

Piotr Majewski

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities
Warsaw

Nationalism, Cyberspace and Convergence Culture

When a large part of Earth's population gained widespread access to the Internet and to new digital media, many social researchers suggested that this fact would disturb the cultural integrity of nations. It was predicted that non-territorial character of the web would lead to fragmentation and unprecedented diversification of people inside national communities. This would in turn result in the loss of collective feeling of national identity that is based on common images, representations and myths (see: Eriksen 2006: 1). The boundless web – the Internet – was to enable both individuals and groups, who had been living in a homogenous world of national cultures, to construct new, open identities. Nationalistic and tribal bonds were to weaken and ultimately disappear. The virtual world, with its unlimited powers and possibilities, was to replace these bonds with global transnational society, which would be willing to adopt new identity narrations and change old ones on a daily basis. Yet, as T. H. Eriksen aptly notes: “Although it is too early to make any conclusions regarding the long term effects of the Internet, experiences so far suggest that such predictions were gravely mistaken. In fact, nations thrive in cyberspace, and the Internet has in the space of only a few years become a key technology for keeping nations (and other abstract communities) together [...] In a «global era» of movement and deterritorialisation, the Internet is typically used to strengthen, rather than weaken, national identities” (Eriksen 2006: 1).

This can be partly accounted for by the fact that national identity can be easily reproduced by means of various digital media that are gathered in one place and are widely available – which is the very nature of the Internet. What is more, digital media readily enter into an alliance with traditional broadcast

media, which enhances the process of medialization of memory.¹ Benedict Anderson described the development of print media as a fundamental factor for the wide dissemination of the idea of nation. They played a vital role in creating and reproducing “imagined communities” – a notion that has become famous in anthropological theory. From this point of view the cyberspace, filled with on-line editions of newspapers, social networking websites, blogosphere, chats and message boards, functions similarly. This includes the naturalization of myths and national symbols, which are rooted and reproduced in everyday life and popular culture (Anderson 1983, Edensor 2002). However, the cyberspace also serves as a novel element in the national “revolution” – it mobilizes (by giving voice to) members of a nation on an unprecedented scale. This happens because both collective and individual notions of a “nation” have nowadays become an important part of participatory culture² (convergence culture). This in turn forces the political discourse to approach the everyday experience of citizens, as it is not sufficient to only “inform” them. The space of the Internet has enabled individuals to mass-produce national narrations and to share them with other web users.

The introduction of nationalistic discourse to the Internet has caused hundreds of millions of users to actively manifest their national identity and to take political stands. What is more, it has become easier for people who feel a strong need for affiliation, loyalty and involvement to unite in groups whose sizes enable them to participate in large (often having a few thousand members), closely knit virtual communities. Furthermore, in contrast to “real life,” one can almost always choose whether to join a particular group on the Internet. Such affiliation is felt both physically

¹ This term is used here in its broad sense, i. e. as a phenomenon “related to the impact of all carriers of memory on the image of the past – not only carriers based on modern methods of mass communication, but also such types of intermediation or carriers of memory as writing, literature, museums, anniversary celebrations, photographs, cemeteries and monuments, films, but also cities or art (Korzeniewski 2007: 9). This understanding of the phenomenon of medialization “does not primarily focus on the notion of «media» as a system of modern mass communication, but rather on the notion of «medium» as «something that intermediates»” (Korzeniewski 2007: 9), that is a transmitter used to circulate and attach sense to images of the past.

² As Henry Jenkins notes: “The term, participatory culture, contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands. Not all participants are created equal. Corporations – and even individuals within corporate media – still exert greater power than any individual consumer or even the aggregate of consumers. And some consumers have greater abilities to participate in this emerging culture than others. Convergence does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others. Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives.” (Jenkins 2006: 3)

and psychically and the participation – due to the dynamics of web communication – can take place every day, unlike for example in rallies or mass political demonstrations, which occur less often and are more difficult to participate in. The Internet provides easier opportunities to meet people who think alike and who declare similar views. In order to find such people on one of numerous portals or forums, it is sufficient to type one or two words into a search engine.

Participation in popular culture provides Internet users with the know-how and tools to transform political discussions and national narrations. By doing so, web users alter the old system of communication and cultural norms, as well as introduce new contents into the canon of national culture. Internauts – as Jenkins remarks – create new texts of culture: “[...] consumers are now using new media technologies to engage with old media content, seeing the Internet as a vehicle for collective problem solving, public deliberation and grassroots creativity. [...] The current diversification of communication channels is politically important because it expands the range of voices that can be heard: though some voices command greater prominence than others, no one voice speaks with unquestioned authority. The new media operate with different principles than the broadcast media [...]: access, participation, reciprocity, and peer-to-peer rather than one-to-many communication. [...] These forces are apt to emerge first in cultural forms – a changed sense of community, a greater sense of participation, less dependence on official expertise and a greater trust in collaborative problem solving [...]” (Jenkins 2006: 169 and 208-209)

YouTube3 - a website that houses the Greek-Macedonian war

Social networking websites become sometimes fighting grounds – a space, where opinions radicalize. The immediacy and easy access to the “battlefield,” as well as the possibility to remain anonymous, reinforce increasing sharpness of expressed opinions. At the same time these websites allow users to meet others who think alike and share similar values. Patricia Wallace, an Internet psychologist, notes: “As people participate in online group discussions with the few others who share their views from around the world, they may well hold biased discussions, experience the influence of

³ YouTube is a video-sharing website, which allows users to upload, share and view videos. Most of them are added by private individuals, but companies, political parties, institutions and governments also publish materials on the website. YouTube was created in 2005, before that there was no simple method for an average user to publish video clips. Due to uncomplicated technology, YouTube enabled every person, who has access to the Internet, to upload materials available to all the internauts in the world. (see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube>)

group polarization and move further and further towards extremism. [...] [In such groups – P. M.] We could quickly acquire an exaggerated perception of the rightness of our views because we found others who not only agree with us, but who are even further out on the attitudinal limb. Inch by inch, we would move out on the limb ourselves – toward the polarized extreme [...].” (Wallace 1999: 79)

It does not matter here that these carriers of medialization are allegedly trivial or that conservatives perceive them only as simulacra of the ancient agora or other public spheres serving as “open areas” (Maffesoli 1996: 25). These websites create space where social bonds are formed and collective sensitivity is manifested, thus establishing a broad sphere of social interactions. They provide users with the sense of social closeness with others and develop an atmosphere which enables the reproduction of “collective frames of memory.”

Web contents inform us about current experiences and aspects of everyday reality that others perceive as important and significant, as well as about the factors that create an atmosphere capable of uniting participants (actors) of communication. Michel Maffesoli argues: “In doing so, the contemporary media, by presenting images of everyday life rather than visualizing the great works of culture [critics of the Internet often accuse it of trivializing reality – P. M.], would be playing the role that used to fall to the various forms of public discourse: to ensure by means of myth the cohesion of a given social entity. [...] In his study of these mass media, Fernand Dumont subtly underlines that these myths, whatever their precise contents, serve mainly to «nourish, as in days gone by, gossip and normal conversations [...] what we used to say about the parish priest or the notary, we now say about such and such a film star or politician»” (Maffesoli 1996: 26).

It should be noted that one of the most important and most discussed topics – both in the Macedonian and Greek communication spaces – is the national issue (see Danforth 1995, Roudometof 2002, Shea 2008). This explains why these spaces have been seized by multidimensional national discourse. Such “flagging of reality” (Billig 1995) – which combines the aspects of “hot” nationalism (the drive to establish a national order and its symbols) and “cold” nationalism (the national state, in order to function in its ethnic form, has to be secured by a network of everyday practices, habitual actions and ideological convictions) – has produced noticeable effects. The question of the origin of contemporary Macedonians is not to be answered by historians, anthropologists or political scientists in the privacy of their offices (however they are also required to take a stand), nor is it only an element of the discourse of populist politicians. The ethnogenesis of Macedonians is a substantial part of everyday experience of ordinary people.

It has become an urgent matter for the whole tribe; and the tribe as a whole, including those who ridicule or disagree with the concept (encouraged by the present authorities) of the ancient origin of the contemporary Greeks and Macedonians, participates in the national discourse. This discourse, assuming the form of a certain transmedial narration,⁴ occurs on a number of planes (from scientific conferences to beer chatter in *kafanas*) and concerns many dimensions of reality (from architecture to ecological issues). It is characterized by a significant simplification of positions, reductionism and selective reading of history – regardless of the side of the conflict. It reaches its heights on the Internet, where all the planes and dimensions of collective sensitivity interweave and merge.

Views (contents) presented by the governments and national intellectuals on official information channels (on broadcast media) are permanently present, though in slightly modified variations, both in Greek and Macedonian popular cultures, which serves as matrices within which the national identity is constantly reproduced. This observation proves the thesis that images and symbols used to explain reality are provided by “traditionally” privileged social actors. These interpretation tools are based on a mythologized concept of history, in which the national community is perceived as an eternal chain of generations, while the national identity is a stable, static and “natural” foundation of narrations. Such beliefs are reflected in numerous posts and video clips published on YouTube, one of the most popular global websites. Its virtual space has become one of the most important battlefields of the Greek-Macedonian war on memory and identity. Texts, images and music serve as weapons here.

A discussion on the website’s forum that was triggered by the video “Macedonia”⁵ (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q4-QeRBuy4>) well il-

⁴ The so-called “antiquisation”, i. e. the process of devising a direct link of origin between ancient Macedonians and Slav citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, is an excellent example of a national transmedial narration; one of its aims is the homogenization of society. This narration develops on various media platforms and every one of its elements (texts) constitutes a significant and meaningful entity. The process of inventing a tradition proceeds in such a way that every medium serving the process of antiquisation acts in its own sphere, so that history can be told by national historians, but developed through architecture, press articles, blogs, Internet forums, television, films, video clips, novels and comic books. Each form of access to the feeling of national community should be self-sufficient, so that we do not have to read complicated scholarly disquisitions to enjoy our ancient past. Every mythological script contained in a single medium serves as a point of access to the national narration as a whole. The in-depth experiencing of a community through various media reinforces even stronger identification with it (cf. Jenkins 2006: 96).

⁵ The exact date of the publication of the video is unknown. The number of views has been counted since November 30, 2007. This video is a modified version of another one called “Macedonia is Greece”, which until July 7, 2009 had been viewed 3.152.070 times and had 682.128 thousand comments on its forum, thus being one of the most commented videos in the history of the website.

illustrates the above statement. This three-minute “documentary” has been posted on YouTube on January 13, 2007 by a user under the pseudonym *makedoniatruth* (<http://www.youtube.com/user/makedoniatruth>). The author of the video belongs to an Internet group called “Fighters for Macedonia,”⁶ who use the keyboard to fight against those who defile the sacred national values of the Greeks – especially against Vardar’s imperialists: *a group for all these who defend Macedonia from Vardarska imperialism* (<http://www.youtube.com/group/fightersforMacedonia>).

The video, made using Photoshop,⁷ depicts the Greek version of the history of Macedonia and the place of this region on the contemporary Greek memory map. Among figures and symbols appearing in this work, which has been viewed 117.790 times and commented 11.730 times,⁸ are Alexander III of Macedon and the most important symbol of the Argead Dynasty, the Vergina Sun. The author does not leave these identity emblems uncommented upon, beginning his lecture with a quotation reportedly taken from Alexander himself: “«Thank the gods to have been born Greek» What does the star of Vergina represent? The Vergina has 16 points. 12 represent each greek god, Chile the Rother 4 represent the elements: earth, air, fire and water. The Vergina was found on the Larnax in 1977 by Monolis Andronikos in Vergina, Greece. The larnax belonged to king Philip II of Macedon Alexander the Great’s father. In 1992 FYROM⁹ stole the Vergina and put in on their flag. In 1995 Greece forced FYROM to remove Greek symbol and create a new flag. Alexsander the Great was born in the year

⁶ The group has 331 members (as of July 7, 2010) (<http://www.youtube.com/group/fightersfor-Macedonia>).

⁷ As Jenkins remarks, internauts: “are using the popular graphics software package, Photoshop, to appropriate and manipulate images to make a political statement. Such images might be seen as the grassroots equivalent of political cartoons – the attempt to encapsulate topical concerns in a powerful image. [...] Some might well argue that circulating these images is a poor substitute for more traditional forms of political activism. I wouldn’t totally disagree, especially in those situations where people are simply hitting the send key and thoughtlessly forwarding the images to everyone they know. Yet, I would also suggest that crystallizing one’s political perspectives into a photomontage that is intended for broader circulation is no less an act of citizenship than writing a letter to the editor of a local newspaper that may or may not actually print it. For a growing number of young [...] [internauts – P. M.], images (or more precisely the combination of words and images) may represent as important set of rhetorical resources as texts. Passing such images to a friend is no more and no less a political act than handing them a campaign brochure or a bumper sticker. The tokens being exchanged are not that important in and of themselves, but they may become the focus for conversation and persuasion. What changes, however, is the degree to which amateurs are able to insert their images and thoughts into the political process – and in at least some cases, these images can circulate broadly and reach a large public. (Jenkins 2006: 220 and 222)

⁸ As of 7th July 2010.

⁹ The Republic of Macedonia is still referred to as FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) by some states in the international forum.

356 B.C. in Pella, Greece. Northern Greece been considered Macedonia for 4000 years. The Ancient Macedonians spoke greek and wroship greek gods. The language of FYROM is slavic and it was not used by the ancient Macedonians. Their language was created in 1944 and did not even exist in the time of Aleksander. Every known river, town, person in Macedonia had a greek name. Philip (friend of horse), Aleksander (protetor of men), Archelaus (leader of people), Amyntas (defender), Ptolemy (warlike). The fake Macedonians came to FYROM during the bulgarian invasion in the Holly Orthodox Empire in 900 AD. The people of FYROM where in Asia at the time of ancient Macedonia and Aleksander. Prior to 1944 FYROM was known as Vardarska Banovina. In 1944 Yugoslav communist leader Tito named south Serbia Macedonia. This weakened Serbia and would also set future territorial claims against Greece. In February 26 1992 FYROM'S president Kiro Gligorov stated: «We are Slavs who came to this area in sixth century. We are not descendents of ancient Macedonians». In march 15 1992 FYROM'S president Kiro Gligorov again stated: «We are Macedonian but we are Slavs Macedonians. We have no connection to Aleksander the Great and his Macedonia». Macedonia is Northern Greece, not north of Greece” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q4-QeRBuy4>).

The analysis of contents and iconography used in the video shows, that basic narrative scripts present in the discourse that has dominated Internet forums housing the Greek-Macedonian dispute relate to broadly understood identity issues (which result from the objective history of a given nation). Either the “true history” of their own nation or the “distortion of history” by users of the forum, who by holding opposite views automatically become representatives of the hostile nation, form the central themes of these narrations: “MACEDONIA WAS, IS AND WILL ALWAYS BE GREEK! YOU ARE ONLY SLAVS WITHOUT HISTORY TRYING TO STEAL THE GLORY OF GREEK HISTORY! ALEXANDER WAS GREEK WE ARE GREEK WE ARE MACEDONIANS!” (TheDuras13:http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=1).

These “stories about history,” as well as opinions and beliefs that give credence to it, help forum users to separate the wheat (true Macedonians) from the chaff (those who only claim the right to the Macedonian identity, but are in fact usurpers). The authors of these narrative scripts emphasize the “long-termness” of their own nation and its honourable historical past whose roots lie deeply in the mists of prehistory and myth. The national community is imagined as a genetically and culturally invariable chain of generations. The members of such nation are faithful to their instinct and tradition, cherish their origin and the community they belong to (cf. Čolović: 146): „Very funny greeks! Let me tell you something first. 1st We are not “Slav” we are true

descendant from Antic Macedonians. 2nd if you know history, you will know about the 2nd Balkan War and what Greek people have done to Macedonians. 3rd Open a Russian History book and look for "MACEDONISM" that is a whole chapter about Slav roots. 4th The Slav did not come behind the Karpats as you know, but they have gone north from Macedonia and colonized all eastern Europe" (goranmacedon: http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=23).

As can be seen from the above post, the identity of a community that is experienced in such a way always has a unique character incomparable to any other national identity and merged into mythical scripts. Thus the history of a nation becomes a perpetual story of a constantly renewing ideal that is both progressive and redemptive and possesses a power to create civilization and culture: "Some questions 4 Scopianogian descendants of ugly Gligorov, black UGLY gypsies GAYS of Vardaska. WHY WERE Macedonians spreading Greek culture, Greek language, Greek customs, Greek Gods, founded Greek cities with Greek names & Greek architecture stating their pride of being descendants of Great Greeks! Stated their Greekness everywhere they went. Revenged Persians for invading their MOTHERLAND GREECE & fought 4 the GLORY OF ELLAS?" (REALmacedonianGR: http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=3).

At the same time opponents are being convinced that their nation is an artificial and recently invented political construct that has nothing to do with authentic identity: "Pontians you are BRAINWASHED !!! Because you live on somebody else's property!!!! Macedonia never Hellenic! Pure Hellenes do not exist, only brainwashed Afroasiatic IDIOTS who believe in their 99,5% pure Hellenic origin [...] of course they present Turks as Hellenes, Albanians as Hellenes, Vlachs as Hellenes has its a big fucking idiotism" (ISTORICAR: http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=14).

The members of such a manipulated "nation" lack real roots, collective memory, tradition and even souls. Both "history" and "culture" provide arguments in favour of these observations: "FYROM is a fake country, they should on the instant change the name of their stupid cucumber country, they insult Macedonian history, even the most oldest ethnic people from FYROM are the Vlachs Aromanians, Latinised Macedonians. FYROMS speak a Bulgarian language influenced by Serbs during Yugoslav occupation. They don't have nothing to do with ancient Macedonia province. We Romanians always will support Greeks at this matter. True Macedonians are Greek. Alexander was Greek" (alex4ucj: http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=2).

Some of the views and speculations of the forum users seem to be confirmed by modern science, especially molecular biology and genetics

– the ethnic and racial discourses overlap here: “The question came from a Greek citizen who asked iGENEA the following question: «What are the roots of today SlavMacedonians». The Institute responded: «Before all, they are Macedonians, not slavMacedonias as you referred to them for political reasons. The largest part of the Macedonians are direct descendants of the Antic Macedonians. Only a minor portion have a Slavic connection» [...] Today’s Macedonians are descendants of the Antic Macedonians, says research results from the Swiss Genealogy Institute iGENEA. For a second time an independent research institution confirms what Oxford and Madrid University confirmed a decade ago. iGENEA is the most famous global Genealogy institute who once again frustrated the Greek government by confirming the direct connection between the Macedonians today and in Antic times” SuperGeorgiev: http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=3).

As we can see, in the 21st century some internauts still perceive race as a classification or genetic system that determines the cultural identity of individuals and groups. What is more, the DNA of opponents automatically makes them members of an inferior or less renowned race and serves as an argument in the dispute over historical entitlement to a given territory: “Macedonians belong to the ‘older’ Mediterranean substratum, like Iberians (including Basques), North Africans, Italians, French, Cretans, Jews, Lebanese, Turks (Anatolians), Armenians and Iranians. Macedonians are not related with geographically close Greeks, who do not belong to the “older” Mediterranean substratum. Greeks are found to have a substantial relatedness to sub-Saharan (Ethiopian) people, which separate them from other Mediterranean groups” (gocesk: http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=20).

The participants of discourse portray themselves and their community as boasting the highest moral standards and cherishing the noblest models of beauty. However, in the visual sphere these images are usually based on patterns of global popular culture – especially Hollywood superproductions. Hence both for the Greeks and the Macedonians a heroic Spartan from the comic book “300” by Frank Miller may serve as a model man and warrior as well as famous film actors, such as Collin Farrell, who played Alexander the Great in Oliver Stone’s “Alexander” or Brad Pitt, who touchingly enacted Achilles mourning for the dead Patroclus in the motion picture “Troy” (see e.g. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l32fOiYu4Z0&feature=related>). What is more, these narrations contain not only mythologized, yet historical figures, like Leonidas and Alexander. Achilles and Hercules appear beside them and in the minds of cyberpatriots they are as real as the former.

Furthermore, homophobic and chauvinistic comments are also frequently used as arguments. However, it would be an oversimplification to treat them as purely intentional attempts to insult and provoke opponents. They do play other, more important roles. Firstly, their content value is treated equally with independent experts' opinions. Secondly, they reflect the psychological structure of forum users, providing information about their concepts of culture and ways of experiencing national identity. Thirdly, the analysis of such comments shows ways of perceiving and categorizing the social world according to what is recognized as "own-good" and what is regarded as "alien-bad" in a given society. Finally, they indicate the selectivity of nationalistic images – both groups, as if bound by an unwritten agreement, never refer to the alleged homosexuality of their greatest national hero and emblem, Alexander the Great. It should also be noted that internauts often enter into transnational alliances directed against mutual enemies. Forums that house the Greek-Macedonian dispute also contain posts from Albanian, Bulgarian and Serbian users (who usually support their Greek cyberfriends), as well as from Turkish internauts (who always back up Macedonians).

The most common narrations can be divided according to messages they are trying to convey. The first group would then comprise of posts referring to the alleged homosexuality of opponents. These allegations can assume both visual and text form, among the latter the most common variant exploits the word *gay*: "you stupid gayreek from where did you get this numbers from your hellas as I saw yesterday it was wery good day in gayrece why these people were fighting with police because you are rich or because you are becomineg so poor even african tribes are moore rich than you go gayreek and begg for money or you can sell your hellas" (TheGrkoebac:http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=20).

It is a common practice among forum users to describe members of the other group as homosexuals. There is no place here to analyse the predominant cultural patterns of gender relations within the Greek and the Macedonian societies, but it may be safely assumed that forum users come from communities that are not favourably inclined towards people of different sexual orientation than heterosexuality. I once witnessed an event that happened in one of the restaurants in Skopje during the World Cup match between Argentina and Greece. At one point of the game a group of adolescent boys appeared inside the restaurant and started yelling towards the TV screen: "Greek fags! Greek fags!"

Actually, it seems that in the homophobic statements made by forum users the phenomenon of homosexuality is the least important. Such posts are aimed at judging the hostile nation's culture. If we assume that forum users

associate the word “gay” with the lack of masculinity, decline of civilization and tradition, depravation and violation of ancestral commandments, natural law and God’s will, then the mechanisms of degrading opponents can be easily understood. It should be noted at the same time that the alleged homosexuality is a collective feature, which is attributed to all members of the hostile nation and embedded in its historical identity and contemporary condition: “What do you expect from a gypsy Arab African combination. gayreece you are a 3rd world shit hole and now you will have to sell olives and fetta cheese for about 2000 years to pay off your debt [...] If you want to pay it off sooner you can always sell your women to Turkey just like old times hehehe. Just make sure you shave them first cos they are so damn hairy. Bankrupt gypsy’s” (TRUMACEDON: (gocesk: http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=17).

Another group of epithets ascribed to forum users is connected with their ethnic identity. One of the frequently recurring words among these is monkeydonkey, which is often used by Greek and Bulgarian internauts: “I wonder how it feels for these fyro-donkeys to come from the most worthless nation in Europe?”(spartiati75:http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=2).

Similarly inventive categories include TurkoSlavoBulgars, bulgaroturks or fyromians, which are aimed at indicating the fact that there are no “true” Macedonians on the territory of the contemporary Republic of Macedonia (although Greek internauts always replace the name “Republic of Macedonia” with “FYROM”). These epithets reveal also the “true” ethnic origin of the inhabitants of the Republic of Macedonia and their “true” national affiliation: “I see a couple of angry mice here [...] I’m so scared of fyrom, a nation who can’t even deal with the albanians. As far as you go super douche, we know that a wacko like you consumes 100% of his day talking shit about Greece, I wonder why that is? Could it be because you and your race are worthless in every respect, and you can’t hide your inferiority complex. Some nations are meant to write history (like us Greeks) others are meant to be bottom feeders (like you fyro-donkeys)”(spartiati75:http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=20).

Such statements are meant to ridicule the Slavic aspirations to the legacy of ancient Macedonians and at the same time signal their racial inferiority and low intellectual level: “macedonians – people without history, brainwashed bulgarians stealing bulgarian and greek history. I am bulgarian and I feel so sad about my brainwashed brothers...life...”(kolkotolko: http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=20).

This group also includes such categories as Gypsy (Gypsies), Albanian (Albanians), barbarians and immigrants, as well as comments relating to the

economic situation of the hostile nation. The ethnonim “Gypsy” points to “mongrel” origin of the opposite nation, as well as to its innate inclination to crime (stealing of identity). Thus the members of the enemy group are given attributes of all the stereotypical notions about the Romani: “you greeks are famous to lie people, like gypsyish ;) Thats one good thing that you can very well. Many Greeds to the gypsyish Greeks”(TheFast4u:http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=19).

The economic situation is used as an argument that proves the opponents’ backwardness: “I guess that means that FYROM is Going to be FYROM for a long time! they may not be in a rush to let in a country with no name and 35% unemployment till Other EU countries get there house in order ! poor Fyrom 20 years behind the other former republics of Yugoslavia. Vardarska timeless!!!” (FYROMINJA:http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=19).

Finally, I will try to analyse the discourse of the forum from a slightly different angle, taking into account not only the narrative contents, but also argumentative patterns and strategies, which can be distinguished from user posts. These patterns and strategies play a major role in giving credence to the presented statements and in demonstrating the falsity of opponents’ arguments. Quotations are the chief weapon in this battle – the most common practice is to invoke authorities in various fields of science (from historiography through linguistics to genetics): “Modern Slavs, both Bulgarians and Macedonians, cannot establish a link with antiquity, as the Slavs entered the Balkans centuries after the demise of the ancient Macedonian kingdom. Only the most radical Slavic factions—mostly émigrés in the United States, Canada, and Australia—even attempt to establish a connection to antiquity [Eugene N. Borza, “Macedonia Redux”]” (historicaltruth12:http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=14). In the users’ belief these quotations prove their opinions, because the sources are “scientific” and “objective.” By citing experts internauts emphasize the objectivity of their judgements and at the same time accuse their opponents of irrationality and lack of logical thinking: “All of you idiots, who think know history, should read more instead of spewing out political and historical incorrectness. Stop using Wikipedia or State Media as educational resource, and focus on finding a true history book written by an author who specializes in the particular field of interest (Macedonian history in this case). George Rawlinson is an esteemed professor of Ancient history at the University of Oxford. Read his books if you are interested in history” (BaceMD: http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments=1&v=1q4-QeRBuy4&page=5).

Conclusions

Producing national narrations on the Internet by means of new media has recently become a more democratized and accessible process, which requires, however, certain world-creating skills. Internauts develop transmedial narrations, which cannot be fully analysed within the scope of one work or one medium. Their world (national imaginarium) is more extensive than the narrations of professional national historians. Speculations and detailed elaborations conducted by nationalistic internauts stretch this world in many directions at once. As Jenkins notes, what nowadays: “[...] holds a collective intelligence together is not the possession of knowledge – which is relatively static, but the social process of acquiring knowledge – which is dynamic and participatory, continually testing and reaffirming the group’s social ties” (Jenkins 2006: 54).

This is why the elite that propagate “high” culture have become only one of many actors creating current patterns of national identity – especially in the space of popular culture, where national identity is reproduced. State or elite version of culture is an indicator of social status. However, it often cedes its leading role to popular and mass versions of national culture. Thus a certain decentralization of national culture can be observed, which starts to draw identity factors from such domains of social life as media (e.g. the Eurovision Song Contest or products of the American entertainment industry), or sporting events. This is the reason why popular social notions (expressed in narrations) revolving around the national issue have an impact on the political actions of the elite. The elite discourse is to some extent dependent on patterns of national identity that are provided by popular culture, but at the same time it has the ability to shape this culture, if only by influencing the direction and scope of modernization processes.

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Nacjonalizm, cyberprzestrzeń i konwergencja kulturowa

W swoim artykule analizuję dyskurs odnoszący się do sporu grecko-macedońskiego toczącego się w przestrzeni Internetu, w tym zwłaszcza na portalu społecznościowym YouTube. Dyskurs ten opiera się na zmitologizowanej wizji historii, gdzie wspólnota narodowa postrzegana jest jako odwieczny łańcuch pokoleń, a tożsamość narodowa jest stałym – nie podlegającym zmianom – i „naturalnym” fundamentem nacji.
