

When Power Goes Green

The Politics of Ecological Emergency in the Shadow of Authoritarianism

Organizers:

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How does the climate emergency engender new configurations of power? And how does it reinforce existing ones? In recent years, there has been a conspicuous convergence, in public debates and political practices around the world, of autocratic leadership and domestic responses to the prevailing ecological crisis. This phenomenon, described as "green authoritarianism" (Magnani 2012), "environmental authoritarianism" (Beeson 2010), "coercive environmentalism" (Li & Shapiro), or "eco-authoritarianism" (Enninga 2023), challenges assumptions about the relationship between environmental governance, the climate emergency, and state-society relations. On the one hand, this emerging pattern reflects a broader "authoritarian fix" (Bruff, 2014: 125), as segments of societies in different countries embrace autocratic governance styles and charismatic figures such as Viktor Orban, Rodrigo Duterte, and Jair Bolsonaro in the face of perceived failure of liberal democratic systems to adequately address critical challenges such as inequality, unemployment, and poverty. On the other hand, the reference to coercive measures and authoritarian control is also a result of the politics of emergency in ecological debates (Adloff & Neckel 2019). In some cases, the existential peril posed by an impending planetary collapse has been used to legitimize the strengthening of centralized authority with the aim of enacting ambitious environmental policies. Authoritarian regimes mobilize populist rhetoric and

execute these policies through processes of top-down decision-making, supplemented by the arbitrary rule of law and coercive measures involving military and police apparatuses. In its other iterations, green authoritarianism appears as a positive vantage point in critiques of the "environmental state", which depict the impossibility to operate a socio-ecological transformation within liberal capitalist democracies (Blühdorn 2020, Hausknost 2020). Within this framework, green authoritarianism proposes an alternative and 'efficient' approach to dismantling the "shadow of hierarchy" in self-regulating environmental governance (Héritier & Lehmkuhl 2008), nurturing a habitable planet, fostering a novel environmental ethos of care, and shaping a distinct green biopolitics of life.

In this workshop, we want to examine the recent entanglement between authoritarian power and the contemporary climate crisis. More specifically, we look into (1) how and why authoritarian leaders have utilized environmentalism as an instrument to sustain and expand their power base, and (2) the instances when authoritarian responses to the climate crisis, which seemingly contravene liberal values such as the rule of law, human rights, and democracy, garner popular support and resistance. Additionally, the workshop will (3) scrutinize how authoritarianism's foray into providing solutions to the climate crisis generates new forms of subjects, relations, and contentious politics.

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Program

Morning Session

09:30–10:00am

Opening Remarks

10:00–10:30am

Yifei Li (NYU Shanghai)

*Capacious Capacity: Conceptualizing the State
in Chinese Environmental Governance*

10:30–10:45am

Response by **Juneseo Hwang** (Universität Hamburg)

10:45–11:45am

Discussion

Lunch Break

Afternoon Session

01:30–02:00pm

Kristian Karlo Saguin (University of the Philippines)

*Authoritarian populist ecologies and
the city in the Philippines (via Zoom)*

02:00–02:30pm

Discussion

02:30–03:00pm

Gvantsa Gverdtiteli (Roskilde University)

*Conflicts and Compromise of Authoritarian State
Environmentalism: National park development and
state-society relations in rural Vietnam*

03:00–03:30pm

Discussion

03:30–04:00pm

Coffee Break

04:00–04:30pm

Attila Antal (Eötvös Loránd University)

*Authoritarian Populism, Environmentalism
and Exceptional Governance in Hungary*

04:30–05:00pm

Discussion

Room: 1021

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