



RESEARCH PROJECT

“Fictions of Resource Extraction”

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Reading Extractive Fictions

Lakshmi Chithra Dilipkumar is a part of the International Doctoral Program “Re-thinking Environment/ um(welt)denken, a cooperative between the University of Augsburg and the LMU. She has a Master’s in English and Comparative Literature and through her research she analyses how select anglophone novels from the South Asia and Africa engage with the social imaginaries and crises of extractivism.

Extraction, Exhaustion and Promised Progress

In the age of AI, big data, and the internet boom, the material realities of resource extraction often remain obscured from the view of most consumers, especially those in urban centers. Those who read these words on a digital screen right now are likely unaware of the vast and violent extractive processes that make such a moment possible. From the rare earth minerals used in semiconductors to the plastic molded into keyboards and device casings, our digital lives are deeply enmeshed in sprawling, often invisible, networks of extraction. Amidst debates about ‘just transition’ in the wake of the current climate crisis - are we aware of the social, cultural, emotional, ecological and political effects of extraction and the ways our collective imaginaries and social lives are entangled with it?

This research approaches literary fiction as a form of cultural enactment that maps our contemporary moment, focusing on select novels from South Asia and Africa to explore how they illuminate—and challenge—an often-overlooked extractive reality. The novels studied are set in rural extractive zones and urban extractive nodes and trace the vast extractive network that defines our energy intensive lives. The analysis engages in depth with three interwoven themes of extraction, exhaustion and promised progress across selected texts. As evident in these novels and beyond, the spectacular violence of extraction is accompanied by many promises—of wealth, an easy life, freedom, speed, and progress. These aspirations and a dream for a brighter future often sustain our own attachments to our resource and energy intensive lives. However, as we grapple with multiple yet intersecting ecological, social and political crises, such promises are ruptured and replaced by a pervasive sense of exhaustion- of bodies, of social and ecological relations and of the environment. Using these themes the research seeks answers to questions like ‘how extraction feels like?’ and ‘how does it seep into our social relations, psyches and bodies?’ At large the research proposes and adopts a wider understanding of extraction, not merely as the act of excavating resources from beneath the earth, but as a defining feature of our contemporary present.

This project contributes to the concept of ‘rethinking’ in the International Doctoral Program’s emphasis on ‘rethinking human relationship with nature’ and encourages a deeper introspection of our own affinities to the promises of extractivism. Drawing immensely from the fields of energy humanities the research offers alternatives to the narratives that normalize our energy intensive lives and its pleasures.

How to read Extraction: Resource Aesthetics

I use resource aesthetics to connect fictional texts with the material realities of extraction. In the analysis of texts set in extractive rural zones and urban nodes, I explore how they evoke and respond to social imaginaries of extractive promise (hope, aspirations) and its rupture (exhaustion, alienation, sickness) in the Global South. Through this I extend the understanding of resource aesthetics as defined by resource logic to read the fictions of Global South, where extractive violence is still spectral and immediate, yet unevenly distributed.



Abbildung 1 © Lakshmi Dilipkumar: A selection of anglophone novels used in the thesis.

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