RESEARCH DESCRIPTION:

In Canada, as in most of the rest of the world, the current boom in mining has disproportionately and unequally affected Indigenous peoples and territories (Laforce, et al. 2012). Ballard and Banks (2003) suggest that Indigenous peoples’ modes of interaction with mining are closely related to their being able to exercise their right to self-determination. But what elements allow for the expression of Indigenous self-determination in the context of extractive projects?

Building on three-years of partnered research collaboration with representatives of the Cree Nation of Wemindji, Canada, and the Maya-Mam community of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, Guatemala, this SSHRC funded research seeks to answer this question through comparing Wemindji and San Miguel’s very different experiences with the same Canadian-owned mining company, Goldcorp Inc. (Goldcorp). Through oral history and ethnographic research in both locales, we aim to grasp: 1) what self-determination means and how it is exercised from Indigenous perspectives in Wemindji and San Miguel; and 2.) how various past experiences with externally-led development might have influenced contemporary interpretations and practices of self-determination with Goldcorp in these two communities.

Canadian companies conduct more than 40% of global mining exploration activities (RNCan 2013). As a leader in this sector at the international level, and having endorsed the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2010, the government of Canada is increasingly challenged by Indigenous communities and their allies throughout the world to find better ways to regulate the activities of Canadian-owned mining companies —both within its territory and abroad. Our research’s primary objective is to meaningfully contribute to the critical task of improving policies in this area. We more specifically aim to improve the prospects for substantive forms of self-determination in the context of extractive development by producing locally relevant actionable knowledge from an Indigenous perspective.

KEY LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

During the Fall term of 2017, the students will assist the Principal Investigator (PI, Karine Vanthuyne, University of Ottawa), and graduate research assistants hired for this project with the: 1) update the literature review; 2) coding of the interviews. Throughout the term, the PI commit to providing one-on-
one training to fit students’ individual learning needs to accomplish this work. To foster sharing amongst the PI and the students, we will also hold regular informal seminars. At these meetings, the students will gain fundamental knowledge about social and political theories, ethnographic methodologies, the history of Indigenous peoples’ relation to states and corporations in Canada and Guatemala, and contemporary issues in socioeconomic development. They will also become acquainted with, and position themselves within, local and international networks of research on mining, including U. Ottawa’s Interdisciplinary Research Group on Territories of Extraction (GRITE) that the PI is directing.