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**Against Hate**

*Gegen den Hass*

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Sample translation by Sophie Duvernoy (introduction) & Alexandra Roesch (chapter I)

“But if all justice begins with speech, all speech is not just.”

Jacques Derrida

“Precise observation means dissection.”

Herta Müller

## Preface

I sink in the miry depths,  
    where there is no foothold.  
I have come into the deep waters;  
    the floods engulf me.  
I am worn out calling for help;  
    my throat is parched.  
My eyes fail,  
    looking for my God.  
Those who hate me without reason  
    outnumber the hairs of my head.

### *Psalm 69, 3–5*

Sometimes I ask myself whether I should envy them. Sometimes I ask myself how they can do it—how they can hate so much. How they can be so sure of themselves. Because this is what the hateful must be: sure of themselves. Otherwise, they wouldn't speak the way they do, wound the way they do, kill the way they do. Otherwise, they wouldn't be able to demean others, humiliate them, attack them. They must remain sure of themselves. Have no doubts. One cannot be hateful if one doubts one's hate. One cannot rage if one is doubtful. One needs absolute certainty in order to hate. Every Maybe gets in the way. Every If subverts hatred, leaches away energy rather than channeling it.

Hatred is imprecise. It's difficult to hate something precise. Precision might bring out tenderness; it forces one to look or listen more closely. Precision would allow an individual to appear in all of her varied, contradictory characteristics, to become recognizable as a human being. But if the contours have been erased, individuals are unrecognizable as individuals. All that is left are vague groups that become targets of hatred, groups that can be defamed and devalued at will, shouted at, raged about: the Jews, the unbelievers, women, Blacks, lesbians, refugees, Muslims, or even, the United States, the politicians, the West, the police, the media, the intellectuals. Hatred fashions the hated object as it likes. It makes it to measure.

Hatred is directed upward or downward—at any rate, along a vertical axis, against “those above” or “those below.” It is always the categorical “other” that oppresses or threatens that which is “ours.” The “other” is imagined as a supposedly dangerous force, or a lesser object, and so the resulting abuse or extermination is not just understood as a

*forgivable*, but also as a *necessary* measure. The other is someone you can denounce, violate, hurt, or kill with no repercussions.

Those who experience this hatred first-hand, who are subject to it, in the streets or on the internet, at night or in broad daylight, who must tolerate terms that imply an entire history of violation and abuse; those who receive messages that wish them death, or rape, or threaten them with it; those whose rights are only partially acknowledged, whose bodies or head-coverings are disdained, who must disguise themselves because they fear attack, who cannot leave their homes because a brutal, violent crowd awaits them, whose schools or synagogues require police protection—all those singled out by hatred cannot and do not want to get used to it.

Certainly, there have always been subtle forms of resistance toward people who are perceived as different or foreign. These were not always noticeable forms of hatred. In Germany, they have often been expressed as condemnations couched in the language of social conventions. The past few years have seen a mounting unease about tolerance: Has it been taken too far? Can't those who have different beliefs, or look different, or love differently, be satisfied at last? There were discrete, yet clear reproaches voiced. Maybe Jews or homosexuals or women could be content and quiet, for once; after all, they've already been given so much. It's as if equality has reached its limits. As if women or gay people might be allowed equal rights up to a certain point, but beyond that, enough is enough. Completely equal? Well, that would be going too far. After all, then everyone would be ... *equal*.

This peculiar reproach—that minorities lack humility—secretly allied itself with a self-congratulatory spirit for the tolerance already evinced. As if the fact that women can work at all is a special accomplishment—but why should they also expect equal compensation? As if it were praiseworthy that queer people are no longer criminalized and imprisoned. Perhaps they should be thankful instead. It's fine for queer people to love each other in private, after all, but why should they get married in public?

The Janus-faced nature of tolerance toward Muslims often manifests itself in the idea that Muslims may well be allowed to live in Germany, but they should preferably refrain from being religious. Freedom of religion is particularly well-accepted when it refers to Christianity. And then, over the years, voices began clamoring more and more frequently for an end to the perpetual examination of the Holocaust. As if remembering Auschwitz had an expiration date, like a yoghurt. As if reflecting on the crimes of the National Socialists were a tourist activity that could easily be checked off a list.

But something has changed in Germany. Today, this country is home to open, unrestrained hatred. Sometimes, that hatred is voiced with a smile, and sometimes not; but far too often, it's shameless. Threatening letters, which used to be anonymous, are now signed with the author's name and address. Hateful comments and violent internet fantasies are often no longer posted under pseudonyms. If someone had asked me a few years ago whether people would ever speak like *this* again in this society, I would have thought it impossible. I could never have imagined public discourse ever becoming so coarse again. I would have found it inconceivable that people could be so violently harassed once again. It almost seems as if all traditional definitions of dialogue have been upended. As if the norms for coexistence have been reversed. As if those who considered respect for others a simple and self-evident form of politeness should feel ashamed, while those who deny others respect, or even loudly hurl out insults and judgments, should feel proud.

Now, I do not consider it a great civilizational gain if people can unrestrainedly shout at, insult, and hurt one another. I do not consider it progress if every inner grievance can be aired out just because exhibiting one's resentment has become publicly or politically relevant of late. Like many others, I do not want to get used to this. I do not want to see the joy that people take in unrestrained hatred become the new norm. Neither in Germany, nor in Europe, nor elsewhere.

The hatred that I will examine is neither distinct nor random. It's not simply a vague feeling that sometimes erupts by accident, or because something impels it to do so. This hatred is collective. It is shaped by ideology. The terms used to degrade others, the chains of thought and images used to think and sort through the world, the experiential grids that are used to categorize and to judge are all pre-formed. Hatred does not arise spontaneously; rather, it is cultivated. Everyone who understands hatred as sudden or distinct inadvertently aids its continued growth.

Yet the rise of aggressive, populist political parties in Germany (as well as in Europe) is not even the most unsettling event of all. There are still reasons to hope that these parties will destroy themselves over time through individual hubris, feuds, or simply by lacking staff capable of professionally working in politics. Not to mention their anti-modernist platforms, which turn a blind eye to the social, economic, and cultural realities of a globalized world. It is likely that they will lose their appeal once they are forced into public debates in which they have to argue and engage with their counterparts, and when they are asked to give reasoned responses to complex questions. It is likely that they will also lose their special status as dissidents once a few of their more reasonable points find adherents. This will only strengthen criticisms of other aspects of their platform. It is likely that we may, in the end, require far-reaching

economic programs that address social unease about growing inequality and old-age poverty in underdeveloped regions and cities.

Both here and elsewhere, the climate of fanaticism is far more worrisome. Increasingly fundamental rejections of people with different beliefs, or none at all, who look different, or love differently from the purported norm, are gathering momentum. A disdain for anything ‘other’ is growing and slowly poisoning everything. We, who are singled out by this hatred, or are witness to it, are all too often terrified into silence. We have let ourselves be intimidated; we do not know how to counter hate speech and terror; we feel paralyzed and helpless. Fear has left us speechless. This, unfortunately, is an effect of hatred: it destroys those at its mercy, it robs them of guidance and trust.

One can only confront hatred by rejecting the invitation to join its ranks. Those who answer hate with hate have already let themselves become deformed. They have already become more like the people the hateful want to hate. You can only confront hatred through acts that elude the hateful: through close observation, relentlessly making distinctions, and doubting yourself. This requires slowly deconstructing hatred into its components, separating the acute emotion from its ideological assumptions, and examining how it arises and operates within specific historical, regional, and cultural contexts. This may not seem like much. It may appear modest. One could object that these methods won’t change the real fanatics. That may be. But it would help to shine a light on the sources that fuel hatred, the structures that make it possible, the mechanisms it obeys. It would help if we could erode the self-confidence of those who agree with and applaud hate speech; if we could take the careless naiveté or cynicism away from those who pave the path for hatred by shaping its thought patterns and assumptions. If those who quietly and peacefully engage with others no longer needed to justify themselves, but rather, those who scorn them were brought to account. If those who naturally turn toward people in need no longer needed to explain themselves, but rather, those who refuse to acknowledge basic needs. If those who desire open, humane coexistence no longer needed to justify themselves, but rather, those who undermine it.

Considering hatred and violence within the structures that facilitate them also means shining a light on the context in which the justifications before the fact and acceptance after it arise. Without them, hate could not flourish as it does. Examining the different sources that lead to particular instances of hatred or violence also discredits the popular myth that hatred is something natural, something that has always existed. As if hate were more authentic than respect. But hate does not simply exist. It is created. Violence does not simply exist, either. Paths are laid for it. The direction in which hatred and violence erupt, their targets, the thresholds and barriers that must first be broken down—none of these things are coincidental or simply predestined; rather, they are channeled. Examining the way in which hatred and violence function, instead of judging

them, also means examining situations in which something *else* might have been possible, in which someone could have made a *different* decision, *intervened*, or *backed out*. Describing the specific course that hatred and violence can take also means pointing out when they could have been stopped or subverted.

Examining hate before it blindly erupts opens up other courses of action. Public prosecutors and the police are responsible for inciting certain kinds of hatred. But everyone in a society is responsible for forms of marginalization and inclusion, for the small and petty gestures, habits, practices, and beliefs that foster exclusion. As a civil society, we must revoke the space that the hateful have to make their object to measure. This is not a task we can hand off to someone else. It doesn't take much to stand by those who are threatened because they look different, think differently, believe something different, or love someone different. Small gestures can change things, can open up social or discursive spaces for precisely those who are supposed to be excluded from them. Perhaps the most important gesture against hatred is not letting oneself become isolated, not letting oneself be forced into silence, into the private sphere, into the shelter of one's own environment. Perhaps it is most important to move out of oneself, to move toward others, and to open up social and public spaces together with them.

Those at the mercy of hate—those abandoned to it—feel that they are “sinking in the miry depths, where there is no foothold,” in the plaintive words of the psalm. They have lost their foothold. They feel as if they are lost in deep water, and the tide is swelling above them. We must not abandon them; we must listen to them when they cry out. We cannot allow this tide of hatred to further swell. And above all, we must build a firm ground on which everyone can stand.

## 1. VISIBLE - INVISIBLE

‘I am an invisible man. (...) That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact.’

*Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man*

He is a man of flesh and bone. Not a spook, not a figure from a film. But a being with a body that takes up its own space, casts shadows, potentially blocks others’ paths or views, this is how the black protagonist in Ralph Ellison’s famous novel *Invisible Man* from 1952 portrays it. Somebody who talks and looks others in the eye. And yet it is as if he were surrounded by mirrors of distorting glass, in which those who encounter him only see themselves or his surroundings. Everything except him. How can this be explained? Why can white people not see him?

Their sight is not impaired, it is nothing that might be explained physiologically, but rather the observer’s inner attitude that blanks him out and makes him disappear. He does not exist to others. As if he were air or a lifeless thing, a lamp post, something that one has to dodge, but that does not warrant any response, reaction or attention. Not being seen, not being recognised, being invisible to others really is the most existential form of contempt. 1 Those who are invisible, who are not socially accepted, who do not belong to any ‘Us’. Their utterances are ignored, their gestures overlooked. Those who are invisible have no feelings, no needs, no rights.

In her most recent book, *Citizen*, the Afro-American Poet Claudia Rankine describes the experience of being invisible: a young black boy is ‘overlooked’ and pushed to the ground by a stranger in the subway. The man does not pause, does not help the boy up, does not apologise. As if there had been no contact at all, as if there had been no human being there. Rankine writes: ‘...and you want it to stop, you want the child who had been pushed to the ground to be seen, to be helped to his feet, to be brushed off by the person that did not see him, has never seen him, has perhaps never seen anyone who is not a reflection of himself.’ 2

You want it to stop. You don’t want only some people to be visible, only those who correspond to some likeness that somebody once concocted and proclaimed to be the

norm, you want it to be enough to be a human being, no additional attributes or features required in order to be seen. You don't want those whose appearance deviates from the norm to be overlooked, you don't even want there to be a norm for what is seen and what isn't. You don't want those who differ because they have a different skin colour or a different body, because they love or believe in another way or hope differently than the likeness-shaping majority, to be pushed to the ground. You want it to stop because it is an insult to everyone, not only to those who are overlooked and pushed to the ground.

But how does this 'peculiar disposition of the eyes' that Ralph Ellison mentions come about? How do certain people become invisible to others? Which emotions promote this way of seeing that makes some people visible and others invisible? Which perceptions fuel this inner attitude that makes others disappear or fade out? Who or what shapes this attitude? How does it multiply? Which historical accounts form the viewing conventions that distort or dismiss? How does the framework that provides the template for interpretation where certain people are perceived as invisible and unimportant or threatening and dangerous develop?

And above all: what does this mean for those who are no longer seen, who are no longer perceived as people? When they are overlooked or seen as something different to what they are? As strangers, criminals, barbarians, sick, in any case as members of a group, not as individuals with different capabilities and likings, not as vulnerable beings with a name and face? How strongly does this social invisibility also rob them of their orientation, how strongly does it paralyse them in their ability to fight back?

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## Love

'Feelings don't believe in the principle of reality.'

Alexander Kluge, *The Art of Making a Difference*

‘Fetch me that flower!’ thus Oberon, King of the Fairies instructs his court jester, Puck, to seek out the magical elixir that acts as a love potion. The flower’s effect is dire: whoever is given a few drops of this flower in their sleep, falls in love with the very first creature they encounter upon waking. Marvellous entanglements and confusions develop in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* because Puck, not the smartest of fairies, inadvertently administers the elixir to creatures other than those designated by Oberon. Titania, Queen of the Fairies, and Nick Bottom, the weaver, are hit particularly badly. Puck turns the unsuspecting man into a creature with a huge donkey’s head. The good-natured Bottom, who does not notice his disfigurement, is very surprised when everyone starts running away from him. ‘Bless thee, Bottom! Bless thee!’ a friend says when he sees the ugly creature, trying to break it to him gently. ‘Thou art translated.’ Bottom thinks his friends are having him on. ‘I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me; to fright me if they could’, he declares and walks off, singing defiantly.

Thus transformed into an animal, in the forest Bottom meets Titania, who has earlier been administered the magic potion in her sleep. And the magic works: the moment she lays eyes on Bottom she falls in love with him. ‘So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape; And thy fair virtue’s force perforce doth move me on the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.’

Nothing against donkeys, but: there’s a half creature stood before Titania, and she speaks of being ‘enthralled’ by its shape? How can that be? What is it that she can’t see, or sees differently? Can it be that Titania does not notice Bottom’s huge ears? Nor his shaggy fur? Nor his huge muzzle? Maybe she looks at Bottom yet does not see the exact outline, the details of what is stood before her. To her, the creature seems an entirely ‘lovely shape’. Maybe she is blocking out all characteristics and features that don’t quite correspond to the predicate ‘lovely’. She is touched, moved, ‘smitten’, and this euphoria appears to have disabled several cognitive functions. Maybe, and this might be another possibility, she sees the huge ears, the shaggy fur and the muzzle, but under the influence of the magic potion she appreciates these aspects differently than she would in her normal state. She does see the huge ears, but they seem delightful and lovely to her.

Shakespeare uses the flower juice as a dramatic device, and its effect is familiar to us: love (or lust) suddenly happens to us. We are completely unprepared and all consumed by it. We are robbed of our senses. We are entranced by it. However, Titania does not fall for Bottom because Bottom is the way he is, but quite simply because he is the first creature she sees upon waking. Although it is Bottom who she loves while enchanted, and what she sees in him or about him genuinely seems entralling to her. She could even give reasons for loving Bottom, and yet they are not the true reason for her love. In the history of the love between Titania and Bottom, Shakespeare tells of that emotional state where the cause and the object of emotions do not concur. To those who have not slept well and are short fused, the merest trifle will give reason to release their anger. That might be directed at the first person who they come across and who might not know what hit them – and who did not even provoke the anger. An emotion can certainly be triggered by something other than the thing or creature or event towards which it is directed. Bottom is indeed the object of Titania's love, but not its cause.

And there is something else hidden in this story: love, as other emotions too, is about an active way of seeing. Titania has no neutral view of Bottom, the object of her love, but rather judges and evaluates him: 'entralling', 'virtuous', 'beguiling', 'desirable'. In doing so, infatuation with all its momentum, occasionally blocks unsuitable perceptions because they are unwanted: indications of unpleasant traits or habits to be found in the coveted person become invisible beneath the loving gaze. Whatever might speak against this love, whatever might oppose one's own feeling and the lust, is – at least in the initial state of rapture – pushed back. And so the object of love is made suitable to love.

Many years ago, a young translator in Afghanistan explained to me why it makes sense for parents to select the bride for their son. After all, so he argued with gentle determination, when in love, one is completely blinded and cannot not really judge whether the revered woman is actually a suitable partner. However, experience shows that love, being a form of mental derangement, does not last forever, the magical effect of the Shakesperian flower abates – and then what? Therefore it was better if, with sober gaze, one's own mother had previously selected a woman who was suited to one beyond the bewilderment of love. He himself had seen his wife without a veil for the first time on the day of their marriage and had first spoken to her unchaperoned during their wedding night. Was he happily married? Yes, very.<sup>3</sup>

There are various forms of blanking something out. Love is just one of the feelings that allows us to shut out reality. In love, this self-absorption, which will not be deterred by anything, appears pleasant. Because it enhances the object and gives it a well-intended allowance. Because the beloved profits from the projection. In a way, love impresses

with its ability to transcend all opposition or impediments created by reality. Those who love don't want to have to explain themselves. Each individual argument, each individual reference to this or that trait appears to the lovers as if it were diminishing their love. Curiously, love is a form of acknowledgement of the other that does not necessarily require recognition. It merely assumes that I attribute certain traits to the being that I perceive as 'enthraling', 'virtuous', 'beguiling', 'desirable'. 4 Even if those traits are donkey's ears and shaggy fur.

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## HOPE

'Empty and false are the hopes of the senseless, and dreams give wings to fools'

Ecclesiasticus, ch.34 1

In the myth of Pandora, as told by Hesiod, Zeus sends Pandora down to Earth with a box containing immorality and evil. The container with horrors so far unknown to mankind is to remain sealed at all costs. Yet when Pandora, driven by curiosity, raises the lid and looks inside, sickness, hunger and sorrow slip out and spread all over the Earth. What Pandora overlooks is hope, which remains at the bottom of the box when she closes it again. So Zeus apparently considered hope to belong to the evils. Why? Is it not something good? Something that inspires us, makes us feel positive and drives us to do good deeds? Is not hope, like love, indispensable?

Certainly, but here we are not talking about the hope that can be understood as justified anticipation or as existential optimism. That hope is desirable and necessary. But the hope that Hesiod writes about is the sort of empty hope that is based upon illusionary

assumptions. Those who hope in that way suffer from the tendency of convincing themselves that their desires will be realised. It is a form of unfounded anticipation, which simply ignores what one should be able to realise. In this context, Immanuel Kant speaks of the ‘partiality of the scales of reason’, in other words a prejudice based on hope.

Those who want something to end well at all cost, turn their gaze from such evidence that might diminish this hope. Whatever is in opposition to a desired scenario, consciously or subconsciously, is blanked out and made invisible. Whether they be military, economic or medical prospects, hope easily clouds the sight on such details or references that run contrary to one’s own assumptions. They interfere because they give cause to revise the overly optimistic prognosis. They’re also irritating because they curb one’s own optimistic momentum, one’s own wishful thinking. It is troublesome facing up to the unpleasant, complicated, ambivalent reality.

When a friend assures us that he does not suffer from an addiction, then we wish that it might be true. We observe him drink, observe how little by little the rhythm of our meetings and of our friendship adapt to the rhythm of the addiction, how over time, the addiction alienates him from himself – and we are still in denial. We hope that we are wrong, that we are mistaken, hope that we are not experiencing what we are experiencing: A friend is ill and we are losing him. We hope things will improve and at the same time prevent that from happening, because that process can only begin with an unbiased view of the addiction.

Sometimes to hope is not to suppress the gloomy precursors of a bad outcome, but rather to reinterpret them. They are inserted into a more favourable reading, one that makes us feel better because it promises a better ending. A narrative that possibly also makes one feel happier because it demands less. Maybe at some point the friend might see sense about his addiction; conversations will follow where he assures us that he has seen through all the mechanisms of his own addiction. He analyses himself better than we ever could. And again we hope that all will end well. All signals that might contradict hope, everything that might expose one’s own expectations as unrealistic or naïve become invisible. Maybe this is joined by our desire to avoid conflict. After all, who likes to tell a friend something that he doesn’t want to hear? Who wants to intervene and annoy and question the friendship? And so the illusion continues to blank out everything that could be obvious: someone is ill and is destroying himself.

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## Worry

‘When of man I take possession,  
Then his whole world is lessened:  
Endless gloom meets his eyes,  
No more suns will set or rise,  
Though intact, to outer sense,  
He lives in the dark, intense,  
Never knowing how to measure  
Any portion of his treasure.’

Care, in: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust. The Tragedy, part two

Translator’s note: “Sorge”, the character’s German name in Goethe’s “Faust”, is traditionally translated as “Care”. However, while this works in “Faust”, the English word “care” has a much more neutral and even positive connotation than the German “Sorge”, which first and foremost expresses worry and anxiety. In this text, “Sorge” is therefore translated as “Worry”.

‘When of man I take possession, then his whole world is lessened.’ These are the words that the character Worry uses to declare herself in Goethe’s Faust. It is midnight in the palace, the ‘four grey women’ – Want, Guilt, Need and Worry – want to haunt the aging Faust, but the door is locked. Only Worry manages to slip in through the keyhole. When Faust notices her, he tries to keep Worry away. He fends off what she is saying (‘Be gone! And don’t come near me! Such nonsense I’ll not understand. Away, with your evil litany. Sent to confuse the cleverest man!’). Faust seems to be aware of Worry’s dangerous powers, how she turns even insignificant days into ‘wretched knots of entangled evils’, how she makes all possessions, all happiness appear futile and wraps all favourable prospects in a gloomy veil. But as much as Faust tries, Worry will not allow herself to be dispelled. Before she does finally leave, she breathes on Faust – and he goes blind.

Worry, as described by Goethe, takes hold of a person's inner life. Having gone blind, Faust's outside world fades (together with his sight). Now, all he 'sees' are the demons that sour his life because they make everything seem precarious, threatening and obstructive. While Hope blanks out everything that contradicts her optimistic expectations, so Worry denies anything that might weaken her anxious premonitions.

Of course there are justified forms of worry, those that have something to do with being careful, with being mindful, yes, with taking care of the well-being of others. But at this point we are interested in the type of worry that feeds on itself and negates what should be possible to see and know. The type of worry that does not permit any questions, that blanks out any contradictions. Worry (like Love and Hope) draws attention to something in the world, in this case something that is seen as a (perceived) reason for worry. But in the same way Titania can provide reasons for loving Nick Bottom although Bottom himself is not the reason for her infatuation – so Worry may focus on something that gives no cause for concern. The object of concern is not necessarily the same as its cause. The object of concern is sometimes made to suit Worry.

Those who think the Earth is flat are probably intensely anxious about falling down. This fear of the precipice can be explained rationally: if the Earth is flat, then there is also an edge, which one could fall off. It is perfectly reasonable to associate an edge with a precipice – and to fear it. Those who are worried because they believe the Earth to be flat cannot understand how others can remain so calm, how they can simply live in their illusory relaxation as if the danger of the precipice did not exist. Those who are concerned that anyone might fall over the edge don't understand why not more is done to combat this danger. They despair of naive politicians who are blind to reality, who don't take action, who don't protect their citizens better, who don't want to set up safety zones at the precipice, yes, who probably even say there are no precipices to be seen far and wide. That all makes complete sense. But: the Earth is not flat.

Maybe the cause, whatever actually causes us to worry, is too big or too vague to grasp. Maybe it is not possible to determine whatever it is that causes us to worry precisely because it instils such fear and this fear is paralysing. In that case, Worry seeks out another object, something that is easier to handle, something one can focus upon, something that does not cause loss of power but empowerment. At least for a moment. For a brief moment it is possible to neutralise the threatening, frightening phenomena or to replace them with others that are easier to cope with.

Worry is currently experiencing a remarkable upswing. Worry, so the rhetoric suggests, embodies a valid unease, an emotion that should be taken seriously by politics and should definitely not be criticised. As if unfiltered emotions were valid per se. As if feelings should not only be felt, but at all cost also displayed and voiced in public without restraint. As if non-reflective emotions had their own legitimacy. As if any form of evaluation and reflection, any form of scepticism towards one's own emotions and convictions were an unacceptable restriction of the possibility to satisfy one's own needs. Thus, worry is elevated to a political category of peculiar authority.

Of course there are social, political or economic concerns that can be debated in public. Of course there are understandable reasons why people who are more exposed, more vulnerable, more marginalised than others, worry about the growing social disparity, about their children's uncertain chances of progress, about the lack of funds in communities or the increasing state of neglect of public institutions. And obviously there are justified questions about where and how one's own political or social doubts and misfortunes can be voiced. I certainly share some of those worries regarding the political reaction to immigration: how to prevent the short-sighted housing policies, which erect quick and cheap mass accommodation in remote areas that tomorrow will be bemoaned as cultural and social 'slums'. How to create an education policy that does not only address the young men who are needed on the job market, but also their mothers who should command the language with which their children and grandchildren grow up, the language of the authorities and the world around them. How to protect those who fled from the racism and violence that is unfolding. And how to avoid a stratification of the suffering or poverty between various marginalised groups. How to create a commemorative culture without turning it into an ethnic story that excludes others. How to open up the accounts of the past and expand them without losing touch with the Shoah. All these are worries that I, too, cannot assess for their necessity. But they can be openly discussed and confronted with sensible criticism.

However, the idea of the 'concerned' (i.e. worried) citizen has assumed the function of a discursive shield to deflect questions about rational reasons for the worries. As if worries as such were a compelling argument in public dialogue – and not just an emotion that can be justified or unjustified, appropriate or inappropriate, sensible or exaggerated. As if in the case of worry, as with love and hope, one could not also question what it relates to, what caused it and whether cause and object correspond. As if worry did not have the power that Goethe mentions in *Faust*: Worry clouds the sight of those it seizes and renders them incapable of recognising all that is stable and secure, all happiness and wealth.

It is by no means necessary to demean the people who worry and are concerned. But they must allow a close examination of whatever masquerades as concern: it must be

broken down into separate components. Those who worry must tolerate the differentiation between concern and what the philosopher Martha Nussbaum calls ‘projective disgust’ – i.e. rejecting other people under the pretence of having to protect oneself.<sup>5</sup> There are many affective forces that infiltrate a society’s willingness to empathise and that certainly differ from concern. Besides fear and projective disgust, Nussbaum also considers narcissism to belong to those forces.

Those who currently speak of ‘concerned citizens’, above all want them to be shielded from everything that could be the object of political or moral criticism. ‘Concerned citizens’ must at all cost be different to racists or right-wing extremists. No one wants to be a racist. Not even the racist wants to be a racist, because the label at least (if perhaps no longer that which it describes) is a societal taboo. This is why concern is well suited as a camouflage sentiment. Concern conceals its occasional inherent xenophobia and thereby serves as protection from criticism in any shape or form. And so the taboo is respected and at the same time undermined. Society’s rejection of xenophobia is confirmed and challenged at the same time. The threshold of what is acceptable is shifted because that which harbours disgust, resentment and contempt is passed off as concern.

The ‘concerned citizens’ might hate immigrants, they might demonise Muslims, they might profoundly dislike people who look different, love differently, believe differently or think differently to them, and might consider them inferior, yet concern – presumed sacrosanct – masks all these convictions and emotions. The ‘concerned citizen’, so it is suggested, is untouchable. What on earth could be morally reprehensible about concern? As if in a society everything should be allowed, as if there should be no norms of what is acceptable or unacceptable, because any kind of norm might inhibit the free egocentrism of the individual.

The idea of the ‘concerned citizen’ is no longer used only by those who hide behind the term: the supporters of PEGIDA and AfD, but by now there are some journalists who assist this curious glorification of emotions. Rather, they should be analysing the causes as well as the objects of concern in a calm and nuanced manner. Justifying the worries wherever possible and criticising whenever they are lacking any factual and real foundation. It is not a journalist’s duty to agree with the reader in all matters, to accompany smaller or larger social movements with affirmation per se, but rather to analyse their motives, their arguments, their strategies and methods and, if necessary, to examine them critically.

It is certainly essential to question whether this hate wrapped in ‘worry’ might possibly be a substitute (or outlet) for collective experiences of disenfranchisement, of marginalisation or a lack of political representation. Therefore, a sober investigation of causes is required as to where this energy comes from that is being discharged as hate and violence in numerous locations. In the same context, the respective societies must submit to a self-critical examination of why it is not possible to identify those injuries any earlier; hate and fanaticism with strong identity elements are nothing but the wrong answer to these injuries. What ideological screens prevent the recognition of resentment fed by social inequality?

To me, the most encouraging reflections seem to be those of Didier Eribon’s – following on from Jean-Paul Sartre – according to which those groups and milieus that form based on negative experiences are prone to fanaticism and racism. In Sartre’s depiction, certain groups, which he calls ‘series’, form through passive, unreflective processes of adaptation to a restricted, resistant environment. It is the feeling of powerlessness towards the social reality that forms such series – and not the feeling of confident, active identification with a task or an idea.<sup>6</sup> Eribon investigates, specifically, the tendency of the French working class to align with the Front National. Still, a structural analysis of the formation of groups and movements that to a lesser extent form around a confident, political intention, but are rather characterised by material-negative experiences (or objects) – such an analysis should also be interesting within other contexts or milieus. Racism or fanaticism is used as a pretext for the formation of a community blocking what an individual could actually be: ‘The missing mobilisation as a group that could be mobilised and act in solidarity, leads to racist categories replacing social ones.’<sup>7</sup>

In such a reading, it would be necessary to infiltrate the racist and nationalistic patterns (thereby protecting those who have been subjected to these patterns), exposing the social questions that were never asked or were ignored. Maybe this is where the particular tragedy of the fanatical and intolerant dogmatist lies: Precisely those topics that give cause for justified political discontent are not actually addressed. ‘The most dangerous aspect of worry is that it blocks the way to a solution of the problem by pretending to find one.’<sup>8</sup>