

CALL FOR PAPERS:

After the posts, before the cataclysm: Global South literary humanities in an era of global multi-crises

Global South workshop hosted by WISER (Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research), University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Tuesday 30-Wednesday 31 October 2018

All climatological, economic and geopolitical prognoses predict unprecedented changes for the planet over the coming decades:

- sharply accelerating levels of global warming with knock-on effects in the areas of sea-level rises, droughts, desertification, erratic weather patterns, increasingly violent storms, floods, tsunamis,
- loss of land, food insecurity, resource-based conflicts, increases in population/population density, and massively rising levels of migration,
- an increasing gap between rich and poor in all countries, with a concomitant rise of socio-economic precarity,
- the increasing fragility of predatory financial systems, with rising levels of civil conflict,
- political instability, the retreat of democracy and rise of populism and autocracy, as consequences.

All these phenomena will be global in their impact and interconnected in truly planetary ways. They may also spell the end of many aspects of human politics, including perhaps even the human itself, that we take for granted at every level of social action around the globe. Their impact will be most intense however, all commentators agree, in the Global South.

What may look like a dystopian, gloom-and-doom scenario of the sort so often instrumentalized for a politics of fear is in fact far more the sum of sober empirical scholarship accumulating across many disciplines but especially in the domain of climate change science. Such a concatenation of globally interlinked, multiply overdetermined and mutually reinforcing factors demands urgent responses and reactions on the part of the academy.

The humanities in particular, not merely those close to the social sciences but those connected to the media, languages and the narrative or semiotic humanities, have a particular role to play not merely in analysing 'discourse' and fuelling 'critique', but also in mediating between various disciplines, in forging activist 'interlanguages', and in framing the imagination of new modes of action and forms of being in the face of transformations that even the most sober branches of the natural sciences label as unprecedented.

If it is true that the challenges of the coming decades will be focussed most acutely in the Global South, then many of the solutions will also have to be formulated there. Genuinely efficacious strategies implemented in the South will have to use intellectual genealogies and creative resources embedded in the socio-economic realities that obtain in the Global South. Ranging from 'Indigenous knowledge' to 'smart climate knowledge' the South harbours manifold epistemological assets capable of assisting us not only in conceptualizing but—as tipping points are definitively passed—in navigating a time that is truly 'post'.

This workshop seeks to begin exploring the issues around mapping out new roles for the literary humanities in planetary futures that in their Global South manifestations are both immensely constrained but simultaneously imbued with moments of promise

and potential. What may be the contribution of the literary humanities to a situation changing increasingly rapidly, at scales that are difficult to imagine but whose local impacts we are already seeing? What is the role of various disciplines and how might they join forces to mobilize innovative and creative action in the face of looming disaster? What genres of teaching, writing, and interdisciplinary research, networking and postgraduate training are most apposite to bring forth innovative strategies in the face of hitherto unsuspected forms of cascading destruction? How can we as members of the global academy with Global South locations or affiliations best position ourselves for an energetic and effective engagement in the debates and struggles that will emerge in the coming decades?

Abstracts should be sent to Dan Ojwang (dan.ojwang@wits.ac.za), Sarah Nuttall (Sarah.Nuttall@wits.ac.za) and Russell West-Pavlov (Russell.west-pavlov@uni-tuebingen.de) by 15 May 2018.