

An institute for “extractive governance” has moved to the Liu Institute for Global Issues at UBC. If we were to judge it from its partners, there are reasons to be concerned. Its largest sponsor is the Lundin Foundation, a foundation with corporate sponsors set up by the Swedish Lundin family, owners of the Lundin oil and mining companies.

CIRDI, or the Canadian International Resources and Development Institute, is a collaboration between UBC, SFU, and the École Polytechnique de Montréal, with support from the federal government and corporations. It operates on the assumption that Canadian universities can help countries make “better use of the extractive sector,” claiming that it is working to “Improve, in a measurable way, the ability of developing countries to manage and benefit from their extractive sectors in order to catalyze sustainable economic growth and reduce poverty.”

The logic behind the institute relies on the assumption that the Canadian government, companies, and academics know more and have better practices than those in the global South, and that the Canadian legal and technical norms should be exported. A similar myth exists in Sweden, the country where I grew up, which simultaneously works to silence its colonial past and present. This assumption is also coupled with another one, that somehow Swedish or Canadian capitalism and companies are “better” than those from other countries, more sustainable, fair, and technologically advanced. Such powerful myths are also the basis of a large part of research done in the name of “reducing poverty” or creating “sustainable development.” These neocolonial narratives uphold the idea that we can help people help themselves through technology and with the help of corporations from the global North, thus ignoring both structural factors and the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and communities.

While it is true that Sweden, like Canada, has a history of internationalism and solidarity, we shouldn’t forget that our high standard of living is dependent on the exploitation of resources in the global South and in Indigenous territories in the North, including national pension funds invested in mining and oil. In her book titled *Business in Blood and Oil: Lundin Petroleum in Africa*¹, which won the investigative journalism award Guldspaden in Sweden in 2010, journalist Kerstin Lundell writes about her struggle to sell her well-researched articles to the Swedish media. Her case illustrates how Swedish media reproduce the self-image that considers Swedes to be better than everyone else. Lundell notes that the racism that underlies this belief simply comes down to viewing “some people with such little worth as there being no point wasting ink to print news when their villages are being burned down.” (p.94). Canada, I believe, has a similar problem.

When I saw that CIRDI’s largest corporate donor is the Lundin Foundation ², set up by the

Lundin family (hailing from Sweden, but currently residing in the tax haven of Switzerland), I decided to share the information readily available in Swedish and international human rights reports.

Philanthropy in colonial history and present

The story I am going to tell is not one of a “few bad apples”, but rather a problem that resides at the core of what we call “development”. In any case, let me begin with the analogy of apples: a particularly bad apple called Lundin. Lundin is a conglomerate of extractive companies based in both Sweden and Canada headed by the Lundin family. Lundin Mining is based in Vancouver, whereas Lundin Petroleum trades on the Swedish stock exchange. The founding myths of the Lundin Foundation, ostensibly a philanthropic organization, are also based on the myth of northern exceptionalism. The foundation states that it helps create sustainable livelihoods.³ It was established by the Lundin brothers who dreamed up the idea on a motorcycle trip through Africa.

You may ask “well, what is the problem with a foundation like Lundin contributing to CIRDI?” To understand the aims of such seemingly benevolent philanthropic initiatives, it may be helpful to first consider a historic example. King Leopold of Belgium, who had carefully studied how to acquire and manage a colony to amass wealth, also established himself as a great philanthropist and humanitarian to justify conquest.⁴ Leopold did this by organizing international conferences to supposedly advance science, such as, for example, the 1876 Geographical Conference in Brussels with representatives from European countries and explorers. The king spoke about the need to civilize Africa and “pierce the darkness” through scientific discovery, but also about abolishing the slave trade and creating peace. The conference set up the International African Association, which served as King Leopold’s smokescreen.

In this way King Leopold acquired the Congo, and was responsible for the pillaging of resources, killing around 13 million people, and cutting off hands and heads in what became Belgium’s prized colony.

To a large extent, today’s neocolonial corporate-academic smokescreens are shockingly similar in their strategies to promote a humanitarian image. In the case of Congo, the Belgian plunder of resources set off many other interventions. For example, in order to protect Belgian interests in mining, Katangan forces supported by Belgian forces and the CIA assassinated the popularly elected leader, Patrice Lumumba, and installed the anti-communist Mobutu as Congo’s leader. The extraction of resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has continued by multinational companies such as the Lundin Mining Corporation⁵, which is operating the Tenke Fungurume Mine, one of the world’s

largest sources of copper and cobalt. Lundin acquired its contract during the dictatorship of Mobutu, and according to UN Inspector Jason K. Stearns, Lundin stated they had given the rebels \$50 million up front as down payment. 6 Journalists from the watchdog Swedwatch have further documented how the company displaced villages and that people became poorer as a result. 7

The myths of boys and men

But let’s go back to the first days of the Lundin companies. The founding father of the companies, Adolf Lundin, described the beginnings of the company on masculinist terms and with great pride. The company’s colonial undertakings were expressed as the dreams of a young boy who was looking for adventures and grew up to be a “self-made” successful businessman. Both in the company’s promotional materials and on a website called the “Miners and Explorers Hall of Fame,” Lundin is described, and has described himself, using words as “fearless,” and having “guts” 8. In a book about Rockefeller and Standard Oil, we learn that it was at the age of 14 that Adolf decided he wanted to dedicate his life to oil and mining. As a graduate from the Royal Institute for Technology in Stockholm, Sweden in 1956, his first job was with Royal Dutch Shell. He went to Colombia to drill for oil. Asked if it was an adventure, Lundin responded: “Yes, it was very good – very exciting for a young man to be traipsing through the jungle.” He also describes his first venture as just costing him the plane ticket to Qatar, where he then was able to acquire companies’ funding for the concession. When asked by an interviewer if he had to bribe an emir to get the concession, Lundin responded jokingly in the affirmative, and the story goes that he lost a bet, but got the license. After such successfully heroic beginnings, Lundin moved from Qatar to Vancouver, Canada, where his first mining company was called Adanac (Canada spelled backwards) and acquired the Ruby Creek molybdenum deposit in northern BC, on ancestral and unceded Indigenous territory.

Adolf was also described as a person who “compares to the great white hunters in Africa” [ibid]. And when the world established sanctions during apartheid against South Africa’s white minority regime that oppressed the black majority, Lundin was doing business there. In fact, one of Adolf’s prime role models was Cecil Rhodes, who established (read colonized) Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe) and founded the diamond business De Beers.

Rhodes, who was both a politician and businessman, pushed for a law of racial segregation in South Africa, the Glen Grey Act, which forced the population in the district around Cape Town off their lands. His mines were protected by his own troops who were often brutal against the local population. Famous for saying “I prefer land to niggers,” and for his belief in white supremacy, to Adolf Lundin Rhodes “promoted a healthy economic development in

Africa”9.

To Lundin’s sons, Adolf was an engineer in the truest form, “for the best of humanity,” and he had an “infallible optimism” that extraction of natural resources would prevent poverty 10. Lundin’s sons continue the legacy of their father by portraying oil and mining business as a mix between adventure and playful fun. The portrayal of Adolf’s son Lukas’ interests in extreme sports represents him as a risk-taking ‘entrepreneur’. In an interview with one of Sweden’s largest daily newspapers, Dagens Nyheter, Lukas Lundin said: “I like to build things, keep things going, do new business, find new oilfields and build new mines, it’s pretty fun”.¹¹ And in the end of 2015, Lukas said he was “almost euphoric” when Lucara Diamond, another Lundin company, found one of the largest diamonds ever in Botswana. ¹² Drastically less cheerful are the critiques of Lundin’s oil business in Sudan between 1997 and 2003. One doesn’t have to dig much more to understand how the language of adventure, fun, and progress attempts to hide its opposites: oppression, tragedy and a worsening of conditions. While in Sudan the company received harsh criticisms from Human Rights Watch and other human rights organizations for allegedly displacing people and for its complicity in war crimes. ¹³ In 2000 Amnesty International issued a warning that the civil war in Sudan was worsened by Lundin Oil’s exploitation. ¹⁴ In 2001 the company was sold to the Canadian company Talisman Energy, and in 2003 the concessions were sold to a company from Malaysia.

After publication of the 2010 report “Unpaid Debt” by the European Commission on Oil in Sudan (ECOS), members of the Swedish Parliament asked for Carl Bildt, then Swedish foreign minister, head of the conservative party and UN peacemaker who was on the board of directors of the Lundin company, to step down as foreign minister.¹⁵ The Swedish Prosecution Authority began a preliminary investigation which is now ongoing and will be the basis for a judgement on Lundin’s complicity in war crimes. A decision is expected in 2016. According to the ECOS report, Lundin’s operations led to 160,000 people being forcibly displaced and 20,000 killed. In his defense, Lukas Lundin said to one of Sweden’s largest daily newspapers that this was a case of “reverse discrimination” against those accused, and further blamed the problems on “tribal warfare.”¹⁶

Lundin and CIRDI looking for elephants

In an article about the Lundin Group, a geologist who worked 15 years with the conglomerate and who now heads Africa Oil, attributes the conglomerate’s success to risky business: “We don’t mind taking technical risks, if the risk is big enough,” and “Looking for elephants in Africa is the way we used to portray ourselves.”¹⁷ But the risks that Lundin is known to take are also political. In 2015, two Swedish journalists went to Ethiopia to

investigate Lundin’s activities and ended up in jail for 14 months. In their book *438 Days: How Our Quest to Expose the Dirty Oil Business in the Horn of Africa Got Us Tortured, Sentenced as Terrorists and Put Away in Ethiopia’s Most Infamous Prison*, Martin Shibbye, one of the journalists, describes Lundin as:

...a very special company, one known for kind of being non-ethical. They did business with South Africa during apartheid. They were kicked out of Congo by the U.N. They were doing business with Assad’s Syria. It’s an oil company that goes to areas where no other oil companies enter, it’s a very special company to be on the board of. 18

With such a reputation, Lundin has felt the necessity to whitewash its public image by promoting the philanthropic mission of its foundation. It was after Bildt resigned from Lundin’s board of directors and Adolf Lundin passed away that the company philanthropic foundation was established, as Adolf’s sons imagined a new future for the company. Initially called the Lundin for Africa Foundation, the company invested in re-imaging and social responsibility. The foundation supports “sustainable livelihoods,” but three separate studies of its operations regard it as ineffective in aid but effective as a business strategy 19, since such re-branding and greenwashing works to diffuse criticisms of its businesses’ operations. Similarly, CIRDI’s mandate to improve “extractive governance” is a form of greenwashing of the mining industry, a concept created to keep afloat the much-criticized term “development,” which has created such oxymorons like “green gold.” And “governance” is the depoliticized term used to avoid addressing power asymmetries between actors, who, in corporate doublespeak, are called “stakeholders.” The modern myth of progress tells us that we may have been mistaken in the past but with greater experience and more technology, we can achieve “sustainable mining.” On the contrary, many people and academic studies witness the ongoing destruction that mining and other extractive industries create, and how companies systematically undermine the right of Indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent.

Elephants in Vancouver?

As staff, students, or professors at the universities hosting CIRDI, how are we all implicated? What is our direct or indirect responsibility in CIRDI’s tacit approval and legitimization of corporate crimes and in its imposition of the dogma of extractivism? What kind of research does CIRDI support? What does it mean to conduct research when this begins with the assumption that, as CIRDI’s former executive director Daniel Dumas has asserted, mining somehow magically lifts a country out of poverty? This past summer, CIRDI’s summer institute on extractive governance collaborated with the UBC Centre for Democracy’s Summer Institute for Future Legislators and the Norma B. Keevil Institute of

Mining Engineering. One can only wonder what CIRDI’s summer institute taught its participants about colonial dispossession and displacement, such as the kind of historical dispossession enacted by Lundin and its affiliates. I highly doubt that the various reports and the related investigation of war crimes in Sudan ever made it into the curriculum. In a recent radio interview, CIRDI’s new CEO Cassie Doyle claimed that CIRDI only partners with governmental agencies, a statement in complete contradiction with information retrieved about the institute’s corporate support and partnerships, including the \$1,000,000 cash donation by the Lundin Foundation 20, and the fact that the Managing Director of Lundin Foundation sits on the CIRDI Board. As CIRDI is attempting to justify its existence by anxiously looking to form partnerships with various departments at UBC, researchers and graduate research assistants funded by CIRDI should be fully informed about its blood-stained funding. Furthermore, I find it appalling that student tuition will also go towards funding this corporate colonial venture. 21

For many students and researchers like myself, the site of our primary research interest may be far away, but that doesn’t mean that we should be passive when faced with the ugly internal mechanics of power and submission in our own universities. Rather than meddling in other countries’ mining laws, CIRDI, as an institute of a public university, could provide critical research to inform the development of a legal code that controls Canadian mining companies abroad and makes it possible to hold these companies accountable in Canadian courts, which is nonexistent to this day.22

As graduate students under constant pressure in a competitive climate to publish or perish, the professionalization of education of which CIRDI is but one example, is inherently coupled with depoliticization. Instead of publishing in journals that few people read and have access to, we as students and academics must use our acquired skills of “critical thinking” to listen, learn, and disseminate the examples of successful strategies of resistance to mining both in the global South and North, thus busting the myth of Northern exceptionalism. I am inviting you to join us.

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