

Introduction to the Special Features: Pandemic, Fear, and Hate: Lessons from the COVID-19 Era

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This special issue, “Pandemic, Fear, and Hate,” features a subset of papers presented at the international workshop on Hate Speech in Asia and Europe. This was the third workshop aimed at fostering interdisciplinary collaboration in research on hate speech and it provided a venue, not only for identifying and comparing the historical, ideological, or religio-cultural background of hate speech production and dissemination in each society, but also for facilitating the productive exchange of ideas, approaches, and solutions to this global phenomenon observed beyond the political and geographical boundaries.

This project was launched in 2017 as a way to bring scholars across the continents together to discuss hate speech, focusing on cases in European and Asian societies. The first workshop, “Beyond Hate and Fear: How do Asia and Europe Deal with Hate Speech?” which was held at Ritsumeikan University in Japan in January 2018, focused on “What’s going on in our society?” and examined empirical cases from Japan, Korea, and France. The second workshop expanded on this conversation by considering acute tensions surrounding hate speech issues around the world, with the title “Hate Speech in Asia and Europe: A Comparative Approach” and was held at Université Paris Diderot (Paris 7) in January 2019 in France. Some of the papers from the two workshops were published as an edited volume and also as a special issue for a well-known journal. (See the special issue “Enemies Inside and Outside: Hate Speech in Korea and Japan” in *Asia Review* Vol.8, No.1, Seoul National University Asia Center, September 2018; Myungkoo Kang, Marie-Orange Rivé-Lasan, Wooja Kim, Philippa Hall eds., *Hate Speech in Asia and Europe: Beyond Hate and Fear*, Routledge, 2021).

The third workshop, “Hate Speech in Asia and Europe: Pandemic, Fear, and Hate,” was held for two days from August 27th to 28th, 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was held online. Participants shared the presentation papers and videos in advance and the two-day workshop was mainly used for discussion time. The workshop, which was scheduled to take place in 2020, was postponed due to COVID-19. What we saw and heard as COVID-19 continued to spread was xenophobia and racist attacks on people of Asian ancestry. Some said it was too early to address and academically analyze the issue, but we could not afford to ignore the situation. The organizing committee decided to deal with the situation of hate and racism under the pandemic and to further expand the scope of the workshop to the whole world, so we called for papers.

Inspired discussions were held with 15 presentations from 12 countries regarding the

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questions: “What are the current contours of hate speech in this/the pandemic crisis?” “What are the differences and similarities in the manifestations of hate speech against “Asians” or the “others” in a particular society in the pandemic crisis?” “What frailties and inequalities does the COVID-19 pandemic expose?” “Who are the scapegoats stigmatized by hate speeches linked to this health crisis?” “How are different media platforms exploited to express and spread hatred against various minorities during the pandemic period?” “What is the relationship between existing discrimination and “new” hatred observed around the world?” “What are the legal and discursive characteristics of individual societies in dealing with hate speech in the pandemic crisis?” And “How can the international community tackle this problem?” In this issue, we have decided to feature some of the published papers that are strongly related to Asia.

Nuri Widiastuti Veronika analyzed the impact of the pandemic and the social and political response to it on hate speech regulation in Indonesia in the spring of 2020. Using online news and articles as an analysis, the study demonstrated how the Indonesian government treated certain public discourses and criticisms - those critical of the government - as hate speech, while ignoring international standards for hate speech. As the meaning of hate speech has shifted into a generalization in which all actions and expressions against the state’s institutions are considered as hate speech, she warned that ignoring the indicators of internationally recognized hate speech leads to a generalization and simplification that *all* expressions of hate have always been hate speech. This has a limiting and intimidating effect. It also diminishes what defining hate speech is meant to accomplish in terms of dealing with racism and other forms of oppression.

Madhu detailed how India’s sanitation workers have been treated in the Covid-19 pandemic. As many as five million sanitation workers providing essential public services were marginalized and stigmatized based on their lower castes (Dalits). She pointed out that pandemic science has justified segregation between castes, provided a reason for upper castes to remain physically distant from lower castes, and reinforced the historical practice of social distancing that Indian society originally held, with the justification that it is to prevent infection in the pandemic era.

Describing the situation in which international law has shifted hate speech regulators from the governments to private companies, especially the operators of huge information platforms, Ayako Hatano examined an effective approach for regulating hate speech while securing the right to freedom of expression. This is especially significant in cyberspace, where there is a multi-sectoral engagement. Coordination and cooperation between the governments of nation-states as well as private entities like the media, tech companies, social media platforms, and society in general is what is needed to regulate hate speech.

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