

# 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.

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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  
January 9th, 2007.  
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 metaphoric 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.