

“Innocent” Hashtags? A Cautionary Tale: #IStandWithGreece as a Network of Intolerance on Twitter During a Land Border Crisis

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This study explores the hashtag #IStandWithGreece as part of the meaning-making processes on Twitter around a border crisis at Europe’s periphery, the Greek–Turkish land border. Adopting a network perspective, we located the most influential Twitter accounts using #IStandWithGreece, the communities they formed in the microblog, and other hashtags used to communicate their views in relation to the unfolding events. This allowed the scanning of the broader ideological character of these influencers and their respective communities and, by extent, that of the debate around the hashtag. The study exposes the strategic use of a seemingly innocent hashtag by certain influential actors to disseminate antimigrant stances that cut across national contexts of the Global North.

Keywords: hashtag analysis, migration, network perspective, social media, Twitter

Scholarly attention on migration-related debates online, specifically in the context of social media, has been directed toward cases that defend human mobility (Dahlgren, 2016) and those that attack it, promoting exclusion on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, or gender (Gualda & Rebollo, 2016). The affordances of social media are instrumentalized by users to promote relevant understandings and to gain visibility. For example, specific hashtags were strategically used to frame the refugee debate on Twitter during the so-called 2015 European refugee crisis in positive ways to promote migrant inclusion or negatively

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to promote discriminatory positions (Kreis, 2017; Nerghes & Lee, 2018). Positive discourse was organized around hashtags such as #SafePassage and #humanrights, which focused on the plight of children; negative discourse was organized around hashtags such as #islamisttheproblem and #refugeesNotWelcome, representing refugees as a threat (Gualda & Rebollo, 2016). Tweets using refugee-related hashtags carried more positive connotations compared with those with migrant-related hashtags (Nerghes & Lee, 2018). Focus on positive or negative hashtags to an extent reflects the omnipresent debate between optimistic and pessimistic approaches to social media research and, in the case of migration, on social media's role in promoting inclusion or exclusion.

We focus on #IStandWithGreece, a not openly discriminatory hashtag toward migrants, but still an evaluative hashtag declaring support to Greece. #IStandWithGreece appeared and gained prominence in social media during one of Europe's border crises, this time at the Greek-Turkish land border in late February 2020. Adopting a network perspective (Markham & Lindgren, 2014), we attempted to reveal who dominated the discussion around #IStandWithGreece on Twitter and the meanings propagated. In so doing, we show how border crises and migration emergencies stimulate social media discussions that advance exclusionary ideologies with antimigrant stances at their core. Attention to a nonblatantly antimigrant hashtag, in contrast to openly discriminatory hashtags explored in earlier research, allowed us to showcase how more subtle strategies may be adopted to exclude migrants using the affordances of the specific medium. We are not advancing a pessimist approach to social media participation, but rather a critical one, which acknowledges that society and technology are interlinked in a dialectic relationship (Fuchs, 2017; Lindgren, 2017), effectively becoming a dark relationship of exclusionary politics and restrictive ideologies.

Power and the Internet: Optimistic, Pessimistic, and Critical Approaches

Social media research develops in the shadow of an omnipresent debate between the cyber optimists and the cyber pessimists, both guided by technological determinism (Fuchs, 2017) and rarely disrupted by pragmatist approaches (Lindgren, 2017).

From an optimistic perspective, early research saw the Internet as the emerging fifth estate (Dutton, 2009) of the new ecosystem revolving around public participation and democratic accountability. Democratization and subsequent increased tolerance were the great expectations of Internet optimists (Lindgren, 2017). In these processes, social media (e.g., blogs, wikis, microblogs) were seen as key drivers for connecting people and ideas, bringing positive social change (Shirky, 2011), and enhancing civic participation (Dahlgren, 2009). Twitter's affordances, this approach argues, allow nonelite actors to produce, disseminate, and redistribute news content (Holton, Coddington, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013). Therefore, the citizen role in using Twitter is arguably amplified as, for example, during the uprisings in Egypt (Lotan et al., 2011; Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2012) and crises like the Mumbai bombings (Potts, 2009). In this line of thought, the networked population that organized Twitter revolutions during the Arab Spring (Lotan et al., 2011) formed a continuum with the "text-messaging generation" in the early 2000s that ousted national leaders (Shirky, 2011, p. 28). Although the result, according to optimist perspectives, is not predetermined, the potential for positive social change is greater; therefore, their response to the recurrent question about the role of social media in democracy is affirmative, at least in the long term. In relation to diasporas and migrant and refugee communities, social media are praised for providing new opportunities for more participation, self-

representation, and therefore visibility (Risam, 2018). Arguably, social media enhance connectivity in reception countries, enabling integration processes, facilitating regular contact with families abroad, and functioning as information sources prior to and after arrival (Alencar, 2017; Borker, Fisher, & Yafi, 2018). Therefore, in concurrent digitalized environments of interconnectivity, social media are places for sociality and belongingness for these otherwise marginalized, invisible communities (Costa & Wang, 2019).

Pessimist perspectives developed as governments adapted to the Internet age, using social media to control and surveil their citizens. Within and beyond authoritarian regimes, the role of social media in curbing rights, like privacy, has been scrutinized (Morozov, 2013; Zuboff, 2015). The effectiveness of social media activism has been questioned as, arguably, undisciplined movements organizing online do not bring actual change as they fail to become more structured and to have longevity (Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018). Given that ties between social media users are weak, they cannot inspire high-risk activism that can challenge the establishment (Gladwell, 2010). Rather, social media users engage in a form of feel-good activism, characteristically named "slacktivism" and "clicktivism" (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009). Moreover, as reactionaries exploit their affordances to participate in order to intimidate and harass, social media are increasingly criticized for encouraging toxic technocultures (Massanari, 2017) in overt and covert ways (Ben-David & Matamoros Fernández, 2016). The opportunities they create for migrants and refugees are also downplayed as scholars countered any euphoria about the connected migrant (Diminescu, 2008) as a digital agent of change (Borker et al., 2018) by reaffirming the persistence of the digital divide, stressing how "refugees are part of a global majority for whom technology access and use is neither assumed nor commonplace" (Leung, 2019, p. 79). Furthermore, scholars have warned against many risks that refugees and migrants run from hypersurveillance by states or individuals because of digital technologies (Gillespie, Osseiran, & Cheesman, 2018). Therefore, issues of privacy and surveillance compromise opportunities for participation and, often, migrants conceal their identities online using avatars and pseudonyms (Gillespie et al., 2018).

The political economy of the Internet, interested in how power is articulated in the new media and digital ecology (Mansell, 2004), emphasizes monopolies on the Internet that profit through managing and collecting information (Bolaño & Vieira, 2015). These critical perspectives underline market concentration by a few dominant corporations, concluding that an elite leads online visibility (Fuchs, 2018). Big media brands monopolize attention on the Internet where two corporations dominate (Associated Press and Reuters; Paterson, 2003), competing for social media user attention (Bhattacharya & Ram, 2015). Thus, social media are approached not as neutral platforms, but as for-profit businesses (Baym, 2011) that embody power relations with significant implications. This inevitably compromises their democratic potential.

Critical social media studies share political economy's concern over unequal power relations on the Internet, but with more emphasis on meaning-making processes. Without secluding user agency, they argue that the democratic or emancipatory potential of social media like Twitter is limited (Fuchs, 2017). This line of research advances a dialectical relation between technology and society that rejects the technological determinism of cyber optimists and cyber pessimists. One argument claims that social media may serve as tools to organize and coordinate, but collective action necessitates "spatio-temporal presence" (Fuchs, 2017, p. 186). A second argument is that social media can play significant roles in meaning-making processes, reproducing the contradictions of contemporary, divisive, and unequal social structures (Fuchs, 2018). Like mass media, social media intersect with various stratifications, reproducing rather than eliminating existing inequalities based on

race, gender, nationality, and class (Lindgren, 2017). As Siapera (2019) argues, they may have offered efficiencies to migrants and racialized people, but they emerged within technocapitalism; therefore, their role cannot but be more about reproducing inequalities and generating new ones rather than tackling them. Studies from a critical perspective have shown how racism (Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015; Daniels, 2012) and nationalism (Fuchs, 2019) persist online, reproducing colonial logics (Yadlin-Segal, 2017). Studies have also shown that racist rhetoric and White supremacist ideologies, including anti-Semitism, are normalized in social media discussions over migration from the Global South (Jakubowicz, 2017; Gantt Shafer, 2017).

Evidently neither the Internet nor social media have led to outset exclusionary ideologies; contrarily, they have provided new spaces and tools for them to become reconfigured or even to gain momentum. Our study explores and eventually exposes how Twitter and its affordances were deployed by certain users to create antimigrant momentum around a contested border crisis in Europe. As such, it is both drawing from and contributing to these critical approaches.

The Context: Europe–Turkey’s Migration Deal

The events investigated are a continuation and consequence of how the European Union managed the so-called refugee crisis, which peaked in 2015 when approximately 1 million people applied for asylum in EU countries and 3,770 died attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. To manage the crisis, the European Union reached a deal with Turkey that all irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey coupled with provisions on safeguarding international law such as the principle of nonrefoulement (Statement, 2016). In addition, the European Union committed to visa acceleration for Turkish citizens and to “reenergize” Turkey’s accession process.

Despite an explicit reference to a temporary measure, four years elapsed before Turkey opened its borders. Specifically, on February 26, 2020, Turkey declared the suspension of the deal and numerous people moved toward its borders with Greece and Bulgaria (the Evros area), where a number of migrants were already stranded (Koc, Hacaoglu, & Chrysoloras, 2020). Greek security forces citing public health halted migrants from crossing, suspended asylum procedures, and activated an extrajudicial center; reportedly, three migrants died during clashes (Stavis-Gridneff & Kingsley, 2020).

The events were tweeted, retweeted, shared, and “liked” across social media throughout March 2020, coinciding with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The highly mediated events prompted an antimigrant rhetoric by far-right European politicians on traditional and social media (e.g., Italy’s Salvini), but also by politicians such as the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who declared that Greece is Europe’s shield (European Commission, 2020), recasting migrants at the border as unwanted.

The deal, claiming to protect irregular migrants from undertaking risky routes (Bialasiewicz & Maessen, 2018), constitutes another step toward the externalization of migration in Europe. It is another attempt to keep migrants and refugees, particularly Muslims, in unsafe third countries, thus endangering them by making them choose riskier routes (Bialasiewicz & Maessen, 2018; Goalwin, 2017). The deal has been found to be legally (Bialasiewicz & Maessen, 2018) and morally (Bhambra, 2017) flawed and scrutinized for privileging geopolitics over refugee lives (Goalwin, 2017), recasting doubt about Europe’s democratic heritage (Bhambra,

2017). Therefore, it constitutes an inherent part of the restrictive and oppressive European migration regime and its colonial logics (De Genova, 2017). In conclusion, the Evros crisis is more the result of reactionary border controls rather than human mobility (De Genova, 2017).

The Present Study

The 2020 Evros crisis rekindled the migration debate online and offline; taking a critical approach, we examine how it was debated on Twitter to explore meanings and perspectives around it. We focus on a trending hashtag, #IStandWithGreece, which appeared as the events evolved. Even though an evaluative, positive hashtag about Greece, #IStandWithGreece did not, at least at face value, seem to discriminate against migrants, as for example #refugeesnotwelcome did, which sketched refugees as clearly unwanted in earlier crises (Kreis, 2017). Essentially, the hashtag was not ranting "migrants out," but still advocated for support to Greece. #IStandWithGreece's ambiguity makes it an ideal case study exactly because of what it stands for within the specific sociotechnological context, and how the meanings circulated around it related to Twitter affordances and the broader events within which it was born. These questions drove our research, acting as a lighthouse in formulating and subsequently addressing two interconnected questions: (a) Who are the influencers within the #IStandWithGreece network? (b) What are the key characteristics of the communities forming the network?

Method

In this study, we adopted a network perspective (Markham & Lindgren, 2014) to make sense of #IStandWithGreece, around which certain users bonded on Twitter to "organize a discourse" regardless of whether they were otherwise uncoordinated (Eriksson Krutrök & Lindgren, 2018, p. 2). As Siapera, Boudourides, Lenis, and Suiter (2018) argue, "Twitter and hashtags, in particular, produce an aggregated community where publics are formed, re-formed, and coordinated via dynamic networks of communication and social connectivity" (p. 4). Naturally, some users play a more central and influential role in a network and their identification can reveal trends and patterns about online discourses and social networks (Ferra & Nguyen, 2017). Networks consist of subsections or subnetworks that hold strong ties, impact, and are impacted by the entire network (Lindgren, 2017). Subnetworks, often referred to as communities, are sets of highly interconnected users because, for example, they are mentioned by each other (Blondel, Guillaume, Lambiotte, & Lefebvre, 2008). Therefore, by examining these communities, we can reveal the identity of the broader network. To summarize, to address the first question, we identify and describe the network's top 10 influencers. To respond to the second question, we describe the six biggest communities of the network. Below, we present the steps undertaken from the data collection to the analysis.

We collected tweets using a combination of keywords² through DMI-TCAT (Borra & Rieder, 2014), which uses the Twitter-filtered streaming API to provide a real-time stream of tweets, including retweets, replies, and quote retweets, matching a set of predefined keywords.³ The starting day (February 26, 2020) is when

² Examples: *Greece asylum*, *Greece border(s)*, *Greece migrant(s)*, *Greece refugee(s)*, *refugeesgr*, *Turkey asylum*, *Turkey border(s)*, *Turkey migrant(s)*.

³ <https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/twitter-api/tweets/filtered-stream/introduction>

Turkey allowed migrants and/or refugees to cross its borders toward Greece and Bulgaria. We observed a local minimum in the five-day rolling window variance in the frequency distribution on March 31, 2020, thus defining the end date of our sample. The search provided 1,850,954 tweets⁴ and 17,523 distinct hashtags; #IStandWithGreece was the most frequently used hashtag found at least once in 591,463 tweets⁵ (about 32% of the tweets forming the data set). From this data set, we extracted a social mention graph (see Figure 1) of the top 50,000 most mentioned users, representing approximately 10% of total users with 186,030 edges and 268,828 mentions, thus representing about half of the total tweets. By mentions, we mean tweets, replies, retweets, and quote retweets mentioning a user and containing #IStandWithGreece. The remaining tweets, not included, were isolated tweets without mentions and thus did not contribute to the calculation of the influencers.

We looked for the most influential users using PageRank, a rather standardized approach to user centrality and influence (Riquelme & González-Cantergiani, 2016). PageRank is used to identify influence by ranking the mentions received and by whom (Brin & Page, 1998). According to PageRank, the more mentions and quality mentions received, the higher the user's influence. Consequently, PageRank is directly related to the affordances of Twitter and specifically to mentions: The more mentions and quality mentions received, the higher the user's influence. The PageRank algorithm as implemented in GEPHI was used to identify top influencers using their mention graph produced by DMI-TCAT. Subsequently, we investigated the top 10 profiles of influencers (see also Al Rawi, 2019).

Operating on the same network, we determined a number of subnetworks (communities) using the modularity algorithm of GEPHI (Blondel et al., 2008). Communities are composed of users who typically interact with each other based on their mention graph; we focused on the six with the highest representation in the overall network (74.31% of the #IStandWithGreece data set), that is, with the highest percentage of user mentions (the more the users in a community, the higher its representation). Then, through DMI-TCAT, we identified hashtags used by the top 10 influencers of each community and the dominant language(s). This entailed focusing on hashtags (a minimum of two) that the top 10 influencers of each community used in combination with #IStandWithGreece to infer meanings. When hashtags are combined with other hashtags, they reflect meanings that their users aim to transmit (Eriksson Krutrök & Lindgren, 2018), and their grouping in a single tweet provides evidence of the framing promoted (Enli & Simonsen, 2018). Studies about refugee debates on Twitter indicate that hashtags can show place (e.g., where the events unfold) and reveal actors, perspectives, or stances (Kreis, 2017; Siapera et al., 2018). Language affects online ties and interactions (Kulshrestha, Kooti, Nikraves, & Gummadi, 2012); therefore, we identified each community's dominant language to gain an understanding of a potentially shared culture (Kim, Weber, Wei, & Oh, 2014) and/or shared space (Takhteyev, Gruz, & Wellman, 2012). Although key influencers, language, and hashtags on their own may provide a limited understanding of who mobilized and interconnected around #IStandWithGreece and the meanings produced, their combination offers a deeper insight in line with the research questions.

In terms of ethics, we followed best practices. First, the use of hashtags shows *prima facie* that users aimed at visibility and this relieved us of any obligation for consent to collect and analyze data on social media

⁴ Number of distinct users = 479,138 for hashtags tweeted a minimum of two times.

⁵ Number of distinct users = 119,552.

(Fuchs, 2019). Second, despite the users' aim at visibility, we offered anonymity to protect their identity save that of celebrities. For this reason, in the text and Figure 1, only the celebrities/officials' labels are shown (Eriksson Krutrök & Lindgren, 2018). When quoting tweets that are no longer retrievable (account suspension/ban) or by individuals, we cite them as personal communications.

Findings

#IStandWithGreece Network Influencers

The #IStandWithGreece network's top influencer is self-described as a nationalist conservative affiliated with Poland and a supporter of the Visegrad Group, an alliance of four Central European countries that clashed with the European Union over the management of the 2015 crisis (Kafan, 2015). Top 1 tweeted 13 times and mentioned⁶ 74,000 times. Top 2 was a British social media persona, Katie Hopkins, self-described as the female Farage, a British politician of the far-right and leader of the Brexit Party at the time. Twitter permanently banned Hopkins for violating its hateful conduct policy (BBC, 2020). Hopkins received 23,158 mentions, but posted nine tweets. The top 3, 4, 7, and 9 influencers appeared to be affiliated with Greece. Top 3, self-described as a Greek patriot and a conservative, posted 307 tweets and received 52,499 mentions. Top 4 had a profile photo of a Greek soldier, the Greek flag, and in the background a photo of the Greek-Turkish borders. Top 4 declared interest in geopolitics and migration and posted 56 tweets and received 13,534 mentions. Top 7's account no longer exists but, presumably, the user was Greek affiliated given the Greek label used (Latin characters). Top 7 posted 178 tweets and received 8,849 mentions. Top 9 had a Greek flag and was labeled using slang in Greek. Top 9 tweeted 15 times and got 13,419 mentions. Top 8 and Top 10 were members of the French Generation Identity group, the latter its spokesperson; Twitter suspended both accounts probably as part of its policy on White supremacists (Dearden, 2020). Top 8 and Top 10 tweeted 25 times each and received 6,533 and 2,383 mentions, respectively. French President Macron (Top 6) and the British tabloid *Daily Mail Online* (Top 5) complete the top 10 list of influencers; although they did not post using #IStandWithGreece, *Daily Mail Online* was mentioned 4,478 times and Macron was mentioned 5,842 times.

The top 10 list consists of certain established elites (media, politicians, celebrities), individual members and/or supporters of antimigrant organizations (Identitarian, Visegrad Group), and Greek nationalists. Eight influencers were positioned within the right and, specifically, the far-right. This points to the politicization of the events within the #IStandWithGreece network from an explicitly far-right and nationalist perspective, coinciding with earlier research that the far-right profits from social media and that migration attracts far-right actors across borders on social media (Froio & Ganesh, 2019). The absence of humanitarian activists and organizations, found as Twitter influencers in other migration debates (Al Rawi, 2019; Siapera et al., 2018), reiterates how this was a network dominated by actors who were negatively dispositioned toward migrants. Therefore, the top 10 profiles indicate an ideological homogeneity of the #IStandWithGreece network rather than a plurality of viewpoints. That the Greek-affiliated top influencers sent the largest amount of tweets resonates with the place of the events and the positive focus of the hashtag on Greece. The remaining top influencers were affiliated with countries other than Greece, revealing how the network cut across national borders while remaining within European contexts.

⁶ Referring to the number of tweets, replies, and retweets mentioning a user.

Key Characteristics of Subcommunities

Figure 1 visualizes the #IStandWithGreece network (GEPHI); each color of the figure represents a community of the network or a subnetwork (Lindgren, 2017). For communication purposes, we named five subnetworks based on the dominant language or top influencers' country of affiliation and one based on the tendency of its top influencers to routinely mention officials. The network's top 10 influencers are demarcated inside their community.

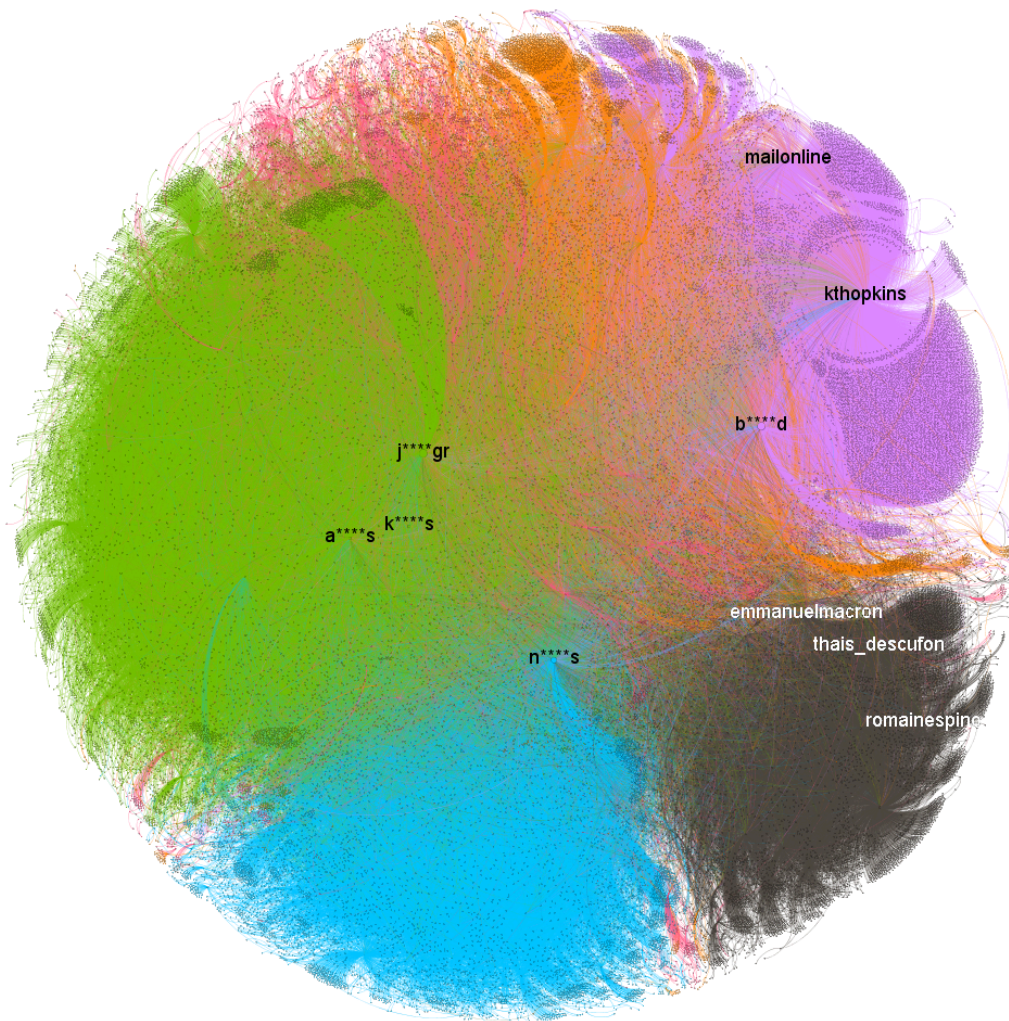


Figure 1. #IStandWithGreece network.

Anglophone I (lilac color), the community with the highest representation in the network, comprised users tweeting in English and was associated with predominantly Anglophone countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. Top 1, Top 2 (Hopkins), and Top 5 (*Daily Mail Online*) were part of this community. This shows that the network extended beyond European contexts.

In exploring *Daily Mail Online's* involvement in this debate, as it did not tweet #IStandWithGreece, we looked for examples of tweets mentioning it. Hopkins (personal communication, March 7, 2020) sent the following tweet mentioning the *Daily Mail Online*, retweeted 4,207 times: "Dear @MailOnline Can you tell me where your 'kid in the wheelchair' is amongst the lot? And that crud you ran about 'poor refugees' being met with bullets. Who funded that 'report'. #IStandWithGreece."

Evidently, Hopkins played an instrumental role in bringing the *Daily Mail Online* into the network and therefore the debate. In terms of content, Hopkins conspired that the *Daily Mail Online* was paid to disseminate promigrant propaganda, including construing refugees as helpless victims. This tweet shows a principal way in which one of the few mainstream media, in this case a UK tabloid, was implicated in the debate to be accused of fabricating prorefugee stories. This accusation, picked up by the network, traveled far and wide within it using Twitters' affordances (primarily retweets).

Hashtags such as #EUexit and other exit-related hashtags (#Frexit, #Irexit, #Deutchexit), prominent in this community, promoted the idea of several countries leaving the European Union. The use of #UNexit suggests that it also advanced a discussion around countries exiting other established supranational institutions such as the United Nations. Such exit discourse is prevalent within the right wing in Europe and the United States. In various EU member states, sections of the far-right have been nurturing a long-term Euroskeptic position and distrust toward other supranational organizations (Mudde, 2019). In the United States, a fraction of the right wing—represented by Donald Trump—is similarly averse toward international organizations. This aversion is primarily motivated by a negative stance toward greater global cooperation for tackling challenges, such as migration.

Other hashtags this community used related to conspiracy theories, the most prominent the #KalergiPlan, that is, the alt-right-endorsed theory that there is a plan for White genocide enabled by the policies of certain institutions, such as the European Union's handling of the 2015/2016 refugee crisis (de Bruin, 2017). #NWO (New World Order) is another hashtag denoting another conspiracy theory that a totalitarian regime with a globalist agenda is threatening to take over the world (Spark, 2000). The following tweet (since deleted) combined conspiracy theory hashtags with EU-exit hashtags: "'REFUGEES' arrive by TAXI at the Greek border. How about that! #IStandWithGreece #MassMigration #EUexit #UNexit #KalergiPlan" (personal communication, March 3, 2020). Through mixing and matching exit-related hashtags and endorsing conspiracy theories, this tweet also questioned the refugee status of migrants crossing the borders. Adding quotation marks to *refugees* and pointing out that they used a luxurious means of transport suggest that genuine refugees would not have arrived at the borders by taxi and that, consequently, they were bogus refugees. This tweet serves as an example of how conspiracy theories and a negative position toward international institutions are also inextricably linked with antimigrant attitudes.

The second biggest community, the Greek community (green color), comprised individuals affiliated with Greece, tweeting mostly in English. Five of the top influencers of the entire network belonged to this community. The official accounts of the Greek prime minister, the Greek police, a right-wing Greek member of the European Parliament, the Polish prime minister, and the Turkish president received multiple mentions within this community. *The New York Times* also featured as a top influencer, although it did not post tweets using #IStandWithGreece.

The majority of hashtags in this community referred to Greece or places in Greece, such as Evros, the place of the events. Therefore, Greece was treated either as a geographical space where key events took place (#Greece, #Evros) or as a noble, deserving actor and victim (#GreeceUnderAttack, #GreeceDefendsEurope). The combination of the most frequent hashtags, #GreeceUnderAttack and #GreeceDefendsEurope, and the less frequent #ProudForGreekArmy along with #IStandWithGreece, offer a reading of the events that portrayed Greece as a victim, a resistor of attacks at its border, and by extension a defender of European sovereignty. Greece was therefore featured as a stronghold that deserved support. Hashtag words like *defend*, *attack*, *army*, and *invasion* were indicative of a militaristic lexicon promoted by the community to shape meanings around the events that were in accordance with the view of a securitization of migration in Europe and to which we return in the Discussion section.

Another main actor emerging through hashtags was Turkey. #TurkishPropaganda was among the most frequently used hashtags that, combined with #FakeNews and #fakeTurkishPropaganda, suggest an effort to tackle certain narratives as Turkish propaganda. Other negative hashtags concerning Turkey were #TurkeyIsATerrorState and #TurkeyIsNotOurFriend. As argued, when used together in a tweet, hashtags contribute to the production of meaning (Eriksson Krutrök & Lindgren, 2018) and in this case, the co-occurrence of negative hashtags about Turkey and positive hashtags about Greece point to the predominance of Greek nationalist ideologies in this community. Europe was construed as a passive actor in need of defense (#defendEurope) in the Greek community. There were no hashtags consisting of the word *migrants* or *refugees*, but #invasion, a commonly used hashtag by this community, was characteristic of antimigrant discourses (Kadianaki, Avraamidou, Ioannou, & Panagiotou, 2018). Therefore, this was a clearly pro-Greece community, strongly anti-Turkish, and one in which Europe had the ambiguous role of being defended but not defending its members. Migrants were represented as "invading" Greece and Europe by extension. Given this is a Greek-dominated community, the prevailing anti-Turkish position resonated with Turkey as Greece's historical inimical "other." This was an indicative tweet combining a set of hashtags promoting what appeared to be the Greek community's predominant reading of the events: "Another video from today's violent events in Kastanies, where Turkish forces appear to be throwing tear gas towards the Greek side of the borders #GreeceUnderAttack #IStandWithGreece #GreeceDefendsEurope #TurkishPropaganda #Evros" (personal communication, March 22, 2020).

Finally, zooming into the influencer *New York Times*, we found that one of the top 10 users of this community tweeted a post mentioning @nytimesphoto, which was subsequently retweeted 864 times. We traced the actual tweet (personal communication, March 1, 2020) and noted that the user used an earlier news report by *The New York Times* to accuse Turkish "trolls" of retweeting a photo at the Hungarian border in 2015, claiming that it was taken during the Evros events. *The New York Times*, like the *Daily Mail Online* in

Anglophone I, was introduced strategically into the debate to corroborate the dominant positions within the network and was not typically expected to be endorsed by liberal media like *The New York Times*.

The third biggest community was the German/ic community (blue). Its top influencers were linked to the German and Austrian far-right beside a German member of the European Parliament of the Green Party. The official Twitter account of the German Identitarian Movement (GIM), for example, was part of this community, and Top 2 was the leader of the Austrian GIM, Martin Sellner, whose account was banned by Twitter. GIM uses ethnopluralism to protect European identity by opposing multiculturalism and the increasing migration to Europe (Virchow, 2015). Facebook deleted the official page of GIM for containing hateful and extremist content (Bailey, 2018). Sellner (personal communication, March 4, 2020) tweeted this: "Solidarity with the Greek Police, Border Force and people in their efforts to protect Europe from illegal intruders! 🇬🇷 #IStandWithGreece."

Several hashtags were German-centered and/or in German (#Griechenland, #Deutschland). The most frequent hashtags were positive toward Greece, elevating it as the main, noble actor of the events (#GreeceUnderAttack, #GreeceDefendsEurope). Erdogan and Turkey featured frequently as hashtags, suggesting that this community recognizes Turkey and its leader as key actors, but they did not reveal opinions about Turkey. Migrants and/or refugees were not featured in the most frequent hashtags of this community, and Europe featured only passively as being defended by Greece (#GreeceDefendsEurope). Although the cohashtag analysis did not provide any obvious positioning toward Europe and migrants, top influencers belonged to the far-right, and Sellner's tweet completely resonated with an overall hostile position on migration.

The fourth community, Francophone (black color), tweeted mostly in French. Three of its top 10 influencers were within the network's top 10 influencers: French President Macron and two members of Generation Identitaire. A characteristic tweet of this community called Macron to militarily support Greece: "GR Help the Greek people by signing this petition! @EmmanuelMacron said to support Greece in the face of an invasion? What he has to do concretely is to send army forces! #GreeceUnderAttack #IStandWithGreece #JeSuisGrec" (personal communication, March 4, 2020). This tweet reveals how via the affordance of mentions, Macron was asked to take a decisive stance that traversed his country's borders. Bringing into the debate the need for military action underlined the interpretation of the events as a warlike situation, feeding into the issue of securitization of migration in the West (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002). Dominant hashtags implicated Greece (#Grèce) and Turkey (#Erdogan, #Turquie), identifying them as key actors and places of the events. #GreeceUnderAttack and #JeSuisGrec spoke to the pro-Greek attitude within the community. As with the Germanic community, migrants/refugees did not feature as hashtags, but its top influencers were affiliated with the French Identitarian movement, which is suggestive of antimigration positions, and the above-cited tweet speaks to their hostility toward migrants.

The fifth community is Anglophone II (orange color), tweeting in English and affiliated with predominantly Anglophone countries in the Global North. Two of its top influencers are self-described as nationalists or patriots. Top 9's profile elevates race as the most important piece of the human puzzle, indicative of White supremacist ideology. Two top influencers proclaimed to be Irish patriots and Proud Indigenous Irish Nationalists, and another pledged allegiance with unionist conservative ideology in Northern Ireland (Ulster-Unionist). Other than hashtags mentioning the key actors (#Greece, #Turkey, #EU) and openly pro-Greek

hashtags (#GreeceDefendsEurope), this community introduced hashtags such as #DefendOurBorders that intensified the divide between us and them, with “us” Europe or the West and “them” migrants or refugees from the East. Hashtags linked migrants with Islamic terrorism (#Jihadists), construing them as intrusive and threatening (#WeaponizedMigration). The use of #invasion also constructed migration as a threat. Within this community, the primary target was migrants/refugees and Turkey was the secondary, as #fakeTurkishPropaganda suggests. This is a typical tweet (Bunting, 2020) using several of the most frequent hashtags of Anglophone II: “Greece looks increasingly like a ‘War-Zone’ as the fight to stop Illegal Invaders from breaking in Europe intensifies #Greekborder #IStandWithGreece #GreeceUnderAttack #invasion #DefendEurope #Lesbos #Evros #CloseTheBorders #Immigrants #Jihadists #GreeceDefendsEurope #EU.” The tweet’s anti-immigrant direction is evident in hashtags used (#invasion, #Jihadists) and in the reference to “Illegal Invaders.” References to Greece as a war zone bring back the securitization and militarization of the events in which migrants/refugees were conceived as a threat that needed to be halted violently.

The sixth community, the officials, comprised two individual users, appearing to be Greek-Cypriots, and the accounts of official institutions and their representatives (e.g., the EU Commission and its president, Amnesty International, the United Nations, the White House, and Frontex) who did not tweet using #IStandWithGreece. The most mentioned officials were the EU Commission through its central account and the account of its president. The mentioning of multiple key actors appears to be a unique feature of this community. This is a tweet by one of its top users (personal communication, March 2, 2020): “@vonderleyen @EmmanuelMacron @Europarl_EN where are you? #Greece needs support to stop a mass invasion. #IStandWithGreece.” Officials and institutions—especially of the European Union—were mentioned in this characteristic tweet and are asked to take action. This is an indication of how Europe was expected to assume an active role and to literally take action to support Greece.

The most frequently used hashtags in this community implicated Greece and Turkey, as was the case in all other communities, but they also brought up other countries (e.g., #Cyprus, #Syria). Hashtags implicating Europe (#EuropeUnderAttack, #IStandWithEurope) are indicative of a rather Eurocentric stance. Therefore, this is a pro-Greek and pro-Europe community that expected key EU representatives, and Europe as an entity, to support Greece decisively. This community also explicitly used anti-Turkish hashtags like #ErdoganWarCriminal and #TurkeyIsATerrorState and hashtags related to events perceived as Turkish atrocities (#ArmenianGenocide). Less frequently used hashtags included #SanctionTurkey and #Enoughwords, suggesting that this community blamed Turkey for the events and expected its punishment by international actors. Therefore, we observed a triangle among Greece, Turkey, and Europe where Greece was the victim, Turkey the perpetrator, and international actors, such as the European Union, were the anticipated saviors.

To summarize, exploring the subcommunities of the entire network in terms of influencers and hashtags co-occurring with #IStandWithGreece, we show the predominance of a range of exclusionary stances, which agreed that migrants should be kept out of Greece and, for some, out of Europe and the West. The hashtags provided the actors and the place of events but also attitudes in relation to these actors. Interestingly, although migrants and refugees did not appear in all communities as hashtags, the combination of other hashtags inferred their broader dehumanization. Next, we discuss wider implications of these findings.

Discussion and Conclusions

Optimists saw social media as spaces encouraging democratic dialogue and participation, whereas skeptics casted doubt on whether democratization of public dialogue on contested issues is a natural outcome of these platforms. Increasingly, the logics, technological affordances, design, and administrator cultures of social media are scrutinized for influencing, if not driving, online discrimination, harassment, and hate, giving rise to arguments favoring alternative designs (Ben-David & Matamoros Fernández, 2016; Eddington, 2018; Massanari, 2017). This study, situated within this debate but with a focus on the social media and migration nexus, explored the seemingly innocent #IStandWithGreece, which started trending during a land border crisis at Europe's periphery. Our analysis shows that #IStandWithGreece was essentially hijacked by influential users holding anti-immigrant and nationalist ideologies, creating what we call a "network of intolerance." In this way, we bring a new insight to previous research on the coded language and strategies that supporters of extremist ideologies use in social media to serve and normalize their political agenda. The network perspective deployed revealed that grassroots activists and established elites of the far-right successfully promoted a visible common aim to support Greece and an invisible, covert aim to promote extremist ideologies as hashtags co-occurring with #IStandWithGreece revealed (e.g., #Jihadists, #KalergiPlan, and #NWO). Essentially, findings bring fresh understandings of the dark side of social media participation, illustrating the continuum between early extremist propagators of repressive ideologies online (Ben-David & Matamoros Fernández, 2014; Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015; Daniels, 2012) and concurrent tweeters of intolerance that target migrants by disseminating racist and nationalist ideologies openly or covertly.

Strikingly, the findings show that antimigrant voices—extending from ethno-nationalists to White supremacists—almost exclusively dominated the debate under #IStandWithGreece, with three being habitual users of extremist discourse, and eventually banned from Twitter (e.g., Hopkins and members of the Identitarian movement). This is crucial because it shows how a set of extremist tweeters used the land border crisis as an offline event and Twitter as the online instrument, resonating with earlier research (Ben-David & Matamoros Fernández, 2016; Froio & Ganesh, 2019; Siapera et al., 2018), to spark a political agenda marked by intolerance against migrants in the name of security, the nation, race, and culture transcending the geographical context of the events. This confirms that migration is an issue that attracts far-right audiences on social media (Froio & Ganesh, 2019), who in this case aimed to link the events with broader migration issues of global concern in which *global* is understood as the West or the Global North. The choice and combination of hashtags point to a strategic dehumanization of migrants who are an absent/present, absent as worthy humans but present as a threat, and therefore violence to keep them out is justified. The network reproduced the usual hyperboles of securitization in the Global North (e.g., #DefendOurBorders, #DefendEurope, #WeaponizedMigration), according to which migration and border crises are imminent threats requiring exceptional management and justifying military response (Leurs, 2019). In addition, these influencers used mentions to hold politicians, bureaucrats and the media accountable, demanding they support Greece, as the focus hashtag claimed, and also adopt oppressive migration policies in general (e.g., #CloseTheBorders). Regardless of how the network stood within far-right ideologies, key hashtags resonated with Ursula von der Leyen's famous quote that Greece is Europe's "shield."

Beyond migrants, the hashtag analysis revealed the othering of Turkey and the European Union, albeit to a different extent and nuances within an otherwise ideologically similar network. In fact, these events gave rise to national debates as subnetwork communities were formed on the basis of linguistic similarities beyond common ideology. For example, stances on the European Union and other supranational organizations differed between communities, ranging between explicit anti-European positions of Anglophone I (e.g., #EUexit) often used in tandem with conspiracy theory hashtags (e.g., #KalergiPlan) and the officials' community that construed the European Union as a potential savior and a victim (e.g., #IStandWithEurope). But in most communities, EU-related hashtags represented Europe as a passive actor that needed to be defended. These multiple and, occasionally, conflicting representations of Europe are in line with research in traditional media, highlighting the ambiguity of Europe's representations in relation to migration that alternate between sketching it either as a humanitarian actor or an inhumane actor (Avraamidou, 2020; Avraamidou, Kadianaki, Ioannou, & Panagiotou, 2018).

The extent to which Turkey and Erdogan were vilified also differed. The Greek community used blatantly anti-Turkey hashtags, typical of right-wing ethnonationalism, preoccupied with the safety and pride of the Greek nation and its protection from a longstanding enemy. The officials' community, dominated by hashtags asking officials and Europe to punish Turkey (e.g., #SanctionTurkey), constructed Turkey as the instigator of the events. However, hashtags reflecting anti-Turkey stances (e.g., #FakeTurkishPropaganda) did not consistently appear in other communities. Therefore, some matters had national significance; for example, a member of the French Identitarian movement would be concerned about migrants not crossing into Europe, overseeing the long-lasting tumultuous Greek-Turkish relations.

In conclusion, this study reveals how a border crisis in the Global North can be treated within social media as an opportunity for certain users to connect and disseminate exclusionary ideologies that cut across national reception contexts. We argue that the use of inconspicuous antimigrant hashtags is a strategy resembling the coded language that populist and authoritarian politicians use to scapegoat migrants and other vulnerable groups (Wodak, 2015). In this case, it was a coded hashtag that conveniently offered an umbrella for overt intolerance to flow across Twitter. Our analysis unmasked the ambiguity of the hashtag, adding to a broader literature that calls for attention to covert extremist discourse online, which intentionally offers refuge and inspires overt discrimination and hate (Åkerlund, 2020; Warner & Hirschberg, 2012). Future work can expose further how promoters of extreme ideologies use other affordances of social media (e.g., URLs, photos, and other multimedia) to advance them, without, in effect, seeming to violate relevant policies or laws (e.g., hate speech). In addition, our understanding of meanings stems mostly from hashtag analysis, whereas, as demonstrated (Bozdog & Smets, 2017), a closer reading of tweets can illustrate what ideologies exactly are reproduced and the specific parameters of migrant othering that #IStandWithGreece promoted.

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