

# Development between Extraction and Compassion.

## Inaugural address as Rector and professor of Lived Religion and Development at the International Institute for Social Studies.

12-10-2023

R.Ruard Ganzevoort

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Rector, colleagues and students, dear friends,

Four months ago. A small town in Colorado, USA, called Golden. The Colorado School of Mines with its nickname 'Orediggers', hosted the twenty third meeting of the Space Resources Roundtable. Presentations dealt with issues like 'Why Nations Care About Space Resources', 'Stochastic Modeling of an Asteroid Mining Business Case', 'Subsurface Water Extraction from Extreme Environments', and – my favorite – 'Poke the Moon'. I quote from the program book introduction: "As we gather for this meeting, oxygen is being extracted from the Martian atmosphere and surface prospecting equipment is expected to be launched to the Moon this year. Legislation has been advanced in several countries for commercial space-resource exploration and utilization. The Artemis Accords now include 25 countries that have agreed to extract and utilize space resources to support safe and sustainable space exploration, while a broader legal framework is being actively pursued at the international level. Most large aerospace companies and dozens of start-ups that have appeared in the past few years are positioning themselves in the various links of the space resources value chain, highlighting the growing interest and opportunities in this field. As current plans focus on the Moon as a destination for renewed robotic and human exploration, as well as paving the way to the Red Planet, it is now abundantly clear that the use of space resources will enable both further exploration and commercialization of space" (Space Resources Roundtable 2023). End of quote.

As a typical social sciences and humanities person, I confess that I am overwhelmed by the technological skills that makes this entire endeavor possible. It is amazing that we can send humans to the moon and even actively envision journeys to other planets. And yet... There is something fundamentally unsettling about this story. It is not only the fact that the Artemis Accords are

primarily US-led and despite obligatory references to sustainability clearly aimed to serve purely commercial and geopolitical interests. It is not even the fact that people and organizations that are able to make the incredulous investments needed for such projects rather spend their money on a pie in the sky than on real food for real people starving on our own planet. What is deeply disturbing about this story is the unencumbered thinking about extraction. The language used in this conference program and in the Artemis Accord is not unlike how European rulers in the age of colonization discussed which country would have the rights to explore, conquer, and exploit other parts of the world. It resonates with the ways in which the Dutch government and VOC decided which parts of what is now Indonesia would be the territory for Protestant missionaries and which parts would be the playground for Catholics. Despite the pretense of a legal framework, the story is troubling because it seems to be a complete and precise re-installment of the colonization narrative. Treating territories as *terra nullius*, no one's land, just because the state or the population is not recognized by us, implementing laws alien to that land, and defending mostly the interests of the colonizers. And especially worrisome are the treaties that colonizing countries conclude in order to divide the territories between them without acknowledging the intrinsic rights of people indigenous to those territories.

Of course, one might object that these territories in space are uninhabited and that there are therefore no humans, animals, or other life forms whose rights might be compromised by our explorations and extractions. But first of all, that was also the argument in the past when the indigenous populations were not recognized as people with rights. It still happens in contemporary land grabbing at the expense of indigenous ethnic minority groups, pastoralists, and peasants who need the land the most, as Tsegaye Moreda (2016) analyzed. It is still the argument when we discuss the intrinsic rights of nature. And secondly, it is completely beside the point I want to make. That point is that this whole endeavor is emblematic for the extractivist agenda and attitude that has been so dominant and now is so contested in the development discourse. It is linked to the agenda of neoliberalism, or – according to Karim Knio – neoliberalization as the practices and values of commodification and marketisation through policy interventions themselves (cf Knio 2022).

## **Extractivism**

### *Earth*

The concept of extractivism has migrated from its original location in the context of mining and producing raw materials and natural resources, usually shipped out of producing countries without much processing in the country of origin. In colonial times, this was of course the dominant model for North-South international trade. Countries like The Netherlands, England, and Spain would conquer or claim territories on other continents with the main purpose to extract valuable natural resources and produce whatever they could not grow in Europe. Today countries don't officially call these activities colonialism

anymore, but the underlying model has not changed. In many places, economic development is defined in terms of trading possibilities and trading is often focused on those resources and products that can be sold to strong economies like Europe and the USA, and increasingly also China. Even when we buy fair trade and organically produced coffee and cocoa (things we want and cannot produce ourselves), even when we improve local economies by stimulating the local processing of these resources, we are still working within the extraction-based economy in which the rest of the world serves the needs of the economic and political centers of power. Revenues of this trade were used to finance development in the resource producing countries (Burchardt & Dietz 2014) and analysis from a political economy point of view reveals that this can indeed create some economic benefits in the short term, which even may result in support from the local population, as Murat Arsel and Lorenzo Pellegrini (Arsel, Pellegrini & Mena 2019, cf Arsel, Hogenboom & Pellegrini 2016) described. The downside of this extraction-based development has been analyzed as the *resource curse*, described by Mansoob Murshed and the wider literature surveyed by Ellisaios Papyrakis and others (Gilberthorpe & Papyrakis 2015), discussing why the extraction and trade of natural resources can lead to economic stagnation.

But extraction is not yet extractivism<sup>1</sup>. Extraction of natural resources and its socio-economical and environmental effects are only one dimension of a wider problem. Extraction is both part of and metaphor for extractivism. Extractivism refers to a philosophical perspective that questions the broader discourse of the mindset and cultural frameworks of extraction. It is a mindset that is pertinent to our thinking about development, about politics, about economy, and much more. It is a cultural framework underlying a significant part of at least European cultures and that is central to many geopolitical dynamics.

This extractivist approach is found everywhere and it may be helpful to explore some of these fields and reflect on the nature and consequences of extractivism. Beyond the first dimension of extraction – planet earth and other territories – we can reflect on extraction in the dimensions of finance, time, data, relationships, religion, and knowledge. Some of these dimensions operate primarily on the systemic or institutional level, other dimensions play out mostly on the individual level, which shows that it is indeed a dominant perspective across our personal, social, and organizational existence. I don't try to be comprehensive in any way, and I will certainly generalize far too much, but I only aim to show how widespread and taken for granted this perspective is.

### *Financial*

A clear-cut example of the link between extraction and finance is of course the ongoing search for gold and diamonds, not so much for its practical use or

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<sup>1</sup> Riofrancos (2020) offers an even more precise differentiation between *extractivism* as the policies and ideologies involved in extraction processes and *extractivismo* as the, especially Latin American, discourse critically reflecting on this.

intrinsic value, but because of the financial value attached to it. A digital version of this is the mining of blockchain based cryptocurrencies. In both cases, the mining itself has severe environmental consequences. But again, this is only extraction (cf Gago & Mezzadra 2017). The more complex financial systems are, the further they move away from intrinsic value and the more they are part of an extractive system. Extractivism in a financial sense is visible in the accumulation of wealth on the one hand and debt on the other. In fact, following credit theories of money we can claim that money is identical to debt, only seen from the opposite perspective. Development is often financed by loans that create a new dependency and reinforce the dominant economies of the Global North while at the same time creating a market for the North to sell our superfluous or even defected products, thus extracting even more from the Global South under the guise of development. By providing money, we are therefore creating more debts and in fact, global debt (as a share of global GDP) has tripled since the mid-70s (Gaspar, Poplawski-Ribeiro & Yoo 2023). A critical question in the context of North-South relations therefore is whether aid money and economic development money should not be relabeled as reparations, paying back to the South what the North has extracted over hundreds of years and continues to extract, if only in a different shape, as Lebohang Pheko said during the recent roundtable that Andrew Fischer organized.<sup>2</sup>

### *Data*

It is well understood by now that there is no such thing as free data.<sup>3</sup> While Big Tech wants us to believe they are creating new possibilities for us to connect and communicate and to access unlimited data and information, the reality is the other way around. By using Facebook, Netflix, Tiktok, and whatever we have on our smartphones, we are allowing these companies to gather data about us and our societies. We are not watching Netflix; Netflix is watching us. This travesty of the extractive nature of the data industry extends to the way it presents itself.<sup>4</sup> Take for example the common usage of the term “the cloud”, as if our data are stored in an ethereal universe and not in a myriad of data centers and data networks, requiring massive mining operations for rare metals and consuming two to three percent of the global energy consumption (IEA 2023). Is “the cloud” only a euphemism, or is it a deliberate attempt to disguise its extractive nature? But there are many more examples of corporations, states, and especially intelligence services trying to collect as many data as possible under the flag of security, and in which even metadata are already sufficient to gain power over other data-gatherers and especially over individuals and communities. The surveillance society that has become possible through data technology is not only a threat for individual privacy. By extracting data, it creates power for the state and for commercial organizations that was formerly unheard of.

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<sup>2</sup> dr. Lebohang Liepollo Pheko during the ISS hosted Roundtable on The Political Economy of Global Reparations, 27 September 2023.

<sup>3</sup> See Ganzevoort (2020) for further reflections on data and humankind.

<sup>4</sup> Crawford (2021) provides a clear and multilayered description of the extractive nature of AI.

### *Time*

Extractivism is not only present in the actions and structures of institutional powers. It is also part of our own cultural attitude. At least in the West, I must add, because I don't want to generalize too much across cultural differences, although cultural globalization is visible everywhere and Western culture remains dominant in many parts of the world and is propagated through commercial activities and especially popular culture. One dimension in which this plays out is how we relate to time. Although a history of the commodification of time is beyond my aims today, it seems safe to say that the industrial use of time clocks to monitor human labor has contributed to a cultural mindset in which our time can be divided into packages that can be sold for money and used for certain purposes. Not only does that give employers the right to use the time they have bought from us, but it also makes us question how to make optimal use of the time that is left for us. Expressions like "wasted my time" and "you have to get the most out of it" or "YOLO, You only live once" reveal this extractivist mentality. The idea that time is a commodity of limited supply also leads to a perversion of how we look at ageing, again especially in Western cultures. The older people get, the less productive time they have left and therefore the less value they represent. Younger people represent more time of potential labor and socially produced aspirations, as Roy Huijsmans describes it (Huijsmans, Ansell & Froerer 2020), and thus more value. This is even translated into insurance calculations in cases of disability where the loss of future laboring time is a factor in determining the compensation. In contrast, we can also see cultures where old age represents not a lack of future time but a richness of experiences.<sup>5</sup>

### *Relationships*

The commodification of time is paralleled in a commodification of relationships. The most dramatic version perhaps is found in forced marriage, sexual or domestic abuse, and marriage murders, as I encountered in Sree Sakti's (2023) research on violence against individuals in inter-caste and inter-religious marriages in India. A central aspect of feminist critiques of patriarchal structures and masculine privileges links to the extractivist exploitation of women, insightfully captured in Wendy Harcourt's (et al. 2023) work on feminist political ecology or Silke Heuman's upcoming book on Gender and Social Justice (Heuman & Antillón forthcoming). The precarious position of sex workers, mostly women, but also including men and trans persons, is one of the important topics of Karin Astrid Siegmann's (2019) work. But it is much broader. Modernization and industrialization have led to differentiation in tasks and activities and therefore also in relationships. Colleagues, friends, family members, neighbors, caregivers, trade partners... Many or all of these relational categories could coincide in pre-industrial times, but are now commonly organized through different and separate relational spheres. And although there is in many cases still a good degree of mutuality and intrinsic

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<sup>5</sup> Nicely captured in the recent PhD-thesis by Constance Dupuis (2023).  
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value, there is also at least the risk of commodification where relationships are evaluated for their utility in satisfying specific needs. Couples break up or engage in therapy because their relationship “doesn’t bring them enough.” In my younger years as a pastoral counselor, a businessman explained why he wanted a divorce, and he said literally: “Some investments pay out, some don’t. My marriage qualifies as sunk cost and there is no use investing more.” Or take an anthropological look at receptions at academic conferences and you will easily see how people flock together around the most ‘interesting’ and often ‘powerful’ individuals, not because they are necessarily the nicest persons to talk to, but because they are expected to yield the best outcomes when we invest in this relationship.

### *Religion*

And then religion, which I mention specifically because my chair here at ISS is in Lived Religion and Development. One of the founders of sociology, Max Weber, already in 1905 wrote his influential and highly criticized *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Religion can easily become part of the extractivist mindset for example when it takes on magical characteristics. Especially in critical circumstances, people may turn to religion trying to avoid imminent danger. In contexts of poverty, there is a strong temptation to follow prosperity preachers who claim that their approach to religion will bring health, material wealth, and much more. Religious leaders may of course act with sincerity, integrity, and humility, but they may also capitalize on their charisma and extract power, honor, and money from the community they are leading.<sup>6</sup> I may note here one interesting parallel between missionaries and humanitarian aid organizations. Both are not only engaged with a society in need, usually far from their homeland and constituency. They also both typically share stories about their work in the field, highlighting the dire predicament in which they find the people they want to reach, the beneficial effects of their intervention, and the impact of the financial support of their donors. Everybody wins. The receivers of care or mission are supposed to benefit, the donors can feel good, and the missionaries or aid workers remain in business. Good intentions notwithstanding, both missionary and humanitarian work can easily turn out to be extractive sectors, and in fact, examples of white saviorism. The challenge is to explore alternative spaces of local agency, as is for example done in the humanitarian observatories supported by the ISS humanitarian governance program.

### *Knowledge*

Finally, and added here specifically because it regards us as an academic institution, is the role of extractivism in the generation and distribution of knowledge. The contemporary movement of open access and open science is at least trying to correct the perverse system in which public money and the individual drive of researchers have been exploited by commercial

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<sup>6</sup> See Sanders (2000) for an insightful analysis of charisma in early Christianity and in contemporary cases.

organizations. But there is more. Even an academic institution like ISS that proudly carries the banner of social justice and invests in what we call Recognition and Rewards, can in fact perpetuate a competitive rat race for especially younger scholars, whose energy and ambition are being used to further the academic reputation of the institute. Are we really building a nurturing and secure environment in which people can grow under fertile circumstances, or are we just as extractive as we reproach other institutions to be?

And even more seriously. Do we truly embrace different epistemologies and forms of indigenous knowledge, also when they come from other, previously colonized parts of the world? Or do we hold on to our Eurocentric model of knowledge generation and transmission, in which students from the global south are part of our business model, leading to the continuation of North-South knowledge-power dynamics and a potential brain drain from the south? I am not doubting anyone's intentions, but we also need to reflect on our own role in development studies and I am happy to see critical studies on pluralist approaches to economy and agrarian studies by for example Irene van Staveren (2021) and Jun Borrás (2023).

### **Compassion**

Maybe you are not convinced by every single example that I mentioned, but I hope that you can follow me when I suggest that extractivism is central to the Western mindset and potentially also influences other cultural contexts. It is at least, I would say, very much present in development discourse and practices. That is not a reason to abstain from talking about development, just like it is not a reason to abstain from relationships, religion, or knowledge. But it is a reason to carefully look for alternative mindsets. Can we reconceive development in non-extractive ways? We can learn from the debates about decoloniality and degrowth or post-growth as Julien-Francois Gerber (2023) and Rosalba Icaza (2022) advocate in recent publications. But if extractivism is an underlying cultural mindset that plays out across many domains of how we interact with the world around us, then we also need an alternative fundamental mindset that leads to different ways of relating to the world.

This alternative mindset may go by many different names. The fourth century Algerian theologian Saint Augustine for example, distinguished between two ways of relating: *Uti* and *Frui* in Latin. *Uti* literally means 'to use' and *frui* means 'to enjoy'. More precisely: *Uti* refers to an instrumental use of people, animals, things, and so on, while *frui* refers to the intrinsic value of the other, not a means to an end (Dupont 2006). And the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1923) wrote exactly one century ago about the difference between I-it relations and I-you relations. I-it refers to the objectifying approach which turns the other into a thing to be used, whereas I-you refers to the dialogical attitude in which the other has a voice to be heard and a subjectivity of their own.

One concept that I personally find very appealing is compassion. Compassion is not a soft-hearted emotional response; it is a virtue that is developed over time through a long series of warm and painful experiences, hard and daily choices, honest reflection and introspection, and especially concrete actions. It is also a virtue that is central to many global and indigenous worldviews and religious traditions and therefore can be seen as a core element of human wisdom accumulated over many centuries, as religious studies scholar Karen Armstrong (2010) has outlined.

The concept of compassion combines three interrelated aspects that are relevant for our considerations today. First, it takes its starting point in the awareness that everything is connected. What happens in Ukraine has direct impact on us in The Netherlands. The fate of indigenous people in the Amazon is connected to our need for gold or aluminum. Humans and other animals, plants and minerals are all part of one interconnected ecosystem. This awareness of interconnectedness does not allow for instrumental and extractivist use of the earth, of the other, of the world around us. It requires instead a holistic analysis that also does justice to past and future generations.

Second, the concept of compassion implies that we are willing to be affected by 'the other', be it fellow humans, animals, future generations, or anything else. "Willingness to be affected". That means it is at the same time an active choice, and an affective openness. Philosopher Emanuel Levinas spoke of the 'face of the other' that speaks to us. Compassion in that sense is nothing less than allowing that other face to speak to us. But being spoken to immediately includes being accountable. Being response-ible. Being invited to respond, to answer to invitations and accusations. It is a fully relational ethics-of-care approach that is found among others in Kaira Cañete's work on disability-inclusion in disaster risks or gender and recovery (Alburo-Cañete, 2022; Alburo-Cañete et al. 2023).

And then the third aspect of compassion is to turn that awareness and willingness to be affected into action. But this action can no longer be the paternalistic expert-driven top-down form of helping that dominated older paradigms of development and care. It must be based in the awareness of interconnectedness and accountability and therefore breathe the values of mutuality, equality, and justice. To quote the famous words of Aboriginal scholar-activist Lilla Watson: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

### **Challenges for ISS**

One thing that becomes very clear from all my readings and encounters in the last two months, is that this critical alternative look at development is not some kind of flower power softness. We live in a world of strong local and geopolitical power games, and it would be naïve to think that this counternarrative of compassion will automatically play out in reality. It is, in fact, like every virtue,



something that only materializes through hard work, constant repetition, and struggling to get the vision engraved into laws, structures, and procedures.

On this birthday of ISS, we gratefully look back on all the great work that has been done, also under the leadership of my predecessor Inge Hütter, and we look forward to where we are heading. The concept of development and development studies is heavily critiqued because of the neoliberal interpretation of development that dominated it, but the field of development studies is maybe more relevant than ever. How can we contribute to a comprehensive understanding of prosperity that aims at flourishing rather than growth? How can we account for the interconnectedness of economic, social, cultural, and political processes, locally and globally? How can we make sense of the multicrisis that results from centuries of extractivist development: ecosystem destruction, food insecurity, conflict, forced migration, climate change? What kind of development is needed and possible to support local communities and contribute to peace, justice, and sustainable living? All these questions require not only critical analysis of governing cultural mindsets, but also efforts to change systems and improve legislation and governance from a perspective of social justice.

That is why I was impressed with the work of Oane Visser (2016) on investment policies for farmland; with Daphina Misiedjan's (2002) work on a legal framework of climate justice for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; with Jeff Handmaker's (2023) legal mobilization; with Farhad Mukhtarov's (et al. 2021) focus on water diplomacy; with Rod Mena and Thea Hilhorst's (2021) eye for governance strategies and structures in humanitarian aid and relief work; with our economists like Arjun Bedi, Matthias Rieger, Robert Sparrow, Binyam Demena who assess the concrete economic reality in policy domains like health and circular energy (e.g., Wagner et al. 2021; Yilma et al. 2021). What we need is a radical analysis of the fundamental values underlying existing practices and structures, and practical steps toward change.

In my talks with many of the colleagues here at ISS and in my engagement with your work, I have come across a plethora of examples resonating with the mindset of compassion. I read about a participatory role of children in climate change debates, as Karin Arts (2019) discusses, grassroot complementary currency in Georgina Gomez's work (Gomez & Medina Prado 2020), Kees Biekart's attention for civil society and civic space (Biekart, Kontinen & Millstein 2023), the importance of community participation for the quality of rural infrastructure as Zemzem Shigute (2021) studied, the notion of frugality as a spiritual value of simplicity and moderation in the new handbook on frugal innovation edited by Peter Knorringa and others (Leliveld et al. 2023), the radical participatory research style of Nanneke Winters (2021) when she works with migrants and their journeys, and so on. I try to acknowledge all the great work scholars at ISS are doing, but I simply cannot mention every single name, so my apologies for that.

I found in ISS a vibrant community that is an embodiment of the celebration of diversity of backgrounds and identities as well as theories and methodologies.

I see committed students, PhD researchers, academics, and professional staff, bound together by the dream of a better world, both inside our small community and outside of it. I see a great collective of scholars and activists, artists and advocates, supporters and facilitators, people who are growing and nurturing others.

Many have asked me in the past two months what my plans are for ISS and where I will lead you. I hope you have gathered by now that it is not about my plans and decisions. It is about what we together, as ISS community will do. This too will be participatory and intentionally non-extractive. But you also have heard in my lecture some themes that I would like to bring to the table when we engage in strategic decision-making about the future of ISS.

First, I hope that ISS will build on its reputation as a leading international institute in the field of critical development studies by crafting dialogues and debates about the paradoxes in development approaches and about the fundamental mindsets and paradigms underlying those paradoxes. We don't even have to agree on specific issues in development and social justice to understand that we have a unique opportunity and responsibility to co-shape the perspective on development.

Second, this will require concrete rethinking of our partnerships with global south and global north institutions. We must find out how these partnerships can grow to become truly equitable, just, and reciprocal. Obviously, this will also affect how we think about our MA and PhD programs and partnerships on that level, even when we cannot escape the fact that also ISS operates in a system where our incomes depend on playing along.

Third, it relates to the challenge to play a much more visible role in the great ecosystem in the Hague of national and local government, embassies, international organizations, humanitarian NGO's, knowledge partners, and corporate organizations. I hope that ISS could become a household name in those circles and also for journalists as the place to go to for development-relates questions.

Finally, we need to consider whether our internal structures and procedures match our vision and principles, what is needed to become effective in our mission, and whether we are truly building a compassionate community ourselves and avoid extractivist temptations.

But that is only my contribution to the conversation. I am sure you have many more and probably even better ideas, because I have less than two months of experience in your midst. I look forward to hearing those ideas. We will reflect together on the future of ISS, not only today, its birthday, but in anticipation of many more years of academic leadership and societal impact, in hopes of a better world.

### **Words of Thanks**

Reaching the end of my inaugural lecture, I want to express my gratitude.

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To my children and grandchildren who are the future.

And to Annas, my Javanese prince, yang tercinta.

Dixi. I have said.

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