

The ambivalent relationship between war and peace: public speeches concerning the issue of terrorism¹

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Abstract: *Following the 9/11 attacks, a coalition of West Countries, led by the United States of America, militarily occupied two countries - Afghanistan and Iraq - in part rewriting the rules which up until then had clearly outlined the difference between a war of aggression and a war of defence. By analyzing the various speeches of ten important world leaders of West Democratic Countries on terrorism of fundamentalist matrix, we will outline a contradiction: declaring the necessity of war as a condition and objective of peace. This is solved in different ways: it becomes an ambivalent strategy in the cases of Obama and Merkel, with the latter being less explicit; in the cases of Bush, Berlusconi, Blair and Rice it leads, albeit with different motivations and arguments, to a stark choice: war; whereas it disappears in the speeches of Zapatero, Prodi and Cameron, who speak of actions and strategies to combat terrorism without ever mentioning war. Without offering any value judgment of the content of the various arguments, I only take them as a pretext to reflect on the rules of ambivalent communication: a communication which starts from a clear contradiction, and argues the necessity of it, before demonstrating its usefulness and proposing strategies of action that take it into account.*

The essay is divided into two parts: in the first one (which is published in this issue) I discuss the concept of sociological ambivalence, I distinguish ambivalence from contradictions and ambiguity and I identify the argumentative strategies of an ambivalent communication. Then I analyze the speech the President of the United States of America Barack Obama delivered on December 10, 2009 in Oslo when he received the Nobel Peace Prize as an example of "good" ambivalent communication. In the second part of the essay (which will be published in the next issue), I analyze the speeches of other world leaders as different examples of ambivalent communication.

Keywords: *political speeches, ambivalence, war, peace, terrorism.*

Introduction

COslo, December 10, 2009: the newly elected president of the

United States of America, Barack Obama, receives the Nobel Peace Prize and delivers his speech.

He is well aware of the controversy that accompanied his nomi-

nation: proclaimed man of peace and yet at the head of a nation, albeit under a wide coalition, that following the 9/11 attacks militarily occupied two countries – Afghanistan and Iraq – in part rewriting the rules which up until then had clearly outlined the difference between a war of aggression and a war of defence. It is also the beginning of his mandate, and to many, such recognition seems to be based more on hope than on the reality of the facts.

Above all, he is aware of the contradiction that he has found himself in. It is for this reason that Obama knows that his words will receive the attention of the whole world.

The analytical perspective that I intend to present, taking a cue from the speeches of ten world leaders on the topic of Islamic terrorism², will show how Obama's speech is skilfully constructed by following a logical progression that leads the listener into a configuration in which the ambivalent contradiction is transformed into strategy: to defeat terrorism, he argues, one must make war *and* peace. It is necessary, therefore, that he (and the prize he is about to receive, the Nobel Peace Prize, and his role of military leader of a belligerent country prove it) is a man of peace *and also* a man of war.

Maintaining at once war and peace, both dialectically (in speech) and tactically (in action), seems to be the *leitmotif* of many public speeches addressing the issue of terrorism, or rather the quintessential

argument that justifies armed intervention in foreign territories which, in other words, makes the war a just war, or at least justifiable.

Just or justifiable? There appears to be some ambiguity in the use of these two terms, even in Obama's speech in which they appear as synonyms. Yet something that is just is unreservedly so, while something justifiable is something that in itself is not fair, but that becomes lawful under certain conditions. Walzer writes that he feels compelled to explain the term 'just war':

*"...just, here, is a term of convenience; it means justifiable, defensible, even morally necessary, given the alternatives, and nothing more."*³

Declaring the necessity of war as a condition and objective of peace is a contradiction that is solved in different ways: it becomes an ambivalent strategy in the cases of Obama and Merkel, with the latter being less explicit. In the cases of Bush, Berlusconi, Blair and Rice it leads, albeit with different motivations and arguments, to a stark choice: war; whereas it disappears in the speeches of Zapatero, Prodi and Cameron, who speak of actions and strategies to combat terrorism without ever mentioning war. Prodi and Cameron – who represent two countries which are involved, albeit to a different extent, in Afghanistan and Iraq – acted with a certain ambiguity. On the contrary, Zapatero – who had Spain withdraw from the coalition in Iraq – was more

consistent with what he had promised in his election campaign.

By analysing the various speeches I do not intend to make value judgements of the content of the various arguments, but only to take them as a pretext to reflect on the rules of ambivalent communication: communication which starts from a clear contradiction, and argues the necessity of it, before demonstrating its usefulness and proposing strategies of action that take it into account.

Ambiguity, contradiction and ambivalence

An analysis of this kind calls into question concepts such as ambiguity, contradiction and ambivalence: complex concepts that have ancient roots and are embedded in the lexicon of various disciplines. It is true that this analysis deals only with communication, in this case oral communication, and it would be sufficient to abide by the meaning that they take on in the economy of discourse and in the logic of the argument, which is something that is perceived as complicated. But it is still worthwhile to broaden our view somewhat just to emphasize how ambiguities, contradictions and ambivalence should not necessarily be construed as deceptions by language, ploys to conceal true intentions or cracks in the logic, but also as expressions of a reality that cannot be represented otherwise.

Now some brief references to the concept of ambiguity. Firstly, we

have Adorno, who, in his work on the authoritarian personality,⁴ demonstrated a strong correlation between ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, and intolerance of ambiguity, following on from the studies of Else Frenken-Brunswik who suggested considering the latter as an indicator of considerable diagnostic interest for the analysis of personality. According to Frenken-Brunswik,⁵ the intolerance of ambiguity corresponds to the denial of ambivalent emotions, a poor capacity for introspection, rigid defences, and an uncritical adherence to cultural stereotypes.

Indeed, in the phenomenology of perception,⁶ the ambiguity inherent to objective reality allows the subject to interpret the world: in art and in literature ambiguity becomes an instrument to represent the polyphony of values that characterize the culture of modernity.

In contrast to this, psychoanalyst Simona Argentieri⁷ defines ambiguity as a 'crime of consciousness'. A petty crime, but a crime nonetheless, capable of corrupting *daily morals*, *political games*, and *the language of passion*, in which ambiguous behaviour, and therefore ambiguous language, are a symptom of psychological and social distress. I do not intend to delve any deeper into the matter, I am interested only for the purposes of my argument, to emphasise the contrast of the two positions. Ambiguity: the symptom of a disease, of a moral weakness, or of the good health of the psyche?

Examining the issue from a sociological perspective, Donald Levine⁸ speaks of the *ambiguity of pathos* to describe the effort that sociology, from its inception, has made to banish from its analysis everything that could be described as the grey area of social behaviour and institutions: chance, irrationality and the pitfalls of rationality, inconsistency ... But obscuring the ambiguity of reality and of experience has not only meant that it would continue to use ambiguously strategic concepts for the discipline (for all of society), but has deprived the social scientist of a powerful explanatory concept capable of shedding light on many aspects of reality⁹.

If the experience is ambiguous, then the language cannot help but be ambiguous. It is therefore necessary to put things in order: firstly to distinguish analytically and then connect – as inherent correspondents and associates – the ambiguity of thought and language (which refers to the ability of the words and phrases to hide a double sense or justify more than one interpretation) and the ambiguity of the experience (the ability of any stimulus to have two or more meanings or simply to have an unclear meaning)¹⁰.

In the economy of these pages the ambiguity of language finds an important place because it is closely linked to the ambiguity of the experience of the subject who is speaking when they, in an ambivalent context, are confused or want to deceive the other party. Interestingly, in this

regard, the definition that, in aesthetics, Empson¹¹ gives for ambiguity: "Any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives rise to alternative reactions in the face of the same language element". As is well known, he distinguishes seven types of ambiguity in poetry: talking about the seventh, he states that it is the most ambiguous one because it is based on two opposite meanings of the word defined by the context. Thus, this level of ambiguity shows a division in the mind of the writer himself.

In this perspective we can clearly see the closeness of the concept of ambiguity with that of the contradictions and ambivalences that arise from the contrast between two propositions of opposite meaning.

It is complicated to trace the genesis of the concept of contradiction which boasts illustrious and complex philosophical traditions. It is a journey that would take us far from ambivalence because if what speculative reason argues is true – that everything contradicts itself – the dialectic proceeds reconciling and resolving contradictions, establishing beyond them, that which Hegel called *identity* or *unity*. This is an operation that by its very nature ambivalence does not allow.

In the sociological field it was Jon Elster,¹² in his reflections on the rationality of action, who outlined a typology of contradictions: logical (i.e. substantial), pragmatic (i.e. contingent), and conceptual (when the explication of the semantic content

of a concept generates logical or pragmatic contradictions).

With a view to choosing, these kinds of contradictions can be divided into desires, beliefs, and choices, as well as into systems of rationality that lead to action as noted by Fiammetta Corradi,¹³ who proposes a fourth type of contradiction: the discursive or argumentative contradiction, which is located in the inner dialogue and fine tunes the strategy that precedes any action. Interestingly, she argues that consistency leads to contradiction. The absence of contradiction is the trait that consistency has in common with rationality, but in the uncertainty of choice, consistency can be a more effective guiding principle than rationality because, unlike the latter, it calls into question the identity and the different visions of the world that make up our individual cognitive map. Consistency, therefore, as a deliberative strategy, is capable of guiding the decision-making process, gradually excluding the less desirable options and overcoming contradictions.

This study is briefly quoted to highlight how contradictions, as well as ambiguities, while part of reality, thought and experience, and enhanced by the complexity of the present, permit, and in many cases require, a choice to be made. So much so, that in the cited case, consistency becomes a strategy capable of effectively overcoming the contradictions that, as noted by the author, are not so much between means and ends (or

goals, if you prefer) but between the same purpose when, as in the case of critical choices, values come into play, the utilitarian criterion of the choice vanishes and the options become infinite.

Ambivalence¹⁴, however, excludes the choice between the two options that it by definition offers. Whether it is a matter of mixed feelings that an individual feels, or two normative instances that belong to the ethical horizon of a society, or the dual institutional mandate of an organization, that which determines ambivalence is that the two proposed options are opposite, of equal strength, and are interdependent, such that they prefigure the impossibility of choice without paying a very high price.

Defining the concept of sociological ambivalence,¹⁵ has meant a painstaking assembly of stimuli, suggestions and theoretical propositions derived from reading the works of authors such as Simmel, Elias, Merton (the only one who speaks explicitly of sociological ambivalence), Elster, Bateson ... to the point of reaching a definition of the ambiguous situation that arises when a social actor (be it an individual, a group, an organization, etc.) in any space-time context, is subjected to the influence of, or must respond to, two different instances which may have something to do with beliefs, individual motivations, obligations, norms, values, knowledge models, cultural forms ... In short, any solicitation

can come from the psychic universe or contingent reality.

What distinguishes these two instances is their opposition and their interdependence, which equally solicit the actor to the point that he must confine his act to a metaphorical space, a continuum defined at its extremities by the two bodies, without being able to provide a better choice for him. In this sense, the action will go towards one of the two poles of ambivalence, but in any case will remain under the influence of the other so much so that it could, under the circumstances, reverse the direction of the action without ever breaking the bond that binds him to the two requirements. In other words, when faced with the double command -do, believe, think... this is the opposite of this - the actor is not capable of making the best choice for himself because the choices, although opposite, appear interdependent and subjectively or objectively imposed. If anything, he may direct his action towards one or other of the two poles in a sort of strategy of alternation (either in time or in space) being careful not to move too far in one direction. Of course he may do so, or even choose a third option, but if this happens, the action that would result would almost certainly have negative effects on both the subject and the context as a backdrop to the action.¹⁶

A useful metaphor to clarify this concept is that of the movement of the pendulum. Ambivalence is given by the juxtaposition of two inter-

dependent forces of opposite force and of equal intensity. The two forces do not exist separately but only in relation to each other. They influence each other and create a dynamic field that supports the effect of this opposing thrust, putting in place a perennially oscillatory movement, provided that it maintains the ambivalent nature of their relationship. This means that neither prevails over the other, if not alternately and only partly. In fact, when one force seems to take the upper hand, the opposing force intervenes, which changes the direction of the movement: equilibrium is always unstable and temporary; ambivalence produces ambivalence.

It is evident that what has just been described is only a theoretical model which exemplifies and simplifies contexts and situations that in reality are much more complex.

Over the years, some of my research has confirmed the usefulness and legitimacy of this interpretation to give an account of social realities and patterns of interaction that are difficult to interpret: teachers of an elementary school attended by non-national and gypsy children, struggling with the dilemma between universalism and particularism; young women whose moral horizon is determined by the tension between the ethics of responsibility towards others and the ethics of personal fulfilment; or juvenile detention centres, whose institutional mandate – to educate and punish

– renders both adults and children ambivalent¹⁷.

Ambivalent communication

It is one thing to ‘uncover’ ambivalence in the interaction of the actors observed, but quite another to do so in an exclusively communicative and non-interactive context, which is the text of a speech. Nevertheless I think it is possible, starting from the concept of sociological ambivalence, to draw a basic diagram of ambivalent communication, a kind of reference model that briefly describes the sequence of argument.

We will begin with two statements from the same speech. Because such communication prefigures an ambivalent configuration, three preconditions must be met. The first condition is that we start from an argumentative force: a thesis is supported and then an opposite view is reaffirmed; two opposing propositions are asserted¹⁸; or an intention is declared, followed by a declaration of an opposing intention. The second condition is that the two statements are both reasonably sustainable. Finally, the two statements must have for the speaker the same motivational force, or if they must argue, the same normative force, or the same degree of accuracy, with respect to the reference context.

The locutor of an ambivalent communication can choose to end his speech here, or continue, either

demonstrating the interdependence between two statements (they justify each other, or are the result of each other, or, if you change the content or character of the former, you are also changing those of the latter); or demonstrating the need to pursue implicit or explicit goals contained in the two statements, to finally outline appropriate action strategies to achieve these goals.

The first three steps are constitutive of ambivalent communication, the others are consequential. Specifically, the first condition is satisfied when there is an explicit and clear admission of the opposition between the two propositions contained in the speech. The second condition is satisfied when the sustainability and practicality of both statements is argued convincingly. The third condition is satisfied when the speaker argues the necessity of it¹⁹. The first two conditions are met when the inadequacy and impossibility, or the inconvenience of choosing are demonstrated. The last is satisfied when the action strategies are convincingly proposed and take into account both options, respecting the ambivalent configuration.

If we were to adopt Toulmin’s model²⁰ for the (argument) analysis, the sequence of argument would be as follows:

1. Two claims are expressed;
2. Their opposition is declared;
3. The sustainability/practicality of both the statements is argued;
4. Their necessity is argued;

5. The inconvenience of choosing is argued and therefore the usefulness of pursuing the indications contained in both statements;
6. “Rational”, and therefore feasible action strategies are presented.

Data (commonly known or verifiable assertions which are logically antecedent), warrants (guarantees or rules legitimating the transition from data to theory) and any accessories such as backing (an assertion supporting warrants), qualifiers (usually an adverb or a similar expression showing caution or presence of mind in reasoning) and rebuttals (expressions showing that the speaker allows exceptions to the presented theories) supporting the theories explained in the different steps of the argument can be adequate or, on the contrary inadequate and this

marks the difference between a good communication and a bad one.

War or peace, war and peace: action strategies and strategies of argument

In his speech, Obama argues the ambivalent relationship between war and peace as a response to Islamic terrorism; other leaders argue the need for a clear choice – war *or* peace – to defeat the threat of Al Qaeda (al-qā’ida), outside of ambivalent logic and argumentation.

It is therefore possible, starting from Obama’s example, to imagine a communication that describes an ambivalent situation and consequently outlines strategies that change the extent to which the speaker is or is not aware or able to tolerate ambivalence.

Cognitive dimension	Affective dimension <i>Intolerance/non-acceptance</i> <i>Tolerance/acceptance</i>	
<i>Unawareness</i>	Ambiguity in the language in an attempt to eliminate cognitive dissonance	Adaptation
<i>Awareness</i>	I’ll wait until the situation changes=I won’t act I’ll act, making a choice=I’ll come out of the ambivalence I’ll deny everything/lie	Alternation in time Separation in space Unity in time and space

Table 1: Ambivalent Communication Strategies

In the case of the speeches taken into consideration, that of Bush could be read as the speech of one who denies ambivalence, and who

does so to deceive the other party. Conversely, Obama’s speech (and, in a less conscious and reasoned way, that of Merkel) declares

ambivalence and proposes appropriate strategies: to alternate actions of peace and war in the same space, to put in place at the same time military actions and humanitarian and diplomatic interventions in different regions of the world, and to militarily assist the government of a country to fight terrorism and promote democracy.

Blair and, with a weaker argument, Berlusconi, admit the evidence of the contradiction between the value of peace and the necessity of war, but their role requires them to choose: the war on terror is fought militarily alongside the United States.

Rice is radical: there is no contradiction, war and peace coincide.

Prodi also speaks of the war on terrorism, emphasizing the concept of asymmetric warfare and unconventional strategies, tactics and resources. He emphasises above all the need for a joint responsibility on the part of international organizations (primarily the UN) to implement measures to combat terrorism, promote development, strengthen diplomacy, prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and supervise and find solutions to serious regional crises.

Sarkozy's argument is simple. In times of war, in 1917 and in 1942, the United States has twice brought peace to Europe and made this a lasting peace through the Marshall Plan. France is at their side out of friendship, gratitude and loyalty.

Zapatero and Cameron also talk about the ways to counter terrorism, but both with an eye to their own country. Particularly striking is the intervention of the former, carried out on December 31, 2004 at the Parliamentary Commission of Investigation on the bombings in Madrid on March 11, 2004. That is to say, that he himself stated, nine months and two days after the terrible Islamic terrorist attack in which 192 people lost their lives, that Aznar had cost himself his reelection by accusing ETA of being responsible.

The speech of Zapatero, who, having become Prime Minister on March 15 2004, immediately announced the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq, is consistent in pointing out the ways in which to combat the terrorist threat: showing that they are not afraid; bearing witness to the values of democracy: respect for others, civility, solidarity, hospitality, citizenship, participation; through coordinated investigative police operations to identify the sources of terrorist financing; with legislative actions to regulate, for example, the sale of weapons and explosives; with international operations of intelligence; and by honouring the victims of terrorism.

“Thirty hours from the time of the massacre millions and millions took to the streets in the biggest and most participated in demonstration of courage that has ever taken place in any country (...) Furthermore, after an attack as brutal as this not a

single case of xenophobia was recorded. Not one. Can you find another country in the world more peaceful and more secure? Stronger? More reflective and more moderate? It is not easy to contain the pride of belonging to a country that gave on this occasion an example of civility, a sense of citizenship, of solidarity.”

It is interesting how Obama, Rice and Berlusconi mention the juxtaposition between realism and idealism that has ancient origins and has characterised in time a heated debate on the necessity / indispensability of war. The realist argument, as noted by Walzer,²¹ can be traced back to Thucydides and literature that Hobbes produced two centuries later: war does not need any justification because it is, by its nature, ruled by necessity (i.e. by interest and power). For this reason, it expresses its own rules, other than those of morality: inter arma silent leges. The idealists, represented by Woodrow Wilson, hold a different view, according to which, on the contrary, war is only just if it is waged to eradicate war.

Walzer points out how this perspective risks the justification of war, transforming it into a crusade. Todorov defines as “political messianism” the attitude of those who claim to act in the name of the ‘greater good’, thus justifying their actions and thereby masking interests as values.

In any case, continues Walzer, who defines himself as realistic and

not a realist, the contrast between aims and values is misleading because war is always discussed in evaluative and ethical terms and it is therefore legitimate to distinguish between just wars, that is justifiable, and unjust wars, that is not justifiable.

The fact remains that Bush’s foreign policy for the Middle East, of which Rice is the spokesperson, is presented as the end of the opposition between realism and idealism:

“No serious realist should claim that power is its own justification. No idealist should imply that power is irrelevant to the spread of ideals. The real issue is to establish a sense of proportion between these two essential elements of policy.”

Obama says:

“And within America, there has long been a tension between those who describe themselves as realists or idealists – a tension that suggests a stark choice between the narrow pursuit of interests or an endless campaign to impose our values around the world. I reject those choices.”

Rice says:

“There is an old argument between the so-called “realistic” school of foreign affairs and the “idealistic” school. To oversimplify, realists downplay the importance of values and the internal structures of states, emphasizing instead the balance of power as the key to stability and peace. Idealists emphasize the primacy of values, such as

freedom and democracy and human rights in ensuring that just political order is obtained. As a professor, I recognize that this debate has won tenure for and sustained the careers of many generations of scholars. As a policymaker, I can tell you that these categories obscure reality. In real life, power and values are married completely.”

Implicitly, but of the same position, are Berlusconi and Blair.

The former says:

“...this is the time in which interests and values must be closely and rigorously combined.”

The latter, speaking of the legitimacy of militarily intervening for humanitarian reasons:

“This not only served the purpose of repairing injustices, but it was necessary because, in an increasingly interdependent world, our interests were closely related to those of others, and it is a really rare event that a conflict which breaks out in one area of the world does not extend immediately to another.”

All of these speeches present an argumentative tension between the themes of peace and those of war and propose strategies to combat terrorism, combining these tensions in different ways.

Possible models of ambivalent communication

An ambivalent message in itself does not exist. What exists, rather, is a person who, for example,

experiences ambivalent feelings and expresses this ambivalence in their speech. Alternatively, a subject who in their communication describes an ambivalent context: in this case a tension between the need to combat terrorism (to make war) and at the same time build peace.

In this sense, the speeches of Obama and Rice are two examples which are very different from each other. Very briefly:

Obama: terrorism is a war against us. In order to achieve peace we must make both peace and war. It is not enough to fight the terrorists; we must also combat the conditions that foster terrorism: poverty, ignorance, disease, and so on.

Rice: Islamic terrorism has changed the way we understand war: they attack, we go on armed peacekeeping missions; they make war, we, fighting terrorism, make both war and peace.

The substantial difference between the two speeches is that in the first case the speaker provides arguments in support of his thesis, and that is the close link between war and peace (or, according to the interpretation proposed, their ambivalent relationship); in the second case a sort of act of faith is required (you have to believe it because we say so), ambiguously solving the contradiction between war and peace.

Ambivalence and ambiguity mark out opposite semantic territories: the first reveals, the second conceals.

‘Good’ ambivalent communication

An example of good ambivalent communication is that of those who take on board the contradictions of their discourse and lead them to the ambivalence of the situation to which it refers. A situation that, as such, must be addressed by implementing appropriate strategies without leaving the ambivalence, i.e. without making a choice that will eliminate one or the other of the terms of the contrast.

It is the speech of those who give account of the contradiction: those who state clearly and affirm in a well-argued way the veracity of the claims and in an equally well-argued manner illustrate the action strategies that take the contradiction into account.

Specifically, the war/peace question: terrorism is a war against democracy. To achieve peace, we must at the same time make war (flush out terrorist nests wherever they are found, capture the leaders, kill them...) and peace (diplomatic and intelligence actions, negotiations, economic investment in poor countries...). Because if it is true that war alone does not defeat terrorism, but rather fosters it, it is equally true that peaceful actions alone cannot fight it.

Those who support this thesis believe that the choice between war and peace is impossible and that it is necessary to put in place a strategy that takes ambivalence into account and that is effective with respect to the given objectives. In other words, it is the speech of those who say "I choose not to choose" and act accordingly.

It is the communication of those who are aware of the ambivalence, tolerate it because they understand it and argue its reasons. In this perspective it takes into account the complexity of the situation, promises action strategies to resolve problems and to achieve objectives (the types of such strategies have been previously described).

Obama's speech is an example of good ambivalent communication for many reasons: it is able to explain and accommodate divergent views, because the sequence of argument respects the 'rules' of ambivalence. Not even its defects (some errors of omission, for example) weaken it significantly²⁴. His whole speech is intended to demonstrate that to achieve the proposed objective – to defeat terrorism – it is absolutely necessary to put in place at the same time acts of war and acts of peace: choosing just one of the two strategies, and excluding the other, would result in failure to achieve the objective.

The interesting thing about Obama's speech is that it does not support the arguments that generally make up the rhetoric of just war (defensive war, war that obeys the rules, war that exports democracy) because for him, it is much more important to show how a war is justifiable only if interdependent with peace.

From this point of view (that is, from the point of view of ambivalent argumentation), it can be considered a good model against which to analyse the other speeches.

Obama's speech

Immediately after he gives thanks, Obama explicitly denounces the contradiction that he finds himself in to be accepting the Nobel Peace Prize (*"the most profound issue surrounding my receipt of this prize is the fact that I am the Commander-in-Chief of the military of a nation in the midst of two wars"*) and makes his own the reasons and objections of those who believe that prize to be undeserved or at least premature: *"Still, we are at war, and I'm responsible for the deployment of thousands of young Americans to battle in a distant land. Some will kill, and some will be killed."*

Not only does he share these reasons, but he argues them and the doubts raised against him become his own doubts: *"And so I come here with an acute sense of the costs of armed conflict – filled with difficult questions about the relationship between war and peace, and our effort to replace one with the other."*

From here on begins a reasoning that leads step by step to the ambivalence of the relationship between war and peace.

"War, in one form or another, appeared with the first man. At the dawn of history, its morality was not questioned; it was simply a fact, like drought or disease (...) and over time, as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers and clerics and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war. The

concept of a "just war" emerged, suggesting that war is justified only when certain conditions were met: if it is waged as a last resort or in self-defence; if the force used is proportional; and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence."

Here, Obama introduces the concept of 'just war', a key concept throughout his argumentation which represents the first pole in the ambivalent configuration that he is about to construct. First and foremost a strong admission of the truth:

"...for most of history, this concept of "just war" was rarely observed. (...) And while it's hard to conceive of a cause more just than the defeat of the Third Reich and the Axis powers, World War II was a conflict in which the total number of civilians who died exceeded the number of soldiers who perished."

This experience, and this knowledge changed us all, "victor and vanquished alike", and we realised that new rules were in play... *"America led the world in constructing an architecture to keep the peace: a Marshall Plan and a United Nations, mechanisms to govern the waging of war, treaties to protect human rights, prevent genocide, restrict the most dangerous weapons. In many ways, these efforts succeeded. Yes, terrible wars have been fought, and atrocities committed. But there has been no Third World War."*

But today *"this old architecture is buckling under the weight of new threats. The world may no longer*

shudder at the prospect of war between two nuclear superpowers, but proliferation may increase the risk of catastrophe. Terrorism has long been a tactic, but modern technology allows a few small men with outsized rage to murder innocents on a horrific scale. Moreover, wars between nations have increasingly given way to wars within nations. The resurgence of ethnic or sectarian conflicts; the growth of secessionist movements, insurgencies, and failed states – all these things have increasingly trapped civilians in unending chaos.”

In these new conflicts, all the rules of just and justifiable war are violated: *“In today’s wars, many more civilians are killed than soldiers; the seeds of future conflict are sown, economies are wrecked, civil societies torn asunder, refugees amassed, children scarred.”*

Obama admits the complexity of the war/peace relation: *“I do not bring with me today a definitive solution to the problems of war. What I do know is that meeting these challenges will require the same vision, hard work, and persistence of those men and women who acted so boldly decades ago. And it will require us to think in new ways about the notions of just war and the imperatives of a just peace.”*

This is the crux of Obama’s speech. It begins an argument that redefines in the light of the present what war is and what peace is and argues the ambivalence of this relationship. The first rule of ambi-

valent communication – a thesis is supported: war can be just or justifiable.

“There will be times when nations – acting individually or in concert -- will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.”

The opposite thesis is supported: war is never just or justifiable.

“I make this statement mindful of what Martin Luther King Jr. said in this same ceremony years ago: “Violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones.”

The second rule of ambivalent communication – starting from this contradiction the veracity of both statements is argued: *“I know there’s nothing weak – nothing passive – nothing naïve – in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King.”*

But being aware of the value and the power of peace does not mean ignoring the necessity of war: *“But as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone. I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler’s armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda’s leaders to lay down their arms. I raise this point; I begin with this point because in many countries there is a deep ambivalence about military action today, no matter what the cause.”*

At this point Obama introduces the arguments that support the third condition in ambivalent communication and that is the interdependence between the two opposite terms.

"...at times, this is joined by a reflexive suspicion of America, the world's sole military superpower" but this accusation is to be rejected because war and peace are terms in an ambivalent configuration of which America is the protagonist, undertaking acts of war and acts of peace:

"Whatever mistakes we have made, the plain fact is this: The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms. The service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform has promoted peace and prosperity from Germany to Korea, and enabled democracy to take hold in places like the Balkans."

This strategy (this "sacrifice") implicitly supports Obama. It was inevitable because breaking the ambivalence of the situation and opting for one or other of the terms of the contradiction (either war or peace) would have had deleterious effects: there would be no democracy in Korea, Germany or in the Balkans. They did it in order to follow their ideals and their interests: *"We have borne this burden not because we seek to impose our will. We have done so out of enlightened self-interest – because we seek*

a better future for our children and grandchildren."

Therefore ambivalence is the only possible strategy:

"So yes, the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace. And yet this truth must coexist with another – that no matter how justified, war promises human tragedy."

Admitting the necessity of war in order to create peace doesn't mean attributing positive values to it, *"But war itself is never glorious, and we must never trumpet it as such"*, because it should only be considered in its interdependence with peace (implicitly it is said that a war that could not be considered within such an interdependence can neither be just nor justifiable).

We must be aware of the ambivalence inherent in reality and in human nature itself and implement strategies that take it into account: it is a challenge and an act of courage: *"So part of our challenge is reconciling these two seemingly irreconcilable truths – that war is sometimes necessary, and war at some level is an expression of human folly."*

To obtain lasting peace "we must direct our effort to the task that President Kennedy called for long ago. „*Let us focus,*" he said, *„on a more practical, more attainable peace, based not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution in human institutions."*

With this statement the fifth and penultimate step of ambivalent communication is introduced: defining the goal he wants to achieve in the context in which he is consciously operating: *“What might this evolution look like? What might these practical steps be?”*

So we pass to the sixth stage of ambivalent communication and that is the proposal of appropriate strategies that take account of ambivalence and that are ‘rational’ in view of the objectives: the creation of institutions that can guarantee peace going against human nature.

The first step in this direction is to establish the rules of just war (one of the two poles of ambivalence).

The first rule: *“I believe that all nations – strong and weak alike -- must adhere to standards that govern the use of force (...) I am convinced that adhering to standards, international standards, strengthens those who do, and isolates and weakens those who don’t.”*

The second rule: *“But in a world in which threats are more diffuse, and missions more complex, America cannot act alone.”*

The third rule: war is admitted for self-defence and it is the only condition that can justify a unilateral act. *“I – like any head of state -- reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend my nation. (...)The world rallied around America after the 9/11 attacks, and continues to support our efforts in Afghanistan, because of the horror of those senseless attacks and the*

recognized principle of self-defence.”

The fourth rule: when there is an unjustified aggression from one country to another it is necessary to intervene because that intervention contributes to reinforcing the first rule (and that is that everyone must respect the rules).

“Likewise, the world recognized the need to confront Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait -- a consensus that sent a clear message to all about the cost of aggression.”

The fifth and sixth rules: on an international level it is possible to militarily intervene in the internal affairs of a country to avoid the massacre of civilians and wherever there are humanitarian crises.

“More and more, we all confront difficult questions about how to prevent the slaughter of civilians by their own government, or to stop a civil war whose violence and suffering can engulf an entire region. I believe that force can be justified on humanitarian grounds, as it was in the Balkans, or in other places that have been scarred by war.”

A rational strategy is necessary if peace is to be achieved. If we work exclusively with instruments of peace, we do not reach our objective: we must implement a strategy of ambivalent action that allows the use of war under the above conditions.

“Inaction (that is, neither war nor peace) tears at our conscience and

can lead to more costly intervention later. That's why all responsible nations must embrace the role that militaries with a clear mandate can play to keep the peace."

"But in many countries, there is a disconnect between the efforts of those who serve and the ambivalence of the broader public. I understand why war is not popular, but I also know this: The belief that peace is desirable is rarely enough to achieve it. Peace requires responsibility. Peace entails sacrifice."

Peace, therefore, is the other pole of ambivalence, because while the rules for war are being established, it is also necessary to establish the rules for peace, rules, like the previous ones, to which everyone must adhere: *"for if we want a lasting peace, then the words of the international community must mean something. Those regimes that break the rules must be held accountable."* In other words, those who break the rules must be punished (implicitly implied, like war). This is a statement that highlights the war/ peace interdependence and their ambivalent relation.

But what are the actions for peace?

First of all, the prevention of the production of atomic weapons; *"Those who seek peace cannot stand idly by as nations arm themselves for nuclear war."*

The second action for peace: the respect of human rights must become a rule for everyone and everyone must work towards achieving this

goal because *"peace is not merely the absence of visible conflict. Only a just peace based on the inherent rights and dignity of every individual can truly be lasting."*

But to promote human rights in places where they are not respected, international reproach and war is not enough: beyond war there is diplomacy even if *"engagement with repressive regimes lacks the satisfying purity of indignation. But I also know that sanctions without outreach – condemnation without discussion – can carry forward only a crippling status quo."* Coming to terms with the enemy does not exclude war but it can be an effective weapon to support internal dissidents and avoid war. Here Obama outlines alternation, one of the strategies suggested by ambivalence: when the pendulum is swinging too close to the side of war, one must put into action strategies of the opposing type. Balancing war and peace is an effective ambivalent strategy but it must be patiently planned and it requires long periods of time: *"There's no simple formula here. But we must try as best we can to balance isolation and engagement, pressure and incentives..."*

The third action for peace: everyone should contribute to the economic security of all countries because if this objective is not reached then there can be no lasting peace (in other words, there is no leaving the ambivalent configuration).

"...a just peace includes not only civil and political rights -- it must

encompass economic security and opportunity. For true peace is not just freedom from fear, but freedom from want."

But this is not enough because there can never be a lasting peace that does not implicate war in its defence "*without something more -- and that's the continued expansion of our moral imagination; an insistence that there's something irreducible that we all share."*

At this point Obama touches on (but does not recognize) an ambivalent configuration, given by the contradiction of universalism / particularism, and equality / recognition of difference. And precisely because he does not understand that this contradiction introduces an ambivalent configuration, he dismisses particularism as the exclusive source of many conflicts. If Obama had continued consistently in his ambivalent argument, he would have had to connect the exasperation of particularism (of which religious fundamentalism is the most extreme expression) to the absence of the opposite pole of the ambivalence: respect for the rights of all, which is universalism. Fundamentalism breeds where there is a lack of civil rights, where there is deprivation, poverty, etc., in other words what Obama has maintained up until now.

He forfeits a strong argumentative resource and falls back to a quite obvious and trivial theory that does not weaken the speech, but neither does it strengthen it.

"...we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Adhering to this law of love has always been the core struggle of human nature. For we are fallible. We make mistakes, and fall victim to the temptations of pride, and power, and sometimes evil."

Another ambivalent configuration? If one looked hard enough, one would find the entire last volume of Freud in there as well as the (ambivalent) relationship between Eros and Thanatos. But, obviously, this call for Obama is just a rhetorical stopgap. A good rhetorical stopgap that singles out emotionally strong values.

It appeals to values which, from now until the end of the speech, in an oratory crescendo, reproduce the ambivalent peace/war configuration that has been set from the beginning and throughout his speech.

"The non-violence practiced by men like Gandhi and King may not have been practical or possible in every circumstance, but the love that they preached – their fundamental faith in human progress – that must always be the North Star that guides us on our journey.

For if we lose that faith – if we dismiss it as silly or naïve; if we divorce it from the decisions that we make on issues of war and peace – then we lose what's best about humanity. We lose our sense of possibility. We lose our moral compass."

Note

- ¹ This essay is part of a broader consideration on political or public communication aiming at a close analysis of the reasoning quality, of stereotypes, of ideological subtle deceits. The results of this work have been published in two volumes: Franco Rositi (ed.), "La ragione politica. I discorsi dei leader politici", Liguori, Napoli, 2013; Vando Borghi, Ota De Leonardis, Giovanna Procacci (eds), "La ragione politica. I discorsi delle politiche", Liguori, Napoli, 2013.
- ² Silvio Berlusconi, September 25, 2002, Chamber of Deputies, Parliamentary debate on the international situation and the crisis in Iraq; Tony Blair, March 5, 2004, Sedgefield; George W. Bush, March 18, 2003, Speech to the nation, 48-hour ultimatum to Iraq; David Cameron, February 5, 2011, Munich Security Conference; Angela Merkel, February 7, 2009, Munich Security Conference; Romano Prodi, September 20, 2006, 61st United Nations General Assembly, New York; Condoleezza Rice, October 1, 2002, Manhattan Institute, "Wriston Lecture", on the national security policy; Barack Obama, December 10, 2009, Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony; Nicolas Sarkozy, November 7, 2007 USA Congress Washington; José Luis R. Zapatero, December 13, 2004, Parliamentary Investigative Committee on the attacks of March 11, 2004 (Atocha). The speeches have been selected from September 11, 2001 to the end of 2011 in solemn public occasions when the speaker explained his opinions with a careful reasoning; I have excluded Islamic leaders' speeches because the analysis is focused on the western defence of war; finally, among western leaders I have decided to keep a balance between the right and left wing.
- ³ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars, A moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, New York, 1978, p. 64.
- ⁴ Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, The American Jewish Committee, New York, 1950.
- ⁵ Else Frenken-Brunswik, "Intolerance of ambiguity as on emotional and perceptual personality variable", *Journal of Personality*, view issue TOC, Vol.18, Issue 1, sept. 1949.
- ⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, Gallimard, Paris, 1945.
- ⁷ Simona Argentieri, *L'ambiguità*, Einaudi, Torino, 2008.
- ⁸ Donald N. Levine, *The Flight of Ambiguity*, The University of Chicago Press Ltd., London, 1985.
- ⁹ This has resulted in errors of three types: inconsistent applications of seemingly precise categories in empirical studies; inadvertent use of the same concept with different meanings in different contexts; and inability to adequately define the different meanings of the word, even when the ambiguity becomes clear. To successfully use ambiguity, Levine proposes two strategies: reasoning by analogy, through that which the different meanings of the term have in common, thus building to a higher level of abstraction a paradigm that includes them all. Or,

- on the contrary, reasoning for differences and understanding the reasons through the genesis.
- ¹⁰ This, according to Levine, allows us to profitably use the ambiguity of concepts and experiences to reflect on such areas and thus restore some order and coherence.
- ¹¹ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, New Directions Publishing, New York, 1966 (first published 1930), p. 34.
- ¹² Jon Elster, *Logic and Society*, Wiley, New York, 1978.
- ¹³ Fiammetta Corradi, "Note sul concetto di coerenza", *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, a. XLVIII, n.2, 2007.
- ¹⁴ Although the concept of ambivalence alienates itself from sociology, it is rather well known to psychoanalysis: the first to broach the subject was Bleuler (Eugen Bleuler, "Vortrag über Ambivalenz", in *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*, vol. I., 1910), who distinguished: *voluntary* ambivalence, indicating a person who manifests opposing behaviour; *intellectual* ambivalence, when a proposition and its antithesis are simultaneously expressed; and *affective* ambivalence, when the same object is signalled by two feelings of equal intensity but of opposite character. A concept incorporated by Freud who, in defining the stages of psychic and sexual development of the individual, uses the concept of emotional ambivalence to measure the progressive change of the relationship between self and other.
- ¹⁵ Anna Rita Calabrò, *L'ambivalenza come risorsa*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1997.
- ¹⁶ Anna Rita Calabrò, "Uguaglianza e differenza: il caso dell'inserimento in una scuola elementare di bambini zingari e stranieri", *La società multietnica*, n.2, Agosto, 1996; Anna Rita Calabrò, *Una giornata qualsiasi*, Ripostes, Salerno, 1996; Anna Rita Calabrò, "Prigionieri dell'ambivalenza", *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, a. XXXVIII n. 2, 2002.
- ¹⁷ In these cases, choosing means compromising a balance, creating a malfunction in the system, or making a costly sacrifice. It is for this reason that in a school where everyone is convinced that universalistic principles should be applied, we realize that this road leads to the discrimination of immigrant children and, conversely, to treat them differently from the others, taking account of their disadvantage, has the effect of a serious act of injustice to everyone (Anna Rita Calabrò, "Uguaglianza e differenza: il caso dell'inserimento in una scuola elementare di bambini zingari e stranieri", *La società multietnica*, n.2, Agosto, 1996). Educating and punishing are two proposals the prison context renders opposite, but when prison officers believe that their role is only to supervise, and delegate the educational role to educators and trainers, and when they, in turn, distance themselves from the punitive reality of the prison, the organization goes into crisis and agents, educators and teachers lose authority with respect to the youths (Anna Rita Calabrò, "Prigionieri dell'ambivalenza", *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, a. XXXVIII n. 2, 2002). For a young woman who is planning her own life and must decide how much to invest in professional success and how much in family (taking into account

that society's expectations of her require her to be present and competitive in the labour market as well as to take on the responsibility of care) the choice often bears the sign of a sacrifice that in many cases calls into question her self-image (Anna Rita Calabrò, *Una giornata qualsiasi*, Ripostes, Salerno, 1996).

¹⁸ "In logic, opposition may exist between two terms, or between two statements. Two terms are said to be opposed to each other either when they are contradictory, or contrary to, or correlative, or when one is the deprivation of the other (like good and bad). Two propositions are in a relationship of opposition when, having the same subject and predicate, they somehow exclude each other, in that they differ either in quality or quantity, or in both quality and quantity. Opposition gives rise to antithesis". From the point of view of logic "contradiction represents, therefore, the most radical form of opposition: two contradictory statements can neither be both true, nor both false: excluding each other necessarily makes one true and one false." (Mario Ghio, Dario Sacchi, "Opposizione", *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, Bompiani, Milano, 2006, p. 8163) In this case, therefore, it is more correct to speak of oppositions than of contradictions because ambivalence is created when two statements, despite their opposition, are both considered necessary.

¹⁹ 'Necessity' in the Aristotelian sense, in that it cannot be otherwise.

²⁰ Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1958.

²¹ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars, A moral Argument with*

Historical Illustrations, Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, New York, 1978; Michael Walzer, *Arguing about War*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2004.

²² Tzvetan Todorov, *Les ennemis intimes de la démocratie*, Editions, Robert Laffont S.A., Paris, 2012.

²³ Henry Kissinger, "Realists vs. Idealists", *The New York Times*, Thursday, May 12, 2005, p. 56.

²⁴ My analysis neglects the quality of the speech in the broad sense, so much so that it fails to capture errors and omissions in Obama's speech. Two examples: When Obama lays claim to the hegemonic role that America had for the maintenance of peace in the world after the Second World War, he admits the fact that there were conflicts, however, where the rules of just war (for example, not striking the civilian population) were not respected. However, he remains ambiguous and does not specify who has violated such rules. But when he mentions the Korean War as an example of a just or justifiable war for the maintenance of peace - a war that has thus complied with the rules - it is clear that America is not named an accomplice and that in his speech there is at least one error of omission: how many civilian victims were there in Korea and Vietnam? Even later, when he says "America has never fought a war against a democracy" he neglects to mention the support that over time the United States has given to more than a few right-wing dictatorships, as well as to local corrupt elites. So much so, that Todorov (Tzvetan Todorov, *Op. cit.*, pp. 76-78) accuses Obama's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech of "political messianism".

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