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## Folk characterisations of hate speech

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## Chapter 4

# Young People's Perception of Hate Speech

The present chapter, much like the previous one, comprises a series of short sections, each focusing on a particular aspect arising from the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. interview discussions. The analyses adopt predominantly thematic qualitative approaches embedded within various theoretical perspectives and are meant to explore the ways in which young people perceive hate speech and matters associated with it. Again, it should be noted that even though each section is based on a particular national setting, the overall argumentation is of relevance to other contexts too, as well as to the wider discussion of the specific phenomenon in focus. In this light, Sect. 4.1 examines the experiences of hate speech narrated by the interviewees in Poland in an attempt to come up with recommendations for countering it and Sect. 4.2 follows suit by examining the mobilisation of young people against discriminatory discourse in the United Kingdom. In turn, Sect. 4.3 focuses on the relatively unexplored issue of folk conceptualisations of hate speech, showing how interviewees in Denmark characterise the concept of hate speech and its regulation, while Sect. 4.4 addresses the thorny issue of freedom of expression when it comes to regulating hate speech in Lithuania. Section 4.5 investigates the tendency of young people to be more accepting of discriminatory comments against migrants rather than the LGBTIQ community, identifying some reasons why xenophobia is so much on the rise when compared to homophobia in Malta. Remaining on the issue of xenophobia, Sect. 4.6 focuses on the typical conflation of the categories of race and religion in xenophobic talk in Cyprus, where anyone not conforming to the Greek Orthodox faith being submitted to similar processes of Othering. Finally, turning to the investigation of hate speech in the online setting, Sect. 4.7 zooms in on Italian youth perceptions of the role that the media plays in the diffusion of discriminatory discourse in the digital era, and Sect. 4.8 draws on the parallels between cyberhate and cyberbullying, by focusing on online anonymity as a crucial factor that is perceived to motivate the expression of hate on the internet in Spain.

## 4.1 Youth and Hate Speech in the (Mediatized) Public Sphere

**Monika Kopytowska, Julita Woźniak and Łukasz Grabowski**

Recent debates on freedom of speech on the one hand and incivility and hatred in public discourse on the other have brought into the limelight the role of language as a social agent in the public sphere. As argued by social constructivists and critical discourse analysis scholars alike (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1966/1991; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Searle 1995, 2010), discursive representations of individuals, groups, events, issues, phenomena and relations are both constituted by and constitutive of the socio-political status-quo of these entities. Since contemporary public discourse abounds in messages of hate, and research findings demonstrate that there exists a link between verbal and physical aggression, it seems vital to explore the dynamics of hate speech production and reception in the public sphere in its current mediatized form.<sup>1</sup>

Habermas' concept of the public sphere denotes "the space between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest is institutionally guaranteed." (1989: xi). There are, according to him, two reasons why discourse matters in the public sphere, or, to put it more aptly, two kinds of actions accompanying public debate: strategic action and communicative action. The former is meant to influence the behaviour of the audience by means of a "threat of sanctions or the prospect of gratification in order to cause the interaction to continue as the first actor desires," while the latter is intended to "[rationally] motivate [...] other[s] by relying on the illusionary binding/bonding effect of the offer contained in [...] speech act" (Habermas 1989: 58).

While globalisation has led to the emergence of a 'global public sphere,' 'mediatisation' has stretched the public sphere, in its traditional sense, beyond the 'geospatial,' or territorially bounded configuration, via a 'sociospatial,' or online virtual space configuration (Youngs 2009). The mediatized public sphere (cf. Kopytowska 2013, 2015a–c), which is created as a result of this process, constitutes an online space where members of society can exchange socio-political opinions, and collaborate in the construction of social reality via peer production. Its near-instantaneous, dialogic, and decentralised nature and interactivity make it an ultra-attractive site for extended socio-political debate. At the same time, however, anonymity and global accessibility have transformed it into a tool for promoting messages of hate and radicalism, by enabling previously diverse and fragmented groups to connect and providing them with a sense of community that shares values, ideologies and fears (Perry and Olsson 2009), while making such messages available to mass publics (Duffy 2003) by removing the boundaries of time and space.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For a comprehensive overview of the performativity of hate speech, see Leezenberg (2015).

<sup>2</sup>For the role of anonymity in encouraging incivility among Internet users, see Santana (2014); for the interface between anonymity, accountability for one's words and tendency towards mental shortcuts and simplistic judgements, see Tetlock (1983).

Drawing on these theoretical insights and referring to the data collected during the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. project focus group interviews in Poland,<sup>3</sup> we will discuss here the interface between the (mediatized) public sphere and hate speech/hate crime as perceived and experienced by the youth in Poland (including foreigners studying here) with a view to coming up with possible recommendations for counteracting these phenomena. Overall, the relevant issues discussed in these interviews can be linked to several concepts, namely accessibility, anonymity in the absence of face-to-face interaction, permanence and pervasiveness of messages, public awareness, and ‘performativity of hate speech’.

As observed by the students who took part in the interviews, while the mediatization of the public sphere has resulted in an overall increase of the amount of hate speech, it has also made the society more aware of the existence of the phenomenon—hence the importance of the historical permanence of online written discourses in contrast to the transient nature of face-to-face communication. As one of the participants characteristically pointed out,

- (37) *such opinions remain in the public sphere and are more salient; earlier someone could say something and it just ‘faded away’.*  
(P2, FG1)<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, both anonymity and lack of direct face-to-face interaction are seen as factors behind incivility in the virtual public sphere:

- (38) *The fact that there is no direct contact with the other person also matters (...). One can afford to say much more than in face-to-face interaction.*  
(P1, FG1)
- (39) *People feel unrestricted because of anonymity. They believe they can say anything and give vent to all sorts of emotions.*  
(P2, FG2)

At the same time, however, the documented increase in the amount of hate speech online can be attributed to the escalation of fear in the current socio-political context (terrorism, migrant crisis, radicalisation), and while it is undesirable, it is still better, as one of the interviewees believes, that such an outburst of emotions takes place in the cyberspace and not publicly, or, as she puts it, in the “material world”, that is, in the streets (P1, FG4).

Yet, the issue of cyber-violence and its potential effects in the real world is also salient, firstly, because of its quantitative nature, in the sense of accumulating hate speech,

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<sup>3</sup>Six focus-group interviews were conducted among 22 individuals in total, all students at either the University of Łódź or University of Opole.

<sup>4</sup>Throughout this chapter, the abbreviated forms ‘Px’ and ‘FGy’ will be used as identifiers of particular interviewees, by referring to the relevant participant and focus group number in each national interview transcript database. Also, due to space restrictions, only a translation of the relevant interviewees’ original utterances into English, when these were produced in a language other than English, will be provided in this instance.

- (40) *a bulk of some threats may exert such a pressure on someone that he or she will resort to crime in the real world.*

(P2, FG3)

and then, due to the fact that such hate speech is widely accessible to various types of audiences, for whom it may act as a trigger for the already active prejudice and hatred.

- (41) *If we look at the statement that “each Paki and Nigger trash should get a 9 mm bullet in between the eyes”...there are different people and masses of people on the Internet. [...] Some, like us will just laugh at it, while someone else after reading it will reach for a gun with 9 mm bullets, go to the street, and seeing the first person with Middle Eastern or African origin, will literally take out this gun and fire...*

(P3, FG3)

Accordingly, as pointed out by several individuals, the existence of Facebook groups inciting to violence, like for example ‘Stop islamizacji Europy’ [Stop the Islamisation of Europe] may become motivation and pretext for fanatics.

While it is generally assumed that more ‘distance’, in the sense of critical thinking, is expected in the case of interactions within the virtual public sphere, it is also acknowledged that this type of environment, which blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, is conducive to possible prejudice and discriminatory behaviour. Still, on a positive note, the Internet is also perceived as

- (42) *the only medium within public sphere that is free of restrictions*

(P1, FG1)

and a place where one can get information that is unavailable (censored) via other channels, such as what one of the participants referred to as “the truth” concerning refugee violence against women in Germany or Sweden (P1, FG1). Hence, a balance should be struck between “uncivil discourse and selectivity-inducing political correctness” (P1, FG4).

Opinions concerning reactions to hate speech in both the physical and virtual public sphere seem to be divided. On the one hand, penalising online hate speech is viewed as something that should be commonly accepted and obvious:

- (43) *just as one can be fined for vulgar speech in the street and it is not perceived as restriction on the freedom of speech.*

(P2, FG4)

But on the other hand, when it comes to how ‘ordinary’ citizens should react to hate speech incidents, reactions to hate-motivated verbal or physical violence seems to be more desirable in the physical world, while in the networked public sphere, inaction is more likely to be perceived as the right attitude, as it does not contribute to the escalation of hate. As one of the interviewees puts it, reacting to online hate speech amounts to “feeding the troll” (P2, FG1), since many haters simply want to be noticed and engage in an endless debate.

Importantly, as argued by some of the interviewees, to properly counter the phenomenon of hate speech in the public sphere, both in the physical and virtual dimension, more should be done in terms of public awareness and education, since

(44) *hate speech results simply from people's lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown.*

(P1, FG3)

As shown by this discussion of the interviews concerning the public perception of hate speech among young people living in Poland, there exists considerable social acceptance of verbal abuse and aggression in online communication. At the same time, our interviewees point to the need of raising public awareness and fostering education that enables individuals to understand and appreciate the links between legal instruments, law enforcement and the social acceptance of hate speech in online and offline modes of communication, both private and public—or to use again Habermas' concepts, between *strategic action* and *communicative action* in the context of public deliberation.

## 4.2 Resistance Against Hate Speech: Generation 'Snowflake' or Generation 'Woke'?

### Georgia Whitaker

Following the EU referendum in June 2016, hate speech and hate crime figures increased by 58% across the UK (National Police Chief's Council 2016). One year on, this trend is still evident, with Islamophobic hate crime increasing by fivefold since the London Bridge terrorist attacks (Travis 2017). Major UK NGOs such as Amnesty UK have launched emergency campaigns to address the issue (Amnesty International 2017), yet the 'millennial generation'<sup>5</sup> have been tackling hate speech long before the EU referendum occurred.

In this section, I explore how British youth have moulded a more radical definition of hate speech which advances on Loewenstein's theory of Militant Democracy (1937). Following the EU referendum, resistance against hate speech has been politicised, as part of a 'remoaner'<sup>6</sup> agenda, or worse, a characteristic of generation 'Snowflake'.<sup>7</sup> Yet the British millennial generation represented in the

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<sup>5</sup>The term 'millennials' generally refers to the generation of people born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s (Main 2013).

<sup>6</sup>The term 'remoaner' refers to a person who vociferously opposes Britain's exit from the European Union (Stromme 2016).

<sup>7</sup>As we will very shortly see, 'snowflake' is used in this setting in an informal, derogatory way to denote an overly sensitive or easily offended young person, or someone who believes they are entitled to special treatment on account of their supposedly unique characteristics.

C.O.N.T.A.C.T. interview data resist these labels, defining themselves instead as generation 'Woke' in their activism against hate speech.

The term 'Woke' was actually added to the Oxford English Dictionary as recently as June 2017 (Steinmetz 2017):

'Woke', adjective

Originally: well-informed, up-to-date. Now chiefly: alert to racial or social discrimination and injustice; frequently in *stay woke*.

The term itself is not exclusive to the U.K, and originates from the U.S. Black Lives Matter movement connoting an awareness of racial and social justice and resistance against "structural violence" (Galtung 1969). Whilst it is now used outside the Black Lives Matter movement, being 'woke' is still largely defined by (but not excluded to) racial issues (Hess 2016). Woke activists endeavour to 'call out' others on their 'privilege' and conscious or unconscious prejudices prevalent due to patriarchal and post-colonial societal structures (cf. Said 1978).

During our C.O.N.T.A.C.T. interviews,<sup>8</sup> one interviewee reflected on becoming 'woke' through a process of self-education:

(45) *Before I would have banter with people and say things I shouldn't say and people would say things to me that they shouldn't really say and now, as I've gotten older, done my research, and I've become more aware of what's ok and what's not ok. So if anyone ever said anything to me that felt was out of order now then I'd 100% report it. I mean our generation is the 'woke' generation.*

(Interviewee 9)

Amongst our interviewees, hate speech has taken a bolder, more radical definition. This new perception of hate speech embraces EU and UN definitions of hate speech, yet expands upon them. Racist hate speech is no longer regarded as comprising racial slurs alone, but also as including post-colonial nuances. Furthermore, interviewees incorporated stigma against sexuality, gender and particularly transgender rights in their definition of hate speech. All in all, the 'woke' generation recognise hate speech as a by-product of societal power imbalances, which an interviewee explains as follows:

(46) *Hate speech is something which uses someone's privilege and power in society against someone without that privilege. Different characteristics have different markers of power in society and people use those characteristics to insult someone and go against someone; that would be hate speech.*

(Interviewee 2)

Being 'woke' involves introspection and an acute awareness of one's own power, or 'privilege' in society due to the intersectional attributes of their identity;

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<sup>8</sup>Twelve individual interviews with young people in the UK were carried out following the common C.O.N.T.A.C.T. methodology.

most notably their race. ‘Privilege’ refers to unequal opportunities by virtue of one’s identity and subsequent immunity to discrimination (McIntosh 1989). On this front, interviewees suggested that being ‘woke’ requires ‘checking’ one’s privilege constantly, and recognising where their life experience exempts them from an understanding of racism, sexism, homophobia and other prejudices. In the following example, one interviewee reflects on how his privilege exempts them from experiencing hate speech:

(47) *I haven’t experienced hate speech as a white cis male*

(Interviewee 3).

There is general consensus in ‘woke’ circles that white people cannot be subject to racism, as self-identifying men cannot be subject to sexism (Houlston 2017). For example, an interviewee described an incident where a student officer at the notably ‘radical’ Goldsmiths university provoked controversy by tweeting “#KillAllWhiteMen” (Telegraph 2015). In keeping with ‘woke’ conceptions of hate speech, she argued that as a woman of colour she could not be racist. With power and privilege in mind, the interviewee here highlights this incident as an example of imbalances in police protection and scrutiny on the basis of patriarchy and racism:

(48) *It’s like that Baha Mustafa thing; someone will say kill all white men and then all of a sudden they are under investigation.*

(Interviewee 4)

Interviewees strongly agreed on the importance of giving the victim the right to choose how to respond to experiences of hate crime off their own accord. One interviewee who had experienced hate speech argued that direct person attacks often prevent the victim’s ability to ‘call out’ hate speech due to emotional distress and exhaustion.

(49) *I, as a woman of colour, really struggle speaking to someone I would define as racist because I don’t think it’s my job to make them less racist.*

(Interviewee 10)

The interviewee here raises the issue of responsibility, and the concept of ‘allies’ which is well-known in millennial ‘woke’ circles. An ‘ally’, in this context, is someone who claims no authority in understanding this discrimination, yet can call out and educate a perpetrator unaffected by an issue by virtue of their identity (Hess 2016). In turn, another interviewee elaborated on the importance of allies using their privilege in order to resist hate speech:

(50) *I don’t think it should be hijab Muslim women who go and speak to BNP sympathisers, but your nice average white liberal man who just wants to do something could have that conversation. The work of having those conversations is left to the people who are most likely to experience the intolerance and allies in the room get to say nothing and not be awkward or disruptive.*

(Interviewee 4)

The practice of 'safe spaces' and 'no-platforming' across universities and millennial communities in the UK is intended to banish those who advocate language considered to mark hateful assaults to people's dignity. Critics, including Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May, have attacked millennial's attempts to curtail what they perceive as hate speech as assaults on freedom of speech itself (Hughes 2016). Yet interviewees were highly sceptical of this argument:

- (51) *Private individuals saying 'don't say that, that is racist' is not censorship! It's totally legitimate; it's not the government saying people can't speak; it's you can speak where you want but we won't be there to listen. Ultimately I think that there is a false dichotomy set up between lovers of freedom of speech and so called safer spaces crews, and it plays into all kinds of nefarious agendas.*

(Interviewee 4)

Turning to references to the millennial generation as generation 'Snowflake,' following the EU-referendum and Donald Trump's election campaign (Nicholson 2016), the term 'Snowflake' has often been used by 'Brexiters' such as Michael Gove (Waugh 2017).

Snowflake, noun

informal, derogatory: an overly sensitive or easily offended person, or one who believes they are entitled to special treatment on account of their supposedly unique characteristics.

*'these little snowflakes will soon discover that life doesn't come with trigger warnings'*

(Oxford Living Dictionaries 2017a)

The term 'snowflake' is essentially an insult to the millennial generation, as it describes them as self-righteously believing that they are as precious and unique as snowflakes. Furthermore, the delicate, breakable metaphor of a snowflake indicates how easily offended the millennial generation are by perceived hate speech.

Far beyond questions of freedom of speech, advocates of the insult 'snowflake' have been known to sneer at the focus on the emotional effects of hate speech which millennial interviewees identified:

- (52) *Hate speech is any kind of speech or incident where someone is making you feel lesser than them or undermined or angry or upset in any way.*

(Interviewee 8)

Interviewees of colour expressed particular concern regarding the rise of hate speech following the EU referendum:

- (53) *Black and brown people are terrified. There's a lot of fear mongering with regards to Muslim people and the Muslim communities. And white people are afraid because they've been told to be.*

(Interviewee 5)

The term ‘snowflake’ has been used prolifically worldwide as an insult by far right groups such as alt-right (Roy 2016). This has for some, including this interviewee, resulted in a loss of confidence in reporting hate speech:

- (54) *[Reporting hate speech] made me lose faith. It also makes you feel like a bit of a tell tale and particularly at the moment the whole narrative of being a left liberal elite snowflake made me feel not so great.*

(Interviewee 11)

Our interview participants regarded digital spaces as places of community where resistance to hate speech can be easily co-ordinated and galvanised. A community responsibility was seen as an alternative way to resist online hate without regulation from the police or social media corporations:

- (55) *There’s a group that I’m part of on Facebook which is for women and non-binary people which is this inclusive space that often there are campaigns on that group to flag up a particular group to get behind supporting something in a short space of time. There’s a community responsibility to flag things up.*

(Interviewee 6)

Yet, there was also scepticism concerning whether online collective resistance against hate speech effectively changed the minds of perpetrators in a productive manner:

- (56) *One has to think very carefully about the difference between expressing outrage in solidarity that can have value and actually communicating in a way that is actually going to change somebody’s mind and both of those things often need to happen.*

(Interviewee 4)

As there was also concern that involvement in online resistance to hate speech may prevent millennials from resisting hate speech offline in their personal lives. Those in question are often described as ‘keyboard warriors’.<sup>9</sup>

- (57) *The hard work of engaging with people often doesn’t get done because people think well I’ve tweeted in solidarity my job is done and all the time in real life they don’t have those difficult conversations with people around them.*

(Interviewee 4)

Finally, whilst interviewees were strong advocates of community-regulation, most were highly sceptical of any sort of government intervention against hate speech:

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<sup>9</sup>A person who makes abusive or aggressive posts on the Internet, typically one who conceals their true identity (Oxford Living Dictionary 2017b).

(58) *The government cannot be trusted with people's data! The government have their cards on the table as to who they care about and who they don't so I don't really trust the government to police online platforms well. I think we need to organise ourselves as private individuals to deal with things like this.*

(Interviewee 4)

All in all, the qualitative results of the British C.O.N.T.A.C.T. interviews reflect a microcosm of a wider geo-political youth movement which may in turn shift definitions of hate speech whilst the millennial generation increasingly adopt positions of socio-political power. Contemporarily, the evolved definitions of hate speech discussed are likely to be too radical for the general population to be regulated into law. Yet, the millennial generation show no explicit interest in legislation on three counts;

1. scepticism as to whether laws would be fairly enforced
2. a preference for community resistance
3. self-induced moral obligations to 'stay woke' and reject hate speech are stronger than legal obligations.

This raises wider questions surrounding tackling hate speech. A tendency to heavily rely on the law ignores the fact that juridical punishment often fails victims of hate speech, and provides no moral lesson for perpetrators. What the 'woke' generation demonstrates is that tackling hate speech requires the work of communities to promote a moral obligation to treat one another with dignity, with a retrospective awareness of the historical origins of hate speech and "structural violence" (Galtung 1969). With this grassroots or bottom up approach, law can be more trusted, and respected.

### 4.3 Folk Characterisations of Hate Speech

**Sharon Millar, Rasmus Nielsen, Anna Vibeke Lindø and Klaus Geyer**

Brown (2017) argues that hate speech as a concept is no longer confined to academic and legal circles, but has currency among the general public and, hence, requires new lines of investigation from the lay perspective. To this end, he proposes that hate speech might be best approached in terms of prototypical characteristics: are there elements that people tend to associate with hate speech, such as minority groups, insults, the possibility of regulation? Since there has been little work done on the perception of hate speech in the Danish context, the data presented here, deriving from five focus group interviews with 20 university students, can be seen as a modest beginning. In this section, we make no claim to prototypicality, but will attempt to identify those characteristics that the interviewees homed in on, first when asked to define hate speech themselves and later when

presented with already formulated definitions. More specifically, we will focus on popular or folk conceptual understandings of hate speech, mindful of research that emphasises the lack of transparency surrounding hate speech as a concept, since, as Boromisza-Habashi correctly notes, hate speech is imbued with local meanings and has its own “cultural life” (2013: 5).

When participants were asked what they understood hate speech to be, the majority either explicitly or implicitly referred to groups (group membership, group identity) or group processes (stereotyping, generalising):

- (59) *hate speech which when there is someone who openly talks down to groups of marginalised people.* (P3, FG4)
- (60) *when you specifically and on purpose attack somebody for their personality which is like you know for example sexuality or gender or skin colour or that kind of thing.* (P2, FG1)
- (61) *you talk about women or Muslims in general or Jews in general instead of thinking that there can also be lots of different people* (P3, FG3)
- (62) *stereotypical things you like put on some person or other ... in a condescending, wicked way* (P3, FG1)

Within these definitions, we see named group characteristics, such as gender, religion, skin colour, or broader labels, such as marginalised people. A few participants, however, also emphasised very specific groups:

- (63) *more discriminatory about other races* (P4, FG2)
- (64) *gender and sexuality. Often if it is gender so women who get attacked by men if they dare to be part of a public debate.* (P2, FG3)

Participants also gave indications of how hate speech manifests itself, but this was mostly expressed in broad terms. Hate speech can be condescension, attacking, generalising, stereotyping, talking in a nasty or wicked way. One participant was more specific, focusing in on threat and incitement to violence:

- (65) *It's you know the degree to whether it invites violence or not. And to whether it is threatening or just a prejudice* (P3, FG5)

The idea of intention, a thorny subject in the legal literature, also occasionally appears: hate speech is done “on purpose” (P2, FG1) or has “an evil intention behind it” (P1, FG1).

Turning to how participants responded to the four differing definitions of hate speech they were presented with, including the issue of whether such speech should be legislated against, it should be noted that all definitions specified the same protected grounds (nationality, skin colour, ethnic origins, religion, gender and sexual orientation). Definitions 1 and 2 described hate speech in terms of, respectively, making negative, prejudiced remarks, and offending/insulting (Danish verb "*fornærme*"). The reactions to these two definitions were very similar. The majority felt that they both captured the idea of hate speech, but one participant did not consider prejudiced remarks to come under the hate speech umbrella. Everyone agreed that both definitions should not be subject to any form of legislation for ideological reasons concerning freedom of speech and practical reasons in relation to the wording and enforcement of any such laws:

(66) *Again, one is moving into a dangerous zone. Okay what can one say and what can one not say. So it'll become a totalitarian state.*

(P3, FG2)

(67) *I mean I think it would be really, really difficult to formulate some kind of proposed law against this type (prejudiced remarks)*

(P1, FG2)

Interestingly, however, in relation to definition 2 (insulting/offending), there was a sense in one focus group that this was more of a grey area in relation to legislation:

(68) *This is a bit more serious you know because it is, it when you consciously...*

(P4, FG2)

(69) *Yeah so you almost attack.*

(P3, FG2)

Insulting/offending then is perceived as more serious than making prejudiced comments as this involves a deliberate attack on someone. Context is also seen as important when it comes to regulating this form of hate speech; it all depends on who initiates the hate speech and why (e.g. Is it individuals or hate groups? Is it due to emotion or ideology?)

(70) *When you are upset with someone, so you can also say some hate speech things, can't you? But I mean there is again this limit because there are these, like, for example, gangs, like, for example, White Pride and things like that, which are practically an organisation based on hate. Where again, where is the limit?*

(P4, FG2)

The third definition encompassed the notion of threat, which was rarely mentioned explicitly by participants when giving their own definitions of hate speech. Part of the reason for this may be that threats seem to be viewed as possible criminal actions.

- (71) *When you threaten somebody so you are actually all of a sudden in a completely different place than if you just say bad things about their religion or skin colour or sexuality but if you directly threaten people so I think that is something completely different.* (P3, FG1)
- (72) *So you go over and it becomes like a hate crime* (P2, FG1)
- (73) *to threaten it, it is also hate speech but I think also you (mumbling) the border to hate crime where it begins not to be just words* (P4, FG2)

There was complete agreement that this definition of hate speech required legislation, although mitigating contextual issues, such as empty threats made in the heat of the moment, were also touched upon.

The final definition covered incitement to violence and hate, which was only referred to by one person when discussing personal understandings of hate speech. Reactions to this definition were more ambiguous. It was acknowledged as covering hate speech, but one focus group considered it a more indirect type.

- (74) *It is not direct hate speech to a person.* (P4, FG2)
- (75) *It is of course some form of hate speech but it isn't... it is more indirect... Because it, yeah, if it was me and I said to this here (mumbles)... Go over there and thump him. So I didn't say it directly to the person over there and so like the way I have understood it on the face of it, it's not direct hate speech.* (P3, FG2)

Views on legislating this form of hate speech were divided as it was seen as a very grey area, dependent on context (such as when it is hate groups inciting to violence), and individual interpretation. There were fears that it could end up in a “blame game” situation (P4, FG2) involving “your word against mine” (P1, FG2).

To sum up, the participants' own understandings of hate speech generally point to the group nature of the concept and describe its characteristics in broad terms, such as using condescending, nasty language, stereotyping and generalising. Their understandings for the most part fit with definitions of hate speech that deal with prejudice and offence/insult. Notions of threat and encouraging violence were not explicitly raised by students themselves, although one participant did see these as defining features of hate speech. Threatening behaviour, however, was considered to be very serious and criminal. This was the only definition of hate speech that provoked consensus in favour of legislation. Perhaps surprisingly, the definition of hate speech as incitement to violence and hate was met with some ambivalence.

## 4.4 Thoughts on Regulating Hate Speech

### Tatsiana Chulitskaya

In recent years, hate speech has become a recognised problem to be addressed at both the national and international level. Regulations of hate speech are “connected with the use of words which are deliberately abusive and/or insulting and/or threatening and/or demeaning directed at members of vulnerable minorities, calculated to stir up hatred against them” (Waldron 2012: 8–9). However, such regulations provoke extensive debates as to whether liberal democracy must take affirmative responsibility for protecting the atmosphere of mutual respect against certain forms of attacks. If it must, then what are the proper forms, and where are the limits of hate speech regulations?

Herz and Molnar (2012) claim that in the West the maximalist idea of an offense-free society is shaped by the long-existing tradition of freedom of expression, which is embedded and practiced in mature democracies. But even there, the scope of hate speech laws should not be taken for granted and needs to remain in the focus of public reflection. For instance, in the past few decades, laws forbidding Holocaust denial have at times been criticised as controversial limitations on freedom of expression (Bleich 2011). In order to avoid such controversies, some authors claim that it is necessary for hate speech regulations to be developed on a case-by-case basis, rather than being entirely content-based (Hertz and Molnar 2012), since the domestic political context of an era needs to also be taken into account (Bleich 2011). This approach, that is, a case-by-case evaluation of hate speech instances while placing them in the current political context, seem extremely important for Lithuania.

On the basis of the focus group interviews that we conducted following the common C.O.N.T.A.C.T. methodology,<sup>10</sup> I will now briefly discuss how local participants, who are not only Lithuanian nationals, but also representatives of other nationalities—in particular, of the Russian-speaking minority, understand hate speech and where they stand in relation to the free speech debate.

In our focus group discussions, hate speech was defined and characterised as the usage of specific words, expressions and intonation that targets human dignity (example 76), while reference was also made to stereotyping and having biased opinions (example 77). Apart from this, the perpetrator's intention to cause harm through hate speech was particularly underlined (example 78),

(76) *When somebody tells you, that you are different and that's why you are worse than they are.*

(P3, FG1)

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<sup>10</sup>We conducted two focus groups in Lithuania, with 10 participants in the first and 15 in the second.

- (77) ... usually when we speak about 'hate speech', we mean a negative assumption based on different backgrounds. [You don't focus] on the fact that somebody just offended you, but [on the fact that] they used a biased opinion, a stereotype, which was not created by you yourself, but by society.  
(P4, FG1)
- (78) The worst scenario is when hate speech is a deliberate [action].  
(P1, FG2)

According to our interviewees, hate speech includes both threats and insults (examples 79 and 80)—to such an extent that some even consider the boundaries between hate speech and verbal abuse blurry (examples 81 and 82). Yet, not all instances of discriminatory discourse are considered prosecutable: some qualify as hate speech in the legal sense, while other are just cases of intolerant, yet permissible, talk (example 83).

- (79) I just cannot understand why we need to differentiate between an insult, a threat and hate speech, when in fact they are quite the same.  
(P8, FG2)
- (80) I just realised that hate speech is a broad concept for defining what people do in order to show their dislike and hatred towards some other groups of people. It includes insults, and humiliation, and threats.  
(P2, FG1)
- (81) In the Criminal Code, there has already been an article against insulting. I don't really understand why we need to define 'hate speech' separately...  
(P7, FG2)
- (82) I don't really understand why we need to define 'hate speech' separately because of religion, if it's wrong to insult someone anyway.  
(P9, FG1)
- (83) [the difference between suggested definitions of hate speech] is in the degree of hatred. If [some definitions] are about expression of thoughts, then [other definitions] are about something more serious concerning crimes or some criminal actions.  
(P2, FG2)

Turning to the issue of how the regulation of hate speech affects freedom of expression, most participants thought that "freedom of speech should be guaranteed" (P5, FG2); yet, some also expressed fear about how people actually use this freedom:

- (84) [reading hate speech comments] "I think about freedom of speech and I get scared. That's why I never read comments to news. And thank God for that, if they are writing such things there. Why should you waste your time on such things? ... I have difficulty with formulating my thoughts, when I see such expressions, or hear somebody say something like this... When people are insulted – I just lose ability to speak... I cannot think clearly".  
(P4, FG2)

The same pattern is also evident when it comes to the necessity of legally regulating hate speech. As we have already seen, there are, on the one hand, some participants who question the need to legally define hate speech as a separate crime, and think that cases of hate speech should be incorporated into other laws as aggravating circumstances, rather than targeted by a separate law. But on the other, there are others who were supportive of the separate legislation on hate speech.

- (85) *I agree that it is possible to create a separate law on hate speech.*  
(P10, FG1)
- (86) *I agree that we need them [laws on hate speech], because we should combat insults in general.*  
(P6, FG2)

At the same time, respondents also expressed doubts about the proper implementation of the existing legislation in Lithuania. To begin with, they believe that even though such laws may exist, people are not always aware of them, and they are not typically followed in everyday life. So, victims are often forced to press charges in order to get justice.

- (87) *I just think that in order for the laws to work, people need to get [the hate speech cases] to the court. Because the problem [of hate speech] exists, but not all the people will go to the authorities and point it out.*  
(P4, FG1)

In parallel, the importance of making the general public familiar with laws against hate speech was also underlined (example 88), but almost everyone agreed that the most important role in combating hate speech lies with education (example 89).

- (88) *... [what is needed is] to popularise it [the law against hate speech] through the media in order to change the situation somehow. Maybe this will increase the cultural level [sic] of the people.*  
(P2, FG2)
- (89) *Preventive measures are better than punishment. I mean education, inter-cultural discursive ethics, trying to explain to kids from a young age that everything is fine and people can be different...*  
(P9, FG2)

Striking a balance between freedom of expression and regulation of hate speech is a difficult task in any national context. Being part of a predominantly academic debate, this problem remains mostly unresolved on the practical, political and legal level, which are more focused on defining hate speech content, and finding appropriate tools for combating it, rather than on its actual contextualisation. Overall, the results of the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. research in Lithuania demonstrates that while our interview participants are in general familiar with the concept of hate speech, they make no particular distinction among the actions that constitute hate speech, and express doubts about how the legislation of hate speech is actually implemented in practice. So, they see the media, education and public awareness campaigns as more important tools for dealing with hate speech than legal measures.

## 4.5 It All Depends on Who Discrimination Targets

### Stavros Assimakopoulos and Rebecca Vella Muskat

As already mentioned in Sect. 2.1 (cf. footnote 14 there), much like in other countries of the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. project, our research in Malta showed that xenophobia is far more widespread than homophobia in the local setting. What was rather surprising, however, was that the results of the online questionnaire that was administered locally gave us a clear indication that participants were much more willing to label homophobic, rather than xenophobic comments as hate speech. This was particularly odd, since all the examples of ‘potential’ hate speech that were provided in the questionnaire were selected on the basis of the same criteria for both kinds of discrimination. So, during the interview<sup>11</sup> phase of our research, one of our main aims was to discover why that might be the case, and a number of interesting points were indeed raised by our interviewees.

According to most focus group participants, while the LGBTIQ community has moved forward in legislation and general acceptance within the Maltese society in recent years, migrants are still very much left on the periphery. Progressive laws and strong activism has ensured that members of the LGBTIQ community are granted rights and privileges that are the same as their heterosexual, cisgendered peers. In turn, this has also granted the LGBTIQ community widespread positive publicity. In addition to the positive narrative surrounding the LGBTIQ community in Malta, our interviewees also pointed out that persons of LGBTIQ identities are part of the Maltese fabric, as family members and friends, while migrants are viewed with suspicion, as outsiders.

(90) ... nowadays, it's not such a taboo topic anymore, so people are coming out of their shells, like 'hey I'm gay' ok, so now it's acceptable. And now families, like Maltese families, they have family members who are also gay, so they've become more acceptable. So, that's closer to home I guess, because they're part of us, they're our family. So, ok, we can accept them, but they're from another culture, they're Arabs, Muslim... so no.

(P5, FG1)

(91) ... because they are Maltese people, definitely, like they're born here so it's fine. They identify as homosexual and that's ok. Immigrants, they came here, we're letting them stay here. So it's like they should be ok with everything, they shouldn't ask for anything, it's enough that we're keeping them here so the kind of mentality is that they do not belong here ... the LGBTIQ community obviously in the last few decades raised a lot of awareness and people are understanding more now the dynamics of it ... Immigration, I think, it's because they are not nationals, the ideology that they do not belong here.

(P4, FG4)

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<sup>11</sup>For this part of the project, we conducted 4 focus group interviews with 5 participants each. It should also be noted that 4 of our participants were slightly over 35 years of age.

- (92) *And I think also politics or mass media has an effect on this, like if you look at recent times ... there have been progressive laws so the introduction of civil [union] rights and now it's being discussed to include [gay] marriage whereas when we are speaking about immigration we take this kind of stance ... they do not belong here, let's find a place where to put them. So the state is already giving kind of this ideology of LGBTIQ is ok, immigration isn't...*  
(P4, FG4)

Hence, people are less likely to tolerate speech that discriminates against one of their own, than speech that victimises a person that they deem to be unrelated to them. Moreover, as one participant also pointed out, since there is this propensity in recent years to actively not discriminate against LGBTIQ community in Malta, even people who are less inclined to accept the community are less willing to tolerate hate speech targeted at them out of peer pressure.

- (93) *Cause people don't want to seem homophobic. If the rest of society is not homophobic, they don't want to be the odd one out, so, if society is progressive will act progressive like it, but still have their own views...*  
(P3, FG1)

Turning to why our interview participants feel that there may be a greater acceptance of xenophobic comments in our data, the most common explanation given was that migrants bring a strong feeling of perceived threat among the Maltese; a perceived threat that can be attributed to a number of reasons.

- (94) *I think most people in Malta, I mean with immigration, they see immigrants like "ah they're taking what's ours"*  
(P1, FG2)
- (95) *They're taking something away, some people feel so.*  
(P4, FG2)

The most commonplace argument among our interviewees appears to be that the fear of migrants partly stems from a fear that migrants will take the jobs that the Maltese are vying for and there would, therefore, be a shortage of jobs on the market, thus leaving many Maltese unemployed:

- (96) *... this idea that immigrants like don't belong here and that it's much stronger than in the comments in the street like "send him back to his country", "they're taking our jobs" and stuff like that so, they're more likely to witness it.*  
(P4, FG4)
- (97) *In fact, I don't know what some of the comments were, most of the comments which I've read are all about "oh they're taking away our jobs."*  
(P4, FG2)

At the same time, there appears to be the perception that, along with so-called "genuine" migrants, there are also too many "illegitimate" migrants, who are either

criminals and/or simply trying to take advantage of the system and scrounge off the state:

- (98) *... you have a whole spectrum of people, immigrants. You get refugees, people who are genuinely out for better opportunities, and then you get, um, maybe, um, younger people. Generally they tend to be young men who simply, who are simply looking for opportunities, but maybe because of the system or whatever, they become idle and they fall in, I don't know, circumstances, um, resulting in them falling in with the wrong crowd or them doing petty crimes because as well of the system ...*  
(P1, FG1)
- (99) *And just the good ones, which are more, get stuck and get a bad reputation because of others ...*  
(P2, FG2)
- (100) *many people who are here and who are taking, in air quotes, our jobs aren't really illegal immigrants or immigrants from certain countries, you know ... There's a mix. ... obviously in everything in life there are the good ones and the bad ones.*  
(P2, FG2)

However, apart from reasons that have more to do with practical aspects of everyday life, our interviewees also pointed out that migrants are bound to face more discrimination than other minorities in Malta due to cultural differences too. In congruence with much mainstream political discourse, as noted by one of our interview participants (see example 102), there appears to be the idea in society that migration will erase or damage Maltese culture and, as such, many Maltese reject multiculturalism.

- (101) *This is a very sensitive issue, um, I think. This issue of the, you know, multiculturalism in Malta. We've only been monocultural for many years. It's only in recent decades that I think, or... with this thing of immigration has only been a hot issue in the last 10, 15 years maybe. So now, um, I think it's, the Maltese are very insular ... and they don't take well to change, as any society I imagine ... Multiculturalism is new, therefore.*  
(P1, FG1)
- (102) *But the mainstream political discourse on the subject of multiculturalism and immigration actually reinforces racism.*  
(P5, FG3)
- (103) *The issues that arise out of multiculturalism affect all areas of life cause there's culture, there's religion, there's...*  
(P3, FG3)

And, indeed, as the comment in (103) mentions, religion is often considered a main feature of the Maltese identity. Malta has a long Catholic tradition, which has, throughout recent history, been protected dearly, and which is still very present in everyday practices. With over 90% of the country being Catholic and also

following the recent spike of religious terrorism across the EU, several Maltese people have started to develop an Islamophobic attitude:

(104) ... even for people who have no problems with Muslims per se, but then, when you start seeing your, I guess, people feel nervous when they see their neighbourhood being transformed um, you know, with the appearance of a mosque for instance, um, they feel uncomfortable with that. So, ... less people would be inclined to defend immigrants who are calling for these changes.

(P1, FG1)

(105) And it used to be “take over, you know, Muslims will come and they will take away our strong catholic.. And everything...” They take...

(P3, FG3)

(106) Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's what they do all the time. We're not against muslims, we're against Islam as a religion or whatever...

(P2, FG3)

Overall, collectively looking at these points raised by our interviewees, what seems to be the underlying cause for the notably different perception of—and attitude towards—the LGBTIQ and migrant minorities is a strong and rather homogeneous sense of *social identity* that the Maltese appear to have; a social identity that filters migrants (or to put it more aptly, some particular groups of migrants) out and retains the LGBTIQ community as part of the Maltese in-group. Given that “one’s social identity is a product of the social relations one is embedded in” (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002: 132), this is not entirely surprising, if one takes into account the extremely small size of the country and the additional premise that “in Malta there has been a historical fear of invasion by non-Europeans and non-Christian people that has lasted throughout the centuries” (van Hooren 2015: 91). That said, not all is lost on this front, since, by definition, social identities are “processes of continuous ‘re-writing’ of the self and of social collectives” (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002: 132). Thus, it seems that the more the Maltese are exposed to multiculturalism, as they have increasingly been in recent years, the harder it will become for them to tolerate xenophobic speech altogether.

## 4.6 The Conceptual Contiguity of Race and Religion

**Fabienne H. Baider, Anna Constantinou and Anastasia Petrou**

When referring to religion in the context of hate speech in the EU these days, Islamophobia inevitably comes to mind. In the particular setting of Cyprus, where religion is a central part of the collective identity, it seems to be a major factor in most processes of Othering, sometimes even trampling on other criteria, such as race

or ethnicity. During the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. interviews in Cyprus,<sup>12</sup> interviewees had to react to our online questionnaire results that included online comments like ‘*This is the race that needs to be annihilated from this planet. Shh*’ and ‘*Only a dead Muslim is a good Muslim*’. And what their reactions revealed is that, in their mind, Islam is predominantly confounded with a particular ethnicity: that of the Turks.

Our present analysis is grounded on the concept of *salience* (Giora 1997, 2003), which is often described as the primary contributing factor in the production and interpretation of lexical units and phrases. Since “salient meanings are processed automatically [...] *irrespective of contextual information*” (Giora 2003: 24, our italics), salience is linked with the relative importance of a concept in a language user’s memory.

A particular meaning’s salience can be assessed on the basis of various factors, such as frequency, familiarity, conventionality or prototypicality. According to Giora, it is familiarity that plays the most important role, when it comes to making a semantic unit accessible (2003: 23), but in studies examining the common ground on which a community builds expectations, judgments and attitudes, frequency was also shown to be equally important (cf. Baider 2013). That is why, we will be employing the criterion of frequency as the main identifier of salience in this section.

Using the freeware concordancer AntConc,<sup>13</sup> we identified the most frequent lexical units across our interview transcripts (Table 4.1).

What was striking was that while the lexical unit ‘*race*’ appeared, quite expectedly, high on the list, the lexical unit ‘*religion*’ did not only achieve a

**Table 4.1** Most frequent lexical units in the Cypriot interview transcripts

Total no. of word types: 1774			
Total no. of word tokens: 17,337			
1.	21	158	People
2.	34	99	Believe
3.	36	93	Think
4.	37	71	Race
5.	55	62	Religion
6.	64	51	Cyprus
7.	72	44	Sexual
8.	95	33	Community
9.	96	33	Threat
10.	98	32	Marriage
11.	103	31	Nationality
12.	105	30	Cypriots
13.	106	30	Gender

<sup>12</sup>20 individual interviews, predominantly with Greek Cypriot participants, were carried out by our partners in AEQUITAS. Further interviews have been being conducted by the UCY team with members of the LGBTIQ as well as the migrant communities so as to balance out our sample, but we have not taken them into account in the present analysis.

<sup>13</sup><http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>.

comparably high frequency, but also mirrored 'race' in syntactic and semantic contiguity, i.e. in most cases where the word 'religion' was mentioned, reference was also made to 'race' in the same participant turn.

Having identified the most frequent lexical units and the pattern that this section focuses on, we needed to analyse the meaning of 'race' and 'religion' in context. To do so, we implemented the notions of *semantic preference* and *semantic prosody*, as these are found in Bednarek (2008). In order to search for the semantic preference of a lexical unit, we considered the most common collocates found in its co-text, while we turned to the axiological value of its context of use (e.g. positive, negative, etc.) to identify its semantic prosody, that is, the typical 'tone' of the textual passage in which the word is used. For example, in interviewee reactions to the comment "*This is the race that needs to be annihilated from this planet. Shh,*" the semantic preference for words related to the Turkish nation is overwhelming,<sup>14</sup> while the semantic prosody is definitely negative, as manifested by the use of lexical items like 'thief', 'imprisoned', 'clashes', 'bad thoughts':

(107) *Well, because we live in Cyprus I think any person would expect this kind of comment. I mean we've seen throughout the history clashes between the communities of Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots*

(Interviewee 16)

(108) *Having in mind that someone is from a different race, we automatically have bad thoughts about them. For example, when I hear that a person is Turkish, I automatically, in my mind, think that he is a thief, yes, this is what I believe hate speech is...*

(Interviewee 15)

(109) *It's not acceptable ... I don't think it's right, because perhaps we have "hate" against Turkish people because they imprisoned our island, and against some foreigners who work in our country and as a result we don't have jobs.*

(Interviewee 18)

Notably, the lexical/semantic contiguity of race and religion (examples 110 and 111) runs parallel to the lexical/semantic contiguity of Turks with fanaticism and Muslims with terrorism, as seen in examples (112) and (113) respectively, which suggests that such contiguities create a vast amalgam, or 'reference chain' of stereotypes; a point acknowledged even by some interviewees, as in (114):

(110) *[Discussing the definition that equates hate speech with insults]  
Generally yes, but as I told you I don't care what the race is, [I care] only about religion.*

(Interviewee 21)

<sup>14</sup>When asked "Which race do you think this comment refers to?", several interviewees immediately hypothesised it was "*The Turks.*" On some occasions, even the interviewers themselves assumed the same.

(111) *[Discussing hate speech/hate crimes in relation to Muslims that live in Cyprus]*

*Interviewee* We have some differences, because of religion.

*Interviewer* Were you or do you know a person that was a victim of hate speech?

*Interviewee* Yes many people.

*Interviewer* Can you tell us an example or two that you personally know?

*Interviewee* Yes, I heard many times in schools these threats that occur. If a kid is different.

*Interviewer* Different from a different race?

*Interviewee* Yes different race or another sexual orientation.

(Interviewee 16)

(112) *I believe that it's a bad race [the Turks]. Perhaps not all of them, but most yes.*

(Interviewee 18)

(113) *Interviewer* You said there is fanaticism [of them against us] that is developed from a very young age.

*Interviewee* Yes, but it's the same from our side, and it's something that I don't think can be fixed.

(Interviewee 18)

(114) *I think these results [in relation to the comment "Only a dead Muslim is a good Muslim"] make sense, if we take into account the Cypriot history; because I think most people do just that. When most people hear talk about Muslims, they think one is talking about terrorists. Basically, they don't know that Muslims also have a problem with terrorists too. And all this is also associated with Turkey, because of the invasion, and they don't see Muslims as individuals.*

(Interviewee 16)

It, therefore, seems that, much like race, our interviewees also take religion to be a fundamental element of an individual's identity, which may not define him/her as a person, but will at least define the relationship they will have with him/her. In example (115), a member of the Christian Arabic minority, called the Maronites, is described as being the victim of threats and abuse, only because of his or her religion:

(115) *Interviewee* In my class we had a Maronitis, they are a minority in Cyprus. They were the black sheep of the class. There was hate speech and threats and what we mentioned above.

*Interviewer* What threats did that person get?

*Interviewee* 'Don't sit down to eat with us because we will beat you', that's a threat. An insult: 'you Maronitis leave from here!', 'You were baptised with the lard of a hog, not with holy water'. It's an insult that insults traditions and generally their religion as a Maronitis.

(Interviewee 13)

At the same time, and quite paradoxically, despite asserting that they customarily judge people by their religion, most of the interviewees also noted that religion is somehow the source of all evil. Indeed, in reference to religion, the semantic prosody is extremely negative, as manifested by the use of lexical items like 'fanaticism', 'stereotypes' or even 'war':

(116) *[Discussing the comment "Only a dead Muslim is a good Muslim."]*  
*Of course, to my mind, the number of people who said that this is somewhat acceptable is not that high, if on considers that, in the Cypriot community, we are very fanatical towards our religion. After all, many crimes were committed in the name of Christianity.*

(Interviewee 19)

(117) *[Discussing who's responsible for negative stereotypes]*

*Interviewee 6* At home, it's the parents.

*Interviewer* Before you also mentioned the church.

*Interviewee 6* Yes! Because even in Religious Studies class, we are not taught about all religions. I think all students should learn about all religions, so that they can choose [which to follow].

(Interviewee 6)

(118) *[Discussing the compulsory Religious Studies unit in state schools]*  
*Religious studies is a good fairytale, but it does not stop creating problems. If we take a look at history, all wars have began because of religion and its squabble. I believe there are more important courses that could be taught at school than Religious Studies.*

(Interviewee 17)

All in all, it is well known that foreign presence can challenge social values and collective beliefs. In this context, gut reactions, like racist statements and social exclusion practices can be interpreted as signs of a community that feels as if it is politically, socially, and psychologically under siege. And while our interview analysis showed that the youth in Cyprus may be prone to confounding race with religion, it also revealed, surprisingly, a pretty extreme self-deprecating attitude, that can be easily summarised in the following two characteristic comments provided by our interviewees:

(119) *This is Cyprus, and no matter how many years pass by, we will still remain idiots*

(Interviewee 14)

(120) *We are a little behind other European countries in our mindset.*

(Interviewee 17)

The use of the pronoun ‘we’ in cases like the ones above does not seem to be self-referential, since these opinions were expressed by the most liberal interviewees in relation to those questionnaire respondents who found phrases like “*Only a dead Muslim is a good one*” acceptable. It thus looks like the official political divide hides a social one as well.

## 4.7 Hate Speech and the Communication Medium

### Ernesto Russo and Valentina Oliviero

The fundamental role of the communication media in our society, given their influence on the form and content of the information we have access to is underlined by McLuhan, in his famous statement that “in a culture like ours [...] the medium is the message” (McLuhan 1964: 28). So, since the personal and social consequences of our communication are the result of the specific means we use, modern ‘automation technology’ should bear prime responsibility for the meaning that it communicates.

During the interview stage of our research in the framework of the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. project,<sup>15</sup> one of our aims was to understand how the Italian youth read and interpret the information they come across online. In this section, we will briefly report on how our interview participants reacted when faced with potential online hate speech, as this was present in three comments to newspaper articles that were included in the Italian C.O.N.T.A.C.T. questionnaire, while focusing on the role that they attribute to the media in relation to this issue.

The first comment we will discuss here followed an article about the arrival of refugees from Africa and the Middle East on the Italian coast:

(121) *Vanno rimpatriati in massa, salvo i pochi con diritto d’asilo. Se no è una invasione (e, ancor peggio, in gran parte una invasione di musulmani, che portano una religione e una cultura pericolose e violente). L’Europa non deve e non può tollerare invasioni.*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Within the remit of the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. project, we ran one focus group with 13 participants in a youth centre in Rome, and 7 individual interviews. The present section is based on the focus group interview, as at the time of writing the individual interviews had not yet been transcribed.

<sup>16</sup>Comment located at: [http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2015/06/27/news/migranti\\_alfano\\_-117817237/](http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2015/06/27/news/migranti_alfano_-117817237/).

They need to be sent back en masse except those few ones with asylum rights; otherwise it's an invasion (and even worst, an invasion of Muslims bringing their dangerous and violent culture and religion). Europe must not and cannot tolerate such invasions.

This comment stirred up different reactions among our interviewees. On the one hand, they condemned what they called a “stereotypical position” which is “radically underinformed” and, thus, “formed quite superficially” (P2, FG1). On the other, they acknowledged that such cultural prejudice is very hard to overcome, unless our educational models change in order to provide us with the right instruments to do so. Of course the media role was also emphasised as a primary bearer of such a change, given the way in which it continuously affects the opinion of people of all ages. More specifically, they suggested that our society needs a “new common sense” (P6, FG1), according to which, everybody should have the opportunity to live without borders. So, rather than giving this particular opinion any weight, our interviewees swiftly dismissed it as ignorant and an example of an unacceptable marked stereotype. What they counter-argued was that anyone who expresses an opinion like this should be reminded that these “poor people” are “just trying to have a better life” (P3, FG1).

The second comment, which is another example of a xenophobic remark, this time against the particular ethnic group of Roma people, was a response to an article reporting the attempted robbery of a jewellery store by a Sinti woman.

(122) *Seppellitela in galera e buttate la chiave. Data l'età non dovrebbe avere figli piccolissimi che possano farle da scudo. Dimenticavo. Era una rom di etnia sinti? Ebbene, i sinti sono i peggiori e più pericolosi fra gli zingari perché sono quelli che più degli altri si sanno mimetizzare fra la gente comune. In ogni caso sempre ladri e delinquenti rimangono.*<sup>17</sup>

Lock her up in prison and throw the keys away. Given her age, she probably hasn't got children who can act as a shield for her. Ah I almost forgot, was she a Sinti? Well, Sinti are the worst and most dangerous among Roma, as they can blend in among common people better than others. Anyway, they're all thieves and outlaws.

This comment spurred the interviewees' feeling of disappointment even more. While acknowledging that the stereotyping of Roma people as thieves is quite widespread, both in Italy and beyond, they underlined the necessity of focusing on the act of stealing rather than on the specific ethnicity of the thief. They then highlighted the “carelessness and inaccurate attitude of news reports” (P4, FG1); they underlined the responsibility that journalists and media reporters carry, as far as the conditioning of the general public's perception of current events goes,

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<sup>17</sup>Comment located at: <http://tv.liberoquotidiano.it/video/libero-tv-copertina/11893443/La-rom-in-gioielleria-ruba.html>.

suggesting that they continuously report news in a way that “paints certain ethnic groups, like the Roma, in a bad light” (P3, FG1). So, they suggested that both online and traditional media need to be controlled more, and that a better monitoring mechanism that would “deter them from diverting people’s beliefs into dangerous territory” (P4, FG1) should be in place. Of course, they also noted that, apart from the lack of the right instruments or mechanisms in place, it is the lack of education among members of the public that “leaves the ground fertile for such opinion conditioning” (P4, FG1).

The last comment we will discuss is a homophobic one, taken from an article about the pro-civil union and same-sex adoption rally in Italy:

(123) *NON MI SEMBRA CHE LA LEGGE SUI «DIVERSAMENTE ORIENTATI SESSUALMENTE» E LE ADOZIONI GAY SERVANO MOLTO ALL'ITALIA!!!*<sup>18</sup>

I don't think that laws on “different sexually-oriented” or gay adoptions are really useful to Italy!!!.

This comment generated another interesting debate, since the topic was linked to what our interviewees felt was a change that is needed for the country and its citizens. Disregarding the marked use of the label ‘*different sexually-oriented*’ that echoes the Italian phrase for disabled people (‘*diversamente abile*’), the group focused on the political undertone of the commenter’s proposal, justifying it to a certain extent on the grounds of the ideological radicalisation of the national outlook on the matter. More specifically, they claimed that since homosexuality is invisible—or, even worse, clearly discriminated against—in both the media landscape and virtually all the big companies’ marketing campaigns, it is to be expected that positions like this, which show “Italy’s social decay and fragmentation” (P13, FG1), are encountered in newspaper comments.

On the basis of this analysis of our focus group interview data, we can draw the conclusion that our interviewees are not only sensitised in relation to the influence that the media has on public opinion, but also very critical of it. However, they still seem to not be completely aware of what hate speech is and how detrimental its impact on the specific people targeted by it can be. We suspect that this is because they are not adequately familiarised with human or citizenship rights provisions, since their cultural and educational paths have not provided them with the necessary stimuli that will motivate them to stand up to hate speech. What is clear, however, is that they do recognise the imperative need to equate the online communication of ideas and opinions to that found in more traditional media and put both these venues on the same level, when it comes to policies against hate speech.

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<sup>18</sup>Comment located at: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/renzi-sfida-family-day-no-ai-veti-sulle-riforme-1230715.html>.

## 4.8 Hate Speech, Cyberbullying and Online Anonymity

**César Arroyo López and Roberto Moreno López**

ICTs and internet access are a defining element in the lives of young people. In Spain alone, daily internet use among young people aged 16–35 is above 90% (INE 2016). The online experience, however, is not always positive, and as some recent studies indicate, traditional school bullying has taken a leap into the digital world, to the point that the number of incidents in both settings is practically the same (Calmaestra et al. 2016).

While it is true that cyberhate, the online variety of hate speech, and cyberbullying are not the same thing, as the former targets certain groups on the basis of a common characteristic and the latter targets individuals usually in the setting of a particularly community (like a school or a workplace), the two concepts are definitely intertwined in the mind of young people. Bullying can be defined as “a type of behaviour aimed at doing harm, repeated over time and occurring in the midst of an interpersonal relationship characterised by an imbalance of power” (Olweus 1999: 25). Cyberbullying resembles bullying in that it, too, is intentional, aggressive and repeated over time, but with the particularity that those who engage in it do so through the use of electronic means. As Del Río et al. (2010) note, cyberbullying, as a mode of harassment, has characteristics that make it particularly intense, like the absence of temporal limits, the imperishability of online content, its capacity to be instantaneously witnessed by a vast audience and the perceived anonymity of its instigator. What is more, the consequences of cyberbullying have been analysed in several studies (cf. Garaigordobil 2011), and their connection with the effects that hate speech has on its victims is clear (cf. Ayto. Barcelona 2017).

During the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. interviews in Spain,<sup>19</sup> as many as six interviewees directly linked their experiences of hate speech to (cyber)bullying:

(124) *Interviewer* Have you had any experience with hate speech?

*Interviewee 2* Yes, what I said about bullying in the first years of high school with my nose problem, adenoids, they harassed me about my tone of voice and such things.

Although in the particular case in (124) the motivation for the incident was not some protected characteristic of the victim, as is typically the case in instances of hate speech, in other reported cases, the cause of the harassment was precisely that:

(125) *Interviewer* Maybe it was done to people around you?

*Interviewee 4* Yes (...)

*Interviewer* Did they harass them about something particular or just because (...)?

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<sup>19</sup>For the purposes of this part of the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. project we carried out 20 individual interviews, with young people in the provinces of Toledo and Madrid.

*Interviewee 4* No, it was with me and another girl, no, and also with a guy who was disabled.

*Interviewer* Was it because of his disability?

*Interviewee 4* Yes

In this respect, our interviewees' perceptions coincide with research that has shown that racial and sexual prejudice often appear as causes of cyberbullying (cf. Hoff and Mitchell 2009).

(126) *Interviewer* What other reasons do you find being used on the Internet that lead to such comments?

*Interviewee 5* Physical appearance, race, homosexuality, culture, there are so many issues that people are always (...) disability, they chase those groups a lot, so to speak in quotes, to crush them, and, really, there is no reason.

A further analysis of the interviews revealed that most interviewees believed that the main pretext behind both cyberbullying and online hate speech was that perpetrators take advantage of the perceived anonymity of the internet and therefore feel free to utter and spread insults, vexations and extreme opinions; things that might not be as easy to do in the offline world. In the words of one of the interviewees,

(127) *Because they do not really show their face, they are through a screen they do not give the face and put the first thing that occurs to them. When they are facing you, maybe if you are going to say it, to a friend of you by WhatsApp or by social networks, you put a thing and if then if you had to say it to the face, you would not say the same thing or you wouldn't say it in the same way.*

(Interviewee 1)

So, what is the role that anonymity plays in the spread of intolerance and hate speech in social networks? In the case that concerns us, that is, of young users who communicate through the Internet, the perception among our interviewees was that, simply because it is not face-to-face, much of the communication that takes place on the Internet is not as 'filtered' as it would otherwise be:

(128) *For the anonymity or shame of saying it face-to-face and you do it for social networks then it's like, I do not know, that we hide, it's like we put on a mask and as a carnival you wear a mask and you can do everything you want. This is the same but over the Internet.*

(Interviewee 1)

Indeed, several of the young people interviewed believe that posting anonymous comments online allows people to openly express intolerance, reject difference and embrace racism without the social limitations that exist in offline communication. For example:

- (129) *There is less [hate speech] on the street, but I think that this is because of shame, because he does not like to show his face. However, through a social network I put it [the comment] on and that's it. Saying things behind [other people's backs] is much easier.*

(Interviewee 2)

Current research has shown that there is no single profile of a hater or cyberbully who is concealed under the cloak of anonymity. Even though there are organised groups that seek to promote hatred online, in most cases the people that hide behind hateful or discriminatory trolling messages are not linked to openly intolerant ideological movements (cf. Isasi and Juanatey 2016), but are instead users who just do not realise the potential impact of their digital activity, and the effects that it can have in the offline world (cf. Stein 2016):

- (130) *Because on the Internet it seems that the thing is diluted, people feel shielded behind their computer, and I am here in my house in Toledo, no matter who reads this. The one who reads it will be far away, so nothing will happen.*

(Interviewee 14)

Our interviewees also discussed the impact of hate speech and cyberbullying on the victim:

- (131) *Interviewer But in the event that it (hate speech online) takes place how you think it affects the people who are targeted by it?*

*Interviewee 3 Well, I suppose that it is bad. Evidently you won't like anyone who speaks badly about you. Surely then that, as we are in the society that we are, will affect your private life. I don't know, I imagine, I don't know what measures should be taken: closing Facebook or changing names or changing friends on Facebook. I want to say, I don't know, or don't see it in some way or, I know, I guess it will affect and I don't know, your security will not be the same if you are being insulted.*

- (132) *I think so, because they already make comments that can affect the other person psychologically and physically (...).*

(Interviewee 17)

Hatred towards certain groups, which underlies both online and offline hate speech, can also manifest itself in other modes of expression of violence and intolerance, such as that of (cyber)bullying. Through their personal experiences, some of our interviewees showed that the expression of hate is intimately linked to the experience of (cyber)bullying, and more specifically, that a person's identity is often used by perpetrators as a weapon to exercise (cyber)bullying. Keeping in mind that (cyber)bullying is typically tied to the school context and considering at the same time that the educational context should be the primary place where the causes of violence, intolerance and hatred against those who are perceived to be

different are dealt with, it just seems sensible to us to propose that more focus is placed on embracing diversity, implementing a human rights approach and carrying out activities within the realm of citizenship and intercultural education.

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