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**JCL**

**Journal of the College of Languages**

Open Free Access, Peer Reviewed Research Journal

<http://icolang.uobaghdad.edu.iq>

P-ISSN: 2074-9279

E-ISSN: 2520-3517

2019, No.(39)

Pg.19 - 40

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## **A Critical Discourse Analysis of Hate Speech**

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(Received on 4/1/2018: Accepted on 24/1/2018)

### **Abstract**

Online communication on social networks has become a never-given-up way of expressing and sharing views and opinions within the realm of all topics on earth, and that is that! A basis essential in this is the limits at which "freedom of expression" should not be trespassed so as not to fall into the expression of "hate speech". These two ends make a base in the UN regulations pertaining to human rights: One is free to express, but not to hate by expression. Hereunder, a Critical Discourse Analysis in terms of Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach (2001) is made of Facebook posts (being made by common people, and not of official nature) targeting Islam and Muslims. This is made so as to recognize these instances of "speech" as pertaining to freedom of expression or to hate speech. It is concluded that the language of the posts and their semiotic details signify that the texts therein represent hate speech which may amount sometimes to call for genocide, and not a mere freedom of expression.

**Key words:** CDA, hate speech, social media, Facebook, freedom.

## 1. Introduction

Indeed, the Internet has the non-negative feature of allowing people to communicate at all levels, a state of affairs which is growing remarkably fast. This sort of communication, however, may be either negatively- or positively-directed towards others (Back et al., 2010). That is, communication may be controlled so as to enhance or support good relations with others; or, it goes on to appeal for the expression of hate against others, i.e., by gathering those self-favoured views and beliefs and creating a front of war against the "**Others**" who do not share these same views and interests. This type of negative use of communication is judged to be a sort of crime known as cyber-bullying or cyber hate (see Jaishankar, 2008).

Amidst these two ends of expression springs up the nationally- and internationally- well-recognised right of all individuals for freedom of expression, which is an essential outcome of the idea of equality among people. As a concept, freedom of expression is an essential internationally-guaranteed right for humans. The expression of opinions and information-sharing both make an indicator of the level of democracy exercised within societies. And so, tolerating others' thoughts and others' contrasting interests will add support to the level of co-existence in modern communities where multicultural co-living is predominant (Mihajlova, et al. 2013, 5). But, the abuse of freedoms is a characteristic feature of some humans, due to an array of reasons whose investigation is beyond the limits of the present paper. Thus, freedom of expression may anyhow be abused, and results in unexpected phenomena. Groups or individuals can hold themselves superior to others, by race, ethnicity, religion, nation, or else, and consequently, they will humiliate or ridicule any "others" not

belonging to their groups, who are beheld inferior to them (ibid); hatred herein comes naturally of any instance of confrontation. Online media and social networking will help facilitate such behavior due to the ease, unlimited access, and "freedom" with which individuals deal with online communication. Such a state of affairs resulted in making messages, whose producers would for the most part stay unknown, spread at a remarkably short time, and so the crime goes unnoticed and unregulated (Awan 2016, 2).

In this paper, those "texts", which are distributed in online media and directed towards Islam and Muslims, and which include feelings of intolerance and rejection against them, are tackled qualitatively by the tools of Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) so as to answer the following:

- i- What image is presented of Islam and Muslims in non-Muslim online media?
- ii- Can this presentation amount to be seen as a form of "hate speech"?

## **2. What is Hate Speech?**

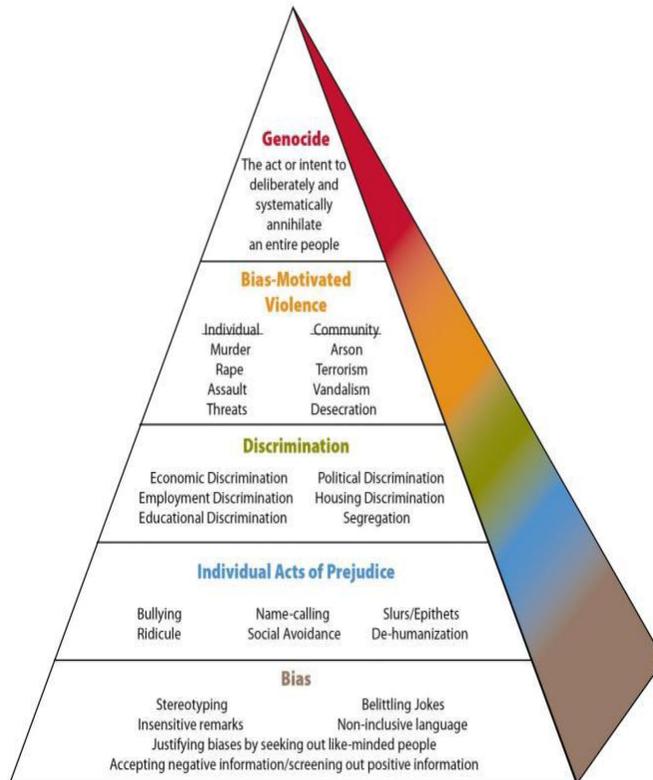
In general terms, there is no consensus as to what hate speech exactly is. Rather, different authors provide parallel definitions. Following no specific technical orientations, hate speech is any expression containing an element of hatred against an individual or a group. It is employed for the purpose of insulting a person or a group on the basis of race, ethnicity, or religious belief (BEROHS 2016, 24). In UN legal contexts, "hate speech" is categorised as "expressions that advocate incitement to harm [...] based

upon the targets being identified with a certain social or demographic group" (UNESCO 2015). In another project, namely the PRISM project, hate speech is seen as pertaining to "every stance purporting to jeopardize the rights of an ethnic, religious or national group, in clear violation of the principles of equal dignity of and respect for the cultural differences among human groups" (BEROHS 2016, 5). Awan (2016, 2) adds to the list of differences which make the raw material of hate speech. He sees it as negatively depicting someone in regard to their "race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation or physical and mental disability" for promoting hate and inciting violence (ibid). What seems to be a comprehensive definition aiming at capturing instances of hate speech of multi-faceted natures is that proposed by Cohen-Almagor (2011, 3) which goes as follows:

Hate speech is defined as bias-motivated, hostile, malicious speech aimed at a person or a group of people because of some of their actual or perceived innate characteristics. It expresses discriminatory, intimidating, disapproving, antagonistic, and /or prejudicial attitudes towards those characteristics, which include gender, race, religion, ethnicity, colour, national origin, disability or sexual orientation. Hate speech is intended to injure, dehumanize, harass, intimidate, debase, degrade and victimize the targeted groups, and to foment insensitivity and brutality against them.

As a relevant issue is the judgment of the level of hate. This is an attempt at reaching a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of hate speech; the judgment is taken from a qualitative perspective so as to create a tool for measuring the level of hate. All in all, to have a better approach to the contextualization of behaviours involving hate speech and

to think of their likely following consequences, the Anti-Defamation League designed what is called the Pyramid of Hate tool as follows:



**Fig. 1: Pyramid of Hate (after ADL Education Division: Pyramid of Hate)**

The pyramid displays those biased acts which would develop in their complexity from bottom to top. At all levels, acts negatively influence individuals and groups or society in general, but what is remarkable about them is that the upper they get in the pyramid, the more life-threatening they become. Thus, hate speech will be involved in "stigmatizing, marginalizing, and intimidating members of distinct and vulnerable groups" (BEROHS 2016, 6).

### 3. Nature of Online Media of Communication

As it is, the Internet does make the platform for all media of online communication, and any attempt to look into the nature of such communication will have to step into the realm of the Internet. The Internet is still viewed as a theatre for opinion exchange which goes beyond regulation. This is so since "anyone, anywhere, who has a computer and a connection, can *express themselves freely* (italics mine)" (Staar 2004, 7). Naturally, the Internet is there as a lazy place for discussing and reflecting upon social problems. Whenever and wherever, people are able to log in and find all types of truths and facts that they are desirous for. Because of such unregulated "freedoms", it makes itself a tool for a controversial representation of social realities (ibid.). The controversy is triggered because all views, true and untrue, extremist and moderate, documented and non-documented, are displayed for free!(ibid.) In this way, irresponsible individuals will take the lead to explain their own beliefs as well as feel free to express contempt of others' beliefs!!!

### 4. What is CDA?

CDA is multidisciplinary in origin. Its roots are there in critical linguistics as well as in sociolinguistics, text linguistics, and applied linguistics. Also, its essence might be discerned in classical rhetoric, and pragmatics as well (Weiss and Wodak 2003, 11). Of these terms, Critical Linguistics and CDA are substitutable, as is noted by Wodak and Meyer (2009, 121). The CDA beginnings are located within the late 1960s and 1970s of the previous century. It was then some sort of a social trend having the aim of analyzing socio-political discourse employing a plethora

of methods for accomplishing the above-mentioned aim (van Dijk, 2010, 621). The full form of CDA however is the product of the very late 1980s and the early 1990s. As such, CDA proves to have had no systematic method of analysis, nor a specific toolkit was there to carry out such an analysis objectively, and so biasness is never fully out! No matter how, the main aim of CDA is the explanation of how relationships of dominance and inequality are maintained and reproduced in discourse. The basis therein is the belief that language is not powerful by itself, but it is powerful when made use of by powerful people (Weiss and Wodak 2003, 14). Upon such a broad conception, CDA may be defined generally as the study of discourse in its social context (Wodak 2001). But as a very technical trend, it may be defined as "a tool for deconstructing the ideologies of the mass media and other elite groups and for identifying and defining social, economic, and historical power relations between dominant and subordinate groups" (Henry and Tator 2002, 72). This definition implies that in every CDA endeavor there is the question of how texts make a reproduction of the represented ideology of the world.

For the purpose of the present study, one major approach, from among three prominent ones, is presented as a toolkit of analysis. It is that of Fairclough's (2001) dialectical-relational approach. Fairclough's view of CDA is based upon two essential notions: language is a form of social action, and is capable of deconstructing the social machinery of power in texts. Fairclough's basic notion in his theory of discourse is "the order of discourse". The idea here is that different discourses are overall controlled by different networks. He (2001, 24) writes:

We always experience the society and the various social institutions within which we operate as divided up and demarcated, structured

into different spheres of action, different types of situation, each of which has its associated type of practice.

To Fairclough then, orders of discourse are always different and independent, but they are related to each other by the type of discourse and the way they are interwoven into the structure of discourse. In these orders, power relations greatly matter to him, specifically when the 'orders' are located within the limits of 'power relations'. Power here is not only seen as operating within certain class relations or certain class struggles, but is manifested extensively between 'men and women', 'ethnic groups', 'age groups', and 'other social groups' which are not stereotypical in specific institutions (ibid, 28). The analytical framework for any issue is to be processed in terms of the following schema (after Abdul-Jabbar and Kareem (2013, 23) :

- a- Specifying a social problem having a semiotic aspect; locating it outside the text and identifying its semiotic aspects.
- b- Specifying the obstacles for the problem to be tackled by analysing: (i) the practices in which it is located, (ii) the relationships of its semiotic aspects to other elements within particular practices, (iii) its semiotic aspects through showing its structural analysis or order of discourse, its interactional analysis , its interdiscursive analysis, and its linguistic and semiotic analysis.
- c- Judging whether the social order or network of practices needs the problem.
- d- Identifying possible ways to overcome the problem. And,
- e- Reflecting upon the analysis critically.

## 5. CDA of Anti-Islamic Hate Speech on Facebook

A number of posts on Facebook targeting Islam and Muslims are analysed in accordance with Fairclough's model (2001). The keywords used to search for the posts included *Anti-Islam, Ban Islam, and Ban Sahriah Law*. The total number of posts is six posts no more, so as to avoid redundancy and repetition. Each post has be thought of as a representation of a certain issue of difference, and consequently, all will be revealing of the amalgam of nearly all problematic issues. The roman numbered procedures represent the stages of applying the analytical tool just named.

- a- **Specification of the Problem:** The social problem manifested in all the posts is the hatred expressed against Islam and Muslims. This has never been produced overnight in one part of the world; it has been a consequence of a good number of events upon a very long period, when the effect thereof was scattered over a very good number of countries. Events such as the first World Centre Trade bombing in USA (1993), the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001 events, the British vs. Asian Muslim youth violence in England (2001), the Madrid bombings (2004), the London bombings (2005), and Stockholm bombings (2010) all contributed to worsening the scene. These mostly terrorist attacks, planned and designed by irresponsible individuals or groups, created the problem. But, let one never forget to look at the other side of the coin! These events are related to other stream of events: the Western, most particularly American, view towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and the relevant Palestinian intifadas (1987; 2000), the headscarf issue in France

(1989), the Cartoon crisis in Denmark (2006), the British Minister declaration of his wish to see women with no face cover (2006), the burning of the Quran in Florida (2011), the official ban of *Burqa* in France (2011). These two-end events, especially after the 11<sup>th</sup> of September events, created two fronts in the West: We "the west", and Others "the Muslims"! People there in the west began questioning the reason behind having Muslims living amongst them.

b- **Specifying the Obstacles for the Problem:** Here, the discussion will take the Facebook posts (See Appendix 1) one at a time, since each encapsulates a certain aspect of the problem.

**1- Post One** is made of two parts, linguistic and pictorial. The linguistic is in the form of a headline including (7) lexical items. These do not include any bad or aggressive word or meaning. It is this: "**Gathering of moderate Muslims demonstrating for peace**". It is written in bold black and is situated at the top end of the post within a realm of white space, taking an oval shape from below. Approximately, it takes one fifth of the whole post. As for the pictorial, it is made of three-section of very many multi-rows of empty chairs, being looked at from behind. The colour of the chairs ranges from greyish-black to grey, and ends as greyish-white. Now, what does it say about Muslims? Is it good? Or, bad? As far as its semiotic significance, simply as it is, it says: Muslims, who are supposed to be peaceful, are far away from being as such! Empty chairs means that the supposition is but a claim, not a fact. They say they want and call for peace, but this is hypothetical, because even if they were to demonstrate for peace, it would be just an act of body and a word of tongue. It would be empty of spirit and a way from mind and soul. This is meant by the *empty chairs*. Or, it means that they would never do such a demonstration,

not even in body; or, it means, if they were absent from *here*, i.e., the place for demonstrating for peace, they would be present *there*, i.e., the place where to call for war and instability.

**2- Post Two** is again made of two intermixed parts, pictorial and linguistic: the background is an image of ordinary people walking in the daylight in a street in a civilized western country. What is to be taken as unusual, however, is the presence of two Muslim women who are fully covered in black. The linguistic part is represented by two separate texts, one vertically situated at the left fifth of the image, and the other is horizontally shown on about the middle of the image and taking nearly two quarters of the full remaining space. The vertical text reads as follows: **"WHAT A DEPRESSING SIGHT TO SEE IN A CIVILIZED WESTERN COUNTRY"**. Here again there is nothing aggressing in the literal meaning of the words. But, if taken along with semiotic symbolization of the image, aggressiveness and harshness appear readily. It is this: it is very depressing to see and have veiled and fully covered Muslim women in our country. The horizontal text is: **"IS THIS THE FUTURE OF THE WEST?"** This is an affirmative rhetorical question. It means: "This should never be the future of the west". The way these two texts are represented on the image is symbolically significant. The top-to-bottom vertical representation form indicates the lowering spirit of the people there to see strange non-belonging individuals among themselves. If these strange people lived where they do not belong, they would domineer the scene. This is the symbolic end which is shown in the horizontal representation of the rhetorical question. Taken together, the two parts of the texts will be as follows: if we, the west, allow strange non-belonging people to live among us, they, the others, will control the scene in our country, and so, they should be kicked out. We should not

permit them to transfer their own tradition of personal freedom-restrain into our communities because they are bad and unknown to us. They have covered identities. We are open to others, and others should be open to us. If not, they have to leave our country.

**3- Post three** involves two figures of men, the kicker to the right side, and the kicked to the left. The kicked, while carrying the "Koran", is thrown into a hole just below him. Below the two figures, there is a text which is an assertive statement logically uttered by kicker while doing the kicking. The text says: "THIS IS EUROPE" (colour in original text). Here, there is a very clear indication of the negative attitude towards Muslims. There is no difference between the two men, but the "Koran". Symbolically enough, it is believed that the Kickers, people of Europe, think that the Kicked, the Muslims, are extremists because of their religious book. They are to the left, and being also kicked by those extremists of the right. Again, the difference lies in the religious belief, no more.

**4- Post four** is totally pictorial. It is an image showing a public demonstration with people, men and women, in a civilized country carrying lollipop-shaped signs prohibiting Islam. Islam is referred to by drawings of mosques on the signs. There is the Flag of Germany. What else one could say about such an image? No more than "Islam is prohibited, and then Muslims should never allowed to come into our country, and those inside it should be kicked out".

**5- Post five** is a circle with its circumference represented as wide black. The centre of the image has two men, one standing and lifting up a pig to hit the Other, and the "Other" is thrown to the ground and begging not to be hit with the pig. On the wide black circumference, there is written: "GOOD NIGHT MUSLIM PRIDE". Then, it is a matter of PRIDE of, not an individual, but a full community. Muslims are proud of, among many

different issues, of eating Halal; the very notorious thing that they despise most is pork, the flesh of the pig. Muslims are very sensitive to pigs, even when beholding them, how about eating their flesh. It is disgusting! Because of such a reality, the man is about to hit the Muslim with pig; the pride is gone when somebody is tortured by something of which he is completely irritable. It is being saluted with GOOD NIGHT, because the Muslim and his PRIDE are going to be kicked and forgotten. The hitter wants to say: "I despise you in the same way you despise pigs!!!".

**6- Post six** is mostly linguistic, and so it is very clear as to what is the intention thereof. It is an image of an orange background having at the upper part the following text: "Have You Made Your NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION to avoid Halal Certified products and services?". Right below it, there exists a pile of Halal products headed by "BOYCOTT حلال". The lower part comprises this wish: "HAPPY NEW YEAR from BOYCOTT HALAL!". As in Post five, Muslims are very proud of eating Halal certified foods and products. The westerners want to oppose the Muslims, and try and avoid what Muslims look for. The post makes an advertisement special to New Year decisions. It calls for making up one's mind at the New Year and avoid Halal foods and products. A logical consequence follows here: which is more appropriate, to avoid the products, or the individual(s) consuming them???

c- **Judging the need for the problem:** Unfortunately, looking at the way the west perceives of Muslims might reveal how the problem is created. The whole picture is that there is a mandatory relation between the "West" and the "Others". The "Others" are living among the Westerners", but the "Others" enjoy what the "Westerners" enjoy of rights and freedoms, whether at the personal or social levels. These both live together, and are free to express opinions and

attitudes. The difference thereof is being aggravated because of the difference in religious and cultural norms and beliefs which will always come to the surface once "freedoms" confronted. So, the problem persists as logically enough as there are people of different views and perspectives when looking at matters pertaining to ordinary life. The problem is needed in so far as it can be seen as an essential aspect of positive end. People do communicate either positively when differences are overlooked and so eliminated; or negatively when differences are stressed and made outstandingly prominent.

- d- **Identifying possible solutions:** Any problem would permit some solutions appropriate to its context and structure. The problem in hand is a social problem created because of a variation in perspectival views. People worldwide are eager always to live peacefully, where all feel safe and unthreatened. And, when we consider the social structure of the western community, we are faced by a multi-layer network of social practices, native and non-native. Native beliefs and traditions work as a solidifying force bringing together the individuals so as to form a unity, which at the same time work ahead to tackle non-native issues. These are practiced by non-native citizens who adhere to different array of beliefs, traditions, and social practices. Any chance to have those two types of individuals –in our case, the Westerners and the Non-westerners, i.e., Muslims, interact, there might be a moment for clash, specifically, when either is not satisfied with the other as to any aspect of religious belief or social tradition. A possible solution to such a problem is purely rational-based. One has to think of the other as equal, and is free to have his own belief and practices. Let's not

forget that it is more commonly ordinary people who trespass the limits of freedom of expression and cut across others' freedoms.

e- **Reflecting upon the analysis:** The analysis was made of a selected number of posts downloaded from Facebook. The posts are reflective of the view of the Westerners towards Muslims. The qualitative approach took nearly all aspects of semiotic significance in the posts into consideration. The linguistic and the pictorial issues have been given due amount of discussion and analysis. If the number of posts is seen as limited, this is because any attempt to search for anti-Islam and anti-Muslim posts will lead you to find a great number of them, and so many are being overused again and again on many other pages on Facebook. Add to this, why there is hate towards Muslims is mostly because of their own beliefs. This might take different ways: the Quran, the mosque, the veiled-women, prayer-performance, and Halal. These are recurrent issues to wage hatred towards Islam and Muslims. Unfortunately, however, such hatred is extensively felt towards them because of some irresponsible individuals who transformed a distorted image of Islam as being terroristic!

## 6. Conclusions

Out of the analysis above, a number of points may be taken as a conclusive statement.

i- Islam is represented by the westerners in these Facebook posts as an unwanted unity that should be terminated.

ii- Islamic traditions, such as headscarf or veil, and Halal products, are rejected and should never be allowed in the West.

iii- The practices targeting Muslims are readily recognized as a very serious level of hate speech which may upon many occasions amount to genocide.

iv- Hatred may be perceived as a form of fear from Islam, i.e., westerners feel Islamophobic, and so they do not want Islam spread in their own countries.

v- Hatred is expressed against Islam because it is thought to be as rejecting personal freedoms, and so it does not allow women to uncover their heads. Consequently, it is seen as unbelonging to west. Its cultural norms are totally different.

vi- Also, Islam is perceived of unwelcoming change; it may never be influenced by modern culture and openness.

## **7. Recommendations**

In so far as we are relating a delicate issue of difference, it is important to make clear some points in due position. As has been announced from the very beginning that the posts are made by common people and not pertaining to official opinions, it is recommended that, in order to help change the extremist views against Islam among the common people, forums and social meetings along with pages on Facebook, targeting both the educated and the common people, need to be held so as help tell the very sense of Islamic belief in peaceful co-existence with all other non-Muslims, and not to be misled by the evil deeds of the extremist Islamists who would never reflect the reality of the religion of mercy. And, a mindful call for all people on earth is put forward: Never to judge a belief by the deeds of only dozen of its believers. By so, extremists will not be able to reach their goals!

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## Appendix 1: The Posts

### Post 1:

**Gathering of moderate Muslims demonstrating for peace.**



Post 2:



Post 3:



Post 4:



Post 5:



Post 6:

**Have You Made Your  
NEW YEAR'S  
RESOLUTION  
to avoid Halal Certified  
products & services?**



**BOYCOTT**  
حلال  
HALAL

**HAPPY NEW YEAR  
from BOYCOTT HALAL!**

## تحليل خطابي نقدي لخطاب الكراهية

أ.م.د. مهدي عناية كريم العتبي

جامعة بغداد/ كلية اللغات / قسم اللغة الانكليزية

### خلاصة البحث

لقد صار التواصل عن طريق الأنترنت في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وسيلة لا يمكن أبداً التخلي عنها للتعبير عن الآراء و المشاركة بها فيما يتعلق بكافة أنواع المواضيع على وجه الأرض، و هذا هو الحال و لا غير! و الأساس في هذا هو الحدود التي يجب ألا تتعداها "حرية التعبير" فتقع في حيز "خطاب الكراهية". و طرفا القضية هذان يمثلان أساساً في قوانين الأمم المتحدة المتعلقة بحقوق الإنسان: الشخص حُرٌّ في التعبير، و لكنه ليس حُرّاً في الكراهية بالتعبير. و في هذا البحث، توظف مقارنة فيركلاو الجدلية-العلاقية للعام ( 2001) في تحليل المنشورات (التي ينشرها عوام الناس، و ليست ذات طبيعة رسمية) التي تستهدف الإسلام و المسلمين في الفيسبوك تحليلاً خطابياً نقدياً. و يهدف هذا التحليل إلى تصنيف الأمثلة من تلك "الخطابات" على أنها حرية تعبير أو أنها خطاب كراهية. و لقد أظهر البحث أنّ لغة المنشورات و تفاصيلها الرمزية تدل على أن نصوصها هي خطاب كراهية قد يصل في بعض الاحيان إلى الدعوة للإبادة، وليست مجرد حرية تعبير و حسب.

**الكلمات لمفتاحية:** تحليل الخطاب النقدي، خطاب الكراهية، مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، الفيسبوك، الحرية.

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