

In the Wake of Extractivism

Navigations of
Knowledge,
Un/Certainties,
and Repair

Heike Drotbohm
Theresa Mentrup
Organizers

Speakers

Zeynep Oguz
Judith Bovensiepen
Jon Schubert
Teresa A. Velásquez
Felipe Fernández
Rita Kesselring
Adriana P. Paredes Peñafiel
Andréa Zhouri
Andrea Muehlebach

International Workshop
23-25 October 2025

University of Mainz | Infobox



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Institut für Ethnologie
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In the Wake of Extractivism

Navigations of Knowledge, Un/Certainties, and Repair

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Programme

Thursday, Oktober 23

20.00 **Dinner**

Friday, Oktober 24

9.00-9.15 **Arrival**

9.15-9.30 **Welcome**

Workshop Session I | Knowledges

9.30-10.00 **Geotrauma, or Origins and Endings in the Sea of Marmara** | *Zeynep Oğuz (Edinburgh)*

10.00-10.30 **Extractive Incorporation** | *Judith Bovensiepen (Vienna)*

10.30-11.00 **Coffee**

11.00-11.30 **Just Dusting Off? Tracing the Evidence of Matters After a Dam Collapse in Brazil** | *Heike Drotbohm & Theresa Mentrup (Mainz)*

11.30-12.30 **Walk & Talk I | Knowledges & Repair**

12.30-13.00 **Wrap-Up Section I**

13.00-14.00 **Lunch**

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Workshop Session II | Scales

14.00-15.00 **The Great Sell-Off: Unpacking Rapid Water Privatization in Brazil |**
Just Water Futures Network

15.00-15.30 **Coffee & Cake**

15.30-16.00 **Along the Seams of Extractivism: Tracing the Circuits of Post-Cyclone Reconstruction in Beira |** *Jon Schubert (Basel)*

16.00-16.30 **Beyond Extractivism: Relational Repair and the Cultivation of an Emancipatory Future |** *Teresa A. Velásquez (San Bernardino)*

16.30-17.00 **(Infra)structural Violence and Extractivism in the Colombian Pacific |**
Felipe Fernández (Freiburg)

17.00-18.00 **Walk & Talk II | Scales & Repair**

18.00-18.30 **Wrap-Up Section II**

19.30 **Dinner**

Saturday, Oktober 25

Workshop Session III | Responsibilities

9.30-10.00 **Repair in an Interdependent World |** *Rita Kesselring (St. Gallen)*

10.00-10.30 **Watching our Water, Watching our Bodies: Politics in Peru's Conga Mining Conflict |** *Adriana Paola Paredes Peñafiel (São Lourenço do Sul)*

10.30-11.00 **Coffee**

11.00-11.30 **Socio-Environmental Governance (ESG): New Social Contract with Nature or Politics of Resignation? A View from Mining in Brazil |** *Andréa Zbouri (Belo Horizonte)*

11.30-12.00 **Corporate Personhood and its Others |** *Andrea Muehlebach (Bremen)*

12.00-13.00 **Walk & Talk III | Responsibilities & Repair**

13.00-13.30 **Wrap-Up Section III**

13.30 **Lunch**

Geotrauma, or Origins and Endings in the Sea of Marmara

Zeynep Ogu , University of Edinburgh

In the summer of 2021, a thick bloom of marine mucilage surfaced across the Sea of Marmara. Nicknamed “sea snot,” the gelatinous mass quickly became a national spectacle, described as the sea’s death. This essay begins from that moment, but refuses its finality. Drawing on marine science, hydrobiology, and tectonic geology, histories of industrialism and urbanism, as well as personal and ethnographic vignettes from Istanbul, Bandırma, and Erdek, I trace the mucilage’s appearance not as a sudden crisis, but as the surfacing of slow and layered violence. The Sea of Marmara is a restless basin, shaped by the North Anatolian Fault, a stratified dual-flow regime, and decades of infrastructural burden. Alongside these geophysical dynamics, I follow the chemical and industrial history of the Golden Horn, the relocation of factories to the Marmara coast, and the repeated dumping of urban waste into the sea. These entanglements, I suggest, do not simply degrade a body of water; they sediment a form of trauma that is geological, ecological, and political. Through an experimental mode that weaves hydrobiological analysis with family memory and urban history, I propose *geotrauma* as a way to think with seas that do not die all at once, but unravel through accumulation, relocation, and forgetting. The mucilage is not an end. It is a return, a thickening, a reminder of what the sea has been made to hold.

Biographical Note

Zeynep Ogu  is Lecturer in Anthropology of Development at the University of Edinburgh and co-director of the Edinburgh Environmental Humanities Network. Her work focuses on energy and resource politics, nationalism and fascism, energy transitions, and geological politics. She is co-editor of two special issues in *Critique of Anthropology and Environmental Humanities*, and her writing has also appeared in *Cultural Anthropology*, *Political Geography*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, among other venues.

Extractive Incorporation

Judith Bovensiepen, Austrian Academy of Sciences & University of Vienna

Extractivism increasingly thrives not by silencing opposition, but by incorporating it. Practices, discourses, and valuations that once seemed fundamentally oppositional are now routinely absorbed into the logics of extraction—a dynamic I term ‘extractive incorporation.’ Rather than directly countering critique, extractive industries progressively neutralise dissent by co-opting its language. While externalising costs onto local communities and ecosystems, companies simultaneously claim commitments to responsibility, sustainability, and transparency. Corporate social responsibility programs, rather than fostering genuine social values, often allow transnational corporations to disengage from meaningful communal relations. Similarly, national oil companies invoke anti-colonial rhetoric to justify

their actions, presenting themselves as sovereign agents while advancing extractive agendas. Cultural initiatives financed by these entities often depoliticise affected communities, limiting political agency. Drawing on Saskia Sassen (2010), Verónica Gago and Sandro Mezzadra (2016), who argue that late capitalism operates through simultaneous inclusion and expulsion, this paper examines how extractivism incorporates opposition. It analyses the discourses and dynamics constituting extractivism's 'constitutive outside,' showing how dissent is not only suppressed but repurposed as a resource. In doing so, extractivism perpetuates itself by continually redrawing the boundaries of inclusion, redefining the terms of critique and engagement.

Biographical Note

Judith Bovensiepen is the Director of the Institute for Social Anthropology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) and Honorary Professor at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. Her research focusses on island Southeast Asia, specifically Timor-Leste, where she has been carrying out ethnographic research since 2005. Bovensiepen's first book, *The Land of Gold: Post-Conflict Recovery and Cultural Revival* (Cornell University Press), examines the role of the spiritual landscape in processes of post-conflict recovery. She is currently completing her second monograph, provisionally entitled *Oil Fever: Animism and Extractivism in Post-Revolutionary Timor-Leste*, which explores how animist practices – based on logics that would appear to undermine extractivism – are incorporated into the circuits of extraction. Bovensiepen also leads an ERC project, entitled '[Resource Spirits](#)', which involves a comparative study of resource extraction in Southeast Asia.

Just Dusting Off? Tracing the Evidence of Matters After a Dam Collapse in Brazil

Heike Drotbohm & Theresa Mentrup, University of Mainz

Speaking in terms of materiality, mining is a paradoxical business: On the one hand, it brims with the abundance of materiality that promises prosperity. On the other hand, and especially for communities affected by mining, this materiality usually remains opaque and the promised prosperity intangible. This paradoxical line along the evidentiality of matters, however, does not end with mining. Especially in situations of damages and collapses, the question of evidentiality, and how it comes into being, structures the aftermath of mining. Our paper draws on anthropological fieldwork conducted in the mining community of Brumadinho, in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, which is still confronted with the consequences of a tailings dam collapse in January 2019. Today, more than six years after the incident, a legal agreement promising and funding "full reparation" is about to expire. We ask how is evidence of toxicity and suffering turned into matters in such a sociolegal process? Following the traces of dust and toxins, we scrutinize the regimes of knowledge present in how different actors negotiate the idea of 'repair' in Brumadinho. In doing so, this contribution engages not only with questions of the un/certainty of matters, but also with the role of political and economic power present in the production of evidentiality.

Biographical Note

Heike Drotbohm is a Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. Her research lies at the intersection between im/mobilities, kinship and care. In her most recent research she followed migrant trajectories across urban and cross-border spaces (in Brazil and Central America), and explored configurations of care and control in solidarity and humanitarian settings. Publications appeared in *Ethnography*, *Citizenship Studies*, the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Ethos*, *Humanity*, *Focaal*, *Population, Space and Place* and several co-editions. She was fellow at the research centre “Work and the Life Course in Global History” (HU Berlin) and at the New School for Social Research (New York City) and guest professor at the UERJ (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil).

Theresa Mentrup is a PhD candidate at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. Her research interests include political and legal anthropology, care, human-environment relations, social movements, and colonialism. As a research assistant in the DFG-funded project "The Management of Loss. Politics of Life and Death in Minas Gerais (Brazil)", she is currently working on the politics and practices of repair after a dam collapse in Brumadinho / Brazil.

Workshop Session II | Scales

Along the Seams of Extractivism: Tracing the Circuits of Post-Cyclone Reconstruction in Beira

Jon Schubert, University of Basel

This paper looks at the challenges of mending or cyclone-proofing homes in Mozambique’s port city Beira after the devastation wrought by Tropical Cyclone Idai in March 2019. Here, the interplay of knowledge, un/certainties, and ‘repair’ in post-extractivist settings manifests at different scales, from the ‘best practice’ logics of official reconstruction efforts led by international development assistance to how the availability of money and construction materials in the city is impacted, in the view of its residents, by the ebb and flow of coal extraction and exports via the Port of Beira. I develop my argument riffing off both Gabrielle Hecht’s idea of minerals as ‘interscalar vehicles for the anthropocene’ (2018) and Juno Salazar Parreñas’ exhortation to ethnographers to make subterranean connections like ‘moles, not mining corporations’ (2023). Through the intersecting circuits of concrete, rebar, sugar cane and coal I seek to trace the buried seams that link not only Beira to far-flung places across the globe, but also the violence of the Companhia de Moçambique’s concessionary rule of the territory (1890-1942) to the seeming inescapability of today’s boom-and-bust cycles of coal and future LNG.

Biographical Note

Jon Schubert is a political and economic anthropologist working on the social life of infrastructures, the impact of extractive industries on African politics, and the experience and memory of political violence and authoritarianism, chiefly through the lens of Angola and Mozambique. He is a member of the editorial collective (and current editor-in-chief) of [Allegrialab](#) and SNF Eccellenza Professor in Urban

Studies at the University of Basel, where he leads the [PRECURBICA](#) project on infrastructural adaptation to the climate crisis in four coastal African cities.

Beyond Extractivism: Relational Repair and the Cultivation of an Emancipatory Future

Teresa A. Velásquez, California State University / San Bernardino

This presentation explores relations of repair through the cultivation of emancipatory futures. Since 2004, Ecuadorian water defenders have organized in opposition to the contentious Loma Larga mine project, a proposed 2.2-million-ounce gold mine located in a highland watershed. While community water defenders have engaged in various legal and political strategies to resist gold mining, I focus on kitchen table politics that comprise women's territorial defense. The *Escuelita de Kimsacocha* is a women's grassroots agroecology project that mobilizes collective and experiential knowledge in the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, and medicinal herbs. Based on ethnographic research conducted with my collaborator Kirsten Francescone, I examine how women's productive and reproductive labor practices of growing and transforming food, hold potential for recovering from historical and contemporary forms of settler violence—from domestic partner abuse to the criminalization of their opposition to extractive projects. Women's bodies may be inscribed with histories of gendered and racialized violence, but they also resist multiple forms of dispossession. Women enact a territorial politics of relational repair by practicing joy, care, and solidarity with each other and their lands, giving new life and meaning to their garden plots. They sow the seeds of an emancipatory future even in the wake of uncertainty.

Biographical Note

Teresa A. Velásquez is Professor of Anthropology at the California State University, San Bernardino. She is the author of *Pachamama Politics: Campesino Water Defenders and the Anti-Mining Movement in Andean Ecuador* (University of Arizona Press, 2022). Her ongoing research among Indigenous community water defenders in the Southern Ecuadorian Andes has appeared in various edited volumes on extractivism and *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture*, *Latin American Perspectives*, among others.

(Infra)structural Violence and Extractivism in the Colombian Pacific

Felipe Fernández, University of Freiburg

This paper explores the relation between (infra)structural violence and multiple forms of extractivism in the Colombian Pacific region. By focusing on the port-city of Buenaventura, an urban enclave in a region widely affected by both licit and illicit forms of capitalist extraction, environmental damage, and post-extractive abandonment, the paper shows how hydraulic infrastructures are in a constant state of decay due to lack of maintenance, repair, and political will.

The city of Buenaventura hosts the biggest port of the country, which has expanded massively since the instauration and unfolding of neoliberal policies. The city, predominantly inhabited by impoverished Afro-Colombian communities, is one of the most violent and poverty-affected cities in Latin America with a system of public infrastructure that epitomizes decades of abandonment, neglect, and racist state-led violence and urban planning.

I argue that extractive economies accelerate processes of capital accumulation and degradation that hinder the development of public infrastructures, limiting the access to urban services such as water. Moreover, the paper illustrates how irregular rhythms of everyday crime (a central element of both licit and illicit economies in the port-city) are constitutive of the urban fabric. This case study shows how extractive practices co-produce spaces of death and abandonment across vulnerable peripheries.

Biographical Note

Felipe Fernández is a Junior Professor at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Freiburg. He holds a MA degree and a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the Freie Universität Berlin (2022). His book *Flows of Violence. Water, Infrastructures, and the State in Buenaventura, Colombia* (University of Arizona Press, 2025) scrutinizes the nexus of multiple forms of violence with the water infrastructure system in the port-city. His new research project focuses on the lithium extraction project and the geological knowledge production in Bolivia.

Workshop Session III | Responsibilities

Repair in an Interdependent World

Rita Kesselring, University of St. Gallen

I have followed and written about several international cases against Northern-based multinational companies violating human and environmental rights in the global South. Typically, and in contexts of mining specifically, to make their case, plaintiffs call upon Northern jurisdictions and claim damages. The fact that corporate actors are from “elsewhere” is used to file the case in the first place. While from a legal perspective, this strategy is important and often the only avenue to some (post factum) justice, if at all, there is little evidence that it has contributed to more just South–North relations. We see the same logic in many other discourses: scholarly, humanitarian, political, and economic; liberal and illiberal: corporate actors are “outside” (read “white” and “global”) actors who inflict harm on “locals” (read Blacks). Such allocations of albeit diffuse spaces produce continuities, blind spots (how interdependent we actually are, both locally and globally; Kesselring 2025) and have real consequences: accountability is attributed unevenly. In this contribution, I will start thinking about an agenda of repair that is transformative; that is, a notion of repair that acknowledges everyone’s embeddedness, historicity,

globality, and responsibility for others, and that is as much forward-looking as it is “in the wake” (Sharpe 2016) of colonialism.

Biographical Note

Rita Kesselring is a social anthropologist and Associate Professor of Urban Studies at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of St Gallen. Her book *Bodies of Truth* (SUP, 2017) examines the legal route as a possibility for repairing the past at the example of apartheid victims and their class action suits against Western corporations. The book *Extraction, Global Commodity Trade, and Urban Development in Zambia's Northwestern* (ZED books / Bloomsbury Academic, 2025) describes life in a new mining town in Zambia and its connections to the Swiss commodity trading hub. The volume *Mother Unknown* (edited with Andrea Abraham and Sabine Bitter, 2025) investigates inter-country adoptions from India to Switzerland between 1973 and 2002.

Watching our Water, Watching our Bodies: Politics in Peru's Conga Mining Conflict

Adriana Paola Paredes Peñafiel, Federal University of Rio Grande / São Lourenço do Sul

In the Cajamarca region in the Northern Andes of Peru, a highly agitated scenario has been present for years. Since 2010, important lagoons for local people are in risk to lose their vitalities by an open-pit mining project called Conga. Compensation for the loss of the lagoons resides in the construction of modern reservoirs that, according to the company in pact with the Peruvian State, would contribute to better management of rainwater for improving peasant farming. Inhabitants of El Tambo, 3-hour drive away downstream from the Conga project, claimed that mutilating the lagoons and mountains and installing artificial ponds is like amputating a leg of a human being and replacing it with a prosthesis. They also argued that the Mamacocha lagoon, which is located at one of the highest points in the mountains, nourishes their land and their bodies with the same water from which she feeds. If Mamacocha “dries up”, the people would also “dry up” and die slowly. Entering the notion of political ontology, the aim of this paper is to discuss how peasants enact their world rejecting the idea that they are disposed to harvest potatoes at any cost and with any water. The concepts of “nourishment” and “being born” are examined in order to discuss the relationship between lagoons, land and human bodies. This document will be based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2014 in El Tambo in Cajamarca. In addition, there were short trips to the mentioned locality between 2016 and the beginning of 2020.

Biographical Note

Adriana Paola Paredes Peñafiel is Professor at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande, campus São Lourenço do Sul, Brazil. She holds a PhD in Rural Development from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (2016). Her PhD thesis received a honorable mention in LASA/Oxfam America Martin Diskin Dissertation Award. She is a PhD student in Social Anthropology at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Her research interests include socio-environmental conflict related to mining in Northern Andes of Peru, peasant women and myth and history.

Socio-Environmental Governance (ESG): New Social Contract with Nature or Politics of Resignation? A View from Mining in Brazil

Andréa Zhourí, Federal University of Minas Gerais

For more than half a century, the global debate on environmental degradation has fuelled international initiatives in search of a new social contract with nature. The term sustainable development was made popular by the Brundtland Report in the 1980s and was enshrined at the UN Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development in 1992 as a new consensus on the need to reconcile economic interests, environmental preservation and the quest for social justice. Subsequently, numerous environmental governance mechanisms were deployed to make this ideal feasible. The certification of forest products was one of them. More recently, a social and environmental label for mining also promises to celebrate a new social contract with nature. Environmental governance centered in principles such as social participation, technological efficiency and conflict resolution is refreshed today under the acrimony of ESG in face of the climate debate. My presentation intends to critically address the scope of such schemes of governance. The analysis is based on ethnographic research involving the implementation of large projects and mining disasters in Brazil. It is concerned with the indigenization of global processes and the continuous - slow or naked - forms violence and violation of environmental and social rights in the name of a alleged new social contract with nature.

Biographical Note

Andréa Zhourí holds a Masters in Social Anthropology from the State University of Campinas and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Essex. She is a retired full professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, where she set up the Group of Environmental Studies (GESTA-UFMG) and the undergraduate programme in Socio-Environmental Sciences. Her research topics involve environmental conflicts and large projects. She was a board member of scientific associations (ANPOCS; ABA in 2011-2012), a fellow of the *desiguALdade.net* project of the Ibero-American Institute with the Latin American Institute of the Free University of Berlin (December 2013), a CAPES Senior Internship Fellow at FU Berlin and Universität Kassel (2017), a member of the SBPC scientific council (2021-2023) and president of the Brazilian Anthropology Association - ABA (2023-2024). She is a CNPq researcher and member of the Human and Social Sciences Committee of the Ministry of Science and Technology (Brazil).

Corporate Personhood and its Others

Andrea Muehlebach, University of Bremen

In 2024, the municipal government of Linhares in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo passed a law that established the rights of the waves at the mouth of the Doce River, recognizing the “intrinsic rights of the Doce River Mouth Waves as a specially protected entity.” The law focused especially on the “unique break on Regência beach, characterized by long, tubular waves” and noted that it was the responsibility of public authorities and the community “to respect, protect and conserve the integrity and identity of

the Doce River Mouth Waves and the elements that make them unique.” This paper tracks the emergence of the wave as a novel kind of legal person in the midst of extractivist calamity. Located at the tail end of the 2015 Mariana dam disaster, the rise of the wave as political agent and legal person raises not only the question of what the wave as a figure with legal standing in court is, but how it relates to the Samarco corporation as corporate person. Rather than treat them as opposites, I treat them as both fundamentally different and foundationally similar. Though they speak different languages, they are also both very different from human persons in liberal systems of law.

Biographical Note

Andrea Muehlebach is a Professor of Anthropology at the Department of Anthropology and Cultural Research at the University of Bremen, Germany. Her research has explored the politics and ethics of economic life, first through the fundamental re-arrangement of public institutions and their concomitant moralities under neoliberal conditions, and second through the the politics of water financialization and re-municipalization in austerity-era Europe. Her first book (*[The Moral Neoliberal: Welfare and Citizenship in Italy](#)*, Chicago University Press 2012) explored neoliberal welfare “reforms” and the moral authoritarianisms (and struggles, tensions, contradictions) that often accompany them. Her second book (*[A Vital Frontier: Water Insurgencies in Europe](#)*, Duke University Press, 2023) investigated the political, legal, and environmental struggles people wage as they seek to protect water as a public good or commons. She is currently working on several new research projects, including a project on the rights of nature/Earth Law movement, a collaborative project entitled "Capitalism's Grotesque Life," and thirdly on the volatile monumentality of mountains in a remote Swiss Alpine region.