



Crisis Narratives and the Pandemic

*International academic conference of
the Regensburg Center for International and Transnational Area Studies ([CITAS](#)) and
the Leibniz ScienceCampus [Europe and America](#) in the Modern World
Regensburg, 19 - 21 May 2022*

Call for Papers

Deadline for applications: 10 January 2022

As a contingent event par excellence, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore a variety of different crisis narratives relating to its symbolic representation and management. These range from narratives about the origins of the virus (animal-to-human transmission, laboratory product, pharmaceutical industry invention, etc.), through populist conspiracy narratives, government success narratives, and heroic epics about doctors, nurses, and vaccine inventors, to victimization narratives, disinformation narratives, science-based narratives, and religious narratives about the pandemic being a divine punishment, as well as functional types of narratives. These different frames attribute responsibility to different groups and actors, while suggesting a variety of remedies.

The conference, jointly organized by the Center for International and Transnational Area Studies (CITAS) at the University of Regensburg and the Leibniz Science Campus “Europe and America in the Modern World”, aims to examine these different narratives from an area studies perspective. Since Paul Ricoeur and Jean-François Lyotard, there has been a sense that narratives struggle to make sense of the world, especially as economic, ecological and now pandemic crises are of a global or indeed planetary scale that manages to disrupt even ‘grand narratives’. Hence, there are not only narratives of crisis but narrative itself seems to be experiencing crisis.

Our conference seeks to explore whether the COVID-19 pandemic has further fragmented narratives, and how these fragmentations relate to spatial, social and cultural divides. Do they further the collapse of shared meaning or, on the contrary, are we witnessing the emergence of new narratives through the reconfigurations engendered by current crises?

The conference seeks to discuss the following questions:

- Which crisis narratives about, or triggered by, the pandemic prevail in different world regions and how do they relate to each other?
- Which actors make use of particular narratives?
- What is the relationship between national particularities and transnational transfers in efforts to narrate the crisis?
- Which different frames, formats and media are employed, and which cultural repertoires are used, to make sense of the repercussions of Covid-19, including the legitimation of state action and intervention?
- What are the functions and effects of the respective crisis narratives in relation to different parts of the world?
- How do narratives reflect and further social, national or international coherence or, alternatively, amplify spatial and social divides?

- What role do citizens play in particular narratives?
- In what ways do certain narratives attribute agency and leave room for alternative futures, and in what ways do they conceptualize citizens as passive victims of other actors, whether human or non-human?
- Finally, what is the relationship between the different crisis narratives and how can these relations be seen in terms of conflict, competition, and complementarity?

The conference encourages contributors to consider the connections between narrative and spatialization, thus exploring how particular narratives of the pandemic configure, divide, delineate, or expand crisis spaces. Do narratives cross or draw boundaries, for example between nations or large- and small-scale regions? How do the spaces of the pandemic crisis relate to other crisis spaces and their determinants, such as poverty, socio-economic standing, development, and (medical) infrastructure? The event will consider how pandemic narratives interact with, bring forth, or indeed push back and repress narratives relating to other ongoing and/or parallel crises in particular regions.

We aim to pursue the discussions across a broad geographic scope, taking the worldwide pandemic as a starting point for a global discussion of crisis narratives alongside their space-bound particularities, as well as their family resemblances. We look to understand how the various pandemic narratives affect the formation (or dissolution) of global, national and community solidarities and divisions. Could the pandemic crisis be the source not only of further global and regional frictions, but also a productive moment for a revival of global collaborations across multiple scales and actors? To address these complex issues, we invite proposals from across the humanities, social sciences and related disciplines. In line with the mission of CITAS at the University of Regensburg and the Leibniz ScienceCampus Europe and America, we particularly welcome contributions that pursue comparative and/or transnational area studies perspectives, including multiscale approaches.

Please send proposals by 10 January 2022, with a title, your affiliation, an abstract of a maximum 400 words, and a brief CV to citas@ur.de.

The conference organizers plan to cover at least a substantial part of travel and accommodation costs. Whatever the pandemic conditions will be in May 2022, we will take your health as our utmost priority and thus implement the necessary safety protocols.

www.ur.de/citas/english
www.europeamerica.de