



GOVERNING THROUGH CONTAGION: PERSPECTIVES ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

Call For Papers

Workshop 19-21 April 2022

Faculty of Law, National University of Singapore

As governments imposed strategies of controls in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Lynette J. Chua (NUS & Yale-NUS College) and Jack Jin Gary Lee (NUS Centre for Asian Legal Studies & American Bar Foundation) devised the concept of “governing through contagion” to critically analyze the power and workings of these controls that sought to contain, discipline, and educate diverse populations in the face of contagious threats.* Governing through contagion, recursively produced by such strategies of control, flexes power over life to regulate subjects of a population to ensure their bodies are free from contagion, do not spread contagion to fellow subjects, and stay economically productive—or at least, avoid incurring the economic costs of medicine and containment. Such power over life comprises three interlocking modalities of power: juridical modality, which prohibits, permits, and prescribes subject behavior with bodily and fiscal sanctions; disciplinary modality, which shapes subject morality and conduct; and security modality, which calibrates and coordinates social relationships to procure outcomes at the collective level of population, a managed, composite reality of individual subjects.

Each of the three modalities engages law, surveillance, medicine, and other technologies to achieve its particular result, such as compliant or moral subjects. However, the goals of the third modality are paramount in governing through contagion—by harnessing all three modalities to produce security outcomes. Almost always economic objectives that legitimize a political order, their specific contents depend on the social relationships that the security modality manages—among humans, as individual subjects, as population, as actors of the state governing that population, other living beings, and the non-living.

* “Governing through contagion” in this Call is based on Chua, Lynette J. and Jack Jin Gary Lee (2021), “Governing through Contagion” in *Covid-19 in Asia: Law and Policy Contexts*, edited by Victor V. Ramraj, pp. 116-32 (Oxford University Press). Chua and Lee (2021) build the concept from Foucauldian ideas of power and draw upon Science & Technology Studies on human and non-human agency. For citations, please refer to the original publication.

Governing through contagion extends far beyond the current pandemic. In many territories, the strategies of control in response to COVID-19, such as quarantine orders and movement restrictions, grew out of earlier episodes of contagion, for example, the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the plague, cholera, and small pox. These strategies also circulated across borders through the global forces of capitalism, colonialism, and international bodies like the League of Nations and the World Health Organization.

Governing through contagion, therefore, concerns the administration and politics of strategies of control to combat contagious diseases across time and space. It produces and emerges from the web of human and non-human relationships, which include contagion, as well as law and other technologies that have enabled the contagion, empowers strategies of control, and allows for relief and resistance. It is a cumulative process with history and memory, but shifts in direction and reach, as the relationships and thus strategies of control relate and respond to contagions of a given time and place. The state usually takes charge of but does not exercise singular dominion over governing through contagion. When put in motion, governing through contagion imbues human subjects, their non-human co-species, and technologies with agency, each having the capacity to transform their interconnected fates.

Based on their analysis of Singapore situated in three contexts – the colonial era (particularly 1868–1915), the 2003 SARS outbreak and the COVID-19 pandemic – Chua and Lee (2021) introduced three themes of governing through contagion: “the centralization and technology of law,” which refers to how the mode and degree of centralization of state infrastructures influence state responses to contagious episodes and its deployment of law to effect strategies of control; “the normalization and technologies of moralization,” which refers to how strategies of control make use of law and other technologies to moralize populations into subjects conducive to defeating contagion; and, “*inter/dysconnectedness* and rearticulation of difference,” which emphasizes how strategies of control and their technologies link people physically, spiritually, and economically, but also divide them inequitably, unjustly, and cruelly. Other themes may emerge as the project expands, such as resistance, be it covert or open resistance against governing through contagion’s strategies of control, or resistance directed at other grievances and social issues in the midst of and despite such controls.

For this workshop, Chua and Lee invite other scholars to collaborate and engage with the concept and themes of governing through contagion. Selected workshop papers will be considered for a book volume published by a prestigious academic press. Scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including but not limited to anthropology, geography, history, law, political science, and sociology, are welcome. Proposed papers should be based on original empirical research, such as archival work, discourse analysis, ethnography, and interviews. They may focus on one contagious episode, whether historical or contemporary (i.e. not limited to COVID-19), trace an aspect of governing through contagion through different periods at one site, or offer comparisons across multiple sites. These sites may be a neighborhood, village, municipality, county, province, state, or federal jurisdiction; sites other than colonial and post-colonial Singapore are especially encouraged. The papers may engage the theoretical framework of governing through contagion, elaborate on any of its themes, develop new themes, or analyze why or how governing through contagion contracted, expanded, or otherwise played out (or not).

The workshop format will be hybrid. Selected workshop participants who happen to be in Singapore may attend in person – subject to prevailing COVID-19 regulations – while those outside Singapore will join the workshop online. Participants have to submit full papers of 8,000-10,000 words, including notes and references, prior to the workshop.

IMPORTANT DATES AND INFORMATION

15 Aug 2021

Deadline to submit proposal at bit.ly/3ptXzHy

10 Oct 2021

Selected participants receive notification

1 Mar 2022

Deadline for selected participants to submit full papers

cals.events@nus.edu.sg

For queries on workshop logistics

jasmine.goh@u.yale-nus.edu.sg For a copy of the “Governing through Contagion” conceptual paper (Chua and Lee 2021)

