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THE RHETORIC OF EXCLUSION: WORD, VICTIM, AND PUBLIC VIOLENCE – FROM ANCIENT BANISHMENT TO DIGITAL EXECUTION

This article presents a philosophical analysis of the rhetoric of exclusion as a specific form of public violence that operates primarily through speech acts and does not require institutional legitimation, formal recognition, or ritual procedure. The study proceeds from the central premise that public violence emerges within the domain of language, which gradually loses its dialogical nature, ceases to function as a medium of communication, and becomes an instrument for assigning guilt, designating the “superfluous”, and delivering a verdict without the possibility of appeal. In such a configuration, the subject remains visible and present within the public sphere, yet is entirely deprived of the capacity to respond, thereby transforming ordinary aggression into symbolic, public, and irreversible violence.

The theoretical framework combines several key concepts: J. L. Austin’s theory of speech acts, P. Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence, M. Foucault’s analysis of discursive power and normalization, and R. Girard’s theory of the sacrificial mechanism and scapegoating. On this basis, the article traces the historical transformation of practices of exclusion – from ancient institutionalized forms (ostracism, the ritual of the *pharmakos*, the trial and execution of Socrates), in which violence was structured by procedure, collective responsibility, and symbolic closure, to contemporary decentralized rhetorical regimes operating within digital public space. Particular attention is paid to how, in the digital era, violence loses the character of a discrete event with a defined subject, beginning, and end, while retaining high effectiveness through distributed responsibility, collective silence, strategies of non-involvement, and the mechanisms of cancel culture, which operate through repetition, archiving, and the continuous reactivation of the past.

The central methodological principle of the study is *politropicity*, drawn from the Homeric tradition and interpreted through the figure of Odysseus. *Politropicity* refers not to cleverness or deceit, but rather to the ability to navigate complex situations where speaking plainly can be risky and language serves as a tool for control and manipulation. It constitutes a strategy for preserving meaning, subjectivity, and the possibility of return under conditions in which speech ceases to be dialogical and becomes a unilateral act of designation. The figure of Odysseus thus functions not merely as a literary image, but as a principle of thought and resistance, enabling passage through zones of exclusion without accepting their rules as final.

The conclusion argues that the philosophical analysis of the rhetoric of exclusion does not offer moral prescriptions or protective strategies but performs a crucial function of resistance: the restoration of distinctions between speech and verdict, aggression and violence, silence and neutrality, presence, and inclusion. It is precisely the capacity to distinguish and to name the mechanisms of public violence that renders them visible, prevents their naturalization as a “natural” order of things, and opens a space for critical reflection in conditions where publicity increasingly functions as an instrument of selection and exclusion without acknowledging its own destructive force.

Keywords: *rhetoric, violence, politropicity, Odysseus, cancel culture, sacrificial mechanism, discursive power.*

Public violence rarely begins with a blow. More often, it begins with speech – uttered in such a way that any response to it becomes impossible [Austin, 1962; Butler, 1997]. In such moments, the word ceases to perform its classical function as a mediator between people. It no longer persuades, clarifies, or connects. It assigns the guilty, the superfluous, the unfit. It assigns a figure around which collective tension suddenly crystallizes. Speech, while retaining the outward form

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of communication, loses its essence and begins to operate as a verdict. This transition – from speech as dialogue to speech as an act of exclusion – constitutes the object of the present study.

At this moment, a rupture emerges: the person is still in the public space, still visible and audible, yet already deprived of the possibility of responding [Arendt, 1958]. Their presence becomes one-sided: they are the object of the statement, but not its subject. It is precisely at this point that aggression ceases to be a private effect and acquires the features of violence – not necessarily physical, but public, symbolic, and irreversible [Bourdieu, 1991].

However, such a rupture is not an invention of modernity. It merely exposes a structure long present in collective forms of existence. Human communities have repeatedly encountered situations in which direct speech proved impossible or mortally dangerous, and the literal name became a vulnerability. Under such conditions, survival did not favor those who spoke louder or more purely, but those who were able to move within meaning, altering its form without destroying its direction. The ancient tradition preserved a special word for this – *polytropic* (in Homer, the *Odyssey* opens with the formula: ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον... “Sing to me, Muse, of the polytropic man...” πολύτροπος / *polytropos*) [Homer, 1996]. It denotes neither cunning nor deception, but the capacity for multiple turns: for changing voice, role, name, and mode of presence depending on the dangers of the environment. Polytrophy in this context signifies not a multiplicity of opinions, but a multiplicity of turns of meaning. The root *poly* points not to eclecticism, but to an excess of forms of presence – the capacity of the subject not to coincide with a single name, role, or position. The term *tropos* essentially represents the act of turning – a subtle change that maintains meaning without making it vulnerable to direct criticism. In rhetorics, this turn is conducted through tropes – not merely as ornaments of speech, but as techniques of semantic navigation. Metaphors grasp the essence through a compressed comparison, allowing truth to be held in a condensed form where direct naming becomes untenable. Metonymic packages multiplicity, making it possible to speak of a structure through an element without exposing the whole. Periphrasis displaces the name, replacing direct designation with a circumlocutory description and thereby deflecting the strike of literalness; in its extreme forms, it unfolds into euphemism and dysphemism, shifting the affective load without altering the factual content. Antiphrasis – from irony to asteism – creates a semantic gap between what is said and what is meant, enabling presence without consent. Polytrophy thus appears as the capacity to move within language without coinciding with its condemning directness. Polytrophy is not opposed to truth; it is opposed to the violence of directness that deprives truth of the possibility of being heard. In this sense, the figure of Odysseus emerges not as a literary character, but as a limiting form (a second?) of navigation in a world where speech is capable of killing. He is not a hero of direct utterance and does not claim moral self-evidence. His path is one of detour, delay, mask, and translation – a path in which the preservation of meaning is possible only at the cost of abandoning literalness.

It is precisely such a polytropic logic – a logic of capture and turning, of movement between speech and silence, between name and hint, between presence and disappearance – that becomes key to the analysis of contemporary forms of public violence. In a world where the word loses its dialogical structure and turns into a verdict, directness ceases to be a virtue. Meaning here is not transmitted – it is either surrendered voluntarily or taken by force. In this context, Polytrophy appears not as a strategy of evasion and not as a technique of survival, but as a form of return: the return of meaning from the zone of capture, where it has already been declared a trophy and turned against the one who dared to speak. Historically, such forms of exclusion rarely arose spontaneously. They were institutionalized and formalized as recognized violence: the ritual of the *pharmakos*, ancient ostracism, the execution of Socrates – all presupposed a procedure, a ritual, and a collective responsibility for what was being done [Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988; Girard, 1977]. Violence was called by its name and thus, for all its cruelty, remained an event with a beginning and an end. Contemporary practices of exclusion seek precisely to dispense with this recognition. They proceed without ritual, without trial, and

without a final act that would allow what has occurred to be brought to completion [Arendt, 1963]. Responsibility is dispersed, yet the victim does not disappear.

Under the conditions of digital modernity, public speech retains the capacity to exclude but loses the necessity of acknowledging its own destructive force [Han, 2017]. The rhetorical act – a shout, an accusation, a viral utterance – operates like a boarding action: sudden, asymmetrical, and not oriented toward negotiation. It requires no proof and does not need a formulated charge. Its task is neither to persuade nor to refute, but to seize the space of the permissible [Butler, 1997]. In this process, a person is neither expelled nor definitively condemned; rather, they are gradually deprived of the right to return, becoming an impermissible figure without a formal verdict. Thus, the problem lies not in the aggression of speech itself, nor in the increasing conflictuality of the public sphere. What becomes crucial is the moment at which speech, having lost its dialogical structure, begins to function as a mechanism of sacrifice that does not recognize itself as such [Girard, 1986]. The transition from word to violence, from argument to verdict, from dispute to capture, allows contemporary forms of exclusion to be understood not as a historical novelty, but as a transformation of an older tradition – a tradition in which violence no longer requires a name, and the victim emerges as a byproduct of the movement of collective language [Foucault, 1977].

In conditions where the public sphere is increasingly saturated with flashes of aggression, the social response to them undergoes a noticeable transformation. The repetition of acts of symbolic violence – shouts, accusations, public humiliations – does not lead to increased sensitivity and does not produce an effect of saturation [Bourdieu, 1991]. On the contrary, it forms a stable practice of evasion. Aggression ceases to be perceived as an event and begins to function as background. What becomes dominant is neither a stance of condemnation nor a readiness to resist, but a strategy of non-involvement: the main thing is not to be noticed, not to be next, not to enter the frame.

Within this regime, silence loses its status as a neutral pause. It acquires a functional significance and becomes a condition for the reproduction of rhetorical violence [Arendt, 1963]. The public act of exclusion becomes possible not so much because of the force of the accuser, but because of the absence of an immediate collective response. The community does not pronounce the verdict directly and does not initiate expulsion as a formal act. It provides violence with its medium – a dispersed, anonymous, outwardly non-violent environment in which each individual participant retains the possibility of saying that they were merely “passing by” [Foucault, 1977].

It is precisely in such an environment that the figure who becomes the object of public speech remains in view, yet loses the support of the horizon [Arendt, 1958]. The person is still present, but no longer included; still visible, but no longer recognized as an interlocutor. The camera continues to register their presence, yet the sound gradually disappears. Response becomes not prohibited, but excessive – and therefore impossible. At this point, exclusion is conducted without gesture and without word, as a slow drift beyond the limits of the permissible [Agamben, 1998].

Such a dynamic fundamentally distinguishes contemporary forms of exclusion from historically institutionalized practices. Where violence was previously acknowledged and formalized in the form of ritual, procedure, or judicial act, it retained the form of an event with a beginning and an end [Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988]. Today, however, violence is increasingly enacted as a discursive process that requires neither formal consent nor subsequent reflection [Foucault, 1972]. Responsibility is dispersed among participants, while the effect of a verdict is achieved without trial, without witnesses, and without a decisive point that would allow what has occurred to be named as concluded [Arendt, 1963].

Within this dispersed scene, the figure of Odysseus appears and disappears. He is not an active participant in the conflict, but a point of delay. He neither intervenes nor objects. He observes, remembers, and waits for the moment when direct speech becomes more dangerous than silence, and stepping into the light becomes premature. His polytropy here is neither a

gesture nor a strategy, but a form of temporary absence that allows him neither to dissolve entirely into the noise nor to be captured by the first verdict that arises.

The relevance of analyzing the rhetoric of exclusion is thus determined not so much by the growth of aggression as such, but by changes in the ways it is socially accepted and distributed [Foucault, 1977]. The repetition of public acts of humiliation and exclusion ceases to be perceived as an anomaly and begins to function as a mechanism of normalization [Bourdieu, 1991]. The fear of being noticed, marked, named loses its character as an exceptional experience and becomes the background of public existence [Han, 2017]. The danger lies not in the individual blow, but in the very possibility of a blow, constantly present and requiring no occasion.

Under these conditions, public speech increasingly functions not as a space of dialogue nor as a form of shared reflection, but as an instrument of selection [Butler, 1997]. It neither persuades nor refutes – it separates. The permissible from the impermissible, the visible from the displaced, the safe from what is to be removed [Foucault, 1972]. Speech here operates like a maritime inspection: without asking questions, without entering into negotiations, it checks belonging and decides who may continue the journey and who will be stopped and left overboard. For this reason, the analysis of rhetorical mechanisms of exclusion becomes necessary for understanding contemporary forms of public violence, in which the victim emerges not as the result of a collective decision, but as a byproduct of collective silence and the tacit agreement “not to intervene” [Arendt, 1963].

The problematics of public exclusion, sacrifice, and violence possess a long and multilayered history of philosophical reflection. From analyses of ancient political and legal practices [Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988] to contemporary studies of language, power, and ideology [Foucault, 1972; Bourdieu, 1991], various aspects of the mechanism of exclusion have repeatedly become objects of theoretical inquiry. Yet, despite the richness of this field, one crucial point remains insufficiently clarified: how a rhetorical act can function as a form of public violence that does not recognize itself as violence and therefore requires neither justification nor responsibility [Butler, 1997]. It is precisely here that a different analytical move becomes necessary – not the description of violence as an event, but its tracing as a movement. A movement in which meanings are neither proposed nor discussed but captured and redistributed; in which the public space turns into a zone of constant inspection; in which return loses its self-evidence and becomes a problem. In this perspective, the figure of Odysseus appears as a principle of thought: a principle of polytropic engagement with meaning, capable of passing through zones of exclusion without accepting their rules as final.

The history of the philosophical reflection on exile, sacrifice, and violence does not form a straight line and does not coalesce into a single theory. Rather, it resembles a set of navigational techniques accumulated at separate times and for different conditions of sailing. Each of them answers not the question “what is violence”, but the question “how does it pass through a community without naming itself”. Ancient forms of exile and sacrifice registered violence as an event: it had a place, a procedure, and a name [Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988]. The polis knew what it was doing and acknowledged its own participation. Yet precisely in this recognition, violence remained localized and therefore limited. The contemporary public sphere operates differently: violence loses the form of an event and turns into a regime that requires neither announcement nor completion [Foucault, 1977]. Its analysis cannot rely on a single optic – it requires polytropic navigation. The theory of the sacrificial mechanism developed by René Girard provides a powerful sail for understanding why a community repeatedly requires a figure capable of absorbing collective tension [Girard, 1977]. However, under the conditions of a secular and digital world, this mechanism is deprived of its ritual form and therefore ceases to be recognizable as sacrifice. The victim emerges, but the victim is not named. The works of Michel Foucault make it possible to see how violence is distributed within the tissues of discourse without requiring a centralized subject [Foucault, 1972]. Power here operates not through command and prohibition, but through the production of norms of the permissible, within which

exclusion becomes a consequence rather than a decision. The diary writings of Victor Klemperer show how language is capable of gradually shifting the boundaries of thought without resorting to coercion [Klemperer, 2000]. Violence in this case is not imposed – it is assimilated as habit, as a form of speech that requires no reflection. Finally, Jacques Ellul's analyses of technique and language make it possible to register the autonomy of rhetorical processes, governed by their own logic of efficiency and reproduction [Ellul, 1964; Ellul, 1973]. In such an environment, the word ceases to be an instrument of the subject and begins to function as a medium through which the subject passes without controlling its direction. These approaches do not form a unified theory and cannot be reduced to a common denominator. Yet it is precisely in their irreducibility that their methodological value lies. They offer unusual ways of holding a course: a sail that allows one to catch the wind of collective tension; oars necessary in complete calm; a chart of shoals where the word most easily turns into a verdict. Polytrophy here signifies not eclecticism and not arbitrary borrowing, but the capacity to move between modes of analysis without losing direction. The figure of Odysseus in this context appears not as a metaphor and not as a narrative frame, but as a principle of assembling a method. He knows when to raise the sails and when to accept the oars; when to take the wind and when to move against it, when to board meaning and when to let it pass by. It is precisely such polytropic navigation that makes it possible to analyze public violence not as a static structure, but as a movement in which return remains open, even if not guaranteed.

As a result, the question remains insufficiently clarified as to how the word, having lost its dialogical function, acquires the force of public violence that requires neither formal recognition nor institutionalization. This transition – from “speech as exchange” to “speech as capture” – eludes comprehensive analysis precisely because it does not take shape as an event. In contemporary forms of exclusion, the victim emerges not as the result of a collective decision and not as a consequence of a conscious choice, but as an effect of dispersed social silence, in which no one gives the order, yet each steps back.

Despite the extensive tradition of philosophical reflection on sacrifice, violence, and power, the rhetorical dimension of exclusion remains conceptually blurred. It is often dissolved either in the analysis of institutions, in the critique of ideology, or in the description of media effects. Yet it is precisely here – in the zone of transition from word to verdict, from utterance to exclusion – that a specific mechanism of public violence is formed, one that does not recognize itself as such and therefore encounters no resistance [Butler, 1997]. This creates the need to consider the rhetoric of exclusion as an autonomous analytical object, one that combines elements of ancient sacrificial practices and contemporary discursive forms of power yet cannot be reduced to either.

The aim of the present study is a philosophical analysis of the rhetoric of exclusion as a form of public violence operating outside institutionalized procedures and not requiring its own acknowledgment. The focus is not on identifying the intentions or motivations of participants in public conflicts, but on clarifying the structural conditions under which the word begins to function as a means of social removal and to reproduce sacrificial logic in an environment devoid of ritual and finality [Girard, 1986].

To achieve this aim, the study is structured as a navigation between several analytical regimes, each of which performs the function of a distinct element of rigging:

1. The analysis of ancient forms of public exclusion and sacrifice (ostracism, the *pharmakos*, judicial execution) makes it possible to establish the initial model of recognized violence – a model in which the victim was named, the procedure was formalized, and the collective assumed responsibility for what was taking place [Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988].
2. The examination of transformations of public violence under conditions of late modernity reveals the transition from institutionally fixed practices of expulsion to decentralized rhetorical forms of exclusion, in which violence loses its event-character and becomes a regime [Foucault, 1977].

3. Engagement with key philosophical concepts of language, power, and sacrifice makes it possible to trace how exclusion is produced not through direct coercion, but through the discursive distribution of the permissible and the impermissible, the visible and the displaced [Foucault, 1972; Bourdieu, 1991].
4. The analysis of silent consent and social non-involvement reveals them not as byproducts, but as functional conditions for the reproduction of rhetorical violence in contemporary forms of public communication [Arendt, 1963].
5. Finally, the justification of the structural necessity of the figure of the victim in the contemporary public sphere makes it possible to show that the loss of ritual and legal forms does not eliminate sacrificial logic, but renders it less discernible and therefore more stable.

The methodological foundation of the study is composed of a combination of several analytical approaches, used not as universal keys, but as instruments for different segments of the path. Hermeneutic analysis makes it possible to work with historical and philosophical texts in which forms of recognized violence are recorded; discursive analysis – to identify the mechanisms by which the rhetorical act functions in the public sphere; comparative analysis – to juxtapose ancient and contemporary practices of exclusion; phenomenologically oriented description – to register shifts in the structure of public communication; conceptual analysis – to maintain distinctions between key concepts, preventing them from collapsing into rhetorical noise. Polytrophy in this sense signifies not eclecticism and not relativism, but the capacity to hold a course in an environment where the very structure of speech ceases to be reliable, where directness often entails losing one's way, and where return is never guaranteed.

It is precisely under such conditions that a shift becomes possible – one that affects the very foundation of public speech. Speech initially presupposes an addressee, the possibility of response, and, at its limit, dialogue [Austin, 1962]. However, in an environment where responsibility is dispersed and publicity loses its event-character, this structure is disrupted. The word ceases to be an address and begins to function as an act of assignment – no longer explaining, but fixing; no longer inviting a response, but preemptively depriving it of possibility [Butler, 1997]. This transition requires no formal legitimation and is not framed as a decision. On the contrary, it unfolds imperceptibly, within the space of everyday communication, where the distinction between speech and action becomes blurred. The utterance does not appear as a deed and therefore is not experienced as an act of responsibility. Publicity in this regime does not amplify the speaking subject, but dissolves it: what is said seems to belong to everyone and therefore to no one in particular [Arendt, 1958]. As a result, the word begins to operate without an owner and without an addressee. It circulates, repeats, intensifies, yet does not return to the speaker in the form of a response. The figure of Odysseus in such a space is significant not as an image of resistance, but as the capacity to move within a language that no longer guarantees either an addressee, or a response, or a return.

The assigning word produces an effect of immediate simplification of social reality. The multiplicity of interactions, the ambiguity of roles, and the contextuality of relations are reduced to a single feature that is declared decisive [Bourdieu, 1991]. This feature, as a rule, takes on a bodily or symbolically bodily form – which is precisely why it proves so effective. The bodily is easily imagined, difficult to refute, and perceived as given. In the rhetorical act of exclusion, corporeality begins to function as a form of evidence that requires no proof [Butler, 2004].

The force of such an act lies not in argumentation, but in fixation. It neither persuades nor explains – it fixes, stabilizes, and cements [Austin, 1962]. The accusation becomes convincing not because it is substantiated, but because it concentrates an excess of situational tension on a single element [Girard, 1977]. In this case, rhetoric does not describe a violation but constructs a figure onto which responsibility for what is happening can be transferred. This is precisely why any response to such an utterance becomes structurally impossible: any attempt at explanation is read as justification, and any disagreement as confirmation of the already assigned guilt. At this moment, public speech definitively loses its dialogical symmetry [Arendt, 1958]. One of the

participants in communication is deprived of the status of a speaker, while remaining the object of public discussion. Social exclusion is carried out not through formal prohibition and not through expulsion, but through a rhetorical redistribution of roles, as a result of which one participant loses the right to participate in communication itself [Foucault, 1972].

It is important to emphasize that rhetorical violence does not necessarily take the form of direct accusation. On the contrary, one of its most effective forms is the redistribution of attention, whereby the figure of the victim gradually loses the status of the harmed party and begins to be perceived as the source of the event [Girard, 1986]. In this case, speech does not directly justify violence, but rewrites its structure, altering the distribution of roles and shifting the locus of responsibility.

A classic example of such a shift is forensic rhetoric, where speech is initially endowed with the legitimate power to influence the interpretation of facts [Austin, 1962]. An advocate's speech may not deny the fact of violence itself, yet it can consistently transfer responsibility from the act to the circumstances, from the subject to the situation, and ultimately – to the victim. Rhetoric here operates not through falsehood, but through selection: from a complex and multilayered event, a single element is extracted and declared key and explanatory of everything else, while context, asymmetry of power, and the irreversibility of the act are gradually displaced to the periphery of collective perception [Foucault, 1972].

The specificity of such a rhetorical mechanism lies in the fact that it does not require a direct accusation of the victim. It is sufficient to present them as an initiating figure – a source of affect, temptation, or a fatal conjunction of circumstances. In this case, responsibility shifts from the act to the very presence of the victim, which begins to be interpreted as provoking or dangerous [Girard, 1986]. Such rhetoric may be formally impeccable: it relies on logic, psychological generalizations, cultural stereotypes, and aesthetic images. This is precisely why it proves so persuasive – violence here is justified not in spite of rationality, but with its active participation.

As a result, rhetoric is capable not only of defending or accusing, but also of producing the victim post factum, rewriting their status in collective consciousness. The victim comes to be not the one “to whom it was done”, but the one “because of whom it happened”. The fact of violence is not denied, yet it loses its unambiguity, which opens the space for its social acceptance.

The rhetorical act of exclusion does not possess stability of its own. In order to produce its effect, it requires a specific social environment – a space in which what is said can be accepted without immediate resistance. Publicity in this context functions not as a guarantee of transparency, but as a condition for the dispersion of responsibility, in which no individual participant becomes the bearer of the decision, yet the aggregate of silences makes exclusion possible [Arendt, 1963].

In situations of public humiliation or accusation, decisive is not only the content of the utterance, but also the structure of the response – including its absence. Silence, refusal to intervene, demonstrative neutrality form an environment in which the rhetorical act acquires social validity. Violence here is neither directly supported nor openly contested; this alone suffices for it to become fixed and continue to operate. Such silence is neither accidental nor spontaneous. It is motivated and functional. As a rule, it is conditioned by fear of involvement, concern about losing one's own position, or reluctance to become the next object of exclusion. As a result, the public space becomes filled not with solidarity or resistance, but with a cautious quiet that outwardly appears as neutrality, yet in fact performs a stabilizing role [Arendt, 1958].

Under these conditions, responsibility for what is happening loses its localization. No subject emerges who can be unequivocally named as the initiator of violence. The rhetorical act is carried out not through someone's decision, but through a coordinated absence of objections [Foucault, 1977]. Publicity, deprived of responsive speech, begins to function as a resonator: it amplifies the force of the accusation while simultaneously freeing those present from the need to take a position. Such a configuration fundamentally differs from institutional forms of violence,

which presuppose clearly defined roles, procedures, and decision points. Here, violence is not carried out in a formally fixed order and does not require acknowledgment. It arises as a byproduct of communication in which each participant retains the possibility of distancing themselves from what is happening, asserting their own non-involvement. Thus, silence ceases to be a reaction and becomes a structural element of rhetorical violence [Bourdieu, 1991]. It ensures the reproduction of exclusion without the need for consent, approval, or conscious participation. In this logic, exclusion is carried out not through collective decision, but through collective evasion of responsibility – a form of joint action that does not recognize itself as such [Arendt, 1963].

Digital publicity radically transforms the conditions under which rhetorical violence operates, without thereby creating a fundamentally new mechanism. On the contrary, it intensifies already existing structures, translating them into a mode of accelerated and dispersed reproduction [Han, 2017]. What previously required physical presence, a shared space, and immediate response now unfolds in an environment where publicity is deprived of bodily proportionality, and responsibility of temporal duration.

Under conditions of digital communication, the rhetorical act of exclusion loses its locality. It is no longer tied to a specific scene, audience, or moment. An utterance initially addressed to a limited circle can be instantly extracted from its context, repeated, amplified, and turned into an object of collective attention. Publicity in this case does not expand, but fragments, which paradoxically increases its destructive potential: the blow is delivered from multiple directions at once and is therefore not perceived as a single act.

In this sense, the digital environment resembles a space of rapid and unpunished raids. Meaning is captured, redistributed, and reused without the need to hold a position or bear consequences. Yet it is precisely here that the structural vulnerability of such violence becomes visible: it knows no measure and does not know how to withdraw in time. As in the Ciconian episode, the success of the initial capture turns into loss not because of the victim's resistance, but because of its own inertia – because of the desire to continue, intensify, repeat, without discerning the moment at which the action should be brought to an end.

In this context, cancel culture appears less as a moral practice than as a rhetorical regime in which the verdict is delivered prior to inquiry, and inquiry itself loses its meaning [Butler, 1997]. Speech here is no longer oriented toward the restoration of justice or the correction of behavior. Its function is to mark the boundary of the permissible and immediately fix its violation through exclusion, without raising the question of the consequences of further repetition.

A defining feature of digital cancellation is the absence of finality. Unlike historical forms of exile or execution, it does not presuppose the completion of the act [Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988]. Exclusion does not end – it is sustained through repetition, recall, and archiving. The victim is placed in a regime of endless present, where the past is constantly actualized, and the possibility of return to the public sphere remains indeterminate and not subject to verification.

At the same time, collective participation in the act of cancellation is rarely recognized as violence. Each individual gesture – a repost, a comment, silent consent – appears insignificant and does not seem to require responsibility [Arendt, 1963]. Yet it is precisely this multiplicity of small actions that produces the effect of a verdict without a concrete subject, but with real social consequences. Violence here is carried out not in spite of rationality, but through its fragmentation [Foucault, 1977].

Thus, the digital “execution” does not abolish classical mechanisms of sacrifice, but transforms them [Girard, 1977]. The victim remains necessary for the discharge of collective tension, but is now produced not through ritual and not through formal decision, but through a distributed rhetoric in which violence dissolves into communication and therefore ceases to be recognized as such. As in the early episodes of Odysseus' journey, the danger here lies not in the possibility of capture itself, but in the loss of the ability to stop in time and to exit the scene without turning success into a source of new losses.

If rhetorical violence is capable of reproducing itself in a distributed and anonymous form, this means that behind the multiplicity of small actions there lies a mechanism of their

symbolic reduction. Collective tension does not dissipate indefinitely – it requires a point of fixation [Girard, 1986]. It is at this point that a figure emerges onto which responsibility for what is happening can be transferred, even if the violence itself is neither recognized nor named.

The analysis of the rhetoric of exclusion inevitably leads to the question of the figure of the victim. If public violence continues to reproduce itself under conditions of the absence of formalized procedures, this means that the victim retains a structural function that exceeds particular historical forms. At this level, the concept of the sacrificial mechanism developed by René Girard proves productive [Girard, 1977]. According to Girard, the victim emerges not as a consequence of individual guilt, but as the result of a collective necessity to discharge violence. Sacrifice does not eliminate conflict, but temporarily stabilizes the community by concentrating aggression on a single figure. Crucially, the effectiveness of this mechanism does not depend on the actual guilt of the victim: what is decisive is their capacity to be recognized as such and to assume the excess tension of the situation [Girard, 1986].

Under the conditions of the contemporary public sphere, the sacrificial mechanism does not disappear, but loses its ritual form. What was previously carried out through sacralized procedures is now realized through rhetorical acts devoid of symbolic recognition, yet retaining the same structural logic [Butler, 1997]. The victim is produced not through an official decision, but through the successive fixation of a certain image, trait, or characteristic capable of bearing collective tension. However, it is precisely here that a fundamental divergence from the classical Girardian model becomes apparent. Even in its latent forms, sacrifice in Girard presupposes subsequent symbolic articulation: myth, sacralization, or at least a collective memory of what has occurred [Girard, 1977]. Violence is masked, but does not disappear from the field of meaning – it receives an explanation that allows the community to continue its existence.

Contemporary forms of rhetorical exclusion operate in a different mode. Here, the sacrificial mechanism is reproduced without myth, without ritual, and without the need for subsequent reflection [Foucault, 1977]. Violence does not require justification, because it is not recognized as violence. It is neither sacralized nor demonized – it dissolves into communication, accompanied by a gradual loss of memory of its own origin [Bourdieu, 1991]. In this sense, contemporary publicity increasingly operates according to the logic of the lotus-eaters. The collective does not so much deny violence as forget it, losing the very necessity of holding what has occurred within the field of attention. Forgetting here is not a consequence of time – it becomes a functional condition of stabilization. The victim fulfills their structural role, but disappears not only from the public space, but also from collective memory as a victim.

If in archaic cultures the victim ultimately became a figure around which a myth was constructed [Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1988], under conditions of digital publicity they are deprived even of this form of recognition. They do not explain what has occurred and do not symbolize the restoration of order – they simply become impermissible, displaced beyond the limits of the visible [Agamben, 1998]. Collective tension is discharged, yet the cost of this discharge ceases to be reflectively grasped.

Thus, the concept of the sacrificial mechanism retains its explanatory force, but requires refinement [Girard, 1986]. Contemporary public violence reproduces the structure of sacrifice while simultaneously stripping it of symbolic frameworks and memory. This allows us to speak of a transition from sacralized violence to unrecognized and forgettable violence, in which the absence of ritual and subsequent reflection does not weaken, but rather intensifies the vulnerability of the victim.

Conclusion: Distinction as a Form of Resistance. The analysis of the rhetoric of exclusion makes it possible to consider contemporary forms of public violence not as a deviation or a crisis of communication, but as a transformation of deep social mechanisms. The transition from institutionalized practices of expulsion to distributed rhetorical acts does not eliminate the sacrificial structure, but renders it less discernible and therefore more resilient. Violence loses the form of an event, yet retains its function – the redistribution of responsibility and the stabilization of collective tension.

Under conditions of digital publicity, public violence loses its center, its subject, and its finality, yet does not lose its capacity to produce real social consequences. The victim emerges not as the result of a formal decision, but as an effect of a constellation of speech acts and tacit agreements, each of which, taken separately, appears insignificant. It is precisely this dispersion that makes violence difficult to recognize and allows it to reproduce itself without acknowledgment or responsibility.

Philosophical analysis of the rhetoric of exclusion is not directed toward the moral evaluation of individual utterances or actions. Its task is the restoration of distinctions lost under conditions of accelerated, fragmented, and affectively saturated communication. The distinction between speech and verdict, between aggression and violence, between silence and neutrality restores to public speech the boundaries and weight without which it inevitably becomes an instrument of exclusion. In this sense, philosophy offers no prescriptions and guarantees no protection. It does not abolish risk and does not promise a safe return. Yet it makes possible that without which any resistance is impossible – the discernibility of the mechanism. As long as the structure of public violence remains discernible, it cannot operate as an unquestionable given or as a natural order of things.

But distinction itself is not neutral. It disrupts the comfortable unambiguity within which violence prefers to remain invisible. Where the public sphere increasingly demands simple figures, a single perspective, and an immediate verdict, the attempt to sustain complexity is inevitably perceived as a challenge. A stone cast into such waters does not sink without a trace – it sets circles in motion.

For this reason, further analysis must turn to figures in which reduction reaches its limit: to situations where the gaze becomes singular, the voice monologic, and otherness mortally dangerous. Within this horizon appears the image of Polyphemus – not as a mythological character, but as a structure of publicity incapable of seeing otherwise than at a single scale. Where public speech is left with only one eye, distinction becomes not merely a method, but a risk.

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РИТОРИКА ВИКЛЮЧЕННЯ: СЛОВО, ЖЕРТВА І ПУБЛІЧНЕ НАСИЛЬСТВО – ВІД АНТИЧНОГО ВИГНАННЯ ДО ЦИФРОВОЇ КАРИ

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АНОТАЦІЯ

У статті здійснюється філософський аналіз риторики виключення як специфічної форми публічного насильства, що реалізується насамперед через мовні акти, не потребуючи інституційного оформлення, формального визнання чи ритуальної процедури. Вихідна теза дослідження полягає в тому, що публічне насильство виникає в просторі мови, яка поступово втрачає свою діалогічну природу, перестає бути засобом спілкування й перетворюється на інструмент призначення винного, визначення «зайвого» й винесення вироку без права на апеляцію.

У такій ситуації суб'єкт залишається видимим і присутнім у публічному полі, однак повністю позбавляється можливості відповіді, що трансформує звичайну агресію в символічне, публічне й незворотне насильство.

Теоретичною основою роботи є поєднання ключових концепцій: теорії мовленнєвих актів Дж. Остіна, символічного насильства П. Бурдьє, дискурсивної влади й нормалізації М. Фуко, а також механізму жертви й козла відпущення Р. Жирара. На цій базі стаття простежує історичну динаміку практик виключення: від античних інституціоналізованих форм (остракізм, ритуал фармакоса, суд і страта Сократа), де насильство мало чітку процедуру, колективну відповідальність і символічне завершення, до сучасних децентралізованих риторичних режимів, що функціонують у цифровому публічному просторі. Особливу увагу приділено тому, як у цифрову епоху насильство втрачає характер дискретної події з визначеним суб'єктом, початком і кінцем, але зберігає високу ефективність завдяки розподіленій відповідальності, колективному мовчання, стратегіям невключеності й механізмам культури скасування (cancel culture), що працюють через повторення, архівування й безкінечне актуалізування минулого.

Центральним методологічним принципом дослідження виступає поняття політропності, запозичене з гомерівської традиції та інтерпретоване через фігуру Одиссея. Політропність розуміється не як хитрість чи ухилення від істини, а як здатність до багатогранної навігації в середовищі, де пряме висловлювання стає смертельно небезпечним, а мова — засобом захоплення й примусу. Це стратегія збереження смислу, можливості повернення й суб'єктності в умовах, коли слово перестає бути діалогом і перетворюється на односторонній акт призначення. Фігура Одиссея слугує тут не просто літературним образом, а принципом мислення й опору, що дозволяє проходити через зони виключення, не приймаючи їх правил за остаточні.

У висновку обґрунтовується, що філософський аналіз риторики виключення не пропонує моральних рецептів чи захисних стратегій, але виконує ключову функцію спротиву: відновлення розрізень між мовою й вироком, агресією й насильством, мовчанням і нейтралітетом, присутністю й включеністю. Саме здатність розрізняти й називати механізми публічного насильства робить їх видимими, запобігає їх натуралізації як «природного» порядку речей і відкриває простір для критичного мислення в умовах, коли публічність дедалі частіше стає інструментом селекції та вигнання без визнання власної руйнівної сили.

Ключові слова: *риторика, насильство, політропність, Одиссей, культура скасування, жертвний механізм, дискурсивна влада.*

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