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Hate Narratives

Language as a Tool
of Intolerance



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EDITION

Introduction

Acts of hate-violence directed against ethnic or religious groups, or against those professing a different world view, have occurred everywhere – in Africa, the former Yugoslavia, and other parts of the world – though the fact is that the mechanisms that have produced those acts are not everywhere the same, and not always the same.

This book is dedicated to a discussion of one of the many mechanisms that incite hatred; it is about those who kill others – or call for their annihilation – in the name of God, One Truth, Justice. Jews, followers of various religions, and people whose political convictions are different than those of their captors, have been murdered because the perpetrators considered them “lice”, “vermin”, “cockroaches” – i.e. individuals of less value, unworthy of life.

This book is about fundamentalists, about those who carried out the attacks on New York’s World Trade Center buildings in 2001, about Anders Breivik, about politicians who call for the “elimination” of political opponents in the name of the One Righteous Cause and True Patriotism.

It is about those who – in the name of God and Patriotism – reject people with different political, philosophical, or religious views, and who refuse them the right to be called a True Patriot (True Pole, True German, True Hungarian, etc.) and to count themselves among the True Followers of the One True God.

It is about how those who are full of hatred for dissenting opinion propagate ethnocentrism, how they dehumanize the “Other” (and the foreign), and how they – in defense of the One Truth – justify the greatest crimes against humanity.

It is about hatred and crime, which – in the mouths of those who feel that hatred and commit those crimes – become a cause for glory and moral exaltation.

This book is meant to be a warning, indeed a call to those who have fallen victim to ideologies of hatred, and who ironically believe that they are serving the Good, to come to their senses.

What causes people to stigmatize, persecute and kill others with no feeling of guilt, but rather with the feeling that they are working for the sake of the Idea or God? We do not have, and probably will never find, a clear answer to this question. The problem is complex and there are a number of possible explanations, all of which depend on which theoretical starting point one adopts.

This issue has long been the subject of discussion among representatives of many academic disciplines, writers and thinkers. The literature devoted to this issue is so vast that it would be impossible to present here all of the most

important trends; to do so would require separate monographs covering various fields of knowledge and analyzing the works of many authors. Given this situation, individual scholars are forced to limit themselves to consideration of the problems that he or she thinks are most important and that serve as a guide to his or her broader thinking. Such is the character of this book.

The contents of this book comprise an analysis of the role that language plays in creating images of reality, and – most importantly – of language’s power to build social relationships based on hatred.

For the purposes of my analysis I adopt the notion that the media and other sources of information create images of “parallel realities,” and that facts created by media – understood as a certain reality – are translated into social fact, conceived as an event, in response to which the individual makes decisions regarding how to act. It is up to individual to choose one or more of these created realities.

There is a second, connected issue that I address in this book, namely the determinants that define the individual’s preferences in choosing one of the many broadcasted images of reality.

As the third and final issue, I address the limits of freedom of speech and the borders of tolerance.

The arguments presented in this book represent a synthesis of academic research I have carried out over the past several years.

Analysis of the problem of tolerance and its borders in the context of human rights theory involves necessarily the legacy of totalitarianism, which is reflected in the mentality of the individual shaped by totalitarianism. Hence, my interest in theories of the psychology of politics. The consequences of totalitarianism on the shape and functioning of democracy in post-totalitarian societies can be seen to this day, and they make up a fascinating field of research.

An important goal of this book is to answer this question: Are we Poles truly tolerant and prepared to work with those who hold views that are different from our own? Tolerance and willingness to cooperate suppose a true appreciation of different visions of the world. Or, is what we are dealing with here a reverse causal relationship? Is it perhaps the case that different visions of the world are what cause us to be open or closed to others? There is no clear and simple answer to this question because research results could assert the presence of a positive relationship, of a negative relationship, or of no relationship though, though the process of explaining the causal relationship between variables always remains open.

In the first chapter of this book I discuss the theories I have chosen to use in my examination of the roles played by language, discourse and narrative in the creation of an image of social reality. In the second chapter, I analyze the language used in totalitarianism systems, and I put forward a particular kind of narrative

description – dogmatic narratives. In the third chapter I focus on the theoretical assumptions that lie at the heart of authoritarianism and dogmatism, and in chapter four I introduce issues tied to comparative studies. The results of this study allow us to characterize how susceptible Polish society is to dogmatic narratives. Chapter five is devoted to a discussion of tolerance and its borders in the context of the right to freedom of speech and the assumptions behind modern liberal democracy.