

Peace Institute International symposium

HATE SPEECH INTERSECTIONS WITH NATIONALISM, RACISM, GENDER AND MIGRATION

4 - 5 July 2024, Park Hotel, Ljubljana

Stemming from existing research that shows a rise in nationalist economic protectionism, Islamophobia, homophobia, hate speech and racist attacks on foreigners and minorities, the conference takes as a starting point the lack of in-depth analyses of the relationship between nationalism, racism, migration, and gender in the generation of hate speech. The topics we want to address include the following questions: How to study and define hate speech? How is hate speech generated and what is the role of the position and (dis)privilege in social hierarchy of the “source” and the “target” of hate speech? What is the explanatory model that connects the concepts of hate speech, racism, nationalism, gender, and migration? Can the contemporary challenges of mass migration, global COVID-19 pandemic and the related upsurge in nationalism and anti-immigrant hate speech be addressed by alternative counter-narratives?

The symposium opens up a space for discussions that address the contemporary challenge of polarization of societies and contribute to a clearer conceptualization of hate speech. The participants from various social science disciplines will address questions such as who, how and why generates hate speech and what is the role of political elites and of the systemic reproduction of social inequalities. The symposium focuses on select country cases outside of the usual “Western gaze”: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. In this way, it is providing a space for exchange, networking, and developing potential new scientific collaborations across the wider Central-Eastern and Balkans region.

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PROGRAM

DAY 1: THURSDAY, 4 JULY 2024

- 12.00 – 12.15 **Veronika Bajt: Welcome**
- 12.15 – 12.45 **Veronika Bajt: The sociology of hate speech**
- 12.45 – 13.00 Discussion
- 13.00 – 13.15 Break
- 13.15 – 13.45 **Ana Frank: The imaginary of hate speech against the gendered Other**
- 13.45 – 14.00 Discussion
- 14.00 – 14.30 Break (with refreshments)
- 14.30 – 15.00 **Hana Huskić: From slurs to upholding traditional family values: hate speech towards the LGBTQIA+ communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina**
- 15.00 – 15.15 Discussion
- 15.15 – 15.45 **Katarina Damčević: Controversial symbols and narratives of war**
- 15.45 – 16.00 Discussion
- 16.00 – 16.15 Break
- 16.15 – 16.45 **Marta Stojić: Hate speech between spectacles and silence: people on the move in Serbia**
- 16.45 – 17.00 Discussion
- 18.00 Dinner

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DAY 2: FRIDAY, 5 JULY 2024

09.30 – 10.00 **Vlasta Jalušič: What works against hate speech?**

10.00 – 10.15 Discussion

10.15 – 10.30 Break

10.30 – 11.00 **Zoran Fijavž: What remains of the forum: the state and the future
of online hate speech in Slovenia**

11.00 – 11.15 Discussion

11.15 – 11.30 Break

11.30 – 12.00 **Melike Akkaraca Kose: Ethnic slurs and international disputes**

12.00 – 12.15 Discussion

12.15 – 12.30 Break

12.30 – 13.00 **Maja Ladić: Hate crime in Slovenia**

13.00 – 13.15 Discussion

13.15 – 13.45 **Neža Kogovšek Šalamon and Sergeja Hrvatič: The impact of the Slovenian
Supreme Court "hate speech" decision on prosecutorial practice**

13.45 – 14.00 Discussion

14.00 Conclusion and Lunch

ABSTRACTS

Veronika Bajt, PhD
The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia

THE SOCIOLOGY OF HATE SPEECH

Hate speech reflects and reinforces the underlying prejudices and structural inequalities, functioning as a mechanism for maintaining existing power structures and social hierarchies. It is a multifaceted sociological phenomenon that intersects with nationalism, racism, gender, and migration. I argue that to analyse hate speech, a comprehensive sociological understanding is required of these intersections. Nationalism and racism are intertwined with notions of ethnic and cultural superiority, fuelling hate speech by promoting exclusionary ideologies that marginalise minority groups. Such rhetoric is amplified in political discourse and media, legitimising xenophobic attitudes, reinforcing social divides, perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination. Hate speech rooted in racism dehumanises marginalised communities, legitimises violence and unequal treatment of minorities, perpetuating historical injustices and contemporary inequalities. Derogatory language stigmatises ethnic groups and becomes a vehicle for perpetuating systemic racism. A systematic, large-scale analysis of American newspaper coverage of Muslims (Bleich and van der Veen, 2022) suggested that consistently negative media coverage contributes to the public's acceptance of negative associations with marginalised groups. Gender also plays a crucial role in the sociology of hate speech, as misogynistic language and gender-based slurs reflect broader patterns of gender inequality and reinforce patriarchal structures. Migration adds another layer of complexity to hate speech, as migrants, often depicted as the Other, have become the prime target for xenophobic and nativist rhetoric. Constructing migration as a threat to social cohesion and economic stability, hate speech against migrants often combines racial, ethnic, and cultural prejudice. Such discourse exacerbates social divisions and influences policies and practices that disadvantage migrant communities, increasing their discrimination and social marginalisation. In addition, immigration laws have developed to reinforce a dichotomy between those viewed as voluntary, often economically motivated, "migrants" who can be legitimately excluded by potential host states, and those viewed as forced, often politically motivated, "refugees" who should be let in. Following Rebecca Hamlin (2023), I argue that this binary is a dangerous legal fiction, politically constructed with the goal of making harsh border control measures more ethically palatable to the public. The sociology of hate speech thus reveals the interplay between systemic power structures and individual prejudices, necessitating a comprehensive and intersectional approach to understand and mitigate its pervasive influence in society.

ABSTRACTS

Katarina Damčević, PhD

Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg, Germany

THE STRUGGLE OVER MEANING: CONTROVERSIAL SYMBOLS AND NARRATIVES OF WAR

This abstract explores the concept of cultural texts and their significance in (post)conflict societies, particularly in relation to controversial symbols. Drawing on cultural semiotics, it examines how texts shape attitudes, behaviours, and self-descriptions within a society, serving as models of meaning that influence laws, social norms, and the construction of a society's identity. In conflict contexts, cultural texts play a crucial role in shaping collective memory and perpetuating divisions between different groups. Using the example of the controversial salute *Za dom spremni* (*For homeland - ready*) in Croatia, this paper delves into the complex interplay between historical symbols, official narratives, and societal interpretations. The resurgence of this salute during the 1990s Croatian War of Independence highlights how cultural texts can be manipulated to promote unity or exclusivity, depending on the dominant narrative in a society. By analysing the Croatian Homeland War Declaration and its reinforcement of a singular interpretation of the conflict, this paper aims to explore the implications of such cultural texts on shaping identity and perpetuating exclusionary narratives. Through a cultural semiotic lens, it seeks to understand how texts in post-conflict societies can either foster dialogue and reconciliation or reinforce historical divisions and obstacles to confronting difficult legacies.

ABSTRACTS

Zoran Fijavž

Jožef Stefan International Postgraduate School, Ljubljana, Slovenia

The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia

WHAT REMAINS OF THE FORUM: THE STATE AND FUTURE OF ONLINE HATE SPEECH IN SLOVENIA

In this contribution, we summarise the developments in the arena of research on online hate speech in Slovenia. To do so, we draw on existing literature, desk research on the declared moderation practices by news sites as well as preliminary data from interviews with media representatives from a national broadcaster RTV Slovenia and a lifestyle news media Metropolitan. We identify a disjunction between the existing literature and evidence from media practice: the former often focus on discussion boards within news websites and the latter indicates that the bulk of user-generated content emerges on social media platforms and that news organisations have virtually abandoned commenting on their websites altogether. The two analysed news sources also contrast in their capacity for effective content moderation, adopting different work strategies (collaborating with the editors versus having a dedicated moderation unit), stating different goals (education versus brand management) and reporting different contexts in which hate speech may arise (general versus celebrity news). We contextualise these results in the shift of governance of public digital spaces from smaller national fora to international social networking platforms. These have systematically phased out access to user-generated content in recent years, including for researchers, which the EU-wide Digital Services Act seeks to redress. However, the act is not yet implemented in Slovenia, which presents a major limitation for the systematic analysis of online hate speech.

ABSTRACTS

Ana Frank, PhD
The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia

THE IMAGINARY OF HATE SPEECH AGAINST THE GENDERED OTHER

This presentation focuses on the mechanisms of gendered Othering as performed in hate speech. Drawing on postcolonial and critical race theory this paper shows how the colonial imaginary of the Other is perpetuated in contemporary discourses against migrants intersecting with race, ethnicity, social status, and especially gender. The once distant colonial Other in foreign and unknown countries or the marginalised inner groups in Europe are now situated in the image of the postcolonial immigrant entering the so-called fortress Europe. In contemporary contexts, racism, xenophobia, hatred and hate speech against the Other often continue to draw upon colonial stereotypes and imaginary, particularly in gendered terms. This can be seen as a means of maintaining and reinforcing the postcolonial status quo, where the legacies of colonialism continue to shape social and political realities. There are many concepts to describe racist prejudice, xenophobia and hatred, but the concept of “the Other” is central in the construction of the binary of Us vs. Them, of the Self vs. the Other. The process of Othering occurs when we turn fellow humans into abstract entities we can distance ourselves from and often treat as less-than-human. In postcolonial theory authors have drawn on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of imaginary and extimite/extimacy, which are useful theoretical concepts to understand the deep roots and mechanisms of Othering and how this is performed in hate speech.

ABSTRACTS

Hana Huskić

The European Regional Master's Programme in Democracy and Human Rights in South East Europe; University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and University of Bologna, Italy

FROM SLURS TO UPHOLDING TRADITIONAL FAMILY VALUES: HATE SPEECH TOWARDS THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITIES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

This presentation explores the boundaries between personal beliefs and hate speech, examining how politicians, the public, and the media influence prejudice toward LGBTQIA+ communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The analysis is framed within the context of BiH's socio-political landscape over the past two decades, focusing on critical events and public attitudes that have shaped queer activism. Personal beliefs transition into hate speech when they incite violence, discrimination, or exclusion based on sexual orientation or gender identity. This line is crossed when expressions of disapproval manifest as calls for exclusion, as seen in the aggressive rhetoric against Sarajevo Pride Marches and the labelling of queer identities as provocations to traditional BiH culture, national identity, and stability coming from influential political figures. Media coverage has played a dual role, sometimes promoting LGBTQIA+ rights as part of a broader human rights agenda while also sensationalising pride events and protests. The result is mainly hostile public opinion influenced by political and socio-economic insecurity and nationalistic sentiments. This presentation concludes by taking all of these factors into account to assess how hate speech impacts the trajectory of BiH queer activism today. Where do personal beliefs end, and where does hate speech begin? What roles do politicians, the general public, and the media play in promoting and overcoming hate speech towards LGBTQIA+ communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina? How does hate speech impact the trajectory of BiH queer activism, steering it towards liberationist or assimilationist politics? This presentation will assess these questions by providing an overview of hate speech towards LGBTQIA+ communities in BiH in the last two decades.

Vlasta Jalušič, PhD

The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia

WHAT WORKS AGAINST HATE SPEECH?

Based on interviews with some key actors-professionals who are both experts in the field and also function as "anti-hate speech actors" in Slovenia this paper discusses the definitions and understanding of hate speech, methods of opposition and the effectiveness of counter-narratives which are addressing hate speech and exclusion.

ABSTRACTS

Vlasta Jalušič, PhD

The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia

WHAT WORKS AGAINST HATE SPEECH? NOTHING WORKS UNTIL IT WORKS...

Hate speech is still not a sufficiently defined label for speech acts of exclusion, discrimination, and dehumanization, which represent a growing challenge in the European and global context. It is considered as anti-minority speech of subjugation and oppression, directed against specific, culturally defined groups that are subjected to inequality, exposed as vulnerable, and with no political or other power. While it is sometimes difficult to recognize, identify, prosecute, and regulate, hate speech, connected with hate crime, often influences the course of public debate on fundamental issues of social inequality, subordination, and exclusion. There are many programs, projects, and activities that are supposed to prevent and reduce the scope and reach of hate speech, but their effectiveness is often questionable. Based on interviews with some key actors—professionals and media editors/journalists who are both experts in the field and also function as "anti-hate speech actors" in Slovenia—this paper discusses the definitions and understanding of hate speech, methods of opposing it, and their perception of the effectiveness of counter-actions addressing hate speech and exclusion. The results of the qualitative content thematic analysis confirm some insights and concerns regarding countering hate speech and misinformation from the recent literature and open up some new questions. Based on interviews with some key actors—professionals who are both experts in the field and also function as "anti-hate speech actors" in Slovenia this paper discusses the definitions and understanding of hate speech, methods of opposition and the effectiveness of counter-narratives which are addressing hate speech and exclusion.

ABSTRACTS

Maja Ladić, PhD

The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia

HATE CRIME IN SLOVENIA

Hate crime – apart from hate speech – has not received much attention until recently in Slovenia. The data and statistics available are quite poor, the public institutions mostly do not collect detailed data due to data protection reasons, which seem to be considered as a high priority. In 2022-2023 we have conducted the first thorough comprehensive research on hate crime in Slovenia, putting the victims and their needs in focus. First, we performed desk research with the aim to examine whether Slovenia successfully transposed the Victim's Directive regarding the generic and specialised services (Art. 8 and 9), and to analyse whether those measures are well implemented in practice (by maintaining a victims centred and intersectional approach). Second, we carried out an online survey which targeted mainly representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) that combat bias-motivated violence and promote civil rights. Third, we conducted 20 interviews, 6 with victims of hate crime (or bias-motivated discrimination) and 14 with professionals dealing with victims of hate crime (or bias-motivated discrimination) within their work. Some of the interviewed professionals were themselves victims of hate crime or bias-motivated discrimination prior to becoming experts in the field they work in currently. Thus, some of the 14 interviewed professionals were at some point also victims. The research confirmed the assumption that the criminal justice system as such is not victim-centred. The transposition of the Victims' Directive only took place in 2019. While the law on criminal procedure now defines the victims' rights more comprehensively, the shift in the perception by all stakeholders has not yet fully taken place. Once the prescribed rights of all victims of crime are fully respected, the position of hate crime victims will also consequently improve. However, as our research has shown, authorities often do not recognise that a crime was hate or bias-motivated and subsequently do not prosecute it accordingly. Furthermore, victims of hate crime are particularly vulnerable and often suffer from stereotype-fuelled secondary victimisation during the proceedings. Thus, much more focused training is needed for all professionals (those working in public institutions as well as those working in CSOs) encountering victims of hate crime within the scope of their work. And especially, much more focus should be put on an intersectional approach. As the research proves, this has multiplicative negative effects on victims of hate crime or bias-motivated discrimination, however the institutions very often completely overlook this. A successful criminal trial can be extremely important for victims who come from marginalised groups, so it is really important that all authorities are properly trained and cannot afford to make mistakes. Another assumption that was confirmed through our research, is the lack of trust in public institutions. All of the victims pointed this out, as well as professionals working in CSOs.

ABSTRACTS

Melike Akkaraca Kose, PhD
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ETHNIC SLURS AND INTERNATIONAL DISPUTES

This paper analyses the use of ethnic slurs for the political actors in the context of international disputes. An ethnic slur as a type of hate speech refers to a remark or statement designed to defame, vilify, belittle, and insult members of a racial or ethnic group, usually by those who are not members of that racial or ethnic group (Rodale 1986). On the other hand, this paper focuses on the use of ethnic slurs for derogating political figures and intellectuals in Turkey, who are not members of concerned ethnic groups. In the case of Turkey and its foreign policy, ethnic slurs play out at intersections between ethnic minorities and a relevant country, such as Greeks/ 'Rums' and Greece. The paper shows how ethnic slurs is a significant element of enemification strategy targeting certain in group members by recategorizing them as members of hostile out groups. Ethnic slurs exclude their targets by portraying them as 'internal enemies' or 'Trojan horse' hostile to the nation. In return, ethnic slurs encourage and justify the hostility and other violent feelings among loyal nation members towards these 'internal enemies.' Lastly, this paper discusses how ethnic slurs, within the context of social identity and through the case of Turkish politics, are instrumentalized in antagonistic populist discourse by depicting the opposition groups including the politicians and dissenting intellectuals as external to the nation due to their rupture from the identity-defining norms.

ABSTRACTS

Marta Stojić Mitrović, PhD

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HATE SPEECH BETWEEN SPECTACLES AND SILENCE: PEOPLE ON THE MOVE IN SERBIA

From sporadic “Not in My Backyard” protests before the 2015 “Long Summer of Migration” to “Grand Replacement Theory” dominating social networks and protests in 2019 and culminating in 2020, or from Serbian officials depicting persons on the move as “refugees” in 2015, to “the Asian bandits and scum” and “those whom no one in the EU wants” in later periods, the importance of migration in public discourse and daily political life in national as well international arena, drastically changed in 15 years. In this text, I will offer a diachronic overview of different instances of hate speech targeting persons on the move in Serbia. These will showcase the thread of anti-migrant narratives and practices moving between the extremes of occasional, situational, local and marginal occurrences to dominant, nation-wide, organised and normalised way of speaking and treating people on the move. I will describe specific narratives and tropes disseminated in social media, on anti-migrant/anti-government protests and in political campaigns of certain politicians. In addition, I will present a series of spectacles of arresting, encamping and physically restraining persons on the move inside the camps intentionally spread to the wider public by state officials. Anti-migrant narratives, tropes and spectacles are pragmatic acts, performed in specific settings to specific audiences. As such, they reveal the worlding, that is by the pragmatic act itself creating an image of the world, of an understanding of the current state of affairs, in which the narrative, trope or spectacle can only make sense and be justifiable. However, as pragmatic acts, they also reveal the dynamics between the parties, performers and the audiences. In this equation, persons on the move are rendered as mere objects, dehumanised, voiceless props in power games, deprived of any agency beyond having a physical body which occupies a certain space and to which meanings can be inscribed. Normalised dehumanisation, voicelessness and imagining and treating persons as objects invites another layer of violence: systemic, institutionalised brutality done in silence, through “creative” readings of the existing laws or ensuing regularisation of the extra-legal practices. Systemic and structurally embedded distance, lack of empathy and mercilessness toward certain foreigners equals standardised, formalised and exactly by that invisibilized hate speech, with perlocutionary force to express and encourage violence by state authorities towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex, or national origin.

ABSTRACTS

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and
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THE IMPACT OF THE SLOVENIAN SUPREME COURT "HATE SPEECH" DECISION ON PROSECUTORIAL PRACTICE

Case law of the Slovenian Supreme Court on "incitement to hatred, violence, and intolerance" is scarce and yearly there are only a handful of convictions for this crime in Slovenia. The prosecutorial and judicial practice in this field has been criticised by various scholars as being too lenient towards the perpetrators, being too highly observant of the freedom of expression, and inconsistent with the Penal Code. Hence the 2019 decision of the Supreme Court, which clarified certain legal conditions for criminal prosecution, was received with expectations that it would increase the number of indictments and convictions. Research has been conducted to analyse 99 case files of State Prosecutor's Offices to assess the possible changes in the prosecutorial and judicial practice following the 2019 judgement. The preliminary findings show the influence of the judgement is weak and limited to manners in which legal assessment of the cases is done. However, it is not particularly visible in the outcomes of the prosecution and adjudication. In the presentation, the general findings of the research will be presented, while the influence of the judgement will also be discussed in the context of the most interesting individual cases.