

**CFP WORKSHOP**  
**Global Digital Media Cultures and "Extreme Speech"**  
**23-24 February 2018**

**Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich**  
Abstracts due: 31 August 2017

Convenors:

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Recent political upheavals in Europe and the US have once again highlighted the paradoxical nature of contemporary digital communication. The celebratory discourse of digital technologies' potential for openness and democracy is now eclipsed by the "dark side" of new media as a platform for promoting hate speech, fake news, terrorism, misogyny and intergroup conflict. Researchers are confronted with a new lexicon of communicative tactics: ecosystems of fake news; disinformation campaigns; coordinated troll attacks; and targeted hacks aimed at influencing elections. Calls to monitor, legislate and remove hateful and violent online speech have also reinvigorated older legal, political and philosophical debates on the boundaries of accepted civility and legitimate forms of political communication. The negative forms of online speech, it is widely argued, threaten the taken-for-granted freedoms commonly associated with digital media cultures across the world and bringing about what some critics have called a "post-truth" society.

Despite this heightened sense of urgency, these concerns are, however, by no means new or limited to the Western world. A cursory glance of many examples from the "global South" reveals a long-standing anxiety about the dangers of unbridled speech in situations where it can provoke ethnic and religious conflict, mass violence and social unrest. In Ethiopia, for example, following a series of violent protests and killings, the government has declared a state of emergency and made political commenting on Facebook illegal under the pretext of preserving peace. In India, social media is replete with acrimonious abusive exchange in political debates. Legal stipulations to prevent hate speech on grounds of religious harmony and national security are routinely invoked to regulate online media in India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. In Myanmar, social media has been used widely by Buddhist groups to ignite violence against its Muslim minority. In all the cases, digital media have also evolved into vibrant forums for political participation and counter-speech.

The aim of the *Global Digital Media Cultures and Extreme Speech* workshop is to examine these paradoxes of contemporary digital communication from a critical-comparative perspective rooted in ethnography. By defining online vitriol as "extreme speech", we depart from the dominant legal definitions of "hate speech" and narrowly constructed terrorism talk. As a form of digital culture, "extreme speech" pushes the boundaries of legitimate speech along the twin axes of truth-falsity and civility-incivility, raising critical questions about some of the taken-for-granted

assumptions of communication and political participation. "Extreme speech" serves to reinforce differences and hatred between groups on grounds of religion, race, political ideology and gender, often with the overt intent to intimidate and agitate target groups and individuals. Yet, its ambivalent nature in certain contexts could also provoke challenges to established hegemony. "Extreme speech" thus foregrounds an approach to digital cultures as forms of situated practice (i.e. what people do that is related to media within specific cultural contexts) in order to avoid predetermining the effects of online volatile speech as vilifying, polarizing or lethal (Pohjonen and Udupa 2017).

To advance these aims, the workshop invites a selected number of scholars from across the world to discuss the latest empirical findings, methodologies and theoretical frameworks to understand "extreme speech" in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. We invite scholars engaged in ethnographic research on the topic using the perspectives of anthropology, critical discourse analysis, history or communication studies. Over two days of presentations and discussions, the participants will explore the different mediatized contexts of digital use and circulation and cultures of digital exchange and securitization, to examine what this dramatic rise of volatile speech means for democratic dialogue and participation across the world.

Topics include but are not limited to:

- Ethnographies of production and circulation of online extreme speech
- Ethnographic analysis of 'hate speech' discourse as regulatory/state agenda
- Cultural translation of hateful content
- Audience ethnographies and the consumption of extreme speech
- Ethnographically driven mixed method approaches to study online extreme speech (virtual ethnography, data-driven digital ethnography, offline-online multi-sited ethnography, network ethnography)
- Trolling and online aggression
- Extreme speech and gender
- Extreme speech and ethnic conflict
- Political cultures of disinformation and fake news
- Forms of resistance to extreme speech
- Extreme speech and its challenges to communication theory
- Technologies and cultures of extreme speech monitoring

Attendance to this closed workshop is fully funded. Organizers will cover the costs of travel, accommodation and food. Workshop papers will contribute to the proposed edited collections (a special journal issue and an edited volume). The workshop will be held at [Frauenchiemsee](#), a picturesque island about an hour away from Munich.

Please send your extended abstracts (1200 words) with the subject line "Abstract for the Global Workshop on Extreme Speech" to [ONLINERPOL@ethnologie.lmu.de](mailto:ONLINERPOL@ethnologie.lmu.de) before 31 August 2017. We will send notifications of acceptance by 30 September 2017. Abstracts should contain a clear outline of the argument, theoretical framework, methodology and ethnographic material (and findings if applicable), as well as a brief elaboration on how the research links to the overall theme of the workshop. Please also include 3-5 keywords that describe your work, and a Bio note (upto 100 words, stating affiliation).

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