

Training in Progress. Communication Skills and Cultural Background of Italian Journalists

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Abstract

This article investigated the relationship between media and justice, between journalists and jurists, in relation to hate crimes and their hidden forms, focusing on anti-Semitism, the main subject of the research. Favouring a socio-cultural perspective of the phenomenon, after a short theoretical parenthesis (concerning the study of national and international literature on the topic of anti-Semitism and the contemporary media system), the paper will present the results of focus groups addressed to participants belonging to two different categories of publics: freelance and professional journalists and Italian lawyer-magistrates.

The analysis focuses on the professionalism and responsibility of journalists and jurists in dealing with anti-Semitic phenomena and hate in general. Specifically, the study will investigate the journalistic culture in relation to the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, taking into account the complexity and ‘gaps’ of criminal law in Italy regarding hate news.

Keywords: law; journalism; crime; media culture; training.

1. Introduction

The issue of journalism’s coverage of reality, the risk of distortion and the institutionalisation of procedures for selecting, hierarchising and processing newsworthy material moves in the wake of information disorder and hate speech.

There is a risk that the choice of what to report will not be based on what the public is interested in, but on what the other media or the system as a whole expects. “Saying to be believed”, an identifying element of journalism, is

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replaced by “saying to avoid making mistakes” in the direction of homologation of production choices and conformity to mainstream ideas (Neuman, 2017). As underlined by Marwick and Lewis (2017), the contemporary communicative space is also inhabited by subjects and groups who, acting in a covert manner, propose issues and points of view to journalists through online practices capable of influencing the mainstream media and thus the complex circuit of public debate. Their tactics often include the sharing of content from local newspapers, with minimal false news, in order to gain credibility in the overall information system by impersonating profiles of individuals who ideologically support this narrative. These are actors who operate in a mix of ideological motivations, economic goals and entertainment dynamics, and who derive satisfaction from manipulating the official media system.

This is part of the creation of what Mark Zuckerberg has called “disinformatzja”, information specifically designed to sow doubt and increase distrust in institutions or, more generally, in those who think differently on a given issue.

The information overload leads people to hide in what they already know or to expose themselves to content that they agree with, with the result that information, ideas and beliefs are reinforced and strengthened by repetition, in an information world that tends to close in on itself, almost as if to protect itself from excessive exposure.

Initially, the greater ability of everyone to choose the news he or she wants was seen as a desirable goal, since it would increase the degree of freedom of the user, who could create his or her own personal schedule (my media). Over the years, this greater autonomy of choice has appeared to be the main cause of a defensive action on the part of the public, which, dazed by the excess of available information, resorts to what is already known and shared, preferring echo chambers (Sunstein, 2017). The public takes refuge in more circumscribed and reassuring worlds, where “we find and rediscover what we like best, meeting those who have the same interests as us and share our same narratives” (Weimann, Masri, 2020).

News therefore very often appears to be in line with the worldview of each connected user, with their same values, and for this reason is more likely to be considered accurate. On the contrary, the accuracy of content that is not in line with one’s own orientations is underestimated.

The networks do not discriminate based on the authenticity of the content; in reality, this task would fall to the users: their behaviour in this respect can make the difference, for example, by choosing to cite an external source or to criticise a news item.

Often, the multitude of information is presented without context or reference to an original source; it ends up being perceived as “noise” in

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cognitive terms, since the same fact, in the same news flow, can have diametrically opposed interpretations or be refuted by other information (Quattrociochi, Vicini, 2017). Rumours, gossip and unverified news about war situations, celebrities, economic indicators, election campaigns and government programmes constantly emerge and are tweeted, shared, confirmed and publicly discussed, becoming part of the new media ecosystem.

Even in the specific case examined, that of a journalistic and legal culture linked to hybrid forms of hatred and anti-Semitism, this risk seems to be rather high.

Among the various forms of hostility and aggression towards others, anti-Semitism today represents a peculiar and worryingly growing phenomenon throughout Europe.

For the Jerusalem Post, 2021 was the most anti-Semitic year of the last decade on the European continent, with an average of at least ten incidents per day (JP, 2021). At a global level, the World Zionist Organisation defines the spread of anti-Semitic incidents as “worrying”, even in Italy. It is no coincidence that in the latest map of intolerance drawn up by the Vox Rights Observatory (2023), Jews are the fourth group to receive the most negative tweets in Italy (after women, homosexuals and disabled people).

It is an ancient hatred, the longest and most persistent in the history of humanity, expressed against Jews as such or, as Jean-Paul Sartre observed, even in the absence of Jews, influenced by deep-rooted fears and prejudices; a hatred that translates into a discriminatory attitude that fuels “political incivility” (Bentivegna, Rega, 2022), aggravated by information overload and the spread of conspiratorial ideas, affecting all institutional levels, in particular the media and political institutions. legal (Neville-Shepard, 2018; Santerini, 2020; Buoncompagni, 2023).

The journalistic field is part of the social system and involves relationships between different actors and their interests, as well as technologies, languages and norms; it also determines constraints of dependence and establishes (power) relations with other fields, in particular the political-legal, which are increasingly asymmetrical.

In fact, the lack of balance between the fields seriously calls into question the correct training process of journalists on the broadest contemporary issues and, above all, the “putting of information into shape” (Schudson, 1988); respect, that is to say, the phases of selection, hierarchisation and presentation of news, which depend on the dense web of relationships that occur in society and that define that abstract place from which journalism draws its data, i.e. the mediatised public sphere.

2. Between media and justice

The media play an indispensable role in a democratic society.

The characteristics of convergence and transparency of the new means of communication allow information operators to focus more on cases that deserve particular attention from the community, such as corruption, violence, abuse, which would very often risk remaining unknown to the institutions for a long time or never coming to the fore without the constant attention of the media and an “intrusive” journalistic story, as well as a sustained interest on the part of the public.

From a sociological perspective, these situations/behaviours are to be framed as “social problems” or, better still, as “cultural objects” (Griswold, 2005). A phenomenon becomes recognisable as a ‘social problem’ when public opinion, usually through the media, becomes aware of its existence and ascribes certain meanings to the event, i.e. frames it.

Framing is the process by which information professionals put events in order, reorganise them, give them meaning, identify a direction and finally make them news.

It usually involves the choice of a political direction or implicit answers to questions such as ‘what to do’ about a phenomenon, what to think about it, how to deal with it for the good of the community.

The often contrasting but complementary relationships between the media and legal actors contribute in different ways to defining and addressing these “problems”. The complexity of this relationship lies in the fact that law and information are areas that are inextricably linked to contemporary society and the cultural objects that make up a wider cultural system.

The media are a powerful means of expression in today’s public sphere. It can be seen as an instrument of responsibility, a channel of civic engagement and denunciation, but it can also be used to protect personal interests, to eliminate political opponents, to spread hatred and racism (Couldry, 2023).

This is why law and justice are more than necessary for the media environment: not so much to limit freedom of expression, but rather to regulate it, or to urge various professionals to regulate themselves in the exercise of their profession, be it journalism, politics, information technology or law, paying attention to cultural changes (also inherent, for example, in criminal investigations, an aspect that is not secondary, as it raises thorny questions about the real usefulness of these mutations in terms of the social function of justice (D’Auria, 2016; Marsh, Melville, 2019).

Journalism and social-digital media are not only one of the most important technical-technological inventions, but they also represent real ecosystems that are constantly renewed in relation to the transformations of legal and economic

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institutions and the information policies of each individual state that help to guarantee civil life (Affaya, 2012). In an increasingly interconnected society, the difficulties in the field of communication affect all institutional and socio-technical bodies, including the legal. Both fields are thus confronted, one in terms of narrative, the other in terms of judgement, with complex issues that are now global, such as identity, freedom, security, solidarity, conflict.

Issues that differ within each community based on its own symbolic-cultural systems (Orgad, 2012).

The electronic dissemination of information or the transmission of content through social networks by journalists are certainly not to be understood as simple acts of transmission, but rather as practices of selection, hierarchisation and treatment of fragments of news that are published daily and in which we all find ourselves involved, since they generate public interest and events - behaviours that are often contradictory or deviant (Marotta, 2015).

“Judging” this type of information or behaviour, i.e. making a decision in this respect, is nothing more than an act of translation of the relevant legal system. Thus, on the one hand, there is the media’s attempt to create an “effect of interest” on society through the dialogue between the news and the audience, and on the other hand, there is the exercise of the public function of legislative power (regulatory function) by legal actors.

Although the media have a strategic importance in formulating the expectations, shortcomings, frustrations and aspirations of communities, the legal system is a crucial lever for the establishment of the rule of law. Referring to Coleman’s (1999) mediological thought, the idea of justice is fundamentally linked to the possibility/capability of building human (and media) relations based on the principles of fairness and equality, so that they can become a reality, guaranteeing to each person the rights to which he or she is entitled.

In this sense, despite the obvious critical points that have been denounced for some time, also by the world of politics, for example the imbalance in time between information and justice (not only in the banal sense that the process requires long times that cannot tolerate the pressure of journalists in search of news, but also in the sense that journalistic work is increasingly done in very short times, which makes the reconstruction of events very complex), there is a complementarity between the two professions, that of lawyers and that of journalists, in establishing the truth, but also in the sense that journalistic work is increasingly carried out in very rapid times, making the reconstruction of what has happened very complex), there is a complementarity between the two professions, that of the lawyer and that of the journalist, in establishing good democratic practices, whatever their limitations and interests (Brown, 2003).

And even if information today is implicated in all the power relations linked to its industrialisation, it is still capable of opening up to a globalised world that is certainly less compact, more frayed and fuller of paradoxes.

In the so-called “media century”, communication has multiplied and strengthened from a technological and political point of view, but the communicative experience is less effective and less satisfying from a social and psychological point of view. Even those who hoped for the “utopia of communication” (Abruzzese, 2015) have resigned themselves to the fact that today the communication project seems to have inexorably failed at the global level, judging above all by the massive presence of violent speeches, sectarian hatred and the implacable hostilities that are constantly (self-)generated in the media ecosystem (Ewick, Silbey, 1995;)

A new open and connected space of communication and information, but seemingly devoid of any social and legal norms, where the barbarian reappears with a vengeance, fuelling “incommunication”, preventing comparison and in-depth analysis, rationalising and standardising diversity (Abruzzese, 2015; Wolton, 2021).

These communication difficulties therefore also affect the legal apparatus.

For these reasons, in the words of the philosopher Affaya (2012), it is precisely in these times of uncertainty and constant change that journalism and justice, together with science, should work together towards common goals, as pillars of a modern society that seeks “infinite progress”, in order to produce information capable of disseminating knowledge and strengthening those relational and cultural networks that are still rather fragile.

There is a complementarity between the journalistic and legal professions in establishing good democratic practices, regardless of their limitations and interests.

On the one hand, the media expose the underbelly of power and make massive use of their ability to control and disseminate information; on the other hand, the judiciary applies the law and renders judgements according to legal principles, sometimes supported by information flows outside legal institutions (Affaya, 2012; Wieviorka, 2018). Both the media and the world of justice today face a triple common challenge that constantly leads them to dialogue and discuss, in particular in the face of the increasingly hybrid phenomena of hatred and discrimination:

- the first is linked to the question of trust and credibility of those who operate in and through the media, and of those who have the power to judge and are presumed to be the new *watchdogs of law*;
- the second is inherent to the skills of these professionals and their ability to provide information on socio-cultural conflicts relevant to their skills and

which affect society , so that the individual, moral and ethical code of conduct is respected in the news and the correct application of the rules;

-the third challenge consists in identifying and limiting attempts to exploit the media and the judiciary by political, economic and ideological powers.

3. Methodological notes

On the basis of this theoretical framework, as mentioned above, this paper will present part of the results of a broader research linked to the HIDEANDOLA project (Hidden Antisemitism and Communicative Skills of Criminal Lawyers and Journalists), which examined the relationship between the media and the judiciary, among journalists and lawyers, in relation to hate crimes and their hidden forms, focusing on anti-Semitism, the main object of the research.

Through a socio-cultural reading of the phenomenon, the paper will present the results of 7 focus groups aimed at journalists, freelance and professionals, as well as lawyers and judges¹.

The focus group is an unstructured group interview method which makes it possible to understand the specific needs of the final beneficiaries of a project or of the users of a service, starting from a representative sample of the latter and analysing in depth what these people think beyond the superficial opinions they may have.

This type of methodology is based on the idea that by gathering people's different opinions and points of view and observing how participants interact within a group, even by modifying their initial opinions, it is possible to gather a greater amount of information than through simple individual interviews (Corbetta, 2015).

The group interview is usually conducted by an expert whose role is to guide the whole discussion and encourage participation.

In the specific case several researchers, sociologists and lawyers from the universities, involved in the project acted as moderators.

This choice is justified by the fact that some of the sessions organised were mixed, with participants who were experts in media and communication as well as in constitutional, civil and criminal law. Interdisciplinarity immediately

¹ The distinction made here in English is to be understood in the sense used in Italian between 'giornalisti pubblicisti' and 'giornalisti professionisti'. In Italy, according to Article 1 of Law No. 69/1963, professionals are those who exclusively and continuously exercise the profession of journalist; publicists are those who exercise non-occasional and paid journalistic activities, even if they exercise other professions or occupations.

proved to be a necessary condition for studying an issue as complex as that of covert anti-Semitism, even if the dialogue between journalism and law sometimes encountered difficulties due to the different sensitivities of the actors involved, their expertise, and particularly the professional jargon.

In the context of the project, the focus group had a twofold objective: on the one hand, to understand the perceptions and the level of awareness - knowledge - of the legal and information actors in relation to the phenomenon of anti-Semitic hatred (and its hidden dimension) in Italy, analysing its media representation and presence in the courtrooms. On the other hand, we tried to investigate the role of culture and journalistic and legal training as useful elements for preventing and combating any form of anti-Semitism in the (digital) public sphere.

For these reasons, the interviews, although not following a rigid structure, followed a path, useful for the moderators in attempting to respond to the research objectives, with a series of questions that can be summarized in this macro-category²:

- *“Typical acts of the profession”*³: journalistic-legal training and culture; responsibility of individuals and the profession.

Here the analysis will focus specifically on this last dimension related to the professionalism and responsibility of journalists and jurists in the treatment of anti-Semitic and discriminatory phenomena more generally. The aim of this reflection will therefore be to investigate journalistic culture in relation to the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, considering the complexity and gaps of criminal law in Italy regarding discrimination.

In this regard, considering that the analysis takes place within an Italian legal-cultural scenario, remember that every journalist should adhere to the clearly expressed principles of the ‘Testo Unico dei Doveri del Giornalista’ (Journalist’s Code of Duties) within his or her profession. This document stems

² The chronology of the group interviews and the complete outline of the questions used during the online focus group is present in the final part of the report as an attachment.

³ Returning to the definition used mostly in the psychological field, the Typical Act is, in its substance, the executive and contextualising competence of a disciplinary technicality, which occurs in the light of a specific and demonstrable capacity for scientific conceptual framing, and of an in-depth understanding theory of the structural processes that are relevant for the situation of merit, with an explicit professional purpose. This distinguishes it from a “generic” action. In understanding and defining typical acts, therefore, it is not possible to imagine a mere descriptive list of individuals “practical micro-actions”, but it is instead necessary to work towards a global understanding of the actions and functions of a specific profession in relation to intended objective.

from the need to harmonise the previous deontological documents in order to allow greater clarity of interpretation and facilitate the application of all the rules, the non-observance of which may result in the disciplinary liability of the member of the Professional Order of Journalists.

In particular, the articles of greatest interest for the purposes of analysis to be taken as a reference will be TITLE II - DUTIES TO PERSONS (Articles 5bis-6-7) concerning personal identity and the right to be forgotten⁴.

In these sections, in fact, the 'Testo Unico' reminds the journalist to:

- (a) take care to avoid gender stereotypes, expressions and images detrimental to the dignity of the person;
- b) adhere to respectful, correct and knowledgeable language;
- c) make sure, after assessing the public interest in the news, that the narration is also respectful of the relatives of the persons involved;
- d) protect the identity and image, not allowing the identification of the person, asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants who agree to expose themselves to the media.

4. In-process training?

In Italy, lawyers and journalists are two professions that require registration in their own Order, a collective body that represents a specific professional category.

The regulations of the individual Orders prescribe the obligation of the journalist and the lawyer to obtain a precise number of training credits each year. This means that in both cases the two professional figures must fulfill the obligation of Continuing Professional Training (FPC)⁵.

The difficulty of reporting or judging hate crimes, especially when they are anti-Semitic in nature, also seems to stem from the cultural and training gaps that exist within individual professional careers or in the curriculum of the professionals interviewed themselves (Buoncompagni, 2023).

It is the latter who often emphasise their lack of knowledge of Jewish history and culture or their lack of attention when confronted with episodes of anti-Semitism.

⁴ Odg: <https://www.odg.it/testo-unico-dei-doveri-del-giornalista/24288>.

⁵ In Italy, Presidential Decree 137/2012 provides that all regulated professions are subject to the obligation of continuous training in order to maintain or improve their professional qualification. The unit of measurement for continuing education is the Professional Training Credit (CFP).

In the focus groups, therefore, the professionals are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses on a personal-professional level and those of their own category when talking about the Jewish world:

“We must admit that we know very little about the Jewish world (..) when dealing with certain topics we focus almost exclusively on the technical aspects of our profession, losing sight of the complexity of the case in front of us” (P8)

“Be it a lawyer or journalist, it is first of all necessary to start again from the foundations of Judaism (..) to start again, for example, from the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism within training courses, avoiding tribalism and partisanship, but looking at history” (P25)

In addition to a cognitive problem, the words of the interviewees also suggest the possibility that, in the face of such complex issues, conflicts may arise within the training context or in the relationship between “teacher-expert” and “participant” in the FPC, or signs of intolerance due to different views of Jewish history.

There is therefore a risk that, in addition to the difficulty of recognising anti-Semitic hatred and the superficiality with which this issue is sometimes addressed in the public sphere, there is another problem related to the (sociological) ability to examine social facts through an “effort of understanding” and a “pure” perception, following the ideas of the sociologists Berger and Luckmann, i.e. leaving aside any personal feelings and prejudices.

This does not seem to be due solely to the strength of personal prejudices or to a lack of culture.

Once again, the logic of information requires journalists in particular to follow the “newsability criteria” (Sorrentino, Splendore, 2022), in particular the interest of their target audience, the quantity and the speed of the news. Thus, if we are faced with the choice between reporting a news item about a “swastika on the wall of a school” or “a smeared Jewish cemetery” or giving it more prominence, the choice will almost certainly be the latter:

“There is no point in hiding it, what we have to consider are the journalistic mechanisms (..) the sale of copies, the polarizing debate (..) the swastika on a school wall is not newsworthy like a smeared Jewish cemetery” (P.27)

“We would also have to ask ourselves: who is interested in that news? or the deepening of this? (..) It is clear that in general the public interest is followed” (P15).

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There is therefore also a question of professional responsibility, a key concept present within all professional orders and courses.

In practical terms “being responsible” translates into numerous opportunities for discussion and work on the use, for example, of careful, clear, specialized language, both in the journalistic and forensic fields, in order to avoid stereotypes, or analysis superficial in the description of a social phenomenon.

An interviewee underlines:

“Let’s think about migrations (..) a lot of work has been done to eliminate expressions such as “vu cumprà”, “invasion” ... despite all the training and linguistic ‘battles’, there are still those who use them every day” (P12)

According to the participants in the focus groups, culture and training are the only means of limiting what Wolton (2021) would define as “information drift”, given the limits described so far.

Two dimensions that have perhaps been over-emphasised in the public debate in recent years, but which, if they are tackled by considering the three key concepts suggested by the journalists and lawyers interviewed, could prove useful in overcoming the obstacles they describe.

The first notion is that of “school”, understood as a training space that is useful for building knowledge and awareness in individuals in a timely manner, starting from the correct use of language (Freire, 1973).

As stated by several participants:

“I have collaborated for a long time with the world of school and teaching (..) I have been able to see the urgency of taking the best possible care of the use of words both in communication between children, between teachers and students, but also within the manuals adopted for the study of history” (P21)

“Regulations and news are communicated with words... we must learn to use and interpret them correctly from a very young age. Telling the facts, the story...is the task first of the school and then of the university which are the cultural institutions that support the education of the individual” (P9).

The second concept has to do with “*dialogue*”, with a double interpretation.

On the one hand, the need has emerged to build training courses linked to the topic of anti-Semitism, possibly free from the logic of achieving training credits to avoid a “forced” and passive participation of lawyers and journalists,

but held by dialogue experts intercultural and religious, i.e. figures external to the world of information or law, much more sensitive to the topic, with a high ability to listen and communicate, beyond any prejudice:

“First of all, a precise commitment is needed on the part of the Order in organizing ad hoc courses on anti-Semitism, just as interest and humility are necessary on our part (..) I don't think training managed only by colleagues who have sporadic experience is very useful in the field, but there is a need for external help from experts in interreligious dialogue, theologians etc..” (P27)

“In collaboration with regional institutions and the representatives of the local Jewish communities themselves, journalists and lawyers together could learn not only the theory, but also have a more practical type of experience such as visiting Italian synagogues” (P24)

On the other hand, it was quite interesting to record how, faced with the challenge of understanding anti-Semitism and its “hidden” dimension, journalists and lawyers declared that they “need each other”, a dialogue and constant comparison in the construction of a solid common training path:

“I find the dialogue between the media and justice very useful. Learning the criminal language would be a real advantage for those practitioners who as soon as they arrive in the editorial office and are sent to courtrooms without experience and then encounter considerable difficulties in translating what happened into journalistic communication” (P5)

“Legal actors, or even law enforcement agencies are very often not clear when they communicate publicly (..) Especially during press conferences in relations with the media the possibility of not fully understanding each other is quite high” (P30)

Third aspect concerns the “counter-narrative “:

“Anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism... are words that take on a political meaning in the media, linked above all to what happens in the State of Israel (..) But in addition to recounting the conflicts, the alleged conspiracies, remaining stuck to the usual imprecise narratives that stiffen the way of talking about certain themes, it would be useful to broaden the public's knowledge of these places (..) Talking about Israel is fine, but also with respect to its potential in terms of technological innovation, green policies (..) Not just geopolitical issues or military” (P20).

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In this sense, enriching a story or proposing a critical and “unpublished” version on the same subject would help to better define and understand some scenarios unknown to the Italian media public.

What is repeated in the newspapers often runs the risk of being just words, empty formulas recited by the media in their incessant litany.

In a scenario of widespread (in)suffering, exacerbated by misinformation and poor education, the construction of “counter-narratives” could offer a thin thread of sociality and collective reflection to demystify the current discourse (Drago, Scandurra, 2021). In fact, there are often poisonous narratives that permeate our reality, polluting political debates and human relationships, spreading prejudices and clichés, exacerbating social divisions and threatening to suffocate the need for culture and education, even in such seemingly different disciplines as journalism and law.

The lack of depth that often characterises the journalistic story is lost on the surface of the news. The causes of anti-Semitic hatred are often neither contextualised nor revealed to refute their basic elements, with the risk that these aspects become implicit postulates and therefore facts.

With regard to the results of the research described here, it seems that the conspiracy arguments, regardless of the specific facts, are in fact structured around recurring emotional narratives that mix with journalistic information and the numerous interventions of the connected public on the platforms, which tend, consciously or unconsciously, to generate a kind of interaction and distracted and sometimes violent involvement (disengagement).

It is based, first of all, on the polarisation of those who identify the conspiracy as the cause of a phenomenon that is often identified in the techno-scientific, political and economic elites.

The *modus operandi* is characterised by the creation of a dramaturgy that includes, on the one hand, contents that can be considered as “activators of hate” or productive texts that derive from an aberrant reading and can generate “resonance” (Jenkins et al., 2018; Klein, 2020). On the other hand, he sees the presence of four specific figures: “conspiracy theorists”; the accused power elite (debunkers, public institutions, etc.); “expert witnesses” who support the advanced conspiracy theories; the media; and the “audience” made up of the public of the wider society (Rufin, 2004).

The increasingly hybrid nature of anti-Semitic hatred, its “hiding” in the new languages and spaces of communication, means that it increasingly takes the form of an “anti-Jewish narrative” of a conspiratorial nature, disseminated by social actors with different roles (creators, disseminators and followers), long structured in representations of a theological-religious nature (e.g. Jews as “deicides”, defilers, ritual murderers) with deep historical roots. In the modern era, the latter have taken the form of ideological constructions or worldviews

centred on a certain number of accusations (conspiracy, social parasitism...), with a significant political role, fuelled by the transparent and public nature of the new social and digital technologies, by the ability of the audience to spread, but also, as we say, by the biased or, in any case, ill-considered attitudes, albeit “in good faith”, of the mainstream media.

Consequently, the hybrid nature of violent phenomena makes it difficult not only to identify them as “crimes” in jurisprudence, but also to understand the dynamics of the events, the relative responsibilities of the actors involved, as well as their cultural symbolic value in online-offline environments.

5. Conclusion

What emerged from the voices of the interviewees helps us to reflect on two specific points.

On the one hand, the media tend to pay little attention to episodes of anti-Semitism (often reported as isolated cases, included in the crime news agenda of the day); on the other hand, the lack of knowledge of the Jewish world in Italian journalistic culture seems to be the main cause of linguistic and interpretative errors, including those of a historical and religious nature, as well as the circulation of toxic narratives that pollute the political debate, legal decisions - actions and human relations themselves, overshadowing some fundamental dimensions of the journalistic “field”: culture, awareness and responsibility.

For this reason, in order to better combat discrimination and disinformation online, it seems useful to rethink and strengthen the idea of journalism as a “new knowledge profession”, based on five fundamental areas of competence (jurisdictions) specific to journalistic training (Carlson et al., 2018): (1) knowledge and interpretation of history and current affairs, (2) experience in specific subjects, (3) critical knowledge based on scientific research, (4) “control” of content and mastery of (new) journalistic techniques, (5) sharing and respecting the principles of professional ethics.

One of the journalists involved in the research presented here was sent to Russia for a long time. This entailed total immersion in the culture of that place and, as he explained during one of the training courses organised by Hideandola for communication and legal professionals, he learned over the years “to talk about foreignness with a specific point of view, using an appropriate language so as not to offend any sensitivity and not to put the identities of minorities in difficulty, but to be understandable for an audience close to him (the Italian one)”.

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After the recent Russian-Ukrainian conflict, despite his retirement, the journalist was “insistently” recalled by the newspaper for which he worked, precisely because of his solid jurisprudence, for his ability to describe the complexity of a country (from) afar, and now to master the historical-social content of the realities in conflict, trying to avoid polarisation and media entertainment.

In this regard, it might be more useful to reflect not only on how to “do (good) journalism” and how to invest better and more in identifying so-called good news or counter-narratives, but also on “being a journalist” today in a society in constant transformation (Gans, 2018), that is, on professional ethics, in order to limit spectacularisation and promote greater professional awareness and knowledge (including scientific) of the phenomenon being narrated, so that media audiences can understand the ongoing events in greater depth.

As the research shows, the current skills of legal actors and journalists often appear to be inadequate in relation to ethnic-religious discrimination.

The consequences of some structural “gaps” are evident in professional practice.

Lawyers and judges should learn communication techniques. This is not just a matter of language, although this aspect should not be underestimated. The semantic richness of the law should certainly not give way to the need for simplification to be understood by the public; it is impossible to eliminate the asymmetries of information that exist in a complex society, and this is also a constraint for journalism.

However, a certain simplification of the purely stylistic information, a less intensive use of abbreviations, such as the reference to the rules by the mere numbering of the articles in favour of the content of the rules, a more comprehensible presentation of the arguments and motivations (of the sentences, for example) can only help.

However, the risk that the discussion might degenerate into the dramatisation of a trial - with the protagonists becoming heroes, villains and wise men - is another aspect that should be considered. Journalists, on the other hand, should abandon the cliché that sees their work as a mere “reflection of facts”: they live in a world of symbolic interactions and are immersed in increasingly hybrid and complex cultural and communicative processes.

Atomic facts are very rare and almost non-existent in criminal trials, where attempts are made to change the meaning of events. Learning to read procedural documents, to follow investigations and hearings has become fundamental: in the quality journalism so often mentioned, skills must necessarily improve (Sorrentino, 2023).

We are therefore faced with ‘symbolic operations’ carried out by journalists and lawyers, with a socially mediated attribution of meaning to events (Alexander, 2012).

This is what deeply connects journalism and law.

As Carlson (2015) suggests, journalism, like the exercise of law, has always been a varied cultural practice, inserted in a complex social landscape and destined to constant change.

It is not something solid and stable, but a constantly shifting denotation that is applied differently depending on the context.

A context, in this case, that is increasingly hybrid, transparent and interconnected, where legal and communicative issues intertwine, conflict and paradoxically need to meet in order to build clearer and more effective messages and rules in the face of cases of ethnic-religious discrimination. And it is precisely for this reason that these professions must continue to educate themselves.

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