

Extractivisms: Politics, Economy and Ecology

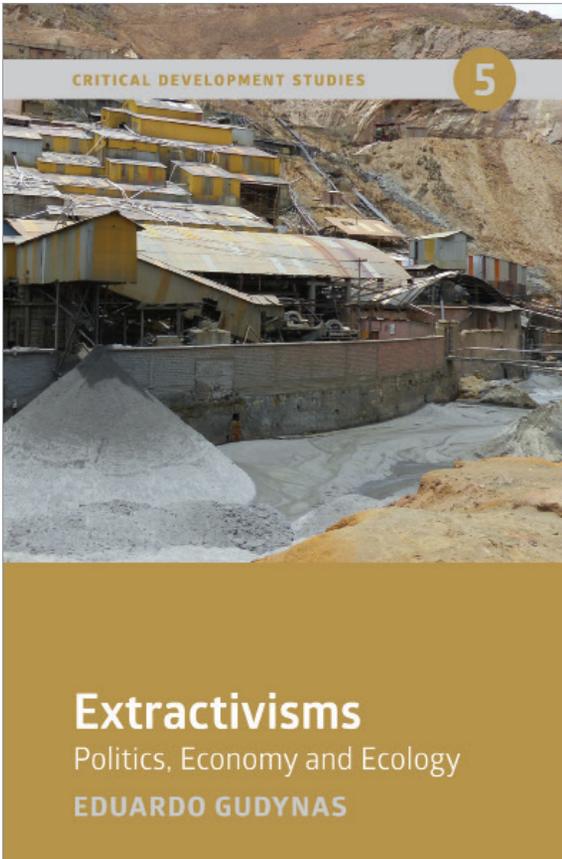
EDUARDO GUDYNAS

CRITICAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES



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CONTENTS

Introduction • Concepts, Local Impacts and Spillover Effects • Modes of Appropriation, Property, Access and Globalization • Diversifications, Defences and Narratives • Nature, Space and Territory • Values and Surplus • Violence, Conflict And Justice • State, Policy and Democracy • Postextractivist Transitions • Notes • References • Index

Extractivisms

Politics, Economy and Ecology

Eduardo Gudynas

Nature and communities in the global South are being overwhelmed at a shocking rate. In many places this is due to ventures such as large-scale open-pit mining, oil extraction in tropical areas and the spread of monocultures. These and other such forms of natural resource appropriation are known as extractivisms.

This introductory book adopts an interdisciplinary and critical perspective, incorporating contributions from economics, politics, ecology and more. Eduardo Gudynas explores negative local impacts, such as ecological and health degradation and violence, along with spillover effects that redefine democracy and justice. Significantly, presented for the first time in English is a comprehensive overview of the theoretical innovations currently being discussed in the South, such as the distinction between appropriation and production modes, a redefinition of surplus to include social and economic features and new understandings on conflict dynamics. Gudynas discusses the Latin American peculiarities of extractivisms produced by both conservative and new-left governments, making clear that it has very deep roots in culture and ideologies. Finally, Gudynas offers solutions for the future

Eduardo Gudynas is the director and a senior researcher at the Latin American Centre for Social Ecology (CLAES). He was listed among the seventy-four key thinkers in development and is one of the fifty most influential intellectuals in Latin America.



Advance Praise for *Extractivisms: Politics, Economy and Ecology*

This book is the result of many years of accumulated knowledge acquired from books and direct experience. Written and thought with demanding erudition and unbeatable passion, it reflects the work of a brilliant mind inhabiting an extraordinary human being. Gudynas's exemplary scholarship has gifted us scholars and politicians with an immensely valuable instrument to learn from, think about and make policy with. Strange to say about an object, but this book is intellectually cosmopolitan: accessible to a very wide public, many will feel at home with it.

— Marisol de la Cadena, University of California in Davis,
author of *Earth Beings. Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*

Extractivisms: Politics, Economy and Ecology is the first comprehensive treatment of this crucial subject in the English language by the foremost Latin American social and political ecologist. The book contains Gudynas' distilled knowledge concerning this insidious economic model at the heart of territorial disputes in Latin America and in much of the world, often conducted under the banner of development. It is the most sophisticated framework to date for understanding the extractive appropriation of natural resources; it vividly demonstrates why the model's widespread adoption has resulted in an elite extractivist culture that reshapes geographies, landscapes and territories — a veritable ecological amputation.

— Arturo Escobar, Professor of Anthropology Emeritus,
University of North Carolina, author of *Designs for the Pluriverse*

With superb analytical precision, theoretical creativity, and an enormous empirical richness, this book takes the debate about the causes and consequences of natural resource extraction in Latin America to a completely new level. It brings knowledge acquired through decades of work with local communities and social movements, into dialogue with contributions from global social science. With courage and clarity, it also designs paths towards post-extractivism without a general de-growth. I already look forward to teaching next years' course on Latin American politics and environmental governance with this book at hand.

— Benedicte Bull, Centre for Development and
the Environment, University of Oslo, and chair of the board
of the Nordic Institute of Latin American Studies

In uncertain times, when we are bombarded with predictions of all kinds, it is when we most need to understand the dominant pulsion that nowadays organizes planetary lives and deaths. Rendering accessible the very complex ways in which extractivisms permeate societies, in Latin America and beyond, Eduardo Gudynas has given us a compass to grasp where we collectively stand and where we might (decide to) go. You will want to read this book!

— Mario Blaser, Memorial University of Newfoundland–St John's,
author of *Storytelling Globalization*

Eduardo Gudynas has carved out a new, grounded, Latin American theory and practice of political ecology fit for purpose in the turbulent times we live in. This introductory text places the variants of “extractivism” in their full context, both theoretical and practical. It also foregrounds the role of social movements in contesting this new/old mode of exploitation and calls for resistance to its life threatening unfolding across Latin America. A must read for students of any discipline and those in the social movements seeking alternatives to development.

— Ronaldo Munck, head of civic engagement,
Dublin City University, author of *Social Movements
in Latin America: Mapping the Mosaic*

To understand the logics of plunder and devastation lived and still present in America, nothing better than to do it from the prism of extractivisms, in the plural as presented in this book. That perspective permits to fully recognize all its consequences, and to understand the need of transitions toward democratic and sustainable societies. Is the liberation from the ghosts of both development and anthropocentrism. To achieve this, nothing better than Gudynas' committed, stimulating and critical reflections.

— Alberto Acosta, former president of the Constitutional Assembly
of Ecuador, coeditor of *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*

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Introduction

Nature in the Global South is being degraded and overwhelmed at a shocking rate. In many places this is due to ventures such as large-scale open-pit mining, oil extraction in tropical areas and the spread of monocultures. These and other such forms of natural resource appropriation are usually referred to as extractivisms.¹

The incidence of extractivisms has multiplied, as reflected in a huge volume of studies, reports and analyses, both scholarly and from within civil society, that it has generated. Many reports have documented the destructive impacts of extractivisms on local communities and the environment. Others defend them by proclaiming their economic benefits. All this has led to making this mode of natural resource appropriation the centre of citizen mobilization and political debate. This has been so pronounced in many countries in the Global South that extractivisms have become a key issue for understanding development strategies and politics. Much of this critical reflection and controversy has not followed the channels of the formal academy but has involved civil society organizations deeply concerned with local or national situations.

This book is an introduction to this theme. The emphasis is on the theoretical and conceptual aspects of the issues raised by extractivisms. On the one hand, the book adopts an interdisciplinary and critical perspective, incorporating contributions from economics, politics, sociology and so forth. But these contributions are selectively focused on certain dimensions of the problems posed by extractivisms as an exercise in political ecology.

The objective is to offer a “theory” of extractivisms with a more precise definition and a description of its organization and dynamics, so as to capture the key dimensions of their impacts and consequences. The book responds to the need to not only understand the situation in many countries in different political contexts but also promote alternatives for change that

respond to the causes and consequences of extractivisms, which can serve the aim of social and ecological justice.

The book is also the result of reflections, exchanges and experiences rooted in the South, and more specifically in Latin America, in a dialogue with local communities, intellectuals, academics and politicians, in their own languages. In this, I do not reject dialogue with the academy that thinks in terms of and expresses itself in English and in a formalism that has become globalized. But at the same time, for those of us who work in this South, it is clear that many local debates are captured and reassembled for those internationalized and institutional spaces in ways that are far removed from the social or ecological urgencies of each original site.

For these reasons, this book prioritizes experiences and contributions, geographical, political and epistemological, that originate in and are specific to the Global South, and Latin America to be precise. Thus, the clarification or correction of interpretations from the globalized formal academic realm is relegated to second place.

The ideas in this book are the result of multiple activities carried out from 2008 to 2018 in Latin America. These include different encounters with leaders and social militants, including Indigenous, peasant or farmer communities; human rights and environmental activists; field visits to extractive enclaves; events with academics, politicians and companies; and so on. Many results were discussed, reformulated and improved over the last eleven years at 131 events (workshops, courses, seminars) in ten Latin American countries, with very diverse audiences and total participation estimated at 10,700 people.

Since the book is an introduction, I have kept the references to a minimum; space limitations also required this. But the basic reference list offered in each chapter allows any interested reader to track cases and topics.

In all these activities, there is a long list of friends and colleagues from citizen organizations and universities to peasant and Indigenous groups, whose advice, criticisms and support nurtured my apprenticeship. Unfortunately, space constraints also prevent me from thanking all of them. As for this work, it was made possible by the urging and patience of Henry Veltmeyer. It was also possible to work on several sections and chapters thanks to a stay as a visiting fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies, Ludwig Maximilians Munich University. Finally, none of this would have been possible without the love of my wife, Rosario.

NOTE

1. In Chapter 1, I explain my usage of the plural term “extractivisms.”

An introduction to the theory of extractivisms.

Discussion of key concepts, along with diagrams and figures.

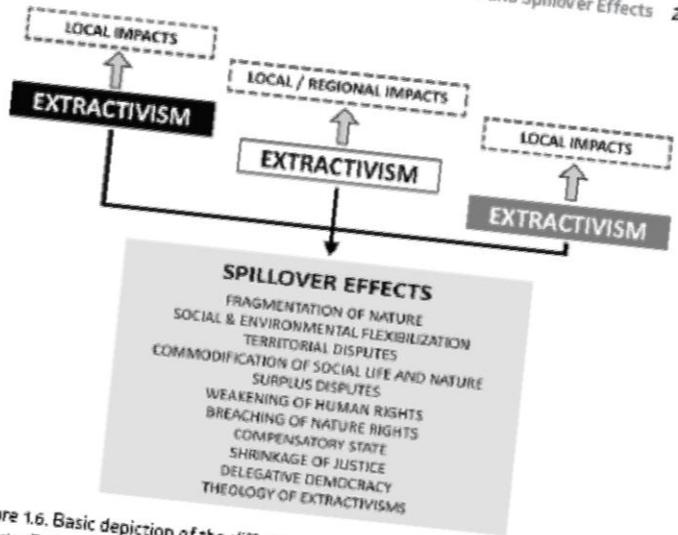


Figure 1.6. Basic depiction of the differences between local impacts and spillover effects. Each one of the three different projects has specific local impacts. At the same time, they contribute to different spillover effects.

ments, usually monetary compensations, and many of the conflicts that erupt on the extractive frontier are actually disputes over the surplus. The spillover effects also reach the conceptions and functions of the state in order to make extractivism functional.

Finally, spillover effects include a reconfiguration of socially accepted understandings of rights, justice and democracy. In many countries, extractivisms operate in formally democratic regimes but are imposed by using or tolerating violence, breaching human rights of all kinds and involving networks of corruption. All this is tolerated and accepted by sizeable majorities, especially in large cities, conceived as the needed ingredients of a capitalism that is accepted by many and that only a few can resist. Extractivisms are defended as an act of faith, which explains the inability of many to accept their impacts and to think about alternatives.

For these reasons, a counterintuitive situation became evident: the spillover effects are deeper and more widespread, severe and persistent than many local and regional impacts are. Redefinitions of Nature, justice

Examples from Latin America.

Photos of noteworthy cases to illustrate conceptual issues

in the case of Argentina). They minimize or ignore the negative effects or contradictions between extractivist promises and local consequences. Reinforcement and distortion are always deployed together.

This represents what could be described as an extractivist "common sense." In this regard, the contributions of the Jamaican-born sociologist, cultural theorist and political activist Stuart Hall, in a perspective rooted in the work of Antonio Gramsci in particular, are useful. Common sense, as Hall conceives of it, refers to everyday, simple, vernacular, largely intuitive ways of thinking that are widely accepted by a society (Hall and O'Shea 2015). It has a distinct logic and content, and therefore is assumed to be internally consistent even if this is not necessarily so. Hall and O'Shea (2015) analyzed the penetration of neoliberalism in the United Kingdom and the transformation of social common sense. In that context, they pointed out changes that justified and naturalized understandings of society, for example, as an aggregate of competitive consumers oriented in their economic action by a rational calculation of self-interest.

A similar process seems to have occurred with extractivisms. This includes narratives like "man is the master of his domain," which means Nature must be exploited in the interest of economic progress. In the case of the Global South, this means Nature is an endless source of wealth that



Figure 3.1. Extractivist culture: this sculpture of a mining helmet sits on one of the access routes to the city of Oruro, Bolivia. It contains many symbols related to mining, machinery and technology, and expresses cultural experiences of belonging and celebration of mining not only there but throughout the Andean highlands. Photo by E. Gudyas.



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