political frameworks across entire ecosystems to support their projects (Granovsky-Larsen & Santos, 2021). For instance, Tahoe Resources hired the Golan Group, an Israeli private security company used by Goldcorp and Hudbay Minerals in previous years, to suppress mining opposition (Pedersen, 2018). In fact, a comparative study by Granovsky-Larsen, Simon, and Santos in 2013 on the Escobal mine found that extractive corporations and PMSC's operate according to a war mentality, illustrating the brutality built into these companies' strategies.

Clashing Paradigms: Neoliberalism vs. Indigenous philosophies

The latest trend of Canadian extraction is just the fourth wave of a periodic cycle of conquest – from imperial Spain, to local and international capitalism, and by state terror (Nolin

& Russell, 2021). Contemporary mining laws and neoliberal policy have simply continued Guatemala's long legacy of dispossession, lack of consultation, and violence. The late 19th century oversaw the rise of capitalism through the exploitation of the coffee and banana industries, forcing Indigenous peoples off their lands and entrenching systems of private property and racial superiority (Quemé-Chay, 1993). This is a development model that began with the Doctrine of Discovery which has always prioritized colonial ideologies and western ideas of progress (Quemé-Chay, 2023). The establishment of the liberal state preserved Creole rights to law and citizenship, while ignoring the general (Quemé-Chay, 2023). The paradigms of unabated progress and economic development and its establishment of thoughts, narratives, and perspectives have systematically continued to benefit the small percentage of elites while harming the dominated through indoctrination, displacement, forced labour, and violence (Quemé-Chay, 2023). Capitalist imperialism resembles the same colonial empires of the past through their relations with the lower class, the domination of territory and peoples by military pursuit, and the use of economic coercion and extraction (Gordon & Webber, 2016).

The ideology behind colonialism, with its fundamental exploitation of Mother Nature and the advancement of science and technology to fuel the necessities of development and profit, is how capitalism was born (Quemé-Chay, 2023). At the hands of neoliberal policy, countries in the global south watch their natural resources deplete at the benefit of transnational companies and foreign states (Pedersen, 2018). While the Canadian government has argued that mining brings development, creates jobs and infrastructure, and increases national revenue, it has only resulted in the subjugation of social and political life to the demands of the market (Pedersen, 2018). Following the peace accords, Guatemala entered the world economy as a state void of trade barriers, private domestic business, and welfare systems (Pedersen, 2018). This has led to the

acceleration of insecurity, poverty, and the inequitable distribution of resources to benefit the Guatemalan elite (Pedersen, 2018). Guatemala has become the ideal place for mining companies due to its lack of state regulation on operation and the government's refusal to reveal the industry's history of colonization, violence, and Indigenous rights violations. The development model propagated by these companies is measured by the number of jobs created, economic revenue generated, and money invested, despite terms of employment being temporary, limited, and the lack of revenue dispersed to local communities. The rapid increase of mining, hydroelectric, and petroleum operations have had devastating impacts on local ecosystems and Indigenous communities by destroying land and poisoning water (Grandin et al., 2011).

Guatemala's story is just one of many when we discuss the effects of capitalist imperialism from the global north to south, using structural adjustment programs, free trade, market liberalization and international institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to concentrate profits from domestic resources into foreign hands (Gordon and Webber, 2016). Neoliberalism's main function is less to remedy poverty and inequality than to organize them to maintain the pre-existing colonial hierarchies from north to south in a process of development that ignores environmental costs and internal conflicts in the pursuit of maximum economic benefit (Aguilar-González et al., 2018).

This stems from the colonial Christian lens of progress and civilization, embedded in ideas of racism and supremacy. The laws of Christianity and the Doctrine of Discovery granted colonial Imperial European powers the right to dominate lands across Asia, Africa, and the Americas by classifying natives as savage, pagan, and uncivilized (Quemé-Chay, 2023). Rigoberto Quemé-Chay explains this phenomenon through two cosmologically different conceptions of development: First, the Judeo-Christian mode that uses biblical precepts to situate

man above nature with the right to exploit the natural world and equates progress as economic advancement. He calls this the “philosophy of death,” arguing that this model of development has driven violence and unsustainable modes of production for centuries (Quemé-Chay, 2023). This desire for godlike powers underlining liberal-capitalist free market ideologues explains why this model is so frequently drawn to crises and disasters (Klein, 2007). Ultimately, the imposition of this philosophy represents the ultimate form of intolerance, as it seeks to silence, assimilate, and replace an Indigenous worldview that prioritizes the preservation of life over the accumulation of capital.

The Escobal conflict reveals two clashing conceptions of development. First, there’s the capitalist mode which views man as a superior to nature and equates progress with economic revenue regardless of the human cost. On the other hand, there’s the Indigenous cosmovision which advocates for a relationship with the land based on preservation and survival. The Xinka have resisted the mine not merely for economic reasons, but to protect their cultural identity and the sanctity of their environment. This paradigm of violence, death, and inequality that neoliberal organization has brought us must end. We need to reimagine a way of thinking that reflects new conceptions of love, justice, and sustainability (Nolin & Russell, 2021). For centuries, the Mayas believed that all of nature was alive with humans, animals, stones, and plants all bending to its design (Quemé-Chay, 1993). Western philosophies of death and the sacrifice of nature in service of economic growth has resulted in monumental global inequalities and climate catastrophes, with us fast approaching nature’s limits. It is time to reposition nature above humans and society, with a focus on community well-being and sustainability (Quemé-Chay, 1993). Indigenous conceptions of development that seek to protect environmental and intergenerational connections will protect our land, waterways, and cultures (Watene, 2023).

Legal Accountability and the Path Forward

Meaningful change in Guatemala depends on the rule of law. In 2017 and 2018, the Guatemalan Constitutional Court suspended the Escobal mine's license, citing discrimination and the lack of consultation with the Xinca (Laplante, 2021). This decision aligns with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, marking a rare moment where international human rights standards were used to hold elites accountable. Although Guatemala holds one of the lowest investigation and conviction rates in Latin America, the court's decision to respect Xinca rights to free, prior, and informed consent under UNDRIP represents an optimistic step in the right direction.

Furthermore, in 2014, the seven men assaulted by Tahoe Resources' security forces at their Escobal mine in 2013 filed a civil suit against the company in British Columbia (Pederson, 2018). In 2019, the seven victims successfully sued the company and Pan American Silver, the successor of Tahoe Resources, took full responsibility for the shooting and human rights violations (Earthworks & Institute for Policy Studies, 2025). This is just one example of the many cases being tried through the Canadian court systems, including three against Hudbay Minerals (Pedersen, 2018). These examples show us the potential of law to hold mining companies accountable for the harm and destruction they cause both abroad and at home. Legal reforms also possess the potential to make a difference by holding Canadian corporations to a set of enforceable laws and standards instead of voluntary standards and agreements like CSRs and IBAs (Wanless & Klippenstein, 2021). Two basic legal reforms could remedy this instantly; First, the elimination of the legal principle "forum non conveniens" to facilitate legal action brought by individuals outside of Canada against mining companies to be tried in Canadian courts for harms committed internationally (Wanless & Klippenstein, 2021). Second, the

elimination of limited liability or the division of transnational corporations into irresponsible subsidiaries, a system which has allowed shareholders and company executives to avoid blame for the violence proliferated by their companies (Wanless & Klippenstein, 2021). These legal challenges serve as a necessary intervention against corporate intolerance, asserting that the principles of goodwill and amity must be enforced through accountability rather than left to the discretion of extractive industries.

News coverage and the production of honest, complex, and truthful histories is also critical to bring about meaningful change. The abuse, power, wealth, and impunity that many mining companies enjoy is a direct result of civilian ignorance (Nolin & Russell, 2021). The re-writing and erasure of history by the elite has been fundamental to the preservation of the status-quo and has been a part of Guatemala's history since the Spanish colonial authorities stole and destroyed sacred and ancient Mayan artifacts (Grandin et al., 2011). It is one of the most powerful weapons of the defenders of structural violence (Farmer, 2004). For those at the top, forgetting is a way of creating bubbles of ignorance that allow them to enjoy privilege without facing the darker history by thinking of other peoples or countries in simplistic terms and as undeveloped, backward, or behind (Chomsky, 2021).

However, this is still a hard-fought battle within the country. After Juan José Gerardi presented the REMHI report in 1998, an investigative report of the civil war from 1960 – 1996, he was found viciously beaten to death two days later (Nolin & Russell, 2021). Furthermore, there are still factions of the Guatemalan military who deny that a genocide occurred, despite Rios Montt's 2013 conviction (Pedersen, 2018). But history is our instruction manual, it's our path forward, and if we keep misreading it then we can never build anything new. The Canadian media has not accurately covered or focused on the human rights violations or sketchy operations

of Canadian mines down south (Nolin & Russell, 2021). With more work to promote and highlight the human rights abuses committed by these companies to the Canadian public, the functions of law and democracy to hold corporations accountable become infinitely more powerful. Historical memory is vital to healing, reconciliation and truth.

Indigenous advocacy and resistance is also vital to the reconstruction of Guatemalan development paradigms. Since 2006, almost one million Guatemalans have organized themselves into *Consulta Comunitarias* to demand self-determination for local communities and negotiate with foreign companies to protect their natural resources and land (Laplante, 2021). This system reclaims power from the country's neoliberal extractive sector and corrupt systems with a focus on Indigenous conceptions of land, sovereignty, democratic participation, rule of law, and the right to free, prior, and informed consent (Laplante, 2021). Indigenous activists have even begun to infiltrate municipal politics with a focus on community participation to resolve issues like water, sewage, road construction, and the development of cultural activities (Rasch, 2012).

Furthermore, many are chasing the idea of a plurinational state, one that acknowledges the interculturality and participation of the Maya, Mestizos, Garifunas, and Xinca without the constraints of qualified citizenship in a representative democracy with a redirected focus on decolonization and earth-centered environmental models of development (Itzamná, 2023). Tied into this are ideas about land distribution reform. Around 60% of Guatemala's population is Maya (Rasch, 2012). For the country to realize a democratic and pluralistic state, the recognition of rights and lands to Indigenous peoples is required (Quemé-Chay, 2023). Land reform is necessary to repair the centuries of unequal access to territory that has laid the foundation of colonial and neoliberal struggles. A plurinational state is the structural embodiment of tolerance,

requiring a foundational goodwill that recognizes Indigenous land rights not as a threat, but as an essential component of a peaceful and unified nation.

Conclusion: Reimagining Development

Until the inequalities embedded in our global economic, political, and military orders are eradicated, meaningful change in mining-linked violence and environmental destruction will not change (Nolin & Russell, 2021). This requires upholding the rule of law and democracy above the demands of the market and finally reforming Canadian foreign policy to hold companies accountable for abuses and crimes committed under their watch (Nolin & Russell, 2021). Neoliberalism is the maximum extension of a philosophy of greed, violence, and over consumption that is ridiculously unsustainable. For real change to take effect, we must envision an alternative model where economic progress and environmental protection are compatible (Quemé-Chay, 1993). This begins with changing land ownership patterns and adopting new strategies for environment conservation that emphasize community participation over technology (Quemé-Chay, 1993). We must understand that development must be based on peace and democracy, not profit, and that capitalist-productive logics of economic organization ultimately result in irrational extractivism and accumulation by means of exploitation (Quemé-Chay, 1993). We must work towards a future that involves the complete integration of the Maya, the Xinca, and Indigenous cosmovisions of progress with an emphasis on harmonious and environmentally sound development.

The history of the Escobal mine proves tolerance cannot exist in a vacuum of corporate impunity or state-sponsored violence. Without a foundational respect for the ‘other’ – in this case, the Xinca and Maya peoples – there can be no lasting peace or amity between nations. If we are to honour the spirit of respect and acceptance, we must move towards a society that

practices mutual respect for all backgrounds. True goodwill depends on more than diplomatic rhetoric; it requires the Canadian government and its mining industry to take responsibility for the violence subsidized by their investments. By transitioning to a development model that goes beyond tolerance and embraces a worldview that values the lives of the Xinca and Maya above the extraction of silver and gold, we can begin to dismantle the bubbles of ignorance that allow privilege to flourish at the expense of human rights. By highlighting Indigenous understandings of nature and enforcing international human rights standards, Guatemala can rework its politics around a view of development that celebrates and protects nature and peoples as opposed to destroying them. Ultimately, this shift is necessary to encourage peaceful and just relations among nations and peoples through the practical enforcement of international human rights and the humble recognition of our shared dependence on a healthy planet.

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