



RESOURCE 13

EUGENE TRIVIZAS ON THE TERM 'PIGS'

Eugene Trivizas, the author of modern fairy tales and professor of criminology at the University of Reading, who won a court case against Coca-Cola, writes and documents in a scholarly way his views on the use of the term PIGS, but also the systematic recourse to negative stereotyping to describe peoples. Professor Trivizas writes:

The characterisation of Greeks as fraudsters, traitors etc. is but another case of the sociological phenomenon of invoking negative national stereotypes in times of crisis. Instead of judging and criticising the decisions or actions of particular individuals, an entire people is collectively stigmatised. The most dangerous stereotype is to question whether particular races or ethnic groups are human.

The acronym 'PIGS' used by Western European and Anglo-Saxon investors and commentators as shorthand for the peoples of southern Europe and their economies is not just an insult in poor taste. It is a modern version of the historical phenomenon of casting doubt on the humanity of fellow human beings, the process by which members of one ethnic group downgrade members of another to the level of animals, thereby indirectly signalling that they deserve to be treated as such.

Even though some papers, such as the «Financial Times», and banks, such as Barclays, have responded to complaints, such as that made by the Portuguese Finance Minister, by banning the term 'PIGS', there is a danger that the term will become established usage. Those who continue to use it fail to appreciate how serious this is. They forget that similar derogatory expressions were systematically used in the past to desensitise the public, to suspend any scruples, to disable empathy and pave the way for persecution, massacres and even genocides.

The genocide in Rwanda, for example, was preceded by a concerted government campaign of verbal 'brutalisation' of the victims, and during World War II Japanese propaganda used the same method against the Americans. The most extreme case, of course, is that of the Third Reich. One of the chemical preparations used to carry out the genocide of the Jews in concentration camps was the pesticide Zyklon B. However, long before the prisoners were killed with pesticides, the Nazi propaganda machine had dehumanised them.

Expressions such as 'rats' and 'vermin' were systematically used to describe the Jews. And, of course, when you see your opponents not as humans, but as beasts or parasites, you don't have many scruples in killing them to recycle their hair or fat. Verbal, 'brutalising' violence is often the first step towards actual violence, and not only on the international stage.

In my research into mob crimes, I had made a distinction between two categories of offensive expression: those that deny the masculinity of the opponent and those that deny his humanity; and I had found that the former pave the way to ritualistic and the latter to actual violence (1). The tragic consequences of verbal 'brutalisation' is the reason why the anthropologists Montagu and Matson



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take the view that the process of dehumanising fellow human beings is 'the fifth horseman of the Apocalypse'. It would, of course, be going too far to claim that users of the term 'PIGS' are preparing the ground for the economic butchery of the prodigal 'pigs' of the South.

But it is surprising that civilised people reach the point of using disparaging expressions that have caused so much suffering in the past. When we no longer treat others as individuals, but as representatives of stereotypes, when one ethnic group is considered to embody everything that is honest and ethical and the opponent everything that is fraudulent and immoral, that opens the door wide to all sorts of barbarism. Southerners are not 'pigs', any more than Greeks are congenital fraudsters, or the Germans prone to committing genocide.

Good and evil exist in each of us and the latter can easily be triggered by verbal social interactions. Let us hope that the 'fifth horseman of the Apocalypse' will stumble on the rocks of reason and our common humanity before he can launch a fresh onslaught.

1. «Crowd events in the Metropolitan Area», The Kingston Law Review, vol.9, No.3, December 1979.
2. Ashley Montagu, Floyd Matson «The Dehumanization of Man», New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983

Source: [TA NEA](#)