

THE LANGUAGE OF POLITICS BETWEEN HATE SPEECH AND HATE CRIMES

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Abstract

This paper aims at stressing tension and interactions between these three definitions of hate speech in relation hate crimes. In particular, the paper investigates the tangible significance of fear and violence originated from hatred. The applied methodology is *Politolinguistik*. This neologism, coined by Armin Burkhardt in 1996, identifies a particular area of analysis between linguistic and political science. At the basis of this method are Johan Searle’s studies on the distinction between method and scope of analysis. Following this argument, the analysis focuses on the impact that stereotypes and prejudices have on the spread of hatred on a social level, in some cases legitimized by politics.

Keywords: hate speech, hate crimes, fear, *Politolinguistik*, stereotypes, prejudices.

Introduction

Words, written or spoken, are the tool of politics. Their mission is, as pointed out in the Rome Charter published in 2017, to respect the truth. This document, written by the Carta di Roma Association, points to contrast hate speeches whose foundation lies in fear. Starting from this account, is important to underline the fact, as the philosopher of language Austin once said: “with words things are done”. Words become things when they are spoken or written. The choice of words gives shape to the story, making it visible and providing content. On the other hand, words mistakenly used might depersonalize, erode identities and instill fear. Words do things and become things when they

transformed more and even more into action. Key words such as respect, truth and justice, face these issues in order to stem the spread of intolerance that feeds on hatred in a perverse circle.

1. Fear as the Foundation of Hatred

Three main events mark the turn of the century: 9-11, the economic crisis of 2008 and the pandemic era we are actually experiencing. These three events have had sovereignism as the outcome, having one word in common, i.e. fear. The hate speeches are proliferated on such word. During this period, the word fear feeds sovereign and populist rhetoric which often supported by hate speeches. The phenomenon of Sovereignty is invading European countries, undermining democracy and values of the U.E. The case of Hungary and Poland are eloquent examples. This is what attests the study report *Scary Stories. Or the Sun of All Fears in Political Discourse in Poland and Hungary*, published in Jan. 2021. The presentation of this report, sponsored by the Projekt Polska, Friedrich Nauman Foundation and from the Luigi Einaudi Foundation, has aroused interest in several areas. Since Dec. 2020, the seminar “The Crisis of the Rule of Law in Poland and Hungary and the E. U. responses”, organized by the Political Science Department of the University of Trieste, highlighted the role of communication and political language used by nationalist parties. These references open a disturbing chapter for the future of the European Union. The facts concerning the crisis of the Rule of Law in Hungary and Poland make us reflect on the fragility on which the democratic culture and the liberal principles of the European Union rest. In all these cases, the word fear has had a strong impact on the public opinion and the civil society. Judith Shklar extensively argues the crisis of liberal principles in the 50s in the perspective of a liberalism of fear, which seems to revive. Judith Shklar talked of a liberalism that aims to prey on individuals from fear.¹ Nadia Urbinati suggests the idea of a “democracy disfigured” by the eruption of movements that have undermined the model of representative democracy,² who refers to a democracy disfigured by words that incite hatred and feed feelings of fear. The cases cited are just an example of what is happening beyond our national borders. Hate speeches have only one language that leverages the feeling of fear. There are, at the center of this reflection, three broad questions: what is exactly the meaning of it? What are its origins? What

¹ Shklar, *After Utopia*.

² Insights into Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, 133-36.

is the relation between hate speeches and fear? As the study reported, a hate speech gives shape to some stylistic features, like the name of fear; who or what instills fear; and what is the thing feared. Fear is mainly a human emotion. Indeed, it reflects a social phenomenon and according to this, we can speak of it as an “experience of fear”.³ This new element arouses, as Elena Pulcini says, unease, mistrust, negative utopias, and restlessness for the future.⁴ This leads to the use of a corpus of lexical and linguistic tools that help to understand the socio-cultural declinations of fear. Yet this is not easy to recognize the fact that, nowadays, we are witnessing a politicization of fear by a part of politics. Indeed, fear represents a tool that undermines social cohesion in communities. In the past, the politicization of fear has had a different meaning. For the sake of the present discussion, it might be useful to re-formulate the issue from a philosophical perspective. According to Hobbes’s paradigm, the politicization of fear is “l’inizio, la molla della politica” as Carlo Galli states.⁵ According to this, as Elena Pulcini claims, fear is the foundation of law, which is a rational and legitimate response to fear.⁶ In light of Hobbes’s theory, a union between fear and reason creates by virtue of the competition for power, which is an integral part of self-preservation, as Elena Pulcini underlines. In particular, referring to this scheme, the origin of the word fear clashes with that of power. In a certain sense, it also intersects with the idea of state sovereignty that signed at the dawn of modernity. More specifically, the legacy that Hobbes left us generates the idea that equality in submission and consent generates popular sovereignty. As Nadia Urbinati states,⁷ the difference from state sovereignty, generates a state of surveillance. This diagnostic consideration of relation between state sovereignty and popular sovereignty is important, because these two categories have fear as a common factor. In Hobbes’s political philosophy, fear leads the individual out of the state of nature through submission and consent. This generates popular sovereignty. Nowadays, the ideological force of popular

³ The essay of Scuccimarra, “Semantiche della paura,” insists “sulle modalità eminentemente riflessive assunte dall’esperienza della paura nella rinnovata vita moderna”, 23.

⁴ Pulcini, *La cura del mondo*.

⁵ Galli, “La produttività politica della paura”, 112.

⁶ Pulcini, “Paura, legame sociale, ordine politico.”

⁷ Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, 133.

sovereignty, reinforced by the arguments of populist leaders, uses fear considering it as a propaganda tool. This generates two serious consequences:

a) a gap between a regulatory plan that enunciates rights, protects minorities, takes sides in favor of diversity, and a political plan based on differentiation that leverages the difficulties of ordinary people;

b) the spreading of language built on stereotypes and prejudices which are a source of social tension. Prejudice and stereotypes, despite their great age-or, rather, because of it- are delicate growths, slow to rise.

These considerations open the discussion. I believe that any argument that has as its object hate speech and hate crimes cannot ignore the lemma of fear.

2. The Perspectives of Polylinguistics

On this assumption, in this paper, I would like to show the importance of the relation between hate speech, and hate crimes and to point out their relationship built on fear. There are close links between speeches and hate crimes. It is necessary to understand their nature and have a documentation of them. This analysis according to specific perspectives develops the meaning of *Politolinguistik*. This neologism, coined by Armin Burkhardt in 1996, identifies a particular area of analysis between linguistics and political science.⁸ Jacob Mey defined politolinguistics as a tropology of the political or a theory of tropes. The tropology specified through the master tropes: metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche.⁹ This methodology analyzes, in a diachronic and composed perspective, the persistence of some tropes, prejudices and stereotypes placed at a social and institutional level. This study uses this type of analysis of the discourse that triggered the prevalence of a populist language in Western democracies. At the base of this method are Johan Searle's studies on the distinction between method and scope of analysis. In particular, his studies on linguistic philosophy and philosophy of language.¹⁰ This brief introduction is a defense of Austin's speech act theory.¹¹ Political activity

⁸ Insights into Burkhardt, "Politolinguistik"; Cedroni, *Politolinguistica*, 11.

⁹ Mey, *Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics*.

¹⁰ Searle, *Speech Acts*.

¹¹ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

uses only few words or, at least, speech acts, which are political acts, as Austin says. According to Austin, as for Searle, in line with John Rawls' distinction, linguistic rules are constitutive and create new rules of behavior that differ from those merely regulatory ones.¹² Yet what are constitutive rules for Rawls? What are merely regulatory rules for Rawls? Constitutive rules have the form "x counts as y". This assumption is the starting point of each individual. The latter regulate already existing practices. According to these assumptions, the communicative experience outcome is political, as Hannah Arendt claims. An experience that has a shared purpose.

In short, hate speeches do not fulfill this function of politics. They are not a new kind of phenomenon. Judith Butler claims: "gli enunciati dei discorsi d'odio sono una parte di un lungo processo [...] per conoscere gli effetti viene chiesto di guardare agli enunciati in quanto entità conformi a esperienze, convenzioni, norme".¹³ They were already appeared during the past ages. In a recent study, *Hate speech: un dibattito lungo decenni*, Anna Elisabetta Galeotti states "l'*hate speech* come problema di una società democratica e pluralista, è entrato nell'agenda del dibattito pubblico insieme al multiculturalismo, sul finire degli anni Ottanta e inizio degli anni Novanta, in parallelo alla questione della correttezza politica, che dell'*hate speech* rappresenta il polo opposto".¹⁴ Elisabetta Galeotti underlines the problematic aspect within liberal principles and the theoretical-normative structure of liberal democracy, given that "le espressioni d'odio minano propriamente il processo d'inclusione delegittimando la presenza nella vita pubblica e sociale degli appartenenti a quel gruppo".¹⁵ What is new, today, is the intensity and pervasiveness of their manifestations. The awareness, based on the assumption that today politics uses hate speech, does not escape observers and commentators, and much less political analysts. Any attempt to understand contemporary politics must deal with this phenomenon.

In sum, I think that political language is, by its very nature, constitutive and is defined a social practice. These formulations is encouraged by the founders of Critical Discourse Analysis (for example by Roger Fowler). At this thesis, however, is based a rule of the persuasive function. On its

¹² Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules."

¹³ Butler, *Excitable speech*, 42.

¹⁴ Galeotti, "Hate speech," 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 5-6.

ritual aspect. On the evocative function of words. Today, these characteristics constitute the strategy of populism. The rhetoric of populism uses words that move against the liberal democratic model. Populist rhetoric based on the performative use of words. It use different topos and metaphors. The most common are: enemy, foreigner, migrant and words like fear and intolerance. In some cases, the first words generate forms of dehumanization. Fear and intolerance generate aggressive nationalism, ethnocentrism and discrimination. They generate new forms of inequality. In particular, inequalities have psychological and social consequences. They accentuate differences in status and heighten “la sensazione di non avere il controllo sulla propria vita”.¹⁶ Societies fall apart, the sense of community is lost, generating unhappiness, violence and ignorance. This diagnostic, proposed by R. G. Wilkinson and K.E. Pickett,¹⁷ supported by Chiara Volpato, has a great impact if analyzed from a political point of view. Specifically on the importance of some words. I begin a summary review of words divided into blocks, aimed at sharpening the focus of the theme. As an introduction, I suggest the following. The first block is the “words for fear”. For example irregular, illegal, foreign, non-EU citizen. The topos of fear is the background to neutral words used by right-wing populism, such as, invasion (referred to border communities), apocalypse, or exodus. On the second block, I put the “words of the new racism”: ethnicity and nationality. They produce the ethnicization of some hate crimes and the non-integrity of some communities. Lastly, the “words of contempt”, as structured on stereotypes and prejudices responsible for hate speech. The first block of words, which I call neutral words, glue the words that incite the two forms of hatred taken into consideration. They have, among the different types of function of language, illocutionary forces and belong to a language capable of “persuading, provoking and alarming”.¹⁸ When a politician or a party leader makes use of these words, “consequential effects” are generated and a real “production of real effects”. This produces effects on two levels: a) at the level of the public sphere in relation to the formation of opinion on a matter; b) at a systemic level for the formation and implementation of output and outcomes in policy decision-making processes.¹⁹ This constitutive character of hate speech emerges when it assumes the form-

¹⁶ Volpato, *Le radici psicologiche della disuguaglianza*, 19.

¹⁷ Wilkinson e Pickett, *The spirit level*.

¹⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things*, 77.

¹⁹ Cedroni, *Politolinguistica*, 18.

function-effect of language that produces reactions on people's behavior. The proposed analysis perspective frames hate speech in the theory of speech acts. Corrado Fumagalli, for example, focusing on the pragmatics of hate speech as linguistic acts, analyzes the relationship between speaker, listener and object of hate speech. In particular on the relationship between speaker and listener. He proposes two theses: 1) "il portatore d'odio produce un effetto sul gruppo target; 2) "il portatore d'odio ha un effetto su intolleranti e tolleranti in apparenza motivandoli ad agire contro il gruppo target".²⁰ In both cases, the hate speech is attributable to a weakening of individuality at the level of rational conviction or as a mere suggestion. A common ground created among the bearer of hatred and the target group that unites the speaker, who are intolerant and tolerant in appearance. From this analysis, it emerges that the constitutive power of hate speech lies not only in the "illocutionary or performative force", but also in the ability to contribute in building reality.

If the notion of hate speech it is interpreted only through the theory of linguistic acts, it appears for some authors, "troppo indeterminata" and suffers, as Besussi writes of "unilateralismo normativo e favorisce una concezione moralistica del discorso pubblico [...] è un concetto vago, cioè sottodeterminato".²¹ The theory of vagueness, advocated by Antonella Besussi,²² loses its meaning if we consider the hate speech is a constitutive act, which tends to create experiences, conventions, norms that have a socio-political impact. On the other hand, the relationship context-communicative dimension and intentional action is a linguistic-symbolic construction. Hate speeches only partially satisfy this relationship as they ground their characteristic on an extra-linguistic lexical apparatus of politics specific to the contingent situation.

3. The Asymmetrical Relationship of Hate Speech

Hate speech often contains these categories hidden by a tropos. The tropos indicates a rhetorical figure in which an expression is transferred from its own meaning into another figurative one. In this context,

²⁰ Fumagalli, "Discorsi d'odio", 59. The thesis supported by Fumagalli converges with the theory of Delgado, "Words that wound."

²¹ Besussi, "Hate speech una categoria inattendibile."

²² The theory of vagueness concerns: "a) l'etichetta di odio, b) le caratteristiche delle persone che ne sono oggetto, c) il confine del discorso come azione intenzionale a sé stante centrata sulla dimensione comunicativa", *Ibid.*, 42.

hate speeches are included. The force of hate speech shapes and transforms our identities, especially social identities, reinforcing social asymmetries and injustices. The three definitions of hate speech that I propose, in relation to the object (target group), have asymmetrical relationships in the background.

The first one given by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

According to the Office Democratic Institutions and Human Rights “Hate Speech is a discourse that attacks, offends, stigmatizes or incites to offend a person for belonging to a given group defined on the basis of ethnic origin, religion, gender identity and nationality”.

The second one given by the Council of Europe.²³

In accordance with the Council of Europe “Hate speech is understood as the set of other forms of expression that spread, incite, justify radical hatred, xenophobia, anti-semitism and other forms of hatred which include discrimination, hostility against minorities”.

The third definition of hate speech is that outlined by the European Commission. More precisely against racism and intolerance (ECRI).²⁴ “Hate speech is the incitement, promotion, incitement to denigrate, defamation of a person or group of people, or subjecting people or groups to harassment and negative stereotypes. The foundation of hatred is based on reasons of race, color, language, nationality, national origin, as well as gender identity”.

Postulating the three definitions within a dynamic model that marks the process of transition of an anthroponymic language (related to the human race), it gives prominence: 1) to the identified object -target group-; 2) to the identification of some topos that produce effects of legitimization, diffusion and promotion of hate at several levels. With regard to the first point, I believe that when hate speech strikes the target group, it generates: a) an alteration of the individual ego; b) it creates a blockage in the collective imagination; c) it produces an alteration in the perception of the relationship with others; d) a weakening of the self. With regard to the second point, I believe that the other forms clause, present in the non-binding resolution of the Council of Europe of 1997, which serves as a reference model for the other definitions, together with the topos of discrimination, is not “ultra-inclusive” and

²³ Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers n. 20 of 1997 of the Council of Europe.

²⁴ General Policy Recommendation n. 15 of the European Commission against racism and intolerance and of the Council of Europe of March 2016 on the fight against hate speech.

does not promote a “neo-language”, as Besussi suggests. It constitutes a tropology of the political. That is, the basis for a theory of tropes that systematizes and explains the function of hate speech in the three spheres of politics, polity and policy. In this way is possible to analyse in a diachronic and comparative perspective the persistence of certain stereotypes and prejudices that trace back to the social media and institutional level.

One of the reasons why it is important to talk about hate speech is because of the effect they have on those affected by them and on the people to whom the message conveyed. For this reason, politics must use appropriate words. Constitutional democracy, which guarantees the protection of civil and political rights, need to be protected. This model can neutralize all forms of hatred.

4. Discrimination, Prejudice and Violence as the Basis of Hate Crimes

My second point concerns the sources of hate crimes. The hate crime is “any crime foreseen by the Penal Code, it is motivated by the prejudice towards the victim for his belonging to a given group”. The factor that transforms an ordinary crime into a hate crime is the choice of the victim in the basis of a prejudice towards the group to which the victim belong. The methodology for studying hate crimes refers to the discourse-historical approach used to analyse the construction of national identities and the various forms of discrimination based on prejudice. In the developed analysis of hate crimes, I distinguish between two forms:

1) hate crimes ascribable to the category “crimini contro l’umanità”, “situazioni spurie”, “genocidi striscianti e dissimulati”,²⁵ that generate physical annihilation of the individual person or target group in which it is difficult to qualify the violence. Some scholars speak of “genocide by attrition” as hate crime implements strategies of indivisibility of violence. In essence, a process of automatism of violence for its own sake generated. As Sofsky says, “the impulse is displaced in the objectivity of the act, reflections and intentions are superfluous”. The automatism accompanies a quota of useless violence that poured on the subject –target group - vulnerable and defenceless. Vulnerable as a permanent statute of the human being, defenceless as one subjugated by circumstances.²⁶

²⁵ Portinaro, *L'imperativo di uccidere*, 183.

²⁶ Cavarero, *Orrorismo*, 42-43.

2) Hate crimes triggered by gender, cultural and social forms of discrimination. From the overlapping of these traits that contribute to define the human condition, hate crimes discriminations originate. This phenomenon emerges when the perpetrator moves from the level of interpersonal dynamics to the impersonal level. The persecution of the discriminated other is transformed into “una forma di costituzione del sé nella quale la violenza funge da surrogato del riconoscimento”.²⁷ The act of discrimination that generates hate crimes is not subject to constraints. It has only one objective, namely that of annihilating identities and erasing the dignity of the people involved.

What do we do to stop the ideologies that legitimize hate speech and hate crimes? Both social philosophy and social psychology emphasise that phenomena are interrelated and share cognitive and motivational antecedents on which, as Marina Calloni says, “Atavistic imaginaries”²⁸ have a hold, based on the need that human beings have to provide order and security in their living environment perceived as dangerous. To come to terms, as Chiara Volpato says, with the fears linked to the idea of death. However, these solutions “foriere di conseguenze simili per individui, gruppi e sistemi, come l’inibizione delle risposte emotive, quali l’indignazione e il senso di colpa che potrebbero promuovere interventi verso gli svantaggiati”.²⁹ I advocate, primarily, the need to wage a cultural battle to prevent the phenomenon of psychological and physical violence that affects victims of hate speech and hate crimes. This thesis strengthened by virtue of what already done at institutional level,³⁰ by breaking down the stereotypical language responsible for most hate speech and hate crimes. It is necessary to proceed with reformed knowledge because social phenomena that have “hate” as a suffix generate disturbing consequences. Knowing how to manage fear, which is a driving factor as it is driven by imagery that is perpetuated not only in an atavistic sense (Calloni) but acquired

²⁷ Portinaro, *L'imperativo di uccidere*, 57.

²⁸ Calloni, “Il lupo immaginato.” This paper analyses the tensions and interactions between these three determinations in relation to the display of imaginaries of violence in politics and daily life.

²⁹ Volpato, *Le radici psicologiche della disuguaglianza*, 38.

³⁰ Significant in this regard is the establishment of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry “Femicide and gender-based violence”, session n. 16 of July 23, 2019, in which Marina Calloni and Michele Nicoletti participated. In that occasion the commitment of the Universities to jointly promote joint projects with the Institutions to combat the phenomena of hatred and violence was reaffirmed.

through forms of transmission of anantiosemic and lithotic language that penetrate people's psychological processes generating negative emotions and actions that produce the effects we know. In conclusion, hate crimes versus hate speech based on prejudice and stereotype. Therefore, there is a direct connection between hate speech and hate crimes, both of which feed on the same stylistic elements.

Conclusion

In the context of this debate it clearly emerges that giving a definition of hate, in relation to both words and actions, is somewhat complex. This complexity is due to the frequency with which it reproduced and the way in which it conveyed on the web and on social networks. Amnesty International's numerous investigations through the creation of the 'Hate Barometer' report how the phenomenon of hatred has grown globally affecting different categories of people without any boundaries. Moreover, discriminatory lexemes and metaphors consciously amplify the extent to which they affect the dignity of many human beings. In order to contrast this phenomenon, the European Union has drawn up intervention programmes involving the institutions of the countries of the Union itself. However, as evidenced by the Hungarian case in which the policy does not provide adequate solutions to address the spread of discriminatory phenomena affecting a large number of citizens, these programmes are disregarded and rendered ineffective generating forms of intervention that are antithetical to the principles of freedom and equality. To some extent, the populist rhetoric in Europe is responsible for and accomplice to xenophobic, racist and violent language that disregards any form of inclusion and cooperation between humans. Thus, a form of relativisation of morals and ethics prevails that are deeply diversified, and for this reason, weakened by the increase in cultural and religious differences. Recovering the ideal reasons for a new form of human condition would make it possible to see how the good, based on mutual recognition, does not correspond to «un moloch identitario immobile e costringitivo», but to a spirit of solidarity, respect and responsibility on the part of each individual. In other words, openness towards solidarity and non-conflict horizons.

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