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The language of hatred: a political ontology

Content of the paper

Conceptually, we could draw inspiration from Bourdieu's (1991) short book *The political ontology of Martin Heidegger*. Bourdieu considers Heidegger to be a 'conservative revolutionary' (along with Jünger and others including essayists and journalists) – how **the ideological Zeitgeist operates across fields**...one of the authors who, in a protest against what they perceived as decline of the nation state and threatening chaos from alien forces (socialists, communists, unions, outsiders), advocated a move away from the modern world and a return to some imagined past, a '**restoration**' of an imaginary ethnic community or moral order.

One of the groups that Heidegger was against in the modern world were the Jews; in particular as they represented a cosmopolitan rootlessness. His vision of a 'pure' German nation was a racist one.

We draw parallels between the racist approach to the cosmopolitan, rootless Jews in early 20th century Germany and the current Tory / 'Faragist' expressed views on the European citizens in Brexit Britain. It also replays the history of Powellite racism.

A political ontology is relational - it comes into being in the form of connections and oppositions between phenomena. Races, nations, communities, languages, we/them, other, invader, culture... in relation to whom or what? What's normative? What are the ontological presuppositions underlying the discourse?

Bourdieu discusses Heidegger's ideas in the social context of the time of Heidegger's thinking. He argues that what Heidegger **is translating into, and so euphemising**, supposedly, 'philosophical' language (and what Heidegger describes as 'philosophical treatise') is, in fact, a discussion of social welfare (as something that undermines the morale of the nation and the ability of people to take decisions for themselves), disguised as something else through the use of certain 'tricks'.

Our initial idea was to say something similar about the way in which e.g. Theresa May refers to EU citizens / workers. An example of this could be May's recent mention of EU workers 'jumping the queue' and then her explanation regarding what supposedly she meant (i.e. wanting to be 'fair' towards 'engineers from Sydney' and 'software developers from Delhi' – rather than being racist). In official rhetoric, Tories keep their hands clean, claiming that they aren't racist. We could look at how racism was brought into the discourse of Brexit. We could also look at the 'hidden' racism of the Brexit rhetoric and its material, tangible consequences, such as the recent case of a Spanish woman having been punched in the face when travelling across London because she spoke Spanish on the phone.

We should also question the romantic vision of Britain and the rest of the world that seems to underpin the Brexit rhetoric of the Tories. This could be compared to the conservative romanticism and the *völkisch Zeitgeist* underlying Heidegger's political ontology: yearning after a homogenous nation, within a strong nation state and an empire (understood as a community of friendly nations). Where does Theresa May think 'engineers from Sydney' come from? What does she think their ethnic identification is likely to be?

National renewal as purification. How does anti-immigration discourse transpose into different fields – in the media/press field there are clear racist positions: Mail, Express, Sun. In the political field: UKIP and the Leave campaign normalise this discourse.

We could look at the way in which categories such as ‘the European citizen’, ‘the European worker’, ‘the EU migrant’ are constructed, and at the racist undertones – either implicit or explicit – of these constructions, which are disguised in the discourse of meritocracy and skills.

Because they are euphemised, the racist implication is always deniable (‘that’s not what I meant’; ‘you are smearing all leavers as racists’)

Our ideas from 1st February

We could frame the paper as being about ‘organising hatred’.

Conceptually, we draw on the idea of ‘political ontology’, taking inspiration from Bourdieu’s arguments about Heidegger’s philosophy being underpinned by right-wing views and a negative stance towards foreigners, and the link between the supposedly ‘innocent’ language of Heidegger and others, and the terrible consequences this language and that whole way of thinking it disguised – the particular ‘political ontology’ underlying it – had for the world (such as racism, Nazism, the holocaust, WWII). We consider the similarities and differences between the ‘Heidegger’s philosophy – Nazism’ nexus and the ‘right-wing discourse – physical violence against foreigners’ nexus.

We point to the links between instances of contemporary political rhetoric (the ‘discursive’ sphere) and specific events (the ‘material’ sphere). Our argument is that this ‘rhetoric’ has impacts that go well beyond words, that the actual consequences for individuals, groups and societies are far-reaching. We point to the representations of discourses in different fields and to the material effects of these discourses. By drawing attention to the connection between discursive hatred and physical violence, we problematize the ‘copout’: ‘I’m a philosopher, I’m not responsible for death camps’ or, in the current context, ‘I’m a politician, I’m not responsible for violence against foreigners’. We question the deniability of responsibility by politicians, and we invite the reader to question it, too.

Methodologically, we build our argument by applying the method of juxtaposition (Sørensen, 2013; Sørensen, 2014). We bring in three pairings, from three different contexts, each of which relates to populism and what it does to people and societies, and especially to how discursive hatred operates in different contexts.

- 1) The UK. In the ‘discursive’ sphere, Nigel Farage expresses his discomfort, feeling ‘awkward’ travelling on train, surrounded by people speaking different languages than English. This took place in February 2014.

Here are some quotes from Farage: ‘I got the train the other night, it was rush hour, from Charing Cross, it was the stopper going out. We stopped at London Bridge, New Cross, Hither Green... It wasn’t until after we got past Grove Park that I could actually hear English being audibly spoken in the carriage. Does that make me feel slightly awkward? Yes... Because I don’t understand them... Not more English - English’.

'The answer is I don't feel very comfortable in that situation, I don't think the majority of British people do'.

'I wonder what's really going on. And I'm sure that's a view that will be reflected by three quarters of the population, perhaps even more. That does not mean one is anti-immigration, we're not anti-immigration, we want immigration, but we do absolutely believe we should be able to judge it both on quantity and quality'. And a quote from his keynote speech at the UKIP conference: 'Whether it is the impact on local schools and hospitals, whether it is the fact in many parts of England you don't hear English spoken any more... This is not the kind of community we want to leave to our children and grandchildren'.

He claimed that part of Britain are 'like a foreign land'.

Commented [SMA1]: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/feb/28/nigel-farage-ukip-immigration-speech>

'I'm not saying people on trains should be forced to speak English... but what I am saying is we now have nearly 10% of our schools in our country where English is not the primary language in the homes those children come from'.

'I think that is a concern and particularly as if you compare us to comparable countries in northern Europe. We have had a record of integration and race relations and religious tolerance that is not met, or even come close to, anyone else in Europe'.

'What we have got and what we have had, and what we continue to have when it comes to the EU is wholly irresponsible and I think it has done great damage to the cohesion of our society'.

Commented [SMA2]: <https://www.standard.co.uk/panewsfeeds/farage-felt-awkward-on-train-9158785.html>

We will juxtapose this example with the example of the young Spanish woman who was punched in the face on 23rd October 2018.

'A woman was punched in the face in a suspected racist attack on a packed train. She was left bleeding from above the eye following the alleged assault after her assailant heard her speaking Spanish during a phone call on the [Overground](#). Witnesses said he shouted abuse at the woman between Dalston Kingsland and Canonbury during the rush hour on Tuesday evening. Engineer Enrik Del Sol, 35, said: "He came up to her quite violently. He was shouting at her: 'You need to speak in English, you're in f***ing England. You shouldn't speak other languages.' The lady was in so much shock she couldn't seem to reply to him in English so she was just replying in Spanish. Then he came up and punched her in the face'. He added: 'Someone pressed the emergency stop ... but the attacker just walked off, nobody tried to stop him'.

'A man, 56, was later arrested on suspicion of racially aggravated bodily harm'.

Commented [SMA3]: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/woman-punched-in-face-for-speaking-spanish-in-suspected-racist-attack-on-overground-train-a3972386.html>

Dutch comedian Eline Van Der Velden tweeted: 'I've seen this type of thing as a problem ever since I moved to the UK. It's normal here to make fun of accents and other languages. I see it as fear of the unknown'. Others blamed rising xenophobia in the wake of

the [Brexit](#) vote. 'I wonder if this thug also thinks Brits should be thumped for speaking English in Spain,' said Mike Galsworthy, founder of the Scientists for European Union campaign [group](#).

Commented [SMA4]: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/woman-punched-racist-attack-london-overground-speaking-spanish-tfl-police-a8604436.html>

- 2) Poland. The issuing of 'certificates of political death' by the All-Polish Youth in 2017 and the murder of Paweł Adamowicz, the mayor of Gdańsk, in January 2019.

'In 2017, the nationalist group All-Polish Youth issued a 'political death certificate' for Adamowicz, citing his liberal views as the cause of his demise. More recently, he was accused by a prominent PiS MP of serving German interests – an obvious dog whistle in a country that survived over a century under partitions, followed by a Nazi occupation'.

'In Poland's feral right-wing media, Adamowicz was routinely described as a traitor, a German, a criminal, a homo-lover, a paedophile, a Commie, and a puppet of the EU – echoing almost exactly nationalist rhetoric from the 1920s describing Narutowicz as in the pocket of "Reds, Jews, and [Germans](#)'.

Commented [SMA5]: <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2019/01/murder-gdansk-mayor-pawel-adamowicz-reflects-poland-s-increasingly-toxic>

'The normalisation of the radical right is helped by a martyrological vision of Polish history, present in the collective imagination and keenly used in political discourse. It is through historical re-enactment that far right ideas and symbols often make it to the mainstream. Fascist marches are disguised as merely patriotic ones, commemorating important events; slogans inciting to political killings as references to the past. It is easier to dehumanise political opponents when images of the great wars are evoked. 'Patriotic' fashion brand Red Is Bad gained iconic status among Polish nationalists, with t-shirts featuring historical slogans such as "death to the traitors of the fatherland." Among fans of brand is President [Duda](#)'.

Commented [SMA6]: <http://politicalcritique.org/cee/poland/2019/pawel-adamowicz-a-very-political-death-in-a-country-torn-by-culture-wars/>

In January [2019](#), Paweł Adamowicz was stabbed by a 27-year old criminal with a history of mental illness. Adamowicz died hours later.

Commented [SMA7]: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46878325>

'The assassination of the mayor of Gdansk shows that we have crossed the Rubicon as a society', wrote Bogusław Chrabota, editor-in-chief of the Rzeczpospolita newspaper, in an editorial. 'If there is no systematic fight against hatred we will all have blood on our hands'.

'Poland is deeply polarised. On one side are those who support the Law and Justice government, with its mixture of conservative Roman Catholic values, euroscepticism and generous welfare hand-outs for families and the less well-off. Then there are those who support the government's pro-EU, liberal or left-wing opponents, like Mr Adamowicz. Using its control of the public media, the government exclusively blames the opposition for the level of hatred in Polish politics. Meanwhile, much of the country's privately-owned media is routinely critical of the government and says Law and Justice is responsible. Adamowicz had come under attack in nationalist and right-wing circles for his support of migrants, LGBT issues, and pro-EU views. Last year the far-right All-Polish Youth group issued a fake death certificate for the mayor, listing the cause of death as 'liberalism, multiculturalism and stupidity'.

Jaroslav Kurski, deputy editor-in-chief of the popular liberal daily, Gazeta Wyborcza, wrote in an editorial that as the party in office, Law and Justice bore responsibility for restoring dignity to the debate. 'Let's stop pretending now. Pawel Adamowicz was the most hated local politician by right-wing government propaganda. On the right-wing forums they didn't stop the hatred, even after his death,' he wrote.

President Andrzej Duda has called on Poles to show unity in the face of violence, despite their political differences. The tragedy is that it took the murder of a kind and respected man for that appeal to be 'made'.

- 3) The US. Trump's administration's 'zero tolerance' policy on migration and putting children into cages in 'facilities' for detainees crossing the border from Mexico.

In our analysis, we will point to connections between the seemingly disparate discursive and material practices and will argue that they are all rooted in the same 'political ontology'.

There is a whole spectrum of practices: from 'nasty' but not illegal to 'physical violence'. These practices are not at all unconnected. On the contrary, they can be discussed together with reference to the ideological Zeitgeist – their rootedness in a particular 'political ontology'. Everybody is immersed in this ontology.

The method of juxtaposition will enable us to draw attention to what we wouldn't see otherwise: in a context where it is acceptable to hate foreigners, expressions of this hatred take different forms and are mutually reinforcing. Technology / social media lead to intensification of these expressions of hatred, and to its international spread. Hatred is transnational: people pick up on memes and discourses from right-wingers in the States, and use them to promote toxic attacks on individuals in other geographical contexts. In this sense, the current situation differs from what was happening at the time of Heidegger.

Bourdieu was writing about Heidegger and about the rise of right wing moods, expression of right-wing ideals which as their consequence had Nazism and the Holocaust; Bourdieu introduces the notion of political ontology. We trace the rise of right wing moods, expression of ideals, nostalgia for purity, acceptability of discursive practices that are legal but nasty ('discomfort', 'dissatisfaction'); to incidences of material practices that are hatred-filled: physical violence (punching; stabbing; putting children into cages, away from their parents, with lights on 24/7).

Commented [SMA8]: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46878325>

Commented [SMA9]: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44518942>

Commented [SMA10]: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jun/17/separation-border-children-cages-south-texas-warehouse-holding-facility>