

Call for Papers

Making a World of Many Worlds: Identities, Activisms, and Comparisons

The Maria Sibylla Merian Center for Advanced Latin American Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences (CALAS), the Pacific Office of the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI) at UC Berkeley, and the Collaborative Research Center (SFB) 1288 “Practices of Comparing” at Bielefeld University invite doctoral students with an interest in history, literary studies, geographies, environmental humanities, sociology, political science, anthropology, ethnic studies, economics, or legal studies, to apply to attend an international summer school that will be convened from July 14–18, 2024, at the Pacific Office of the German Historical Institute Washington (Berkeley, United States) on the theme of “Making a World of Many Worlds: Identities, Activisms, and Comparisons.”

Rationale

Latin America has long served as a breeding ground for new visions of the world. Colonization, the expansion of capitalism, and religious imperialism prompted both local views of an emerging global order and the, often violent, suppression and adaptation of indigenous cosmologies. Slavery and exploitation incited discussions about the nature of humanity, freedom, and citizenship, shaping diametrically distinct visions of colonizers and those who sought to escape the burdens of exclusion and exploitation. Struggles against capitalist, extractivist, patriarchal, and xenophobic regimes of the past century inspired counter world designs, new visions of the relationship between human beings and nature, and demands for a world in which many worlds fit. In our own era of multiple crises, such imaginings of new futures and discussions about the tension between universalities and pluriverses are at the center of many conflicts.

With Latin America as an important example, the summer school “Making a World of Many Worlds: Identities, Activisms, and Comparisons” will examine such processes of world-making all over the world from the early modern, colonial period to our present age, comparing not only between different world regions but examining the exchanges between them as well. We intend to explore the political, socio-economic, and cultural relevance of these processes through three thematic lenses: identities, activisms, and comparisons. Experts in each of these respective fields will provide short lectures and lead discussions of assigned theoretical and empirical readings. Participants will have the opportunity to present and discuss their own work. We are particularly interested in exploring the following sets of questions, which might well overlap empirically:

1. Identities

Identity-making and world-making are two intimately related processes. Individual notions of the self shape people’s visions of their place in the world. Collective identities, in turn, often are crafted in interaction with new legal practices or regimes of knowledge being envisioned and implemented. On the

one hand we are interested in the interactions between dominant narratives about how the world is or should be organized – e.g., modernity, nationalism, racial scientism, neoliberalism – and the situated practices, discourses, and narratives that shaped identities in specific spaces. On the other hand, we want to focus on those groups who were excluded or marginalized by those socio-economic, racial, or migratory regimes. What counter narratives about citizenship, culture, race, or the economy did these groups produce? What was the role of international solidarity and transnational interactions in the shaping of alternative world visions and corresponding identities? Through what every-day, political, mediatic, or artistic practices were these designs of the world envisioned and lived out within specific communities?

2. Activism

Activism plays an important role in the remaking of worlds. We will explore the potential and limits of change of political, social, and cultural activism. We wish to discuss how past and present social movements – laborer, women, Jewish, Indigenous, Afro, queer – have been involved in the reimagining of worlds. What has been the role of art, literature, science, and other forms of knowledge in this process? How have they been interacting? How has ontological politics been used for promoting these movements' agendas? We are interested, too, in discussing the limits of such activism. What pushback do projects of counter world-making provoke? How do dominant actors appropriate activists' narratives and vocabularies? How have calls for the making of a different, better world served in the pursuit of either individual advancement or the reinforcement of existing orders? Finally, we aim to reflect on the relationship between science and activism. How can academic discourses contribute to an activist remaking of the world? How are calls for the acceptance of the pluriverse – an ontological plurality, that is – impacting the knowledge and stories academics produce?

3. Comparisons

Practices of comparing are key world-making tools. They shape how we perceive, organize, and change the world. We ask how actors use comparisons to grapple with crises, exclusion, violence, and inequality. Which comparisons individuals or collectives use to create, shape, or reshape their own visions of the global order, local cosmologies, or diasporic worlds? This approach focuses on the question of what actors do when they compare and how practices of comparing used by historical and contemporary actors contribute to preserving or remaking existing worlds. How did the choice of criteria for comparison shape and change what or who was compared? We assume that comparisons contribute to naturalizing social, religious, or racial differences, but likewise may help to unsettle firm beliefs and convictions.

Application and Procedure

Travel (economy), accommodations, and most meals will be covered. The program targets doctoral students engaging in projects related to the aforementioned themes and questions, particularly from a comparative perspective. The discussion will take place in various formats, including project presentations, thematic workshops, scholars in conversation, and keynote lectures. The working language is English. The application should likewise be in English and consist of:

- a curriculum vitae (2 pages max.)
- an outline of the current project (600 words)
- a motivation letter that describes the relevance of one's own research to the summer school's topic (2 pages max.)
- two relevant suggested readings (please provide bibliographical data only, no copies of the suggested readings)
- the names of two university faculty members who can serve as referees (no letters of recommendation required).

Please upload all documents to the [online portal](#) by October 1, 2023.

Please contact Heike Friedman (friedman@ghi-dc.org) if you have any difficulties submitting your information online. For other questions related to the event contact Nino Vallen (vallen@ghi-dc.org) or Cornelia Aust (cornelia.aust@uni-bielefeld.de).

Applicants will be notified whether they have been selected in December 2023. Successful applicants will be asked to submit the draft of a research paper or draft chapter of their PhD (6,000 words max.) by June 15, 2024.