Introduction

The words *Islam* and *Muslim*, and their derivatives, are probably the words most used in public discourse during the last 20 years. As has been shown, however (Arjana 2015), already after the emergence and gradual expansion of the Islamic world, the West constructed the idea that Islam and Muslims constitute a threat and a frightening enemy. It comes as no surprise, then, that Islam and Muslims have been the protagonists of public debates, in politics and the media (Said 1981), mainly after the Iranian revolution and the ‘Rushdie affair’, and then again during the 1990s when the first discussions about the presence of Muslim communities in Europe and the issue of Islamophobia emerged (Runnymede Trust 1997), with 9/11 being a turning point. Scholars from a wide range of disciplines have tried to understand the presence of Islam in the West, the issue of Jihadism and Western reactions towards Muslims among others (Haddad 2002; Roy 2006; Khosrokhavar 2009; Cesari 2013; Nielsen 2016; Sonn 2016). Furthermore, since 2010 the ‘Arab Spring’, the emergence of the so-called Islamic State and the waves of refugees, mainly from Africa and the Middle East, boosted these debates about Islam and gave rise to Islamophobia in many Western societies.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine if and to what extent Islamophobia is present in Greek society, its routes and nature, as well as its consequences through the following questions: Does Islamophobia exist in contemporary Greek society? Which are the main channels through which Islamophobia is being reproduced? Is Islamophobia influencing Muslims’ everyday lives and how? Which are the reasons behind Islamophobia and hate for Muslims? Building on the concepts of politics of fear and moral panics this chapter argues that Islam has been at the centre of a religious panic constructed by specific agents through the reproduction of an archaic fear for the ‘religious other’ and this has serious implications for religious freedom and equality within the Greek society.

Politics of fear and moral panics

According to Furendi (2006) the usage or over-usage of the term ‘fear’ does not indicate simply a reaction to a specific danger, but the use of broader cultural metaphors for interpreting and
making sense of various experiences through a narrative of fear. The culture of fear increases the role of instability and exacerbates distinctions between the friendly ‘us’ and hostile ‘others’. These emotions may be deliberately used for political gains, but also in building a kind of national homogeneity and solidarity. Although in recent discourses the culture of fear is frequently connected to the rise of Islamist fundamentalism and the global war on terrorism, its roots descend from ancient times (Mölder 2011). The major impact of these discourses of fear is to promote a sense of disorder and a belief that ‘things are out of control’, implying that someone needs to take back control. As it is argued (Ferraro 1995, p. 12) ‘fear reproduces itself or becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy’ and is ‘being exploited by numerous claims-makers, including politicians, who promote their own propaganda about national and international politics’ (Altheide 2003, p. 10).

Political fear is the peoples’ felt apprehension of some harm to their collective well-being or the intimidation wielded over men and women by governments, political parties and/or political groups. As Robin (2004, p. 16) has noted, political fear can work ‘when leaders or militants can define what is or ought to be the public’s chief object of fear’. Political fear of this sort almost always preys upon some real threat but politicians and other leaders have much leeway in deciding which threats are worthy of political attention and which are not. It is they who identify a threat to the population’s well-being, who interpret the nature and origins of that threat, and who propose a method for meeting that threat making particular fears items of public discussion and mobilisation. Based on the above, it is going to be argued that specific political agents within the Greek political spectrum, mainly of the extreme right, but not exclusively, similarly to other Western countries (Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy 2016), play with these fears of the Greek society and capitalise on the fear about Islam.

The concept of politics of fear is related with the concept of moral panic. Modern times in general are ‘the age of the moral panic’ (Thompson 1998, p. 1) and the media continually warn of the possible dangers of moral laxity. These dangers evoke different things at different times – panics over crime, activities of youth, anti-social behaviour, ‘sexual permissiveness’ of the 1960s, subversion of traditional family values, the image of the young black mugger, and many others. Such panic plays and capitalises on the fears of the majority (Thompson 1998; Cohen 1972; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009). Nowadays, this panic is increasingly shifting towards ‘aberrant’ behaviours of Muslims constructing this way a panic about a specific religion or what could be named a religious panic. It is indeed accurate to argue that ‘Muslims in the West have emerged as the new “folk devils” of both popular and media imagination’ (Zempi and Chakraborti 2014, p. 24). In the Greek context, this kind of panic relates to the broader historical legacies of the creation of the Greek nation-state after centuries of Ottoman rule. Not only was the Greek state established as an ‘Orthodox’ political entity, but it was also created as an antidote of the Ottoman occupation and its religion, Islam. This experience of state-building has shaped a dichotomous long-standing discourse between national Orthodox ‘self’ against the Islamic ‘other’ and it has to be taken into consideration when one studies the place of Islam in Greek society and the issue of Islamophobia. This panic about Islam is reproduced not only from political agents but also from leading figures of the Orthodox Church of Greece.

**Studying Islamophobia: practical issues, the method and the material**

Islamophobia has been extensively studied during the last 20 years but mainly after 9/11 (Runnymede Trust 1997; Fekete 2009; Esposito and Kalin 2011; Morgan and Poynting 2012; Tyrer 2013; Ernst 2013; Pratt and Woodlock 2016), without avoiding controversial debates about its meaning and definition. According to a recent definition Islamophobia is ‘a fear or
hatred of Islam that translates into ideological and material forms of cultural racism against obvious markers of “Muslimness” (Zempi and Chakraborti 2015, p. 46). When it comes to the types of Islamophobia, Sayyid (2014) has underlined six clusters of Islamophobic activities:

- attacks on persons;
- attacks on property;
- intimidation;
- institutional;
- comments, public discourse; and
- state.

Therefore, Islamophobia could be divided into two main categories: ideology and activism (discourse and assaults). The absence of Islamophobic physical acts does not make Islamophobia a ‘myth’. Islamophobic ideology and discourse are key-factors for any kind of Islamophobic attacks, which do not occur in an ideological vacuum.

In more practical terms, one crucial problem in Greece is the lack of evidence regarding Islamophobia, especially when it comes to recording assaults. Reports in Greece usually count xenophobic and racist attacks with no particular focus on the religious motivation, perhaps because in most of the cases it is not clear. Attacks against immigrants, for example, which during the second half of 2017 were on the rise in Aspropyrgos, a region near Athens, though mainly targeted Muslims, it is not always easy to count them as clearly Islamophobic, although probably the most appropriate way is to count them both as xenophobic and Islamophobic. These kinds of acts are not as clear as attacking a masjid, an Ottoman mosque or an Imam. That is why in this chapter Islamophobic acts are taken into consideration, but due to their scarcity the main focus will be given at the discourse level. Besides, before someone proceeds to an attack he/she has been somehow ideologically influenced by Islamophobic discourses and that is why the issue of Islamophobic ideology and discourses is very important.

The material used for the analysis comes mainly from the media, the Internet, the websites of specific political parties and groups, the Orthodox Church of Greece and the Greek Parliament. The method applied to analyse the material is the classic content analysis, based upon thematic categories (Grawitz 2004; Kyriazi 2001). As it has been argued, ‘discourse contributes to the composition of the rules and regulations of social life as well as of relations, identities and institutions’ (Fairclough 1992, p. 65), therefore, discourse has become a very important tool for social scientists in their efforts to study and understand society and social relationships.

Constructing the fear about Islam: the threat of Islamisation

Immigration

Greece is home to different Muslim communities, which are divided into two main groups. First, there is the Muslim minority of Thrace, located in the northeastern part of Greece consisting of about 120,000 Muslims inhabiting the region together with a Greek Christian majority (Tsitselikis 1999; Ktistakis 2006; Katsikas 2012). This group constitutes ‘Old Islam’, and is visibly different from the recent waves of Muslim immigrants who are considered ‘New Islam’ (Tsitselikis 2012). The second group is generally composed of Muslim immigrants, who, far from being a unified group, belong to different nationalities. Although other ethno-religious communities already existed in Greek society, their number was rather negligible until 1991, when thousands of immigrants started arriving in Greece following the collapse of communism.
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in neighbouring Albania. Since then, Greek society has seen substantial increases of Muslim immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East arriving in Greece primarily via Turkey.6

This change in terms of cultural and religious synthesis of the population has created a reaction from those parts within the Greek society in favour of the country’s national identity and homogeneity. Similarly to other cases (in the USA and Europe)7 the fear of Islamisation has been at the forefront of the public debates in the last 15 years. Such discourses started to dominate the public space through a narrative of panic about immigrants since 2000 with the establishment of the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS).8 In 2001 the party’s leader inaugurating the main offices in Syntagma square declared that among the party’s goals was to fight against globalisation and the thousands of immigrants coming to Greece. Using the politics of fear strategy and a narrative of panic he argued that more than a million immigrants are going to be legalised, meaning receiving the Greek citizenship, altering this way the synthesis of the population and threatening the Orthodox religion.9 After the party’s entrance in the Parliament in 2007 such discourses continued being reproduced. According to one of LAOS’s MPs, immigrants from Asia and Africa are characterised by ‘strong Muslim attributes and terrifying birth indicators’ (Parliament Proceedings, 24 June 2009, Session H [8], p. 586), implying that this is a direct threat for the synthesis of the population and, as a consequence, for the national identity.

Multiculturalism was painted with dark colours while MPs of LAOS attempted to reproduce fears towards a multicultural future in opposition to Greek national identity, its values and principles:

What kind of society do we want? Do we want a national society, as we know it, keeping as the dominant element the values and principles of the Greek nation and culture or do we want a multicultural society? Do we want Athens to be a city where women will walk around wearing burkas, with mosques and huge minarets, with different languages spoken or do we want a society as we know it with one dominant nation?

(Parliament Proceedings, 10 March 2010, Session ΠΑ[81], p. 4788)

The above excerpt illustrates the construction of fear through the usage of extravagant phrases including the symbolic words burkas, mosques and minarets. According to the extreme-right party of Golden Dawn (GD),10 which somehow took the leading role in such discourses after the collapse of LAOS, and is one of the most significant agents of Islamophobia in Greece, immigrants are a direct threat for Europe, Greece and the ‘white race’:

Asian peoples invade Europe threatening to alter the synthesis of its population. After that, the spirit of Islam and its traditions will dominate. Within a multicultural world the winner will be the race, the population that will dominate over the other. Now, Muslims fight to dominate biologically and become a majority in Europe. The shrinking of the White World has been prepared.

(Golden Dawn 2013a)

Today Muslims in Europe are a minority but very soon will be the majority. . . . In Greece, if this rise of immigrants continues, Muslims will be around 30–50 per cent of the population within one generation.

(Golden Dawn 2013b)

The new thing that GD introduces is a clear and open reference to biology and race, while in the previous years the main focus was on the cultural aspects of this so-called Islamisation
One of GD’s MPs argued that Greece will become Islamised and Greeks will listen to the muezzin from the minarets, experiencing a new Ottoman rule in this way, but GD would fight against this Islamisation of Greece because ‘this is something that contradicts Greek tradition and culture’ (Parliament Proceedings, 27 April 2015, Session KH [28], p. 49; Parliament Proceedings, 8 May 2015, Session ΛΗ [38], p. 264). The function of politics of fear is clear at this point, since GD describes a situation that is out of control with regard to Muslim immigrants and through this clear division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ argues that the party’s purpose is to take back control and protect Greek people’s well-being.

Such views are found throughout smaller political parties of the extreme and populist right. Christos Nikolopoulos, who is now an independent MP but was formerly an MP of ANEL and before that of New Democracy, the conservative party, has also argued that through refugees, Islam threatens to alter the Christian synthesis of the Greek and European populations. Another example is the new party founded in 2016 by Failos Kranidiotis, a former member of New Democracy, called ‘The New Right’. In its statutes it is clearly stated that the party will pursue among other things to ‘become a wall against the Islamic danger for Europe’. Furthermore, a right-wing newspaper, Dimocratia (‘Democracy’) hosts his articles on a regular basis and through those he manages to address to the right-wing supporters reproducing his Islamophobic discourses.

It is not only the extreme right however, that reproduces Islamophobic discourses in the political field. MPs of New Democracy since the 2000s already and after LAOS’s success started to have similar views arguing for example that ‘a person is losing his/her autonomy within multicultural societies’ and ‘our society will be divided’ with all these Muslim immigrants (Parliament Proceedings, 10 March 2010, Session ΠΑ [81], p.4817). More recently, during the so-called refugee crisis, in the island of Lesvos, a local party member has made a call through his Facebook page for the establishment of a citizen’s movement against the policies of Islamisation of Greece and his island, in particular, due to the high numbers of refugees and immigrants (Anon 2016a). In the same island another local member of New Democracy through her personal blog argued that ‘Lesvos is under attack; Lesvos is being Islamised’ (Machaira 2016). While a visceral opposition to, and demonisation of Islam lies at the epicentre of the contemporary extreme right’s ideological profile and political message it has been argued accurately (Kallis 2015) that what may have started as an ideology of hatred toward Muslims from the fringes of the political system has become part of an increasingly acceptable attitude shared by ever-broader segments of mainstream European societies and this could be the case for Greece as well.

From the above examples it can be argued that Islamophobic discourses are not a monopoly of GD or of extreme-right parties only, but can be observed in other parties of the right as well. Immigration is considered a direct cause for the Islamisation of the country and that is why political parties and groups of nationalists have organised demonstrations and rallies against it (e.g. in Oraiokastro near Thessaloniki, in Samos and elsewhere). In other cases, parents refused to send their children to school in case refugee children were going to attend it (Brattou 2016). GD especially has organised rallies and demonstrations mainly in Athens and Piraeus against immigrants and refugees and against the construction of the mosque in Athens. In the party’s calls it is mentioned that Greece’s Islamisation is developing very fast and that Greeks are becoming a minority within their country (Golden Dawn 2016). It has to be noted that some attacks have been recorded against the camps, which were established for immigrants and refugees during recent years. In some cases groups of people threw pigs’ heads in the camps so that Muslims do not go (Anon 2016b).

Apart from politics the Orthodox Church of Greece has also expressed its ‘agony’ about the high number of Muslims in Greek society. The Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, Anthimos, for example, has stated that it is horrible that today almost 700,000 Muslims live in Athens, adding...
that these people are actually a problem for Greece, since the country is going to become full of Al Qaeda’s groupings (Anon 2010). Even the so-called moderate Archbishop Ieronymos has argued that indeed there is a danger of Islamisation from the immigrants and refugees and that in case these people finally stay in Greece, ‘the country will lose the Greek neighbourhood, this beauty of life, what we used to say, that we are a clean country’. In that direction, the Metropolis of Thessaloniki, Orthodox Christian groups and the Panhellenic Union of Theologians organised an event in Thessaloniki in 2016 against the Islamisation of Greece and Europe. Immigration, as a consequence, like in other Western countries, is the key theme and the axis on which Islamophobic discourses and activism are based on. The ‘religious other’ is targeted as the main threat and is used by political parties, politicians and religious agents in order to establish the politics of fear and a moral panic for Muslims indiscriminately, who are presented as a threat to the national identity and homogeneity.

The mosque of Athens

Closely related to immigration is the issue of the construction of the mosque of Athens. Muslims who live in the urban areas of Athens lack official places to pray and are therefore obliged to meet in warehouses or basements of buildings in order to exercise their religious duties; in other words, they are treated as an ‘invisible’ religious community (Sakellariou 2011). The construction of a mosque in Athens has a long history and has raised serious debates and reactions from the Orthodox Church and specific political parties and politicians (Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2009; Anagnostou and Gropas 2010; Sakellariou 2017a). On the political level, while almost all the political parties have agreed on the need for a proper mosque for Muslims in Athens there is a delay in its construction. Of course, after the first law about the construction of a mosque in 2000, 9/11 and the subsequent rise of the extreme-right followed and this changed the political climate giving space to the politics of fear, while many politicians who were in favour of the mosque then started to have second thoughts. The main parties reacting to the mosque of Athens were LAOS, Independent Greeks (ANEL) and of course GD (Sakellariou 2017a). Large demonstrations against the construction of the Islamic mosque in Athens have been organised, mainly by GD, their main slogan being: ‘No, to an Islamic mosque, neither in Athens, nor in any other place’. Parliamentary questions have also been asked about the money that was going to be used for the construction of the mosque, while ancient Greek temples and Greek Orthodox churches remain abandoned. It is in parliamentary debates that one can find the construction of fear regarding the mosque of Athens. Similar to other cases around Europe (Cesari 2005), the main arguments are that the mosque will attract criminals and fundamentalists and will also contribute into the degradation of the region and the radicalisation of Muslims (Golden Dawn 2017a; Sakellariou 2017a).

A few Church officials have positioned themselves against the construction of an Islamic mosque in Athens, as well. According to Ambrosios, the Metropolitan of Kalavryta, ‘the construction of a mosque somewhere in Athens using state money, i.e. the money of the Greek Orthodox people, is just the beginning of the Islamic territorial domination against our country’ (Ambrosios 2013). The Metropolitan of Piraeus, has also argued against the construction of a mosque in Athens. In his encyclical letter after the attack against the Coptic Church in Egypt, after describing Islam as a destructive cult, and claiming that Islam is not compatible with the Greek Constitution, he asked the Greek government to withdraw the law concerning the construction of an Islamic mosque, because of its unconstitutional content; otherwise, he argued, the government would be responsible for similar criminal acts in Greece by fundamentalist Islamists (Serafeim 2011). Despite the above examples, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church never
took an openly hostile stance against Islam and Muslims on the whole or against the construction of the mosque, but it also never strongly disapproved of these statements and announcements.20

When it comes to Muslim communities in Europe the quest for public space and the debates about mosques and minarets is not a Greek exception (Alievi 2009).21 Those agents who are against the establishment of the mosque seem to follow the international example creating a link between immigration, mosques and terrorism. In that sense the construction of a mosque in Athens, the only European capital without an official mosque, is instrumentalised and becomes part of the politics of fear agenda.

**The role of history: Turkey**

This whole panic about Islam draws on and reverberates, at least in part, the fear about national security and the rise of fundamentalism worldwide. In this context, Turkey takes a special place given its connotations as an ‘eternal enemy’ of the Greek nation. For many Greeks, moreover, Turkey and Islam are one and the same. The Orthodox Church has a crucial role in reproducing the stereotype, that Islam and Turkey are identical, while claiming that the rise of Muslim immigrants or the construction of a mosque are related to the danger that emanates from Turkey (Sakellariou 2015a). This fear about Turkey comes to the forefront in many occasions. In 2010, for example, the Greek government gave permission to the Muslims of Athens to celebrate Ramadan in a central square of the city. The Metropolitan of Piraeus, in his encyclical letter (Serafeim 2010) argued that this was unacceptable and caused him real pain, because it was the first time since the war of independence against the Turks in 1821 that Muslims celebrated Ramadan in a public space, connecting this way the historical past with the needs of Muslim immigrants. Ambrosios, the metropolitan of Kalavryta, in his message for Christmas of 2013 wrote:

> In this way, what the President of Turkey, Turgut Ozal, once said, will be gradually implemented: ‘we will dominate Europe through the birth of Turks’. In a few years we will be foreigners in our land! . . . So, Greece is coming to an end. The Greek population is getting smaller, while the Islamists are growing very fast!.

_(Ambrosios 2013)_

A controversial statement of a former Turkish president interrelates with the problem of immigration in order to excite people’s national(-ist) instincts and reproduce fear about Islam. The menace from Turkey was not an important issue in the political field and in the parliamentary debates with regard to the mosque issue until 2006, given the broad consensus regarding the necessity of the mosque. The electoral success of extreme right-wing and populist parties in recent years has placed the danger of Turkey more prominently, and has now emerged as one of the most powerful arguments against the construction of a mosque. After the electoral collapse of LAOS, GD has become the major player expressing concerns that relate the fear of Islam with Turkey. Indeed, the GD MPs do not miss any opportunity to vocalise fear and religious panic whenever there is a parliamentary discussion regarding the mosque, the immigration issue or any other issue that might be slightly related. The party complains against the government, which is seen as too open towards Turkey:

> You want to eliminate values like fatherland, religion, family, Orthodoxy. You are the best companion of our enemy, Turkey, which is very happy seeing hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants coming to Greece.

_(Parliament Proceedings, 24 June 2015, Session ΞΒ [62], p. 264)_
The above could lead to two main conclusions. First, when the international climate changes and when a new player (Golden Dawn) enters the political field, the historical past re-emerges and acts as an important parameter on the whole issue of Islamophobia. Second, these three parameters (i.e. immigration, the mosque and Turkey) are interconnected and form a nexus on which Islamophobia in Greek society is built.

The causes of fear: a clash of civilisations?

Immigration, the mosque and the role of Turkey form a first level of explanation. But is there anything that goes deeper in the Islamophobia field and used by political agents and Church figures in order to justify their negative views against Islam and Muslims? How they try to support their negation to immigration and the construction of a mosque in Athens? The above discourses are actually reproducing a Manichean scheme of the good ‘Us’ and bad ‘Them’. But is there a content attributed to ‘them’? The main argument clearly follows the clash of civilisation thesis of S. Huntington, and is based on two main issues which dominate these kinds of discourses: First, ‘the inherent barbaric and violent character of Islam’, and second Islam’s ‘inferiority as a religion’ according to some Church officials.

The Islamic threat that features in public debates is grounded on incidents that take place around the world and especially in Muslim countries, which are presented as another example of the ‘Islamic danger’ and ‘Islam’s brutality’. The Metropolitan of Kalvryta, Ambrosios, in a 2012 message referred to the civil war in Syria and the killing of a Christian Orthodox priest by Islamists underlying the brutality of the incident. In his view, Islam is violent by nature and this is proved by the fact that the Koran includes Jihad and it leads Muslims to massacre everyone who is not Muslim, based on the premise that non-Muslims are considered infidels (Ambrosios 2012). The Metropolitan of Piraeus, Serafeim, has also argued that Islam is violent by nature and managed to expand through the use of war violence, of knives and murders based on the jihad (Serafeim 2017).

GD also considers Islam as absolutely violent in nature. They use as an example the attacks of Muslim terrorist groups (Al Qaeda; Daesh) around the world and of course in Europe, as well as various incidents from Muslim countries, to support their argument (Golden Dawn 2017b). Parallel to mentioning bomb attacks worldwide they strive to create a climate of fear through the use of the phrase ‘soon in Greece’, implying that we will soon have similar attacks in Greece (Golden Dawn 2017c). Anything that happens in a Muslim country is used to reproduce panic, through the use of words such as ‘massacre, Islamist cannibals, barbaric Islam, obscurantist Islam’, and others. They frequently use the words ‘terrorism, terrorist, terrorism’, in such a way that their audiences are easily influenced. For them, ‘the relationship between Islam and terrorism proves itself every day’ (Golden Dawn 2013c). Finally, they make ample use of the names of Islamic cities like Kabul, Kandahar or Islamabad to make people afraid that with all these Muslim immigrants, sooner or later, Greece will become a Muslim country with all the drawbacks that such a transformation will entail: violence, killings, rapes and brutality. According to the party’s discourse, Islam’s goal is to strengthen Islamic religious and cultural traditions, and its main weapon is jihad (Antepithesi 2013). Muslims are considered as uncivilised, they do not respect women and human rights, and their education is only based on ‘the green small book with the golden letters on the front-cover, which leads them to extreme actions and terrorism, because for them, the Koran is the only real book and all the other are lies’ (Golden Dawn 2013d).

Islam is also seen as inferior to Christianity and incompatible with the Greek-Christian civilisation, because it is not considered a true religion and Mohamed is not a real prophet. As written back in 1997 by an archimandrite, ‘during the centuries many false prophets existed,
people not actually called by God. An example of such a false godsend prophet who was very successful . . . was Mohamed’ (Kastoris 1997, p. 51). The Metropolitan of Piraeus (Serafeim 2010) in an encyclical letter argued that Islam is a fallacy and a human creation and it has nothing to do with the real God that was revealed in the Old Testament. Furthermore, he argued that the true God does not force people to follow Him, implying that Allah is not a true God since he uses violence in order to force people to follow him, while he has also supported the argument that Mohammad is a fake prophet and the Koran a fake book (Serafeim 2017).

Apart from the above arguments, which are clearly hostile towards Islam and Muslims, others are trying to use more mild arguments. According to these views the emphasis is given to the different culture Muslims have, which of course does not exclude the role of violence mentioned above and somehow reproduces the clash of civilisations thesis. This means that it is not possible for Muslims to live and integrate in Western societies and as a consequence in Greek society. MPs of the right-wing party of New Democracy, for example, have argued that ‘Muslims are against the western way of life’ (Parliament Proceedings, 24 June 2015, Session ΞΒ [62], p. 71), implying that it is almost impossible for Muslims to live together with a Christian majority. Along similar lines, MPs of ANEL have argued that ‘Muslims can’t be acculturated and adjusted to Greek society’ (Parliament Proceedings, 12 May 2015, Session Μ [40], p. 176).

Ultimately, according to the extreme right and the right-wing discourse, either from political parties or the Orthodox Church, Islam and Muslims are seen as a threat to the national identity and Greek-Orthodox values since they are coming from a complete ‘other’ culture and way of life, which are incompatible with the Greek one. This argumentation is clearly Islamophobic because it generalises events like Islamist terrorist attacks, for example, and uses them in order to characterise Islam and Muslims as violent. As it has been argued (Wodak 2015) such parties instrumentalise a minority group, in this case the Muslim one, as a scapegoat for most if not all current woes and subsequently construe the respective group as a threat to ‘us’, to ‘our’ nation which is at the core of politics of fear.

Conclusions

Islam and Muslims have been one of the main groups scapegoated and targeted as a ‘threatening other’ in Greece. The main conclusions that can be drawn regarding Islamophobia in Greek society are the following. First, Islamophobia in Greece is not as serious as in other European countries especially when it comes to assaults against Muslims or Islamic places. However, on the discourse level Islamophobia is present and thus one can speak of an Islamophobia ‘under construction’, to which special attention should be paid. Second, although Islamophobia does exist, this does not mean that it dominates Greek politics, the Orthodox Church and society on the whole. One can find strong Islamophobic discourses, but at the same time, there are people and political parties trying to confront it, and support and protect Muslims, both natives and immigrants. Third, Islamophobia is primarily found in the extreme-right and then in the right-wing political parties and groups, but also among significant Church figures even some of the Metropolitans of the Orthodox Church. Fourth and summarising the above three conclusions, it is evident that the Greek case follows the Western Islamophobic pattern in terms of who are the main agents and which are the main arguments (namely, terrorism, violence, clash of civilisations). The only difference is that in the Greek case, Turkey as a neighbouring country plays an important role in the Islamophobic discussions either as a path for immigrants and refugees or as an Islamic country per se threatening the very existence of the Greek nation. Fifth, Islamophobia as in any other country has serious implications on issues of human rights of Muslims, since the fear of Islam has been used in order to put obstacles to the construction
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of the mosque in Athens and also to the establishment of the Muslim cemetery which is still under question. Finally, as it comes out from existing opinion polls from 2010 onwards Greek society has little knowledge of what Islam is (Public Issue 2010) and expresses negative views about Islam, Muslims and the construction of the mosque (Dianeosis 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Lipka 2016). It is not clear which and if so how important the role of Islamophobic discourses are in the formation of such views among the Greek population, although attention should be paid both by researchers and policy makers to a phenomenon that might be under construction, but which seem to have serious implications for the life of Muslims in Greece.

Notes

1 Recently a new report on Islamophobia from Runnymede Trust was published on the anniversary of the 20 years from the first report (Runnymede Trust 2017).

2 Taking into consideration the given space of the chapter, but also the limited evidence available, not all aspects of Islamophobia in Greek society are going to be fully presented and analysed. The main focus will be on those aspects which seem to dominate the public space, without implying that Islamophobia is not found in other domains like for example in state authorities and institutions (e.g. the police, the secret service) or the media. However, and based on the available findings, a selection needed to be made.


4 Since October 2017 a new extremist group emerged in Athens, under the name of ‘Crypteia’ inspired by an ancient Spartan group. They claimed an attack against the house of a little Afghan boy who was chosen to participate in the national celebrations of 28 October holding the Greek flag, although the school administration decided otherwise and then they also claimed an attack against two Muslim immigrants, one of them being an Imam, in November 2017. For these see www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/omada-krupteia-i-fasistiki-organwsi-pou-xtupaei-metanastes (accessed 4 December 2017).

5 The national census does not select data on religious affiliation. Any estimation is based on the nationalities declared in the census and on unofficial data, for example from interviews with representatives of Muslim organisations.

6 During the summer of 2015 thousands of refugees and immigrants gathered for many days and sometimes weeks in other regions of Greece, mainly the Aegean Islands and along the borders with Balkan states, waiting to be transferred to other European countries. By December 2015 more than 800,000 refugees and immigrants came to Greece searching for a path to other European destinations. For more information see www.iom.int/news/irregular-migrant-refugee-arrivals-europe-top-one-million-2015iom (accessed 20 November 2017). The situation came to a dead-end during March of 2016 when Eastern and Central Europe countries decided to close their borders even for Syrian and Iraqi refugees and these people were blocked in Greece. Today it is estimated that about 55,000 refugees and immigrants have been blocked in Greece (data of October 2017), see http://migration.iom.int/europe (accessed 20 November 2017).

7 See for example the Stop Islamisation of America (SIOA) and Stop Islamisation of Europe (SIOE) initiatives. In Greece there have been some Facebook pages with similar content, e.g. ‘Stop Islam in Greece’ or ‘We say NO to the Islamisation of Greece’.

8 Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) was an extreme-right party founded by a former MP of the conservative New Democracy party in 2000 and had a continuous presence in the Parliament until the elections of 2012.

9 See his speech at www.youtube.com/watch?v=plHZNZuYg8xg (accessed 4 December 2017).

10 Golden Dawn is a political party of National-Socialist ideology and history which achieved an electoral breakthrough in mainstream politics since 2010 in the local elections of Athens and in the national elections of 2012 becoming the third political power (Koronaioi et al. 2015a, 2015b; Sakellarion 2015b).

11 Independent Greeks (ANEL) is a populist right-wing party founded also by a former New Democracy MP in 2012 and now participates in the coalition government. For some the party belongs to the extreme right because of its views on immigration, national issues, relations with neighbouring
countries, etc. The party voted against the construction of the mosque of Athens and expressed its skepticism regarding the dangers that might come from such a development based on what is taking place in Europe with regard to the terrorist attacks of the last years.


13 It should be mentioned that Dimocratia is one of those media including Islamophobic articles written by journalists or political commentators on a regular basis.

14 As it has been supported there is also a kind of Islamophobia coming from the liberal spectrum of the public sphere through the texts and writings of well-known authors like Takis Theodoropoulos and Soti Triandafyllou and neo-liberal politicians like Andreas Andrianopoulos and Thanos Tzimeros (Sakellariou 2015b; Hatzipanagiotou and Zarikos 2017).

15 Golden Dawn’s members and MPs have been accused and some even sentenced of racist attacks against immigrants and refugees from 2010 onwards in various neighbourhoods of Athens.

16 One of the first actors that initiated such a public discourse of religious panic in modern times was Christodoulos, the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church from 1998 to 2008) during the war in the former Yugoslavia. According to Christodoulos, the Yugoslav war was a plan organised by the Vatican, the West and Turkey in order to form an Islamic arc in the Balkans and in the future, a Muslim state. He wrote several articles in Greek newspapers under the titles: ‘The Muslim curtain in the Balkans’ and ‘The volcano of Islamism: The lava that ‘burns’ the Balkans’, to mention just a few of them (Vassilakis 2006).

17 For the entire interview see www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eSJySedZ9M (accessed 16 November 2017).

18 The video of this can be found in the following link www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TsY9gg5sg (accessed 16 November 2017).

19 Mosques exist only in Thrace, where the Muslim community lives and in the islands of Kos and Rhodes in the Aegean. At the moment the first official mosque in Athens is under construction after many delays which lasted more than a decade, since the latest law was voted by the Greek Parliament in 2006. There are also three other private mosques functioning legally since 2015 and all the others are considered at least semi-legal since they function having a permit of a cultural association or other and not that of a religious place. The same problem exists with the lack of a Muslim cemetery in Athens, which obliges relatives of the deceased to transport them either to Northern Thrace or to the country of their origin.

20 Although not a repeated phenomenon it should be noted that in previous years some attacks have been recorded against prayer houses and mosques in Athens and Thrace, either through arson attacks or throwing pig heads in front of the places (Sakellariou 2016, 2017b).

21 For more cases regarding mosques in Europe see also the special issue of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 31(6), November 2005.

22 Antepithesi is the official website of the youth branch of Golden Dawn and one can find many ideological texts, comments and other texts uploaded on a regular basis.

23 In a recent survey 40.8 per cent of the interviewees said that they would be disturbed by the establishment a mosque in Greece as opposed to 58.6 per cent who said no and probably no. Furthermore, when people were asked if they would be disturbed by the construction of a mosque in the area they live 45.1 per cent replied yes and probably yes, while 54.4 per cent answered no and probably no (Dianeosis 2016a). According to another survey regarding the current refugee crisis it appears that the words ‘Islam, Muslim, Jihad’ have negative connotations and that a terrorist attack in Greece is possible (Dianeosis 2016b).

References


Islamophobia in Greece


