

The State of Extraction: A Conference Primer

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PREAMBLE

This conference has deep roots in developments internal both to the university and to the immediate community within which it is situated. More specifically, the idea for the conference emerged, in a sense, in response to Simon Fraser University's receipt of a ten million dollar donation from the Vancouver-based mining company Goldcorp some five years ago. The money would be used by the university to relocate the School of Contemporary Arts, from its dilapidated trailers on Burnaby Mountain, to the site of the old Woodward's department store – a unique monument of the Downtown Eastside's vibrant, conflicted past – now renamed the "Goldcorp Centre for the Arts." Funds would also be used to engage in "community development" in the context of a process of gentrification that was clearly gathering pace. After Woodward's closed its DTES location, it was occupied for a period of 92 days in 2002. The Woodsquat, as it was called, was part of a larger set of struggles oriented towards what Henri Lefebvre calls the "right to the city," or the collective freedom to make and re-make the city. In particular it drew attention to the urgent and growing crisis of homelessness in the city, a direct effect of the inflation of the housing bubble in the Lower mainland, one that, to this day, shows few signs of abating. Subsequent struggles include the establishment of tent cities during the 2010 Winter Olympics and last year in Oppenheimer park. In these instances, Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, have often taken the lead roles. These struggles have not been without their wider political effects, such as forcing the current Mayor to make putting an end to "street homelessness" the centre-piece of his electoral platform. He failed spectacularly, as homelessness numbers continue to rise.

There are direct ties between resource extraction and the many social issues a city like Vancouver continues to struggle with. Among the responses to the Goldcorp donation was an attempt to expose the activities of mining companies such as Goldcorp, Barrick Gold and Teck Resources. That last of these, for example, has been prosecuted in US courts for knowingly, and in contravention of the law, dumping billions of gallons of effluent into the Columbia River.

So under the aegis of the Institute for the Humanities, Professor Stephen Collis organized two successive lecture series on this theme, series which included experts such as Nathalie des Rossiers of the CCLA, Grahame Russell of Rights Action, and Alain Deneault, who is speaking at our conference. This conference, then, emerges directly out of this very local instantiation of a universalizing and abstract logic of neo-liberalism that we see embracing all corners of the globe – a logic of one-sided deregulation, re-commodification, defunding and privatization. This leads to a situation in which institutions of higher education become increasingly starved of financial resources, enter into a "fiscal crisis," the only alternative to which appears

to be increasing dependency on precisely the kinds of “gifts” companies like Goldcorp are ready to offer. In what amounts to a truly vicious circle, subtle or not-so subtle pressure is subsequently brought to bear for further austerity measures, and a deepening of a logic Herbert Marcuse called “one dimensionality,” the progressive exclusion of genuinely critical perspectives without which there simply cannot be a scientific-scholarly debate. The impact on the academy is therefore inestimable. Compounding this state of affairs is, of course, a government whose direct political agenda of deepening extractivism – in the services of transforming this country into what the Prime Minister calls an “energy superpower” – leads it, for example, to direct hitherto well-respected, independent Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to provide funding for a new Institute on Mining, co-hosted by SFU and UBC to the tune of an extraordinary \$25 million. This at a time in which the same government claims to be unable to find sufficient funding to keep open the globally unique and vitally important ELA, nor, apparently, can it properly over-see the management of the invaluable DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) libraries. From the standpoint of higher education, science and research, this is simply a travesty. We felt a certain responsibility, then, to raise the broader question of the nature and ramifications of the “State of Extraction.”

THE STATE OF EXTRACTION

To inquire into the current state of resource extraction is to ask fundamental questions about both human rights and the relationship between human beings and the natural environments they inhabit and depend upon. Indeed, it may also be to inquire into the “rights” of the non-human environment itself or what has been called the possibility of a “natural,” not just a social contract: that is, a contract not just among humans securing the conditions of their sociality, but also between human beings and the natural world, securing the conditions of their mutual continued existence. Just as surplus labour time is extracted by capital from an increasingly internationalized, racialized and precarious workforce, so too are resources forcibly extracted from the earth. Human labour power is itself a force of nature. The result in both, overlapping, instances is violence, suffering and death. Both the violent extraction of surplus labour time and the extraction of natural resources historically emerge alongside of modern science which no longer passively beholds the natural world from afar but, rather, “puts nature to the rack” to *extract her* secrets. The realization of this three-fold sense of “extractivism” today is, as Naomi Klein has recently argued, nothing less than to acknowledge and investigate “an existential crisis for the human species.”¹ What follows is the beginning of such an investigation, in which the current state of extraction leads to questions about the economy, the state, the climate, justice, and, most importantly, alternatives to the current order whose limits are becoming ever clearer.

Resource extraction is unavoidably a highly impactful industry: water and land are damaged to extract and process mineral resources, and people living on the land – and depending on its water, soil and biodiversity for their survival – are displaced,

suffer negative health effects, and are often impoverished. Human beings, like any species, necessarily *metabolize* material from the “natural world” in which they find themselves and, indeed, are a part of. The development of industrial capitalist civilization over the past 200 hundred years, however – especially in the area of fossil fuels and resource extraction – has taken this metabolic process to and beyond its sustainable limit, depleting non-renewable resources at an alarming rate, damaging the environmental and social lives of communities, contributing greatly to anthropogenic climate change, and reducing biodiversity to the point at which scientists are speaking of an unfolding planetary mass extinction.² This is what John Bellamy Foster has called, following Karl Marx, the “the global metabolic rift,” which refers to the “overall break in the human relation to nature arising from an alienated system of capital accumulation without end.”³

Socio-economic change, on the fundamental level that would alter extractive practices, mitigate climate change, and make for a more just order, is made all the more difficult by the ways our current civilization is completely imbricated with, and predicated upon, extraction. Modern industrial-capitalist society, in Timothy Mitchell’s words, “was made possible by the development of ways of living that used energy on a new scale. ... Thanks to this new social-energetic metabolism, a majority of the population could now be concentrated together without immediate access to agricultural land.”⁴

However, as much as the standard of living we, for the most part, have become used to in the West and that so many developing nations aspire to, is dependent upon extractive industries, we cannot lose sight of the fact that these industries exist first and foremost for the sole purpose of limitless capital accumulation, predicated on the exploitation of human labour power (in its waged and unwaged, “productive, and “reproductive,” material and immaterial forms) and the natural world. Profit cannot be realized until such time as the circuit of capitalism is completed, which is to say, until the commodities produced by industry are consumed. Consumption, extraction, and the production of excess carbon dioxide at current levels did not simply arise to satisfy “needs” or “demand”: it was and is driven by the profit motive and the unevenly developed accumulation of staggering wealth. George Monbiot refers to current practices as “pathological consumption”: only 1% of consumer goods remain in use six months after purchase and “manufacturing and consumption are responsible for more than half of our carbon dioxide production”; furthermore, fossil fuel production and the consumption it enables (the two form a feedback loop) drive escalating inequality.⁵

Extraction is one of the primary modes through which we have for too long been “robbing the future to pay the present,” in Ronald Wright’s words.⁶ “If civilization is to survive,” Wright continues, “it must run on the interest, not the capital, of nature.”⁷ Guy Debord, writing in the aftermath of the global student and worker uprising in 1968, which he helped provoke, claimed that late capitalism took the form of “capital accumulated to the point where it turned into a spectacle,” culminating in the “Sick Planet.” The “Sick Planet,” in Debord’s view, entailed the mutuality of the

destruction of human and natural environments. In this he anticipates the idea of the anthropocene – the geological age following the Holocene – referring to the 200 year period following the Industrial revolution in which the human being, the anthropos, irreversibly transforms the natural environment. Nature and history, in other words, no longer form a binary: historical society appears to be governed by natural, law-like regularities that seem beyond the reach of human agency; there seems, for example, to be no alternative to “austerity” even when it continues to fail so spectacularly, while nature appears to be changing before our very eyes. Perhaps this is the reason why Fredric Jameson has suggested, with respect to Hollywood movies, that it is easier to imagine end of the world than the end of capitalism.

ECONOMICS

Extraction undergirds virtually all of what we commonly refer to as “the economy”: precious metals are key market commodities, especially gold in a time of currency fluctuation and market instability⁸; the pervasiveness of communications technologies in contemporary society is dependent upon the mining of rare earth metals; fossil fuels feed our extreme energy consumption levels. Moreover, the very notion of a totalized “economy” is a discourse invented and promulgated around the mid-twentieth century, dependent “upon abundant and low-cost oil supplies,” and which, “measured by the new calculative device of national income [GDP], had no obvious limits,” leading to the notion of “the future as a limitless horizon of growth.”⁹ In other words, the inner logic of the capitalist system of production, distribution, circulation and consumption is a nihilistic accumulation for its own sake on an ever-expanding scale. This, of course, leads to an imperative of expansion from capitalist centres to under-capitalized peripheries and what geographer David Harvey has called “accumulation by dispossession.” The neo-liberalization of capital has created the conditions for a resurgent neo-colonization particularly vis-à-vis the Middle East since the First Gulf War (1990-91), but also has deepened settler colonialism in Canada, the US, Australia and so on. As a consequence it has redoubled the production of racism and xenophobia on a truly global scale. Let’s not also forget that extractivism, mining in particular, historically has been the site of both settler colonialism and resistance to it. As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (quoting Alejandro Murguía) describes the “49’ers” during the mid-19th century Gold Rush:

They would do anything for it. They left families, homes, everything behind; they sailed for eight months aboard leaky, smelly ships to reach California; others, captains and sailors, jumped ship at San Francisco, leaving a fleet of abandoned brigs, barks and schooners to rot by the piers. They slaughtered all the game they could find and so muddied the rivers and creeks with silt that the once plentiful salmon couldn’t survive. The herds of elk and deer, the food source of Native Americans, were practically wiped out in one summer. The miners cheated and killed each other in the gold fields. ¹⁰

In the ensuing 25 years something like 100,000 people were exterminated by the US Occupation which Dunbar-Ortiz describes as “quite possibly the most extreme demographic disaster of all time.”¹¹ Almost exactly 100 years later, Apartheid was put into place in South Africa, creating the conditions in which black African labour could be super-exploited in the mines around Cape Town and Witwatersrand. It hardly comes as a surprise, however, that the mining sector was therefore also a site of profound resistance and opposition with COASTU, along with the SACP and, of course, the ANC playing key leadership roles in the anti-Apartheid struggles. With the recent massacre by the current ANC regime of some 38 miners during the Marikana strike in the Summer of 2012, we know those struggles are on-going. Mineworkers have also of course played a key early role in the struggle against neo-liberalism just as the latter was in the process of institutionalizing itself in Britain in the mid-1980s. Miners have also played a key role in the struggles over structural adjustment and the commodification of water in Cochabamba in Bolivia in the 1990s. This set of struggles helped to constitute the social and political base for the first elected Indigenous president in the Western Hemisphere, Evo Morales.¹²

Turning now more specifically to Oil, we can discern how it led the development of the global economy, as the postwar “relationship between the American state and US oil companies ... already epitomized ‘globalization.’”¹³ The unity of the global market with the circulation of fossil fuels was further cemented by the linking of oil to the US dollar, and the US dollar to the global financial system.¹⁴

Such an intertwined system is, obviously, not without its weaknesses and dangers, and the current “carbon bubble” is “the result of an over-valuation of oil, coal and gas reserves held by fossil fuel companies.... [A]t least two-thirds of these reserves will have to remain underground if the world is to meet existing internationally agreed targets to avoid the threshold for ‘dangerous’ climate change. If the agreements hold, these reserves will be in effect unburnable and so worthless – leading to massive market losses.”¹⁵ Thus the financial mechanisms of the global market are so tied to resource extraction that failure in one sector will inevitably lead to failure in the other. This is sometimes described as “locked-in” climate change, and highlights the way in which the current struggle for alternatives is as much a struggle over spaces as it is a struggle over time, that is, the contradiction between the market’s inherent “short-termism” and the “long-termism” of the environmental and climate consequences of market-driven fossil fuel production.

One aspect of the “lock-in” is used to form the basis for an argument mobilized by governments and other advocates in favour of continued fossil fuel development. This is the argument that fossil fuel and other extractive projects are keys to job creation and thus unassailable aspects of the total economy. There is ample evidence to suggest that this argument is simply untrue, starting with the phenomenon of “Dutch disease,” where the excessive development of the energy sector leads to the inflated values of currency and therefore hampers the exports of manufactured goods. This is clearly evident in Canada, where “For every new job created in the petroleum sector during the past decade, 30 have been lost in

manufacturing.”¹⁶ As Doug McArthur of SFU School for Public Policy has indicated, Kinder Morgan has overstated the prospective benefits and understated the possible costs of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion.¹⁷ Furthermore, a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report notes (to focus on a local example) that “just two per cent of British Columbians are directly employed in mining, oil and gas extraction and forestry and logging combined,” and goes on to argue that “the majority of jobs stemming from these resource projects will be generated during their construction stage, so any lift to the local economies is likely to be short-lived.”¹⁸ Much more could be accomplished to address employment through, for example, a robust, which is to say, “punitive” wealth tax, as called for by the French Economist Thomas Piketty, who has attributed the rising inequality that has structured “Capital in the 21st Century” to the fact that the rate of return on capital is higher than that of the productivity of the economy and hence wages. More discussion could also be devoted to the establishment of a Guaranteed Annual Income. And, as Klein reminds us in *This Changes Everything*, social justice, the valuing of people and the natural world over profits, needs over capital accumulation, is irreducible in any environmental struggle. Moreover, at a strategic level it would create the conditions in which *capacities* could be further developed for even more far-reaching social change that would begin to address not the effects but the actual causes of extractivism.

THE STATE

It could be argued that the management of the economy has become the central, and in capitalism’s neoliberal phase, virtually the sole task of government, and states seemingly exist merely to “superintend” the workings of the global economy.¹⁹ Economic austerity is the leading edge of the knife paring the public sector back to a ghostly sub-sub-committee of the private sector. This is nowhere clearer than in the massive bailouts by the state, in 2007-09 in Canada, Europe and especially the United States, of financial institutions that were supposedly “too big to fail,” while hundreds of thousands are still reeling from the loss of their jobs and in many cases their homes.

In the case of resource extraction, no state plays (or at least aspires to play) as significant a role as Canada does. As Christian Parenti reminds us, “the state is a crucial ecology making institution within the metabolism of capitalism.”²⁰ Extractive companies are disproportionately based in Canada (some 75% of the global industry²¹) and operate globally, *because this situation is beneficial to them*: Canadian corporate and tax laws and the Canadian Government *superintend* the transfer of profits to these corporations, while simultaneously transferring the attendant social and environmental costs to the communities effected by extraction. As Alain Deneault and William Sacher have argued, “Canada stands out as a judicial and financial haven that shelters its mining industry from the political or legal consequences of its extraterritorial activities by providing a lax domestic regulatory structure that it seeks to export through international agencies, diplomatic channels,

and 'economic development projects'.²² One notable way in which the juridical system protects extractive industries is by way of SLAPP suits or "strategic litigation against public participation," which was recently used against those protesting Kinder Morgan/TransMountain Pipelines' survey work in a conservation area on Burnaby Mountain in contravention of municipal by-laws. Indeed, the National Energy Board, itself, has been described as pursuing the interests of the energy sector by a prominent member who resigned from it in frustration claiming that it had been "industry captured." Gandesha and Sheldrick point out in a recent editorial:

As a result of the SLAPP suit filed by Kinder Morgan, we now have the RCMP acting at the behest of a foreign oil company to arrest young people, SFU faculty and Coast Salish elders, who are profoundly concerned not just about what more than doubling of the capacity of these pipelines might mean to the region but also about the effects of tar sands bitumen on global climate change more generally. When challenged about what he thought about what this meant for the ability of Canadians and First Nations peoples to democratically determine their own fate, one RCMP officer simply said he doesn't think about such issues; he was simply "doing his job." Where have we heard that before? And with what consequences?²³

At the same time, however, the courts have also been allies of activists and First Nations communities as in the case of the landmark Tsilhqot'in decision of which more below.

Concerns about whether or not Canada is becoming a "petrostate" fold into the reality that it is already the quintessential *extractive state*, superintending the global mining industry while simultaneously pursuing fossil fuel projects and related enabling policies. And this is very clearly the direction the Harper government has set since first coming to power in 2006, when the new Prime Minister, in his first speech to a foreign business audience, referred to "the emerging 'energy superpower' our government intends to build."²⁴ The roots of this agenda dovetail closely with the rise of authoritarian populism against the backdrop of the history of constitutional questions pertaining to the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments as they came to crystallize around Pierre Elliot Trudeau's National Energy Policy – much derided in Alberta. Harper reaffirmed this in a January 2012 speech in which he declared that his government "will make it a national priority to ensure we have the capacity to export our energy products beyond the United States and specifically to Asia."²⁵ The aim is for Canada to become a new "energy superpower."

Petro and extractive states, like Canada, have a history of putting democratic processes in jeopardy. As Mitchell notes, "countries that depend upon petroleum resources for a large part of their earnings from exports tend to be less democratic;"

indeed, “existing forms of democratic government appear incapable of taking the precautions needed to protect the long-term future of the planet” because “economic calculation” occupies “the space of democratic debate.”²⁶ In part, this is due to the fact of the “mutual constitution of states, classes and markets;”²⁷ states serve specific interest, and these interests are by and large private, not public. A case in point is the recent revelation that the Harper government adopted industry recommendations “either verbatim or in substance” when it comes to relaxing and even eliminating environmental protections, so that “the oil industry has helped write the rules that now restrict public participation on the environmental impacts of tar sands expansion projects.”²⁸ When the extraction of energy becomes almost exclusively the driver of economic growth, when the state becomes transformed into a “State of Extraction,” then the danger grows, of course, that those forces, NGO’s, activists and, particularly, First Nations communities that stand in the way of extractivism, are understood as anathema to it. The State displays a worrying propensity to declare that extractivism must be pursued at any and all costs, that it is in the “national interest,” and invokes its sovereign authority – the ability to decide upon the exception to normal legality. Under these conditions, and the new Security Bill C-51 recently tabled in the House of Commons, the State of Extraction always teeters on the fateful abyss of a permanent state of exception and does so by clearly constituting the “enemy” of the State as the “racialized, Muslim other.” Bill C-51, while purporting to strengthen the state’s security apparatus to counter the “Jihadi” threat, seems according to a non-partisan group of legal experts, to target opponents of extractivism, referred to in official RCMP documents as “anti-petroleum extremists.”²⁹ The real target, as grand Chief Stewart Phillip and Pam Palmater separately have suggested, are Indigenous peoples defending the land.³⁰

Finally, we can see the Harper government once again directing Canada as an extractive state, and industry superintendent, in its well-documented “vendetta on science and the environment,” and its “long campaign to undermine evidence-based scientific, environmental and technical decision-making.”³¹ These practices have rendered Canada amongst the world’s most notorious climate criminals.³²

CLIMATE

Climate change is the largest and most pressing challenge to the sustainability of human civilization and perhaps even life on this planet. And climate change is almost exclusively driven by human industrial practices – in particular, the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. The discussion now is not *whether* climate change is happening, but *how fast*.³³ And while the global climate may be changing faster than human societies are typically able to respond to, the takeaway is simply that we must act, quickly and dramatically.

“Today, in 2013, we face an unavoidably radical future,” climate scientist Kevin Anderson writes. “We either continue with rising emissions and reap the radical repercussions of severe climate change, or we acknowledge that we have a choice

and pursue radical emission reductions: No longer is there a non-radical option. Moreover, low-carbon supply technologies cannot deliver the necessary rate of emission reductions – they need to be complemented with rapid, deep and early reductions in energy consumption.”³⁴

This urgency, and lack of room for a “non-radical option,” is echoed with growing frequency: “The window for gradual, reformist climate change mitigation may already have closed. The window for revolutionary climate change mitigation is rapidly closing.”³⁵ Increasingly, it is difficult to conclude anything other than that extraction, in so far as it does not reduce carbon emissions, but is in fact the very source of such emissions, has no sustainable future – otherwise, *we* have no sustainable future.

JUSTICE

“Climate-change-related deaths are already estimated at 5 million annually,”³⁶ and these deaths are not distributed evenly, but rather, impact “poor and vulnerable groups” on the margins of the global economy.³⁷ Climate change, and thus resource extraction, raise questions of social justice.

Such issues coalesce around the fact that extractive projects are very often carried out on indigenous land – that is, land originally expropriated from Indigenous peoples during colonization, and land that, being rural or otherwise marginal to population centres, is still inhabited and used by Indigenous peoples for their sustenance and traditional cultural practices.

Martin Lukacs, writing in *The Guardian*, suggests that “contrary to the myth that Indigenous peoples leech off the state, resources taken from their lands have in fact been subsidizing the Canadian economy since contact. In their haste to get at that wealth, the government has been flouting their own laws, ignoring Supreme Court decisions calling for the respect of Indigenous and treaty rights over large territories. Canada has become very rich, and Indigenous peoples very poor.”³⁸ First Nations scholar and activist Glen Coulthard similarly argues that Indigenous blockades against extractive projects “seek to negatively impact the economic infrastructure that is core to the colonial accumulation of capital in settler political economies like Canada’s,” at the same time as they are “also an affirmative gesture of Indigenous resurgence insofar as they embody an enactment of Indigenous law and the obligations such laws place on Indigenous peoples to uphold the relations of reciprocity that shape our engagements with the human and non-human world – the land.”³⁹

Canada’s unjust relation to its own First Nations peoples is sadly mirrored in the practices of its resource sector in other parts of the world.⁴⁰ According to a 2012 report by the Latin American Environmental Conflict Watch, “more than 160 conflicts are taking place today in Latin America.... In these cases we can see serious

weaknesses in terms of access to justice for affected communities and accountability of Canadian companies operating abroad.”⁴¹ An open letter to the Canadian, US, and Mexican heads of state from a coalition of Mexican organizations and communities similarly sites the extent of Latin American conflicts with Canadian extraction projects: “It is clear that every year there are a growing number of communities in resistance and in direct confrontation with national, foreign and transnational mining companies, especially Canadian firms, although not exclusively. This is a result of the clear, recurring and intransigent way in which they try to appropriate the natural commons in our territories. With their false vision of progress and development, they cause serious and irreversible damage to health and the environment, while at the same time destroying the social fabric of our communities by fostering divisions between individuals.”⁴² Responding to the Canadian government’s plans to pursue “economic diplomacy,” the letter references “twelve cases that demonstrate what this sort of ‘diplomacy’ means:” it means, quite clearly, injustice, exploitation, and destruction.⁴³

Justice can be served in a number of ways. Some recent legal challenges offer one possible hope. Toronto-based Klippensteins Barristers and Solicitors are representing 13 Mayan Q’eqchi plaintiffs from Guatemala in a case against Canadian mining company HudBay Minerals. The Klippensteins website notes, “These lawsuits represent one of the first attempts to hold a Canadian mining company accountable in Canadian courts for abuses committed in the developing world,” and a recent Ontario court ruling has agreed that the case can proceed to trial in Canada.⁴⁴ Justice will also be served when we manage to transition to energy and economic systems which “run on the interest, not the capital, of nature.”

The evolving legal definition and recognition of Aboriginal title in the unceded territories of western Canada also highlights issues of climate justice. The recent Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Tsilhqot’in Nation v British Columbia* in part defines Aboriginal title as “collective title held not only for the present generation but for all succeeding generations. This means it cannot be ... encumbered in ways that would prevent future generations of the group from using and enjoying it. Nor can the land be developed or misused in a way that would substantially deprive future generations of the benefit of the land.”⁴⁵ The question of justice in the context of indigenous land claims coincides with climate and environmental justice when practices of stewardship, extending into the future, are seen to trump the long-term consequences of resource extraction.

ALTERNATIVES

Contrary to what is often assumed, renewable and clean energy alternatives are realistic and achievable, and many countries are taking steps to make the transition to renewables.⁴⁶ A 2011 “Energy Report” from the World Wildlife Fund suggests that “by 2050, we could get all the energy we need from renewable sources,” and that “such a transition is not only possible but also cost-effective.”⁴⁷

Research produced by Stanford University and UC Davis professors concurs with the WWF report: Drs. Mark Z, Jacobson and Mark A Delucchi report that conversion to renewable energy sources “can be done with today’s technology at costs roughly comparable to conventional energy.”⁴⁸

In light of these reports, one has to ask: why are we not transitioning, en masse, and as quickly as possible, to renewable energy sources? In part, the answer is as simple as the question: vast profits are being made from current practices, and the corporations reaping these profits have enormous influence over government and thus policy. However, the question is also one of an ingrained economic ideology which we can call *extractivism*. *Extractivism* is in part the belief that environmental destruction is “the inevitable cost of achieving development” and growth in resource-rich nations.⁴⁹

Alberto Acosta, the former energy minister of Ecuador, argues for the need to begin work on a post-extractive economy. The transition will nevertheless be complex and difficult – because of the hold extractivism has on us conceptually, due to its embeddedness in our sense of our relation to the natural world as an apparently boundless store of “resources.” Arguing for a different sense of this relation, Acosta writes: “We should bear in mind that all humanity is obliged to preserve the integrity of the natural processes that guarantee flows of energy and materials in the biosphere. This implies maintaining the planet’s biodiversity. To achieve this civilising transformation, the decommercialisation of Nature would seem to be essential. Economic objectives must be subordinate to the laws that determine how natural systems operate, without losing sight of respect for human dignity and the need to improve the quality of life of people and communities.”⁵⁰

In Naomi Klein’s definition, “Extractivism is a nonreciprocal, dominance-based relationship with the earth, one purely of taking. It is the opposite of stewardship, which involves taking but also taking care that regeneration and future life continue.”⁵¹ What is required now is a “shift” in this “mentality,” which “will require rethinking the very nature of humanity’s power – our right to extract ever more without facing consequences, our capacity to bend complex natural systems to our will.”⁵²

Harsha Walia has recently suggested, in *Undoing Border Imperialism*, that questions of migration and immigration cannot be addressed in other than a simplistic and superficial way if their causes are not addressed. By the same token, it is simply not possible to address extractivism and the underlying climate crisis of which it is a central driver, unless their underlying causes are themselves addressed. And in both cases, the causes must be identified as having deep roots in the current phase of de-regulated, predatory and totalizing neo-liberal capitalism on a truly planetary scale.

FORWARD

At **The State of Extraction** conference we hope to move from this basic picture of how extraction functions and the impacts it creates to the real task, as identified by Acosta and Klein: how do we begin to organize for a post-extractive economy? How can we most effectively support each other, around the globe, in this struggle? What resources and practices are at our disposal for this transformation? What are the next steps we need to take?

Klein, for one, sees a larger role for the state as a regulator and director of the economy. This requires, at the very least, a decoupling of the state from the ideology of market fundamentalism, as well as a reconciliation between economics and ecological sustainability on a local and global scale. One challenge to be addressed in this regard is that of reconciling this call for a reinvigorated public sector with a) the project of decolonization and the realities of Aboriginal title (*who is the public* – how is it to be constituted, now, here on a Turtle Island?); and b) the necessary shift in world view that Klein also calls for – a shift to a world view which is largely based in indigenous ideas of stewardship and reciprocity? It is the goal of The State of Extraction to take up this challenge.

¹ Naomi Klein. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014: 15.

² See Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2014.

³ John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth* NY: Monthly Review Press, 2010, p.18.

⁴ Timothy Mitchell. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*. London: Verso Books, 2011:12-15.

⁵ "In the US in 2010 a remarkable 93% of the growth in incomes accrued to the top 1% of the population." George Monbiot, "The Gift of Death."

<http://www.monbiot.com/2012/12/10/the-gift-of-death/>

⁶ Ronald Wright. *A Short History of Progress*. Toronto: Anansi, 2004: 79.

⁷ Wright 129.

⁸ Christopher Mathews, for instance, refers to gold "as a hedge against catastrophe."

See <http://business.time.com/2013/04/16/whats-behind-the-crash-in-the-gold-market/>

⁹ See Mitchell 123-142.

¹⁰ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014): 129.

¹¹ Dunbar-Ortiz, 129.

¹² See Razmig Keucheyan, *The Left Hemisphere: Mapping Critical Theory*, pp

¹³ Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin. *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire*. London: Verso, 2012: 103.

¹⁴ Mitchell notes that after World War II, “US companies supplying Middle Eastern oil would accept payment only in US dollars”—“an arrangement that secured the role of the dollar as the basis of the global financial system, built on the need to use US dollars to acquire oil.” *Carbon Democracy* 30.

¹⁵ See Damian Carrington, “Carbon Bubble will plunge the world into another financial crisis.” *The Guardian*. April 19 2013.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/apr/19/carbon-bubble-financial-crash-crisis> Such a bubble seems to be under-going a significant correction largely through the efforts of OPEC to protect its market share by thwarting alternative sources of fossil energy such as the Tar Sands as well as Shale and LNG.

¹⁶ Yves Engler. “Dutch Disease in Canada.”

<http://dissidentvoice.org/2013/12/dutch-disease-in-canada/> Klein also notes that the equivalent money spent on renewables that is currently given to subsidize the oil and gas companies could generate “six to eight times as many jobs as that money generates in the oil and gas sector.” *This Changes Everything*, 127.

¹⁷ Rather than the companies’ estimate of 36,000 person-years of employment, McArthur and his colleagues revise it significantly downwards to 12,000 at the most. As far as costs, given a “worst case scenario,” Kinder Morgan estimates a cost of \$300 million, while the actual costs for a spill in a heavily populated area would be closer to \$3.5 billion dollars. See full report here:

[http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/mpp/HomepageFeatureArticles/Economic%20Costs%20and%20Benefits%20of%20the%20Trans%20Mountain%20Expansion%20Project%20\(TMx\)%20for%20BC%20and%20Metro%20Vancouver_20141110.pdf](http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/mpp/HomepageFeatureArticles/Economic%20Costs%20and%20Benefits%20of%20the%20Trans%20Mountain%20Expansion%20Project%20(TMx)%20for%20BC%20and%20Metro%20Vancouver_20141110.pdf) CBC News asked Kinder Morgan for a comment, but they declined.

<http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Canada/BC/ID/2595523122/>

¹⁸ Igluka Ivanova. “Two years in, the BC Jobs plan is failing to deliver.”

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/two-years-bc-jobs-plan-failing-deliver> Another CCPA paper on the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline found that the company’s “claims about employment are grossly overstated,” and notes that “Minimal processing of oilsands bitumen in Canada passes up larger employment opportunities from domestic upgrading and refining,” and further, that alternative investments of similar value “in green jobs and industries would create between 3 and 34 times the number of direct jobs.” See Marc Lee. “Enbridge pipedreams and nightmares.”

http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2012/03/CCPA-BC_Enbridge_Pipe_Dreams_2012.pdf

Similar reports have come out questioning the optimistic projections associated with Kinder Morgan’s Trans Mountain pipeline. See the report by the SFU School of Public Policy / Goodman Group report:

[http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/mpp/HomepageFeatureArticles/Economic%20Costs%20and%20Benefits%20of%20the%20Trans%20Mountain%20Expansion%20Project%20\(TMx\)%20for%20BC%20and%20Metro%20Vancouver_20141110.pdf](http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/mpp/HomepageFeatureArticles/Economic%20Costs%20and%20Benefits%20of%20the%20Trans%20Mountain%20Expansion%20Project%20(TMx)%20for%20BC%20and%20Metro%20Vancouver_20141110.pdf)

¹⁹ See Mitchell: “The economy [in the postwar period] became an object whose management was the central task of government” (125); and Panitch and Gindin (whose term “superintend” is borrowed to describe the economic role of states): “The role of states in maintaining property rights, overseeing contracts, stabilizing currencies, reproducing class relations, and containing crises has always been central to the operation of capitalism” (1).

²⁰ Christian Parenti, “The Environment making State: territory, Nature and Value,” *Antipode*, Vol. 00, No. 0, 2014): 15.

²¹ “[D]isclosure requirements are pretty lax, you don’t have to have Canadian directories or Canadian shareholders to be a Canadian company... and the Canadian government doesn’t ask too many questions about whether you’re paying your taxes in other jurisdictions (i.e. foreign countries where the mines are operating).” See Dave Deen. “75% of the world’s mining companies are based in Canada.” http://www.vice.com/en_ca/read/75-of-the-worlds-mining-companies-are-based-in-canada The 75% figure is also cited by Deneault and Sacher.

²² Alain Deneault and William Sacher. *Imperial Canada Inc.* Vancouver: Talon Books, 2012: 2. Deneault and Sacher further note the role of Canadian banks (10) and the Toronto Stock Exchange (16)—in each case with the backing of the Canadian state—in assisting the extractive industry and thus making Canada the industry’s home of choice.

²³ <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/bc-pipeline-protest-case-shows-how-lawsuits-threaten-democratic-voices/article21789300/>

²⁴ Cited in Paul Wells and Tamsin McMahon. “How Ottawa runs on oil.” Wells and McMahon also note, “Increasingly in Ottawa, power isn’t just exercised by westerners, it is exercised in a way that reflects the increased clout of the resource-producing regions.” *Maclean’s Magazine*. March 23 2012.

<http://www2.macleans.ca/2012/03/23/oil-power/>

²⁵ Cited in Wells and McMahon.

²⁶ Mitchell 1, 11. See also Andrew Nikiforuk: “When governments run on petro dollars or petro revenue instead of taxes then they kind of sever the link between taxation and representation.” <http://desmog.ca/2014/01/28/andrew-nikiforuk-canada-petrostate-dramatically-diminished-international-reputation>

²⁷ Panitch and Gindin 3.

²⁸ “Who Writes the Rules? A Report on Oil Industry Influence, Government Laws, and the Corrosion of Public Process.”

http://forestethics.org/sites/forestethics.huang.radicaldesigns.org/files/Who_writes_the_rules.pdf

See also Stephanie Boyd. “Harper in Peru: What the Media Failed to Report.” *The Tyee*. May 30 2013: “Underneath the rhetoric, Harper’s ‘aid’ is directed at helping Canadian mining corporations get richer with Canadian taxpayers picking up the tab.... [E]very Canadian taxpayer is now financing the human rights abuses of our mining companies in foreign countries. The conservative government has turned Canada’s International Development Agency into the public relations wing of the mining industry, with the prime minister himself as head PR wonk.” The close relationship between the extractive industry and the media could also be added to this picture of democracy in jeopardy, as a recently released document reveals that

Postmedia (owners of many major newspapers across Canada) has planned to work with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers to “bring energy to the forefront of our national conversation,” following the industry’s “thought leadership.” See “Presentation suggest intimate relationship between Postmedia and oil industry.” *The Vancouver Observer*. Feb 4 2014.

<http://www.vancouverobserver.com/news/postmedia-prezi-reveals-intimate-relationship-oil-industry-lays-de-souza> It is also worth noting that the National Energy Board of Canada, the body responsible for the energy project approval process, has been called “deceptive,” “misleading,” and a “farce” by energy industry insider and project intervenor Marc Eliesen. See

<http://thetyee.ca/Blogs/TheHook/2014/11/03/VIEW-energy-exec-blasts-Kinder-Morgan-quits/>

²⁹ <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/anti-petroleum-movement-a-growing-security-threat-to-canada-rcmp-say/article23019252/>

³⁰ See also Samir Gandesha “Is the State of Extraction a Permanent State of Exception,” *Contours*, 2015.

³¹ See “An Open Letter to the World on the Governmental Destruction of the Environment in Canada” <http://uncloaked.wordpress.com/2012/05/18/an-open-letter-to-the-world-on-the-governmental-destruction-of-the-environment-in-canada/> and John Dupuis’s extensive documentation, “The Canadian War on Science: A long, unexaggerated, devastating chronological indictment” <http://scienceblogs.com/confessions/2013/05/20/the-canadian-war-on-science-a-long-unexaggerated-devastating-chronological-indictment/>

³² Canada ranks dead last in a global ranking of environmental protections in 27 developed countries, and is the only country on the list whose environmental score has actually gone down since the rankings began in 2003. See Paul Waldie, “Canada dead last in ranking for environmental protection.” *The Globe and Mail*. Nov 18 2013. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/canada-dead-last-in-oecd-ranking-for-environmental-protection/article15484134/> Indeed, Canada’s carbon emissions are predicted to soar 38% by 2030, largely driven by expanding tar sands development; “the EU, by contrast, is considering carbon cuts of around 40% by 2030.” See Stephen Leahy. “Canada’s carbon emissions skyrocket as climate costs mount.” *rabble.ca* Nov 13 2013. <http://rabble.ca/columnists/2013/11/canadas-carbon-emissions-skyrocket-climate-costs-mount>

³³ See Paul Beckwith. “Abrupt Transition in Climate to a Much Warmer World.” <http://worlddaily.ca/featured/paul-beckwith-abrupt-transition-in-climate-to-a-much-warmer-world/> and Dahr Jamail. “The Coming ‘Instant planetary emergency.’” *The Nation*. Dec 17 2013. <http://www.thenation.com/article/177614/coming-instant-planetary-emergency#>

³⁴ Kevin Anderson. “The why and the how of radical emissions reductions.” <http://www.climatecoded.org/2014/01/radical-emissions-reductions-1-kevin.html>

³⁵ <http://libcom.org/blog/whos-afraid-ruins-18022014>

³⁶ Jamail, “The Coming ‘Instant planetary emergency.’”

³⁷ See the “Climate Vulnerability Monitor.” <http://daraint.org/climate-vulnerability-monitor/climate-vulnerability-monitor-2012/>

³⁸ Martin Lukacs. “Indigenous rights are the best defence against Canada’s resource rush.” <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/true-north/2013/apr/26/indigenous-rights-defence-canadas-resource-rush> Lukacs also cites a report that claiming that “while Canadian jurisdictions remain competitive globally, uncertainties with Indigenous consultation and disputed land claims are growing concerns for some,” upon which he in part bases his argument that indigenous land claims remain “the best defence against Canada’s resource rush.”

³⁹ Glen Coulthard. “For Our Nations to Live, Capitalism must Die.” <http://nationsrising.org/for-our-nations-to-live-capitalism-must-die/> Deneault and Sacher also argue that, in terms of resource extraction, “The federal and provincial governments of this country have continued to support practices inherited from their colonial origins” (9).

⁴⁰ United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, has characterized Canada’s treatment of indigenous people as a “crisis.” See <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/un-aboriginal-envoy-says-canada-is-facing-a-crisis-1.2054682>

⁴¹ People’s Tribunal on Canadian Mining Industry, “Project Summary.’ May 2014. Statistics cited (in Spanish) from <http://www.olca.cl/oca/index.htm>

⁴² “Dear Mr. Harper: An open letter from mining-affected communities in Mexico.” *rabble.ca* Feb 18 2014. <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/miningwatch/2014/02/dear-mr-harper-open-letter-mining-affected-communities-mexico>

⁴³ The letter sites Mining Watch Canada’s “A Dozen Examples of Canadian Mining Diplomacy.” <http://www.miningwatch.ca/article/background-er-dozen-examples-canadian-mining-diplomacy>

⁴⁴ See <http://www.klippensteins.ca/our-cases> and <http://www.chocversushudbay.com/>

⁴⁵ See https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14246/index.do#_Toc391480032

⁴⁶ Examples include Scotland, which is currently at 40% renewable energy consumption (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-25451385>) and Germany’s Renewable Energy Act, which has set goals of 50% renewable by 2030 and 80% by 2050. http://www.germanenergyblog.de/?page_id=283

⁴⁷ http://www.wwf.ca/conservation/global_warming/energy_report.cfm

⁴⁸ Louis Bergeron. “The world can be powered by alternative energy.” <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2011/january/jacobson-world-energy-012611.html>

⁴⁹ See Alberto Acosta. “Extractivism and neoextractivism: two sides of the same curse.” http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/beyonddevelopment_extractivism.pdf Acosta also notes that “In practice, extractivism has been a mechanism of colonial and neocolonial plunder and appropriation.”

⁵⁰ Alberto Acosta. “Extractivism and neoextractivism: two sides of the same curse.”

⁵¹ Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 169.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 25.