

**Topics in Latin American Politics:  
Political Ecology and Extractivism in the Americas.  
POL 360  
Summer 2020**

**Donald V. Kingsbury, PhD**  
[donald.kingsbury@utoronto.ca](mailto:donald.kingsbury@utoronto.ca)

**Drop-in Office hours:  
Wednesday 1-2 and by appointment**

**Political Ecology and Extractivism in the Americas**

This third year course introduces students to Political Ecology approaches to the study of Latin American politics. The course examines historical and contemporary state-society-nature relations, with an emphasis on the relationship between extractivism and development and attempts to resist exclusion, inequality, and environmental racism. Case studies of note include the formation of the petrostate in Venezuela and Ecuador, mining sectors in Chile and Bolivia, and agribusiness in Brazil and Argentina.

**Learning Objectives**

This course introduce students to key concepts and dynamics in Latin American politics through the lens of political ecology. Our work this semester aims to:

- Highlight the specificity of political ecology against other disciplinary, methodological, and ethical approaches in the social sciences;
- Introduce, contextualize, and problematize approaches to development that rely on resource extraction and export;
- Enhance our deep and critical reading skills;
- Encourage effective communication skills in remote-learning contexts;
- Build research skills through the composition of a case study.

**Note on Course Format**

This is an online asynchronous course.

Lectures will be given as 2-3hr (total) online lectures/week asynchronously.

Students will have the opportunity for synchronous online drop in office hours on Wednesdays, 1-2pm to ask questions and clarifications about lecture and tutorial content.

Students need Power Point and the ability to use Blackboard Collaborate (Ultra).

### **Assessment**

| <i>Assignment</i>  | <i>Point Value</i> |
|--|--------------------|
| Discussion Board Responses (4)                             | 20                 |
| Discussion Board Original Post and Comment (2)             | 20                 |
| News/Multimedia Posts on Discussion Board (2)              | 20                 |
| Responses to News/Multimedia Posts on Discussion Board (2) | 10                 |
| Case Study Introduction (Due 20 May)                       | 10                 |
| Case Study Final (Due 15 June)                             | 20                 |

#### *A note on etiquette and participation:*

Since we won't be able to meet in the classroom, and since this will be an asynchronous course, the bulk of our work will take place on the Discussion Board in Quercus. The internet does weird things to people, so let this be a reminder that the success of this class hinges on our collective good faith participation and engagement with the course material. On that note, keep commentary directed at the material. It's fine to disagree, and I hope we do. Lots of learning happens when ideas clash. However, keep the focus of disagreements about ideas, not about the person expressing them. Abusive or harassing behaviour or *ad hominem* attacks will not be tolerated.

*Discussion Board Responses* – (At least) once a week I will post questions, provocations, comments, or discussion to the Discussion Board. Students are required to make four (4) responses critically engaging with the original post. These responses are intended to be short interventions, 1-2 paragraphs in length, that substantiate their positions via references to either class texts and lectures or outside sources. Students are also encouraged to constructively engage with their colleagues and professor through commenting on these threads.

*Discussion Board Original Posts and Comments* – In an the spirit of encouraging conversation rather than monologues, students will also be required to make an original posts to the Quercus discussion board. Posts should be brief (1-2 paragraphs) engage with the content and/or themes of the course or with a comment made by the professor during lecture. Students are also required to comment on the original post of one of their colleagues at least once during the semester, using the same care in preparation and collegial tone that they would use if they were writing to the prof. Actually, scratch that. You should all be much more respectful to one another than to me.

*News/Multimedia Posts on Discussion Board* – three times during the semester you will be required to post a news or multimedia item on the discussion board that pertains to the course' themes. You should explain how you see the article as related to the course in a ~1 paragraph introduction that will accompany the post.

*Responses to News/Multimedia Posts on Discussion Board* – Twice you are required to write a 1-2 paragraph critical response to a posted news or multimedia article.

The Discussion Board is your chance to engage with the course. You are all invited to use it as much as you see fit beyond the minimum engagement required for the purpose of assessment.

Keep in mind that *critical* doesn't always or only mean *negative*. Critical here can also mean a discussion of underlying or unstated assumptions, extensions of an article's argument to different cases, comparison of one article with another.

**\*Please note, there will be no discussion board posts during the final week of the course.**

*Case Study* – The major project for this class will be a case study on a contemporary or historical extractive encounter in the Americas. The case study should be short – no more than 5 pages – and will present the results of your research throughout the course. The point of the case study is to introduce and familiarize your reader with a specific instance in which resource extraction has shaped a locality's livelihood. The case study should offer an explanation for the positive or negative impacts of extraction, identify key stakeholders at local, national, and international scales, and highlight key points of contention or conflict. The case study is divided into two components:

*Introduction* (due 20 May on Quercus) – Or perhaps better, “draft introduction +”. This first part of the Case Study should introduce the reader to a specific extractive encounter in broad strokes (is it a mining site in Ecuador? An agribusiness project in Colombia? Oil exploration off Cuba's shore?) and identify, at least partially, the key stakeholders (local residents? Foreign or National mineral concerns? Political parties or projects?). The Introduction should also identify the concepts it will deploy and identify the work these concepts will perform in explaining the case. While this is a rough draft, the key components of the project should be clearly identified by this stage.

The Introduction should cite its sources. *At a minimum* the Introduction must cite 2 peer-reviewed academic articles from outside the syllabus, 1 news media source, and 1 NGO/IGO report. This “draft introduction +” should be 1-2 pages in length (12 point font, double-spaced, Times New Roman, normal margins) and should use Chicago in text author-date citations ([https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html))

*Case Study Final* (Due 15 June) – The final draft will build on the Introduction, taking into account comments and suggestions. The final will have a fully fleshed out picture of the extractive encounter. Key stakeholders will be identified and the power dynamics of their respective positions and relations will be clearly described. Theoretical frameworks identified in the “draft introduction +” should unify and direct the case study in a compelling and directing fashion, streamlining analysis and highlighting the significance and consequences, positive or negative, of the case.

The final draft should be 5 pages in length and must cite its sources (same mechanics as the draft). *At a minimum* it must cite 5 peer-reviewed academic articles from outside the syllabus (including the 2 from the draft), 5 news media sources, and 2 NGO/IGO reports.

## **Grading Rubric**

A: Excellent work, with clear, challenging, original ideas supported by sufficient, appropriate, logically interpreted evidence. 'A' quality work should engage the reader in the inquiry, convincingly answer opposing views, be well organized, and free of significant flaws. An 'A' paper should be not just good but outstanding in ideas and presentation.

B: Good to very good work, with a clear thesis supported by sufficient, appropriate evidence, organized and interpreted logically. The 'B' paper may have some outstanding qualities but be marked by significant flaws which keep it from being an 'A'; or it may be all-around good work, free of major problems but lacking the deeper insight necessary for excellence.

C: Satisfactory work, but not yet good. The 'C' paper meets the basic requirements of a thesis supported by interpretation of specific evidence, but it needs work in thinking and/or presentation. There may be a lack of clarity, the evidence may not always be sufficient and appropriate, or the interpretation may have logical flaws. The paper may have organizational or mechanical problems that keep it from being good. The 'C' paper may be good in some respects but poor in others, or it may simply be adequate but not noteworthy overall.

D: Barely passing work that shows effort but is so marred by serious problems that it cannot be considered a satisfactory paper. Papers without a readily identifiable thesis are liable to be graded 'D'.

No Pass: Failing work—for example, a hasty, sloppy paper that shows little or no thought, effort, or familiarity with the text.

Please Note: Poor mechanics detract from your grades, but good mechanics by themselves do not make a good paper. Sloppy grammar, punctuation, and spelling tax the goodwill of your reader, which all effective writing is careful to respect. These problems won't be overlooked, since they affect the communication of thought— but thoughtful work is the most important.

**Late Policy:** We are all trying to adapt to life on-line and in isolation. However, given the accelerated pace of summer session, late submission of your work is strongly discouraged. Marks on any late assignments will be reduced by 10 (on a 100 point grading scale) points per day past the due date.

## **Email Policy**

For the purposes of this course, the primary use of email will be to share information such as announcements of events of note or news stories relevant to the course material and to schedule meetings for more individualized questions. Email is a poor medium for discussing or clarifying substantive matters that come up in lectures or reading. Face to face interactions are much better for this sort of work. Please ask these sorts of questions in class or during office hours.

I do my best to respond in a timely fashion (usually within 48 hours) to all student emails. Please do not expect an immediate response, especially on evenings and weekends. Please be sure than

any questions you have are not already answered in the syllabus. I will neither respond to nor acknowledge questions that can be answered in the syllabus.

### **Background and Refreshers**

Ideally students will arrive prepared with a degree of background in Latin American politics and history. However, readings and lectures are intended to be accessible to newcomers and specialists alike. Advanced knowledge of Latin American history is a much-encouraged plus, but not a prerequisite for enrollment. As always, the best way to get around any problems that might arise due to gaps in the knowledge we come to the course with is to ask questions, to ask them often, and to ask them without fear.

Students less familiar might consider referencing general histories of Latin America such as:

John C. Chasteen (2011) *Born in Blood and Fire* (New York: W.W. Norton)

Tulio Halperin Donghi (1993) *The Contemporary History of Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press)

Eduardo Galeano (1997) *Open Veins of Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press)

Robert Gwynne and Cristobal Kay (1999) *Latin America Transformed* (New York: Routledge)

### **Additional Resources**

A very (very, very) partial list of potentially useful links for more information on the history and present of extractivism and research in political ecology. I expect many of you have your own preferred sources, which I encourage you to share on the course Discussion Board this semester.

University of Toronto's United Nations and Intergovernmental Organization Research Guide – <https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/igo> -- your one-stop source for NGO and IGO reports, datasets, and agreements (includes a Google custom search!).

Environmental Conflict Atlas – <https://ejatlas.org/> – crowd-sourced global resource on ongoing and resolved environmental conflicts.

Mining.com – <https://mining.com> – comprehensive and global mining industry journal.

Mining Watch Canada – <https://miningwatch.ca> – activist website and organization focusing on the impact of Canadian mining companies throughout the world.

General Readers on Political Ecology:

Raymond L. Bryant, ed. (2015) *The International Handbook of Political Ecology*

Malden, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, James McCarthy, eds. (2015) *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. New York: Routledge.

Washington Office on Latin America – [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org) – US-based think tank and lobbying organization focusing on human rights issues in the Americas.

North American Council on Latin America – [www.nacla.org](http://www.nacla.org) – Academic and non-Academic journal dedicated to news and analysis on contemporary Latin American affairs.

Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, FLACSO – <http://www.flacso.org> – network of Latin American researchers and research institutions.

### **Schedule of Readings and Topics**

Please note that all readings are available on the U of T library website, or through a search on Google Scholar.

#### **May 4**

**Intro to the seminar, its themes, and its participants (and a very brief intro to the Latin American region)**

#### **May 6**

**Political Ecology Approaches (I)**

Enrique Leff (2015) “Encountering Political Ecology: Epistemology and Emancipation” in *The International Handbook of Political Ecology*, Raymond L Bryant, ed. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 44-56. (Ebook available through library website).

Rebecca Elmhirst (2015) “Feminist Political Ecology” in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, James McCarthy, eds. New York: Routledge (Ebook available through library website).

Andrea Spikin and Jorge Rojas Hernández (2016) “Climate Change in Latin America: Inequality, Conflict, and Social Movements of Adaptation” *Latin American Perspectives* 43(4): 4-11.

*Suggested:*

Juanita Sundberg (2008) “Placing Race in Environmental Justice Research in Latin America” *Society and Natural Resources* 21: 569-582.

Arturo Escobar (2006) “Difference and Conflict in the Struggle over Natural Resources:

A Political Ecology Framework” *Development* 49(3): 6-13.

### **May 11**

#### **Dependent Development and/as Extraction**

Linda Farthing and Nicole Fabricant (2018) “Open Veins Revisited: Charting the Social, Economic, and Political Contours of the New Extractivism in Latin America” *Latin American Perspectives* 45(5): 4-17.

Interview with Arturo Escobar on post-development in Latin America

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/openeconomy/latin-america-in-post-development-era-interview-with-artu/>

*Suggested*

Theotonio dos Santos (1970) “The Structure of Dependence” *The American Economic Review* 60(2): 231-236.

### **May 13**

#### **Extractivism**

Murat Arsel, et al (2016) “The Extractive Imperative in Latin America” *The Extractive Industries and Society* 3(4): 880-887.

Thea Riofrancos (2017) “*Extractivismo* Unearthed: A Genealogy of a Radical Discourse” *Cultural Studies* 31(2-3): 277-306.

Working Group on Mining and Human Rights in Latin America (2014) *The Impact of Canadian Mining in Latin America and Canada’s Responsibility: Executive Summary*.

[http://www.dplf.org/sites/default/files/report\\_canadian\\_mining\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](http://www.dplf.org/sites/default/files/report_canadian_mining_executive_summary.pdf)

### **May 18**

**No class, Victoria Day**

### **May 20**

**Film: Even the Rain (También la Lluvia – Icíar Bollaín, 2010) \*\*Pending**

### **May 25**

#### **Political Ecology (II): The coloniality of nature**

Héctor Alimonda (2019) “The Coloniality of Nature: An Approach to Latin American Political Ecology” <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2019/6/10/the-coloniality-of-nature-an-approach-to-latin-american-political-ecology>

### **May 27**

#### **Extractive Cities and the Urbanization of Nature**

Martín Arboleda (2016) “In the Nature of the Non-City: Expanded Infrastructural Networks and

the Political Ecology of Planetary Urbanisation” *Antipode* 48(2): 233-251.

Niko Block (2017) “Toronto’s Buried History: The Dark Story of How Mining Built a City” *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/mar/03/toronto-hidden-history-how-city-built-mining>

### **June 1**

#### **‘Progressive’ Extractivism**

Maristella Svampa (2019) “Neoextractivism and Development” in *Development in Latin America: Toward a New Future* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing), 4-19.

Gudynas, Eduardo (2010) ‘The New Extractivism of the 21st Century: Ten Urgent Theses about Extractivism in Relation to Current South American Progressivism.’ *Americas Program Report*. Washington, DC: Center for International Policy. <http://postdevelopment.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NewExtractivism10ThesesGudynas10.pdf>

*Suggested*

Karen Siegel (2016) “Fulfilling Promises of More Substantive Democracy?: Post-Neoliberalism and Natural Resource Governance in South America. *Development and Change*. 47(3): 495-516.

### **June 3**

#### **Energy Transitions (I): Extending Business as Usual**

Vergara, Walter, Paul Isbell, Ana R. Rios, José Ramon Gómez and Leandro Alves (2014) *Societal Benefits from Renewable Energy in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Washington DC: Inter-American Development Bank.

Energy Transitions Commission (2016) *Shaping Energy Transitions*. <http://www.energytransitions.org/sites/default/files/20160426%20ETC%20Position%20Paper%20vF%20low-res.pdf>

### **June 8**

#### **Energy Transitions (II): Criticisms and Alternatives**

Riofrancos, Thea (2019) “What Green Costs” <https://logicmag.io/nature/what-green-costs/>

Kingsbury, Donald (2020) “Combined and Uneven Energy Transitions: Reactive Decarbonization in Cuba and Venezuela” *Journal of Political Ecology* (link forthcoming)

### **June 10**

**Film: Daughter of the Lake (Hija de la laguna – Ernesto Cabellos, 2015) \*\*Pending**

### **June 15**



## **Beyond Extraction**

Alberto Acosta (2017) “Post-Extractivism: From Discourse to Practice—Reflections for Action”  
International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement  
<https://journals.openedition.org/poldev/2356>