

Extraction: The Frontiers of Green Capitalism

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IE Talk in cooperation with ÖFSE Development Lectures, Department of Political Science, Department of Geography and Regional Research, and Department of History

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4.15—5.45 pm

ÖFSE Alois Wagner-Saal, Sensengasse 3, 1090 Vienna

Chair: Aleksandra Wojewska (*Department of Development Studies*)

Discussants: Erika Faigen (*Department of Geography and Regional Research*), Sebastian Felten (*Department of History*), Bernhard Tröster (*ÖFSE*)

Will green capitalism save us from the climate crisis? "Clean" technologies and renewable energy are certainly growing sites of capitalist investment, with government policies playing a key role in making these sectors profitable. But the supply chains that produce the technologies pose vexing dilemmas for the energy transition. These dilemmas are most dramatic at the extractive frontiers of green capitalism: where the natural resources needed to manufacture electric vehicles and build windmills are extracted. In this talk, we will unpack these challenges through the lens of lithium, a so-called "critical mineral" essential for its role in decarbonizing one of the most polluting sectors: transportation. With forecasters predicting an enormous surge in lithium demand, exceeding existing supplies, Global North governments and downstream firms scramble to "secure" lithium, resulting in a new state-corporate alliance and the return of vertical integration. Meanwhile, environmental and Indigenous movements contest the rapid expansion of extraction, defending ecosystems, livelihoods, and waterways already under pressure from global warming from a new boom in mining. It is in the play of these forces, unfolding amidst geopolitical rivalry and economic turbulence, that the energy transition will be forged. To conclude, we will explore the possibility of a less mining-intensive pathway to zero carbon transportation.

