

Seminar n. (32)

De-/Re-humanizing the Language of Global Fears: Crises, Extremisms, Terrorisms

Convenors:

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Abstract

The new millennium has brought forth an escalating series of global challenges – including mass migration, climate change, pandemics, AI development, acts of terrorism and wars or conflicts (e.g., Russia-Ukraine) – which have contributed to a heightened sense of global fear. These crises are not only material, but also profoundly discursive, as they are framed and reframed in public discourse. At the heart of these representations lies the strategic construction of humanity and its boundaries, which shapes how crises, extremisms, and terrorisms are mediated, understood, and responded to (Cap 2017, Demata 2018, Wodak 2020 [2015]).

The seminar critically examines how language both dehumanizes and rehumanizes in times of crisis. While dehumanizing strategies strip individuals or groups of their agency and moral worth – reinforcing fear and legitimizing exclusion – rehumanizing discourses work to restore dignity, agency, and empathy, often serving as counter-narratives to dominant fear-based frames (Entman 1993). We invite contributions that explore these discursive processes across political speeches, media discourse, and other public texts, analyzing both the linguistic mechanisms that construct fear-driven Othering and those that attempt to reclaim shared humanity.

While embracing diverse linguistic approaches outlined in the AIA call for seminars, the proposal prioritizes critical perspectives that analyze how language shapes meaning, constructs identities, and influences worldviews (possibly also considering the interaction with semiotic resources, e.g. Machin, 2013; van Leeuwen 2014). By examining the processes of dehumanization and re-humanization in political and media discourse, the seminar seeks to uncover pathways for fostering more ethical, inclusive, and empathetic narratives in an increasingly polarized world.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, dehumanization/rehumanization, global crises, media discourse, political discourse

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