

Postcolonial Seminar 26.10.2026

From citizen media to fake news: Freedom, democracy and truth-making in the Brazilian digital commons

Interdyscyplinarny Zespół Badań Postkolonialnych UW zaprasza serdecznie na prezentację dr Guilherme Fians (University of Manchester).

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Przydatne informacje **Link do strony wydarzenia:** [Facebook](#) [1]

Miejsce: sala 108, budynek Wydziału Nauk o Kulturze i Sztuce UW, Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28

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In 2013, a series of progressive protests against police brutality broke out across Brazil. As mainstream media coverage remained limited, protesters and amateur journalists turned to social media to give visibility to the demonstrations, and their news production was celebrated as “citizen media.” A decade later, in 2023, conservative protests over alleged electoral fraud produced a similar phenomenon: feeling that their cause was underreported on mainstream media, protesters circulated online their own accounts of political events. This time, however, much of this material was dismissed as “fake news.” This talk asks: what epistemic practices do these apparently opposed forms of grassroots news production share? What happens to truth-making when our primary source of information shifts from the “mainstream media” to alternative, citizen-led media?

Drawing on digital ethnography on social media platforms, as well as in Brasília and Rio de Janeiro, I examine these two waves of protest as sites of grassroots truth-making. I trace how left- and right-wing content producers assemble fragments of information – from statistics to personal testimonies – to produce anti-mainstream assertions of what “democracy” and “truth” are. I argue that citizen media and fake news draw on a similar truth-making repertoire: celebrations of free speech, the empowerment of ordinary citizens, and appeals to direct

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democracy over institutional accountability.

These cases lead us to consider a crucial epistemic craft in polarised Brazil. Rather than categorising left-wing news production as “authentic” and its right-wing counterparts as “deceptive,” I examine how both reorganise available information to exert agency over political reality. Expanding this framework, this talk further examines to what extent the concept of “postcolonial” helps to explain Milei’s and Bolsonaro’s libertarian rhetoric and truth-making practices or, alternatively, to obscure parallels between such practices and Trump’s and Musk’s quest for free speech.

Suggested reading (about the topic of freedom and online content creation – in a significantly different online setting, but with theoretical and analytical similarities):

Fians, Guilherme. 2024. The death of Elizabeth II on Wikipedia: Fleshing out freedom through technoliberal participation online. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 30(4): 912-931.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.14115> [2]

Adres URL ?ród?a: <https://etnologia.uw.edu.pl/aktualnosci/postcolonial-seminar-26102026>

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[1] <https://fb.me/e/6DJzx5ktp>

[2] <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.14115>