

## **INTERPRETATIVE REPERTOIRES, IDENTITIES AND IDEOLOGY IN FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSSING WAR: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GREEK YOUTH DISCOURSE ABOUT THE KOSOVO WAR**

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**Abstract:** Using as an example the Kosovo war in 1999, the present study aimed to explore the discourse about war in the context of Greek youth focus groups, analysing the interpretative repertoires that were used, the identities produced and the ideology of nationalism that informed them. Within this context, and applying a critical approach in the analysis of discourse, the following issues were addressed: First, whether young people in Greece comprehend and judge the different dimensions of war in a variety of ways or whether they express uniform and one-sided arguments. Second, whether the war in Kosovo as an event facilitated the strengthening of the ideology of nationalism or whether it facilitated its “disarticulation” through the articulation of alternative lines of arguments and identities critical of nationalism. The implications of the present study are discussed in relation to the wider field of social research exploring the discursive devices and ideology through which war is legitimized.

**Key words:** Identity, Ideology, Interpretative repertoires.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Mainstream psychological research has studied war mainly as a form of extreme conflict focusing on the individual traits, behaviours, cognitive abilities or attitudes as the main causes that allow people to become involved in wars. However, one may also study war as the result of: (a) inherent aggressive human instincts, essential for the survival and evolution of humankind (ethology) (Berkowitz, 1982; Glad, 1990;

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Lorenz, 1966); (b) social learning (Bandura, 1973) and obedience to authority (behaviourism) (Milgram, 1969); (c) personality traits such as right wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (Crowson, DeBacker, & Thomas, 2005; Doty, Winter, Peterson, & Kimmelmeier, 1997), and finally (d) rational or irrational decision-making by the leaders, based on cost-benefit analysis of whether to get involved in a war (socio-cognitive theories) (Healy, Hoffman, Beer, & Bourne, 2002; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). In either case war is comprehended as an unavoidable product of “human nature” (Potter, 1996) rather than the result of specific social, historical and ideological conditions. Moreover, when we study war by traditional attitude research and opinion polls that examine views people hold about wars through questionnaires, seeking either agreement or disagreement with already formulated and polarised opinions, we fail to give the respondents the opportunity to develop different opinions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Thus, little is revealed about the meaning members of the public ascribe to war (Hallin, 1997).

Trying to avoid the individualism and cognitivism of mainstream psychology and to explore psychological phenomena in their historical, social and ideological context (Billig, 1997), the present study draws upon the analysis of discourse<sup>1</sup> (Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Edwards & Potter, 1992) and the study of rhetoric within social psychology (Billig, 1991, 1995). In this way, war is studied by looking into the way lay people – those who take part in wars as soldiers, or vote in favour of governments who support or oppose war – talk about war, supporting or criticizing it. Positioned in the middle of the micro/macro binary (Billig, 1999; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; Wetherell, 1998), discursive psychology was used to study context at the level of talk-in-interaction, based on conversation analysis (Schegloff, 1997). However, it was post-structuralism that led the study of the historical, cultural and ideological resources which are provided to people by the society to think and talk about the world (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; Wetherell, 1998). Thus, the emphasis in the analysis was placed on the micro-politics of power as well as on the macro-structures of power (Hepburn, 1999). In this way discourse-analytical work becomes a political act that allows for ideological analysis to take place «recovering hidden meanings» and discovering «how shared patterns of action might be preventing other patterns from occurring» (Billig, 2006, p. 21).

When talking about the historical and ideological context of war, one of the conclusions drawn from theoretical studies is that this can be constructed along the dimensions of nationalism and crisis. According to authors like Billig (1995), Coles (2002) and Graham, Keenan, and Dowd (2004), nationalism and its “banal”

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<sup>1</sup> The term “discourse” is used as language use in talk and text as a form of social action or practice (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

aspects – meaning the ideological habits, practices and beliefs that daily reproduce the established nation states of the West as nation states and their citizens as national citizens (Billig, 1995) – has been the main rhetoric that legitimises modern wars and hostility between national groups. It is the ideology<sup>2</sup> that supports the rights of the nation states, especially the right for self-determination, and attributes greater significance to national sovereignty, independence and the protection and defence of the nation state than to the protection of human life. Wars are conducted in the name of the nation's rights and are presented as proof of the defence of national sovereignty and as proof of social order and the unity of the nation (Coles, 2002; Heddetoft, 1993). The stories of “our glory” function as factors that bond the nation and strengthen the morale of the nation in new wars (Farell, 2002). In war time or during anniversaries of wars, leaders usually speak about the particular characteristics of the nation, rendering it unique (Coles, 2002). This is despite the fact that research from anthropology (Nordstrom, 1998) shows that realities of war are very different from its representations in the public arena and in the media.

War can also be presented in discourse as a crisis (Stavrakakis, 1998), that is, as an unexpected and extraordinary event, with severely negative implications (human victims, material, economic and ecological hazards). As a crisis, war could have two antithetical influences on the discourse produced. Feeling insecure people find shelter in traditional ideologies to interpret reality, thereby enhancing ideologies, such as nationalism and national identities (Moskalenko, McCauley, & Rozin, 2006; Schildkraut, 2002). Nevertheless, periods of crisis, such as a war, can also be presented as moments when widespread ideologies are rendered ineffective, since they fail to account for the “new” conditions. They are, thus, disputed while alternative lines of arguments acquire stronger force (Laclau, 1990; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Therefore, one could assume that war as a crisis can facilitate the “disarticulation” of the widespread ideology of nationalism, and can promote the articulation of new critical lines of argument.

### ***The present study***

Following the above rationale, the present study aimed to explore the discourse about war employed in the context of Greek youth focus groups about the 1999 Kosovo war. The NATO air strikes in Kosovo began on the 24 March 1999 and finished eleven weeks later, on the 10 June 1999, when Serbia accepted the U.N. Security Council terms. From NATO's point of view the military intervention was the only means to

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<sup>2</sup> «An ideology comprises the ways of thinking and behaving within a given society which make the ways in that society seem ‘natural’ or unquestioned to its members» (Billig, 2001, p. 217).

put an end to the Serbian hostilities against the Albanian citizens of Kosovo. However, from the Serbian point of view, their attacks against the Albanians were part of a defensive strategy that aimed to prevent the Kosovo Liberating Army (KLA) from achieving the secession of Kosovo from Serbia (Chomsky, 1999; Judah, 2000). During this war governments and public opinion in Western Europe supported the legitimacy and the necessity of the military intervention in Kosovo, whereas in Greece, although the government officially supported the NATO intervention, a lot of protests were organized against the war and the Greek media took a strongly critical stance towards the NATO intervention (Michas, 2003).

The present study explored, first, whether young people in Greece, as competent members of the discursive community, comprehend and judge the different dimensions of war in a variety of ways or whether they express uniform and fanatical argument (Michas, 2003). Second, it investigated whether the war in Kosovo as an event facilitated the strengthening of the ideology of nationalism, or whether it facilitated its “disarticulation” through the articulation of alternative lines of arguments and identities critical of nationalism. However, the present study is embedded in the wider field of social research exploring the discursive devices and ideology through which war is legitimized.

The discursive analysis focused on the ways through which speakers construct different accounts or versions of the world, including themselves. Thus, the analysis aimed to reveal the macro-discursive as well as on the micro-discursive phenomena of talk-in-interaction. Emphasis was placed on the participants’ orientation but also went beyond that proximal context so as to draw conclusions about the broader ideological context and «then use our knowledge of this broader context to make sense of the patterning of interaction» (Seymour-Smith & Wetherell, 2006, p. 107). The analysis distinguished three interrelated dimensions. First, the interpretative repertoires<sup>3</sup> participants used to account for the war in Kosovo. Second, the identities discussants adopted in these accounts, with emphasis placed on the reflexive understanding of the construction of identities (Hepburn, 1999) acknowledging, thus, that various identities are discursively constructed by speakers depending on the functions they serve (Edley & Wetherell, 1999). Finally, the ideology of nationalism reproduced in the argumentation (Billig, 1991).

The following hypotheses were formulated. The interpretative repertoires will reflect the two major stances of the Greek society during the Kosovo war, namely Serbia as defending its sovereignty and USA as establishing its hegemony (Hypothesis 1). As

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<sup>3</sup> Interpretative repertoires are «recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena» (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 149).

regards the identities, it was expected that the main identity adopted by the participants would be the national identity of the Greek (Hypothesis 2). Finally, as regards the ideology of nationalism, it was expected that this would be the main ideology informing the discourse of the discussants and in particular the ideology of nationalism as it is articulated in the discourse about the Greek national identity (Hypothesis 3). For alternative interpretative repertoires, identities and ideologies no predictions were possible. However, we have to mention that our hypotheses are not experimental to be tested with statistical methods, thus they are rather expectations created by the literature review.

## METHOD

### *Design*

Focus groups were selected to explore the above issues. Even when they are organised as informal conversations (Seymour-Smith & Wetherell, 2006), focus groups are situations of formal interaction (Puchta & Potter, 2004) rather than mundane discourse. However compared to individual interviews, they allow for argumentation that is closer to daily discussions (Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Rapley, 1999).

### *Participants*

Twenty-four focus groups in Greece were formed to discuss on the Kosovo war. The focus groups comprised 91 young people (aged 18-30 years old,  $M = 22.85$  years,  $SD = 2.81$ ) took part. Each focus group consisted of three to six participants, and ran for approximately forty to ninety minutes. The participants (61 women and 30 men) came from a variety of backgrounds in terms of education (26 high-school graduates, 15 polytechnic students or graduates, and 50 university students or graduates). Of them, 50 were students, 32 employees, and 9 unemployed. Most of them lived in Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city, and a few of them in Larissa, a medium-sized Greek city.

### *Procedure*

The recruitment of the participants was achieved by asking psychology students, who volunteered to take part in the research<sup>4</sup>, to invite friends and form focus groups of

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<sup>4</sup> No extra credits were given to the students for participating in the study.

three to six young individuals. The focus groups were introduced as being discussions about issues raised with respect to the Kosovo war. They met in the residence of one of the members of each group during the period April-May 2000, one year after the Kosovo bombings. To facilitate discussions, since participants were asked to discuss events that took place one year ago, at the beginning of the focus groups, participants watched a short, ten-minute video from news reports that were broadcast by Greek TV channels during the war. After watching the video, all groups were asked to consider the same probe questions, with slight variations; example questions were "What are your views about the Kosovo war and its causes?" and "What were the views held in Greece and in the rest of Europe and in America about this war and its causes?" An attempt was made to encourage participants to talk mainly among themselves and to minimize the facilitator's interference during the discussion.

### *Analyses*

The discussions were tape recorded, and initially transcribed in Greek to a conventional orthographic level. First, a file was created with all conversations relevant to the issue of the causes of the Kosovo war and transcripts were read and re-read for recurring and collectively shared interpretative repertoires and identities in accounting for this war. After interpretative repertoires were identified, transcripts were organised accordingly in different files. Specific extracts were selected for intensive study as robust and coherent examples of the identified interpretative repertoires and the constructed identities. These extracts were transcribed using Jeffersonian notation (see Appendix A; Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). Following discourse analytic methods, the analysis was carried out by the two authors through repetitive readings and in depth discussions about the content of the transcripts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The analysis was terminated when consensus was reached.

Discussions were transcribed and analysed in Greek. However, for the purpose of this article certain extracts were translated into English by the first author, who is also Greek speaking, trying to keep the same transcription notations in the English translation (see also Tileaga, 2005). Analysis was conducted on the Greek original, but to enable the reader to follow the analysis, the references in the text are made to the English translation (for more information on translation issues see Temple & Young, 2004).

## RESULTS

### *Interpretative repertoires*

Our analysis identified two recurring interpretative repertoires within which discussions of the Kosovo war were framed. Both of the repertoires appeared in almost all the focus group discussions. In the first interpretative repertoire war was represented as a conflict between two nations with rival interests. The Serbs, on the one side, were presented as a nation defending their state and fighting for the maintenance of their sovereignty. Albanians, on the other side, were presented as a national minority that desired the secession of Kosovo from Serbia and the creation of a new nation state. In the second interpretative repertoire, war was presented as an aggressive act conducted by the USA with the help of NATO in order to stabilise its political, economic and military hegemony.

In what follows, each of the two interpretative repertoires in turn will be presented and discussed, with an emphasis on the different arguments and the identities produced within each of them, by the use of specific extracts from the focus groups. It should be noted that in most of the extracts presented below the facilitator was absent since the participants mainly talked with each other and the facilitator's interference was minimal.

### *Protecting the nation state*

***Protecting the nation state from minority demands.*** The first repertoire presented the Kosovo war as the only means of protecting the sovereignty of the Serbian state. In this case the Serbian citizens of Kosovo were presented as the members of the nation state who had to protect and Albanians as the minority that aimed at the secession of Kosovo.

#### Extract 1 (Discussion group 17)

The extract follows a discussion concerning whether such a war could have also happened in Greece.

1. Simos: The:: alarm bell rang precisely for *this* reason in Greece > this is the
2. reason why there was increased < sensitivity felt by *every* Greek (.)
3. because we *have* a minority (.) that ↓ has the Greek citizenship (.)  
↑ but
4. has another *religion* and other *customs* (.) I *accept* that (.) but:  
< under

5. *no* circumstances does *anyone* have the right to ask to create a new
6. *state* > (.) the creation of a new state i::s <it is achieved only by *war* > (.)
7. basically, let's say if they ask for a new *state* it is as if they ask for *war*
8. (.4) and >when you ask for *war* < (.) there exists ↑no opportunity for
9. dialogue (.) NONE WHATSOEVER (.2) *if sir* you want to be with
10. Turkey you have to go to *Turkey* > if you want to be with Albania < you
11. have to go to *Albania* (.4)

The speaker in this extract, using an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) to legitimize his claim (line 2), voices the positive stance that Greek people adopted towards the Serbs, presenting the war in Kosovo as a defensive war. By using the category 'Greek' (line 2) and speaking on behalf of the rest of the category 'Greeks' (Potter, 1996), he attributes the support of the Greeks to the Serbs to a "sensitivity" Greeks have because of similarities between the two groups, although the Serbs are invoked rather than explicitly mentioned. However, in lines 3-4, he divides Greeks, based on "religion and other customs", into a majority (implicitly meaning Christians) and a minority (implicitly meaning Muslims). Adopting the identity of the member of the Greek majority, he emphasizes the existence of a minority group inside the nation state as the main common feature between the Greeks and the Serbs. In his attempt to disavow that he is being biased and disrespectful of minority rights, he claims that under the condition that the minority group adopts Greek national identity, this minority group is allowed to stay in the nation state and maintain their customs and religion (line 4) (see Figgou & Condor, 2007). However, this acceptance of the minority group is followed by a refusal and an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) – "but under *no* circumstances" (lines 4-5) – and the description of the conditions under which the minority is unacceptable. The minority is not eligible to creation of its own state being achieved through detachment from the existing sovereign state. Finally, by using reported speech of an imaginary dialogue with some unspecified individual who is not present (lines 8-11), the speaker accuses the minority of lack of commitment to the current nation state and urges them to move to their own nation state (Billig, 1995). At the end of this account this unspecified individual is presented as either committed to Turkey or Albania (lines 10-11). Thus, at this point national identities rather than religious ones are ascribed to



the minorities in Greece and in Kosovo.

War is presented as an inevitable response to such ethnic minority group demands. In the dilemma between the protection of the nation state and the protection of minority rights, the speaker adopts the identity of the defender of the unity of the one nation state, which can be achieved through the displacement of national minorities to other already existing nation states. Adopting the identity of the member of the Greek majority, he bases his arguments on the ideology of Western nationalism, which dictates the priority of the protection of the nation state system and the utopia of the "one nation" state, rendering war inevitable, when the nation state is threatened by secession (Billig, 1995).

***Protecting the nation state by attributing responsibility to Serbia.*** The extract that follows differs considerably from the preceding one, since the discussants attribute responsibility for the war to the Serbs and justify the claims of the Kosovar Albanians, supporting the rights of minorities inside nation states.

Extract 2 (Discussion group 12)

1. Olga: there exists a reality in the ↑Balkans which i::s well known (.2)  
>in the
2. Balkans we *cannot* have < stable *borders* [there are]
3. Takis: [certainly]
4. Olga: there are <\_so many::> (.) e:: changes in populations a:nd  
minorities
5. >here and there and there< that if we start [making wa:rs]
6. Takis: [certainly]
7. Olga: the question is <if all these minorities can be *recognized* (.)> so  
that
8. they aquire *autonomy* a:nd *respect* for their rights as <*citizens* (.)  
in
9. ↑each state> so that they would provide us with equality in the  
eyes of
10. the law and with *all* the other citizens a:nd only this policy
11. [can be effecti:ve]
12. Takis: [°this for sure°]
13. Olga: otherwise we will *continuo:ously* *continuously* be entering in a
14. vicious circle where we will be *entering* and we will be *fighting* (.)  
for
15. the unity of *the one* ((state)) or for the unity of the other (.)
16. Takis: yes

Olga, the first speaker, chooses to construct the war as a conflict that characterizes a certain geographical region, the Balkans (lines 1, 2), rather than a particular state. She describes the region as one with unstable state borders and presents this description as real, based on general consensus ('well known', line 1). The instability of the borders is attributed to the existence of many nations inside every state. The speaker avoids attributing the causes of war to particular characteristics of the nations living in Kosovo. Rather she attributes the causes of this and other wars in the Balkans to national differences and the coexistence of different ethnicities.

Olga avoids identifying herself with certain national groups of the Balkans. She constructs herself as a citizen (line 9) of the Balkans, speaking of 'we' (lines 1,2, 13, 14) and 'us' (line 9), invariably with 'they', meaning the minorities (line 8), without ascribing importance to her national identity (Billig, 1995). Instead she constructs a distinction between all citizens—be they minority groups or not—on the one hand, and the state on the other, and assigns the responsibility for the protection of their rights and their equality to the state. In this way she renders the identity of the citizen as more important than that of any national identity and indirectly criticises the states that do not respect the rights of minorities.

With her argument the speaker removes from the minorities, and indirectly from the Kosovar Albanians, the responsibility for provoking the war and attributes the main responsibility for the war to the nation state, Serbia. For Olga, war is triggered by discrimination and the disrespect of citizens' rights rather than by the difference in national identities. The war, in her argument, does not provide the resolution of problems but is rather part of the problem as it tends to permanently perpetuate itself ('vicious circle', line 14). The dilemma between the rights of the nation state and the rights of the minority group is solved by constructing the notion of a rational state which provides all its citizens with equal rights irrespectively of their national identity (Billig, 1995).

The analysis of Extract 1 shows that one way of accounting for the war in Kosovo is by mobilising the interpretative repertoire of war being a means to protect the nation state from the demands of national minority groups. Placing the Albanians in the position of the minority group that demands the creation of a new nation state the speaker ignores that officially NATO did not support the independence of Kosovo but the protection of the rights of the Kosovar Albanians (Chomsky, 1999). The ideology of the nation state (i.e., nationalism) informs this interpretative repertoire, since in accordance with nationalism, each nation state should protect its borders from external or internal attacks and all its members should declare their faith and their devotion to the state, resorting, if necessary, even to war (Billig, 1995).

However, as is evident in Extract 2, in the interpretative repertoire of war as a way

of protecting the nation state there is place for “antilogos”,<sup>5</sup> when the identity of the citizen rather than that of the national subject is adopted. In this case, the responsibility for war is attributed to the state that emphasises national differences among its citizens and discriminates against citizens who belong to national minority groups.

### *The war as an action of USA hegemony*

Another interpretative repertoire, from which discussants drew, presented the war as an attack by NATO, and more specifically by the USA, in its quest to establish their hegemony. National differences between the Serbs and the Albanians were not considered important causes of war or they were altogether omitted from the discourse. This argument focused on the description of US actions in Kosovo as actions of war in order to repress anyone opposing or constituting a threat to the establishment of American hegemony.

**Seeking control of Kosovo.** The war in Kosovo is presented as a war that the USA caused in order to establish their hegemony in Kosovo.

#### Extract 3 (Discussion group 8)

1. Paris: I believe tha::t this is why at first >they ((US)) talked about issues of
2. *religion*?< because their interests were mainly *economic* (.2)  
↑people
3. for example if they were told that this was a war >for economic
4. reasons< ↓let's say (.2) ↑everybody would spit [on it] (.)
5. Agni: [of course]
6. Paris: >from the moment howeve::r< that they put *religion* forward  
°that
7. ↑everybody considers it important° (.2) afterwards let's say the  
*people*
8. begin also:: to face the war the *religious* somehow mo::re (.2)
9. [from another point of view] (.)
10. Agni: [from another point of view]
11. Paris: ye::s because if you say to the other I did it for the oil [let's say::] (.)
12. Agni: [a bravo:: yes]

<sup>5</sup> A Greek word meaning “counteracting an argument”.

13. Paris: they had their *mines* there >and *this* is why the *war* bega:n °let's say° <
14. or for exa::mple >the drug trade as it is said< (.) tha::t the *others*
15. trafficked °in these regions° and *Milosevic* wanted to clean it up °at a
16. certain phase° (.) eh wh-*what* do you want America to say ↑'we
17. support the drug trade? >we want their oil and their mines and this why
18. we make war? <'NO (.2) let's say because they are ↑Albanian
19. *speaking* and *Muslims* they *are slaughtered* and I go there to *save*
20. them=
21. Agni: =yes (.)
22. Paris: the::re ((in Western Europe)) people let's say >saw the war
23. differently< (.) they say a:: *bravo* ↓to the American (.) something was
24. done=
25. Agni: =also you know and that *I will save* them (.) especially *Clinton* this
26. thing *drives me mad* (.) >*neither* am I *retarded* nor a *human* being
27. without will< (.)

The main speaker, Paris, introduces as an opinion rather than as a fact ('I believe', line 1), his argument that the Americans used the resolution of the conflict between two groups with religious differences as a pretext for the military intervention in Kosovo. The speaker does not challenge the existence of religious differences between the Serbs and the Albanians, but he doubts this difference as a cause of war. He introduces as a fact ('were' line 2) (Edwards & Potter, 1992) the claim that the American interests were economic. Using hypothetical examples (lines 2-4), that need no support by facts in order to be accepted, to support his claim, he argues that Americans actively and deliberately presented religious difference as the main cause of the war, so that they could conceal their real economic motives.

The projection of religious differences as the cause of war and the concealment of underlying economic motives are attributed to the American efforts to manipulate public opinion (lines 2-9). According to the speaker, people in general accept the legality of a war that aims to protect a group which is mistreated on the basis of their religious beliefs. The construction of religious differences as a justified cause of war, however, did not characterize the official discourse of NATO, neither that of the mass media in the Western world. It was not the resolution of religious differences that

appeared to be the motive for the military intervention but rather the protection of the rights of a different ethnic group, the Kosovar Albanians (Chomsky, 1999). Religion, however, is important for the definition of Greek national identity (Michas, 2003) and thus we see it being projected as similarly important to the rest of the world.

The speaker constructs the reaction of public opinion towards a war with economic interests as negative, using a vivid expression 'everybody would spit on it' (line 4) (Potter, 1996), and the reaction towards a war for religious differences as positive. Following Agni's agreement, Paris moves on to the exposition of the economic reasons that led to the war, namely illegal trade (drugs, oil and mines), through descriptions ('they had their mines there ... drug trade', lines 13-17). Then, using irony, active voicing and the personification of the category 'the Americans' (lines 18-20) (Potter, 1996), he constructs it as impossible for the Americans to reveal the 'real' reasons for their intervention if public support was to be gained.

During his speech, Paris seems to manage issues of stake (Edwards & Potter, 1992), presenting his argument as hypothetical rather than as fact ('let's say', lines 4, 7, 11, 13, 22), to avoid being accused as biased against the Americans. In the same way, he distinguishes himself from the rest of the people who were deceived by the USA, and introduces a distinction between the Greeks and the rest of Europe via the local determination 'there' (line 22). He himself and the category 'Greeks' to which he belongs differ from the other Europeans, as they realised the real economic motives of the USA, while the rest of the Europeans were convinced by the USA pretexts and approved of the war as a war for the protection of a religious group that was maltreated by the Serbs. In this way, the opposition of the Greeks to the intervention of NATO is attributed to rational thinking and to the more critical observation of reality, while support for the intervention is attributed to deception by the USA and the susceptibility of the other Europeans to American propaganda.

**Seeking control of Europe.** The war in Kosovo was also presented as a war that the USA caused in order to intervene inside Europe and weaken the European Union as a future economic adversary.

Extract 4 (Discussion group 16)

1. Ntina: a::nd ↑ok at the same ti::me (.3) they ((the Americans)) *show*  
e:: their
2. *force* as well perhaps towards the e:: (.4) ↑European Union  
which is e::
3. *emergi::ng* (.2)
4. Eli: *emerging?* (.)
5. Ntina: *emerging* (.) >ok certainly it ↑*hasn't* reached< the:: point to be

6. [compared to America]
7. Eli: ↑[the European Union] does *not* have military force=
8. Ntina: =*it does not* but slowly it becomes (.3)
9. Eli: it *doesn't* have nothing to be afraid of the [European Union]
10. Ntina: [there is *nothing*]
11. to be afraid of (.2) *now* (.2) *certainly* not now=
12. Eli: =or ever >I think it has a completely < different basis (.) it is only
13. *America* there is *nothing*=
14. Tasia: = there is *nothing* to be afraid of after °the:: collapse of the Soviet
15. Union° >which was supposed to be< the *second* force (.3) °*there* is no
16. one to be afraid of specifically° (.6)
17. Ntina: n-not e: not to be *afraid of* but >they ((Americans)) are also *careful* for
18. later on <=
19. Tasia: =e: *certainly* (.2)
20. Eli: *ok* you are not at the level of being *afraid*
21. [you are:re at the level of:]
22. Ntina: [NOT AFRAID ↑NO IN ↑NO case *fear*]
23. Eli: I remind you that: *ok*? [I am *here:re*]
24. Ntina: [but I don't think] they don't only see
25. the *now* >I mean that in *all* their *movements*< they look at: *a lot of*
26. years later (.2)
27. Tasia: [ok]
28. Ntina: [meaning] they might *th-they* >might want to stop< *something* before
29. it develops into something *much bigger* (.2)
30. Tasia: *yes*: anything that: goes up [let's say]
31. Ntina: [that is to say] they:: *th-they* stop it
32. before before it goes on (.2) >before from the very first stages<=
33. Tasia: =yes

The extract begins with the argument that the Americans intervened militarily in Kosovo in order to demonstrate their power to the rising European Union. However, Ntina, in her account, uses the tropic modality 'perhaps' (line 2) and pauses in order to mitigate the certainty of her opinion (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The adjective that she attributes to the European Union, 'emerging', is repeated in question by another speaker and Ntina continues to define the European Union as an emerging opponent of the USA.

In a series of turn taking the speakers do not disagree on whether America conducted the war in order to intervene in European Union affairs but on whether the European Union is, or can be, a rival of America in the future. For the first speaker, the European Union does not constitute a danger for America for the time being but its development in the future does, while the second speaker presents the European Union as a non-military force. During the discussion a third speaker, Tasia, intervenes and imports a historical element, the cold war antagonism between the USA and the Soviet Union. She argues that after the collapse of Soviet Union, the USA has no rival capable of threatening its primacy, since the European Union does not possess the military power to threaten the US. Thus, while in the first part (lines 1-23), both Eli and Tasia disagree with Ntina's argument that the European Union poses a threat to US hegemony, in the second part of the discussion, Ntina elicits their agreement through moderating her claims and through introducing a future orientation to the argument.

The discussion then examines whether the intervention in Kosovo was due to American fears of the future development of the European Union or a general demonstration of force. The European Union is presented as a potential opponent of USA that can threaten its primacy and render the international system bipolar.

## **DISCUSSION**

In general, the hypotheses of the study were confirmed. The interpretative repertoires found by the analysis reflected the two major stances of the Greek society during the Kosovo war, namely Serbia as defending its sovereignty and USA as establishing its hegemony (Hypothesis 1). The Greek national identity was found to be used when accounting for this war (Hypothesis 2) and the ideology of nationalism informed the discourse of the discussants (Hypothesis 3). However, the analysis also showed that alternative lines of argument inside the interpretative repertoires were articulated, identities other than the Greek one were also taken and the ideology of nationalism was in some cases doubted.

In particular, the present study focused on how young people in Greece talked about the Kosovo war in focus groups and, more specifically, how they constructed the war, how they attributed responsibility and which identities they took up in order to support their arguments. As far as ideology is concerned, the main questions that were posed regarded whether the war in Kosovo facilitated the strengthening of the ideology of nationalism (Moskalenko et al., 2006; Schildkraut, 2002) or its 'disarticulation' (Laclau, 1990; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Stavrakakis, 1998) and the articulation of alternative lines of argument and identities.

The analysis of the discussions in the focus groups was structured along three dimensions, namely interpretative repertoires, identities, and ideology. Despite the emphasis on the interpretative repertoires, the analysis showed that the discussions varied in content and in form. This variety (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) was profound even when the discussants supported one-sided arguments, that is, extreme anti-American or pro-Serbian stances. Besides this, when holding extreme opinions, speakers were aware of the opposite opinions that refute their own arguments, a tendency that is consistent with the findings of Billig (1991) that variety and dilemmas exist even in the discourse of groups that support ideologically extreme opinions. These findings put into question the view that young people in Greece hold a homogeneous, bigoted and uncritical position on the war due to propaganda (Michas, 2003). On the contrary the Greek young people who participated in the present study displayed a sophisticated political consciousness. The support of Serbs and the opposition to the military intervention of NATO were expressed with various lines of argumentation, and various identities were adopted.

However, it was possible to discern strong interpretative repertoires and common lines of argument (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) regarding the war and its actors in the discussions. The war was presented, almost in all focus groups, either as a defensive war conducted by the Serbs in order to safeguard the national and territorial integrity of their nation state and/or as an aggressive war that was orchestrated by the USA in order to impose its hegemony. In the former case, the war was presented as a conflict between two national groups with rival interests. In the second interpretative repertoire, national differences between the Serbs and the Albanians were not considered to be the decisive causes of war. In its quest to establish economic and political control of the region of Kosovo and Europe, USA was viewed as the main agent responsible for the war and presented as a state that tried to increase its own power and establish their hegemony. The rest of Europe which supported the NATO intervention were presented either as victims of American propaganda or as passive allies of USA who did not have the courage to react against USA power. However, within the two prevalent repertoires alternative lines of argument were identified, based on different identities and ideologies.

In so far as identities (Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Hepburn, 1999) are concerned, when using the first interpretative repertoire, speakers talked mainly using the identity of the Greek. By adopting this identity, they took the position of the members of a sovereign nation state within which one minority group lives (the Muslim minority). Thus, the acceptance of Kosovo secession and the creation of a new Albanian state were constructed as dangerous, potentially fuelling further secessions of minorities in existing states, like Greece. The speakers did not attribute importance to other



characteristics of the Greek national identity. Characteristics such as the common religion or the common historical wars of the Greek and Serbian nations (e.g., against the Ottoman Empire, or in the Second World War), did not appear as decisive similarities. Although it is far less common, the identity of the citizen was also present in this repertoire, when the speakers criticized nation states for disrespecting the citizen rights and for discriminating between citizens on the basis of their ethnic provenance.

In the second interpretative repertoire, where the war was presented as an action of USA hegemony, various identities were adopted. The speakers used the identity of the Greek, the identity of the European citizen (Risse, 2004), as well as the identity of the citizen of the world. However, irrespectively of which identity they rendered relevant, responsibility for the war was attributed to USA. The Americans became the attackers while the speakers, as Greeks, as Europeans or as citizens of the world, were placed in the position of the defenders.

As regards ideology, the question was whether war is a crisis that reinforces, or disarticulates, the ideology of nationalism (Laclau, 1990; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Moskalenko et al., 2006; Schildkraut, 2002; Stavrakakis, 1998). The findings of the present study suggest that even if speakers did not express predominantly traditional nationalistic lines of argument, they did not formulate radical, subversive ones, which doubt the nation state system, either. Probing deeper into the restrictions for the formulation of subversive lines of argument, it is evident that the ideology of nationalism played the major restrictive role (Billig, 1995; Coles, 2002; Graham et al., 2004). This restriction became more obvious in the line of argumentation that considered the war as the only means of defence that a state had against threats of secession. In this line of argument, war was legalised and justified on the basis of the primacy of national sovereignty. In no case was the obligation of citizens and leaders to protect the state from exterior or internal attacks disputed. The Serbs were conceived as having a moral obligation to protect Serbia, as the Greeks had the obligation to protect Greece. The state was mainly identified with the sovereign nation, and not with the citizens that live there regardless of their national identity.

It is noteworthy that when talking about war there was still room for the growth of alternative lines of argument that resisted the dominance of nationalism. Instances of this could be seen when the speakers, despite supporting Serbia, also accused Serbia of not respecting the rights of Albanian citizens. Such arguments in favour of the respect of citizen rights irrespectively of national identity exceeded nationalistic differences and placed the value of citizenship above the value of national identity in contemporary states.

At the same time, the American hegemony interpretative repertoire also took various forms. This anti-USA stance can be attributed to a more specific form of

nationalism which is connected with the culture and history of Greece (Diamantouros, 2000; Herzfeld, 1987). In this form of nationalism Greek history is presented as a history of wars, where the Greeks, who are not seen as aggressive people, need to permanently defend their homeland from constant threats. The discrepancy in the socio-economic development between Greece and the West is presented as the consequence of frequent wars and interventions of the more powerful European states in Greece. One result of this representation of Greek history is the growth of an intensely anti-Western interpretative repertoire, in which Greece is contrasted with the rest of the Western world (Diamantouros, 2000; Herzfeld, 1987). In the present study this anti-Western interpretative repertoire became particularly pronounced with regard to the USA. In this sense, however, a modification in the anti-Western interpretative repertoire appeared to have emerged in Greek youth talk. Young Greeks were not opposed to Europe; rather they were presented as allies of it. In the context of anti-Westernism, the Greeks were contrasted to Western Europeans in terms of not being 'fooled' by the Americans. However, both the Greeks and the Western Europeans were placed in the same position of being threatened by the USA and they were both contrasted to the USA.

To conclude, the ideology of Western nationalism (Billig, 1995), and more specifically of Greek nationalism (Diamantouros, 2000; Herzfeld, 1987), seems to permeate the discourse formulated for the war in Kosovo. However, restrictions imposed by nationalism to this discourse do not exclude the articulation of alternative lines of argumentation that are informed by citizens' rights, and by the importance of critical thinking and resistance to political manipulation. Such an ideology renders important supranational identities, such as the identities of the European citizen or of the cosmopolitan citizen of the world. Hence, the present study highlighted the discursive resources that support or oppose war in focus group discussions. At the same time it showed the constraints imposed by nationalism, as well as the alternative lines of argument that challenge nationalistic assumptions. Future research following a discourse analytic approach is still needed to provide more insights in the representation of war as a multidimensional psychosocial phenomenon.

## APPENDIX A

## Transcription notation (drawn from Potter &amp; Hepburn, 2005)

[ ]	start and end of overlapping speech
↑↓	marked pitch movement, over and above normal rhythms of speech
<i>word</i>	vocal emphasis
WORD	obviously louder speech than surrounding speech
° text °	obviously quieter speech
(0.4)	pauses in seconds
(.)	micropause, hearable but too short to measure
((text))	additional comments from the transcriber
wo::rd	elongation of the prior sound
?	'questioning' intonation, irrespective of grammar
>text<	faster speech
<text>	slower speech
text=	immediate 'latching' of successive talk with no interval

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