Call for Proposals

GLOBAL DYNAMICS CONFERENCE – HAS 2021 BEEN A WATERSHED IN THE GLOBAL CONDITION?

Leipzig, 27 – 29 April 2022

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY GLOBAL STUDIES CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY THE LEIPZIG RESEARCH CENTRE GLOBAL DYNAMICS

This conference brings together scholars aiming at an interdisciplinary understanding of past, recent, and upcoming global dynamics in all spheres of social, economic, cultural, and environmental interactions. To this end, we are inviting historians, area studies specialists, social scientists, and scholars from the fields of religious studies, migration studies, climate research, and global health to present their current investigations and to join efforts in finding overarching interpretations and interdisciplinary explanations of global dynamics.

Our conference starts from the assumption that the pandemic years from 2020 to 2022 form a caesura in the history of the global condition. The global condition is defined by a degree of interconnectedness and interdependency between various societies across the planet that had not existed before the nineteenth century despite all the connections between different regions that had already impacted the history of humankind before 1800. This global condition not only is characterized by an increasing division of labour, creation of world-spanning migration regimes, and the emergence of transregional markets, but also goes hand in hand with ongoing territorialization and consequentially with the establishment of nation-states aiming at defending their sovereignty when confronted with a growing number of global challenges. The resulting dialectics of de- and reterritorialization have impacted world regions in a divergent manner both in terms of time and space. As a result, the history of the global condition neither is linear nor can be understood as a spreading out and transmission from a sort of hegemonic centre to any kind of periphery. On the contrary, the global condition produces dynamics that sometimes are contradictory and/or not at all equally directed.

If we want to recognize whether we are in the midst of a caesura in a long-term process, then a fundamental dilemma of any contemporary diagnosis of societal change arises: we can make assumptions about the long-term consequences of individual events, but we can only prove their plausibility to a limited extent. At the same time, we, as scientists, are confronted with the fact that at the moment of such events, their public discursive processing already begins, trying out framings that sometimes prove to be tenable in the long run, but usually only withstand later scrutiny to a certain degree. Regardless of this, however, these framings become a blueprint for
different actions such as politics (in the broadest sense) and thus contribute to the creation of those political frames that they have just formulated.

To deal with this dilemma, it seems unsatisfactory to us to simply participate in the public debate with a contribution that claims sovereignty of opinion in competition with journalistic efforts. Rather, our conference, which we would like to continue in the coming years if it is successful, aims to observe and analyse the construction of such interpretative frames at the moment of their emergence or shortly afterwards. For this purpose, we select moments of crisis over the past year and invite researchers to analyse the construction of their interpretation in public reporting, political discussions, and academic treatment and, if possible, to address the diversity of such constructions. The fact that these interpretations are contentious is, we assume, due to the fact that there is no clear opinion leadership with regard to world order and processes of globalization any longer (if it even ever existed), as well as that different actors, who have powerful interpretation apparatuses and such for media dissemination at their disposal, each pursue their own globalization projects and consider themselves to be confronted with classifying the conspicuous crises of our time in their master narratives.

The selection of crisis moments is left to panel organizers, with an overall preference for processes for which worldwide significance or at least the possibility of using them as an example of an effective global dynamic has already been claimed during the process.

Determining if a certain historical moment has begun to experience a substantial change in the working of the global condition is extremely difficult as long as the postulated transformations are only visible along the horizon, so to say, and only manifested in their infancy. At the same time, such a diagnosis of contemporary processes is being requested by all those who seek societal orientation and expect academia to produce well-grounded interpretations.

To deal with this dilemma, we propose a conference that examines manifestations of global dynamics that occurred in the recently concluded year 2021 and tries to explain these dynamics by putting them into a historical-comparative perspective. To mention only a few examples, which by no means should be misread as a limitation to possible topics, consider the following:

1. The retirement of the West from Afghanistan is not only the end of a 20-year-long international mission but also perceived as a challenge to the humanitarian intervention strategy and projects so prominent since the late 1990s as well as to many related issues, such as the intertwining of military and civil engagement for development.

2. The Ethiopian civil war not only is a menace to peace in the Horn of Africa but also has raised the question regarding the different ways of nation-building and the chances for their successful realization, together with debates regarding the expected new role of regionalisms in Africa and beyond.
3. The discovery and extremely fast mass production of new vaccines against Covid-19 has made 2021 a tangled period of vaccination campaigns in the Global North and related debates about modern medicine and state-driven body politics. It has also raised questions of global (in)justice and the control of intellectual (and company-owned) property rights.

4. In many societies, on the one hand, right-wing extremism and racism has contributed to political and cultural polarization, while, on the other hand, debates about the internationalization of the Black Lives Matter movement and colonial legacies have begun. In these regards, and particularly standing out in 2021, were debates on new cultural arrangements for future societies characterized by immigration and multicultural configurations, as well as on the restitution of cultural goods stolen during the colonial period.

5. Within a little more than a week, the climate summit in Glasgow COP 26 brought to the world stage what will probably be the central matter of contention for the next years and decades. On the one hand, the current assessments became increasingly agitated, according to which there was a very last chance to either still take the lead on climate change or to accept the demise of the world as we know it. On the other hand, the conference broke the problem down in a technocratic way while making it clear that we make the best use of time that is running out and to work out the smallest compromises.

6. The payment difficulties facing the Chinese construction company Evergrande have not only fuelled doubts as to whether the bedrock of the boom is crumbling and the contradictions of the Chinese growth model are becoming a systemic threat, but also renewed the question of how economic processes are evaluated and to whom we entrust this evaluation, especially when it comes to economic systems based on non-Western premises.

There are many more of such examples, and our first aim of this conference is to generate a series of panels focused on varying cases that is not shaped by the preferences of individual disciplines but that instead focus on the interplay of various social dimensions. We have not yet determined the number of possible panels but will make a decision that highlights a diverse range of proposals – and this also goes for knowledge from various world regions. Our second goal is to answer, at least provisionally, the question of whether the phenomena analysed are sufficient to speak of a caesura in global dynamics and to proclaim a fundamental crisis of humanity. The third and final aim is to test the extent to which the category of global dynamics represents a suitable entry point into a research programme that is as broad as it is interdisciplinary and that does not normatively observe the extent to which a particular globalization project prevails or must adapt to its environment, but rather places the interplay of various such globalization projects at the centre of observation and theory-building.
Practicalities

- Call for papers and panels: **Submission deadline by 31 January 2022**
- Meeting of the selection committee and decision about the applications: 10 March 2022
- Information about accepted papers will happen by mid-March.
- Final deadline for registration: 10 April 2022

The conference will be organized in a hybrid format. We encourage as many presenters as possible to come to Leipzig and hope for a very lively debate in person. Nevertheless, due to the ongoing difficulties related to the pandemic, we will provide sufficient technical support to hold panels in a mixed format and to stream major sessions so that registered participants can also follow from far.

For presenters of accepted papers, costs for travel and accommodation will be covered by the Leipzig Research Centre Global Dynamics.

For further information, please contact miriam.meinekat@uni-leipzig.de

www.recentglobe.uni-leipzig.de