Lot Eight / Lote Ocho

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This piece was submitted as a spoken-word poem. A recording can be found on the UnderCurrents website:
http://www.yorku.ca/currents
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[Author's Note - Content warning: this poem discusses sexual, gendered, and other forms of violence.]

Dedicated to the women of Lot 8 who are fighting like hell for justice not only on their land in Guatemala, but who have brought their historic fight into Canadian courts as well.

This poem is about Lot 8.
A community where we have sent our Canadian companies
in search of the nickel, the gold in the ground;
companies like Inco, Goldcorp, Hudbay
all determined to do away with
anyone there who's in their way
no matter how long they have been there, lived there
no matter whether they have anywhere else to go
to grow maíz frijoles platano
to sow the seeds for the plants that feed families.
This in Guatemala, a country where we have already so heavily left a mark
infamous euphemisms
like free trade, like structural-adjustment programs
adjusting exactly how we're re-colonizing these lands.

This poem is about Mayan families.
Those who have survived, have lived through
30 years of genocide started by a US sponsored coup
that Canada played a part in too. Guatemala,
a country where memories of the massacres are only beginning to fade
where justice has never been done so people see their neighbours' killers
every single day.
This poem is about Mayan Q'eqchi'.
Who now face a whole new slew of
Canada's best kept secret, these mining companies
who they've found have gone so far as to name their town.
And I guess it's true, that when the name you give a town
is a number – lote ocho, lot eight - and when you demarcate, delineate
the borders of a place with mineral exploration trenches
it becomes easier to designate people
as property.

And so, Lot 8 became quickly one of many communities
evicted illegally by a Canadian company arriving unexpectedly
with the police, private security, what looked like half the Guatemalan army
over 700 men with guns
who burned their homes, crops, lives to the ground
raining tear gas canisters
gunshots drowning out the sound of the town
screaming
mourning
disbelieving
what they were seeing
what was happening.

But Lot 8 had nowhere else to go
and so, after this eviction, this attack
the community had to come back and start rebuilding.
And 8 days later the men with guns came back too
only this time the town men were off in the fields
and the police, army, security found only women and children in the town.

And I feel like you know what I'm going to say
what the army, the police, the private security hired by our Canadian company
did on that day
But I promised Elena Choc Quib that I would repeat how 8 men
beat her
raped her
left her unable to move on the ground
and how she never gave birth
to the child she was eight months pregnant with at the time.

And I wish I hadn't heard the same story
from Irma Yolanda Choc Cac
or ten other women in the town.
Maybe this poem is about solidarity
Because if it’s the Canadian company, the police, and the army
who have raped you then who the hell do you have to turn to?
I can’t face that the only thing I could stand up straight
and say in Lot 8 was
lo siento
I’m so sorry.

Can’t face that all I could promise after all I’d been shown
was that I would tell their stories when I got back home.
And so.
I’m telling you.

But maybe I’m not done.
Because I kind of want to send fliers to all the nice
Canadians tourists who visit Mayan ruins
to let them know that every day our companies
ruin Mayan communities
with our mines. And with the community testimonies
activists have been gathering for years
I want to plaster the walls of the Toronto homes
of mining company execs. I want photos of
the whole community of Lot 8
whose names they won’t hear
who they will never meet, but who were forced to learn their
company’s name, to be some pawn in their twisted investment game.
And with these faces and places and stories for wallpaper, posted in Toronto
visibly, publically, let them dare to keep talking corporate social responsibility.
And let’s instead, for just a second,
access some humility, speak honestly. Because
I want to call it as I see it
and if this isn’t a new generation of colonization
then I don’t know what the hell this is.
Or maybe these systems of raping and razing and segregating,
creating euphemisms like “community resettlement”,
do have another name. Maybe that’s what our country calls
“international development”.
And I do believe this is development work
if the worth we’re developing
is Canadian stocks.
You know, maybe this poem is actually about Canada. Because I think we should take stock of our country and the companies of our nation that run 70% of mines and mineral exploration around the world. And maybe we should ditch the reputation, the idealization of us as a peaceful nation. And maybe let’s go personal for just a second, cause leaving aside the colonial myth, the legend, how many of us can truly say that we live where we do legally on lands that were not stolen?

Because colonization is not just about conquistadors and conquest, about residential schools or corrupt governments, about multinational companies and our investments. It’s about the millions of people on this land like me who are pursuing our own freedom our own wealth our own dreams at the expense of and subsidized by Indigenous people. Their lands, their cultures, their communities and their bodies. Whether we know it or not.

So let’s stop talking like we’re being generous handing out hand-outs or development charity and simultaneously handing-off responsibility to this or that ministry, or agency for what we are doing.

And beyond the size of our metaphorical ecological footprint, or whatever is trendy to quantify and analyze in this moment I would suggest we focus for just a second on where the hell we’re walking.