Rome, 18th April 2019

Report

Summary of the introductory speeches

Lunaria Introduction

 "When we'll be older, we will reopen Auschwitz and put you all in the ovens, f*** Jewish"
Ferrara, middle school, April 2019

How is it possible, nowadays, for a middle-school student to address one of his peers in this way? Couldn't be that maybe the cultural and political landscape lead him to this?
Hate speech is a growing phenomenon in the political communication. Although the presence of discriminatory discourses, declaration and messages is a long-standing fact, **the development of new technologies definitely opened new channels for the viral diffusion of violent expressions** targeting specific groups of people o individuals.
Among the most relevant changes caused by the spread of new technologies in the information system, we want to highlight three of them.

1. **The decentralization of the information production**. From a hierarchical system, in which only few powerful communication channels hold control over information, to a seemingly-democratic system, in which millions of people, through social networks, are able to produce information and interact with political and mediatic powers.
2. **The circulation of information has grown exponentially but is only apparently free.** What the users read is mainly what someone else choose for them: social networks and browsers managers, and the algorithm used by them.
3. **The information system tends to give up the seek of truth from facts, while tending to polarization**. The cultural hegemony of a relational model centered around the **contraposition friend/enemy** has two main consequences: it makes **online communication more and more aggressive** – the web and the social networks are among the main channels of stigmatization, verbal violence and racism circulation; instead of promoting democratic processes and pluralism, web and social networks trap the users in **eco chambers** where different ideas and opinions that don't match with the users' political, religious or cultural beliefs are excluded.

On the other side, **the crisis of the political representation model**, centered on the parties, highlighted the tendency of shifting **the focus of the political action from democratic debates** between different visions of the world, developments models and alternative proposals of public policies, **to the political communication**, soaked with populism, centered around the image of a leader, extremely simplified, aimed at producing an emotional reaction in the audience and strongly aggressive with its opponents.

The field of the dialectical discussion between different ideas and models of society left the field open for a deeply polarized political debate, more easily prone to use violent tones and expressions and always looking for scapegoat in order to obtain and maintain consensus.

All this makes us - civil society organizations - wonder and force us to **reflect upon the strategies of advocacy, institutional and political communication.**

- How to keep up with our cultural, educational and critical thinking production role in this context?
- How to adjust style, language and tools of communication without surrendering to simplification, superficiality and polarization?
- How to contrast the diffusion of online and offline relational models tending to the normalization of the practice of violence and the erasure of dialectical practices and non-violent conflicts resolutions?
- How to effectively combat online and offline racism?

From these questions, since time Lunaria started to produce an internal reflection and promoted specific initiatives against violent rhetoric. Since we are aware that we are dealing with a complex phenomenon, we must confront ourselves with others and promote a shared reflection on the possible routes that can be taken, stimulating, when it's possible, **a common and coordinated initiative.**

The complexity of the phenomenon led us to face it **not as a mere technical problem.** It's difficult to try to contrast hate speech without taking into consideration the cultural, political and social context in with it takes place, the existing intersections between social and democratic crisis, populist and nationalist pulsion; the impossibility to define it and understand it referring only to the national regulations; the web's complex modes of operation that make increasingly difficult to distinguish correct news from fake news or from a discriminatory, xenophobic and racist messages.

Therefor the decision to start today's work with **three introductive talks** that will help us to situate hate speech in this complex context.

Politics, authoritarian populism and new form of racism in Europe and the United States

Guido Caldiron

Is racism an accessory phenomenon? Or is it, in a period of crisis, a key to leave from the right side the economic and social crisis, while offering an answer to this "meaning crisis" that Western countries are going through?

Right-wing rhetoric about migrations not only criticize the given system, but are actual government proposals: they look like they can offer an answer to Western societies' feeling of disorientation, leveraging racism and xenophobia to build new national identities.

Among the most recent examples we find Farage's Brexit campaign, Trump's elections campaign and the debate that followed Macerata racist raid of February 3rd, 2018.

In his referendum campaign, **Farage** launched some poster with the slogan "breaking point" picturing him with a march of migrants at his back. The message was: "I can stop them by making us leave Europe". More than half of the people who voted for Brexit did it to express their hostility towards immigration.

At the core of **Trump election campaign** was the recognition of an enemy looking up (to China) and another one looking down (to migrants). **The wall** acquired a strong symbolic meaning in both directions: outwards as the symbol of economic protectionism, inwards for the closure of the borders. The systematic and repeated use of social media has been the main channel for the spread of hate speech, unrelenting proposing a few key concepts: a) the idea of the **invasion as a threat for ethnic replacement**; b) the **topic of criminality,** through the diffusion of data aimed at demonstrating that white people are killed by illegal migrants, black and Hispanic people; c) "**great again**": the invocation of the return of some kind of "**golden age",** a counter-trend which gave the electors hope of being able to stop the decline of the American society.

The **raid of Macerata** offered a new occasion to bring back up the equation between criminality and foreigners. And the slogan proposed by Salvini "Italians first" gives the opportunity to rebuild a national identity. It's interesting to remember that this slogan was created in France by Jean Marie Le Pen in 1972 ("**Les francais d'abord**"), more than 30 years ago.

In this context, European Elections run the risk of becoming elections where people situate themselves against or in favor of immigration. The ongoing confrontation has implication with the model of democracy itself. Victor Orban coined the phrase "**illiberal democracy**". The premise is that Europe is in an exceptional situation: the exceptionality is in the recurrence of some "emergencies" (including migrations). **Exceptionality and emergency allow to cross certain rules.** In every western democracy has spread the idea, in the common feeling, that **the West is going through a declining phase**, displayed both at individual and collective level, which permeate our everyday life and urge a search for the responsibles, which translates in the **search for scapegoats**.

The idea leveraging the threat of "ethnic substitution" and identity-related fears ("if others arrive, we are not ourselves anymore") is at the core of contemporary right-wing's hate speech. The threat of "ethnic substitution" was used, for example, from the attacker in New Zealand.

It can be useful, then, to read once more the last Censis report, that described as "**psychic souverainis**" the pre-political reaction to the economic and social effect of the crisis. What happens to the Italian people after the resentment wave? The delusion towards the elites entails, according to Censis, **an interiorization of the crisis and a tendency to isolation and loneliness.** In the 2.0 era, what is left is the **resonance of oneself:** life becomes a self-brand and negative socialization runs the risk of becoming the only meeting space. The recent events in Torre Maura are a clear example of that.

Therefor today is not enough to denounce the preachers of hate, but it's necessary to analyze deeply the structural, social and economic changes that took place in the suburbs and the responsibility of the left wing that is not in these areas anymore.

Fake news: how do they work and how to protect us from them
Gabriela Jacomella

We find ourselves in an historical phase characterized by a lack of meaning, and this leaves the space open for new narrations that create disinformation. We live in a society of information amplified without a purpose, where is increasingly harder to separate the wheat from the chaff. Who could help us? Intermediators, and among them there are the creators of fake news. Disinformation and fake news are two different things. The novelty of this era is that we have the illusion and the freedom of selection the information, but we tend to do so according to the emotions. Trust and authority of the sources fall, and the very own meaning of the news tend to lose importance, so the selection of the information is made according to the emotions: fake news are often comforting and they strike our irrational chords.

Obviously, this has important consequences also for the crisis of democracy. A significant example is offered by the eco chambers that represented the tendency in the last American election campaign.
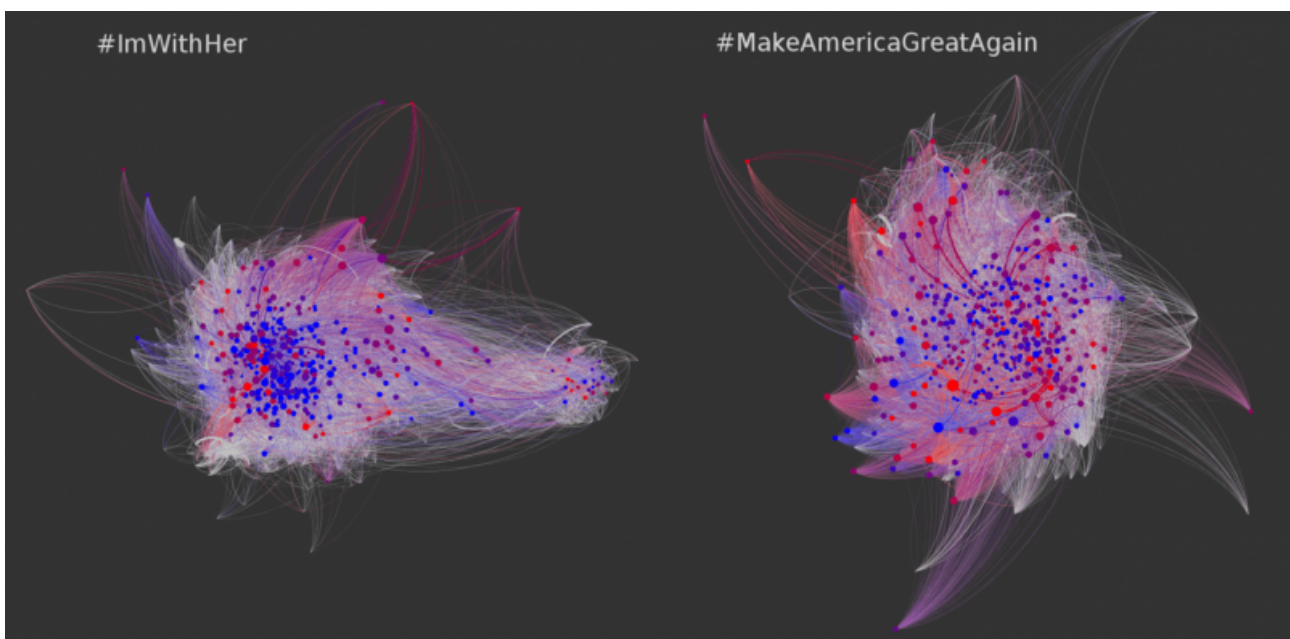
Sharing election hashtags: Dots are Twitter accounts; lines show retweeting; larger dots are retweeted more. Red dots are likely bots; blue ones are likely humans. Credit: Clayton Davis, CC BY-ND
https://phys.org/news/2016-11-misinformation-social-mediacan-technology.html#jCp

What can we do? We've got trimmed weapons.

The web is a trans-national space, therefore focused censorship is not possible. Given the great chaos of information, also fact-checking is useless, because media and official sources are de-legitimated. The shortage of official data about some phenomena creates lack of information, and conspiracy theories insinuate in the lack of information.

So, of great importance are overall deconstruction, diffusion of correct information and media literacy. It's important to explain why we let fake news mislead us.

Political discourse between freedom of expression and principle of non-discrimination

Francesco Di Pietro

To hate is it a right?
Where is the boundary between freedom of expression and principle of non-discrimination?
Insults are not opinions. Opinions are licit, insults are not.
Some examples.

2016. During a manifestation organized by Lega Nord in Saronno, around 70 posters are affixed, bearing the expressions "Saronno doesn't want illegal immigrants"; "Renzi e Alfano want to send to Saronno 32 illegal immigrants: room, board and vices paid by us. Meanwhile they cut the pensions and raise the taxes to the people from Saronno"; "Renzi e Alfano accomplices to the invasion".
2015. Unar reprimands Giorgia Meloni, questioning some of her statements about immigrations ("a communication based on stereotypes and generalization doesn't support a prompt and adequate process of integration and social cohesion"). The parliamentarian feels censored. The general secretary of Palazzo Chigi reprimands Unar, recalling art. 21 and 68 of the Constitution.,
2013. Lega celebration in Treviglio. During a speech, Roberto Calderoli compares the Minister for integration Kyenge to an orangutan.
2004. Mirco Tremaglio, Minister for the Italians around the World, declares: "Poor Europe, *culattoni* (i.e. homosexuals) are the majority"
2000. President of Lazio Region Storace, to a journalist asking him to say something right-wing oriented, answers: "Faggots! (Ah froci!)"

Let's focus on two of these cases.
Case Calderoli / Kyenge
Bergamo Courthouse, January 13th, 2019. Roberto Calderoli is sentenced to one year and six months for racist insults to ex Minister Kyenge, with the aggravating factor of racist hate incitement. The Court proposed conflict of attribution between State powers at the constitutional court. The council, sentence n. 58 of 23.03.2018, states that "parliamentary prerogative of art. 668, first comma, cannot be extended "up to including insults – of which is arguable the qualification as opinions – only because connected with "battles" carried on by members of parliament" (sentence n.137 of 2001; similarly sentence n. 257 of 2002).

Case Lega in Saronno
Milan Courthouse, ordinance of February 22nd, 2017. "The term illegal immigrant (…) has a denigrating value and is used as an emblem of negativity"; moreover "carries the deeply negative idea that asylum seekers are a danger for citizens". According to the Judge, the expression violate foreign asylum seekers' dignity and facilitate "an intimidating and hostile atmosphere towards them". Lega Nord behavior represents therefore a discrimination and the party is condemned to reimburse the damage in favor of ASGI and NAGA.
The verdict is highly symbolic as invites to reflect upon the role of words in the political world; and, widely, in a democracy. The Judge states that is erroneous to define "illegal immigrants" people who aren't so. An asylum seeker is not someone who has entered and stays illegally. He is exercising the asylum right provided by the Constitution and the Geneva Convention. It's discriminating to enclose in the unique (and erroneous) category of "illegal immigrants" different and various situation such as asylum seeker, human trafficking victim, unaccompanied minors, vulnerable people, etc.

Personal situations are many and various. We have the words to distinguish them, both in the Italian and juridical language, and we just need to use them. We need what was defined as "the care of the words".

With regards to this, we must ask ourselves:

Is penal repression adequate, suitable and sufficient? And more specifically, is it in compliance with the Constitution?

Can we keep on hardening the penal code or trying to integrate the prevision of law Reale (l. 13 October 1975, n. 654) and the following law Mancino (l. 25 June 1993, n. 205)?

Before giving an answer, we must distinguish hate speech from hate crimes. Not every hate speech is a hate crime. Let's discern the political discourse held during a TV talk show from the chatting between retired people at the bar.

The excess of penal response to homophobia, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and sexism run the risk of resulting as additional limits to the freedom of thought.

This is also true for our constitutional system, where freedom of expression of thought represents the core of the democratic system, as said in the Constitution. In the art. 21 of the Constitution, followed also by art. 10.1. CEDU, "every person has right to freedom of expression. This includes freedom of thought and freedom to receive or give information or ideas, without any interference from public authorities...".

Question: do we have limits to freedom of expression in the name of anti-discriminatory protection? Let's have a look.

→ Implicit limit of the ideal public order

The exercise of freedom of expression can be delimited, if and when it's necessary to safeguard other rights, goods and interest of constitutional ranks. It's the logic of balance of the rights, that has to be found in each case, through the prevalence of one without sacrificing too much the other.

Problems

Whenever the display of thoughts can be juridically reconstructed as a freedom functional to democracy, its anti-democratic expression should be forbidden. Every force at power will qualify

ideas opposite to them as such. This is why to reconstruct freedom of expression as aimed to the general interest it's like a boomerang. As Alexis de Toqueville said, freedom of the press should me valued "for the bad that prevents, more than for the good that produces". These are the most general limits to the pedagogic or propulsive role of the penal code.

→ Implicit limit of the principle of equality

Art. 3 Cost. forbids distinction based on sex, personal or social conditions, religions.
We must be careful with tis limit! Should be licit to punish whoever affirm the superiority of women over men (and vice versa), of poor ones over riches (and vice versa), of entrepreneurs over workmen (and vice versa)? Should be a crime to declare one religion true and the others false? Maybe even some cliché should be considered as expression of discriminatory thoughts regarding some category of people? What kind of debate can start inside the public sphere? Freedom of expression, obviously, would be cut at the very beginning.

→ Implicit limit of human dignity

Let's change perspective. In order to punish hate speech, we often invoke as justification the implicit limit of respecting constitutional principle found in artt. 2, 3, 19 and 21. There are already some kinds of penalty for offences – such as injuries, defamation and contempt- aimed at containing opinion harmful to the dignity of the offended person. On the contrary, "new" crimes of opinion (historical negationism, homophobia, xenophobia) refer to the protection of a collective human dignity, separated from the individual dimension: an abstract idea of human dignity, not easy to decline. Moreover, to punish an expression of thought in the name of the protection of human dignity creates a ground out, because the practice of freedom of expression (that would be limited) is itself the execution of the individual human dignity of the person accused of disseminating hate speeches, contrasting with a collective idea of human dignity.
Who thinks that some kind of incriminating thoughts are allowed by the need of protecting a certain idea of human dignity, should take the responsibility to propose a formulation that takes into account some kind of balance, which management is entrusted to the Judge: expression punishable in abstraction, are punishable also in concrete only if – for the reasons used, the public recipient, the links with ongoing debates – freedom of expression shouldn't prevail.

→Logical limits to freedom of expression

Recalling the implicit limits of freedom of expression doesn't allow to go much further. Therefore, we try to investigate the logical limits of freedom of expression. This is the strategy used in the constitutional law in order to "save" crimes of opinion such as incitement, apologia, subversive propaganda: the expression of though is not such anymore when it becomes action. Here the link between words and material conduct is so direct and immediate that is not guaranteed by art. 21 anymore. It's a deeply grounded belief that is also frequently found in the common language, ad with the expression "word are stones", that besides the title of the workshop is also the title of a book from Carlo Levi (writer sent to confinement for practicing freedom of expression before the existence of art. 21). According to the theory of words becoming action, freedom of expression able to spread a serious, documented and persuasive critique, able to inspire action, will always be punished. Freedom of expression would cover only the harmless thought.

Objectives: to define some possible common working strategies in order to promote correct information.

Goals of the discussion: a) to identify the main obstacles to correct information; b) to suggest possible strategies to promote correct information; c) which are the possible common strategies?

Report Summary

Context analysis

Carta di Roma, the code of conduct on correct information about migrations, and the many formative initiatives directed to journalists are important, but they didn't manage to overcome the recurring problem of cases of incorrect information. Violations of ethical code are still recurring, and even if the association Carta di Roma asks for the withdrawal of the piece, it's often necessary to involve ASGI and consider the opportunity to take action on a legal level.
We find ourselves in a new transitional phase where, following the approval of the law 32/2018, vulnerability situation and their impact on local communities are increasing. In this context is not simple to predict what will be the narrative approach favored by the press and as a consequence it's difficult to define a specific strategy to promote correct information. There is from the side of mainstream medias the tendency to prefer news/speakers /guests that bring audience and increase sales.
Offensive piece about migrants and minorities are more frequent in the local press. For this reason, the experience of monitoring, pressing charges and counter narratives that are arising at local level are precious, such as the one of *Occhio ai media*, born in Ferrara in 2008 from a "second generation" group of young people.
Regarding the local press, on one side it is more difficult to report racist cases on the media because racism became more hidden and implicit, while on the other side became once more predominant a media narration presenting migrations as a negative phenomenon, often

connecting them with criminality. Crime news become of national relevance, especially when they involve foreign citizens as key players.

Possible strategies of self-defense

- To reduce the visibility of the media who adopt a stigmatizing and hostile editorial strategy towards migrants. Also when they publish racist and discriminatory pieces, to avoid playing their game.

- To prefer a narration centered around the concepts of social equality and rights for all more that around discrimination; on the condemnation of the various form of social and economic inequality that affect everyone more than on the discrimination of migrants, refugees and roma people.

- To promote alternative narrations in a proactive way, choosing simple yet provocative slogans, able to tell the beauty of a hybrid society.

- Trying to involve in our campaign influencers with a larger number of followers.

- To intensify the activities of monitoring the media also at local level, because this will help push the monitored media.

- To tell punctually the real and concrete consequences, for every citizen, of the laws on migration, asylum and security.

- To promote a kind of information able of giving visibility to migrants and minorities.

- To create a logo and online and offline events with the aim to disseminate anti-racist messages (es. Masters in Spain).

- To participate in TV programs but choosing not to answer to the question asked by journalists, that often have the purpose of confirming their thesis, and changing the order of the discourse, for example telling what civil society is doing every day.

- To promote a coordinated campaign among civil society organization in order to have visibility through a TV advertisement campaign.

- To change our language, simplifying it in order to make less institutional and more understandable for everyone.

Objectives: how to best use technology and the web to contrast hate speech targeting both minorities and the world of solidarity?

Goals of the discussion: a) To share best models of communication strategies and initiatives; b) what are the necessary steps to go from a defensive communication to a proactive communication? c) to identify possible common initiatives to promote, in order to overcome the fragmentation of social reporting and counter-narrative initiatives.

Report Summary
Context analysis

The institutionalization of racism and its acceptance at cultural and social level make it harder to promote counter-narrative and fact-checking initiatives, also because the one creating fake news often employ the same format of fact-checkers, for example using misrepresented, de-contextualized or partial data.

It's necessary to take into account the fact that hate speech is an everyday problem, present not only online but also in others context (TV, press, public spaces) and must be tacked both online and offline.

One of the biggest challenges is to enlarge our public reaching and involving people that are not inside our organizations.

A big share of the public opinion (according to some studies is the majority), is located in an intermediate zone between "haters" and "friends": they are the one more willing to change their opinion. In this intermediate place are mostly young people who are also the most active on social medias. Our attention should be directed to this zone.

Self-defense strategies

- A priority is to create an original alternative narration, to take care of the production of our own contents and leave the simple defensive strategy: it's essential to take the initiative and "assault", stopping being subject to the mainstream public debate agenda.

- The production of a counter-narrative must follow current affairs topics.

- Counter-narratives must be engaging: people are attracted by positive and personal stories, even more in relation to migrations. Would be important to be able to tell everyday positive personal stories.

- Our strategies should consider different communication methods and tools according to the target and the space (online/offline).

- To conduct effective campaign, it's necessary to involve communication professionals and third-actors, outside the anti-racist activist's world, for example posting and sharing events and campaign tools from our personal profiles.

- One of the most effective strategies for enlarging the public is considered to be the one involving testimonials and influencers.

- To create a net among civil society organizations is another priority. Some simple ways of networking could be: sharing and promoting each other's events and campaigns, mutually supporting them, using common tags, using tools already created by others, without having to create new one when not necessary.

- To define common and coordinated strategies of social media managing on the platform allowing it (Facebook, Twitter).

- To create a social media managers network in the civil society, that can communicate between them in a planned and regular way.