



## Spread of Hate Speech and Non-acceptance of the Other - From Social Factors to Political Exploitation

Dr. Abdelatif Hannachi

Professor of Contemporary and Current History, Manouba University, Tunisia

Human history has witnessed several conflicts and wars between human groups inside and outside the same State. This behavior took new forms and dimensions with the rise of kingdoms and empires that sought to expand geographically through organized invasions to achieve various economic, political, religious, social, goals and objectives .

Hate speech has had an adverse impact on these discordant groups. It contributed to the transformation of predisposing feelings into inhumane practices, such as deportations, expulsions, exiles, starvation, looting and plunder, leading to massacres and genocides in some countries, where libelous discourses of slander, defamation, and accusations of treason flourish, in terms of polarization and internal divisions in countries. The more collapses on several levels, the more these discourses expand and diverge from the “old” real space to the “new” virtual space to eventually cause several undesirable repercussions and impacts.

The rapid spread of this type of content among the target audience in our world today has made it difficult at all levels to curb, contain and exclude it. This necessitates analyzing and uncovering the trajectories of such a discourse between human groups by focusing on the social and political dimensions and analyzing them from a sociological perspective as key drivers of violence in many cases, ancient and modern.

### Hatred and Discourse

Hatred is a human emotion that may last over time. It may be constant or transitory. Therefore, we can distinguish between temporary extreme anger and permanent and occasional hatred. Hate speech, however, is a form of expressing an idea or opinion to an audience in writing, verbally or visually. It is manifested verbally or practically towards the other through anger and stigmatization, contempt and disgust,

unsubstantiated accusations, blasphemy and slander, verbal abuse and arrogance, disapproval, and belittling.

The content of such a discourse extends to highlighting the distinction from others on identity bases, such as gender, race, religion, belief, or intellectual affiliation. It explicitly or implicitly calls for symbolic threats, incitement and physical aggression against a particular individual, group, or segment, and justifies physical and symbolic violence.

Hatred poses a threat when it becomes a factor leading to social, ideological, religious and/or political tensions, towards identity-related determinants, leading to various individual or collective acts of violence in various forms, peaking at the desire to cleanse and annihilate the other physically or symbolically.

Hatred arises and infiltrates societies that are predisposed to a variety of intertwined factors, including psychological and social factors, such as isolation and the lack of a culture of acceptance of the other and their differences and views. Mainstream political discourse also plays an important role in disseminating such a discourse by inciting individuals to violence against marginalized groups.

### **Discrimination and Marginalization**

Feelings of racial discrimination and social marginalization grow when a group is no longer part of society politically, economically, or professionally. Those who are socially excluded can quite relate to this feeling. It is expressed in mechanisms and media that have evolved over time, including local media and social media with their multiple platforms that are exploited to spread racist and discriminatory discourses aimed at marginalizing some groups, promoting hatred through color, race, shape, religion and gender, and targeting some segments, such as women, minorities, expatriate workers, refugees and those fleeing wars .

Hate speech based on discrimination and marginalization poses a significant threat to societies, especially if it incites violence against other groups in society, in addition to its less severe forms, such as belittling, denigration, repeated insults, slander, or graphic images, which result in further negative repercussions on the cohesion and unity of society. Perhaps South Africa and the Apartheid based on shape, color and identity between whites, blacks, mulattoes (people of mixed ancestry) and Indians are a good example of this.

The same applies to the discriminatory discourse targeting migrants, refugees, and some minorities in Europe. The prevalence of such discourses causes psychological damage and increases the scope of marginalization of the target group, as well as the high number of attacks against the targeted, threatening the integrity of democratic values and human rights, harming communities, and working towards identity-based division. A study conducted in Sweden found a significant correlation between incendiary speech published about refugees during a given period and the increase in attacks on them during the same period.

### **Exclusion and Isolationism**

The lack of personal connections with the complementary members of society, and the growing desire to get rid of people of different identities, are negative feelings that ultimately lead if exploited by incendiary speeches—to catastrophic consequences for the unity and cohesion of societies. Exclusion and social isolationism refer to the denial of equal citizenship rights at various levels, such as participation in production, work, consumption, management and social interaction, leading to isolation.

There is no doubt that some groups' feeling of exclusion within any society from the equitable distribution of resources, employment opportunities, etc., contributes to increased isolationist tendencies. The situation is exacerbated with the biased stances of central governments towards one group over another. Hate speech condemning the other is widespread among excluded groups, and there are realistic examples in our recent history that demonstrate and confirm this.

For example, there is a sense of exclusion and isolation between the settler "pastoralists" of the north in Mali and the settler "farmers" of the south, as a result of the concentration of services, development, power and the distribution of resources to one group over another. This gave the impression of exclusion and social isolation to pastoralists of the north. It even undoubtedly contributed to the growth of hate speech exchanged between the citizens of the two regions, and the rise of armed factions exploited by terrorist organizations and the death of thousands of citizens.

In general, and given that speech based on hatred, discrimination, racism and exclusion is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, it can be understood and analyzed from a social perspective based on some studies as follows :

**Social and Cultural Context:** It significantly influences the emergence and spread of hate speech. For example, the history of relations between different groups and historical practices can play a great role in shaping this discourse.

**Identity and Belonging:** Social and cultural identities are influenced by the communities and groups to which individuals belong. The exclusionary discourse appears when individuals feel threatened by their identity or affiliation to another group.

**Power and Domination:** Hate speech may be used as a means of maintaining control and dominance over a particular group by discriminating and identifying other groups as enemies or threatening them.

**Politics and Law:** Government policies and laws can influence the promotion or restriction of hate speech. For example, legislations protecting human rights and criminalizing discrimination can reduce the prevalence of this type of speech.

**Media and Information Technology:** The media and social media websites with their various platforms have a great impact on spreading hate speech. A study published in 2017 on the correlation between the Internet and political polarization by researcher Gentsco Boxal showed that the rise of social media and the Internet is the main factor in increasing political polarization in US society.

**Social Interaction:** Interactions between individuals and groups in society can lead to the reinforcement or reduction of hate speech. For example, open communication and mutual respect may reduce tensions and clashes.

**Social Movements and Trade Union Activities:** Social movements can play a role in combating hate speech by raising awareness and developing a sense of the importance of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect.

**Demographic changes:** Changes in the composition of society can affect people's perception of different things and encourage tolerance or hostility.

According to these general factors that can affect the spread of hate speech or limit its damage, the mainstream thought in the literature of political systems and international relations has differentiated between several hate speeches that are used in multiple societies under different circumstances to ensure political superiority and mass polarization, including:

**Counter-hatred:** This discourse appears among political forces and ruling parties in several Arab and European societies, such as right and left wing parties, and is used to mobilize support and validation to ensure access to power.

**Sectarian Hatred:** It happens for sectarian or religious considerations in multiple societies. Sectarian hatred is enshrined in Yemen and Iraq, and religious hatred is manifested in political speeches in several Western countries. It has resulted in frequent targeting of Muslims in Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Austria and France, which is known as Islamophobia.

**Regional Hatred:** This discourse shows marginalization among residents of areas of interest to governments and areas deprived of development services. Several African countries suffer from the spread of this type of discourse socially and politically.

**Severe Hatred:** It appears in speeches of some civil forces and political parties in Europe against immigrants and refugees. It also appears among expatriate workers and societal sectors from some of their host countries. This type of hatred is predominantly racist and discriminatory towards color and race. However, the economic situation may lead to the escalation of this discourse significantly, as hatred of migrants and refugees increases in some countries due to political tensions and political grandstanding. Locals view this group as a cause of high national unemployment and a burden on the economy or economic prosperity.

### Political Exploitation

Employing hate speech in internal or external political affairs of a single country did not arise recently in recent history in which the potential infiltration and spread thanks to information and communication technology has become common. It is rather as old as history, and has been occurring throughout human history where dozens of peoples have been systematically wiped out thanks to incendiary mobilization. These practices were not limited to the systematic destruction of a specific ethnic or religious group, but were rather one of the deadliest and most common practices towards many groups.

Alexander the Great's strategy of war (356-323 BCE) meant not only the defeat of the enemy, but the annihilation of all combatants and the destruction of the culture of the very target peoples who dared to oppose his imperial dominance. This is the same method used when the Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus arrived in the continent of America, as the new Europeans committed brutal genocide against the indigenous

peoples of the Americas (Native Americans) after they were considered degraded and inferior beings who must be disposed of.

In our recent history, Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in Germany took hate speech as a springboard for mass crimes. It was embodied in the time of international tensions between the two World Wars (1918-1939) and its aftermath when propaganda was used to instill hatred and fear against many nationalities and groups. In our contemporary reality, Piazza's (2020) study revealed that some current politicians deepen existing divisions when they use incendiary language in their speeches to mobilize supporters and delegitimize opponents, making their societies more vulnerable to political violence and terrorism.

Therefore, it is crucial to combat hate speech by eradicating its roots and breeding grounds, increasing awareness, fostering a climate of dialogue, promoting the values of respect for human rights and tolerance, and developing a legal framework that criminalizes organizations and people who use hatred and rejection of the other as a tool to advance their own political agendas. Additionally, this entails enhancing social and economic conditions, avoiding the fostering of divisions among members of the same society, and securing political and speech rights in a way that promotes social cohesion and civic peace.