Far-right blogging, migration and gender: discourses and aesthetics

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Abstract

Even though most of the main narratives concerning the crisis in Greece over the last 6 years are evolving around financial aspects, in this paper we present the socio-political dimensions with regards to far-right ideological reproduction. In particular, we focus on discourses about migration that arose during 2015 which was incidentally one of the high points of political turbulence and transformation.

Despite the fact that far-right discourses in Greece have been around since the late 1970s and 1980s, we perceive the entrance of the neo-nazi party Golden Dawn in parliament in 2012 as a 'rupture' in recent Greek political history. Discourses are sourced from 18 far-right websites and the emphasis is given on three interlocking systems of power that show us how social identities are constructed: nation, gender and sexuality. Moreover, we focus on the aesthetics of these websites and the cultural politics that are articulated by them. We utilise the tools of critical discourse analysis, which recognizes that the relationship between discursive practices and the social world is dialectical, i.e. that discourse is both constituted by social practices, while it also constitutes them. The recent refugee crisis triggered a (re)production of posts concerning the phenomenon of migration and therefore the reinforcement of nationalist narratives addressing the ideal national identity and national construction,

the social representations of gendered identities and the role of biological reproduction in the establishment of the nation. These discourses are bringing into the foreground narratives that draw both on notions of nation as blood and simultaneously of nation as culture. More specifically, the waves of immigrants arriving at the Greek borders are represented as soldiers attacking the Greek nation-state and endangering the employment of Greeks. Whereas, multiculturalism is represented as threatening Greek civilization, ethics, religion and traditions, therefore a new wave of anti-semitism and islamophobia is being revived.

This paper is part of an ongoing research project on civil society and online political participation conducted at the National Centre for Social Research.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, far-right, gender, nation, social media

Even though most of the main narratives concerning the crisis in Greece over the last 6 years are evolving around financial aspects, in this paper we present the socio-political dimensions with regards to far-right ideological reproduction. In particular, we focus on discourses about migration that arose during 2015 which was incidentally one of the high points of political turbulence and transformation.

In this presentation we will focus on the online far-right discourses on migration that arose since SYRIZA, was elected to lead the government coalition in 2015. Despite the fact that far-right discourses in Greece have been around since the late 1970s and 1980s, we perceive the entrance of the neo-nazi party Golden Dawn in parliament in 2012 as a 'rupture' in recent Greek political history.

This presentation is also related to a broader social and political context which (re)defines civil society via the online world. In other words, it relates to the study of the impact of organizations/individuals throughout political society. This also includes issues of political participation and various types of transformations in political culture. The rapid creation of new collectivities of social solidarity indicated that under extremely harsh economic conditions, a large part of civil society was triggered to cope with the negative consequences of the crisis while at the same time, another part used cyberspace to promote deeply disturbing conservative ideologies. Interesting is the emergence of "communities" which are only active via social networking and the Internet.

The financial and refugee crisis intensified a (re)production of posts concerning the phenomenon of migration and therefore the reinforcement of nationalist narratives

addressing the ideal of national identity, the social representations of gendered identities and the role of biological reproduction in the establishment of the nation.

This research is part of an ongoing project lead by Dr. Alex Afouxenidis at the National Centre for Social Research in Athens and we are currently finishing a book chapter on this particular topic. It draws on his earlier and long-term study of civil society and its organizing elements in Greece (see for example Afouxenidis & Gardiki, 2014) and from a small-scale study that we conducted around the "cultural politics" on Twitter (Sioula-Georgoulea, 2015).

The virtual space of far-right discourses is bigger than someone may think. We have detected more than 100 blogs. In this paper 18 far-right websites[1], are examined which are indicative with respect to the ideas portrayed overall. The emphasis is given on discourses related to nation, gender, sexuality and migration. Moreover, we seek to examine the aesthetics of these websites with the aim of identifying visual representations and sub-narratives.

Our research utilized the following theories &methods:

1) critical discourse analysis, which recognizes that the relationship between discursive practices and the social world is dialectical, i.e. that discourse is both constituted by social practices, while it also constitutes them. Aiming to expose the role of discursive practices in the reproduction of unequal power relations, struggles for a radical social change and it is committed to the oppressed social groups.

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[1] againstmodernworld, ideapolis, redskywarning, hellenicpride, armahellas, maiandrioi, combat18hellas, mavroskrinos, eleysis-ellinwn, ethnikidrasihleias, allenaki, antipliroforisi, koinosparanomastis, eleytheroi-ellines, erimihora, theodotus, kyanosaden, hellenicfascism.

2) Normative framework (what sort of things constitute far-right discourses as they appear online) with the aim of producing descriptive typologies and

3) Critical theoretical framework (Habermas, Adorno, Benjamin, but also Baudrillard and Foucault).

Our analysis draws from theoretical studies around the formation of the far-right discourse (Mudde, 2007; Billig, 1995; Georgiadou, 2015) as well as from recent studies around the social and political implication of the Internet use (Afouxenidis, 2015; Fuschs, 2014; Murthy, 2012). We are interested in the way the far-right discourse is articulated in different social contexts (della Porta et al., 2012; Macgilchrist & Bohmig, 2012; Yilmaz, 2012; Petrou et al., 2015) with respect to feminist interpretations (Keskisen, 2013). Since "Internet technology is fundamentally conceived in terms of a cultural public sphere" (Afouxenidis, 2015), our approach is enriched by studies illustrating the aesthetic part of far-right discourses (Richardson & Wodak, 2009; Engstrom, 2014; Peters, 2015; Enkman, 2014).

Our sample was formatted according to a typology that emerged through our research, leading us to 3 main categories: first, the characteristics of the basic ideological and political profiles that these blogs embody, their political activism and cultural politics. Based on the self-identification of these blogs, the 2 dominant ideologies are nationalism and Nazism. The offline political activism portrayed through these blogs was also mapped (posters, brochures, marches, slogans, violent acts etc). We also focused on the cultural, political and religious remarks that we found in these blogs, such as poems, videos, pieces of novels or theoretical texts by important figures of nationalism and Nazism, as well as on the characteristics of the language in use. Secondly, we studied the discourse concerning migration and thirdly gendered

representations. Additionally, the majority of the blogs under study reproduced some form of conspiracy theory, leading us to a more detailed analysis of this phenomenon.

Social networking

Website	Starting date	Number of visits	Social Networking
antipliroforisi	10/05/2007	2.961.888 (unique hits)[1]	twitter
erimihora	25/06/2007	-	-
mavroskrinos	01/09/2007	-	-
armahellas	17/09/2007	-	-
redskywarning	30/11/2007	(747 members via Google)	twitter
maindrioi	27/02/2009	-	-
allenaki	18/06/2009	603.070	twitter
eleytheroi-ellines	01/02/2011	733.955	facebook/ twitter/ youtube
theodotus	19/11/2011	-	-
koinosparonomastis	06/06/2012	955.754	facebook
againstmodernworld	22/02/2013	28.001	facebook
ideapolis	29/03/2013	-	facebook
kyanosaden	20/05/2013	-	-
hellenicfascism	10/10/2013	-	twitter
ethnikidrasihleias	13/08/2014	-	-
hellenicpride	27/09/2015	-	facebook/ twitter/ youtube
eleysis-ellinwn	2015	-	facebook/ twitter/ youtube

In this table we can have a glance at the history, internet traffic and social networking of these 18 blogs. We notice that the majority of them were founded during the last 5 years (since 2011), while the rest operated during the last decade. The information regarding the number of visits are few, since none of the web-analytics tools that provide such information are free of charge. Therefore, we settled with some doubts to the number of hits that these blogs display. As for the use of other social media, we noticed that twitter and facebook are equally used, with some of these blogs having accounts on both platforms as well as on youtube.

Now, in order to get an idea of the aesthetics of these blogs, we have collected the banners of the websites, divided in the 2 main ideological trajectories.

Nationalist blogs
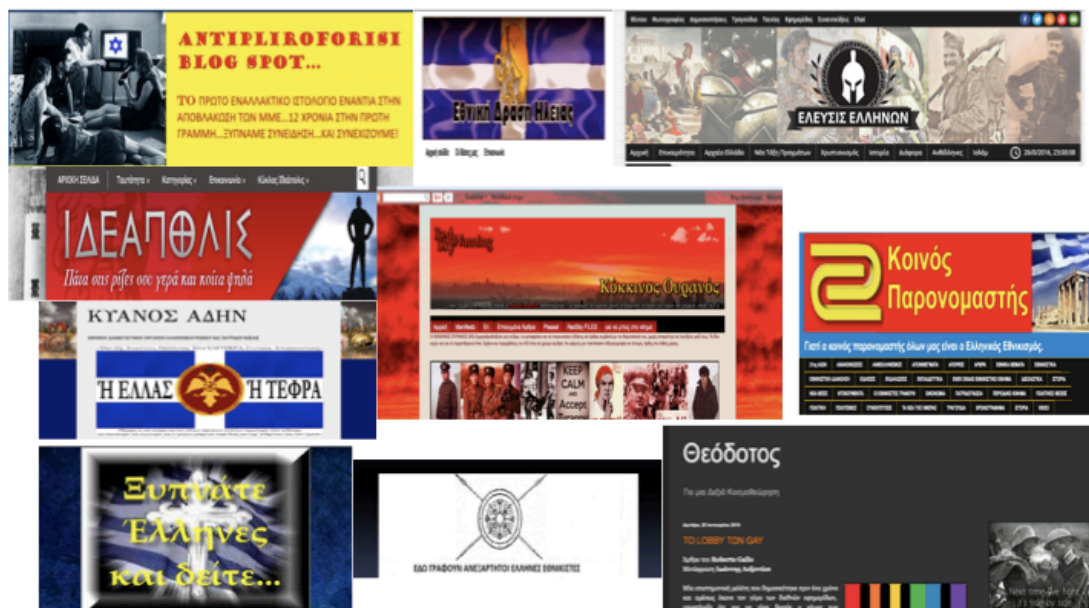
If we look at the blogs that reproduce nationalist discourses we will notice that the dominant colors are blue and white, due to the iteration of the greek national flag and red, a warm color (but also a colour that denotes *blood* & honour) that is telling the visitor to browse a website affiliated with revolutionary and combative standpoints. We also notice military images deriving from ancient Greece, such as the Spartans, Alexander the great, meanders, helmets, shields and spears. On the upper left side, where we see a screenshot of antipliroforisi blogspot, you can notice the unraveling of a conspiracy theory along with an anti-Semitic message: 4 young people are absorbed by the television which is displayed as an instrument of stupidity, controlled by the «Jews», because the Star of David is depicted on its screen.

The dominant colors portrayed in the nazi blogs are black and red, creating a more combative image.

The depicted black male figures wear full-face hoods, reproducing a more "radical" look, which we observed that is often adopting elements from the black block. Meanders and swastikas and targets are the most reproduced symbols. C18 is referring to a nazi terror group, part of the "Blood and Honor" group, which was active in the UK in the 90's killing immigrants and non-white citizens. 18 symbolize the 1st and the 8th letter of the Latin alphabet matching the initials of Adolf Hitler, A and H. The greek national flag and photographs depicting statues or temples constructed in ancient Greece are once more in the foreground, as well as military helmets.

Now, if we focus on the discourses articulated in the examined blogs around migration, we will notice the emergence of 4 interwoven types of representations of the migrant population. First of all, the refugee crisis is seen as part of a worldwide conspiracy planning on destroying nation-states and establishing a global governance in order to control mass populations. Immigrants' and refugees' entering Greece is

almost depicted as a military attack, threatening to alter the values and culture of the Greek nation and to "pollute" national purity in the name of "multiculturalism". In the end, migrants are endangering the rights and wellbeing of the Greek population. Therefore, we notice that these discourses are bringing in the foreground narratives that draw both on notions of nation as blood and simultaneously of nation as culture.

More specifically, this conspiracy is lead by "the New Order" or "New World Order", "an invisible center", "the European Soviet Union", "the bankers", "communists-globalizationists", "internationalists", "Masons" aiming at the weakening of the nation-states in order to establish a "worldwide Zionist dictatorship", "a new global slavery". This "plan" has several names, sometimes is called "Ozal plan" which is referring to the former Turkish prime minister and his statement that "a war is not necessary in order to conquer Greece", or "Agenda 21" referring to an action plan of the United Nations with regards to sustainable development, part of the examined blogs is disputing the apparent goals of this agreement, supporting that the real targets are the depopulation of the Earth, the abolishment of national sovereignty and personal property, the destruction of family, the degradation of standard of living etc.

We observe the emergence of a triangle scheme where the people that cross the Aegean Sea on boats in order to reach the greek borders, risking their lives, are portrayed as the victimizers, as soldiers invading Greece bloodlessly, willing to contaminate the population, under the order of this invisible center of power. In order to devalue them and to identify them with criminals, the examined blogs are referring to them as "brownyellow lizards", "contraband immigrants" or "contraband refugees". On the other side of this triangle are the victims of this invasion, the Greeks and the Greek state, and the third part of this scheme is the medium used to

succeed this invasion, multiculturalism. These foreigners bring along new traditions, cultures, ethics, religions and values and are willing to alter greek civilization.

Apart from the different ethics and lifestyles, immigrants are bringing along "foreign blood", "alienating little by little the Greek people", "threatening national purity". This interpretation of reality is vividly visualized in this poster found on ideapolis's website, which was placed on walls as a poster in various streets of major greek cities.

It refers to legislation regarding Greek citizenship. In the first picture, the queue of colored men is headed "uncontrollable lathro-immigration". "Lathro" is the greek adverb of the word "contraband" which is used by the far-right discourse in order to address immigrants who arrive in Greece without legal documents. This expression embodies the stereotype of the criminal immigrant since the other uses of the preposition "lathro" are found in the words "smuggler" (lathremporos, contraband trader), "stowaway" (lathrepivatis, contraband traveler) etc. The fact that only men are depicted in this picture is reinforcing the imagery of an army invading Greece. The illustrated outcome of this invasion is mass citizenship, leading to the unaccepted

phenomenon of a shared culture, since a black boy is holding the greek flag at a school parade on a national day celebration. The effect of this will be the replacement of population, resulting to a classroom where white children will be the minority. The message that this poster wants to convey is written below the pictures "Stop Greek extinction". Through a time travel, we witness the alienation of the greek population and its replacement by foreigners and we are called upon action.

The last point of threat that immigrants embody in these discourses is the wellbeing of Greeks. The labor, insurance and housing rights of Greeks are at stake according to several posts that are referring to an old agreement from the 90's signed between the Greek and the Albanian state in order to avoid double taxation, and b) to a law that the Greek government is supposed to pass through parliament, allowing immigrants to stay for free in the indebted houses. Disinformation is utilized here in order to portray the greek state as favoring immigrants instead of greeks, disseminating panic and fear of the Other.

Since the refugee crisis is seen as part of the Turkish plan to Islamize Europe, Syrian refugees are not as depicted by the media. We can find posts in these blogs mentioning that reporters try hard to find a picture of a mother with her children in order to represent refugees as "innocent" and to make Greeks more receptive of the arrival of foreign populations, since the majority of the refugees arriving at the Greek borders are young men, who have a lot of money, which is connoted by the fact that they can afford this expensive trip, they wear expensive clothes and use expensive mobiles. Some blogs claim that even the picture of the body of Ailan, who was found dead on the Turkish shore, is a product of montage aiming at the sensitization of European citizens.

As it has already be shown, discourses regarding migration have also to do with social constructions such as nation, gender and sexuality: black, foreign, young men are entering Greece and are willing to transform its culture and pollute its purity. Similar visual depictions of male refugees, studied by international scholars, have led to the representation of the male refugee population as dangerous (rapists and/or terrorists) and/or as cowards (leaving their women and children unprotected) (Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016).

These men are further diminished through the republication of a video headed "How do women in Syria feel about their men leaving in Europe as refugees?". In that video, women who live on camps in Syria are accusing those men that abandon their motherland in times of crisis by stating: "who is going to free us? Who is going to protect us? It is a mistake to abandon your motherland, your women and children. Islam forbids it". The honor of those men is based on their will to fight and probably die for the protection and freedom of Syrian women. Whereas, Syrian women come to the foreground and deserve to be protected due to their reproductive role in society as wives and mothers. In this example we notice the operation of "self-orientalization" (Ong, 1999) through the use of social media, leading to a marginalization of Syrian women (Alhayek, 2014). The depicted Syrian women reproduce hegemonic orientalist discourses, representing themselves as powerless, victimized and in need of protection by someone strong, homogenizing the Syrian female population and marginalizing different experiences.

At the same time that those "waves" or "flows" of migrants that threaten to overflow Greece and spoil its national purity, discourses around the demographic problem arise once again. Abortions are depicted as murders, weakening the Greek nation, and the

effort to legitimize them in countries where they are forbidden it is interpreted once more as part of the worldwide conspiracy, which is this time aiming at the depopulation of the Earth. Therefore, according to the examined blogs, the interconnection of national policies about abortions and migration is heading towards a genocide of the Greek population. Fragments of political opportunity theory are noticed, since we might assume that if the main refugee population was originating from India the narrative would be the same.

The nazi blogspot "mavroskrinos" designates the role of women in national socialism through the comparison of two ancient cities, Athens and Sparta. By characterizing the regime in ancient Sparta as "national socialist", the blogspot tries to illustrate the upgraded role of women in comparison to that of women in ancient Athens by claiming that women in ancient Sparta had the right to property, to athletics, to choose their husband and to polyandry". Their analysis focuses also in the upgraded role that women held in nazi Germany, since they "enjoyed maternal leave and privileges that the 'suffragettes' couldn't even imagine". The role of women in these two societies is understood due to their proximity to nature via their ability to give birth. Therefore, it is understood that the value of women in these nazi discourses is estimated through their ability to give birth, especially to brave men, capable soldiers that will defend their nation.

In this photo we notice the representation of a young woman taking a selfie:

Her blouse, which is in the center of the photo, we observe a Kalashnikov framed by the phrase "defend Europe". This photo is incites the use of guns for the protection of Europe through an instagram aesthetics. The fact that a white western young woman is the subject of the photo leads us to a double reading: on the one hand, the body of the woman symbolizes Europe which is in need of protection, while the black blouse with the printed message on it functions as a shield, symbolizing the way Europe should be defended (with guns). On the other hand, we can notice a differentiation and an upgrade of the role of women in this fight against the enemy either through the encouragement of the fight or through their active involvement.

The photos found on the ideapolis blogspot addressing the male population are of similar aesthetics. The buff and ready-to-fight man is the dominant ideal masculinity. More elements of this ideal masculinity can be drawn in the portrayed poster of the "propatria" martial arts festival. The ethnocentric character of the festival is understood from its name (propatria) in favor of motherland, while the ancient greek statue connects the organizers with the ancient greek civilization, which is considered as the ancestor and inspirer of the contemporary greek civilization.

At the same time, we notice the expression of a concern for the "feminization of the population" through the endorsement of two scientific studies indicating that "the average man has 22% less testosterone than the men of the same age during the 80's".

The ramifications of this phenomenon are noticed in the psychology, the appearance and the sexual "nature" of men. This article was published on the occasion of death of the young student Vangelis Giakoumakis which opened the greek debate on the phenomenon of bullying and its main argument is that this "campaign against bullying" is actually "a campaign against masculinity". The conspiracy theory comes once again in the foreground claiming that "contemporary states invest in the control of their citizens and when men are coward, weak, without dignity or honor, are easy and efficient for the states. Men who wish to fight constitute a problem since they disturb commerce". The dignity and honor of men is measured on the levels of their testosterone and the amount of power that they possess. In this example, we notice the splice of anti-capitalist (trade, economic interests) and anti-state discourse with a highly gendered one. Men who are willing to resist their manipulation and fight in the name of national pride, against the state dictates not to do so, perform the ideal masculinity.

Some concluding remarks

Obviously, there is a substantial part of political blogging promoting, as we argued at the beginning, deeply disturbing conservative and racist ideologies.

Another interesting remark could be that of the depiction of an embedded contradiction: far-right blogs are arguing against cosmopolitanism and globalization through the use of transnational and globalized digital mediums, such as social media. This sort of contradiction is an additional outcome of the politics of late modernity, which has changed the construction of the subject, has fragmented identities and has generated ambivalence, chaotic social relations and new sets of contradictions, e.g.

Resistance to westernization coupled by simultaneous acceptance of its cultural formations.

This contradiction is an outcome of late modernity, especially as it is being unfolded in Greece, who seems to have an ambivalent stance towards oriental ideas: on the one hand it's striving to be modernized and be part of the so-called 'west' and on the other hand it is resisting.

Lastly, it is noteworthy that such disturbing and racist ideas are filtered through to "mainstream" cultural politics, leading to legitimization and mainstreaming. While, at the same time, we come across a vicious circle, where ideas found in public discourses are appropriated by far-right websites. Subsequently, when we discuss the realm of "cultural politics" as seen through the lens of these types of online political mediums, the emphasis should be given to the idea of "politics" as the main component re-shaping the "cultural".

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