

Justice, Climate and Extraction *Rethinking Global Justice from the African South* **26-27 February 2026**

This workshop is organized with the support of the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (FMSH) by the European School of Political and Social Sciences (ESPOL - Université catholique de Lille), in coordination with the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER - University of the Witwatersrand). It brings together African and international scholars, practitioners, and civil society representatives to explore new approaches to justice, law, and extraction in the context of the post-carbon transition. It aims to foster dialogue, reciprocity, and knowledge co-production across regions and disciplines, with a focus on building equitable frameworks for sustainable development.

Co-organisers

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Venue

Location: WiSER, Wits University
6th Floor • Richard Ward Building • East Campus
<https://wiser.wits.ac.za/page/contacting-wiser-9524>

I. Scientific Background and Rationale

The post-carbon transition raises major stakes for global justice. Amid the race for the minerals powering the green and digital transitions, global justice institutions increasingly arbitrate the “who wins” question.

But climate change is embedded in the wider transformation of the geography of extraction due to the accelerating global flows of capital, people and natural resources fostered by global value chains (GVCs). This is driving a selective judicialization of extraction that is fragmenting the landscape of global justice. Judicial processes, whether local, national, supranational or “offshore”, like international arbitration, tend to code the value of people,

power and capital in narrow circuits of globalization. A sovereign may be a reliable business partner in one judicial forum and a failed state in another; a person a victim or a threat; financial flows legal or illicit.

Examining the disconnect between GVCs and global justice is essential to address the violence of climate change.

The African South stands at the center of this reconfiguration - home to the critical minerals that fuel decarbonization and digitalization yet often marginalized in the governance of global value chains. Understanding the dynamics of law, extraction, and justice in Africa is therefore key to imagining a fairer transition.

The capital of its globally significant mining industry, Johannesburg South Africa provides a unique vantage point to explore these questions as the industry, city, and country exemplify the tensions between economic growth, social justice, and environmental degradation, tensions which lie at the heart of the global energy transition.

As a country that historically combined industrial take-off with deep social divisions under racial capitalism, South Africa has long served as both an exception and a driver in shaping extractive relations across sub-Saharan Africa. The rise of the mining sector helped the country escape the so-called “resource curse” by developing strong domestic engineering capacities. Yet, this development model also exported a pattern of extraction across the continent.

From the early monopolistic concessions of major mining corporations in the late nineteenth century to the privatization and financialization of extractive industries from the 1980s onwards, the South African mining model has influenced how resource-rich African economies are integrated into the world market. From the 1980s, South Africa has also emerged as a key site of resistance against extractive relations through law and courts.

This workshop takes this context as a starting point to examine how law and justice interact with the transformations of extractive economies, and how new frameworks of accountability, redistribution, and sustainability can emerge from within Africa.

The workshop’s premise is that the problem is not lack of relevant information or data, but rather its segmentation. Legal responses to the violence of extraction are studied and designed to fit in the loopholes and strategic opportunities opened by already constituted GVCs. This knowledge is therefore post hoc. There continues to be a critical lack of dialogue with actors involved upstream – such as geologists, engineers or anthropologists – and with financial actors.

The overall aim is to create a space for interdisciplinary and multi-scale dialogue at the intersection of social sciences and earth sciences, to identify conflicts related to the post-carbon transition and climate change upstream - before they reach dispute settlement mechanisms - as well as downstream, once the damage has been done.

The event will emphasize reciprocity and knowledge co-production and circulation engaging scholars, communities, and practitioners from the African South and the Global North.

II. Objectives

The workshop aims to:

1. Critically reassess the legacy of South Africa’s mining history in shaping extractive relations and legal frameworks across sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Explore the intersection of law, markets, and justice in the governance of critical minerals within the global energy transition.
3. Create a platform for dialogue between researchers, practitioners, and communities affected by extractive industries to share perspectives and strategies.
4. Build the intellectual and institutional groundwork for a workshop to be organized at the European School of Social and Political Sciences (ESPOL)/Université catholique de Lille in April 2026, which will focus on designing a **Justice and Energy Transition Clinic** at the Université Catholique de Lille, grounded in the principles of service learning, interdisciplinary and reciprocal South/North collaboration.
5. Promote reciprocity and epistemic justice, ensuring that knowledge from the Global South shapes and informs global debates on justice, law, and climate transitions.

III. Expected Outcomes

The WiSER workshop will provide the empirical and conceptual foundation for a subsequent event at the Université Catholique de Lille (9-10 April 2026).

By examining South Africa's unique position as both a historical exporter of extractive expertise and a testing ground for new models of regulation and activism, it will inform how the ESPOL workshop - and ultimately the future Clinic - can integrate African perspectives, local knowledge, and reciprocal engagement into its design and operations.

The WiSER event is expected to:

- Produce a collective report based on the discussions at the workshop outlining key insights on law, extraction, and justice in the African South;
- Strengthen research networks linking African, European, and international partners;
- Lay the groundwork for student involvement through service-learning initiatives and collaborative projects;
- Contribute to shaping a global dialogue on justice, law, and the green transition that begins in Johannesburg and continues in Lille.

IV. Workshop Format and Expectations

This event is conceived as a working workshop, not a conference.

Therefore, there will be no formal papers; no PowerPoint presentations; no pre-circulated written contributions.

Each roundtable will be structured around a small set of open guiding questions.

Format of Interventions

- Each invited participant will have 8-10 minutes maximum for an initial intervention.
- You do not need to prepare a formal presentation - but rather engage with one of the suggested guiding questions.
- After the first round, the session will shift to moderated discussion.
- A substantial part of each session will be open to audience participation.

Time limits will be strictly enforced to ensure equal participation.

Preparation

Participants are invited to reflect on:

1. One insight from their work that helps de-segment debates on extraction and justice
2. One blind spot in current legal, scientific, or policy framings
3. One upstream intervention point that could alter value chain dynamics before harm occurs

Speakers' distribution across roundtables and speaking order are indicative.

V. Programme Overview

Day 1 - 26 February 2026

Diagnosing Extraction: Segmentation, Violence, and the Limits of Justice

9h30-10h - Welcome and introduction

Sara Dezalay & Jonathan Klaaren

Roundtable 1 - 10h-12h - Between Extraction and Extractivism: What Kind of Justice?

This roundtable brings together social scientists, geologists, financial experts and civil society actors to discuss how the energy transition reproduces or challenges existing forms of structural violence.

Objective: Diagnose structural segmentation

Identify the visible and invisible links between concurrent processes of value and wealth creation domestically and globally; the forms of violence they generate; and foster a debate on how new epistemic links could help confront some of the structural dynamics fueling the violence of the energy transition.

(Potential) guiding questions:

1. When does extraction become extractivism? What institutional or economic thresholds produce that shift?
2. What forms of violence does extractivism generate in South Africa and beyond - and which remain invisible?
3. How do global value chains structure the disappearance of responsibility?
4. What knowledge is marginalized when harm is assessed (scientific, historical, community-based)?
5. Is justice territorial, national, or transnational in extractive contexts?
6. What would it mean to re-embed extraction socially and politically?

Roundtable moderated by Sara Dezalay and/or Jonathan Klaaren

Roundtable speakers:

- Gabrielle Hecht
- Faeza Ballim
- Wolfgang Kaleck
- Christopher Gevers

Lunch 12-13h at WiSER

Roundtable 2 - 13h-15h - What Past and Ongoing Legal Disputes Teach Us About the Limits of Justice

Focusing on current or historical cases and including an upstream perspective, this session invites lawyers, and activists to reflect on how legal processes - both domestic and supra-national - mediate conflicts around extraction and environmental harm.

Objective: Law as selective intervention

Assess the strengths and limits of existing justice mechanisms in addressing structural and environmental violence.

(Potential) guiding questions:

1. What kinds of harm become legally legible - and what remains structurally invisible?
2. How do different legal forums produce competing truths about extraction?
3. Does strategic litigation transform structures or primarily redistribute costs?
4. How does scientific uncertainty shape litigation outcomes?
5. What are the unintended consequences of legal mobilization?
6. What would an upstream legal strategy look like?

Roundtable moderated by Sara Dezalay and/or Jonathan Klaaren

Roundtable speakers:

- Hanri Mostert
- Tracy-Lynn Field
- Tara Weinberg
- Keith Breckenridge
- Junecynthia Okello

Coffee break 15h-15h30

Roundtable 3 - 15h30-17h30 - Changing the Terms: Rethinking Global Value Chains Upstream

Objective: Design and intervention

Imagine how cooperation among the natural sciences, law, and civil society can help prevent injustices rather than merely repair them.

(Potential) guiding questions:

1. Where are the highest-leverage upstream intervention points?
2. What should be redesigned first - metrics, contracts, permits, financing, engineering standards (...)?
3. What would genuine interdisciplinary cooperation look like in practice?
4. How can just transition discourse avoid becoming purely rhetorical?
5. What institutional innovations could de-segment knowledge and responsibility?
6. What would success look like by 2030?

Roundtable moderated by Sara Dezalay and/or Jonathan Klaaren

Roundtable speakers:

- Tim Gibbs
- Laura Philipps
- Joel Pearson
- Rangarirai Chikova
- Spencer Eckstein

Collective synthesis – 17h30-18h15

The closing session will summarize the discussions and identify key areas for future action.

Session moderated by Sara Dezalay and/or Jonathan Klaaren

Session speakers:

- Achille Mbembe (tbc)
- Short responses by roundtable speakers
- Open floor

Workshop dinner (time and venue tbc)

Day 2 - 27 February 2026
Designing Intervention: Building Upstream Justice in Extractive Value Chains

Roundtable – 10h-12h – From Diagnosis to Design: What Would an Upstream Justice Clinic Do?

This working session will examine the following guiding questions: if we were to build a Climate / Extraction Justice Clinic anchored at ESPOL (and in dialogue with WiSER), what would it concretely do? With whom? And how would it avoid reproducing the same segmentation we diagnosed?

This panel will be structured around three “blocks”.

Block 1 – What Is the Demand?

1. What are the most urgent gaps you encounter in practice?
(Evidence? Technical expertise? Legal research? Cross-border coordination?)
2. Where do current legal and policy tools fail you?
3. What kind of knowledge would genuinely support your work upstream?
4. What should a clinic *not* do?

Block 2 – What Could a Clinic Actually Do?

1. Should the clinic focus on:
 - Strategic litigation support?
 - Upstream regulatory analysis?
 - Early-warning research?
 - Community-science partnerships?
 - Value chain transparency mapping?
2. What would meaningful interdisciplinarity look like in practice?
(Joint field visits? Shared databases? Policy briefs? Rapid response teams?)
3. How do we avoid reproducing North/South hierarchies in knowledge production?
4. Should the clinic be:
 - Case-based?
 - Thematic?
 - Regional?
 - Issue-specific (energy transition, lithium, coal, rare earths)?
5. How do we ensure it strengthens – rather than substitutes for – existing NGOs?

Block 3 – Governance and Sustainability

1. What governance model would protect independence?
2. How should partnerships be structured (Wits-ESPOL-PALU-ECCHR etc.)?
3. What funding model avoids capture?
4. How do we embed students meaningfully (service learning) without instrumentalizing communities?
5. What would success look like in 3 years?

Roundtable moderated by Sara Dezalay and/or Jonathan Klaaren

First round of interventions:

Wolfgang Kaleck (ECCHR) - transnational research-action model

Rangarirai Chikova (PALU) - continental governance & mineral resources

Junecynthia Okello (PALU) - vulnerable populations & economic governance

Tracy-Lynn Field - mining/environment & academic-activist bridge

Second Round of interventions:

Hanri Mostert (land/mineral law)

Tara Weinberg (legal history / archives / memory of dispossession)

Tim Gibbs (value chains & infrastructure)

Laura Philipps (rural SA; class formation)

Joel Pearson (local state capacity)

Closing Session - 12h-13h

The closing session will be structured around the following question:

If we had to commit to three pilot initiatives in the next 12 months, what would they be?

VI. Workshop speakers

The workshop brings together an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral group of participants combining academic, professional, and civil society expertise.

(1) Faeza Ballim, University of Johannesburg (Johannesburg, South Africa)

Expertise: African history and Science and Technology Studies

fballim@uj.ac.za

(2) Keith Breckenridge, Professor, University of the Witwatersrand, Wits Institute for social and economic research (Johannesburg, South Africa)

Expertise: Law and Development

keith@breckenridge.org.za

(3) Rangarirai Chikova, Economic Governance Officer, Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) (Arusha, Tanzania)

Expertise: Mineral resources governance

rchikova@lawyersofafrica.org

(4) Sara Dezalay, Professor, ESPOL, Université catholique de Lille (Paris, France)

Expertise: Legal professions and inter/national dispute settlement mechanisms

sara.dezalay@univ-catholille.fr

(5) Spencer Eckstein, Mining and Business Development Specialist, Ukwazi (Johannesburg, South Africa)

Expertise: Mining services

spencer@ukwazi.com

- (6) **Tracy-Lynn Field**, Director, Mandela Institute, Associate professor, University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, South Africa)
Expertise: Mining, environment and sustainability
tracy-lynn.field@wits.ac.za
- (7) **Christopher Gevers**, Director, Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS), University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, South Africa)
Expertise: Advocacy; strategic litigation
christopher.gevers@wits.ac.za
- (8) **Tim Gibbs**, Associate Professor, Université Paris-Nanterre (Paris, France)
Expertise: Extractive value chains and infrastructures
t.gibbs@parisnanterre.fr
- (9) **Gabrielle Hecht**, Professor, Aix Marseille Université (Marseille, France)
Expertise: History and sociology of science; mining and racial capitalism
gabrielle.HECHT@univ-amu.fr
- (10) **Wolfgang Kaleck**, Director, European Center for constitutional and Human Rights (Berlin, Germany)
Expertise: Strategic litigation; corporate crimes
kaleck@ecchr.eu
- (11) **Jonathan Klaaren**, Professor, University of the Witwatersrand, Wits Institute for social and economic research (Johannesburg, South Africa)
Expertise: Legal professions; legal education
jonathan.klaaren@wits.ac.za
- (12) **Achille Mbembe**, Professor University of the Witwatersrand, Wits Institute for social and economic research (Johannesburg) and Innovation Foundation for Democracy (Johannesburg, South Africa)
Expertise: Critical theory, politics and philosophy
achille.mbembe@wits.ac.za
- (13) **Hanri Mostert**, Professor, University of Cape Town (Cape Town, South Africa)
Expertise: Land law; Mineral law
hanri.mostert@uct.ac.za
- (14) **Junecynthia Okello**, Economic Governance Officer, Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) (Arusha, Tanzania)
Expertise: Economic governance support to the pan-African legal profession
jokelo@lawyersofafrica.org
- (15) **Joel Pearson**, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of the Witwatersrand, Wits Institute for social and economic research (Johannesburg, South Africa)
Expertise: Local state in rural South Africa
jdpearson1989@gmail.com

(16) Laura Philipps, Senior Researcher in the African Trust Infrastructures Chair,
University of the Witwatersrand, Wits Institute for social and economic research
(Johannesburg, South Africa)

Expertise: Rural South Africa, histories of mining, and class formation

Laura.Phillips@wits.ac.za

(17) Dineo Skosana, senior researcher, Society, Work & Politics Institute (SWOP),
University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, South Africa)

Expertise: Transition from coal mining and burning to clean energy

dineo.skosana1@wits.ac.za

(18) Tara Weinberg, Lecturer, University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, South
Africa)

Expertise: Legal history and anthropology; land reform; agrarian studies; political economy;
archives and memory

tara.weinberg@wits.ac.za