Extraction: Geographic, Theoretical, and Normative Dimensions

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Abstract
Extractive industries, like crude oil extrusion, mining, or chemical refining, are at the center of conversations about climate change and environmental justice. Subsequently, resistance to these industries - like that in the Niger River Delta and the “cancer alley” of Louisiana - has gained traction in the press. These cases are now a kind of reprieve for nihilistic climate news observers, embodying unlikely resistance to overwhelmingly powerful industries. But their structural dimensions remain under examined. How might processes of extraction be understood as sites of political theorizing? And why does extraction matter to theories of political resistance? In this paper I theorize extraction not just as the act of deriving products from the Earth, but also as a system of normatively problematic distributions of political, social, and economic power, which privileges private profit over the maintenance of communities. I present extraction as a tripartite concept: extractive industries (1) physically remove resources from Earth. However, extraction also manifests as a (2) policy logic, rendering resistance to extraction politically impossible. Finally, I define extraction as a (3) normative schematic, which normalizes funneling public funds away from collective life and to private capital. This last dimension illustrates that extraction, even outside the context of certain highly visible industries, should be central to the political theory of our climate change era.

"For we also need resources in order to live a good life, although we need fewer of them if we are in a better condition, more if we are in a worse one."

-Aristotle's *Politics*

I. Extraction's popular narratives

The David-and-Goliath framing of a recent protest and occupation against the oil company Chevron by women in the Niger River Delta gave a recent *New York Times* story a certain familiar ring. A group of fishermen, made up predominantly of women, identified a leaking pipe from a 46-year old oil drilling operation that the company had neglected to rectify. The group, motivated by the oil-slicked waters endangering their livelihoods, geared up to fight, despite the enormity of their opponent, Chevron Oil. "You want to kill us with your oil," one activist told the reporter, "We'll come to you so you can kill us yourselves. In person."[1]

Especially in the current era of increasingly destructive climate change-fueled weather events amid growth of destructive industries, the narrative of local groups (sometimes successfully) confronting corporate drivers of fossil fuel extraction and development are slowly becoming infrequent but valued sources of reprieve for nihilistic or cynical climate news observers. The protesting fisherwomen of the Niger River Delta are thus one narrative among many. The work of former employees and union members to hold the now-bankrupt ASARCO, the American Smelting and Refining Company, to account for its abandonment of the communities that developed around their facilities, was documented in the recent documentary film *Under The Stacks*.[2] The research collaborative Their Mines, Our Stories continues to catalog the struggle of those left in ASARCO's wake.[3] A rogue faction of shareholders within the Exxon Corporation recently forced a relatively unprecedented corporate proxy war as a means of expanding the firm's investment in renewable sources of energy. The move put the billion dollar corporation face to face with its role in fossil fuel-related climate change for the first time, and might have changed the face of the company's corporate board permanently.[4] Earlier this year activists and residents in a remote Solomon Islands community "went and physically stopped the machines" that were set to begin mining over 60 percent of the community's land for Bauxite.[5] They have thus far fought off the mining project that seemed all but inevitable in the community of about 2,000 people. And the fight between more than 80,000 residents of a California town and their utility provider, PG&E, continues as their class action suit alleges that the corporation "neglected their duty to ensure the equipment wouldn't kill people" and thus helped to fuel deadly and destructive wildfires in recent summer months.[6]

The stories invoke the spirit and popular appeal of Julia Roberts' iconic character in *Erin Brockovitch*: the under-resourced masses taking on neglectful and therefore morally questionable corporations. In doing so they reveal the harms those corporations dole out to

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[1] https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/25/world/africa/nigeria-fisherwomen-chevron.html?smid=tw-share
[2] https://vimeo.com/116440111
[3] https://www.theirminesourstories.org/
[4] https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/23/magazine/exxon-mobil-engine-no-1-board.html
[5] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/07/the-little-island-that-won-how-a-tiny-pacific-community-fought-off-a-giant-mining-company
[6] https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/pge-wildfire-victims-sue-management-neglect-76096832

communities who, by chance or strategic exploitation of their structural dispossession, end up on the receiving end of corporate extraction's externalities. In cases like these the perpetrators of harmful extraction are clearly identified: the oil company that drills in historically poor or remote areas without equally distributing the profits derived from their ventures; the mining companies which subsume entire communities' political economies while facing few or no consequences when their operations stop being profitable; the profit-hungry utility company that knowingly relies on outdated infrastructure and puts lives and homes at risk in the process. Extraction, in other words, is on full display in these cases as an economic force that is not only directly tied to the natural resources of the Earth,[7] but is also seen clearly as a normatively problematic system of unequal distribution of the resources as they are derived from those natural sources.

How might the processes of extraction like the ones on display in the cases above be understood as a question of political theory? Given extraction's normative implications, how might communities resist its most un-democratic strains? And finally -- why does extraction, as both a physical process and organizational logic, matter for our contemporary understandings of political resistance in the US? In this paper I theorize the method of extraction, not just as an act of deriving products from the natural Earth for eventual use in energy and industry, but also as a system of normatively problematic distributions of political, social, and economic power, which privileges private profit over the maintenance of communities themselves. My conception of extraction, as outlined below, departs from existing work on the subject by asserting that it is a system not only material and geographic in its scope, but also institutional and thus central to contemporary understandings of how American political life is structured. More specifically, my intervention here dislodges the automatic need to associate "extraction" as an activity with economic dimensions, only with systems of natural resource production. Extraction, as I understand it, is a system in which resources come in the form of natural products from the Earth -- oil, Bauxite, diamonds, steel, all come to mind here -- but, and perhaps just as importantly, they also come in the form of institutional rewards from state and local governments. Tax revenue here becomes a resource that is easily extract-able, for example. Institutional support like specially tailored industrial policies or regulatory and tax exemptions thus become vectors of extraction; seemingly disconnected from those systems of physical resource extraction, but nonetheless harmful to communities who lose out on institutional rewards like tax revenues and policy fairness as a result.

I begin by defining extraction in its physical or material sense -- a form of economic activity with political consequences that has been well-documented in literatures related to international relations, critical geography, and histories of capitalism. I then turn to the importance of contemporary conditions of neoliberal political economy as a means of understanding the relative "newness" of the kind of extraction I document in the project. Rather than a certain industry or process, I argue that extraction represents a new logic, made possible under the organizing principles of contemporary neoliberal political economy and social principles, that no longer needs to be associated with certain industries or resources. Rather, I go on to argue, extraction as a geographical and normative regime creates a background

[7] Marx refers to these natural and kinship-based "inputs" as free gifts at several points throughout Capital Vol. I, as explained most famously by Harvey (2018). See Battistoni (2016) for a helpful critique of the free gifts logic.

condition through which US politics operates. I present a tripartite understanding of extraction that takes seriously the normative consequences of this new and broadly defined version of the term. I elaborate the consequences of this fiscal or "background condition" form of extraction, and point to its tendency to 1) further entrench existing inequalities along lines of race and class, and 2) create a higher demand for social reproductive labor related to the maintenance of material conditions and resources that make social and political life possible. Finally, I outline the normative threat that unabated extraction (in its fiscal or regulatory manifestation) presents to contemporary theories of democratic politics and political life.

II. Existing definitions and American extraction

By the term extraction, I allude especially to the work of critical international relations scholars and political geographers (Riofrancos 2020; Bebbington et al 2018; Wenar 2008; Hoffman et al 2016; Zalik 2009; Martin et al 2016; Farran 2016), who highlight the historical and contemporary tensions between industrial development and environmental preservation. More importantly, these studies focus on the ways in which political communities, both large and small, have always played a role in the development of (or resistance to) extractive industries. Drawing heavily from the language of Marxist historiography, these critical scholars often describe these systems in terms of uneven development on a global scale. While these approaches are helpful for my project, the idea of of extraction has a much longer history in political science.

One of the most canonical treatments of natural resource extraction in political science is the literature on the so-called resource curse. First advanced by comparativists and international relations scholars in the 1970's and 1980's, the resource curse hypothesis sought to explain the reasons for struggling economies of resource-rich countries amid resource-dependent economic markets, an interest spurred in large part by the 1970's oil crisis (Auty 1990, 2007; Gochberg and Menaldo 2016). Resource curse-inspired hypotheses and theories aimed to elucidate states' uneven development despite the existence of valuable raw materials. Some resource curse scholarship Auty (2002) and Sachs & Warner (2001) does advance a normative framework for understanding extraction's dangers; tying the resource-richness of poor or underdeveloped countries to a lack of industrial development and an accordant lack of real wage and labor growth. However, this area of literature eventually gave way to theories of dependency (Wallerstein 1974; Smith 1979; Cardoso 1979) and global value chains (Gereffi et al 2005), wherein binary understandings of core and periphery states became the popular means by which to explain long standing inequalities and seemingly counterintuitive patterns of stunted development among resource-rich states.

Political economy scholars went so far as assigning dependency theory characteristics to individual citizens as a means of explaining their stagnated growth on the state level (Yates 1996). An important counterpoint to the resource curse, advanced by Menaldo (2016), reversed the causal arrow of the theory, asserting that institutional weakness, not the presence of extractive industries themselves, did more to explain the lack of stable democratic regimes in resource-rich countries. Through resource curse theories, political economy scholars set the groundwork for understanding why systems of extraction -- even despite their harmful externalities and often unpredictable revenue streams -- remain so entrenched in global

economic systems. They solidified the field's understanding of global dependence on low-cost raw materials, the role of institutional capacity in stabilizing these industries, and the distinctive nature and fundamental unpredictability of revenue streams derived from natural resource extraction.

A later subset of international political economy scholars eventually illuminated the shortcomings of these state-centered theories by bringing the interests of globalized private capital into in-depth case studies and analysis of individual countries' involvement in global extractive circuits. Zalik (2009), for example, argues that, because the global market for oil is always inherently extractive in nature, the private market interests in oil wield power that ultimately re-shapes the very territoriality and social ecology of countries like Nigeria and Mexico. Zalik and others' (Wenar 2008; Hoffman et al 2016) interventions acknowledge the "intensive and strategic commercial investment and technological penetration involved in oil extraction" and thus bring a specificity to the resource curse and dependency school of thought that I employ and elaborate. Industries like oil extraction and refining, mineral mining, and large-scale logging differ from industry and manufacturing more broadly, in that they inherently involve intensive penetration into a state's geography, often by private capital, and thus will always create unwieldy externalities in the form of heightened environmental risk.

How might we understand contemporary modes of extraction as distinct from the colonial and imperial regimes that precede them? One way of understanding the distinction is the unification of state interests and power with those of the private sector. Under the contemporary neoliberal conditions wherein shrinking public investment has made way for increased privatization, extractive regimes and the interests driving them face less accountability, thanks to shrinking state resources for systems like regulation, and thus enjoy more permissive environments wherein state power acts as a handmaiden to private development rather than a check on it. I follow the lead of Petras and Veltmeyer here, who define extractivism as a far reaching agenda of capitalist accumulation that is distinctly contemporary in its motivations: "economic development based on the extraction of natural resources such as fossil and biofuels, minerals and agro-food products extracted in a process of 'large-scale investment in land acquisition' or land grabbing." (19) But the "new extractivism" of the 21st century is that they theorize is distinct from the generalized extractive processes of natural resource and agricultural industries. They argue that a "new world order based on free market capitalism and the financialization of global production" emerged in the wake of overproduction crises of the mid twentieth century. It is in this historical moment that neoliberal globalization, and its attendant focus on macro structural adjustment reforms that trapped many global South nations in relationships of debt with international financial institutions, firmly took hold. These changes made extractivism an attractive economic model, especially in nations that faced rapid deindustrialization and compounding indebtedness and thus sought lucrative revenue streams like those provided by oil and mining industries (Chapter 2).

Petras and Veltmeyer center the "the role of the state" itself, as a factor that exists "in support of extractive capital," explaining the importance of the neoliberal moment and its muddling of the line between state and private power for extractive industries. This, the authors note, is "extractive imperialism," a force that at once *exploits* the increasingly globalized nature of capitalist economic forces, and *relies* on the crisis-laden processes of deindustrialization and financialization to shore up dependence on natural resource-based revenue streams (7-9,

Chapter 2). While Petras and Veltmeyer focus mainly on Latin America as a site of extraction, their findings and theoretical framework are widely applicable. Most centrally, their conclusion, that "the costs" of natural resource extraction-heavy economies "are externalized, borne disproportionately by small landlonders and indigenous communities that are dispossessed of their territorial rights regarding land, water, and other natural resources" can and should be broadly applied. Indeed, as I argue, even economies in the US rely on this structural dispossession and externalization to maintain extractive regimes.

Their work also leads them to conclude that political leaders in the states that are host to this new extractivism are united in their resistance to it based on those externalized costs (40-42). Thea Riofrancos' recent study of Ecuador's struggle against antidemocratic extractivism, for example, involved "popular mobilization" and "dynamic conflict with state and corporate elites." In both of the modes of resistance she theorizes, "radical resource nationalism" and "anti-extractivism" citizens and activists registered natural resource-based industries as a threat to their material worlds and the democratic collective. While the former sought collective ownership of resources like oil, the latter fought for an abolition of extraction from their society (2-4). However, this unanimous resistance is far from the case in the US. indeed, extractive policies that favor private capital at the expense of social welfare are often hailed in the post-1996 welfare reform era of political rhetoric as effective free-market strategies that will jumpstart economies via guaranteed job creation (however mythical or hopeful those predictions might be).[8] This point of divergence especially adds to the urgency of taking extraction and its consequences seriously as a conditioning factor in American politics, despite its position in the highly developed Global North. While the Ecuadoran movements Riofrancos tracks take extractivism as their object of interest, my schematic of extraction as a regulatory and fiscal regime in the US is in most cases much less likely to be registered as the banner interest of broad-based activist movements. As a result, these extractive systems are less likely to gain substantial buy-in from diverse actors that lasting social movements need to succeed. Rather, extraction as I theorize it is a background condition which usually fails to reach the threshold of collective threat or mobilizing event.

As a result, I take as a starting point the fact that the US is shaped by extractive politics not just as a participant in global circuits of natural resources and their surrounding extractive industries, but also as a site of extraction itself. Put another way, I argue that scholars of American politics ought to look inward for sites of uneven development, resource extraction, and normatively problematic systems of accumulation in order to understand how these forces operate domestically to limit democratic opportunities, especially on the state and local levels. While most research on extractive forces has neglected the US context, two notable exceptions provide a model for work that takes the conditions of extraction seriously in the American context. John Gaventa's 1980 study of Appalachian miners and their precarious relationship to the forces of private and extractive capital that determined so much of their lifeworlds is one of those exceptions. Gaventa's theorization of the "power and powerlessness" of individual

[8] Research from groups like Good Jobs First unpacks the hidden costs of economic development deals that are often touted as net-gain job creation programs by state and local political leaders in the US. See, for example, Ending the Economic War
among the States (2019) -
https://www.goodjobsfirst.org/sites/default/files/docs/pdf/Ending_the_Economic_War_among_the_States.pdf.

citizens, even in the venue of their local and community governance systems, models the kind of analysis needed to grapple with the stakes of extraction as a conditioning factor in US political life. In outlining this new dimension of extractive politics I aim to expand on Gaventa's assertion that "patterns of power and powerlessness can keep issues from arising, grievances from being voiced, and interests from being recognized" (1980: vii). In recognizing extraction as one form of that power, I extend Gaventa's argument about power's consequences in asking: how do states and communities in the US imagine their opportunities for democratic resistance? While less of a theoretical investigation, sociologist Robert Bullard's analysis of environmental degradation in *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990) brings the logic of uneven development to the Southern US, and finds fertile ground for political economic analysis of environmental degradation and its impacts. Both of these studies bring arguments about extraction and development into the realm of American political life, supporting my case that extraction is a meaningful force in American politics despite its place in the industrialized Global North.

III. Extraction as neoliberal policy regime

Extraction itself is a central yet under-studied feature of neoliberalism in political economy, political theory, and economics. In this section I identify the definition of neoliberalism to which I refer, and outline why extraction as I've theorized it fits well within the contours of the contemporary neoliberal moment, especially in the US. I first provide a brief overview of research on inequality that substantiates the "newness" of the neoliberal era compared to prior historical moments. The dovetailing of extractive regimes and neoliberal economic logics thus explains how the extractive politics I describe are a central tenet of contemporary American political economy. As I go on to argue in subsequent sections, extractive policies have in the contemporary moment gone relatively unabated for decades thanks in large part to neoliberal governance regimes like privatization and deregulation. These policies now exist as mere background conditions as a result, and shape the lives of individuals and communities across the US in varied and indirect ways. Finally, I briefly discuss the nature of physical space and "place" as vital in the process of extraction; a point that is in line with the all-consuming nature of neoliberalism as I understand it. The particularity of place as both commodity and input in the capital accumulation process is central here -- a point elaborated on by critical geographers -- is central to my understanding of extraction as something that has deeply shaped the political, social, economic, and very material dimensions of the contemporary US.

Current levels of income inequality in the US are historically high by many measures. The size of the American middle class has been shrinking since 1971, while most of the country's recorded income growth has gone to the top five percent of the nation's earners (Pew Research Center 2020). At the same time, structural changes in the US economy contributed to this lop-sided growth. Especially since the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999, the US banking and finance industries enjoy a much more permissive atmosphere that incentivizes risky investments that are available only to capital-rich actors, feeding this increasing trend of inequality. Going further, 2008's Housing and Economic Recovery[9] and Emergency Economic

[9] HOUSING AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT, 42 U.S.C. (2008). https://www.congress.gov/110/plaws/publ289/PLAW-110publ289.pdf.

Stabilization Acts[10] signaled to financial industries that the government was willing to underwrite risky investments in the hopes of avoiding nationwide fiscal crises. These structural changes have skewed political economic development toward the most wealthy, a trend that has only increased in intensity since the 1970's (Pew 2020). These structural changes and the historic levels of income inequality they've engendered have challenged the ubiquitous Kuznets curve in economics research. Kuznets famously hypothesized that, although market forces and economic development often spurs a period of increasing inequality, that period eventually subsides or evens out, and development in the long run contributes income equality (1955). This inverted U-curve which predicted an eventual "evening out" during eras of economic development has of course been challenged by the increasingly unequal wealth distributions that have defined the last few decades.

This New Gilded Age (Grusky & Kricheli-Katz 2012) has of course wrought political consequences. Republican presidential administrations and elected officials are associated with more rapid growth in inequality (Bartels 2008), but the country's "runaway rewards for the affluent" also operate beyond party affiliation, thanks to more than thirty years of state retrenchment and concurrent growth of the American millionaire and billionaire classes (Hacker and Pierson 2010). Thomas Piketty's work shows us that these distinctly American iterations of wealth inequality and their political consequences are part and parcel of a broader trend wherein capital's rate of return out-earns any real economic growth in national economies (2014). His concise r > g framework is now a ubiquitous signifier for what observers call the financialization of global and state economies, and clearly justifies the continuously widening income gap between the wealthiest holders of capital and everyone else.

Some economists, however, find shortcomings in these existing theories. In his summary of the shortcomings of both the Kuznets and Piketty theories of the interplay between economic development and inequality, economist Branko Milanovic attributes this new era of rampant inequality to a combination of technological development and what he calls pro-rich policies (2016). While revolutions in communications and tech drove labor markets away from manufacturing and toward service sectors, tax and regulatory laws that favored market forces and limited government interference -- the chosen agenda of politicians in industrialized Western economies beginning in the 1980s -- dovetailed with the mobilization of capital itself. He writes:

> In the era of information technology and globalization, it is simply more difficult to tax mobile capital that, with freely accessible information and the global reach of banks and stock markets, can easily move from one jurisdiction to another. In a reversal of the well-known adage of Karl Marx that "proletarians have no homeland," it could be said that in the present era, capital and capitalists have no homeland. Capital has thus become much more difficult to control and tax. This has exacerbated the increase in inequality. (2016, 55)

To take Milanovic's point here seriously, we must attribute the prioritization and un-bridling of capital itself in the decades since the 1980s as the driving force behind our new era of

[10] Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, Public Law 110-343 (2008). https://www.congress.gov/110/plaws/publ343/PLAW-110publ343.htm.

inequality. But what about this era of inequality makes it historically unique? I align with political theorist Wendy Brown and others in pointing to the rise of neoliberalism -- an all-encompassing organizing principle for social and political life -- as the turning point that marks our contemporary era of inequality.

Although the term is “a loose and shifting signifier,” I argue that it is a meaningful descriptor for the era of US political economy since the 1980s, especially after the 1981 Patco Strike (McCartin 2011). Beyond the prioritization of capital over labor, as personified so blatantly through Reagan’s mass firing of air traffic controllers, I point to neoliberalism as “a distinctive mode of reason, of a production of subjects, and a scheme of valuations” (Brown 2015, 21). In this new era of inequality, we see a rise not just of political economic structures that prioritize the free flow of capital and the weakening of labor power, but also of a new mode of understanding life itself. All aspects of life, whether they are deemed political, social, familial, community-based, etc., are subject to the logic of economization that is, at base, geared toward maximizing productivity or returns on investment. Brown explains: “both persons and states are expected to comport themselves in ways that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value, and both persons and states do so through practices of entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and/or attracting investors.” Under Brown’s formulation, then, we can understand both the political economy changes charted by writers like Piketty and Milanović, but also the upended social norms by which any subject, even before they enter the ostensible “political sphere” must shape their lives at risk of banishment from the contemporary era of neoliberalism.

Brown continues: “any individual who veers into other pursuits risks impoverishment and a loss of esteem and creditworthiness at the least, survival at the extreme” (22). While Brown puts neoliberalism in the Platonic terms of “reorganizing both the soul and the city” under its new configurations of value, I point to extraction, broadly defined, as an important vector through which this reorganization takes place. Every place, subject, community, state, neighborhood, or resource, is thus not only a site for future entrepreneurialism. It is also a site primed for potential extraction. As later chapters show, that extraction may involve natural resources or environmental benefits, but it can just as easily extract the value (made measureable via neoliberal reason) inherent in entities as diverse as community infrastructure, local governing structures, workforces, and even families themselves. Extraction here is a handmaiden of neoliberal logic, not originating in the current contemporary political economy of the US, but made more central and empowered in the era of neoliberalism and its attendant widening inequalities.

Normatively speaking, these developments are threatening to democratic politics writ large, and this threat has been thoroughly discussed by political theorists across traditions. In a move similar to Brown’s examination of neoliberalism as a re-shaping of democracy’s meaning, Bonnie Honig has traced the importance of “public things,” which are less and less likely to sustain themselves in the contemporary neoliberal moment as “necessary conditions of democratic life” (2017, xii). Her explication of public things and their threats under current formulations of value and efficiency are especially illustrative here:

> Those who favor privatizing public things often invoke efficiency, citing waste in public bureaucracy and sloth among civil servants whose government jobs are said to insulate

> them from the supposedly much-needed market incentives that make workers more productive. State bureaucracy, but not corporate bureaucracy, is said to be inefficient. Private service providers, answerable to markets more than to governmental mechanisms of accountability, are also seen as more reliable than government agencies. (5)

Here we see how the language of efficiency, value-creation, and capital flows become the language of all life, and indeed all "things" in Honig's terms. Physical places are especially crucial here, as geographical space no longer operates just as *sites* for capital's accumulation. Rather, places and communities themselves become *subjects* of accumulation and thus extraction, as they get defined through the language of efficiency and marketization. Without Honig's "governmental mechanisms of accountability," the interests of capital thus become wholly reflected in the shaping of spaces and the resources they contain. I use the work of critical and Marxist geographers to further elaborate this point.

Extractive processes, in the most literal sense, are directly dependent on and rooted in the specificity of place. By place I mean in the geographical sense -- a mine must be located where the material of interest is lodged in the earth for example -- and also in the social and political sense. Place, and its situatedness, on the other hand, contributes to the idiosyncratic nature of the relationships between extractive industries and the places or communities that they condition. Geographer John Logan describes this idiosyncrasy in his classic study of how land, real estate, and cities themselves become commodities: "People use place in ways contrary to the neoclassical assumptions of how commodities are purchased and consumed. We do not dispose of a place after it has been bought and used. … place is indispensable; all human activity must occur somewhere. Individuals cannot do without … They can, of course, do with less place and less desirable place, but they cannot do without place altogether (2007, 18). Comprehensive theorizations of place as an important vector of capitalist accumulation are also central in the materialist theoretical tradition of uneven or combined development (Löwi 2010).

Geographer Neil Smith's *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (1981), is perhaps the best treatment of the concept, arguing that "uneven development is the concrete process and pattern of the production of nature under capitalism" (8). But, similar to Marxist studies of care that aim to reveal the contradictions inherent in the capitalist, studies like Smith's point to the fundamental reliance on contradiction that deems some spaces more primed for capitalist development than others. Smith points to differentiation and equalization as the main determinants of spatial development under capitalism. These contradictions not only "emanat[e] from the core of the capitalist mode of production" but also "inscribe themselves in the landscape as the extant pattern of uneven development" that appears to those inhabiting the space as the *natural condition* of everyday life (133, emphasis added). Put another way, Geography and space are in effect products of capitalism itself; thus uneven development, which is often pointed to as a stubborn but inevitable outcome of geographical disparities and spatial differentiation, cannot be explained away now that modern systems of transportation, raw material distribution, and global transfer render these basic geographical facts devoid of the kind of explanatory power they had in earlier eras of industrial capitalism.

Smith continues: "The concentration and centralization of capital in the built environment proceeds according to the social logic inherent in the process of capital accumulation,"

rendering both the built environment and natural resources and spaces as merely reflections of accumulation's inherent inequalities. This, perhaps most obviously, happens during the taming and extraction of natural spaces: "first, nature is made the universal appendage of capital; second, the quality of nature is leveled downward at the hands of capital" (155). But capital's control over built spaces is just as easily explained under Smith's framework: "the necessity of capital accumulation leads to a frantic geographical expansion of capitalist society [which requires] a continuous investment of capital in the creation of a built environment for production. Roads, railways, factories, fields, workshops, warehouses, wharves, sewers, canals, power stations, dumps for industrial waste" (159).[11] It is this form of spatial organization, built around and catering to the contradictions of capitalist development, that is most useful in my analysis of extraction. Whereas the natural world is exploitable as a potential "input" in the accumulation process, the built environments that surround political communities are also prime sites for extraction. While extraction in these spaces might not look like an oil well or or miles-wide mine, it can and does take the form of policies that continuously shortchange the development of built spaces that make up social worlds. In Smith's terms, this means that extractive regimes make it possible (through vectors of private capital flows *and* state regulation) for capitalist production and accumulation to continue. However, its internal logics, driven by capitalist interests, often ensure that only the bare essentials of social structures, and sometimes not even that, get built and sustained to maintain communities. Those essentials, in the shape of services or social goods (like roads, canals, schools, etc.), are in service to capital, but they also allow the continuation of life itself from generation to generation.

By definition, the interests of capital and the state infrastructure that surrounds them need to contribute to these social goods, but not so much that it threatens the pace of private accumulation. And this fundamental contradiction, as inherited from Marxist geographers of space and place, provides a key insight into the mechanics of extraction. When the interests of capital see these built environments or social goods not just as sites for investment (as a contribution to continued to capital production), but as potential sites for extraction through the funneling of resources away from state coffers and back into the cycle of private capital accumulation, we see the logic of extraction come full circle. Extraction here is not just a material practice, of taming natural resources or squeezing out every ounce of value from the production process. It is an organizing schema that has the potential to reshape geographic and political spaces.[12] As I discuss further in subsequent sections, this process and the unequal outcomes it ensures get naturalized, just as Smith's systems of uneven development and differentiation do in the case of geographic space as a product of capitalist development. This naturalization renders the forces at work a mere background condition for those living under the logics of neoliberalism and accumulation; rarely engendering resistance or rejection.

IV. Extraction, institutionalized

[11] Heynen et al's (2011) treatment of Smith's landmark text one in conversation with social reproduction theories is especially illustrative here. They argue, most succinctly, that Smith's text reveals that "what is perhaps the ultimate act of resistance to capitalist accumulation: survival itself." (243)

[12] See Ajay Singh Chaudhary's recent discussion of extractive circuits for a similar argument (2021). https://thebaffler.com/salvos/the-extractive-circuit-singh-chaudhary.

The material extraction discussed in section I is most familiar to political scientists and scholars of political economy. However, I have here expanded the schematic definition of extraction to better understand the deep entrenchment of these logics in the material and discursive conditions of US politics. One might consider the process of extraction as happening through three distinct channels, all underwritten by the fundamental logic of some form of value getting diverted from its source without remuneration, with costly externalities being created in the process. See Figure 1 for a sketch of these three channels.

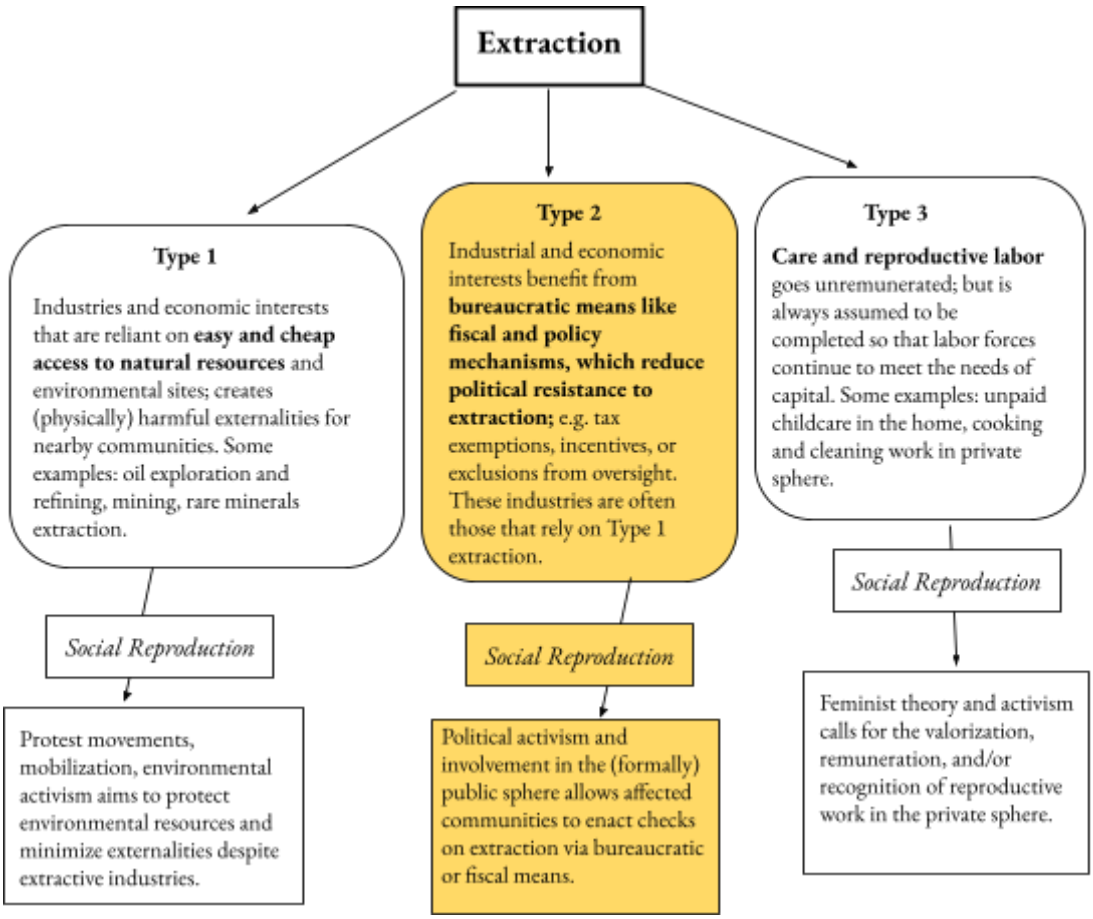

Fig. 1

For the purposes of this paper I am most concerned with the normative consequences that arise from the second type of extraction -- that which is implemented via bureaucratic or regulatory means and takes place in the built environment of interest to critical geographers like Smith.

This type of extraction, which treats social goods like tax bases and community processes as inputs that are ripe for private diversion, is relatively new in terms of existing work on the term. However, scholars of American politics are beginning to acknowledge the logic of extraction as one that shapes aspects of life in addition to natural resources and private wealth creation. Colin Gordon's study of suburban St. Louis is perhaps the most notable example of the kinds of private diversion I am examining here, and highlights the constitutive role of race that often drives the extractive regimes that favor upper class and white communities over

communities of color and working class neighborhoods in “public” service provision. Gordon explores the “devolutionary minefield” of state and local governing structures in the era of neoliberalism by examining the persistent racial segregation in the suburbs of St. Louis (2019). In addition to the stark racial politics of overpoliced black communities, mass incarceration, and de facto segregation covenants, however, Gordon points us to the less headline-grabbing sources of inequality, like property values and school quality, that do just as much to entrench racial and class hierarchy alongside the violence of policing and incarceration. The current era, during which federal involvement in state and local governing has been eroded through expanded use of block grants and increasingly polarized state legislatures, has provided fertile ground in which stratified systems of citizenship can take root. Gordon argues that “deference to local authorities on issues like zoning or economic development amount to little more than an opportunity or invitation to sustain segregation,” highlighting the central role race and racism played in the development of Missouri’s suburbs (18).

That segregation, importantly, is tied not only to places of residency and housing availability, but also to the uneven provision of goods that are often considered public utilities.[13] Gordon calls this the “fragmented allocation of services integral to the meaning and enjoyment of citizenship,” (50) and points to the existing stratification of American political communities along lines of race and class. Bureaucratic practices like zoning, urban renewal, school district management, sewer maintenance, and taxing authority, in Gordon’s analysis take on an increased role in maintaining the racism and poverty that many studies of incarceration and policing point to. While some of these services and systems are in Gordon’s terms, mundane, (think sewers, street paving, crosswalks, stoplights), they are no less instrumental in maintaining the race and class parameters of local citizenship. In fact, they are instrumental in accumulating over time, often manifesting “a political margin at which rights and protections and obligations are thinner and less substantial,” that gets borne out in communities who receive fewer services at higher costs, over generations. The structural aspect of this “thinner and less substantial” experience of governance is central to my argument. When the benefits of government become subject to the whims of extractive processes, they become a means by which differential economic and political rewards get distributed.

Because these processes happen over generations, and develop in spaces that might otherwise seem normatively neutral (e.g. the private management of a city’s sewer system may seem un-problematic on its face, especially if it results in efficiencies for a local government), they are rarely highlighted in conversations about systemic inequality. This very aspect is at the root of the normative problems I point to. Rather than generating outrage, these conditions naturalize a “thinner, less substantial” experience of government or community life, for those marginalized by systems of extraction. The logic of privatization, which makes way for the funneling of public funds away from social resources and to private interests like corporations and local industries, thus entrenches inequality in ways that are difficult to see and less likely to generate resistance. In this way, the second type of extractive process visualized in Fig. 1

[13] Private ownership and management of communal goods like electricity grids, sewer systems, and water tables come to mind here. Honig’s analysis in Public Things dovetails with Gordon’s discussion of devolution of governance structures over time -- clarifying how that devolution to local and private management often correlates to a decline in the quality or quantity of services that would traditionally be seen as public goods.

becomes a conditioning fact of life in communities that suffer the consequences of things like ongoing tax exemptions, lax regulatory standards, or industry-friendly policies approved by state legislatures.

V. Normative consequences

Thus far I've argued that extractive regimes and their logics will necessarily expand beyond the realm of environmental hazards into spheres of local politics and social environments. This leads to the conclusion that extraction itself is not merely a material process that creates externalities, but one that yields significant normative costs -- externalities that are far more difficult to measure but should be of much interest to theorists of environmental justice, democracy, and political power. In this section I outline the likely risks to political efficacy that these diverse systems of extraction engender. To take cases like industrial mining in Aboriginal Northwest Queensland, Australia (Martin et al 2016), or rapid widespread logging in Solomon Islands (Farran 2016) as examples, the extraction itself exerts radiating effects on political, social, and local community ecologies. Given a lack of public involvement in decision-making on matters concerning these industries, paired with growing mistrust in the ability of states to act outside the interests of global capital, decreasing efficacy in institutions is a likely outcome within affected communities. I argue that these social and political consequences of extractive politics are central to our normative understanding of extraction as an organizing principle with multiple and radiating effects at the individual, community, and institutional levels in US politics.

As cultural studies and Global Souths scholar Macarena Gomez-Barris (2017) persuasively argues, for example, "zones of extraction" in the current late capitalist moment necessarily employ "colonial paradigms" and methods in order to "mark out regions of 'high biodiversity'" in ecologically and socially diverse places, all which results in the reduction of "all life to capitalist resource conversion" in those sites deemed amenable to extraction. This pattern, of organizing systems of capitalist extraction in areas that are already marked with colonial domination, is laden with political and social consequences. Increased military presence, increasing privatization of public space, and the violence to communities involved in making land and resources available for extraction all radiate from these global regimes, illustrating the far-reaching effects that accompany extraction as an organizing paradigm.

More specifically, this normative line of inquiry about the tendency of extraction to exploit and widen existing inequalities places theories of democratic politics and extractive economies in conversation with one another. Put another way, need we, as political scientists and theorists, look exclusively to the Global South for examples of the kinds of extraction theorized by scholars of political economy, geography, and colonialism? I assert that the consequences observed in extractive regimes abroad—including decreased political efficacy, constrained abilities to participate in politics, and marginalization—are also present, and perhaps even amplified, in cases of extraction that take place in the US context. Given the importance of democratic values and norms associated with American institutions, these processes and their connection to extraction should give any observer of American politics pause.[14]

[14] Geographers like Pieterse (2000) have argued that globalization's effects have culminated in the reality that "the South is in the North and the North is in the South" (131), but maintains that the use of North and South distinction retains its utility. Indeed, my argument rests on the fact that communities within US

David Harvey's assertion that resource extraction in the neoliberal moment is simply a new formulation of a Marxian "accumulation by dispossession" provides a starting point for these normative investigations (2003). For the purposes of this paper, I understand Harvey's formulation as a means for understanding the process by which costs, burdens, and externalities associated with extraction get offloaded most frequently onto marginalized communities. Indeed, recent studies of resource extraction regimes that emerge within the logic of neoliberal capitalism seem to support Harvey's case that modern extraction often leads to substantial normative consequences like dispossession[15] (Veltmeyer 2013; Petras et al 2016; Petras and Veltmeyer 2014). Even more worrying is the connection between unbridled global systems of extraction and the increase of violent racialization of marginalized groups by political and social elites (Padovan and Alietti 2019). While some scholars have made the argument that the conditions caused by these diverse forms of extraction could amount to human rights violations (see, for example Weiss 1990; Nickel 1993). Voices outside the academy have begun to acknowledge the role that communities themselves play in registering objections to the kinds of extractive regimes in place that put their bodies, families, and ways of life at risk.[16]

These normative impacts of extractive regimes shores up international sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse's broad critique of the normalization of uneven development among international relations scholars: "The steady succession of development fixes and failures is papered over by global economic management; poverty alleviation and development are being outmaneuvered by the management of global growth, in the vague expectation that a rising tide will lift all boats" (2000; 129). Pieterse takes issue with the universalizing language of globalization and development, as extractive politics finds its way into an increasing number of states and communities, and no longer maps neatly onto existing theories of development on a global scale. These findings corroborate my claims that extraction is not simply a form of political economy that impacts material worlds. Rather, it can be and indeed in many cases has become the logic through which communities become victim to private capital at the expense of social welfare.

While this theoretical reading of extraction might seem detached from existing scholarship on the industrial and political economic dimensions of the term, it is not unprecedented. Extraction, as a normative drive in fact bears resemblance to many existing

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states and counties often experience extractive regimes through similar processes that previous scholars have observed in Global South and formerly colonized countries. While acknowledging the nuance of extraction across global contexts, I advance the claim that by using theories of extraction borrowed especially from Global South scholars we might reveal the threat that extraction presents to democratic ideals in the specific case of American politics on the state and local levels.

[15] Harvey includes both dispossession and extraction as tenets within his helpful schematic of "new imperialist practices" (2005). He writes, "imperialist practices, from the perspective of capitalist logic, are typically about exploiting the uneven geographical conditions under which capital accumulation occurs and also taking advantage of what I call the 'asymmetrics' that inevitably arise out of spatial exchange relations. The latter get expressed through unfair and unequal exchange, spatially articulated monopoly powers, extortionate practices attached to restricted capital flows, and the extraction of monopoly rents. … The wealth and well-being of particular territories are augmented at the expense of others." (*The New Imperialism*, Ch. 2, pg. 31-33).

[16] Excellent reporting on extractive economies and their associated environmental risks to localized communities has been more widespread in non-academic forums. See, for example this recent *Guardian* report:
https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/mar/08/climate-changed-racism-environment-south.

critiques of contemporary liberalisms. C.B. Macphearson finds, for example, that canonical thinkers from Hobbes to Locke are only able to concoct universal conceptions like the state of nature and the essential nature of man by "reading back into the nature of men and society certain preconceptions" (1962, 197) that emerged from the particular motivations of the mercantilist milieu of 1700's Western capitalist society. That society, which Macphearson dubs the "possessive market society," is the only one that provides the necessary preconditions for Hobbes's eventual sovereign to provide the means of a social covenant. Its characteristics, like an assumed "limitless power over others, and the permission of "continued invasion of each by each" in pursuit of great power, are, contrary to Hobbes's claims, not universal and unmovable "physiological postulates" driving human nature, but rather outgrowths of the possessive market society that drove the forces of war, colonialism, and empire that shaped the conditions in which authors like Hobbes and Locke wrote (67-68). Here we see that Wendy Brown's quest to uncover the very re-making of democracy's meaning through her "stealth revolution" of neoliberalism is nothing new.

The all-encompassing nature of theories like Brown's and MacPhearson's is important here, as I point to the *growing prevalence* of extractive policies in the US, even in those communities that are not considered marginalized.[17] While the ubiquity of the extractive regimes I theorize continues to grow within US politics, the disproportionate burden of extraction remains central to its understanding, and thus is central to my framework here. Existing research, especially that which charts the rise of neoliberalism as an organizing economic and political ideology, makes this point clear (Walker 2012; Schnaiberg 1994; Bell 2016; Pulido 1996; Holifield et al 2017; Lerner 2010). Faber (2018) argues that "not all people are equally impacted by social and ecological costs of capitalist accumulation" in the current moment despite the seemingly all-encompassing scope of neoliberal logics of deregulation and unbridled capital accumulation. As a result, neoliberalism itself must be contextualized along axes of identity. In order to expel harmful waste or chemicals into a political community with the least resistance, for example, a corporation has an interest in finding communities that lack the resources, political organization, or political capital to object to their practices. Faber continues:

> Following the path of least resistance often means targeting the most disempowered communities in society for the most ecologically hazardous industrial facilities, toxic waste sites, and destructive forms of natural resource extraction and energy development. The less political power a community of people possesses; the fewer resources (time, money, education) the people in that community have to defend themselves from potential threats; the lower the level of community awareness and

[17] Scholars of neoliberalism point to the increasingly precarious nature of work in Global North nations and the exponential rise in income inequality as evidence that neoliberal systems of extractions have "gone global" (Harvey 2007; Fraser 2017; Brown 2015).The idea here is that the kinds of precarity and predation inherent in the extractive economies that have long shaped Global South communities have come to infiltrate the Global North via global forces of neoliberal development. Indeed, a recent ProPublica headline describing the declining air quality in south Louisiana reads: Even Louisiana's Wealthier Neighborhoods Can't Escape Toxic Air in "Cancer Alley." (see: https://www.propublica.org/article/even-louisianas-wealthier-neighborhoods-cant-escape-toxic-air-in-cancer-alley.)

> mobilization against potential ecological threats, the more likely they are to experience arduous environmental and human health problems.

Faber draws this connection between characteristics of physical landscapes, like toxic waste sites or ecological damage, and the political capacity for resistance among the people living among those landscapes. This “path of least resistance” thus shapes not just physical space but the politics and social worlds of places threatened by extractive industries or regimes.

Noted environmental sociologist Robert Bullard corroborates this point in *Dumping In Dixie* (1990). His work tracking so-called LULU’s, or locally unwanted land uses, is now seen as the seminal text on how environmental racism specifically impacts working class groups and communities of color more than their less marginalized counterparts. “Historically, toxic dumping and the location of LULU’s have followed the ‘path of least resistance,’ meaning Black and poor communities have been disproportionately burdened with these types of externalities.” With few advocates in local political systems, and a lack of time and resources to devote to resistance to LULU placement, these communities are much less likely to both register and resist the threat of environmental destruction, something like a toxic waste site would ensure. Rather than resist, these communities adapt, and thus the cycle of inequality continues its implantation into the very material conditions of community life. He puts the consequences of this phenomenon into stark relief: “Middle and upper-class households can often shut out the fumes, noise, and odors with their air conditioning, dispose of their garbage to keep out the rats and roaches, and buy bottled water for drinking. Many lower-income households (Black or White) cannot afford such “luxury” items; they are subsequently forced to adapt to a lower-quality physical environment” (7-9).

What Bullard called the “environment-development” dialectic is, in the contemporary age of US politics, one of the most potent tensions animating state and local policy decisions (1990, 21). Part of what makes extraction so intractable from contemporary American life is the deeply entrenched logic of job creation as a net-positive development; no matter the job, no matter the wage, and no matter the tradeoff it requires. In light of his findings, Bullard turns the lens of uneven development onto the US, pointing to the persistent inequalities that characterize Southern states especially (see especially Ch. 2). Here he draws intentionally on the legacy of racial segregation in jobs, housing, political representation, and resource provision in Southern states, highlighting the many vectors of marginalization through which this type of environmental racism operates. But the process he describes, of the region’s growth thanks in large part to over-polluting industries, is generalizable to myriad sites of extraction. In fact, the tendency of political leaders (no matter their race) to side with the interests of industrial development during the economic changes of the 1960s and 70s (Goldfield 1987) is illustrative of the immense power extractive interests have long wielded over local and state governing institutions across the country. In Louisiana, for example, the interests of industrial firms and polluters have been so firmly established that residents and observers have for decades argued that entire swaths of the state, largely Black-majority areas and working class parishes, have been written off (by business leaders and political leaders alike) as expendable in order to make way for new industries and dumping sites. Here Bullard asserts that the state’s rapid industrial expansion paired with the environmental racism and historical political dispossession of threatened

communities has rendered it a “paradise lost” to the forces of un-checked polluters and business interests (Chapter 5).

While these cases are discussed in existing research using the language of environmental racism, political theorists and observers should also understand these unequal outcomes through the lens of extraction. As I’ve argued here, extraction operates not only on the level of material practice, but also on the level of geography, by determining the conditions of geographical and social spaces. Perhaps more worryingly, extraction also shapes political outcomes, often cementing background conditions of private accumulation that come at the expense of the collective life of communities. This results in normative consequences that naturalize systems of marginalization, and often amplifies existing hierarchies like race and class. By expanding the definition of extraction itself, we can thus more easily understand how its internal logics create conditions of undemocratic governance that, even when not physically violent or visibly harmful, undermine shared political life in ways that are generational and difficult to overturn without concerted and collective resistance.

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