On May 9, 2017, Europe Day, a date chosen as a sign of goodwill for the future of Europe, a group of philosophers, linguists, historians, political scientists and media experts, coming from Belgium, France, Greece, Iceland, Norway, Poland, and Italy of course, gathered in Genoa (Italy) to debate *The Rhetoric of Prejudice.* The subtitle of the Conference, which should not to be overlooked, posed a crucial question: *can Europe still be inclusive?*

Opening the conference on Europe Day was presumed to have a symbolic flavour, seventy years after the Treaty of Rome. A choice that marked the will to strengthen the ties of an already-existing scholarly network, the aim of which lies in the mutual exchange of cultural and academic concerns, in order to face without hypocrisies and restraints social and political topics, however unpleasant they may be.

The conference has been conceived as the first step of a research path which involves a larger network of scholars, from Northern and Southern, Eastern and Western Europe. In fact, this group has proposed to the European Commission a Cost action on *Discourses of violence and peaceful persuasion: new and past Rhetoric in Europe,* as a useful instrument to tackle the language of violent propaganda, a major challenge for Europe today. More specifically, the Action wishes to provide a comparative analysis of the patterns of both violent rhetoric and peaceful communication, in order to identify their core-principles and offer recommendations and strategies to everyone confronted with these phenomena in the public sphere (political journalists, policymakers engaged in educational and cultural policies, teachers, civil servants, social workers, NGO's operators and International public organizations).

We believe that only an international and inter-disciplinary network will lead to a thorough comprehension of the political, religious, and philosophical roots of the persuasive arguments that, having a strong impact on social imaginary and historical narratives, seem to justify violence or, the other way around, can lead the audience to recognize the value of peaceful communication.

The inquiry has started with the meeting in Genoa and tried to trigger a free and balanced debate on language and its relations with power and society. More than ever, we focused on the multiple misgivings caused by the distorted and discriminative use of language, though conscious or unconscious.

The topic was "prejudice", and there's no need to remind that an abundant and eclectic literature has been produced on the issue, in the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology and philosophy of science in 20th century, from Adorno and his eminent theories to Allport, Tajfel and Teun van Dijk, just to name the best-known scholars.

As a first step, looking at a bunch of national dictionaries could help us to grasp what prejudice is; or better, how it is defined in various contexts.

In Italian: *Giudizio basato su opinioni precostituite e su stati d'animo irrazionali, anziché sull'esperienza e sulla conoscenza diretta* (*Il Sabatini Coletti. Dizionario della lingua italiana*).

In French: *Jugement sur quelqu'un, quelque chose, qui est formé à l'avance selon certains critères personnels et qui oriente en bien ou en mal les dispositions d'esprit à l'égard de cette personne, de cette chose* (*Dictionnaire de Français Larousse online*).

In English: *An unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge* (*Cambridge Dictionary* online).

So: lack of knowledge, experience, rationality, critical skills...

If we were to "limit" ourselves to a strictly philosophical approach, we could face the question reassessing the legacy, so to say, of the Enlightenment or Hermeneutics. According to the Enlightenment approach, we can assume that reason, in its path towards the truth, must get rid of prejudices as well as any other sort of deceitful knowledge available beforehand. But we could also deem prejudices, in the way Gadamer did, as the unavoidable starting point of any enquiry on the world and its structure. In fact, Gadamer's treatment of prejudice is by far more moderate and "liquid":

Actually 'prejudice' means a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined. […] Thus 'prejudice' certainly does not mean necessarily a false judgment, but part of the idea is that it can have either a positive or a negative value (Gadamer 2004: 308).

We could also think that prejudice should not be challenged upon a rigorously rational ground, when emotions play a role in the definition of its cognitive value. More than ever since we are equally interested in the output: how prejudice is expressed and its impact on a relational, social and political level.

Here, moreover, other actors enter the scene, namely the study of language and communication: what about the various means of expressing prejudices – verbal, visual, physical etc.? Does a rhetoric of prejudice really exist? Do we rely on a typical verbal or visual form to express our prejudices? What is more, do we emphasize improperly our *negative* prejudices?

This issue is particularly important, because the rhetoric of prejudice and the logic of exclusion are strictly connected. If we want to think anew the European societies as societies of inclusion, we must pay close attention to language, to the different types of narratives through which negative prejudices are expressed.

Prejudice is grounded on the absence of recognition as far as identity is involved. Such a lack of recognition denounces not merely the want of a shared history, but, focusing on the existence of a small community, our common heritage and the same belonging to mankind. Any co-identity is forbidden when it comes to prejudice; what we face, here, is the rejection of co-identity, even as an option.

So if we could come close to unveil the rhetorical tools of prejudice, we could also fight prejudice by means of a "good" rhetoric, apt to "resolve the problem itself of prejudice".

The rhetorical analysis of prejudice has a large space of inquiry: cultural industry and media produce and reproduce a set of diffused prejudices; the discourses of political leaders are often embedded with prejudices; through everyday language and, in the present tense, from blogs and social networks, harmful sentences filled with words of hate and racial, sexual, ethnic, religious prejudice bounce in the net, as well as just till the newest shape prejudice has picked up, the one which points the finger against experts in the fields of politics, science, medicine, education, media...

Once the ruling classes were highly influential in the production and diffusion alike of

prejudices; today, though, elites experience a great loss of fortune and guidance, being followed, or even recognized, no more by public opinion. The leading role has passed to the web-based influencers, who seem not to violate the horizontal power-structure streaming from the net. All in all, public discourse itself apparently has become flat, so that popular judgment, instead of public opinion, is feared of.

We should wonder whether it be feasible to fight this state of affairs, triggered by what I would call "horizontal prejudices", by means of a rhetorical strategy embodied in daily acts of non-racism, non-anti-Semitism, non-homophobia, non-misogyny etc., where the moral and linguistic extents are inextricably tied up, which means resisting those prejudices stationing inside of us as well.

Adhering to this view, the distinguished scholars in rhetoric and argumentation, history of philosophy, social ethics and political science attending the Conference have delivered their papers, a first group of which is published here.

The congress got started with the prolusion of Maria Zaleska, associate professor at the University of Warsaw, Department of Italian Studies, and president of the Polish Rhetoric Society, who stressed the crucial role of rhetoric and the need to depict a "good rhetoric" through a novel appreciation of its theoretical and methodological stances (please note that her contribution will have to be uploaded at a later stage than the others). A road alike was taken by Victor Ferry, a member of the *Groupe de Rhétorique et Argumentation Linguistique* at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*, a network of scholars who try to rejuvenate the teaching of Chaim Perelman. Dr. Ferry has argued that precise argumentative techniques could be used, as revealed by multiple experiences of high-school and college students groups, to soften social habits and teach people mutual respect, when it comes to ideas and values so different to seem irreconcilable.

Carlo Penco, professor of philosophy of language at the University of Genoa, has focused, by his side, on non-offensive language as a means of self-discipline: in the steps of the Italian philosopher Flavio Baroncelli, former professor of moral and political philosophy at the University of Genoa, Penco maintained that the collapse of any distinction of the public and

private spheres in the field of communication, most noticeably in social media, threatens the same role of non-offensive language as a tool of respect and appropriateness. New media and technology, then, challenge us all to find original solutions to overcome negative prejudices.

The freedom-attaining potential of language by means of a close dialogue between reason and emotions has found its way in the paper of professor Paola de Cuzzani, of the University of Bergen, who provided the audience with an interesting and innovative reading of Spinoza. While Dr. Hans Marius Hansteen (University of Bergen) has compared Adorno's theory of authoritarian behaviour to Paul Ricoeur's main theses. In so doing, he has revealed how ideology, utopianism and prejudice share a possibly common ground when we deal with an identity-driven utopia which leads to a sort of dis-humanizing rejection of the Other.

Pascal Nouvel, professor at the University of Tours – François Rabelais, by his side has proposed an interesting, new tool to explore the logic of prejudice: the analysis of inner discourse in classic, award-winning novels. Quite an extraordinary example of this method has been presented by Nouvel in his reading of the inner speech of detestation in some pages of *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust.

We have seen, so far, that the pluralistic nature of the approaches has allowed us to debate the rhetoric of privilege in nearly every distinctive feature. The same applies to the papers more centered on the social relevance of prejudice, as to philosophy, politics and the media. There is no need to say that the very idea of prejudice retains a strong impact on political culture, public communication and policy-enhancing: Giorgio Baruchello, professor at the University of Akureyri, offered a provocative though persuading study of Donald Trump's political rhetoric through the lens of Richard Rorty's vision, while Dr. Alberto Giordano (University of Genoa) has emphasized the fact that contemporary populists set up their discourse around some fixed patterns such as the worship of the people, an inner appeal to prejudice and the rhetoric of privilege.

The conference closed with a stimulating paper centered on the ambiguous and often dangerous liaison between prejudices and media: Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), indeed, has wondered how much both traditional and new media

increase or fight prejudices, relying on their peculiar lexical and narrative choices in the Greek political context.

In the end, while countries like Greece and in Italy, but it might be said the whole Southern Europe, must confront with dramatic choices all along the refugee and migrant crisis, the scholars who attended the Conference agreed on the reflection that the way in which old and new media handle the story of migrants and refugees could be a good starting point to question the topic of prejudice in our countries. Would it be enough to fight the rhetoric of fear and build anew an inclusive Europe?

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