



Extended Abstract

How do far-right movements and parties use the internet and the social media?

Digital Facebook Postcards, with Hate, your Far Right.

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Introduction

Stanley Kubrick's movie, *Paths of Glory*, can be summed up in one statement made by Kirk Douglas. 'Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel'. With the quote by Samuel Johnson (1775), Kirk Douglas captures the fatigue and pointlessness of the First World War trenches. This problematizing of patriotism and the lessons of the early 20th c European history seem to have been lost. In the 21st c. patriotism is widely accepted and generally considered unproblematic. This paper aims to show that patriotism on Facebook should be problematic since it has become the last refuge of the racist.

Discussion

In Europe, there is a well-documented rise of the far right with a patriotic Europeanist discourse (e.g. Caiani et al., 2012)). This is accompanied by an intense presence and activity of the European Far Right on Social Media (Caiani and Wagemann, 2009). This presence has not gone unnoticed. White supremacist and racist groups have been targeted by anti-racist groups due to the use of hate speech. These put pressure on social media corporations to act. In social media therefore, the forms taken by hate speech is increasingly shaped by Facebook and Twitter terms of service and community standards and by individuals and organisations whose will is to 'stop racism' or at least stop the process of

spreading hate through social media. The Far Right, in order to maintain its activity on social media must learn how to navigate through the community standards and through the anti-racist group activity. One way in which they can accomplish this is by shifting the discourse using the vocabulary of protection, human rights and for 'what it is ours', 'what belong to us' and 'loving one's own'. As Les Back put it, 'the language of hate is increasingly being articulated through invocations of love' (2002b: 1)

A broad definition of patriotism is precisely the '*love of one's own*'. In his well-known critique of Nathanson's work "*In Defense of 'Moderate Patriotism'*", Gomberg exposes the role of patriotism in legitimating racism. Nathanson (1989) tries to show that there is a moderate patriotism that does not collapse into an unpatriotic universal morality. Gomberg's point is that there is no possible alternative between chauvinist patriotism and unpatriotic universalism (Gomberg 1990). To fight for you 'own nation' when the compromise is impossible or conflict unavoidable implies the given of a greater value to one's own national traditions than those of other nationalities. And this is no more than racism. In the most plausible assumptions about our world patriotism is no better than racism (Gomberg 1990).

Gomberg's arguments acquire more credence when one looks at the prominence but also the work undertaken by patriotic Facebook pages. Facebook patriotic pages, which in this paper we refer to as Facebook Postcards, has become the last refuge of the racist.

The study presented in this paper shows empirical evidence of how Spanish, Greek and Irish far right groups and far right followers have found a digital space on Facebook where no national legislation or Facebook Terms of Services can prevent the use of hate speech, racist discourse, Islamophobic sentiment as it appears in the guise of patriotism, thereby remaining unchallenged. This paper refers to what it can be coined as 'digital postcards' Facebook pages. These pages aim to show the beauty of a nation, a region or a city, its nature, myths and traditions. Postcard Facebook pages are digital lands outside national legislation in relation to hate speech and outside Facebook's community standards regulations. Functioning as a tourist or photographic showrooms, 'postcard nation' Facebook pages remain a tranquil space where far right groups and potential far right followers can easily meet and interact, and where racist speech, information and discussions based on hate can easily spread. These arguments are pursued based on three separate examples of Facebook Postcards from Greece, Spain and Ireland.

In the case of Greece the analysis focuses on <https://el-gr.facebook.com/EimaiEllinasEtsiGoustarw>, (I am Greek and that's how I like it). This page has 108,000 likes and enjoys a relatively high visibility addressing Greeks' with general comments and news.

In the case of Spain the focus is on the Facebook page Espania, que bonita eres (Spain, how beautiful you are) <https://www.facebook.com/ABCDE24678909> . With over 80 thousand followers the page was open in July 2011 and it claims to host generalist content.

In the case of Ireland the selected page is called Waterford City & County, Ireland. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Waterford-City-County-Ireland/1488943764699629?fref=ts> . Waterford is a County on the southern-east of Ireland and it is one of the most affected areas for the recession. Last November 2014, Waterford experienced a racist outbreak against a family of Roma. Over 200 people congregated in front of a Roma Family house. The mobilization was organised on Facebook and it can be tracked down from explicit racist to Waterford City & County passing by The Kilkenny Journal <https://www.facebook.com/groups/kilkennyjournal/?fref=ts> .

The analysis of the three pages canters on: a) general description of the page, based on the information provided by the administrators. This first analysis will enable us to understand how it articulates itself in relation with Facebook Terms of Services and Community Policies b) The structure of the page in term on restrictions for the users to use the wall. By observing the restrictions of the page we can obtain information about the role of the administrator c) Users participation, discussions and content particularly in relation to national topics, migration and islamophobia. The aim of the research to analyse the discussion that the pages are hosting in relation with migration and hate racist speech and the level of acceptance of this discourses d) The functions of these sites such as propaganda, recruitment, humanizing racism articulating economic problems trough ‘ethnicity’ discourses, and so on.

The national context of each country remains important to understand the nature of the Facebook postcard page. As a comparative dimension, national context provides insights about the use of social media. In the case of Greece evidences coming from interviews with Golden Dawn members and anti-racist activists, suggests that Golden Dawn members or affiliates are involved in Facebook postal cards. Both legal and anti-racist activities have shaped a Golden Dawn communication strategy which seems to be performed differently online than offline in terms of hate speech. In the case of Spain and considering the influence and power of far right political groups, it is dubious that any formal organization is behind the analysed Facebook postcard page; however, the page is sizing its number of followers significantly, improving the possibilities of functioning as a place for far right groups targeting potential voters. Finally, in the case of Ireland, there is no far right political party at

the moment. What can be found in this context is a Facebook base group called Irish Voice whose performance is purely online and whose speech has been persecuted by anti-racist networks.

Conclusions (M_Heading1)

The study presented in this papers shows empirical evidences of how Spanish, Greek and Irish far right groups and far right followers have found a digital space on Facebook where racist discourse , Islamophobic sentiment and far right organisations can be hosted. Presented as patriotism, pages that appear as ‘Facebook Postcards’ have become the last refuge of the racist. The implications of Facebook on the perpetuation of racism are rooted in its design. Facebook is understood as a technological expression that facilitates and perpetuates the modern project and the idea of modern nation states. Facebook design does not innovate or create any sort of evolution on how humans interact. If any, it has amplified and multiplied the offline reality emphasizing the idea of groups of people of determined characteristics or associations. Social media are made out of concepts, values, categorizations and systems of power and control that already operate in our offline existence and in consequence it can be said that racism on social media is structural (c.f. Feenberg, 2003). To this extent, it is inevitable that attempts to control the appearance and manifestation of racism online will always have limited and temporary success. The activity of anti-racist groups on Facebook is well intended and necessary as they create counter narratives, but we have to assume that we are fighting against the Hydra; where one head is cut, two more will grow.

References and Notes

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