

workshop program

social media surveillance & DIGITAL VIGILANTISM



LMU

LUDWIG-
MAXIMILIANS-
UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

**Vigilanz
Kulturen**
SFB 1369

date

11-12 july 2022

venue

**Lyrikkabinett,
Amalienstr. 83
80799 Munich**

language

english

workshop description

Social networking sites have long been regarded as more than mere communication tools. Our social relations are “transformed by virtue of being mediated on platforms like Facebook” (Trottier 2012). Online social networking has evolved into a sharing practice and a form of societal participation in which peer monitoring constitutes a crucial element due to the nature of cyberspace, data handling, and growing digitalization of life in general. In addition to conventional understandings of surveillance, as presented in classic metaphors of “Big Brother” and “Panopticon”, online surveillance is mutual, lateral, collaborative and horizontal. Individuals rely on digital media to monitor one another when soliciting personal information online.

Depending on the political and social contexts, including grassroots or government mobilization, they may also take action in pursuit of moral concerns or perceived

notions of social justice. Practices of doxing, denunciation, flagging, leaking, public shaming, harassment, whistleblowing, investigating, stalking as well as hacktivism, scambaiting, crowdsourcing, and vigilante shows - all represent what has been conceptualized by recent scholarship as “digital vigilantism” (Favarel-Garrigues, Tanner and Trottier 2020).

Digital vigilantism considers the relationship between citizen participation, law enforcement activities and digital media. Vigilante groups or individuals make use of social networking sites to assert a particular social order through highlighting offensive acts or crimes against society. They can also leverage harm and reproduce discriminative patterns. Digital vigilantism consists, thus, of collective, coordinated, moral and communicative components. It also reflects the kind of relationship individuals have with the state.

workshop description

During the two-day CRC workshop, leading scholars in the field will introduce participants to the conceptual models of social media surveillance and digital vigilantism. We will illuminate surrounding issues of privacy, visibility, autonomisation/deputisation, moral gatekeeping, hate-speech and many others. The LMU Collaborative Research Center's notion of "vigilance" and the way it is framed within the culture of vigilantism will also become an important consideration for our discussions.

The first day will consist of three keynote lectures delivered by **Daniel Trottier** (Erasmus University Rotterdam), **Gilles Favarel-Garrigues** (Science-Po Paris) and **Daniel Kunzelmann** (University of Basel). Participants will acquire knowledge about the conceptual frameworks of mediated vigilantism. Gilles Favarel-Garrigues will provide a brief account of the emergence

and practice and emphasize the importance of case-study to feed the theory, focusing on vigilante shows in Russia. By drawing on the prominent and minor cases in the Anglo-American and Dutch contexts, Trottier's presentation will address the routinization and legitimation of mediated scrutiny and denunciation and disputes around these practices. Daniel Kunzelmann will situate the researchers among other "watchers" of social media and will talk about the ethical and methodological issues of digital ethnography.

The second day will seek nuance in the theory, methodology and ethics by putting forth three case studies that employ the concepts of online surveillance, vigilance and digital vigilantism. The study of **Alena Zelenskaia** (Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich) on vigilant discourses about marriage migration in a Facebook group will focus on moral gatekeeping among Russian-

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speaking migrants in Germany. **Carolín Luiprecht** with a contribution from **Jonathan Alderman** (Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich) will examine social media watchfulness as means against oppression in practices of spirituality and healing in San Diego, USA. **Avital Binah-Pollak's** (Technion Israel Institute of Technology) presentation will inform us about the involvement of Chinese social media and forum users in tasks of observation and mistrust against their compatriots, who studied abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, participants will be involved in a group work, analyzing recent denunciations in the context of Russia-Ukraine war.

All participants will be provided with key readings and necessary translations beforehand.



day 1: 11 july

10.15-10.45	(30 min)	welcome & introduction (Irene Götz & Alena Zelenskaia, project B07)
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10.45-12.15	(90 min)	'digital vigilantism, online policing and vigilante shows' (Gilles Favarel-Garrigues)
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12.15-13.30	(75 min)	lunch
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13.30-15.00	(90 min)	'digital media visibility: surveillance practices and grievance media platforms' (Daniel Trottier)
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15.00-15.15	(15 min)	coffee break
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15.15-16.30	(75 min)	discussion session (moder. Eveline Dürr, project B06)
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16.30-16.45	(15 min)	coffee break
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16.45-18.15	(90 min)	'the vigilant researcher? methodological and ethical implications for digital ethnography' (Daniel Kunzelmann)
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day 2: 12 july

09.00-09.15	(15 min)	introduction (Irene Götz & Alena Zelenskaia, project B07)
09.15-10.05	(50 min)	case 1 "“are you marrying germany?” vigilance and digital vigilantism among russian-speaking users in a facebook group' (Alena Zelenskaia)
10.05-10.20	(15 min)	coffee break
10.20-11.10	(50 min)	case 2 'moral gatekeeping of chinese towards chinese students during the covid-19 pandemic' (Avital Binah-Pollak)
11.10-12.00	(50 min)	case 3 'social media watchfulness and healing for justice in san diego, usa" (Carolín Luiprecht & Jonathan Alderman)
12.00-13.15	(75 min)	lunch
13.15-14.15	(60 min)	group work (denunciations in russia-ukraine war)
14.15-15.30	(75 min)	final discussion & wrap-up (coffee-break afterwards)

abstracts

“Digital Vigilantism, Online Policing and Vigilante Shows”, Gilles Favarel-Garrigues (CNRS, Sciences Po-CERI, Paris, France)

The first part of the lecture focuses on general characteristics of digital vigilantism. It shows that this form of vigilantism gives digital tools for the three main functions: data collection, dissemination of information, production of punitive spectacles. In the second part of the talk I will use the case of Russia to show the current challenges that weigh on the analysis of vigilantism. Since the beginning of the 2010s, vigilante shows have been multiplying in Russia and renewing the understanding of vigilantism, in its physical and digital dimensions. They raise three questions: the relationship to coercion and violence, the relationship to the state and the relationship to business. I will try to show how these three issues can help to understand digital vigilantism in other national contexts. They will also shed light on the question of the legitimacy of the actions carried out and the moral issues they raise: can digital vigilantism be used for progressive causes?

“Digital Media Visibility: Surveillance Practices and Grievance Media Platforms”, Daniel Trottier (Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands)

Digital media practice has furthered contemporary surveillance by a range of actors. This includes exploiting the mediated visibility of individuals, who routinely become the target of denunciations on grounds of justice seeking and entertainment. Although earlier scholarship considers the court of public opinion in terms of journalistic interventions in legal proceedings, this presentation proposes a radical expansion of both the actors involved and the cases explored in the public eye. This amounts to a mainstreaming of the scrutiny and assessment of both public figures and private citizens through an assemblage of actors, devices and platforms. While movements like #metoo (as one example) bring accountability to long-neglected forms of sexual violence and oppression, these repertoires are also mobilised by

abstracts

alt-right populists for political gain. Digital media platforms (and the communities and moderators that populate them) allow a global public to air grievances, enabling both accountability and abuse. This presentation is attentive to the routinization of mediated scrutiny and denunciation, in order to situate the discourses and cultural practices that gain salience. Focusing on prominent and minor cases primarily in the Anglo-American and Dutch contexts, it suggests not only that sites like Twitter and Reddit are platforms that exploit and benefit from disputing targets' reputations but that the legitimacy of these very practices is also frequently disputed.

"The Vigilant Researcher? Methodological and Ethical Implications for Digital Ethnography", Daniel Kunzelmann (University of Basel, Switzerland)

Social media create seemingly transparent contexts of information. Comments, attitudes and attributions become (often) easily accessible to researchers. Not least for qualitative approaches, this provides an empirical treasure of data offering valuable insights into sometimes very intimate spheres of life. We might understand the virtual spaces in which such data are generated as architectures of vigilance that establish a specific regime of (in)visibility. This conceptual reframing raises some fundamental methodological and research ethics questions anew: Who is allowed to see (and know) for what purpose? And how may this knowledge be generated and disseminated? Using an ethnographic example which addresses the opposite "private" vs. "public", this presentation reflects on some of the challenges that scientists face while conducting research via social media. The main focus will be on the tension between the actors, wish (or need) for anonymity and a scientific standard that demands the disclosure and traceability of empirical material. A "case-based approach" is presented that makes it possible to uphold established research ethical standards and, at the same time, benefit from the potential of easily accessible material on social media.

abstracts

“Are You Marrying Germany?”: Vigilance and Digital Vigilantism Among Russian-Speaking Users in a Facebook Group”, Alena Zelenskaia (Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich, Germany)

This contribution critically examines discourses on marriages between German men and women from Third Countries articulated in one of the most popular Facebook groups of Russian-speaking migrants in Germany. Drawing on the notions of "vigilance" (Brendecke 2018) and “digital vigilantism” (Favarel-Garrigues, Tanner and Trottier 2020), a total of 114 wall posts and 24,915 comments was subdivided into five large categories and qualitatively analyzed. The presentation proposes a methodological framework to reveal and describe an ingroup vigilance that intends to detect threats that international marriages and subsequent migration to Germany face or constitute. The analysis shows that Facebook vigilant discourses are interlinked with micro-level stereotypes as well as macro-level regulations of the German border regime, where marriage is often suspected to serve as an economically driven migration strategy and a misuse of intimate relationships. The study presents a striking result: to a certain extent Russian commentators intentionally or unintentionally serve as guardians of the German migration system.

“Social Media Watchfulness and Healing for Justice in San Diego, USA”, Carolin Luiprecht in cooperation with Jonathan Alderman (Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich, Germany)

Social media plays an important role in all aspects of daily life; and as such also in practices of spirituality and healing, as well as in social justice activism. During my fieldwork I examined the importance of social media for a group of self-proclaimed witches in San Diego, USA who combine these aspects in their activities. I found that social media is used as a platform for self-empowerment, interaction and self-expression, as well as functioning as a tool and outlet for vigilance against oppression.

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In this presentation I argue that in this context the aim of practices of digital vigilance is for individuals and the collective to start a healing process towards a future of (social) justice. Here, marginalized people use virtual denunciation and self-reflection to make triggers and perpetrators of trauma more visible.

“Moral Gatekeeping of Chinese towards Chinese Transnational Students during the COVID-19 pandemic”, Avital Binah-Pollak (Technion Israel Institute of Technology, Israel)

For some years now, there has been an increase in the number of Chinese students travelling abroad to pursue higher education. Based on an analysis of online forums during the pandemic (January–July 2020), this presentation focuses on the challenges Chinese transnational students have been facing. From the state’s point of view, being at the front of China’s internationalization progress, the students are expected to have both a ‘vision of globalization’ as well as a deep ‘Chinese feeling.’ However, in practice during the pandemic, the students found it extremely difficult to achieve a balance between their multiple identities. As this analysis will show, the main reason for that is the complex digital involvement of Chinese compatriots in tasks of observation, mistrust and anxiety against the Chinese students. These digital tasks demonstrate that China’s nationalist discourse has spread beyond official domination.



guest speakers



Dr. Avital BINAH-POLLAK is a faculty member at the Technion's Department of Humanities and Arts; Israel. She is a socio-cultural anthropologist with an emphasis on education, learning processes, immigration, and mobility in contemporary China. She has presented her work at various national and international conferences and workshops, and her work has been published in a number of journals and edited volumes. Her book about cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men was published by the University of Amsterdam in 2019. Her current research focuses on three main topics: 1. education policy in contemporary China; 2. mobility and borders between mainland China and Hong Kong; 3. anthropology and ethics in data science education

Find more about Dr. Binah-Pollak: <https://faculty.works/technion/avital.binah.pollak.html>

guest speakers



Dr. Gilles FAVAREL-GARRIGUES holds a Ph.D. in political science (2000) from Sciences Po. He joined the CERI in 2001. His doctoral dissertation dealt with the fight against economic crime in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia from 1965 till 1995. He now works on deviance, policing and vigilantism, especially in post-Soviet contexts. He has published in English "*Policing economic crime in Russia. From Soviet planned Economy to privatization*" (Hurst, 2011); "*Organized crime and states. The hidden face of politics*" (ed. with Jean-Louis Briquet, Palgrave-PcMillan, 2010). On vigilantism, he has edited with Ioulia Shukan "*Citizens' Crime Watch and Vigilantism in Post-Soviet Societies*", *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research*, 11, 3, 2019; with Samuel Tanner and Daniel Trottier, "*Watchful Citizens: Policing from Below and Digital Vigilantism*", *Global Crime*, 21, 3-4, 2020.

Find more about Dr. Favarel-Garrigues: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/en/cerispire-user/7221/1291>

guest speakers



Dr. Daniel KUNZELMANN is a cultural anthropologist with a specific focus on digital media. In 2019 he wrote his PhD thesis at the Institute for Cultural Analysis (LMU Munich) about the usage of social media and algorithms within a group of political activists in Spain. His current research project lies at the intersections of didactics, educational technologies and health.

Find more about Dr. Kunzelmann: <https://kulturwissenschaft.philhist.unibas.ch/de/personen/daniel-kunzelmann/>

guest speakers



Dr. Daniel TROTTIER is an Associate Professor at the Department of Media and Communication of Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. His current research considers the use of digital media for the purposes of scrutiny, denunciation and shaming. Daniel is the PI of a five-year NWO-funded project on this topic, entitled “*Digital Vigilantism: Mapping the terrain and assessing societal impacts*”. Daniel previously held appointments as a Postdoctoral Fellow in Social and Digital Media at the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI), University of Westminster, as well as Postdoctoral Fellowships in the Department of Informatics and Media at Uppsala University Sweden, and the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta, Canada. Daniel completed a PhD in Sociology at Queen’s University in Kingston, Canada.

Find more about Dr, Trottier: <https://www.eur.nl/en/people/daniel-trottier>

workshop organizers

Project B07: The Impact of the Border Regime on the Immigration of Spouses from Non-EU Countries into the European Union. The Case of Russian Marriage Migration to Germany

PI: Prof. Dr. Irene Götz

Researcher: Alena Zelenskaia

The subsequent immigration of spouses from Third World countries subject to visa requirements to the European Union takes place in an institutionally controlled space. The review of marriage migrants is carried out in a space caught between constitutional rights and migration management, so that before entry into the EU can be granted various administrative bodies have to survey and inspect the individual. Consulates are tasked with determining which marriages are "worthy of protection", in accordance with the German constitution, and which were merely registered for immigration purposes. Cultural norms play an important role (for example, unions of love versus marriages of convenience). As a marriage cannot really be proven to be "legitimate" one way or another, and the validity of a union is defined using culturally coded characteristics, administrative bodies use different strategies and practices to position couples on a scale stretching from "not suspicious" to "abusing the marriage migration system/fraudulent". The aim of the project is to highlight, using a multi-perspective approach, the cultural value system of all participants, as well as the practices used, within this closely monitored space.

More about the project: https://www.en.sfb1369.uni-muenchen.de/research/projects/project-area_b/project_b07/index.html

Project B06: The Vigilance of Those Mistaken for Migrants in the U.S.-Mexican Border Area

PI: Prof. Dr. Eveline Dürr

Researcher: Dr. Jonathan Alderman

This project examines constellations of vigilance in the border city of San Diego, Southern California. Many US citizens of Chicano, Mexican, or Puerto Rican heritage have always lived in the mainland US, yet are often falsely perceived as “strangers” and “immigrants.” We ask how members of these partially connected communities respond to overlapping forms of vertical state surveillance and horizontal citizens’ vigilantism by employing their own practices of watchfulness, self-defense, healing, and consciousness-raising to resist, reproduce, or avoid racism, and to seek respect and self-determination. We thus investigate forms of vigilance (in the widest sense) directed towards oneself as well as towards others near the world’s most militarized border.

In what ways are cultures of vigilance inflected by the built environment, policing technologies, phenotype, ethnic belonging, gender, age, class, and political attitudes? As it profoundly shapes individual and collective ways of being in the world, how does vigilance transform notions of citizenship and illegality, sociality, and belonging among border residents in San Diego? What are the material and embodied dimensions of vigilance and life on the border?

More about the project: https://www.en.sfb1369.uni-muenchen.de/research/projects/project-area_b/project_b06/index.html

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