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Living hated: Everyday experiences of hate speech across online and offline contexts

Abstract: The article builds on current research into the effects and harms of hate speech in the lives of its victims. It introduces the anthropological concept of everyday violence to focus on hate speech as an everyday experience as opposed to a sequence of separate hate speech acts. Methodologically, the study is based on a qualitative approach and analyses data collected via semi-structured interviews (N=33) with people who have experienced hate speech in four EU member states (Italy, Germany, the Czech Republic and Portugal). The analysis documents four overlapping themes of how hate speech manifests as the everyday experience of "living hated"—hate speech as a flow; its spatial dimension of moving across online and offline contexts; its long-term effects, leading to what we call "cumulative desensitization" (aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic); and the role of support systems and their (in)effectiveness. The article concludes by suggesting possible applications as well as avenues for future research that could provide a deeper understanding of hate speech as the daily life experience of its targets.

Keywords: Hate speech, Hate speech as daily experience, everyday support, everyday violence, cumulative desensitization, online – offline contexts

1 Introduction

The escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, the migration and climate crises, the illiberal turn of some EU member states and the COVID-19 pandemic—all these crises combined have sparked social tensions and caused hate speech (HS) to proliferate around Europe. Although HS has permeated all critical areas of life (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023), online spaces seem to be particularly problematic as social networking sites are prone to HS proliferation due to affor-

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dances such as anonymity, low threshold access, speed and audience engagement size (Brown, 2018; Leonhard et al., 2018). Bilewicz and Soral (2020) have even coined the term "hate speech epidemic" as the proliferation of HS itself erodes the ability to intervene against HS, normalizes it in people's lives and leads to its omnipresence.

That omnipresence in both the online as well as offline spheres is the focus of this article. We explore what it means for HS targets to live daily under such conditions, how we can understand HS in this omnipresent context, how it affects the everyday lives of those targeted by HS and the support they can get. Based on semi-structured interviews with respondents from diverse backgrounds, our study complements recent quantitative surveys focused mostly on online hate speech.

In the theoretical overview, we summarize current research on HS, mainly focusing on HS theorized as an act of hate speech and its connection to regulation, legal support and online civic support. We then clarify our position in this context and discuss the victim's perspective. We argue for expanding HS theories with the concept of everydayness to capture HS in its epidemical omnipresence across offline and online contexts. Furthermore, we consider omnipresent HS to have both spatial and temporal dimensions of durability, repetitiveness, cumulation and longevity. In the empirical analysis, we provide evidence that everyday HS is (1) experienced as a flow, (2) taking place within a particular dynamic of cumulative desensitization, (3) shifting the relations of HS victims to offline/online spaces and (4) connected with ambivalence and problems getting everyday support. We conclude by discussing the results, suggesting possible applications and outlining avenues for future research.

2 Theoretical overview

Scholarly debates about hate speech and its harms have been heavily influenced by their disciplinary and political contexts. Building on Austin's (1962) speech act framework, legal scholars and critical race and feminist theorists conceptualized HS as an act (Delgado, 1982; Matsuda, 1989; Calvert, 1997). Austin's performative theory allows us to relate HS to its harms as it understands a hate speech act as a form of conduct possibly constituting harm in an utterance itself (illocutionary act) as well as causing harm through the utterance's effects (perlocutionary act) (Neu, 2008). This framing is essential as it helped reveal HS as a tangible act that reinforces subordination and cements structural inequalities, the racial and sexual domination of minorities and the intersectional functioning of power relations in society (Matsuda et al., 1993; Calvert, 1997; Nielsen, 2004; Crenshaw, 2017). Understanding HS as a concrete, harmful act also allows for HS regulation within the

framework of criminal sanctions against discrimination. This act-oriented ramification remains prevalent today. Obermaier et al. (2023), for instance, define HS as a statement intended to denigrate or harm a group of people based on aspects of their ascribed identity.

Adopting the hate speech act perspective enables us to relate HS to structural inequalities and distinguish between the immediate and long-term impacts of HS acts on their targets (Gelber and McNamara, 2016). Many psychological, physical and social effects have been well documented, such as anxiety; self-harm; personal insecurity; lower self-esteem; fear; the internalization of inferiority (Delgado, 1982; Matsuda, 1989; Whitten, 2020; Obermaier et al., 2023); higher suicide rates (Mullen and Smyth, 2004); quitting jobs; distancing from schools; changing the way people dress, talk and interact (Nielsen, 2004); loneliness; and social exclusion (Leets, 2002) as well as health issues such as chronic stress (Crowley, 2014), depression (Tynes et al., 2008) or high blood pressure (Matsuda et al., 1993).

Although the conceptual framework of HS as an act remains essential today, over the years, it has received specifications, corrections and criticism (Neu, 2008, pp. 167–168; Gelber and McNamara, 2016; Whitten, 2020). The coupling between documenting and understanding HS harms was also problematized to move and push forward legal cases. Critical legal scholars expected targets to report HS incidents to the police and courts, framed as the universally desired institutional support (Matsuda et al., 1993). However, this expectation proved to be partly wrong. Many studies have shown that victims do not report HS due to distrust, the normalization of hate, fear of secondary victimization and negative experiences with repressive and legal state apparatus (Carr, 2016; Gelber and McNamara, 2016). Besides, many HS targets do not consider it a legal problem but rather social and personal (Nielsen, 2004). These were crucial findings that were invisible to legal scholars as they mainly worked with court cases as examples in their studies.

Furthermore, hate speech takes place daily. As a result, most HS cases remain unreported and unprosecuted simply due to their regularity and omnipresence (Gelber and McNamara, 2016; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023). Striving to transform the everyday occurrence of HS acts into separate legal acts would not only be practically impossible for the victims (Carr, 2016) but, as Butler points out, could also lead to reinforcing the oppressive mechanisms of the state (Butler, 1997). At the same time, research focused on different correlations between HS harms and support systems, including family, community and friend-based social support systems, have returned inconclusive results so far (Noh and Kaspar, 2003; Ajrouch et al. 2010; Ortiz, 2019; Giwa, 2022).

Nevertheless, with the emergence of online HS in the last 15 years, the connection between HS harms and support systems has gained new urgency. Departing from research focused on victims (and their perspectives), many quantitative and

experimental studies emerged scrutinizing the limits, determinants, repertoires of action, consequences, dynamics and group differences of online interventions by social media users against HS (Kunst et al., 2021; Obermaier, 2022; Rudnicki and Vandebosch, 2023; Obermaier et al., 2023; Hansen et al., 2023). In this regard, desensitization processes are particularly intriguing, apart from the well-documented bystander effect (Leonhard et al., 2018). Through frequent exposure to hate and violence in the media, online games and social media, people's sensitivity to HS tends to decrease. Thus, when witnessing HS, they not only notice it less, become less inclined to intervene on behalf of targets or accept HS as usual but even internalize and express it themselves (Leets, 2001; Soral et al., 2018; Ortiz, 2019; Soral et al., 2022).

3 Our position

As hate speech in contemporary Europe spreads epidemically and occurs well beyond what is reported (Bilewicz and Soral, 2020; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023), our default position is not to treat HS primarily as a legal act or an online phenomenon but as a daily occurrence. Thus, to properly understand the variety of HS harms and the effectiveness of support systems, we focus on their everydayness. Characteristics such as regularity, routine, invisibility, elusiveness and recurrence are crucial for understanding HS's complexity and for distinguishing it from hate crime. Hate crime has a structure closer to a traumatic event and its post-traumatic aftermath (Salter and McGuire, 2020). Although several psychological and medicinal studies did analyse HS as a traumatic event (Leets, 2002; Crowley, 2014), we see HS as closer to microaggressions, with repetitive, mostly more minor, but *cumulative* injuries, which can and do lead to significant issues (Sue, 2010). If we can see microaggression as an implicitly offensive variant of abusive language, then, like Ashida and Komachi (2022, p. 11), we include it in the same set as hate speech. The significant similarity between the two then lies in the long-term effect and the concurrent shared feeling of bystanders that "nothing happened", that is, the low intensity of the individual impact of microaggression, which, nevertheless, accumulates with each repetition (Ong and Burrow, 2017, p. 173). Different terms have been proposed to capture this HS harm characteristic—"accumulated discriminatory experiences" (Feagin, 1991), "discrimination as process" (Feagin and Sikes, 1995), "cumulative harm" (Calvert, 1997) and "enduring, not ephemeral harms" (Gelber and McNamara, 2016). Our research aims to expand on these concepts.

With the focus on the daily experience of HS, we want to reinvigorate an interest in the victim's perspective (Feagin and Sikes, 1995; Gelber and McNamara, 2016),

which was partly set aside in recent years due to the focus on researching bystanders (Rudnicki and Vandebosch, 2023). Just as it was important for critical legal scholars to give voice to victims to make a case for HS as a legal act (Matsuda et al., 1993), we believe it is as essential to give space to victim stories to make a case for HS as a cumulative life situation. To conceptualize HS as a daily lived experience, we consider existing theories insufficient as they presuppose that hate speech is an HS act. Instead, stemming from our expertise, we use concepts from social anthropology that focus on everydayness and violence.

Stewart understands the everyday as "a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergencies" to which people tend to become attuned—what she calls "ordinary affects" (Stewart, 2007, p. 2). To understand how such affects in daily life are impacted by HS, a concept of violence is needed. From the 1990s onwards, anthropologists have analysed everyday life as it concerns violence, pain and suffering (Scheper-Hughes, 1993; Kleinman et al., 1997; Berlant, 2007). The term "violence of everyday life" is used to document how "the violence of global processes […] translates into the severe deprivations of everyday life" (Das, 1997, p. 204). This concept of everyday violence connects the structural violence of discrimination, articulated in the HS context by critical race and feminist theorists such as Matsuda (1989) or Crenshaw (2017), with an elaborated understanding of everydayness. Everyday violence can reconstitute one's relation to self and others, recalibrate the field of ordinary affects, erode lives and bring "the kind of destruction that consists of small, recurring, repetitive crises … happening repeatedly, undramatically, uneventfully" (Das, 2020, pp. 6–7). Everyday violence thus moves beyond specific acts and events into motions taking place "uneventfully" and thus enables us to grasp HS as a repetitive life constellation for people affected daily.

Drawing on the concept of everyday violence, our study aims to move beyond the online/offline binary and complement research on harms and supports in solely offline (e. g., Gelber and McNamara, 2016; Giwa, 2022) or online (e. g., Kunst et al., 2021; Obermaier, 2022; Hansen et al., 2023) settings. We pick up Brown's call to design research on HS harms across online-offline interfaces because "the content of hate speech across online and offline platforms is similar and mutually reinforcing" (2018, p. 6). To empirically investigate it, we specifically focus on the spatial dimension of HS (Feagin, 1991; Nielsen, 2004).

In doing so, we mainly draw from recent debates in anthropology, where the relationship between online and offline practices and experiences is conceptualized as dialectical (Miller and Horst, 2012). From this perspective, all interpersonal interactions, whether online or offline, are mediated differently. The online and offline spaces are interconnected and experienced often simultaneously. At the same time, the online sphere cannot be seen as a derivative or an extension of the offline sphere as it is heterogeneous and thus mutually irreducible (Boellstorff,

2012). This difference is well documented in HS studies, which show that online HS has recognized distinctive characteristics, such as anonymity or the speed and intensity of engagement (Brown, 2018; Leonhard et al., 2018).

On the other hand, from the everyday victim's perspective, some differences may be blurred, for example, between (online) HS and cyberbullying (Obermaier et al., 2023; Rudnicki and Vandebosch, 2023). Cyberbullying is assumed to be a repeated affair based on a power imbalance, whereas HS can be a one-off affair focused on attacking collective identity (Wachs et al., 2019, p. 180). Thus, while there are many instances where cyberbullying differs from HS, we also see a relatively large area where the two phenomena may overlap, both in the reasons for the attack, in their longevity and in being experienced concurrently by victims.

Situating our attitude in line with this position and reflecting the overall aims of the project that this research was part of (see below), we have designed our research to pursue three research questions:

> RQ 1: How do our respondents experience and understand HS and its harms in its everyday-ness?
> RQ 2: How does experiencing HS affect how people live and move spatially in both the online and offline worlds?
> RQ 3: What is the respondents' experience with everyday support in the social and civic sphere?

4 Methodology and ethical research considerations

The primary method used in our research is semi-structured interviews (N=33) conducted in 2021 with research participants from four European countries: the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and Portugal. The research design reflects regional specificities as it tries to encompass the perspective of both old and new EU countries and the different historical frameworks in post-colonial/post-fascist/post-socialist regions. The Czech Republic represents a relatively stable, standard democracy within the post-socialist region. Its attitudes and policies towards discrimination and HS were mainly developed after 1989 and then adapted to the European policy framework after 2003. However, similar to other post-socialist countries in the region, it has been, for most of the twentieth century, a country with closed borders and, therefore, until today, relatively homogenous, with low rates of immigration compared to Western European countries. Portugal is comparable to the Czech Republic in terms of the size/number of inhabitants and current economic situation, but it has a very different history regarding immigration as it was part

of the European colonial order. Germany and Italy, on the other hand, are large countries with strong economies and a history of involvement in fascism/Nazism that has shaped their policies to the present. Both are also challenged by clear internal economic divisions (north/south in Italy, west/east in Germany) and are the leading immigration destinations in Europe. In this regard, we consider the selection of these countries not as representative in terms of the conditions of HS but as diverse yet meaningful in presenting the diversity of everyday experiences with hate speech.

The methodological process of our research is also partly determined by the fact that it was conducted as part of a larger applied project, and our analysis was designed in a way that could inform policy briefs and education activities in the later stage of the project. In the first phase of the empirical research, we conducted an overview of (a) existing research on HS in each country and (b) an overview of available policy documents on HS and discrimination policy documents in each country and on the European level. We also conducted several informal expert interviews and roundtable debates with our project partners from the NGO sector in the respective partner countries. This first phase of the research revealed two important points that determined the setup of the interviews.

Firstly, we found that concrete national policies vary with respect to the characteristics they include in HS definitions; for example, while gender identity and sexual orientation are part of Germany's anti-discrimination legislation, that is not the case in the Czech Republic. The final choice of respondents is thus not the same in each country; instead, it reflects the situation in each respective country—based on existing data, for instance, we know that LGBTQ+ people are often targeted in Italy, whereas in the Czech Republic, Muslim women who wear a scarf are frequently attacked. However, in line with the focus of our study—the omnipresence and everydayness of HS in Europe—the diversity of respondents was our main criterion. Apart from the country of residence, this includes different occupations to reflect the different social statuses and income brackets of the respondents (Sewell et al., 1957; Bourdieu, 2005), gender identities that play an important role in how people experience HS and age (for example, Eckert, 2018), reflecting experiences with different types of HS based on racism, sexism, Islamophobia and so on. Our approach is not comparative, neither among countries nor social groups, as the qualitative nature of the research and the sample size do not allow for meaningful comparison. We aimed instead to capture the diversity of everydayness of HS as a life situation and the diversity of responses to it.

We relied on the field experience of our research assistants in each respective country to identify and recruit respondents. The assistants were instructed to base their selection mainly on the diversity of HS experiences (see above). Additionally, the snowball method was used where some respondents recommended

other people they knew who had had experiences of HS (for example, colleagues or members of support networks). The aim was to conduct 6 to 10 interviews in each country until we reached the data saturation point.

Table 1: Summary of respondents.

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation	Reasons for experiencing HS	Residence
Marco	Male	45	Unskilled job	Immigrant	Italy
Anna	Female	57	Journalist	Woman/journalist	Italy
Laura	Female	60	NGO	Disabled/Activist	Italy
Aurora	Female	57	Journalist	Jewish	Italy
Luca	Male	50	NGO, Carita	NGO	Italy
Flavio	Male	67	Journalist	LGBT/activist	Italy
Martha	Female	50	Teacher	Roma	Germany
Karl	Male	19	Student	Jewish	Germany
Brunhilda	Female	40	Restaurant worker	Immigrant	Germany
Frida	Female	32	Artist	Immigrant	Germany
Berta	Female	35	Teacher	Hate Speech Specialist	Germany
Otto	Male	22	Student	Immigrant	Germany
Paul	Divers	25	Student/worker	Immigrant/LBTQ	Germany
Hans	Male	23	Student	Immigrant	Germany
Gustav	Male	20	Apprentice	Immigrant	Germany
Elsa	Female	35	Public relations/ volunteer	Immigrant	Germany
Max	Male	54	Attending a training course	Immigrant	Germany
Sophia	Female	61	Attendant	Roma	Portugal
João	Male	32	Hairdresser	Immigrant	Portugal
Rodrigo	Male	27	Food company worker	Immigrant	Portugal
Martim	Male	39	University degree, driving instructor	Immigrant	Portugal
Rita	Female	47	Unemployed	Immigrant	Portugal
Beatriz	Female	36	Hair salon owner	Immigrant	Portugal
Leonor	Female	49	Cleaning lady	Immigrant	Portugal
Mariana	Female	52	Restaurant worker	Immigrant	Portugal
Tereza	Female	23	Student	Immigrant/Muslim	Czech Republic
Adéla	Female	40	Assistant	Muslim	Czech Republic
Natálie	Female	39	Teacher	Mother	Czech Republic
Ema	Female	30+	NGO	Muslim	Czech Republic
Viktorie	Female	30	Student	Immigrant	Czech Republic
Sofie	Female	34	NGO	Activist	Czech Republic
Karolína	Female	42	NGO	Activist	Czech Republic
Jakub	Male	38	NGO	Activist/LBTQ	Czech Republic

Secondly, from the desk research and informal expert interviews and also following the project's overall aim (to mediate the experience of living with HS to policymakers and educators), we identified key themes that we needed to cover in the empirical research: the everydayness of HS and its repetitive nature and, connected to that, the long-term effects of HS on the everyday from the perspective of its victims, the spatiality across online and offline spaces and experiences with support networks. Subsequently, these themes informed our main research questions (see above) and were reflected in the structure of the interviews. The interviews also contained questions about the nature of support networks and coping strategies that were not analyzed for this study, as they were aimed to inform the educational and policy activities conducted within the project (and therefore, are not reflected in the research questions stated above). The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1.

All interviews were conducted in the national languages of the respective countries where the respondents live (CZ, DE, PT, IT). The interviews were then transcribed and translated into English. The transcriptions were organized following a template to classify the data across national contexts. The templates with interview transcripts were consequently manually coded using open coding (Rivas, 2012). During the coding process, the following categories emerged: (i) HS experienced as an everyday flow, (ii) long-term effects experienced as cumulative desensitization, (iii) the specific forms of spatiality with a focus on the continuous interconnection between online and offline spaces and (iv) the ambivalence of social support and the absence of civil support. The empirical part of this study is organized in line with these categories.

At the same time, a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was conducted to identify key themes within each interview and an analysis of the frequency of each category. In the interviews, our respondents talked about more of their experiences with HS incidents, which allowed us to quantify issues related to the reasons for HS and where our respondents most frequently encountered it.

The interviews were conducted in each respective country by research assistants who were either researchers or social workers dealing with discrimination, racism and hate speech or professionals in the NGO sector. Their background provided a baseline level of ethical understanding of the situation HS victims face. Before the data collection started in September 2021, we organized an in-person workshop for all partners involved in the data collection (recruiting and interviews) to discuss and establish guidelines for creating a safe space for the respondents throughout the process, such as sensitive language, available psychological intervention, the possibility to withdraw from the process at any time and so forth.

Written informed consent was obtained from all research participants. However, as many research participants are vulnerable, we opted for pseudonymi-

zation. All names and defining characteristics of the research participants were changed to protect their privacy and prevent further exposure to hate speech acts.

5 Findings

Living hated: Hate speech experienced as an everyday flow

"Little things happen every day, and you unconsciously collect all of this," sums up the long-lasting experience with hate speech of Paul, an LGBTQ+ second-generation migrant from Latin America to Germany. Most of our respondents, like Paul, experienced HS throughout their lives, from early childhood experiences of being mocked or even bullied at school, in the streets and online to adult experiences on public transport, at work or while shopping. Karolína, a human rights activist from the Czech Republic with a rich history of HS experiences, defined the conditions of living hated as "the anticipation that it will happen again." Hans, a student of a German mother and Eritrean father living his whole life in Germany shared a memory of what he calls "a certain atmosphere" in which his high school teacher often denigrated him as a slower student only to be surprised later on by his participation in the advanced course.

Ema, a Czech NGO worker and a Muslim woman, had an experience with police and court proceedings that may be illuminating:

> I reported online hate speech, and it ended up being prosecuted as 19 different incidents, including ten comments from the very same thread prosecuted idividually all over the country. As for the judges, I think they really had no context. They did not see the hate speech, the incredible amount of dirt, hate and ugliness I was constantly flooded with from so many directions. They saw one mean comment. Furthermore, that must have looked to them like I wanted too much. (Ema)

Continuous hate speech in such a constellation is not necessarily perceived as sequences of separate daily micro-events or micro-cases but rather as a continuous experiential flow with blurred boundaries between acts that keep "flooding over you." This is not to say that victims do not perceive hate speech as a sequential individual act but rather to complement such an understanding with long-term perspective.

The flow is both a temporal and spatial characteristic of hate speech. Seen from the respondents' long-term perspective, hate speech is experienced as flowing over the boundaries of online and offline spaces. Otto, a German student with an immigrant background, shared the following experience:

> After a child was pushed in front of a train in Frankfurt, my classmate shared a post on Facebook that sought to blame Merkel's refugee policy for the incident. I opposed her the next day at school, stating that the perpetrator was not a refugee and that she should inform herself properly. She responded by saying that I should go "back to Africa." (Otto)

Reflecting from a broader perspective, Rita, a migrant from Guinea to Portugal, started to enumerate the places HS had occurred: "The streets, bus stops, inside buses, job centres, the Internet." She paused for a while and then added: "Any place is suitable for that." In addition to public transport and schools, the Internet or the online sphere are just other places that respondents mentioned when asked about places where HS occurs. Overall, 51 % of interviewees were subjected to HS across online and offline spaces and did not experience it exclusively offline or online.

The spatial aspect, where HS flows from one space to another and moves between online and offline spheres, not only relates to its omnipresence but also its harmful effects. Online experiences impact how people feel and act offline and vice versa. This does not mean that the respondents did not differentiate between online and offline experiences when experiencing both; instead, they observed that the effects on their everyday lives resulting from HS across these contexts were in a dynamic relationship and influenced each other. On the one hand, offline hate speech was often reported as more 'severe' in terms of its impact on a person's life than online hate speech. João, a DJ, hairdresser and child of African parents living in Portugal, described the distinction: he is not as affected by online hate compared to offline hate since he cannot be harmed by "those hidden behind screens, with no personality, education, in anonymity and showing only what they want."

On the other hand, as the interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, several respondents mentioned shifting HS dynamics. As offline activities moved to the online environment, online hate increased. Although Aurora, a journalist from Italy, has lived with HS since childhood as a person with a Jewish background, the pandemic made things worse. When asked about a specific incident of HS, she recalled the online launch of her new book. During the event, a group of individuals joined the Zoom meeting using false profiles and screamed, "Since when is a Jewish woman allowed to publish books?", "Jews in the ovens" and "Go hide yourselves," in addition to having images of Adolf Hitler appear on screen with "Faccetta Nera" (a popular song during Mussolini's rule) musically playing in the background.

Spatial dimension

"Traveling by ICE [the Intercity Express rail system] in eastern Germany is particularly challenging," recalled Elsa, an Asian-German woman working in a refugee centre, "99 % of the time there is a Nazi on the train. It helps people mentally look for an escape route or to seek out well-meaning people or other POCs [people of colour] on the train." Ema, a mother of two Czech-Egyptian children, listed all the adjustments she had to make when using the streets of Prague:

> For many years, I have avoided public transport, especially the subway. I prefer to use a car … When we want to do something as a family on weekends, we must think twice about it; for example, we would not go to a zoo as there would be many people and the risk of someone being mean or aggressive in front of my children would just be too high. (Ema)

These quotes illustrate that living hated means changing how and when one moves through public spaces. Unlike her friends, Adéla, a Czech convert to Islam, refuses to stop wearing a scarf but adjusts her bodily manners, preferring to walk with her head downcast, avoiding eye contact. Others, like Elsa, cultivate a permanent sense of being alert and on guard and always look for possible escape routes. Living hated is not only about actual HS but about its omnipresent potentiality. Gustav, a Latino-German apprentice, expressed clearly this dimension of how HS flows: "Almost all places have the potential for discrimination."

The shifts concerning space occurred both online and offline: "I have already closed my personal online account several times because of comments," claimed Beatriz, a Brazilian woman living in Portugal who runs a beauty salon. Men tend to confuse her shop with an erotic services salon due to a prejudicial image of a Brazilian woman always wanting sex. As she needs to promote her salon publicly, she keeps only work-related accounts. Other respondents try to make themselves invisible as much as possible in the online space—they create a network that only corresponds to offline contacts or known friends, avoid certain websites, never read comments and frequently log off altogether. Others mentioned fearing to open their emails and online accounts because of the potential threats and slurs they might receive. Luca, from Italy, works for a charity helping immigrants and talked about his experiences with emails and social media: "With my colleagues, we are sometimes forced to spend whole afternoons deleting hate messages and posts and always pay greater attention to what we write ourselves, sometimes even wondering whether we should continue using specific social media altogether."

Because many interviewees perceive online and offline public spaces as hostile, the need for private safe spaces is accentuated. Beatriz decided to move her salon to her home, and others, like Laura, managed to move most of their everyday

activities (work, shopping) to their homes, a process accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, while for some, home has become the ultimate safe space, this is not the case for others. Natálie, a Czech woman married to an African man, experiences hate inside their block of flats as an anonymous neighbour keeps writing racist slurs on their post box. "I do not feel safe here, inside the building. I will not let my children run [up and down] stairs on their own," she said. Natálie's experience takes place in an interface between public and private space, but others have lost even a sense of safety inside their homes. While experiencing the constant and intense flow of hate, the dichotomy of a hostile public and a safe home shatters and even collapses. Under yet another intensive round of threats, Jakub, a human rights activist from the Czech Republic, started to feel in danger at home: "I started to fear that somebody would break a window, tag the house. I decided to lock myself inside the bedroom before going to sleep. I imagined ways to escape, and that calmed me down." Feeling in danger and unsafe in public spaces and at home is particularly challenging. "I just cannot feel safe anywhere anymore … and that is really difficult," accentuated Karolína. Thus, for several respondents, there was no safe space left—only an imaginary one as they had started to consider moving abroad and, in the case of immigrants, returning to their native country. The basics of ordinary life or "one's access to context" (Das, 2006, p. 9) are lost, one of the most severe characteristics of violence in everyday life described by anthropologists: "The grounds on which trust in everyday life is built seem to disappear, revealing the ordinary as uncanny and in need of being recovered rather than something having the quality of a taken-for-granted world in which trust can be unhesitantly placed" (Das and Kleinman, 2000, p. 8).

Cumulative desensitization

Many respondents mentioned that they became used to the everyday presence of HS after a while. With one exception—situations involving their children, if they have any—the omnipresence, long-lasting dynamics and intensity of HS flows eventually overpower the people who experience them. They have lived through discrimination so many times, it almost feels like a "normal" part of life, too mundane and every day to even remember or reconstruct the incidents as proper events. The interviewees proposed many terms to capture this normalization process—adaptation, resignation, ignoration, surviving day by day, numbness, hopelessness, apathy, routine, increased threshold, callosity and resilience. These mechanisms of desensitization help people to develop a protective shield. "It doesn't hurt you anymore, and it's not as offensive," reported Martim, an Angolese living in Portugal working

as a driving instructor. "I started ignoring the incidents, noticing them less," mentioned Otto, adding, "I cannot change anything about the situation anyway."

This normalization process, however, does not lead to complete dislocation from the HS flows and does not stabilize the respondents' quality of life. This becomes evident when juxtaposed with the long-term effects. Laura, an activist and a person with a visual impairment from Italy, helped to describe this process: "To experience hate speech feels like being a dead person who is still breathing. Everything you have always worked for, your integrity, credibility, honesty, just came crumbling down."

Desensitization needs to be understood not as a gradual progression towards resignation and apathy but as a dynamic of accumulation, revealed in phrases like Paul's description of "unconsciously collecting all of this." People facing flows of HS accumulate it all and occasionally experience an emotional outburst. Viktorie, a Czech NGO worker from Ukraine, recalled one such situation:

> After years of waiting, I finally got my Czech ID. I was so happy about that and went to celebrate. During a pub conversation, my flatmate asked me if I was a fan of Sparta or Slavia [two football clubs from Prague]. When I responded that I was a fan of neither, the roommate started questioning my ID as he considered this fan choice an elementary part of being Czech. I got so angry with him, yelling, being aggressive, then crying and leaving the scene (...) I don't think the roommate ever understood what he had done wrong. I had just reached a tipping point and had to relieve all the accumulated stress in me. (Viktorie)

Adding to her own experience, Karolína described a feeling she shares with her clients at the NGO dealing with hate violence: "You face and swallow ten hateful comments and nothing happens, but then the 11th one hits you extremely [hard], destroys you and leads you to profound emotions." People then turn angry and become aggressive, crying, furious and unpredictable. Thus, to capture these dynamics, we suggest the term "cumulative desensitization."

Everyday support: Social and civil

Since most hate speech appears in everyday life and goes unreported to police and NGOs, close relationships play a crucial role in potentially forming a durable system of informal and unofficial support for people affected by HS. "I usually talk about it with somebody from my family or friends, which helps. It is good to get stressful thoughts off your chest," reflected Elsa. "When in need, I just surround myself with good friends who make you forget that hate speech happens," said João from Portugal. Apart from talking and sharing, Viktorie recalled a situation from high school of active defence using counter-speech: "There were two teachers who constantly

went after me. After one such incident in class, my close friend stood up and started to talk back loudly to one of them, defending me and arguing that he could not be serious." In addition to family and close friends, peers from the community who have had similar experiences are also important sources of support. For Frida, an artist with a migration background, attending a choir was a vital support growing up in Germany: "It became my safe space. The criteria for being accepted was music ability only. I started to feel integrated." Rodrigo, a Brazilian in Portugal who works in food delivery, summarized the importance of support systems: "Shared suffering is half the suffering."

Abstracting away from specific examples, respondents appreciated and benefitted from having somebody:

– with similar experience who understands it and is capable of sharing their experience;
– trusted to talk to and also to make light of the situation with;
– capable of distracting them and making them forget about it for a while;
– to go out with and feel protected; and
– taking an active approach, denouncing such situations, and standing up for them publicly and openly when necessary.

However, support systems that rely on close friends, peers and family have limited effectiveness. Not only can they not replace institutional support, but the respondents also recounted misunderstanding and mistreatment from their social support system: "I wanted my partner to take it seriously, but he was constantly depreciating it," recalled Jakub of his troubles with his non-supporting partner. Misunderstandings are most likely to occur in online HS. Karolína explained: "My people understand why it is unpleasant to be commented on in a mean way in public, but most of them think 'it is just the Internet', and I am overreacting." Respondents also reported instances where the blame was redirected onto the respondent's manners via normalizing everyday life with hate. "You must expect this," Ema was told by her community, "when you are being so public." Some respondents also prefer not to communicate their experiences to their significant others because they do not want them to worry.

Negative experiences of this kind can be particularly harmful as they come from those closest to them. "This is just very hard for me to cope with," recalled Ema, "my own family practically refuses to acknowledge that there is something bad happening to me." From a long-term perspective, this can lead to changes in relationships with friends, family (including partners) and peers, and it can cause a feeling of being disconnected from close social ties. Consequently, it can lead to alienation, loneliness, self-isolation, distrust, increased social insecurity and decreased social participation. Such social trajectories occur particularly in specific

constellations, for example, for converts, partners or children from mixed families who may have difficulty with community members outside of their nuclear circle. This was Natálie's case—even though they have a good relationship, her mother disapproved of her having children with her partner from Africa and proposed abortion. Similar experiences were mentioned by second-generation migrants, whose experiences differ from those of their parents and peers. Martha, a second-generation Roma migrant from Serbia to Germany, remembered disputes with her parents over identity issues and relations with the majority: "As a young person, I never knew who I was because my parents drilled into me that I must not stand by the fact that I am Roma."

How did respondents reflect on the everyday support of fellow citizens witnessing HS situations? Sofie and Aurora, a refugee rights activist in the Czech Republic and a journalist writing about antisemitism in Italy, spoke positively about support for online HS. "Lots of strangers stood up for me, even offering help," said Sofie. Aurora added, "I have received solidarity from various colleagues, politicians, universities and individual citizens who have given up their anonymity." However, as most HS is experienced either exclusively offline or across offline and online contexts, offline HS was perceived as more harmful, and the respondents tended to focus more on their offline experiences.

When Elsa experiences HS on public transportation, she looks for "a silent ally, that is, a person who seems sympathetic and serves as a confidant (even if it is not true at all), a kind of a mental anchor." Other respondents affirmed that having a sympathetic onlooker is helpful in offline constellations. According to most of our respondents, however, support from strangers was relatively rare. Max, a black German, described a much more common situation:

> I was standing with others in front of a closed door to a concert venue that was very well attended. Then, one guy started shouting the N-word and attacked me and my friends with further insults. The situation was very threatening, and the bad thing was that none of the bystanders said anything. (Max)

Most of the respondents continue to experience similar silent non-reactions from witnesses and bystanders. "The witnesses walk away, they do not react, they do not want to meddle," summarized Rita, a migrant woman from Guinea living in Portugal. According to the respondents, people tend to pretend that nothing is happening, do not look the victim in the eye and start looking elsewhere instead, for example, at their phones. Max said this accelerates the effects of loneliness and isolation: "The worst thing is the silence when they look away. That also makes ... a difference. You realize that you are very much alone."

6 Conclusion and discussion: Towards a society of civil courage and mutual aid across online and offline spaces

To better grasp the omnipresence of hate speech in contemporary Europe, we believe studies of HS dynamics, harms and support systems need to expand their theoretical apparatus with proper concepts of the everyday. We did so here with the help of anthropological concepts, which enabled us to grasp HS not as an act but as a daily life experience. With the conceptual shift towards the everyday, we investigated several of its important components—how it is understood by respondents, its long-term dynamics and spatiality issues, with a particular focus on the correlation between online and offline spheres and the proper support system for everyday life. Our main findings are summarized below.

People do articulate the everyday presence of HS differently. However, hate speech as a flow is, we argue, a shared understanding, and as such, it complements a different modality of experiences, of HS as an act. Moreover, hate speech as an act needs to be understood as a political technology of the state for processing discrimination. As the everyday is a temporal category of durability, long-term dynamics matter tremendously. We document in this regard that processes of cumulative desensitization need to be considered in lives impacted by HS. People accumulate experiences of discrimination and, simultaneously, become desensitized by them. This seriously affects their quality of life and may create a specific dynamic of eventual outbursts of strong responses to hate. Usually treated separately in HS literature, we believe that cumulation and desensitization should be understood as an interconnected process. Furthermore, the everyday omnipresence is a spatial quality as well since people do change how and when they move through public spaces, whether online or offline. Most people experience HS across online and offline settings with the Internet seen as only one of many spaces, albeit with particular features. On the one hand, offline HS harms more—especially when it reaches inside the private spheres of homes. On the other hand, there has been an increase in online HS experiences recently, which, however, tend to be belittled as not being real enough.

What possible applications does the focus on the everyday and our findings suggest? Contrary to our conclusions, police and courts usually process hate speech only for specific cases—concrete acts and concrete comments. However, if micro-events are isolated from the overall and long-lasting HS flow, proving the severity of the impact can be tricky (Calvert, 1997). Consequently, state institutions become incapable of grasping what it means to live with everyday hate speech as well as its long-term effects of cumulative desensitization. We agree with Gelber and McNa-

mara that "regulatory models ought to recognize these ... enduring ... effects" (2016, p. 325). One possible way to do so might be to treat HS as an issue of toxicity, and we agree here with Brown when he draws "parallels between the cumulative effects of hate speech and the cumulative effects of asbestosis or industrial deafness or other dose-based diseases" (2015, p. 58).

However, when Gelber and McNamara write about mitigating the harmful effects of hate speech, they rely on a regulatory framework. Respecting the victim's perspective, hate speech, we argue, needs primarily to be highlighted, researched and addressed in its domain; that is, in everyday life, where it tends to erode. HS often goes unnoticed, as it happens daily, invisibly, through small acts and gestures, and it remains unreported and thus unofficial and unreachable via legislative measures. In this sense, it is not only a problem of regulation but, above all, a problem of everyday informal support. Although respondents differed in their many answers, there was one thing about which they were unanimous—a call for more immediate support from bystanders and witnesses. Max captured it when evaluating one of his recent significant experiences with hate speech: "It would have helped if someone had said something like 'shut up' and then others had stepped in. Looking back, that is what I would have wished for." As our findings add evidence to the ambivalent character of social support from families and friends (Noh and Kaspar, 2003; Ortiz, 2019), the everyday support of fellow citizens is crucial in mitigating the effects of hate speech.

When the problem is in the everydayness of HS, people standing up for its victims in everyday situations is the primary means to prevent the proliferation of hate speech. Recent literature in HS studies targets many issues of online bystander intervention, including digital civic courage (Obermaier, 2022) and solidarity citizenship (Kunst et al., 2021), and urges a focus on sensitization processes (Soral et al., 2022). Building on these but also expanding away from them, we suggest sensitization activities for families, friends and citizens could focus on explaining HS as an everyday flow, whereby processes of cumulative desensitization beyond a specific event matter crucially (Feagin, 1991). Furthermore, faced with the challenges of a hate speech epidemic, civil courage and mutual aid are indeed principles worth cultivating in European society, but preferably across online and offline contexts.

Regarding future research on life with hate, we see three possible avenues to explore, each a kind of self-critique of the approach developed in this text.

First, we suggest focusing on relationalities between HS as an act and a flow of "living hated", which should be explored ethnographically. This is relevant in the personal lives of HS targets and in daily interactions with others, including the state, nongovernmental institutions, peers, families, friends and citizens. As our research documents, treating hate speech as an act goes well beyond being

a neutral analytical process. Thus, long-term ethnographic research of everyday life with hate could mediate misunderstandings when interacting with HS targets. This presupposes moving methodologically beyond the interview-only approach as well as fully immersing the researcher in the field without relying on research assistants and translation processes.

Second, we identify the challenge in analysing the dynamics of online-offline spaces while avoiding epistemological presumptions of their default radical differences or radical sameness. Further research needs to keep tracing their mutual relations in concrete empirical settings. Moreover, it is crucial to investigate and document how and by whom online-offline dynamics are articulated as either radically identical or separate. Regarding the latter, an important phenomenon emerged which is still to be properly researched—whereas hate speech is often deemed not so serious because it is only a verbal or singular act, yet another dimension of belittlement emerges in online-offline dynamics: hate speech is considered not so serious because it is only virtual.

Third, this research aimed to document commonalities in daily life with hate across varied European contexts and social milieus. The sample was too small to focus on differences between different social groups, not to mention whole countries. Nevertheless, some interesting differences emerged in our data which could become possible hypotheses for future research, for instance, concerning issues of politicization vs personalization; that is, where, by whom, and how the problem of everyday life with hate is mobilized as a political problem to be tackled by political means (Italy, Portugal, Germany) or as a personal problem to be instead tackled through psychiatric therapies (Germany, the Czech Republic). Quantitative surveys on everyday harms and supports could provide data suitable for a comparative study and dig deeper into cultural and political differences in the framings and practices of and against hate speech in historically different parts of Europe.

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