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Chapter 8

Communicating Hate on YouTube: The Macedonian Identity in Focus

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Abstract

This chapter explores the dominant narratives of the two conflicting sides - Greeks and Macedonians, on YouTube to reveal how these narratives promote a certain knowledge that shapes the Macedonian identity. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to identify the users' ideological constructions, hatred as an argument, Christianity as part of Macedonian identity, and the economic fight as discourses in 3,500 comments on 76 YouTube videos related to Macedonian Name Dispute (MND). MND is an essential part of the Macedonian Question that has challenged the borders of various Balkan countries; so the findings highlight the power of nationalistic narratives and shed light on the constant use of hate opinions as comments on YouTube.

Keywords: Discourse, Hate Speech, Macedonian Name Dispute, Nationalism, Prespes Agreement, YouTube

Introduction

The struggle amongst the Balkan countries for the creation of their nation-state is linked with the theoretical aspect of imagined communities and the manufacturing of a national consciousness through nationalistic narratives. The construction of the national identity, for the majority of the scholars, is supposed to be a prominent outcome of the ideas of the French Revolution and there has also been an academic consciousness about the emergence of nationalism for at least two hundred years (Anderson, 2016; Greenfeld, 1993; Veremis, 2010).

Given that the notion of nationalism is associated with a variety of economic, political, and physiological factors, throughout the history of humankind there have been narratives that included elements for forming a common kind of national ground. Not surprisingly however, this is not steeped in objectivity but rather emotional attachment to the place or the population, in which the individuals feel belonging (Anderson, 2016). This sensitive, emotional, ideological notion provides to the citizens a certain political identity, from which they are recognized as descendants of particular origins of a country (Anderson, 2016; Greenfeld, 1993; Veremis, 2010). According to Roudometof (1996, p. 254) “national identity is seen as the outcome of conflicting claims that are generated by more or less selective references to, and interpretations of, written and oral historical narratives, a process that establishes collective beliefs in the legitimacy of claims to a territorial ‘fatherland’.”

Such territorial sentiments are evident between Greece and Macedonia, and manifest in the Macedonian Name Dispute (MND). The MND is a conflict that has been going on for almost 30 years between Greece and the country now-named North Macedonia, over Greece not agreeing to give the name “Macedonia” to its neighboring country. The resultant Macedonian Question (MQ) is generally the struggle to occupy Macedonia's region under one state and a common national identity (Danforth, 2019). The MND occupies a unique place in public discussion in Greek society because it is one of the issues that belong to the so-called “national matters”, which tend to provoke aggressive action against those who express opinions that do not align with the official narrative of the Greek foreign policy (Christopoulos and Karpozilos, 2018). As different views are expressed about the issue, ideological constructs are made and that is what this chapter seeks to analyze.

Sometimes those speaking about finding a solution for the MND between Greece and its neighboring country have even been criminalized, with censorship becoming a common practice (Christopoulos and Karpozilos, 2018). For instance, in the Greek public discourse there was no actual “Macedonian issue,” but a “Skopjan controversy” (Christopoulos and Karpozilos, 2018). This was characterized by the fact that one of the largest parties in Greece - New Democracy (ND), had significant issues in the negotiation processes with finding a solution to the MND whereby dissenting opinions within the party threatened to undermine its cohesion. At one point in 1992, the then Prime Minister of Greece, Konstantinos Mitsotakis and Foreign Minister, Antonis

Samaras, conflicted so sharply over the issue that it led to the fall of ND's government at the end of 1993 (Baskakis and Psarras, 2018). In addition, the conflict revealed many unusual practices for influencing public discourse. Antonis Samaras was accused of using the so-called "secret funds" of the Greek foreign ministry to finance Greek journalists, media, and publishers. Some of these complaints came from Mitsotakis, who accused Samaras of using these funds freely to promote his political ambitions and develop sound public relations with several media outlets (Iospress.gr, 2009).

This chapter does not try to review the national struggles amongst the countries of the Balkan Peninsula or the Greek political rivalries about the MND. Rather, it focuses more closely on the public, YouTube (online) discourse that surrounded the events of the MND between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Specifically, the study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the comments of YouTube videos that were online during the first and most prominent demonstrations related to the MND events in Thessaloniki on January 21, 2018. The CDA focuses on four major aspects: competing ideological constructions, hatred as an argument, Christianity as part of Macedonian identity, and the economic fight. A review of the discourse created around these incidents will contribute to a clearer understanding of the events and issues relevant to hate speech analysis. As the demonstrations unfolded, incidents were organized via various social media platforms and disseminated in support of or against existing nationalistic narratives about the Macedonian identity. The various social media platforms used were Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. This study focuses on the narrative on YouTube because literature is scanty on the hate opinions posted there, and YouTube has not been examined extensively to review sensitive political affairs like the MND.

The Macedonian Name Dispute (MND)

MND is a part of the Macedonian Question, which has been provoking wars and rivalries between the Balkan nations for more than a century (Danforth, 1993). This long-lasting struggle is associated with the nationalistic efforts of the countries that were born during the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Each new state had its own goals for obtaining some different territories of the Empire. Thus, the fighting nations were waging wars against the same lands, because, according to their constructed

narratives, these territories were a part of their “fatherland” (Danforth, 1993). In the case of the Land of Macedonia, the main competitors were Bulgaria, Greece, and to a lesser extent, Serbia. Countries such as Albania also wanted a share of the land because part of their population had Albanian roots (Stefoska and Stojanov, 2017; Koukoudakis, 2018).

The Macedonian region is essential not only for its critical financial and political location but also for creating a remarkable albeit possibly imaginary past, which is associated with the bloodline of Alexander the Great and his father Philip II of Macedon. This legacy is crucial for the creation and maintenance of the Greek national pride and identity. The citizens of FYROM perceive Alexander the Great as a symbol for constructing their nationalistic narrative for forming and protecting their own national identity. While the Macedonian region used to be under the rule of several empires such as the Bulgarian, Byzantine, Serbian, and the Ottoman Empire (Cappelli, 1998; Harris, 1913); FYROM changed its name after the “Prespes Agreement,” which was signed on June 17, 2018. According to the Agreement, the new name of FYROM would be “Republic of North Macedonia,” and it would be used for all purposes by every state or non-state agent. Henceforth the nationality of the citizens would be “Macedonian/citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia” (Koukoudakis, 2018:14).

During negotiations for the realization of the agreement though, some of the most massive demonstrations in the contemporary history of Greece broke out in Thessaloniki and Athens (Ekathimerini, 2018; Triandafyllou, 2018) proving that nationalism plays a crucial role in shaping Greek politics (Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018). These protests were a repeat of similar demonstrations that occurred in 1992 when an estimated one million citizens gathered in Thessaloniki to express their disagreement against a possible solution to the name dispute (Anderson, 2016; Heraclides, 2019).

The difference now was that the use of social media platforms played an essential role in mobilizing the protesters during the 2018 demonstrations. Social media platforms host an enormous number of different users and profiles. YouTube has more than a billion active users, Twitter more than 300 million active users, and Facebook, more than 2 billion active users (Karyotakis et al., 2019a). Subsequently, the comments on social media platforms might have an important influence on individuals, as there are cases where the provided content changed or challenged the

ideas and the beliefs of users. Furthermore, comments are associated with the visibility of the media sites by providing engagement, which means that even provocative or harmful comments can be significant in the users' engagement by initiating discussion or action (Karyotakis et al., 2019a).

In the case of MND it needs to be highlighted that nationalism is an ideology that exploits propagandistic techniques to differentiate the national identities, as well as tries to underline the uniqueness of certain people against others, who do not share the same heritage and common values (Luqiu, 2018). This uniqueness can lead to the verbal or even physical attack of other groups of people seen as different or threatening to a held national identity. Throughout the years, many far-right groups and political parties have exploited the discussion of territorial control and identity, linking them with the MND in order to gain more power (Ellinas, 2010). This study focuses specifically on hate opinions and polemic comments in favor of or against the Greekness of Macedonian identity. Therefore, the next section highlights the relationship between hate speech, YouTube, and MND.

YouTube, Hate Speech, and MND

YouTube is the most prominent video platform in the world, supporting various options such as commenting, uploading video content, reviewing content, and sharing the provided content to different online platforms (Karyotakis et al., 2019b; Ekman, 2014). Unlike other platforms like Instagram, its use is not just for entertainment but also for promoting other forms of expression like political opinions. YouTube allows even extreme right-wing groups to bypass the barriers of traditional media and reach out to people who do not agree or are aware of these opinions (Karyotakis et al., 2019b; Ekman, 2014). In some cases, the motive is to attract new members to these extreme groups (Karyotakis et al., 2019b; Ekman, 2014). For instance, there were cases in the past when videos on YouTube (e.g., "Innocence of Muslims") were being used as a tool to trigger a series of hate events resulting even in injuries and killings (George, 2014).

The term hate speech has become a well-discussed phenomenon around the globe in the past few years. It started to be used regularly in the 1980s, and its contemporary use is commonly associated with the description of offensive speech

that provokes disruption, but the used speech is not always unlawful (Siapera et al., 2018). The European Union in Recommendation No. R (97) 20 of 1997 defined hate speech as “all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.” Recently, George (2016, p. 157) analyzed more extensively the phenomenon of hate speech and created a new term, “hate spin,” to describe the use of hate speech as “a twin political strategy of incitement and manufactured indignation, exploiting group identities to mobilize supporters and coerce opponents. Like hate speech, the broader strategy of hate spin can ride not only on religion but also race, nationality, sexual identity, and so on.”

The phenomena of hate speech on social media platforms has resulted in pressure on social media companies to take action against those incidents that promote hate and violent actions. Usually, the platforms try to prohibit accounts that seem to violate the rules of the community regarding hate speech. For instance, in 2018, YouTube decided to ban a channel from its platform that was linked with neo-Nazi content (Robertson, 2018). Also, US President Donald Trump was permanently suspended from Twitter in January 2021 “due to the risk of incitement of violence” (BBC, 2021). Nevertheless, social media companies are still criticized for not doing enough to deal with harmful content (Grygiel, 2018). More specifically, YouTube has been labeled by journalists, news outlets and companies as a purveyor of hate speech (Hu, 2018; Solon, 2017; Aro, 2016).

Ben-David and Fernández (2016) also revealed that extreme right-wing Spanish parties employ discrimination. This behavior is imitated by their supporters resulting in hate comments and actions online. Those that have a different opinion are attacked with offensive language, and they are depicted often by the attackers as non-humans (Karyotakis et al., 2019b). The dehumanization process is significant in mobilizing a group against another one, and it has resulted in hate campaigns that led to the Holocaust or the killings of the Native Americans (George, 2020, see also chapter 7 of this volume).

Starting in 2018, YouTube made more efforts at banning discriminating content, including hate speech by, for example, stopping groups or individuals from posting

comments or content that argues that a group is superior in order to justify discrimination, segregation or exclusion (Lerman, 2019).

As highlighted above, this research study uses as a case study of the events of January 2018 when demonstration incidents took place in Greece because the FYROM and Greece signed the “Prespes Agreement” in a bid to end the name dispute by agreeing to rename FYROM as the “Republic of North Macedonia” (Smith, 2018b). Citizens of Greece rioted in large numbers, protesting against giving the name Macedonia to FYROM. The most notable protest was the demonstration that took place at Thessaloniki on 21 January 2018 when thousands of people shouted, “There is only one Macedonia and it is Greek!” (Ekathimerini, 2018; Triandafyllou, 2018). Another significant event was the physical assault against the mayor of the second largest city of Greece, Thessaloniki. Yiannis Boutaris, Thessaloniki’s mayor, was beaten publicly by a nationalistic group during a ceremony to mark the Pontic Genocide (BBC, 2018). This attack, linked to the MND, made some prominent Greek politicians such as the European Member of Parliament, Stelios Kouloglou, to talk publicly about the need for new regulations against hate speech (Left.gr, 2018). However, the dominant discourse around the demonstrations was and still is important for preserving a certain knowledge for the MND in the conflicting countries, and so the next section briefly reviews how CDA can be used to identify these ideological constructions and narratives.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Many studies apply this method in different fields of research, such as communication, social psychology, and philosophy to study language itself, the use of it, and the production of texts (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). The discursive tradition, for example, underlines the significance of discourse as “productive of social structures and realities” (Connaughton et al., 2017, p. 2). By studying language use, the researcher can reveal the ways it shapes a collective identity as well as collective action. In addition, language is an essential part of creating specific narratives that have an actual impact on reforming and creating collective identities (Connaughton et al., 2017).

Discourse analysis is associated with Michel Foucault – a French philosopher and literary critic. Foucault's discourse analysis had several distinct aspects, such as the social aspect of discourse, which proposes that words and their meanings are an outcome of the circumstances in which the speech/discussion is taking place. In other words, it plays an important role where the words and meanings are used and from whom to whom. Foucault further pointed out that there are many discourses, and some of them go against each other. Furthermore, power is a core concept in understanding the use of discourses, as discourse is a regularized way of speaking or writing about the reality that determines what one can think and say about the world and what one cannot (Foucault, 1972).

A method in the field of discourse analysis, which does not pay attention only to language patterns, is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA has its origins in Critical Theory and the study of language. It treats language as a social practice (Janks, 1997). CDA also reveals the ideologies and the values that are a part of language patterns. The use of language constructs a reality that shapes society. As a result, CDA is both a theory and a method for exploring more profoundly the consequences of the language patterns of society (Fairclough, 2015; Chiluba, 2019). For Van Dijk (2015, p. 466) CDA "is discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context."

CDA explains political and social issues without just simplistic interpretations of the discourse. As it tries to provide various multidisciplinary explanations, political and social issues are portrayed as more complex topics created by social interactions of different agents. Subsequently, it evaluates, identifies and even challenges the power discourses that offer legitimacy to certain social agents (Van Dijk, 2015). Therefore, this study aims to shed light on the main narratives and patterns of YouTube ideological discourse regarding identity, hate speech and the 2018 events of MND. Focus will be on the four major aspects: competing ideological construction, hatred as an argument, Christianity as part of Macedonian identity, and the economic fight.

Methodology

The sample of the study came from the created database after collecting all the 3,642 comments from 76 YouTube videos on the issue of the MND. The selection of the videos and the comments was done manually through anonymous web browsing by Google Search from 18 to 24 January 2018, the week when the most significant demonstrations regarding Macedonian Name Dispute happened in Thessaloniki. The keyword for the Google search was “Macedonia,” in order to include every result that was related to the event. The language of the search was “US English.” The study used a qualitative approach to analyze the comments and provide insights into the name dispute's polemic online discourse. Thus, the content of the videos was not analyzed. In addition, the current paper presents as examples some of the most enlightening collected comments. Discourse analysis is believed to be a prominent advancement of qualitative research because it proves that the expressed opinions and ideas of people are a significant element for shaping larger and more powerful discourses (Punch, 1998).

This study is based on Van Dijk's ideological discourse analysis (1995) to reveal how the discourse is used to maintain the dominant narratives that shape the identities through the ideological constructions that are associated with the nationalistic narratives of Greece and the country now-named North Macedonia. Van Dijk (1993; 2013) has shown that the communication of certain narratives supports a certain knowledge, in which the ideology seems to play an important part. Identities are not fixed and thus they are enforced to groups and individuals through ideologies and dominant discourses (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020). In particular, “the creation of group identities involves both the categorization and ideological positive evaluation of the in-group in relation to an outgroup” (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020, p. 2). Consequently, the analysis investigates how the individuals construct their identity concerning the perceived Macedonian heritage and promote their ideological narrative.

Analysis and Findings

The Competing Ideological Construction of the Macedonian Identity

The results reveal that one of the main concerns of the users is to protect and support their narrative and collective identity concerning the “Greekness” or “Macedonianess” of the Land of Macedonia. There is an ongoing fight for claiming the Macedonian identity by each of the sides. Key meanings and patterns such as the origins of Alexander the Great, the connection between the current Macedonian identity and ancient Greece are some of the most common narratives with each side claiming stake to the identity. For example, the first user refers to Herod to support his claims about the Greekness of Macedonia and its culture (comments 1 and 2 of Table 1).

The users of Greek origin tried to prove that the Macedonian identity is linked with the ancient Greek history and the fact that Alexander the Great was Greek. That narrative is strongly linked with the nationalistic and ideological construction of the modern Greek state. Paparrigopoulos’ construction is achieved in connecting the current Greek state with many remarkable civilizations, such as ancient Greece, the Macedonian and the Byzantine Empire. That construction was under the umbrella of the “framework of ideological discourse” (Kitromilides, 1998, p. 26) provided by the Great Idea (Megali Idea). The Great Idea is a narrative that is still linked with the Greek education system, promoting a political and cultural hegemony in the region occupied once by the Byzantine Empire. It could be said that the Great Idea was aiming to resurrect the Byzantine Empire (Kitromilides, 1998).

Subsequently, while on the one hand the Greek users tend to accuse the North Macedonians of trying to steal the Greek land and history, on the other, the users from North Macedonia accuse the Greeks of disseminating falsehoods and propaganda. They too try to prove that they are ancestors of Alexander the Great, who is a part of their national identity (comments 3 and 8 in Table 1).

By reading the provided comments, it can be argued that there is a fierce verbal war between the two groups. Each group tries to impose its ideological narrative on the other, even without strong ideological arguments; sometimes, they resort to the use of insults (comment 4 – Table 1). Apparently, the emotional association with the national identity of the individuals gives them the right to present their ideas in favor of their collective national identity without even trying to pay attention or understand the arguments of their opponents sometimes (comments 1-5, Table 1).

Table 1. The Competing Ideological Construction of the Macedonian Identity (*original spelling and grammatical errors of users maintained*)

1	User 1	"Tell your king (Xerxes), who sent you, how his Greek viceroy (Alexander) of Macedonia has received you hospitably." (Herod. V, 20, 4 [Loeb])
2	User 1	Look the ancient greek text "... πρὸς(to) δὲ καὶ βασιλεῖ(king) τῷ πέμψαντι(sent) ἀπαγγείλητε(tell) ὡς ἀνὴρ(man) Ἕλληνα(greek-hEllen), Μακεδόνων(of Makedon) ὑπαρχος(subruler), εὖ(well) ὑμέας ἐδέξατο(receive) καὶ τραπέζην(table-food) καὶ κοίτην(bed-sleep)". ps:Mouth. Watch it..
3	User 2	Macedonians were called "varvari" by hellenic historians, shame for your lies ! Greeks doesnt egzist as nation! Its eastern orthodox RUMELIOTES linguisticaly hellenized in times of Eastern Roman empire of many different ethnicities of Balkan, Middle east and North Africa. Greece as state of so called "greeks" egzist first time in history from 1830 !!!!!
4	User 3	User 2 in 1830 we became a free country...back then there were the Hellenic states...learn history
5	User 2	Before Greek state from 1830 were Ottoman empire not "Hellenic states" don't be redeciolous...
6	User 3	User 2 I was talking before the ottoman and Byzantine empire dear when were the Hellenic states
7	User 3	User 2 sparta Athens Macedonia Thessaly crete corinthos etch
8	User 2	Hahaha, oh dear you know what's going on 2000 years ago ??? hahahahaha you'r great...What hellenic state was where is today's Macedonia ? Do you know borders of Macedonia, its capital city, which areas was in that state??? You'r funny same as every modern Greek who believe that he have "hellenic" origin...with hight of 1,65m...:)) take a mirror please and stop to emberecing yourself publicaly...

9	(...)	(...)
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Hatred as an argument

Some users endorsed the beginning of a war against the other country, agitating for the occupation of North Macedonia or Greece and “unite the Land of Macedonia.” These opinions were expressed using hatred and rage as an argument. Here, the results show that there was extensive use of offensive language (e.g., “idiot,” “go fuck yourself,” “bitch,” etc.) and violent obscene expressions (comment 3, Table 2), as an outcome of the power provided by the national narrative and the fighting for the Macedonian identity (comments 1-15, Table 2). Hate seems to intensify the argumentation fallacies of the users. In general, fallacies are common in ideological discourses (Van Dijk, 2013).

Notably, the Greek users employed various sources from ancient Greek texts to support their arguments. However, in several cases, the facts were distorted to support the existing ideological narratives. When the users from both warring sides could not restrain their anger, they attacked their opponents through offensive language and life-threatening expressions such as the following comment:

“Greek Gypsy you will taste same genocide bastards, why you are happy for that, will you smile when they fuck your mother or sister, kill your father, cut his dick and put in his mouth, steal everything from you, and extinct you Greeks...”

This discussion highlights the users’ hope for genocide or extinction of the opposite sides, pointing to deliberate dehumanization of those individuals that do not agree with the imposed narrative. The North Macedonians are described as “Monkeys [Monkeydonians],” and the Greeks are portrayed as “Gypsy dogs” (comments 13 and 14, Table 2). The dehumanization process is a critically dangerous step in a hate campaign, which comes before the so-called “call for action” of once side against the other (Article 19, 2015). Such hate campaigns have led to dreadful events, such as the Rwanda Genocide and the Holocaust, to name a few (George, 2016).

Furthermore, both sides present themselves as victims of the power of the other nation. They accuse each other of manipulative tactics and invest in creating an all-out emotional war. In other words, hatred becomes an argument as the users do not discuss by using fact-based arguments. Instead, they express their hatred against the other side as an argument for supporting or undermining opinions, beliefs, and ideas

(comments 1-4 , Table 2). The individuals feel and believe themselves to be under attack, and so compelled and justified to take immediate action against the other side (comment 15, Table 2).

Table 2. Hatred as an argument (*original spelling and grammatical errors of users maintained*).

1	User 1	Macedonia is GREEK helloooooooo wake up idiot. learn history please. Fyrom is Slavic County that's why you speak the Bulgarian language idiot.
2	User 2	go fuck yourself
3	User 3	User2 im fucking your mother in the ass you bitch
4	User 4	lots of fake slav accounts by child minds adding silly comments that can be easily traced unmasking their IP address along with other personal details. Brilliant!
5	User 5	+1 but how you know for sure, that they are slavs?
6	User 6	As fake as your own
7	User 7	Hes right your are slaves but our best leaders came from Macedonia basil the boggle slayer ring a bell ... whats that?.... no?.... you don't know you're own history..
8	User 8	User 7 get a life
9	User 7	User 8 youre a Fake Macedonian you go back to Russia or Albania
10	User 8	User 7 u go back to asia minor
11	User 9	I see so many FYROMians cry in the end why
12	User 10	Macedonians**
13	User 9	Macedonians=Greeks Your monekydonians and your ancesors are monkeys of planet of apes movie ahahahahha

14	User 10	User 9 Greek= A hairy, stinky, shit skinned Gypsy dog..... ahah
15	User 9	The Great but Greeks can destroy you country,like Alexander the great did in Paionians,you will jnever be a macedonian and i dont recognize you,i dont recognize you i wont give the name of my macedonia to some gypsies with albanian population,you are bulgarian and you never was indepent state in history,you was part of Ottoman empire and Bulgarian.
16	(...)	(...)

Christianity as Part of Macedonian Identity

Several Greek users presented their belief that the Macedonian identity is associated with Christianity and that the Bible can be a reliable source for proving the Greekness of Macedonia (comments 1-7, Table 3). Hence, many comments supported the connection between Christianity and the Macedonian identity. Greece is one of the few states in Europe which has as a mandatory course on Christian Orthodox Religion in its education system, and the Christian Orthodox tradition is linked with the Greek national identity because the Church took part in the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the relationship between the Greek state and the Church is often not clear. The result is that there are voices of citizens and scholars who argue that there must be a change in the Greek constitution to at least have an actual separation between the Greek State and the Church (Karyotakis et al., 2019c). The prominent role of the Church in Greek politics and identity was thus not only highlighted in the ideological construction of the Great Idea (Kitromilides, 1998) but was also evident in the 2018 YouTube discussions of the MND.

Notably, Christianity is a core value of the Greek identity as the Modern Greek State was built based on the motto *Fatherland (Patris), Religion, and Family*. This slogan and the produced nation-building narrative is often associated more closely with the totalitarian regimes such as the dictatorial government of Ioannis Metaxas from 1936 to 1941 and the Greek military junta from 1967 to 1974 (Gazi, 2014). However, the Greek users used the fallacy that Macedonian identity must be linked with Christianity (comments 1-7, Table 3) as opposed to the Macedonian users. In the years of the ancient Macedonian Kingdom, there was no Christianity as a prevailing

religion due to the fact that Jesus Christ had not been born yet (Roisman and Worthington, 2010). As a result, Christianity cannot be considered reasonably as one of the elements of the Macedonian identity.

Table 3. Christianity as a part of Macedonian Identity (*original spelling and grammatical errors of users maintained*).

1	User 1	Ok dont answer if i am right or not, but at least, you own a clear answer to yourself. Maybe later. Dont deny it. Now, the orthodox christians dont wait for a miracle when, let us say, they can do (in Lord Jesus Christ always) it(not the miracle) themselves. Do you know from where i know this?
2	User 2	User 1 What exactly are you trying to say here?? I'm not quite comprehending your comment,
3	User 2	User 1 I am Orthodox Christian, it is no different to any other form of Christianity... unless you acknowledge the fact that most of our religion has incorporated our pagan faiths! (Are you aware of this?? God tells us to not believe in such religions and yet we've concluded them amongst his doctrine)
4	User 1	Em...Have you ever thought, that a title (e.g. Thessalonians I) and a miracle are different issues. Why you brought in the "If you take the bibles word"? Its a title in the authentic greek New Testament, not a miracle. Now, if you want me to continue...Do you know from where i know this?
5	User 1	Its different, Orthodox Christianity is not a philosophical system, neither a man-made religion, neither a geo/political system, neither secular altruism, neither a strategic choice, neither an invention, neither a lie, neither a trick, neither a cheat, neither conceit, neither an ideology etc . Its the ONLY safe "harbor" to the Kingdom of HeavenS. ((But that doesnt mean that all they who claim that they are "orthodox christians" will be saved (from the second death, the

		spiritual death)...and if this happens to the safe "harbor", what is happening elsewhere;;;...Lord Jesus Christ have mercy, a sinner.))
6	User 3	Macedonia was for a very short time under Bulgarian rule to make such a claim,and the ancient kingdom of Macedonia was more or less the modern province of Macedonia in Greece,your country in antiquity was inhabited with Illyrian,Thacians and Dardanian tribes,the Vardar river(greek Aksios) was named after a Magyar tribe settled in your country in medieval times(Byzantines called them turks),then Slavs migrated,but you believe the most extreme scenario,the whole Macedonian population who speak greek,became Bulgarians and you are their descendants..The truth is way more simple..
7	User 2	User1 Because I wanted to explain to you that the bible has be written, re-written and written again it's not a reliable source, And yes Christianity has also incorporated (or stolen) MUCH of the pagan religions, what the hell do you know?
8	(...)	(...)

Economic fight

Another argument that was being made on both sides of the discussion was about the economic power of the countries. The Greek bailout programs and the European Union's economic policies are some of the most common topics discussed by the users. In many comments Greece is portrayed as a bankrupt country, which is called upon to pay attention first to its financial condition before it meddles with the affairs of other nations, as in this user comment: "Greece is now rated the poorest country in Europe, hence why they went into Bankruptcy, how is that not clear enough for you. Greece citizens are crossing the border to neighboring country Macedonia to buy necessities, as the cost of living is too high in Greece. That is the truth."

To further the economic fight, the EU bailout programs were cited by the users from North Macedonia to imply that Greece is not an independent country and has to follow the rules of the real owner of the country - Germany: "Greece = Bankrupt,

Owned by German. The new queen of Greece is now Angela Merkel.” It was insinuated that after solving these issues, Greece could then decide if it had the power and time to negotiate its neighboring country Macedonia’s identity. Thus, the country’s economic power was equated to its authority for imposing its ideological narrative concerning the Macedonian identity on the other side. So, Greece’s financial troubles seem to undermine the nation, in the opinion of the Macedonian users (Anastasakis, 2004).

Discussion

This study shows that the majority of the users tend to support and protect **fallacies** as a part of the ideological constructions linked with nationalistic narratives of each nation-state. **The fallacies are “breaches of argumentation rules and principles” (Van Dijk, 2000:57).** These ideological constructions are an essential part of their national identity. For the Greeks, the Land of Macedonia is strongly associated with the ancient history of the country and the origins of Alexander the Great. Moreover, the Greek language of the users is being used as a tool for promoting their opinions. The argument is that the ancient Macedonians were Greek. They spoke Greek, and they lived in the same region of the current Greek State. Therefore, the people of North Macedonia cannot be ancestors of the ancient Macedonians.

Even when blatantly competing with available evidence of ideological construction, these arguments are seen as vital elements of the national narrative of those who are advancing it on either side. If the Greek national narrative is separated from Macedonia, which was created from the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire, then Greece loses out. And if Macedonia is not just Greek, then there is a real fall of the country's national-building narrative. Therefore, even Christianity plays a vital role in this ideological construction as a part of the authentic Greek identity. Greeks seem not to be able to separate the narrative of Macedonian identity from the core slogan of the authentic Greek identity (*Fatherland (Patris), Religion, and Family*), which is of significant influence throughout the formation of the contemporary Greek State (Gazi, 2014). In the minds and hearts of Greeks, the region of Macedonia is a part of Greece, like the Byzantine Empire's other geographical territories. Losing the name Macedonia means a partial collapse of the Great Idea (Kitromilides, 1998).

Furthermore, the hatred and life-threatening expressions on YouTube are not new. Users employ the popular video-sharing platform for promoting threats against politicians and governments (Chiluwa, 2019). In this study, it seems that hatred can be a core part of this verbal war about Macedonian identity. The users do not pay attention to the arguments of each side, but they want to enforce their opinions to prove that their discursive identity is the true one. This significance of protecting the constructed reality aligns with the arguments of Connaughton and her colleagues (2017), for the impact of the discourse in manufacturing reality.

Moreover, there are comments in which the people of North Macedonia are portrayed as Monkeys “Macedonians=Greeks, your monekydonians and your ancestors are monkeys of planet of apes movie ahahahahha” (an example of the examined comments), and the Greeks as “Gypsy dogs”, “idiots”, and propagandists, “Your comments is a load of Greek Propaganda. At the end of the day Macedonia is Macedonia and was never Greek” (a part of one of the study’s comments). This discursive dehumanization process has been observed in severe historical hate crimes such as the Holocaust, the World Wars, and the Rwanda genocide. The findings also show the reflection of the concept of “hate spin” by George (2016), who said that hate speech could be used even as a political strategy to promote incitement and aim at groups’ identities. In addition, the anger and hate expressed seems to be used as arguments to support the fallacies through probably intimidating those users that challenge the enforced ideological narratives. These findings align with Van Dijk’s (2013) argument about the construction and preservation of a threat in some ideological discourses.

Through the discursive lens of Christianity, the Macedonians argue that the ancient Land of Macedonia is a vast region, which is not only Greek. In addition, Alexander the Great did not speak Greek, but Macedonian. These findings underline again the importance of the nationalistic identity narrative that shapes the long-lasting debate about MND and the Macedonian Question (Anderson, 2016; Greenfeld, 1993; Veremis, 2010). Furthermore, the rhetoric of the users aligns with the arguments of Luqiu (2018), who claimed that nationalism tries to highlight the uniqueness of a certain group against the other that does not share the same heritage and shared values. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why Christianity also seems to

be a vital characteristic of the Macedonian identity as the majority of Greeks are Christian Orthodox.

The discourse on economic power and the expressed opinions in favor of starting a war for occupying the other country only when one is financially stable in their country, are highlights of hate speech spread to undermine economic and national viability.

Finally, the findings also support George's (2020:147) claims that the social media platforms cannot fully regulate hate speech, as many hate comments are "innocuous in isolation but inflammatory when reading in context"; thus, it cannot easily be identified by the platforms. However, this study shows that hate speech can be identified and called out. YouTube, like other social media platforms, gives space to divergent opinions, which sometimes end up being extreme opinions. While it cannot be credited for promoting hate speech, discussion now should rotate on how to make the online space it provides safer and more accommodative. As a social platform, YouTube remains a place where extreme hate can be easily spread despite its new regulations, and so the main challenge is how society can tackle these phenomena not only online, but also offline.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on the discussion regarding hate speech on the social media platform, YouTube. CDA with Van Dijk's ideological discourse analysis (1995) has been used to provide useful insight into the way users employ hate speech to promote their ideological constructions linked with their nationalistic narratives, specifically the Macedonian identity. The MND is a long-lasting problem that has not been examined extensively from a communication approach. It is a sensitive and topical issue, which influences all the Balkan countries as it is related to the Macedonian Question that has provoked tension in the region.

The findings highlight the power of nationalistic narratives in promoting fallacies and hate against those individuals that challenge these narratives. These fallacies, like the linkage between Christianity and the Macedonian identity, seem to have become an essential part of the individuals' identity and the challenge of those ideological narratives could lead to extreme reactions.

Further, this research shows that extreme opinions are disseminated on YouTube concerning sensitive political issues and such extreme opinions have the capacity to promote verbal abuse against the people who do not share the same beliefs and narratives. And since nationalism remains an essential characteristic of the public discussion regarding MND until today, this study proposes that these findings can be generalized, as around the world, there are cases of sensitive topics, in which the different sides disseminate extreme hate and even support atrocities against the people who do not share the same beliefs, ideas, and opinions.

Lastly, this study contributes to the expanding interest in communication studies, especially on hate speech that focus more on Eastern European or Balkan issues, a geographical region of the globe that has not been studied extensively in this field. Future studies can focus on exploring hatred in offline and online spaces, possibly applying a quantitative approach.

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