



THE LANGUAGE OF COVID

An Interdisciplinary Symposium

APRIL 13-14, 2022

*Hosted by the Department of Languages,
Literatures, & Cultures.*

*Sponsored by the Cultural Affairs Committee and
the School of Arts & Sciences Dean's Office.*

*Supported by the Departments of Geography &
the Environment; History; Latin American, Latino, &
Iberian Studies (LALIS); Theatre & Dance;
Health Studies; and Global Studies.*



RICHMOND
School of Arts & Sciences™

AGENDA

Wednesday, April 13, 2022 Humanities Commons & Modlin Center for the Arts

KEYNOTE

SPEAKER

5:30-6:15 p.m.

Humanities Commons

The Importance of the Medical/Health Humanities

Kirsten Ostherr

Gladys Louise Fox Professor of English and Director of the Medical Humanities program, Rice University

Q&A

FILM SCREENING & RECEPTION

6:15-7 p.m.

Humanities Commons

***A Sense of Place* by Megan Maybee**

Introduction by Sonja Bertucci

Assistant Professor of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (Film Studies)

The film will be followed by Q&A and reception.

THEATRE PREVIEW

7:30 p.m.

Alice Jepson Theatre,
Modlin Center for the
Arts

Standing Together, Six Feet Apart

Co-created and directed by Chuck Mike

Associate Professor of Theatre, University of Richmond

Special preview available to LOC Symposium attendees with Q&A by Chuck Mike after the play.

Play will also be open to the public on April 14-17, 2022.

Thursday, April 14, 2022 Brown Alley Room, Weinstein Hall

WELCOME

ADDRESS

8:30-9 a.m.

Daniel Palazzolo

Interim Dean, School of Arts & Sciences, and Professor of Political Science, University of Richmond

PANEL

SESSION 1

9-10:15 a.m.

Biopolitics of Covid-19: The Language of the “State of Exception”

Moderator: Elizabeth Outka

Professor of English, University of Richmond

In Praise of Pessimism

Gabriel Trop

Associate Professor of German, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Populist Rhetoric as a Communication Strategy for Covid in Duterte’s Philippines

Marlon James Sales

Lecturer and Postdoctoral Fellow in Critical Translation Studies, University of Michigan

What “COVID” Fails to Say

Raquel Baldwinson

Department of English, University of British Columbia

10:15-10:30 a.m. REFRESHMENTS BREAK

**PANEL
SESSION 2**

10:30-11:45 a.m.

Covid-19's Effect on Education

Moderator: Linda Boland

Professor of Biology & Associate, Provost for Faculty, University of Richmond

The Educational Response to Covid Across Two Countries: a Critical Examination of Initial Digital Pedagogy Adoption

Christine Greenhow

Associate Professor in Educational Psychology and Educational Technology at Michigan State University

International Student Mobility: New Directions for Global Academic Exchange

Mirka Martel

Head of Research, Evaluation and Learning at Institute of International Education

Faculty Work-Life in a Time of Crisis: Widespread Challenges and Institutional Responses

Katalin Szelényi

Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director in the Higher Education Doctoral Program of the Department of Leadership in Education at University of Massachusetts Boston

**LUNCH BREAK &
FILM SCREENING
12-1:50 p.m.**

The Tsugua Diaries, 2021

by Miguel Gomes and Maureen Fazendeiro

Moderator: Sonja Bertucci

Assistant Professor of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (Film Studies)

**PANEL
SESSION 3
2-3:15 p.m.**

The Particularity of National Responses to Covid-19

Global Data on Policy Responses to the Pandemic

Anna Petherick

Departmental Lecturer in Public Policy and Director of the Lemann Foundation Programme, University of Oxford

Dramas of Catastrophe: the Chinese and American States' Cultural Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis

Bin Xu

Associate Professor of Sociology, Emory University

National Covid-19 Response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Jean-Marie Kayembe

Recteur, Université de Kinshasa (UNIKIN), Professor of Medicine, Democratic Republic of the Congo

**PANEL
SESSION 4
3:30–4:45 p.m.**

Social Media and Covid-19

Moderator: Dan Chen
Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Richmond

**“It Seems Like You Guys Forgot It’s a Long Walk to Freedom:”
Social Media Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic and
Lockdown in South Africa**

Carolina Piotrowska
Lecturer of English Literature and Linguistics, North-West University, South
Africa

Social Media, Covid-19 and Misinformation

Wasim Ahmed
Senior Lecturer in Digital Business, University of Stirling, Scotland

**The Politics of Fighting Misinformation and Radicalization
in the #StopAAPIHate Moment**

Jonathan Corpus Ong
Associate Professor of Global Digital Media, University of Massachusetts
Amherst

**PLENARY
CONVERSATION
5–6:15 p.m.**

**Observational Correction as a Response to Social Media
Misinformation**

Emily Vraga
Associate Professor and Don and Carole Larson Professorship in Health
Communication, University of Minnesota.

Introduction: Kathryn H. Jacobsen
William E. Cooper Distinguished University Chair, Professor of Health
Studies, University of Richmond

6:15 - 6:30 p.m. CLOSING REMARKS

Kasongo Kapanga
Chair and Professor of French, Department of Languages, Literatures, and
Cultures, University of Richmond

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SYMPOSIUM ABSTRACTS & PANELISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

DAY 1: Wednesday, April 13, 2022

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: The Importance of the Medical/Health Humanities

The importance of the Medical/Health Humanities has never been more apparent than it has been during the coronavirus crisis. The pandemic has shown that human connection, social bonds, and creative expression play a powerful role in shaping our health outcomes, as do the intersectional legacies of historical injustices, societal inequality, and cultures of discrimination. Medical Humanities exposes these patterns in our health and illness experiences, while offering new pathways to intervene and improve the well-being of our communities. In this talk, Professor Ostherr will discuss the ways that Medical/Health Humanities can develop translational practices that bring novel insights and methods to frontline pandemic responses, highlighting the importance of collaboration across fields of scholarship and practice, particularly across humanities, engineering, clinical practice, and community partnership. Professor Ostherr's lecture will feature numerous real-world examples of translational work that brings together methods and insights from the humanities to help address the profound challenges of global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the intersecting climate crisis. These translational projects offer new ways for students and researchers in the humanities to contribute to solving some of the most pressing problems facing the world today.



Kirsten Ostherr, Ph.D, MPH is the Gladys Louise Fox Professor of English and Director of the Medical Humanities program at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Kirsten is the author of *Medical Visions: Producing the Patient through Film, Television and Imaging Technologies* (Oxford, 2013) and *Cinematic Prophylaxis: Globalization and Contagion in the Discourse of World Health* (Duke, 2005), and editor of *Applied Media Studies* (Routledge, 2017). She is founder of the Medical Humanities program

(2016-present) and the Medical Futures Lab (2012-present), and she has extensive experience using human centered design for patient collaboration in health technology development. Her research on trust and privacy in digital health ecosystems has been featured in *Marketplace Tech* on NPR, *The Atlantic*, *STAT*, *Slate*, *The Washington Post*, *Big Data & Society*, *Catalyst*, and the *Journal of Medical Humanities*. Her writing about the Covid-19 pandemic has been featured in *The Washington Post*, *STAT*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *American Literature*. She is currently writing a book called *Robot Pathographies: Datafication, Surveillance, and Patient Stories in the Age of Virtual Health*. Kirsten leads a digital health humanities project called "Translational Humanities for Public Health," and her work was recently profiled in *The Lancet*.

FILM: A SENSE OF PLACE by Megan Maybee

A Sense of Place is an experimental documentary exploring how the increased use of virtual environments has impacted our relationship to physical spaces and one another. Featuring interviews with educators, workers, students, musicians, meditators, and spiritual leaders, filmmaker Megan Maybee captures feelings specific to the summer of 2021. Present in these interviews is both a heightened awareness of the joys of being present in physical space and conflicting feelings of grief and gratitude for spending a large part of the past year through a screen. The story begins in 1962 as Maybee's grandfather describes the day AT&T came to his classroom to explain how video-telephony technology would one day be an ordinary occurrence of daily life. The film goes on to show how this futuristic fantasy of digital communication has become reality and to what extent it has influenced our ways of being in the world, propelled by the coronavirus pandemic. What kind of language are we forming around this phenomenon of being in 2 "places" at once? What may be gained from computer-mediated communication? And ultimately, what of our humanity is lost in the zeros and ones?

**A sculptural installation of the piece is on view at the Keller Hall gallery, placing the viewer in conversation with interviewees set on monitors atop barstools.*



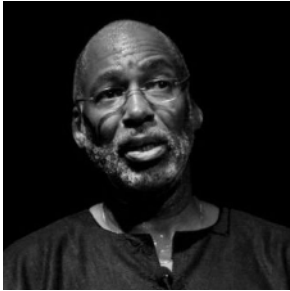
MEGAN SALTERS, known by the pseudonym Megan Maybee, is a multimedia artist, filmmaker, and writer working at the intersection of perception, technology, and ecology. She is a junior at UR from Lexington, KY studying visual and media arts practice, cognitive science, and environmental studies. Upon graduating, she hopes to delve deeper into a career in environmental filmmaking, believing in the power of storytelling to inspire and educate in the midst of the current ecological crisis. Megan

received a UR Summer Fellowship during the summer of 2021 to create a film that served as a testament to what it meant to be living in a time in which much of our human interaction existed through computer mediation via Zoom. The project is thanks to the incredible support of her faculty mentor, Dr. Sonja Bertucci, and all those willing to share their experiences and time.

THEATRE PREVIEW: *Standing Together, Six Feet Apart* Co-created and directed by Chuck Mike

Dubbed "theatre for the people by the people and with the people," *Standing Together, Six Feet Apart* is a theatrical collage of stories gathered from individual experiences within the Richmond community during two pandemics: Covid-19 and the urgent demand for racial justice mobilized by the death of George Floyd. Evocatively woven with music and imagery, the presentation is drawn from live interviews, poetry, written stories, and improvisation. An eclectic ensemble

re-enacts the courageous personal narratives of Richmonders' encounters with fear, sadness, confusion, and anger against a tapestry of resilience, hope, and re-awakenings. Often haunting, sometimes humorous, always compelling *Standing Together, Six Feet Apart* celebrates the indomitable strength of the human spirit and its ability to thrive in the face of grave adversity.



CHUCK MIKE was born in Brooklyn, NY and has lived in Nigeria since 1976. A practical disciple of Wole Soyinka and former MacArthur Foundation Fellow he is a distinguished actor, producer, director, and theatre activist of enormous energy. Producer of four festivals/seasons of theatre for CAFTAN (Collective Artistes Festival of Theatre Arts Nigeria) he is founding director of The Performance Studio Workshop (Nigeria) and Collective Artistes (Nigeria and UK). His forte is “devising” Theatre for

Development. Spaces of work range from villages across Southern, Western, and Eastern Africa to The Kennedy Centre, Lincoln Centre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, The Royal Court (UK), MUSON Centre, and The National Theatre (Nigeria). Some of his main stage credits include; *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Fences*, *Home*, *The Crucible*, *Makbutu* (after *Macbeth*), *Tegonni* (after *Antigone*), and *Death and the Maiden*. His UK productions include *Unsung*, *ZHE: (NOUN) UNDEFINED* (co-authored by himself), *The Meeting*, *The African Company Presents Richard III*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, *It's Just a Name* by Don Kinch (Birmingham Rep), *Trojan Women/Women of Owu* adapted by Femi Osofisan, (UK Tour), *Sense of Belonging* devised by himself with the Performance Studio Workshop (Arcola), *Things Fall Apart* (World Tour) and a Nigerian adaptation of *Yerma* (UK Tour) both adapted by Biyi Bandele. The latter went on to win the Barclays TMA theatre award for best supporting actor after a successful Edinburgh Festival run. Chuck also shares his off season time with teaching and has taught or conducted workshops at various institutions across the globe some of which include the Universities of Ife and Ibadan (Nigeria), Leeds, Oxford and The Royal National Theatre Studio (UK), Smith College, New York University (USA) and the University of Toronto. Currently he holds an associate professorship at the University of Richmond.

PANEL 1: Biopolitics of Covid: The Language of the “State of Exception”

In Praise of Pessimism

Gabriel Trop

Pandemic conditions sparked a national discourse that desperately sought silver linings amidst the increasingly grim reports of case counts, death tolls, variants, lockdowns, war, economic inflation, looming environmental catastrophe, and democratic decay. Drawing on the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, this talk suggests that cultivating a relentless pessimism — including targeted despair — may produce paradoxical effects that can enable both insight and agency.



GABRIEL TROP is associate professor of German in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He has published a monograph with Northwestern University Press entitled *Poetry as a Way of Life: Aesthetics and Askesis in the German Eighteenth Century* (2015) and co-edited (with Edgar Landgraf and Leif Weatherby) an essay collection published with Bloomsbury Press entitled *Posthumanism in the Age of Humanism: Mind,*

Matter, and the Life Sciences after Kant (2018). His research interests tend to focus on the relationship between poetic practices and aesthetic discourses, both broadly conceived. His general scholarly activity within this broader framework is comparative; in both teaching and research, he engages with texts from Ancient Greece, Roman Antiquity, the Middle Ages (mainly Middle High German), and German and French literature and philosophy from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century. He is particularly interested in literature and art as imaginative practices of selfhood, and is currently working on a project that investigates the relation between poetry and the philosophy of nature (Naturphilosophie) in German Idealism.

Populist Rhetoric as a Communication Strategy for Covid in Duterte’s Philippines

Marlon James Sales

Although Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte imposed what eventually became the world’s longest and toughest lockdown, there is hardly ever a mention of the word “lockdown” from his administration. Policymakers and state broadcasters have instead devised a slew of neologisms to describe the extent of coronavirus outbreaks in specific locales and identify measures that should be activated to curb the spread. These neologisms are the most ostensible sign of an institutionalised approach of using populism in government discourses, further characterized by the coarsening and securitization of language, the circulation of

false information, a lack of transparency and empathy, and an increased hostility toward mass media. This presentation offers a succinct reflection on Duterte's long-held reputation for untranslatability, its intersections with post-truth, and its impact on implementing an effective communication plan on a national scale.



MARLON JAMES SALES is a co-investigator in the Mellon-funded project Sites of Translation in the Multilingual Midwest at the Department of Comparative Literature of the University of Michigan, where he worked as the first postdoctoral fellow in Critical Translation Studies from 2019 to 2021. Aside from researching the history of translation and multilingualism in the Spanish Philippines, he is also preparing the groundwork for his next research project that will investigate translation as a core component of an inclusive, post-pandemic future.

What “COVID” Fails to Say

Raquel Baldwinson

“COVID” has flooded American public discourse since the onset of the pandemic. “COVID” inundates our media; “COVID” is the discourse of governance, rule, regulation, and law; and “COVID” has become a salient idiom in our private lives. Yet, while we say “COVID” so much, and say so much about “COVID,” Baldwinson will step back to consider what we aren’t talking about, when we talk about “COVID.” In particular, Baldwinson will draw attention to our conspicuous silence about the failure that precedes Covid-19: the failure to deliver on the long-promised vision of “global health.”



RAQUEL BALDWINSON is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English with a specialization in Science and Technology Studies at the University of British Columbia. She is also a Liu Scholar at the Liu Institute for Global Issues. Through the support of the Killam Doctoral Scholarship and the Friedman Award for Scholars in Health, Baldwinson completed a four-year Visiting Fellow appointment in the Department of History of Science at Harvard University. Baldwinson’s dissertation, “Global Health Doubt:

Belief and the Grammars of Global Health,” tells the story of how, at the turn of the new millennium, societies were presented with a new grammar for social action called “global health” — but publics did not “believe” in it. Baldwinson theorizes that, just as global climate change efforts have been obstructed by a condition of denial, global health efforts have been obstructed by a condition of doubt.

PANEL 2: Covid's Effect on Education

The Educational Response to Covid Across Two Countries: a Critical Examination of Initial Digital Pedagogy Adoption

Christine Greenhow

In spring 2020, K-12 schools adopted remote learning amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Using activity theory, the authors examine the educational response to this global health crisis in the United States and the United Kingdom. Data are drawn from three to four key news media publications in each country between February 1 and May 31, 2020. The authors critically examine the tensions and contradictions within and between interrelated systems (schooling, educational policy, home learning). They consider how remote digital pedagogy was perceived and enacted by different stakeholders: teachers, parents, and policymakers. Tensions arose between digital pedagogy, system rules, and teachers' digital skills, leading to different experiences for students. The division of labour shifted; parental responsibility for managing their children's learning increased. Digital equity issues prevailed in both countries (technology access, social support), disadvantaging students from low-income families. National educational policy system responses were more coordinated in the U.K. than in the U.S.



CHRISTINE GREENHOW is an associate professor in educational psychology and educational technology at Michigan State University. She studies online education, learning, and teaching with social media, the design of technology-mediated learning environments, and scholarship practices with new media. Her latest book is *Education and Social Media: Toward a Digital Future* published by The MIT Press. Dr. Greenhow earned her doctorate at Harvard University and completed postdoctoral work at

the Yale Information Society Project and the University of Minnesota. She is the recipient of the Outstanding Post-doctoral Scholar Award from the University of Minnesota, the Early Career Award from the American Educational Research Association's learning and teaching division, and the Teacher-Scholar Award from Michigan State University. (More information can be found on her website: cgreenhow.org).

International Student Mobility: New Directions for Global Academic Exchange

Mirka Martel

As international higher education responds to the Covid-19 health pandemic, this chapter will analyze the historical impacts of health crises on international student mobility, and the more recent perspective of U.S. higher education institutions grappling with the impacts of Covid-19 on their campuses. As the number one

host of international students in the world, the United States higher education system is committed to internationalization of students from over 200 countries. This chapter will delve into the short- and long-term effects that the U.S. higher education system may need to consider to promote study for international students in the United States and study abroad of U.S. students in the future. Based on primary data collected from U.S. higher education institutions, the findings will provide insight into the efforts campuses are making to support and promote internationalization, whether in-person or virtual, to provide opportunities for continued global exchange of knowledge.



MIRKA MARTEL is head of research, evaluation and learning at the Institute of International Education. She manages research and evaluation projects specializing in international education, leadership, and development. Dr. Martel's oversight of key resources in the international education field, including the historic Open Doors report on international educational exchange and the Project Atlas research initiative on global student mobility, advance the field and provide strategic insight

into the future of academic mobility flows in the United States and worldwide. She recently published a report on the impacts of Covid-19 on international educational exchange at U.S. colleges and universities (2021). She holds a master's degree in international affairs from Columbia University and a doctorate degree in international and comparative education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Faculty Work-Life in a Time of Crisis: Widespread Challenges and Institutional Responses

Katalin Szélényi

The Covid-19 health crisis has brought major changes to faculty work-life. In fact, the personal and professional realms of the faculty experience have come to intersect in unprecedented ways, with a high number of faculty experiencing significant disruptions in their research, performing sky-rocketing care-giving responsibilities, and working through anxiety and depression. Work-life concerns have also heightened inequities among the faculty. Colleges and universities have responded to these challenges with changes in policy and practice. This presentation discusses the work-life experiences of faculty members with various social identities and describes the institutional responses instituted to mitigate the challenges faculty members have faced in relation to their work-life experiences.



KATALIN SZELÉNYI is an associate professor and graduate program director in the Higher Education Doctoral Program of the Department of Leadership in Education at UMass Boston. Her research focuses on 1) gender and racial equity in the professoriate, with particular emphasis on work-life experiences and STEM faculty, 2) the experiences and outcomes of students at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and 3) science identity and expressions of the public good in STEM graduate education. She is the

principal investigator of an NSF-funded grant, titled ADVANCE Catalyst Gender and Racial Equity in the STEM Faculty at UMass Boston.

FILM: *The Tsugua Diaries*, Dirs. Maureen Fazendeiro, Miguel Gomes. Portugal. 2021. 102 mins.



“Tsugua” is not a place, it’s more a state of being — and it’s also the word “August” in reverse in Portuguese. So, given their respective approaches, it’s fair to be perplexed about the specific nature of their very ludic collaboration. Likewise, this is a laidback experiment in Covid-19-era cinema.

The film was shot in lockdown in August and September of 2020, but as an exercise in reverse chronology: it begins with a caption reading

“Day 22,” then counts down to Day 1. On the first day we see three youngish people having a small party, dancing to the Four Seasons’ “The Night” in a room mysteriously lit with ever-changing colored glows from outside. The scene ends with Crista in a clinch with one of the men, observed by the other — seemingly the end point to a 22-day process, as we then skip to the previous day when one suggests having a party. The film proceeds in this enigmatic laid-back vein and gradually more people appear. (Adapted from the *Cannes Review*).

PANEL 3: The Particularity of National Responses to Covid

Global Data on Policy Responses to the Pandemic

Anna Petherick

The OxCGRT project has tracked government policy responses to the pandemic the world over. Anna Petherick will outline some key insights that have characterised different countries’ responses, drawing from the OxCGRT international project, as well as subnational foci on Brazil, India, China, and the US. Her talk will also draw out key conclusions across countries in citizens’ behavioural responses.



ANNA PETHERICK is a departmental lecturer in public policy and director of the Lemann Foundation Programme. She is co-principal investigator of the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) project, which, going back to January 2020, has been recording and analysing how national and subnational governments around the world have been enacting policies to fight the pandemic. Her research as part of OxCGRT focuses on combining policy data with behavioural data, from surveys and

mobile phone records. In addition, she works on corruption, gender and trust, with much of it based in Brazil.

Dramas of Catastrophe: the Chinese and American States' Cultural Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis

Bin Xu

Xu draws on the dramaturgical sociological theory and his previous work on disaster politics to analyze how the Chinese and American states have responded to the Covid-19 crisis. Both states failed to provide meaningful and effective accounts of the disaster, their citizens' suffering and death, and the accountability of the crisis. Nevertheless, their different political regimes and situational factors shaped their responses.



BIN XU is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Emory University. Dr. Xu received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Northwestern University. His research interests are situated at two intersections. The first intersection is within the disciplinary boundary of sociology: between cultural sociology and political sociology. The second intersection is between two broader "fields:" general sociology and China studies. His ultimate intellectual goal is also twofold: to develop generalizable knowledge without

sacrificing a sensitivity to context-specific processes and local knowledge, and to address important public issues without losing scientific rigor and intellectual depth.

National Covid-19 Response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Jean Marie Kayembe

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JEAN MARIE KAYEMBE is from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He is the current rector of the University of Kinshasa since September 2021. Prior to occupying his current position, he served as dean of the faculty of medicine at the same university for six years and deputy dean in charge of research at the School of Medicine. He is a pulmonologist and physician in pulmonology at the University of Kinshasa Hospital, Internal Medicine Department.

His training involves an M.D. degree in surgery and birth-child from the University of Kinshasa Medical School. His passion for the medical world led him to pursue his studies at the University of Liège in Belgium, where he received a specialist candidate title in internal medicine and two years later, a specialization degree in Internal- Pulmonology, and ten years later a Ph.D degree in medical sciences from the same university.

Dr. Kayembe has occupied positions of leadership in medical higher education. From 2006 to 2012, he served as the vice-dean in charge of research, specialization, and aggregation. He has taught advanced courses in respiratory physiology, pulmonology, and pharmacology. On the Congolese national level, he serves as scientific advisor to the national program to combat Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. He is a member of the National Committee on Health Ethics and, Editor in Chief of *The African Annals of Medicine* since 2008 (*Annales Africaines de Médecine*) a scientific journal financially supported by the US NIH (National Institute of Health) through the National Library of Medicine and the Fogarty International Center) and facilitated by the Council of Science Editors (www.anafirmed.net). Dr. Kayembe is a member of the Congolese response committee against Covid-19.

PANEL 4: Social Media and Covid-19

“It Seems Like You Guys Forgot It’s a Long Walk to Freedom:” Social Media Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Lockdown in South Africa

Caroline Piotrowska

When President Ramaphosa announced a nation-wide lockdown in March 2020, South Africans took to social media to share their thoughts regarding the effect that the pandemic would have on their lives. This talk will focus on the negative and positive responses to the lockdown, based on data collected from local news and meme pages on Facebook from March to August 2020. Citizens used social media platforms to voice their concerns regarding their safety, the impact that the lockdown would have on their financial and emotional wellbeing, the cigarette and alcohol bans, as well as the effectiveness of their leaders. However, a subset of citizens responded instead with humour, using memes as a coping mechanism to add levity to the situation. Social media platforms therefore became safe spaces for South Africans to foster interpersonal connections, despite being physically separated by the lockdown regulations.



CAROLINE PIOTROWSKA is a lecturer of English literature and linguistics at North-West University in South Africa, doing research in the field of sociolinguistics, internet linguistics, and world Englishes. Using a corpus linguistics approach, Piotrowska investigated grammatical change for a Master’s dissertation, titled “A Diachronic Analysis of the Progressive Aspect in Black South African English.” Thereafter, a Ph.D thesis titled “Lockdown language: online communication in South Africa

during the COVID-19 pandemic,” describing the multimodal and multilingual communicative practices of South Africans online. Piotrowska is interested in the impact that globalisation and the internet have on language change in specific varieties of English, and also interested in the use of memes, gifs, and emojis in communication.

Social Media, Covid-19 and Misinformation

Wasim Ahmed

This talk provides insight into two conspiracy theories that became popular during the Covid-19 pandemic. The first conspiracy was based on the claim that 5G technology was causing Covid-19 and the second was the wider claim that the pandemic was a hoax encouraging hospitals to be filmed using the #FilmYourHospital hashtag. The study then explores and discusses the role of automated accounts. The research featured in this talk has been presented to the World Health Organization, the British Broadcasting Regulator (Ofcom). One of the papers from the project has been cited 400 times with an altmetric score of 788.



WASIM AHMED is a senior lecturer in digital business at the University of Stirling. His research and teaching interests include digital business, digital sport, and digital health. He completed his Ph.D at the University of Sheffield, and his thesis examined the role of social media during infectious disease outbreaks. His Ph.D involved completing an internship at Manchester United Football Club. Dr. Ahmed also holds an Msc in Information Systems and a B.A. (Hons) degree in philosophy from the

University of Sheffield. Dr. Ahmed has also delivered a number of invited talks across industry and government for organisations such as the Department For Work and Pensions (DWP), the Office of Communications (Ofcom), Edinburgh Science Festival, the British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC), the South African Broadcasting Cooperation (SABC), and the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN).

The Politics of Fighting Misinformation and Radicalization in the #StopAAPIHate Moment

Jonathan Corpus Ong

His talk discusses racially targeted misinformation and hate speech against Asian-American and Pacific Islander communities during Covid-19. In particular, he pays attention to how an expanding conservative digital media ecosystem on Instagram and YouTube has emerged to radicalize young AAPI individuals using anti-black narratives and “crime wave” fearmongering amidst anxiety and confusion in the #StopAAPIHate moment. His talk draws on ongoing digital ethnography of online communities spreading misinformation and interviews with AAPI community organizations to open up discussion how we can develop culturally specific interventions that promote solidarity within the large AAPI umbrella as well as build meaningful alliances with other minority groups.



JONATHAN CORPUS ONG is associate professor of global digital media in the University of Massachusetts - Amherst. He is the author of two books and over 25 journal articles in the areas of media ethics, humanitarian communication, and digital politics. He is currently co-principal investigator on a National Science Foundation Accelerator Grant (2021-2022) entitled “FACT Champ,” which investigates racially targeted misinformation and hate against Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in the

wake of Covid-19. He is currently research fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Shorenstein Center where he studies 1) the true costs of misinformation to human rights workers and 2) networked conspiratoriality in tarot and astrology communities.

Observational Correction as a Response to Social Media Misinformation

Emily Vraga

Many solutions have been proposed to address misinformation spreading on social media. Of these, observational correction — which occurs when people witnessing a correction of someone else on social media update their own attitudes as a result — holds special appeal as a remedy that is scalable and community-driven. Observational correction that follows best practices tends to be effective across social media platforms, valued across many social divides, and common for many issues and contexts.



EMILY VRAGA is an associate professor in the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota, where she holds the Don and Carole Larson Professorship in Health Communication. Her research tests methods to identify and correct misinformation on social media, to apply news literacy to limit biased processing of news messages, and to encourage attention to more diverse content online.

