



Jan. 17-19. 2023

Tracking Global Wokeism

Conference organized by the GUST Global Studies Center

The word 'woke', initially coined by African Americans in the 1930s as an injunction to stay mindful of racial inequalities, has over the last decade been used to raise awareness of any sort of discrimination. The term has helped to advance the cause of social justice in many domains. However, a search on the internet can quickly yield the impression that "woke" is now, similar to "Political Correctness," predominantly used in a negative fashion. People who are "too woke" are criticized as dogmatic, self-righteous, and obsessed with moral purity.

Does this phenomenon exist in the non-Western world? If yes, is it imported from America or does it have vernacular roots? Is wokeness compatible with existing traditions? The Chinese translate wokeism as "*baizuo*," meaning "white left," which is curious given the African American origin of the term. Feelings of guilt have led privileged Americans (and Europeans) to the adoption of wokeism. What is the Arab, African, Latin American, or Asian view on this? Is the search for "individualism" that wokeism supports less strong in these regions, thus making any introduction of woke impossible or superfluous? Is wokeism simply the domain of privileged "First World" youth and irrelevant for other places? Wokeism is based on "identity politics," which is a typically American phenomenon. Can it/should it be imported into the non-West?

Russian president Putin frequently speaks up against Western "cancel culture" and criticizes as pathetic debates on gender and race led by what he argues are spoiled individuals steeped in consumerism and feelings of entitlement. What happens when Islam meets woke? Does Islamic culture generate something like its own kind of wokeness? Or do, in these parts of the world, traditional "class based" fights remain more relevant for leftist politics than identity politics? What shape, if any, does wokeness adopt in South America or Africa?

Some examples of topics that can be explored in this conference:

- Is wokeism possible in formerly colonized nations?
- Is there an Islamic language code that comes close to woke?
- Is the banning of Halloween or Valentine's Day a sort of Islamic woke?
- Does cancel culture exist everywhere?
- Do Arabs, Asian, Latin Americans/Hispanics, Africans, etc. have a problem with Identity Appropriation?
- Is there woke-washing (companies who signal support for progressive causes as a substitute for genuine reform)?
- Does the Human Resources department of your non-Western university send you a long bullet-point list about how to look at and interact with people?

Research on other elements of “political correctness”, identity politics, any state-sponsored (or religion-sponsored) discourse on moral righteousness, or other similar topics are also welcome for consideration.

Keynote speakers:

Hans-Georg Moeller (Macau University)
Ignacio López-Calvo (University of California Merced)
Neha Vora (Lafayette College)
Nesma Elsakaan (University of Palermo, Italy)

Abstracts are due by September 30, 2022.



The conference takes place at the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) in Kuwait and is organized by the GUST Global Studies Center.

There is no registration fee.

Please send abstracts to gsc@gust.edu.kw

<https://gsc.gust.edu.kw>