**Commodities: a view to resource chains in Western Civilization**

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**Platform:** <https://moodle.studiumdigitale.uni-frankfurt.de/moodle/course/view.php?id=726>

**Time of online meetings:** Tuesdays 10:15 – 11:45

**Course description:**

Modern society is the result of the historical process of consolidation and expansion of modern capitalism. This expansion expresses in the intensive and extensive extraction, transportation and consumption of natural resources, in other words, in global commodity chains. Oil, coal, sugar, copper and soy are just some of the many commodities that form the material basis of our daily life. More often than not, we take them for granted, but in practice, they require a complex assemblage to reach us as final consumers.

While combining perspectives from anthropology, political ecology and science and technology studies, this course will explore the varied entanglements of natural resources in global commodity chains. We will explore the materialities, temporalities, and landscapes coproduced by resource extraction, transportation, and consumption. We will analyse the ways of knowledge, power relations, and forms of violence that emerge in the process. We will also reflect on methodologies that have served to study such entanglements and apply theoretical concepts to analyse current political issues and environmental problems.

**New times, new challenges:**

As we all know, due to Coronavirus this semester courses will be held online. The university and the lectures have made a great effort to guarantee that online teaching maintains the same quality as regular face-to-face teaching. However, as with regular classes, students have an essential role in the success of the course and responsibility for their learning processes. I invite you all to make of this a learning opportunity for all of us.

As these are times of increased anxieties, it is important that you take care not only of your physical but also of your mental health. Please do not doubt to contact me about any problematic situation that you might have at home and that might interfere with the course.

As this is a new situation for all of us, please feel free to give me feedback at any time.

**Course dynamic:**

The course can be taken asynchronously to account for the situation each of you might have. It will provide you with self-learning tools and guidance. The platform that we will use is **Moodle**, but you will also receive a weekly email with instructions for the week.

Each week there will be one **assigned reading** and one **assigned activity**. These are the core of the course and are both mandatory. Assigned activities need to be completed by **Saturday**. If there is a holiday in the middle of the week, then the deadline will be Sunday. Assigned activities might include reading diaries, short questionnaires or essays, multiple choice quizzes, commentaries to the text, among others. Assigned activities will be uploaded before the beginning of each week.

To complete the assigned activities, you will not only need to read the assigned text but look for additional information yourself, whether to clarify concepts, understand historical contexts or locate the text within academic traditions. Each assigned activity will have clear instructions, and you will receive feedback within the next week. If the activity requires writing, do not forget to cite properly using one unified citing style. (*the use of a reference manager software is highly recommender not just for this course, but to keep track of all references you read and use during your master. It will save you lots of hours when the time comes to write your master thesis. I use Zotero, but there are many more. Google Scholar is also a handy tool to look for and cite documents*)

For each week there will also be a list of **additional resources.** You will find these displayed in Moodle after the assigned reading and the assigned activity.These are intended to help you understand the text and expand your knowledge about the topic of the week. They might also help you with the assignment. These additional resources might include an extended bibliography, links to author's webpages, newspaper articles, short readings and media, and PowerPoints prepared by the lecturer. You should at least browse through these additional resources.

Every week during the class hour (Tuesdays 10:15 to 11:45), we will meet online synchronously. There, we will discuss the text assigned for the previous week and solve doubts concerning the week's topic and activities. Since not necessarily everybody has equipment for video conferences, a reliable internet connection or might have to attend family issues, attending the online meeting is not mandatory. Nonetheless, if you can meet, you are highly encouraged to do so.

**Platform**: ZOOM

**The meeting ID is**: 911-7755-7485

**The password is**: 627060

**The link to join is**: <https://ruhr-uni-bochum.zoom.us/j/91177557485?pwd=TElRd1hFemNOOFlUZVJkZUpnYk1pZz09>

The first online meeting (April 21) will be introductory. We will meet each other and discuss the course logistics. If you cannot come, please send me and your classmates and email introducing yourself and briefly presenting your research interest and the reasons why you decided to take this seminar.

The discussion of the first week assigned reading and activity will be on the second session (April 28), for the second week in the third session (May 5), and so on.

Students are also welcomed to book online "office hours" that will generally be scheduled for Fridays, although other times might be possible. These can be held by video conference or by phone. Please send an email in advance.

* ***The program may have changes that will be announced on time.***
* ***An email will be sent at the beginning of each week summarizing the assignments.***

**Evaluation:**

To pass the course, you are required to read each week's assigned reading and to complete all the assigned activities on time.

An optional activity is to write a term paper (one per module) within the context of the class. In this case, you need to write the lecturer that you intend to do so and book office hours to discuss the topic.

**Weekly schedule**

*Introduction of the course and participants April 21*

**Week 1: April 20 to 24 – Western history and commodity trade: plantations**

Mintz, S. W. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. Penguin Publishing Group, 1986. Introduction and skim through the book, especially chapters 2 and 3.

*Discussion on April 28*

**Week 2: April 27 to May 1 - Western history and commodity trade: energy**

Mitchell, Timothy. *Carbon democracy: Political power in the age of oil*. Verso Books, 2011. Introduction p 1-11 and Chapter 1 p 12- 42

*Discussion on May 5*

**Week 3: May 4 to 8 - Resource Making - Temporalities**

Ferry, Elizabeth, y Mandana Limbert. *Timely assets. The politics of resources and their temporalities*. School for advance research advance seminar series. School for Advanced Research Press, 2008.

*Discussion on May 12*

**Week 4: May 11 to 15 - Resource Making - Materialities**

Richardson, Tanya, y Gisa Weszkalnys. «Introduction: resource materialities». *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, n.o 1 (2014): 5-30.

*Discussion on May 19*

**Week 5: May 18 – 22 -** G**eographies of extraction: Enclaves**

Appel, Hannah. «Walls and White Elephants: Oil Extraction, Responsibility, and Infrastructural Violence in Equatorial Guinea». *Ethnography* 13, n.o 4 (December 1 2012): 439-65.

*Discussion on May 26*

**Week 6: May 25 -29 -** G**eographies of extraction: The Pit**

LeCain, Timothy J. *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines That Wired America and Scarred the Planet*. Rutgers University Press, 2009. Introduction and excerpts of chapter 4

*Discussion on June 2*

**Week 7: June 1 – 5 - Moving commodities – transportation and infrastructure**

Helmreich, Stefan. «Nature/culture/seawater». *American Anthropologist* 113, n.o 1 (2011): 132-44.

*Discussion on June 9*

**Week 8: June 8 -13 - Resource affects**

Weszkalnys, Gisa. «A doubtful hope: resource affect in a future oil economy». *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22, n.o S1 (April 2016): 127–146.

*Discussion on June 16*

**Week 9: June 16 – 20 - Toxic environments**

Tironi, Manuel. «Hypo-interventions: Intimate activism in toxic environments». *Social Studies of Science* 48, n.o 3 (2018): 438-55.

*Discussion on June 23*

**Week 10: June 22 – 26 - Labor**

Tsing, Anna. «Supply Chains and the Human Condition». *Rethinking Marxism* 21, n.o 2 (abril de 2009): 148-76.

*Discussion on June 30*

**Week 11: June 29 to July 3 - "Ethical capitalism": the performance of transparency and CSR**

Barry, Andrew. *Material Politics: Disputes along the Pipeline*. RGS-IBG Book Series. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013. Chapters 3 and 4

*Discussion on July 7*

**Week 12 - July 6 to 10 - Controversies and activism**

Carmona, Susana, y Pablo Jaramillo. «Anticipating futures through enactments of expertise: A case study of a coal mining environmental controversy in Colombia». *Extractive Industries and Society* forthcoming (2020).

*Discussion on July 14*

**Week 13:** July 13 to 17 - **Theory and daily life**

*No assigned reading*

**Assigned activity: Analysing News**

**For this week, find one news article on an environmental or social issue related to commodities extraction, transportation or consumption. The article's central message should express some ethical concern or pose a relevant political issue that needs to be discussed. The aim of the assignment is to connect theory with concrete daily life issues and to explore the relevance of the concepts learned when it comes to analysing public information regarding commodity chains. The exercise should also help to practice giving persuasive justifications.**

1. **Copy the article's text in a different word document and copy the link so everybody can follow the original sources.**
2. **Highlight the parts that you believe express ethical problems (Yellow) and/or the part that can be related to concepts learned in class (Green).**
3. **Write a short explanation of why you highlighted those specific parts of the document and how they relate to the class concepts. Finalize with a brief reflection where you assume a position towards the news piece.**
4. **Send to all class participants**