

## Navigating a Fractured World: UCD and the Current Conjuncture

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The early 21<sup>st</sup> century has been marked by a bewildering series of dynamics – dynamics, moreover, that often appear in contradiction with one another. A pre-existing Eurocentric order appears to be weakening with the rise of new non-Western powers; and yet enormous inequalities stubbornly persist, in no small part those facing the Global South. The so-called ‘return of geopolitics’ has come *alongside* ongoing and increasing forms of international (economic, military, political, ideational) integration. Even when we turn to ‘internal’ matters, trends such as the growth of far-right politics seem to hold a *general* significance not limited to any single society; and yet the sheer range of concrete differences across these cases has caused serious difficulties in renewed debates on the relevance of fascism as a concept today. In all these ways and more, the current historical conjuncture in world affairs appears to be an overwhelmingly *fractured* one.

Thus, if the current conjuncture is to be characterised, it is at first sight precisely the way it lacks the systematic unity necessary for it to be thought as a whole. Recent ideas such as ‘polycrisis’ embrace this fact of fracturing in itself. The question remains open, however, how the many-sided character of the current conjuncture might more adequately be thought together *as a whole*.

This workshop seeks to shed new light on this question working through the theory of Uneven and Combined Development (UCD). Over nearly three decades, UCD has evolved in International Relations (IR) to cover numerous fields including international theory, international political economy, international history, area studies and ecological studies. It has also engaged with a wide variety of approaches to IR including realism, Marxism, postcolonial theory, and globalisation theory. These have variously addressed the current conjuncture in terms of the transition from uni- to multi-polarity, the breakdown of the liberal international system, and the end of the Eurocentric world order. But while UCD has also addressed *individual* aspects of contemporary world affairs, it has yet to provide its own *overall* reading of the current conjuncture – the fractured world. In this respect, it remains an underdeveloped and hence underused resource in IR.

The workshop will bring together scholars from a range of IR issue areas – including international theory, area studies, and cultural studies – to work out what such a UCD reading of the current conjuncture in world affairs might be. Each participant will be asked to present a paper addressing, inter alia, the following questions:

- a) What is your understanding of **UCD**? How does it comprise a distinctive approach in IR?
- b) How does UCD relate specifically to **your own issue area**?
- c) On the basis of (a) and (b), what is your reading of **the current conjuncture** through UCD and in relation to that issue area?

We invite contributions which focus on the place of UCD in International Relations and the distinctive insights it can bring to the study of our fractured world today. The workshop will offer an interactive space for us to draw together these contributions across issues areas. Through these discussions, we seek to build towards a composite picture of the whole.