



Living Minerals: Nature, Trade, and Power in the Race for Lithium

Thursday, March 12th, 2026
1:00 - 3:00 PM EST

WEBINAR

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Consumers today are buying electric vehicles with lithium-ion batteries motivated by the belief that they are doing good and decarbonizing society. But is sustainable lithium extraction possible? In *Living Minerals*, Javiera Barandiarán examines the history of lithium mining and uses during the 20th century, with a specific focus on the two oldest brine-lithium mines: Silver Peak, Nevada and Salar de Atacama, Chile, where lithium is found as one more element in a liquid mix of salts, minerals, and organisms.

For six decades, mining experts have failed to ask about water usage, about waste or brine leakage, and about the ecosystem impacts in delicate deserts. Instead, they have relied on various fictions about the size of reserves, the fate of leaked brine, or the value of waste in facilitating mine development. These fictions, rooted in brine-lithium's material qualities, could be sustained thanks to powerful mining memories that celebrated resource nationalism. Unique in its historical and multi-dimensional approach to minerals and mining, based on the novel Rights of Nature paradigm, and the use of new archival materials from both Chile and the U.S., the book argues that decarbonizing society requires that we reckon with these realities—or risk deepening our dependency on an unsustainable mining industry.

SPEAKER:



Javiera Barandiarán
Associate Professor
Global Studies
University of California

Dr. Javiera Barandiarán is Associate Professor in Global Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and director of UCSB's CREW Center for Restorative Environmental Work. She has published four books, including *Science and Environment in Chile* (MIT Press) and *Demanding a Radical Constitution* (Palgrave Macmillan). For her research on lithium mining, she won NSF research funding, a Berlin Prize from the American Academy in Berlin, and a fellowship at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center.

DISCUSSANT:



Craig Johnson
Professor
Political Science
University of Guelph

