

MINE: A public ethnography of the case of Minera San Xavier in Cerro de San Pedro, Mexico

by

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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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Abstract

Canadian companies lead the world in the development of mineral commodities and mining is crucial to the Canadian economy. Recent research shows instances of civilian criminalization, injury, and even death in connection to Canadian mining companies operating across Latin America. This project explores issues related to conflicts between Canadian mining interests and local communities through a public ethnography of the case of Minera San Xavier in Cerro de San Pedro, San Luis Potosí, Mexico. The results challenge the often-polarized discourse on mining by creating space for narratives based on the communities' experiences, which prove to be more nuanced. The end discussion offers insights into the socio-economic and political factors underpinning mining conflict and the role of public ethnography in deepening our understanding of these issues.

Dedication

To my grandmother, Bessie Vroom Ellis, whose commitment to education and documentary storytelling is an inspiration to all her “little pets.”

~

To my family, as always, for their unconditional love and support.

~

To Mexico, and to the dear friends I made while on this journey, *los quiero*.

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reviews provided additional depth to this project, as well as to my own understanding of public communication.

Introduction

In 1996, two years after the ratification of NAFTA, Canadian-owned Metallica Resources announced its plan to construct what it claimed would be one of the greatest open-pit gold and silver mines in the world (Vargas-Hernández, 2009). The plans for Minera San Xavier (MSX) were met with a mixture of apprehension, anticipation, and opposition by the residents of Cerro de San Pedro and the nearby state capital of San Luis Potosí in central Mexico. While the announcement of the mine brought promise of renewed economic development in the historic yet dying mining town, it also ignited significant concerns over the potential environmental impacts resulting from the mine's use of cyanide and large amounts of water in an already water-scarce and protected area. Original plans for the mine included the relocation of the town of Cerro de San Pedro, which was met with resistance. Founded in the 16th century, Cerro de San Pedro is one of the oldest original mine sites in Mexico.

With the arrival of Metallica Resources and subsequent resistance to the mine, the Broad Opposition Front (*Frente Amplio Opositor* - FAO) was formed. The movement was credited as one of the first instances of organized resistance to a large-scale mining project in Mexico (Altamirano, 2017). Despite multiple court cases being successfully filed against the company over false acquisition of *ejido*¹ lands, and the questionable validity of water and municipal land-use permits, the mine began operations in 2007 (Vargas-Hernández, 2009). New Gold (also Canadian-owned) purchased the mining project from Metallica Resources that same year. Ten

¹ A collective of farmers whose rights to a particular land base are protected under agrarian law in Mexico.

years later, the entire mountain directly behind the town — known as the *cerro* [hill] of San Pedro, which serves as the state emblem of San Luis Potosi — has been completely mined out by New Gold’s Mexican subsidiary company, Minera San Xavier (MSX). As the mine moves into its closure phase, residents who depend on the mine for employment are left with questions of what’s to come. Opponents, left jaded by the actions of the Mexican government, continue to dispute the legitimacy of the mine to this day (Stoltenborg & Bolens, 2016).

Utilizing the ethnographic case study approach (Gallant, 2008) this project explores how the communities of Cerro de San Pedro have experienced MSX, as well as the social, economic and political factors underpinning conflict around the mine. The results are displayed as a web-based, multi media documentary using textual, audio and visual data, which can be viewed at <https://amandaannand.atavist.com/mine>.

Background

A report from MiningWatch and the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG) (2015) states that “60% of mining companies in the world [are] listed on the Canadian Stock Exchange” (p. 7) and that an estimated 32% of Canadian mining firms have been involved in reported mining conflicts (p. 8). Despite having signed on to frameworks to address social and environmental issues related to mining operations abroad, the former Conservative government in Canada was heavily criticized for not meaningfully addressing these issues (Sagebien et al, 2008). Numerous organizations continue to raise alarm bells over the increasing criminalization and violence against those in opposition to Canadian mining interests in Latin America (MiningWatch & ICLMG, 2015; Imai et al., 2017), and criticize the current Liberal government’s apparent inaction on these issues as well (Khan, 2017).

The Canadian government provides support to the mining industry abroad through financing, insurance, diplomatic support, tax incentives, and research and development funding (MiningWatch & ICLMG, 2015). Neoliberal reforms across Latin America in the 1990s opened these economies to foreign investment while leaving social, environmental and cultural protection to non-legally binding international frameworks, and weakened state regulations subject to corruption. These negative impacts have been well documented (Clark, 2003; Helwege, 2015; North, Clark, & Patroni, 2006; Sagebien et al., 2008). Canada and Mexico have a close economic relationship through trade agreements such as NAFTA, and Canada was heavily involved in the widespread economic restructuring throughout Latin American in the 1990s (North, Clark & Patroni, 2006). As a direct result, it is estimated that Canadian mining companies now own up to 70% of the mining concessions in Mexico (Studnicki-Gizbert & Bazo, 2013), making mining conflict in the Mexican-Canadian context an important area of study.

Research on Mining Conflict From a Communications Perspective

The way in which power is maintained through discourse is an important theme in communication studies (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Cameron (2012) outlines how economic and political structures rooted in neoliberal ideals shape the narratives on mining conflict between communities and Canadian mining interests in mainstream media and public discourse. Using Chomsky and Herman's Propaganda Model, which demonstrates how systematic hegemonic biases are perpetuated and maintained in mainstream media, Cameron (2012) concludes that "the dissemination of the neoliberal ideologies through [mainstream] media . . . leads to public obfuscation surrounding these [mining] issues and public policy in favour of

corporate interests” (p. iv). This is cause for concern considering the major role Canada plays in the mining sector worldwide.

The media, however, plays a dichotomous role when it comes to its portrayal of the mining sector. Many scholars argue that the idea of “social license to operate” pushed forward expectations of the mining industry through the evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Sagebien et al., 2008); this is largely due to increased public awareness through media and pressure from NGOs (Webb, 2012). But the notion that CSR alone can meaningfully mitigate the environmental and social impacts of Canadian mining abroad — in the absence of monitoring or enforceable standards — has been widely criticised by academics and NGO’s (Gordon & Webber, 2008, MiningWatch & ICLMG, 2015, North et al., 2006). Campbell (2006) argues that “the effectiveness of institutional constraints is only as strong as the monitoring and enforcement procedures associated with them” (p. 931). The absence of adequate governmental oversight of the mining industry, either at home or in host countries, makes public awareness of mining operations abroad that much more important.

Vannini and Milne (2014) argue the need to create communicative spaces outside mainstream media in their conception of public ethnography. Public ethnography is ethnographic research intended for public consumption. Ethnography, as a research methodology, aims to understand people by observing them in their own environments (Ivarra & Agüero, 2009). Literature specific to the case of Cerro de San Pedro includes research from an anthropological perspective (Schiaffini, 2011); environmental history (Chaves, Mendieta, Robledo, & Caretta, 2010); critical approaches rooted in political ecology and conflict analysis (Altamirano, 2017; Stoltenborg & Boelens, 2016;); and institutional ethnography (Herman, 2010). However, widely

lacking in the academic work on mining conflict in Mexico, including Cerro de San Pedro, is ethnographic work that utilizes public ethnography and visual approaches. The need for wider public awareness of the underlying issues related to mining conflict involving Canadian mining operations in Mexico can be addressed through public ethnography.

Methodology and Research Design

This project draws on characteristics of both case study and ethnographic methodologies, including the use of a range of data sources, immersion, and triangulation; in-depth and relationship-based interviews; and the use of rich, descriptive text. The research design takes an applied approach, characterized by qualitative and inductive research, an emergent and cyclical design process, and multiple methods of data collection with the goal of examining broader issues within a particular context. It also draws from the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm as an ethnography that aims to understand, explore and describe particular phenomena (i.e. mining conflict) as exemplified in the case of MSX. This research is emic in the sense that the aim of the work is to communicate the experience and perspectives of the community, but also etic in the sense that themes underpinning mining conflict are drawn out in the data analysis. Both these aspects are reflected in my own documentary work.

The research strategy and analytical lens for this study are grounded within the theoretical influences of Dhutta's (2011) "culture-centered approach", political ecology (Peet & Watts, 1996), and public ethnography (Vannini & Milne, 2014). The selection of ethnographic methodology was inspired by Dhutta's (2011) culture-centered approach which draws on subaltern and post-colonial theory to contextualize the links between globalization, neoliberalism, and marginalization: including how hegemony in the communicative space is

maintained by dominant structures and how communities challenge that. Political ecology is a wide field of study, which combines inquiry from the ecological social sciences with that of political economy (Peet & Watts, 1996) to examine social, political, and economic factors within environmental issues. Public ethnography makes academic research accessible to the public and provides a depth to publically relevant issues that journalism often cannot (Vannini & Milne, 2014).

The multi-modal presentation of this project embraces the merits of visually based communication, which Woodside and Megehee (2010) expand on in their writings on Visual Narrative Art (VNA). VNA speaks to the power of visual imagery in telling narratives as it engages subconscious processing in ways that text cannot (Woodside & Megehee, 2010). A wide range of ethnographic approaches, including public ethnography, supports the use of visuals.

Data and Data Gathering

The data for this study is the case of Minera San Xavier in the municipality of Cerro de San Pedro, located approximately 20 kilometers from the state capital of San Luis Potosi, Mexico, and focuses on the townsites of Cerro de San Pedro and La Zapatilla. Although original plans for the mine included the relocation of Cerro de San Pedro, the opposition was successful in the preservation of the townsite. Conversely, members of the community of La Zapatilla signed a deal with the company to relocate from its original location in exchange for new housing, public infrastructure, and employment in the mine — thus making way for the mine's heap leaching pads and processing facilities.

I chose the site of Cerro de San Pedro for this study for a number of reasons: a) it is a visually compelling location due to; i) the mines proximity to the town, ii) features of the

surrounding landscape, and iii) the symbolism of the mountain of Cerro de San Pedro as the state emblem and birthplace of SLP; b) the community of Cerro de San Pedro is relatively safe, has a small tourism base, and is accessible from San Luis Potosí (approximately 45 minutes by public transport and then a four kilometre walk); and, c) due to the presence of tourism and the familiarity of the community of Cerro de San Pedro with researchers coming to study the mine, I was able to work with the community independently and did not need to work through outside contacts or organizations who may have otherwise presented some kind of external bias or filter in my work.

Methods used for documenting this case include a range of ethnographic research techniques. I lived in the city of San Luis Potosí for four months and regularly commuted to Cerro de San Pedro and La Zapatilla, in order to immerse myself in the communities, make contacts, conduct document reviews, initial interviews, and participant observation (at community events, meetings, etc.). During this time, I also conducted my own documentary work which, combined with participant interview data, comprises the ‘write-up’ of my research findings in the multi-media documentary, [MINE].

During the fieldwork process, I identified participants to follow as characters in the documentary narrative and through them, tell the story of Minera San Xavier in Cerro de San Pedro. These were individuals with whom I was able to form relationships and who were willing to have their stories publicized. Additional individuals linked to the story of Minera San Xavier also participated both formally and informally throughout the research process, by providing information or perspectives that help flesh out the narrative. I spent countless hours in Cerro de San Pedro and became known as a photographer in the communities, as I showed interest in

documenting whatever it was that people wanted to share with me. I also made an effort to attend community events across the municipality, including *jaripeos* (rodeos), birthdays, baby-showers, *peleas de gallos* (cock-fights), festivals and pilgrimages for patron saints, community events involving MSX, and holidays. This was important to gain trust within the community, build relationships with potential participants, and to deepen my own understanding of day-to-day life in Cerro de San Pedro.

Much of the academic research specific to conflict around MSX has focused on the townsite of Cerro de San Pedro and the residents from there as well as the FAO movement (Herman, 2010; Peña & Herrera, 2008; Stoltenborg & Boelens, 2016). After spending some time in the communities and conducting the document review, I decided to focus a considerable amount of my research efforts on La Zapatilla, as I felt that both the academic community and the resistance movement (FAO) had overlooked that community's experiences; this decision is reflective of the emergent research design process. The majority of the households in La Zapatilla still have employment in the mine. However, with the mine's imminent closure, and lack of the similar infrastructure for tourism that the town of Cerro de San Pedro has, the residents of La Zapatilla are faced with the most uncertain future. The time I spent in La Zapatilla — building relationships with families, observing as well as participating in community events and daily life — deeply informed both my visual and analytical perspective in this work.

A total of twelve in-depth formal interviews were conducted with ten different participants; nine of these individuals appear as characters in the multi-modal narrative. The interview format for formal interviews was open-ended and loosely followed an interview guide (see Appendix A). Prior to having a formal and recorded interview, I met with each of the

participants at least once (and usually a number of times) to build relationships and trust, as well as to conduct informal interviews. In this way, I was able to get a feel for the participant's narrative, which helped me to prepare what I wanted to discuss with them in the formal interview (J. Harold, personal communication, February 24, 2017). Formal interviews ranged roughly from one to three hours. In addition to the participants that I eventually conducted formal interviews with, I had informal interviews/conversations with a range of other community members or people involved in the case of Cerro de San Pedro; three of these individuals also appear in the final research project. Interviews were recorded with both video and audio recording equipment to ensure that there were back-ups of the interviews. All of the interviews, with the exception of one in English, were conducted in Spanish and then transcribed into English. Written consent was obtained from all participants who gave formal interviews. Verbal consent was obtained from participants identified in the final project who gave informal interviews. Throughout my four months in SLP and the communities of Cerro de San Pedro, I took over 20,000 photos. The photo-essay as well as individual photos within the final project are intended as a visual reflection of the narrative themes and local realities.

Analytical Approach

Data obtained through informal and formal interviews as well as through observation was organized into themes via content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Rose, 2016). Drawing from the issues highlighted in existing literature on conflicts involving Canadian mining interests in Mexico/Latin America, these themes were informed by political ecology (Peet & Watts, 1996) as they relate to the social, economic and political factors underpinning the conflict over MSX. They also reflect different perspectives on concepts of development. These themes were further

refined as part of the emergent research design — based on local observation, field notes, and document review — and then arranged into a narrative storyline. The broad themes that emerged include:

1. *Personal experiences and perceptions on the chronology of MSX in Cerro de San Pedro* (how people experienced conflict over the mine, and/or the presence of the mine in the community, and the sequence of events involving the mine).
2. *Role of the mine in Cerro de San Pedro* (both the negative impacts and benefits from the mine, as well as the mine's role of "filling power voids" in the community where government is incapacitated or absent).
3. *Mining culture and identity in SLP* (the link between the history of mining in Cerro de San Pedro and SLP and how this is reflected in the mining culture and identity of the inhabitants there).
4. *Connection to landscape/place* (the significance of the cerro of San Pedro, people's desire to remain in their communities, and how connection to landscape/place served as both motivation to resist the mine and to embrace it).
5. *Canadian connection to the events of MSX in Cerro de San Pedro* (the link between governance and activism in Canada, and resistance and mining in Mexico).
6. *Future of Cerro de San Pedro* (speaks to the mine's impending closure and the need for good local, state, and national governance).

After considering the themes that emerged from the content analysis, I constructed a narrative outline to communicate the case of MSX in Cerro de San Pedro in a multi-media, documentary style format. The documentary narrative is grounded in Dhutta's (2011) culture-

centered approach and inspired by the oral history format used by Ginger Thompson in ProPublica's recent publication, "How the U.S. triggered a massacre in Mexico" (June 12, 2017). In an interview with Longform Podcast on her use of the oral history format, Thompson describes it as "ordering the voices", stating that the written, narrative connective tissue "to help [the] reader get from one form to the other" was very light (June 28, 2017, Longform Podcast #251). Thompson's approach was inspired by Svetlana Alexievich's (2006) *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*. Dhutta (2011) argues for a culture-centered approach in communication theory, which takes structure and agency into consideration when locating narratives from marginalized communities in

. . . the realm of the agendas of neo-liberal politics, and centers the margin as the site of global process of social change by listening to the voices of those communities that have historically been erased from platforms of academic enunciation and policy-making. (pp. 13-14)

The participants' voices provide the narrative in the case of MSX in Cerro de San Pedro, which I then stitch together with an impressionistic approach in my writing. Leavy (2011) defines this style as prioritizing writing as a storyteller, while remembering you are also a researcher (p. 96). This style is reflected by the tone of the project text, which is journalistic, not academic. I chose the oral history format (Leavy, 2011) for presenting my work because it utilizes my most foundational ethnographic material (the interviews) and best honours the voices and experiences of the participants while allowing room for supplementary visual data. The final photographs selected for the project reflect daily life in the communities of Cerro de San Pedro, the underlying tensions presented by the mine, and the permanence of the community in that place.

Results and Discussion

The case of Minera San Xavier embodies issues endemic to Canadian mining companies operating in Latin America, although the factors influencing them are complex. While scholars and NGOs are critical of the lack of oversight by the Canadian government (MiningWatch & ICLMG, 2015; North et al., 2006; Sagebien et al, 2008), it was clear from my interviews that impunity and corruption within the Mexican governments at the federal, state, and local levels were seen as the biggest issues. As highlighted at the end of the documentary narrative, good governance at the local and national levels is considered to be the antidote to the issues generated by the presence of the mine in this particular political climate.

Prior to beginning my field-work in Cerro de San Pedro, I had a preconceived idea of what the issues were, what I would find, and what people would tell me. This was based on my review of newspaper articles, academic literature, and writings on the conflict in Cerro de San Pedro regarding MSX. The bulk of this material was critical of the mine and how it came to be. My sense was that the majority of the community was against the mine, that the resistance was a “grassroots movement” emerging from the community, that the mine represented major failures in capitalism and globalization, and that the Canadian government was to blame for not having stronger laws and regulations in place to monitor Canadian mining companies abroad.

Going into my fieldwork, I tried to shelve these pre-conceived ideas and to be very neutral in my approach. I sought to speak to people involved on all sides of the debate regarding the mine: members of FAO, community members (those against the mine and those who lobbied for it), and staff at New Gold. The act of spending time in the community helped me understand things in a much more nuanced way. The atmosphere is calmer now, and the feeling I gained

from participants was one of reflection. While my previous readings of the academic literature and newspaper articles led me to believe there was still a very active resistance going on, what I found was that FAO is now divided and its impact greatly dissipated. This was supported by my conversations with Enrique Rivera and Juan Carlos Ruiz Guadalajara, who have since distanced themselves from FAO. The height of the conflict regarding the mine was close to ten years ago. While FAO still exists, it is a remnant of its original form, save for the work of a few key members. My observation is that FAO is (and was) comprised mainly of people from the academic and professional community in San Luis Potosí, as well as students. FAO splintered in the years following the height of the conflict with the mine as key leaders had major falling-outs. No doubt peoples' opinions on the movement vary greatly, but the excerpt from Enrique Riviera below clearly highlights the relationship between FAO and the communities:

There wasn't a relationship with the communities [and FAO]. There was a relationship with people, habitants of CSP that had been inhabitants in the years of the 60's and 70's. But the majority [of these people] already lived in SLP. . . . This was the problem with this movement, that we didn't have political capital or strong human capital in the region. Because all of this movement, was made (in large part) with people from SLP, . . . there had been, like what Lorena was saying before, sympathizers who were interested, yes in La Zapatilla, or there in Cuesta de Campa, but they made it hidden because they knew what could happen if they said no. They would say, "I am with you guys, but I can't go to your meetings or anything because if they see me, well I live here, right? Something could happen." There was a lot of fear, always. And so there wasn't a good relationship . . . so the work was made more in the capital, where we knew that we were going to find a

bit more force, because the communities are very poor, ignorant about the theme of open-pit mines, like how we were ignorant as well (personal communication, May 5, 2017)

Most research and media attention at the height of the conflict focused on the townsite of Cerro de San Pedro. Because La Zapatilla signed an agreement with the mine to relocate, I got the sense that the residents of La Zapatilla were written off by the opposition as being in support of the mine. In my observation, the majority of academic research tends to focus on Cerro de San Pedro. Mario Martínez — one of the original founders of FAO — still maintains an active presence in the community and serves as an intermediary between researchers interested in the resistance movement and issues with the mine in Cerro de San Pedro. Other researchers have gone into more detail about the political work FAO is still doing to lobby for changes in the mining code as well as hold MSX accountable to their remediation plans (Stoltenborg & Boelens, 2016, personal communication, Mario Martinez, April 14, 2017).

While this project did not include a discourse analysis regarding hegemony in the communicative space (Dhutta, 2011), it was clear to me that FAO had much more agency than local community members in generating an oppositional front to the mine. While the movement relied on the support of key community members — members who had family ties to Cerro de San Pedro, but had since left and received university education elsewhere — the bulk of the support came from SLP. There is a distinct difference between these community members compared to those who stayed in Cerro de San Pedro through the years of economic drought: people who perhaps lacked the education to obtain work in other contexts. While FAO played an extremely important political and social role in bringing serious issues to the forefront of the

debate, including environmental impacts from open-pit mining, and corruption and impunity in the Mexican government, as well as challenging ideas of development that prioritized mining over other options (like tourism); the idea that they were a grassroots movement from the community of Cerro de San Pedro is not really accurate. Whether this characterization of FAO happened intentionally or unintentionally, or whether it was generated by FAO or the media coverage of the movement or both, I cannot say.

In their discourse analysis of the mining conflict in the nearby Real de Catorce, Boni, Garibay and McCall (2015) outline how “certain discourses have been useful in the mobilization of people and resources, and have thus played a role in the conflict’s events and outcomes” (p. 763). In the case of resistance to the First Majestic mine in Real de Catorce, the NGO spearheading the resistance to the mine tried to gain support of the local community (many of whom supported the mine) by establishing alternative narratives around concepts of sustainable development (like tourism) — similar to the way in which FAO tried to gain the support of the local community in Cerro de San Pedro. In both cases of the First Majestic mine in Real de Catorce, as well as of MSX in Cerro de San Pedro, it was important for the organized opposition to attract and maintain local support. But in the case of MSX, New Gold also claims support from the majority of the community in Cerro de San Pedro, stating on their website “the Cerro San Pedro Mine has an enviable record of compliance with Mexican and international environmental, health and security standards and enjoys overwhelming local support as a trustworthy corporate citizen” (New Gold, Operations, Project Summary, 2017). Herman (2010) challenges this in her institutional ethnography of how MSX “engineered” their claim of “overwhelming” community support for the mine, stating “‘support’ can be ‘produced’ through

legal texts, a series of permits and a web of court rulings without necessarily implying that people affected by a project can make decisions that tangibly implicate outcomes” (p. 113).

Taken into consideration with the findings of Boni et al. (2015) it is evident that conflict over mining is rooted in a narrative battle.

In the case of Cerro de San Pedro, I saw that the mining narratives perpetuated by both the media and FAO as very “black and white”: where mining can only be viewed as “pro or against” as Marc Davila states (personal communication, May 5, 2017). Perhaps these strong narratives are what gain traction in media and government and are thus more effective in instigating change, but this is at the expense of exploring or accepting more nuanced versions of reality. What is missing in the public discourse on Cerro de San Pedro is an acknowledgement of the realities of the local communities, and the hard choices they had to make regarding immediate economic benefit for long-term environmental and cultural tradeoffs. This project is an attempt to fill that gap.

The relationship between the mine and the community members is convoluted. People’s perception of the mine ranges from very positive and protective to very critical. But there’s no clear divide. People I spoke with in La Zapatilla saw the mine as a means forward for the community, but also felt a tremendous loss for the old La Zapatilla. Those in Cerro de San Pedro also had mixed reactions: some saw the mine as a direct threat to their historical and cultural patrimony; others saw it as a means for economic advancement but at a high cost. As Oscar Loredó (personal communication, June 14, 2017) repeated to me a number of times, the mine brought damages as well as benefits to the community. Many people saw the mine as an opportunity, and this is understandable in a place where few other opportunities existed or were

legitimized. There are clear political, social, and economic structures which make a place like Cerro de San Pedro fertile ground for a mine like MSX: the longstanding history of mining in the region and the lack of economic alternatives are not the least of them.

Reflecting back on Dhutta's (2011) writing on structure and agency, including how communities at the margins are challenging dominant narratives with their own, I argue that in the case of MSX in Cerro de San Pedro, communities are using the agency they have *despite* the structures around them, to etch out the best life possible for themselves and continue forward with education and better governance. This project shows that at the community level, the narrative is not as black and white as a big bad mining company arriving to destroy everything and take advantage of the population, or a good mining company coming to solve all the economic problems. This project reflects elements of both those binaries, but in the end it is not so simple. Mining is a part of people's identities in Cerro de San Pedro, and while open-pit mining is a departure from historical mining practices in terms of the technology and environmental impacts, this identity factor plays a role in the community's relationship to the mine and to the landscape. Takach (2016) explores these tensions in his writing on place-based identity construction in Alberta — particularly in relation to tar sands extraction. He acknowledges the “complexities and contradictions inherent in negotiating place-based identity” (p. 121), and challenges how extraction is portrayed, stating:

... In the interests of sharing diverse voices engaged in the discourse around complex issues of environment, economy and place-identity, I sought to avoid the reductionist binary characterizing much popular-media news coverage and rendering it woefully incomplete. (p. 121)

The author goes on to acknowledge that popular news media faces resource and time pressures that may contribute to this incompleteness. This is congruent with Vannini and Milne's (2014) argument for public ethnography as a means of generating public awareness of important issues outside of the constraints faced by mainstream journalism.

Concluding Reflections

The research design and methodologies employed in this study were effective in meeting the objectives of the research question regarding the communities' experiences of Minera de San Xavier in Cerro de San Pedro. This methodological approach also supported the reliance on participants' voices and perceptions in telling the narrative as a public ethnography. The true test of the effectiveness of this project will be in its publication and dissemination. It is my hope that the viewer's response to the multi-media documentary will be one of reflection. I hope that taking the time to listen to the voices of the people who stood to gain or lose the most from the mine will prompt more questions and soften the otherwise black and white perceptions on resource extraction — a journey similar to what I have been on this past year. While I do not anticipate that most people who see the project, [MINE], will also be reading this paper, being able to write a paper that supports the academic pillars in my research decisions has been cathartic for my own process of reflecting on and grounding my work.

The additional questions I found myself grappling with in this process were those of tensions between identity and landscape, capitalism and globalization, development and culture. Who benefits from mining? Who doesn't and why? How does this relate to structure and agency? How are individuals using the options available to them to improve their lives in the best ways they can or know how? What are the socio-political and economic factors are that keep

those structures in place? NGO's, academics, and politicians have been pushing for years for tougher regulations on Canadian mining operations abroad. But as the participants conclude in the closing section of [MINE], better governance and education are seen as the keys to the future within the communities of Cerro de San Pedro and SLP. These findings support the conclusion drawn by Helwege (2015) who states that while

... support of investigation into criminal and environmental transgressions would reduce the sense that Canadian firms act with impunity in Latin America . . . the real work must be done within Latin America. Conflict over the distribution of mining's economic benefits and the burden of its environmental costs reflects deeply rooted social divisions and poorly developed democratic institutions. (p. 82)

Future research on community empowerment, democratic process and local governance could address some of the issues underscored by this project.

The conflict in Cerro de San Pedro has received a considerable amount of academic attention (Altamirano, 2017; Chaves et al., 2010; Herman, 2010; Peña & Herrera, 2008; Schiaffini, 2011; Stoltenborg & Boelens, 2016). A number of residents in the town of Cerro San Pedro told me about researchers from all over the world coming there to do studies. It is worth noting that the level of attention received by the mine in Cerro de San Pedro may be disproportionate compared to the impacts from larger mines in neighboring states, like the GoldCorp mine in Zacatecas (Garibay, Boni, Panico, Urquijo, & Klooster, 2011). Mines such as this one may not receive the same level of attention for reasons linked to access and safety, or lack of interest from urban-based organizations. This is important to consider when evaluating research locations, as factors such as inaccessibility and safety could take attention away from

regions with potentially more pressing issues in comparison to locations which are more accessible and well-known, such as Cerro de San Pedro, or Real de Catorce (Boni et al., 2015).

My curiosity about Canadian mining in Mexico grew out of my own experiences working with indigenous groups in the Athabasca oil sands region. I observed that much of the media and regulatory agencies' discussion of the oil sands and potential impacts did not adequately capture the realities of the communities' experiences, nor the pressures they faced. This observation is also supported by the work of Takach (2016) who states:

... My arts-based approach offered a broader view of how accomplished communicators not only help to instill the sharply drawn polarities of black and white, but also can help us navigate the murky sea of grey that can bridge them. Many of my participants expressed a keen understanding of perspectives on Alberta and the bit-sands beyond their own. This gave me a stronger appreciation of the complexities of the discourse and debate that I suspected existed, reinforcing my wariness to oversimplify it into a reductionist binary. (pp. 118-119)

I believe that the solutions to the issues we face at the heart of resource extraction lie somewhere in this 'murky sea of grey' — somewhere in these nuanced experiences, in an examination of our perceptions of development and the relationship between our identity and sense of place. It can't be found in exclusionary binaries.

The case of Cerro de San Pedro shows that people are writing and re-writing the dominant outside narratives in their day-to-day lives in their choices of work: achieving higher levels of education and striving to elect better governments in efforts to ensure a better future for their families and communities. I see two things happening in the discourse on mining in the case

of Cerro de San Pedro: how things “should” be — what regulations should be in place, how governments should act, how mining companies should operate, and how people are directly challenging the existing structures to generate change — contrasted by with how things “are”. This is where I see community members exercising their agency to make the best life possible within their realities and with what is perceived to be in their power to do. I think we need both these visionaries and realists to tackle the underlying social, political and economic structures that factor into mining conflict: the visionaries to chart the course for change, and the realists to keep us in touch with the everyday struggles of getting there.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

Questions

Section A: Getting to Know

1) Tell me about yourself:

- a. Where did you grow up/where is your family from?

- b. How long have you/your family been in Cerro de San Pedro?

- c. What do you do here in Cerro de San Pedro/for work?

- d. What do you like the most about living here? What don't you like? What about this place is most important to you?

Section B: The Mine

1) Tell me about Minera San Xavier;

- a. What did you think when you first heard about the mine? (Where were you/how old/doing what)
 - i. What do you remember other people saying about the mine before it was built? (community members/company reps/government)

 - ii. What promises did the company and/or government make about the mine?

- b. What has been your experience with the mine? (How has it affected you? Your family? Your community?)

- c. What do you think now of the mine? What positive things have come from it? What negative things?

Section C: The Conflict

- 1) What kind of conflict do you see/have experienced between:
 - a. The community and Minera San Xavier
 - b. Within the community/Within the ejido?
 - c. Between the community and the ejido?

- 2) What role do you think the government plays here? (Municipal/State/Federal)

- 3) What things do you think contribute to the conflict between:
 - a. The community and Minera San Xavier
 - b. Within the community/Within the ejido?
 - c. Between the community and the ejido?

Section D: Resolution

- 1) What kind of future do you want for yourself? Your family? Your community?

- 2) Do you think the mine contributes to that future? Or takes away from it?

- 3) What expectations did you have about the mine that were met? Or promises that were made? What expectations or promises weren't met?

- 4) What do you think will happen after the mine closes? Do you think the mine benefited your community?

- 5) What would you want to say to members of the Canadian public or government about Minera San Xavier? What would you like to say to the Mexican government?