"Controlling Borders – not Vaccination Status": Teaching about "Fake News" and Human Rights across the Curriculum

Helena Dedecek Gertz, Franziska Gerwers, and Sílvia Melo–Pfeifer

Abstract

In this chapter, we present research based on the empirical analysis of "fake news" ("FN"), which is aimed at discussing its pedagogical strengths when used as classroom resources. We focus on "FN" related to COVID-19 and migrants. Our project aims at combating, first, the spread of disinformation and misinformation on COVID-19, which causes harm to public health, and, second, the proliferation of othering and hate discourse in media outlets, which is detrimental to human rights. Understanding schools as capacity-building structures, we claim that pedagogical practices based on a content, discursive, and multimedia analysis of "FN" can strengthen the development of media and information literacy (MIL) across the curriculum. After a literature review, we present the most common discursive and multimodal strategies used to establish a misleading connection between migrants and COVID-19 and provoke negative emotional reactions in the audience. Thereafter, we discuss how to turn these findings into pedagogical approaches with the potential to go beyond the identification of "FN" characteristics and linguistic deconstruction to embrace more holistic perspectives based on critical discourse and multimodal analysis.

Keywords: Disinformation; "fake news; migrants; COVID-19; curriculum development; interdisciplinarity*

Embedding media and information literacy (MIL) in school curricula can play a central role in preventing prejudiced and divisive discourses from circulating as "fake news" ("FN"), understood as a form of information disorder (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Despite the criticism leveled at "FN" (Baptista & Gradim, 2022; Habgood-Coote, 2019; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), we use the term throughout this pedagogical contribution because it is more widely circulated in school environments (Melo-Pfeifer & Dedecek Gertz, 2023) and is more easily understood by laypeople.

Owing to the increasing ubiquity of digital media (Hepp, 2020), MIL has the advantage of being interdisciplinary and hence adaptable to all school subjects (Opree, 2017). The spread of disinformation, which associates COVID-19 with migrants, is a pressing issue that can be addressed in schools through MIL. Connecting such "FN" to science (e.g., how a virus spreads) and diversity issues (e.g., using migrants as scapegoats) can be approached through a transversal implementation of media literacy in school curricula. On the basis of that observation, we ask what aspects of "FN" linking COVID-19 and migrants can serve an MIL pedagogy that counters hate and othering discourses.

To answer this research question, we propose an analysis of a disinformation observatory, a databank that compiles analyses and deconstruction of different pieces of disinformation. The observatory was developed within the Covid, Migrants and Minorities in Teacher Education (CoMMiTTEd) project and contains deconstructed articles in four languages (Spanish, Portuguese, German, and Dutch; some analyses are also available in English). The analyses featured in the observatory are mainly addressed to school students aged 12–18 and are intended as pedagogical resources. This chapter proposes a pedagogical use for disinformation within an MIL pedagogy approach.

First, we present our theoretical approach based on the intercultural aspects of MIL. We then provide background information about the CoMMiTTEd project and present our research design based on a content, discourse, and multimodal analysis of "FN" collected in an online database for that project. Following a multilayered analysis, we account for the text and visual elements of the "FN". In the analysis, we present aspects of "FN" that promote othering and hate discourses against migrants and minorities in Europe by attempting to associate these groups with the

COVID-19 pandemic. We contend that identifying these aspects and how they are conveyed is an important step in adapting "FN" into pedagogical resources and using them to counter othering and hateful discourses about marginalized populations in Europe. Furthermore, after discussing how MIL accounts for aspects of social diversity, we describe ways in which it can be incorporated into different school subjects. We conclude by suggesting that such a perspective can also be encouraged beyond school settings, thereby fulfilling the premise of MIL for the public good.

Against Fake News, Othering, and Hate Discourses

Next, we define our perspective on MIL as centered on a social model, that is, one that promotes critical thinking regardless of media content and platform. To that perspective, we emphasize diversity aspects to promote an analysis that is sensitive to discourses about marginalized populations, such as migrants from low socioeconomic backgrounds coming to Europe from the Global South. After defining our position within MIL, we define othering and hateful discourses, which are two core aspects of "FN" about migrants. Finally, we define "FN" as false content that encompasses misinformation and disinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, 10). Although "FN" can circulate across media platforms, in this study, we focus on digital media because of its reach and capacity for the rapid spreading of "FN".

Interest in MIL grew as a result of concerns regarding violent scenes broadcast on television, which could have a negative effect on young people (Abreu & Mihailidis, 2014). Nowadays, the focus is shifting to the spread of hateful discourses and false or misleading information online. With regard to this concern, there is compelling evidence of the potential negative consequences of using media with low MIL skills. Adults are also prone to fall for fake or hateful content; however, we focus on young people because they usually attend institutions with available resources and infrastructure to expose students to such content under controlled conditions. Schools and teachers can thereby foster critical thinking about messages being conveyed on any media platform, a core aim of the social model of MIL (McDougall, 2014, 5). The concept of MIL encompasses individuals' rights to "communicate, express, seek, receive, and impart information and ideas" and encourages "the evaluation of information and media based on how they are produced, the messages being conveyed,

and the intended audience" (Grizzle, 2013, 260). In this chapter, we focus particularly on the latter aspect of the evaluation of information and media. We do this by discussing the adaptation of pieces of "FN" for pedagogical purposes.

Taking advantage of increasing mediatization and digitalization worldwide (Hepp, 2020), MIL has the potential to create awareness about the global scope of social problems (Grizzle, Torrent, & Pérez Tornero, 2013, 15). With this in mind, our empirical examples of "FN" can be related to an internationally pressing topic: misinformation that associates the COVID-19 pandemic with hateful discourses against migrants. We approach MIL by accounting for elements used to discriminate against migrants coming from the Global South to Europe, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class background (Neag, Bozdağ, & Leurs, 2022). Concurring with Neag and colleagues (2022, 3), we understand that learning about how media representations of marginalized groups reinforce stereotypes is a central path toward a more inclusive society. The quicker the processes of mediatization become (Hepp, 2020), the more a critical approach to MIL is needed. On the one hand, teaching MIL from that perspective provides tools for critical thinking that can be adapted to any context or platform; on the other hand, teaching MIL cannot be limited to a technical perspective that does not consider social contexts and historical narratives. Importantly, this approach to teaching media literacy using "FN" itself can allay the potential to create critical incidents or reinforce the content of those same "FN" within the class and school environment (Melo-Pfeifer & Dedecek Gertz, 2022; 2023). Thus, our meta-analysis of "FN" that associates migrants with COVID-19 provides researchers and practitioners with examples of the aspects of "FN" that can be used as pedagogical tools to teach critical thinking and promote the inclusion of marginalized groups.

A pedagogical use for "FN" involving disinformation about marginalized populations should focus on strategies for discovering and countering othering and hateful discourses. Like Said (2003 [1978], 107–109), we understand othering as ascribing stereotypes and fixed socioeconomic characteristics to populations outside industrialized countries from the center of capitalism. Content conveying such views can also be described as "essentializing": as if people associated with contexts such as the Middle East, Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe, Africa, and some countries in Asia share negative, innate, and unchangeable behavior

patterns. Such unfounded beliefs caused by othering ideologies lead to "us vs. them," a concept that propels the belief that migrants and people from families with international backgrounds are essentially unable to live in a society different from the one they or their family members come from. When put into practice, such undercomplex thinking can become hateful (and poorly informed) discourses, involving racist, sexist, and classist views. More broadly, hateful discourses, or hate speech, can be defined as "any speech that insults, discriminates, or incites violence against groups that hold immutable commonalities such as a particular ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, age bracket, or sexual orientation" (Bahador, 2021, 507). Such insults, incitations of violence, or discriminatory discourses can be blunt or wrapped in false or misleading information and in formats that resemble news or are published by people considered reliable by some (e.g., politicians). In that case, the hateful discourses derived from othering ideologies become characteristics of "FN".

"FN" relies on such discourses, as its appeal to divisiveness contributes to its rapid spreading, particularly on digital platforms (George, 2021). "FN" is part of what Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, 5) defined as "information disorders." These disorders convey different contents, which are categorized into those that are false but with no harm intended (misinformation), those that are harmful but not false (mal-information), and those that are both intentionally harmful and false (disinformation). The "FN" analyzed in this chapter falls into the latter category of disinformation. Through misleading content and false connections, the "FN" we selected fuels harmful and othering discourses to harass migrants and divert public opinion against their presence and integration. Hence, we can classify this type of "FN" as disinformation.

The Empirical Study

In this section, we present our empirical object: the selected pieces of "FN" circulating in four European languages that associate migrants with the COVID-19 pandemic. We also present the context of that data collection, namely the CoMMiTTEd project and its aims: to elaborate an observatory, a course, and a handbook for teachers about the pedagogical uses of "FN" that associates migrants with COVID-19. We then present our research design based on a content, discursive, and multimodal analysis of the "FN" adapted to teachers' pedagogic material.

The CoMMiTTEd Project

The CoMMiTTEd project has three practical outcomes geared toward pedagogists and teachers: two online teacher education modules, a pedagogical e-handbook for teachers and teacher trainers, and an online database. The data for this chapter comes from the online database. This database contains pieces of "FN" that relate migrants and minorities to COVID-19, which are then analyzed and deconstructed by the team members. Professionals can use these resources to teach critical thinking skills about media content and incorporate aspects of diversity into the discussion. The decision to select "FN" involving social minorities (instead of climate change, for instance) was made by taking into consideration our intended audience: teachers who work in diverse classrooms, who may not be sensitized to appropriately approach "FN" and hate discourses that affect their students, or who may not have tools to deal with such content. By starting with a socially relatable and directly observable situation in classrooms, professionals can transfer the knowledge gained to other (media) content and social interactions.

The CoMMiTTEd project is a joint effort of four research teams from universities in Aveiro (Portugal), Hamburg (Germany), Navarra (Spain), and Tilburg (the Netherlands). Each team, coming from its individual contexts for analysis, selected five pieces of "FN" that associate migrants with COVID-19; in total, 20 pieces were analyzed. The database created with these pieces is multilingual and multimodal as it is constituted by texts, images, or videos circulating on social media and "FN" websites. In the online observatory,[1] the pieces of "FN" and accompanying analyses are presented as downloadable PDF files (from 4 to 6 pages) with screenshots of the "FN" and texts elaborated by team members. First, the context of the "FN" item is presented, providing information about its source, relevant actors, and situations involved. Then the aspects that determine the piece as "FN" are explained: These are based on its content (e.g., "migrants jump ahead in the vaccination queue"), the way the content is presented (e.g., grammar or spelling mistakes, no sources mentioned, and hateful and discriminatory claims), and the format of the "FN" (e.g., attempts to provide credibility to the content by mimicking quality-journalism websites or, inversely, appealing to the readers' emotions by the use of

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[1] The CoMMiTTEd online observatory of fake news can be accessed at https://committedobservatory.eu/en/observatory/.

manipulating images). In cases where the news included oral elements, these were transcribed to prevent the disappearance of the "FN". Posts in social networks do not exist in isolation but also include reactions from readers that are visible to those reading a post. This is why these reactions were also included in the analyses.

This chapter is based on a representative sample of elements from the observatory, which itself is, from its inception, directed at practitioners with the intention of making these resources useful in classroom situations. Here, we focus specifically on aspects of this sample of "FN" that can be used as pedagogical resources to counter hate and othering discourses.

Research Design

In this chapter, we intend to answer the following research question: "What aspects of "FN" linking COVID-19 and migrants can serve an MIL pedagogy that counters hate and othering discourses?" To achieve this goal, we propose a secondary analysis of "FN" that connects migrants to the emergence and spread of COVID-19.

The initial analyses were conducted in Dutch, German, Portuguese, and Spanish, with some of the analyses translated into English. First, the four teams identified the pieces of "FN" they wished to include in the observatory and subsequently analyzed them in groups. They attempted to give an accurate account of the events being "reported" in the "FN" and provided a thorough analysis of discursive and visual means used to misrepresent migrants and minorities as responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 1 presents the titles of the "FN" items and the languages in which they were analyzed.

Table 1. *Corpus of analysis*

Language	Title (translated into English)	Date of publication	Source of the original "FN"
Dutch	Chinese offended by distasteful Corona song with Radio 10 DJ Lex Gaarthuis	February 2020	DenD
	The coronavirus is a Salafist plot	28.02.2020	Joop
	Spot the difference, 1940–2020	January 2021	De Gelderlander
	Bunkers in Zeeland plastered with Jewish stars with the word COVID	25.05.2021	Nu.nl
	PVV leader Geert Wilders: Henk and Ingrid versus Mohammed and Fatima	11.10.2020	Twitter
German	A controversy in Berlin	07.01.2022	RBB
	Border control instead of vaccination control	19.01.2022	Instagram
	Corona numbers among migrants	20.04.2021	PI-News
	Multikulti vs. Coronavirus	03.03.2021	Tweet
	Special payment even for rejected asylum seekers	07.11.2021	Facebook
Portuguese	Native Australians resist vaccination against COVID-19	18./19.10.2021	Twitter
	Zmar Eco Resort – A "Nazified" accommodation complex	01.05.2021	Facebook
	The problem of refugees – Which M&M are you going to eat?	22.04.2020	Facebook
	Population replacement with masks against COVID-19	07.12.2021	Facebook
	Racial minorities and psychiatric patients more likely to die of COVID-19		
Spanish	COVID-19 vaccination priority groups	January 2021	
	Spain opens its borders to a new tourism group	July 2020	Twitter
	Infected Moroccans in Cartagena staying at Hostal Manolo	July 2020	WhatsApp
	"Colombian variant" of COVID-19	05.06.2021	TikTok
	Jews behind COVID-19 vaccines		Twitter

One interesting finding from this first phase of research and analysis is that most of the data selected for the observatory come from social networks and are connected to right-wing groups or individuals. One exception is RBB, a television outlet that features a press conference by a left-wing politician in Germany. During the prior phase of the analysis, the researchers from the CoMMiTTEd project particularly searched for misleading designations and the misleading establishment of relationships between facts.

In our secondary analysis, we dove deeper into the thematic, linguistic, and structural elements that were perceived as the most salient by the researchers of the CoMMiTTEd project. Thus, this analysis allows us to explore in greater depth the commonalities and differences in "FN" circulating in different countries and languages, in terms of the construction of narratives of the other. Furthermore, this analysis provides additional layers of meaning that might not have been apparent to the researchers conducting the preliminary analysis within the contexts in which such "FN" first emerged and circulated. By following this methodology, we embrace the principles of shared cognition in the analysis of "FN" and gain a greater understanding of inter/transcultural issues and trends present in "FN" (at least as they emerge within some countries of the European space). We first searched for indicators of othering and hate discourses in the analyses provided by the researchers in the first phase. Specifically, we looked at the classification of disinformation/misinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) through, for example, false context, propaganda, misleading relationships, and false use of concepts, and we analyzed the connection of those "FN" items to broader narratives associated with migrants and minorities. Subsequently, we analyzed the commonalities in the visual representations of migrants and minorities. Analyzing multimodal elements, especially images, derives from an acknowledgment that such multimodality can "elicit strong emotional responses" (Lilleker, 2019, 38) and offer cognitive shortcuts, thus "manipulating peoples' beliefs and attitudes" (Lilleker, 2019, 38). Lilleker argued that in political communication ("FN" on migrants can be understood as a subset of political communication), "the image must convey an idea that resonates with the learned values of their audience" (2019, 38), thus producing the effect of familiarity. Thus, our analysis starts with a content and discourse analysis, followed by a multimodal analysis, the two steps being complementary.

Analysis

Content and Discourse Analysis

The first indicator of othering that we analyze is how migrants and minorities are named in the titles given to the pieces of "FN" (see Table 1). In our corpus, migrants and minorities are associated with countries of origin (Chinese, Colombian, Moroccan, etc.), religion (Jews), or specific migrant status (refugees), as well as through the use of stereotyped onomastics as identifiers (Mohammed and Fatima). Such designations are amalgams (they are always in the plural form), often combined with depreciative adjectives ("rejected asylum seekers" or "infected Moroccans") or framed as problems (the "problem of refugees"). Another discursive strategy is the use of synecdoche, associating a nationality with a new variant of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2), although this has not been established by the specialized medical profession. It could seem plausible to the reader that a Colombian variant was found after the so-called British, Brazilian, and South African variants referred to in those terms by mainstream media and, to some extent, the scientific community itself.

These strategies have also been found in previous research. Baker (2008), for example, explains several strategies for positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. These are (i) referential/nomination, which includes synecdoches (taking a part for the whole) as found in our data; (ii) predication (positive or negative labeling of social actors); (iii) argumentation (as can be seen in the example "a controversy in Berlin" when the position of a politician from a center-left party about the vaccination rates among migrants is used to reinforce an argument against migrants); (iv) perspectivation/framing/discourse representation (as in the "FN" cases where migrants are framed as vectors of COVID-19); and (v) intensification (as in the example "Corona numbers among migrants," where numbers are exaggerated). Augoustinos and Every (2007) name other practices of othering as follows: denial of prejudice, grounding one's views as reflecting the external world rather than one's psychology, discursive deracialization, and the use of liberal arguments for "illiberal" ends. The denial of prejudice in particular is frequent in the initial analyses of our corpus, as actors who spread "FN" distance themselves from racism by referring to alleged "facts." Strani and Szczepaniak-Kozak (2018) identified stereotyping as a common strategy of othering, which can also be found in our analyses (e.g., migrant communities and minorities, such as Native Australians, are framed as more skeptical toward vaccination).

Specifically, in the case of "FN" on Native Australians and their supposed resistance toward the COVID-19 vaccine, we could ask ourselves about the agenda behind its publication in Portugal. We can suppose that framing a minority in a distant country as a problem to national health becomes a proxy for other minorities (in the Portuguese context), thus serving transfer and deductive purposes: "If one minority acts like this, all minorities are probably the same," disregarding the context.

Among the most frequently called-out groups are those associated with Judaism and Islam. In Spain, a third group of scapegoats emerged: migrants from Africa. Usually, fear ideologies feeding collective moral panic are reproduced by right-wing ideologues, but we also found false claims related to minorities and migrants pronounced by left-wing politicians. The latter case used culturalist arguments, framing migrants and minorities as more prone to believing in "FN" and therefore refusing vaccination (and therefore increasing virus spread).

The secondary analysis here is derived from a classification conducted for the observatory. The "FN" items were first classified according to eight categories based on the works by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) and Baker (2008). Several categories can be applied to a given "FN" item. The classification was challenging, as the intentions of the author/s are not always clear, and it is hard to distinguish between, for example, manipulated and fabricated content. The CoMMiTTEd researchers attempted to make the analyses as objective as possible by reading and comparing the impressions of several researchers. An overview of the categories and the number of occurrences is given in Table 2.

Table 2. *Categorization of "fake news" and the number of occurrences*

Category	Number of occurrences
False context or connection	7
Manipulated content	4
Misleading content	12
Fabricated/imposter content ➔ disinformation (intention to harm)	5
Satire/parody	1
Propaganda	1
Misinformation (no intention to harm)	1

As shown in Table 2, misleading content was the most common type of "FN" included in the analyses, whereas the second most common category was false context. Both categories are challenging in terms of identification, as they contain true elements that are misleadingly intermingled with false or manipulated content.

Besides misleading information (including calculations) and false relationships, other very common features were the use of false concepts and the lack of a primary source for the information. An example of the first case can be seen in the analysis of the "FN" items "Special payment even for rejected asylum seekers," revealing that the denominations asylum seekers, migrants, and foreigners (*Asylbewerber, Migranten,* and *Ausländer*) are used interchangeably, even though the three groups are not equal in terms of status and need for protection. In the second case, information is provided without a trusted source, usually through reference to abstract or vague data sources, creating a false sense of shared background information between those creating the news and those reading it. That is the case, for instance, in the "FN" "*Grenz- statt Impfkontrolle,*" in which it is alleged, with no source cited, that the German government would have "opened the borders" during the pandemic. Other times, readers are guided to supposed sources (usually through external links) that already present a secondary view of the facts, a strategy that has the potential of creating loops of falsified or incomplete information, which feed and pseudolegitimize each other. This can be seen in the examples "Special payment even for rejected asylum seekers," where the author added a link to a political document, and in "COVID-19 vaccination priority groups," where the legitimate source is highlighted to try to confer credibility to the misleading analysis.

Analyzing the comments below the post, it becomes evident that those comments agreeing with the original post are mostly visible: "fact," "they come as all-inclusive tourists," "true words," "people who will never integrate," and thumbs-up and clapping-hands emojis. Displaying these comments amplifies the "us vs. them" rhetoric.

The "FN" items also use their readers' fear to generate hate discourses and othering: Migrants are depicted as people who "steal financial resources," as can be seen in their depiction as "all-inclusive tourists" and the exaggeration of a COVID bonus payment. While fear is the most prevalent emotion, other emotions are also triggered (e.g., hate, frustration, pride), which constitutes a very common feature of "FN".

Multimodal Analysis

Images are important elements in "FN" as visualizations tend to more easily persuade people (Jones et al., 2021, 119; Veneti et al., 2019). Through a multimodal analysis, three trends in terms of othering can be identified in our corpus: symbols present in the pieces of "FN", differentiated treatment of the news anchor and the minorities, and the creation of false historical analogies. These are three powerful strategies of "multimodal persuasion" and cocreating a visual narrative (Jones et al., 2021, 119).

In terms of the first trend, most "FN" items display national symbols, such as flags (see Figure 1), and national colors associated with a country (see Figure 2). Less prominent but inducing a relationship of trust in the reader is the name of the news anchor or writer (usually with a clear association with the majority national language and ethnicity, and not a minority; for example, "Han van der Horst" in Dutch) and a status or profession/hobby perceived as trustworthy, as in Figure 3 ("Historicus").

Figure 1. *"Spain opens its borders to a new tourism group"*

Figure 2. *"Control the borders – not vaccination status"*

Figure 3. *"The coronavirus is a Salafist plot"*

We also compared how the source of information and the subject were visually treated (see Figures 4–7). We analyzed both the quantity and the quality of the presentation. In terms of quantity, the source or mediator of information is a singular person. The person's name is connected to the majority language of the country, and the "FN" is accompanied by a distinguishable face, positioned in the foreground and usually representing the majority (male) group. Minorities or migrants, conversely, are mainly portrayed from far away, giving the impression of distance: They do not have individualized faces and can even be referred to through metaphor ("M&M" in Figure 7). In terms of quality, the news anchors are portrayed in professional rooms, surrounded by artifacts that give the impression of press conferences or news outlets (microphones, clean clothes, etc.),

while migrants and minorities tend to be portrayed in uncertain and/or insecure open environments (even if the photos have been decontextualized and recontextualized to give a sense of contemporaneity; (see Figure 6).

Sources of "information"

Figure 4. *"A controversy in Berlin"*

Figure 5. *"Chinese offended by distasteful Corona song with Radio 10 DJ Lex Gaarthuis"*
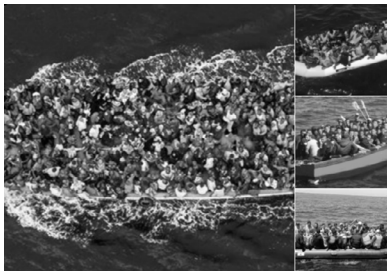
The groups being targeted

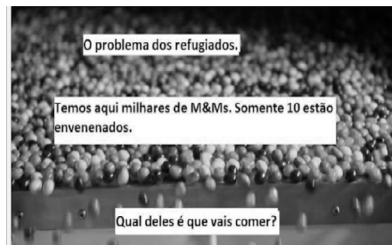**Figure 6.** *"Spain opens its borders to a new tourism group"*

Figure 7. *"The problem of refugees – Only 10 as poisonous, which M&M are you going to eat?"*

The visual strategies used to depict the source of information and the scapegoats mirror the rhetorical/linguistic strategies used in the pieces of "FN". The anchorperson of the news channel or source of information is presented in sober tones, with a professional look, surrounded by the visual apparatus associated with trustworthy information channels and displaying the same type of visual elements (e.g., "breaking news" banners and graphs). We can thus conclude that this type of "FN" reproduces

visual imageries related to news and exploits them to create a sense of familiarity and identification with the content, possibly inducing the audience to lower their critical guard despite malicious "information."

Another strand identified in the multimodal analysis is the tendency to create false analogies relating to different historical moments. One of the most misused analogies is comparisons with the Holocaust (see Figures 8 and 9). These instances of analogy show that "FN" producers are aware of a certain perception of history as a stable and objective subject that cannot be manipulated because it belongs to the past and is therefore attached to truth. The use of historical documents (photos, which are usually associated with the documentation of facts) corroborates this illusion.

Figure 8. *"Zmar Eco Resort – A Nazi concentration camp and an accommodation complex for refugees"*

Figure 9. *"Spot the difference" using a comparison between photos described as being from 1941 and 2021*

In Figure 8, a center for housing precarious workers exposed to the danger of contamination from COVID-19 is compared with a concentration camp in Nazi Germany. In Figure 9, the control of vaccination status is compared with the control conducted on Jews by Nazi officials. In both cases, the chronology is taken as further evidence of the repetition of crimes of the past. The depiction of government workers in 2021 as "bad" (by comparing them with Nazi officials) aims to paint the authors as the "good" side, once again labeling the different actors positively and negatively.

One "FN" item that we considered particularly interesting was the comparison of different facial coverings (see Figure 10). In this case, the producer intends to show the evolution of face masks, which were first associated with COVID-19 protection and evolved to face-covering related to the supposed Islamization of Europe. As we can see in the juxtaposition of images, the masks grow bigger, first covering the face and eventually covering the whole head. In this case, the chronology is not used as evidence of parallelisms (as in Figures 8 and 9) but as an indicator of the alleged inevitability and natural evolution of the situation, which predicts the near future and is aimed at creating anxiety in the reader.

Figure 10. *Population replacement with masks against COVID-19*

In addition, it is interesting to note that the first three pictures in the sequence show women with a lighter complexion, while the last one, representing the alleged "Islamization of Europe," has a darker complexion. In terms of their line of vision, the first three women look directly into the camera, showing self-confidence, while the last does not look the reader in the eyes, suggesting submission and, perhaps, that she has something to hide.

This multimodal analysis shows that images can be employed to dissimulate the source and purpose of a piece of "FN", creating correlations that lack causal links and rely solely on their intended audiences' emotional resonance (Lilleker et al., 2019).

Discussion

Following our analysis in the previous section, the next step in working with "FN" to develop MIL should be to make students aware of such othering strategies used in "FN", both rhetorical and multimodal. The strategies encountered in our corpus are summarized in Table 3. Whereas most checklists on how to identify "FN" focus on discursive features, our analysis shows that students should be called on to connect rhetorical and multimodal strategies of othering as "FN" is often multimodal and its analysis should not be limited to linguistic deconstruction.

Table 3. *Rhetorical and multimodal othering strategies in "FN"*

Rhetorical strategies	Multimodal strategies
Onomastics and amalgams: Merging migrant individuals into one stereotypical person ("Fatima," "Mohammed") Predication: Using depreciative adjectives for migrants and minorities ("rejected," "infected") and labeling the majority with perceived positive attributes ("honest," "normal people") Misleading problem framing ("the problem of refugees") Synecdoche (the "Colombian variant" or "refugees" instead of "migrants") Exaggerations to provoke a more emotional reaction (e.g., "wide open borders") False connections between facts: COVID-19 regulations are compared with refugee policies	Nationalistic symbols, such as flags and colors Elements associated with the credibility of the source/mediator of the information (who belongs to the majority group, is possibly a native speaker of the language, and has a "respected" profession) Different framing of the source/mediator and the targeted group(s) in quantitative and qualitative terms Visually misleading historical analogies (use of historical documents, timelines, etc.)

An analysis of our corpus shows that "FN" around migrants and minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic amplified three misleading narratives: "the (growing and inevitable) Islamization of Europe," "the (renewed) control of the world order by Jews," and "the great replacement racist theory," according to which "the black population intends to outnumber

the white population and take control of Europe." In other words, "FN" is not creating new hate targets but feeding existing resentments and narratives of power control and hierarchies that circulate in the majoritarian discourse. One possibility in working with "FN" to enhance MIL would be to spot the groups (ethnicities, nationalities, religions, status, etc.) being highlighted and relate the "FN" to other episodes in history where these same groups were singled out and misrepresented. Analyzing well-informed parallelisms in history and across minority groups (rather than constructed instances to instill fear and other emotions) could be a way to make students perceive the pseudological machinery behind "FN" creation and spread. Because historical arguments can be misused, as we saw in the discussion about the presentation of chronologies or the misleading parallelism of historical facts, it would be important to thematize the ways in which history can be manipulated to serve obscure political agendas. From this perspective, history as a school subject (sometimes coupled with politics, as in German schools) can be an important curricular context to counter "FN" and enhance MIL.

The documentation of "FN" in different moments and the comparison of xenophobic ideologies across countries and documents, both from a synchronous or diachronic perspective, can enlighten students about what we could call a "universal grammar of "FN"" and its specificity arising in different contexts. This can be the case, for example, with different countries addressing different scapegoats or giving different importance to traditional international scapegoats. In the case of Jews, we perceive a contradiction in their representation in "FN": On the one hand, they appear as victims of the past to call out the injustices of the present (see Figure 9); on the other hand, they are the ones allegedly making money with the mass vaccination of the populations ("Jews behind the COVID-19 vaccines"). This ambivalence highlights what we might call an argumentative "one-size-fits-all": Regardless of the context in which "FN" is mobilized as a piece of evidence, "Jews" are depersonified and manipulated according to the agenda that suits the specific piece of "FN". Students should become aware of this "objectification" of minority groups and reflect on the propagandistic and manipulative uses of these strategies. To do so, it would be important to analyze the various appearances of these groups in the media and see how they are treated (both linguistically and visually). This analysis could be enabled by specific searches in online tools, which would then be facilitated by methodologies of linguistic corpus analysis. This task could be included in foreign language lessons and in specific modules on intercultural competence and MIL.

We also observed that readers' reactions can be an object of interpretation, both quantitatively and qualitatively. "FN" tends to garner a great deal of attention and therefore many likes, shares, and comments. As "FN" tends to be liked, commented on, and shared by like-minded persons, its popularity is compounded by algorithms that easily pick up on such trends. As a pedagogical consequence, students should be informed about the role of algorithms and their functioning, namely, in terms of influencing the information we are exposed to (at least in social media). This also calls for thinking of schools as sites of social activism to understand algorithms and engage in debunking "FN" in public spaces (both online and offline). Tasks such as posting counternarratives on "FN" websites or social media accounts could be integrated into both the mother tongue or language of schooling and foreign language classrooms. Such activities would be aligned with the call to promote intercultural communicative competency at school, namely, the ability to "savoir s'engager" (Byram, 1997; Melo-Pfeifer & Dedecek Gertz, 2022). Data analysis and the questions surrounding algorithms could also be part of math and computer sciences, for instance, in a class where students explore the logic of recommender algorithms that favor the spread of "FN".

Interaction around "FN" tends to be asynchronous, such as by posting a comment or a reaction on social media. Thus, students could develop their digital pragmatic competence (Yus, 2011) around the use of smileys, emojis, memes, and other communicative sense containers to convey humor, play, and irony as strategies to introduce counternarratives. Again, these tasks could be included in the first language or foreign language classroom.

Our analysis concluded that the visual strategies used to represent news anchors differently from migrants and minorities mirror the rhetorical strategies uncovered. This could inspire creative tasks in arts classrooms, aimed at creating, for example, "worlds in reverse," in which the strategies of depersonification and credibilization would be inverted, with dencentering effects. As a consequence, intercultural education would also be integrated into the arts subject.

As we also saw, simply identifying media outlets and interlocutors as "left" or "right" wing is not enough to claim that a piece of news is potentially fake. MILs at school should make this point clear, maintaining a high degree of criticality and a vigilant stance around discourses on minorities. Such a cautionary tale could become a theme in politics (and also history) classrooms.

Finally, if the goal of "FN" is to create moral panic and lead people to act based on a moral obligation, the classroom can also be a place to talk about feelings and how "FN" resonates with personal stances (or family positioning) and with one's own beliefs and biographies. Again, foreign language and arts classrooms could be safe spaces for these purposes.

Conclusion

A review of the analyses of "FN" from the CoMMiTTEd project reveals that there are common trends regarding othering across different national contexts. This includes targeting certain groups – Muslim and Jewish people and black and brown people living in Europe – and reproducing stereotypes and exaggerations. The use of "FN" as a pedagogic resource thus seems necessary to approach the problem from an intercultural/transcultural perspective in terms of interactions with or about minorities and migrants. In particular, in the context of MIL studies, this intercultural/transcultural stance needs to be integrated, as it has not yet been sufficiently connected. Existing antiracism approaches to education (Fereidooni & Simon, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015) should be revised and adapted to include an MIL approach.

With regard to our research question, the rhetorical and multimodal strategies identified should be taught and discussed to serve an MIL pedagogy that counters hate and othering discourses. They include onomastics, predication, problem framing, synecdoches, exaggerations, and false connections, as well as the use of nationalistic symbols and elements attached to credibility, framing of the source and targeted groups, and the creation of visually misleading analogies.

School actors should become aware of the connections between "FN" and othering discourses, as this can lead to a more interdisciplinary approach, which is desirable when dealing with MIL in school. The different approaches can then promote a more holistic view and more conscious handling of "FN" overall.

Following our study, some scope for further research in the field of MIL remains: Our results should be transferred to a wider audience beyond school students. If we want MIL for the public good, education must extend beyond schools, for instance through public information campaigns, citizen

science programs, or easily accessible training programs. Furthermore, although our research includes examples from different national contexts, all of these contexts can be classified as "Western/European." Further research should thus aim to include more diverse contexts, looking at examples from other parts of the world and in more languages, to adopt a deeper intercultural/transcultural approach to "FN" about minorities and migrants and to MIL studies.

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