Nationalities Papers, 2017
Vol. 45, No. 4, 511–523, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1294561

Fear of Islam in Greece: migration, terrorism, and "ghosts" from the past

Alexandros Sakellariou*

Department of Sociology, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, Greece

(*Received 8 February 2016; accepted 16 September 2016*)

The article explores the "fear of Islam" through a specific series of political debates about Islam and the future of the Greek-Orthodox national identity. The analysis is based on the method of qualitative content analysis, which makes use of thematic categories and draws on the proceedings of the Greek parliament. The main questions the article will try to address are: How have Greek political parties reacted to public demand for the construction of a mosque? What have been the rhetorical tropes they use? How have they capitalized on current and old fears about Islam? What have been the implications of this discourse on state policies toward Islam? Have there been any differences in this discourse over time? The analysis highlights the role of historical interpretations of Greek national identity and contemporary problems related to new waves of migration due to Greece's place on the border with Turkey and with the broader Islamic world.

Keywords: Greece; national identity; political discourse; Islam; politics of fear

Introduction

Following 9/11, the attacks in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005, and more recently the rise of the so-called Islamic State, Islam and Muslims have penetrated the public discourse in Greece and are getting ample attention. This reflects Europe-wide concerns but also more specific Greek collective memories rooted in the experience of nation-building. Furthermore, given its geographic position in Europe, Greece is particularly vulnerable to "waves" of Muslims migrating from the Balkans and North Africa, and, more recently, escaping wars in the Middle East. More than 850,000 refugees and migrants entered Greece in 2015, and another 173,450 came in 2016.[1] Incoming waves of migrants, unabated since at least the fall of Communism in the 1990s, have caused intense debates and stoked a climate of fear that has been exploited particularly by right- and extreme right-wing political parties.

This article examines how the political discourse about Islam and Muslims is constructed by focusing on the evolving parliamentary debates about the building of an official mosque in Athens. More specifically, right- and extreme right-wing political parties, but also leading figures of the Greek Orthodox Church as well as specific media outlets, have sown fear and panic about Islam. Their input into mainstream political debates features different narratives of Islam that tap into memories of the Ottoman past, military conflicts with neighboring Turkey, and the nation-state building process, as well as anxiety about

*Email: sociology.panteion@gmail.com

increased migration and global and European concerns about terrorism. Such issues dredge up old and plant new fears of the Muslim "Other" within the Greek public sphere.

Hence, the main purpose of this article is to analyze the tropes that shape political discourse on Islam and how they shift during the period under analysis. In order to uncover the static but also changing parameters of the discourse, we analyze parliamentary proceedings during crucial moments when the construction of a mosque in Athens became a political concern. The underlying questions of this article are: How have Greek political parties reacted to public demand for the construction of a mosque? What have been the rhetoric tropes they use? How have they capitalized on current and old fears about Islam? What have been the implications of this discourse on state policies but also on popular attitudes toward Islam? Have there been any differences in this discourse over time?

The argument proceeds in four sections. The first section discusses the data and the method of the analysis. Section two introduces the historical construction of the Greek national identity and the problem of Islam, which provides fertile territory for the politics of fear regarding Islam and Muslims' presence in Greece. The third section elaborates on the historical and contemporary features of Islam in Greece. Section four analyzes the parliamentary debates along four main topics: (1) acknowledging the problem: the need for a mosque, (2) national identity and multiculturalism, (3) fear of Islam: criminality and terrorism, and (4) connecting Islam with Turkey.

The material of the analysis

The primary data of the analysis will draw from the proceedings of the Greek parliament from 2000 to 2015, the period when the first law on the construction of an official mosque in Athens was debated as the Muslim population in Greece, especially in Athens, was growing due to migration.[2] The thematic categories of the analysis were formed through searching the proceedings of the Greek parliament available on its website using keywords such as Islam, Islamic, mosque, and Muslim.[3] The focus was on issues closely related to the construction of the mosque and/or to fear about Islam, which figured in 99 parliamentary sessions. The method applied to analyze the material of the respective sessions is classic discourse analysis, based upon thematic categories (Kyriazi 2001, 283–301; Grawitz 2004, 133–231).

For its role in shaping the rules and regulations of social life as well as of relations, identities, and institutions (Fairclough 1992, 65) discourse has become a crucial tool for social scientists in their efforts to understand society and social relationships. Discourse analysis treats a wide range of linguistic or non-linguistic material – speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events, and interviews – as "texts" and "writings" that enable subjects to experience the world of objects, words, and practices (Howarth 2000, 10). Through exhaustive reading and systematic analysis, the most interesting and common themes that emerged were transformed into the four main categories of this study: (1) acknowledging the problem: the need for a mosque, (2) national identity and multiculturalism, (3) fear of Islam: criminality and terrorism, and (4) connecting Islam with Turkey. The analysis will also explore possible variations in the political discourse about Islam during the period examined.

Before we proceed with the analysis, two things should be clarified. First, not all the parties and members of parliament have participated in anti-Islamic public discourse during these debates and those who have are mostly related to the parties of the right, the extreme right, and the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn. Second, Muslims in Athens still do not have an official place to pray and a cemetery to bury their relatives, meaning that the

anti-Islamic discourse influences political decision-making. Hence, we consider political discourse a crucial aspect of the wider public discourse on the construction of the mosque and Islam more generally.

National identity, religion, and the politics of fear

In his seminal work on nation-building and nationalism, Anderson (1991, 5–6) argues that the nation is an imagined political community, because its members, even in the smallest nation, will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them. Yet in the mind of each "lives" the image of their "imaginary" communion, reinforced through collective memories and narratives of a future destiny. In this nation-state building process religion plays the fundamental role of interpreting the communion and defining an explicit criterion for inclusion and exclusion (Elbasani 2015, 1–17). According to Turner (1988, 324), Christianity came to play a crucial part in the emergence of the nation-state system in Europe; the church and the state became necessarily conjoined and Christianity came to provide a crucial basis of legitimacy for emerging nation-states. The growth of the state apparatus in Europe also made possible the growth of the church as a national institution. At least during the founding period of European nations, the "nation-state-church" became a crucial instrument to glue and rally the nation around a specific religion. In the same vein, Bax (1987, 2–3) argues that religious regimes play an important role in the processes of state-formation and state-development but that the converse is equally true: for their expansion religious regimes often depend upon states.

Many discussions have taken place about the construction of the Greek national identity and the role of various actors, for example intellectuals (Hertzfeld 1982) or the educational system (Zervas 2010), especially during the first decades after the establishment of the post-Ottoman independent Greek state. The Greek Orthodox Church has also played a crucial role in the formation of the imagined Greek nation and of the homogenized narrative of national identity, especially since the revolution against the Ottoman Empire in 1821. Afterward, the church emerged as a powerful social and political institution, closely intertwined with Greek society and politics. In many aspects, it has historically served as the country's main cultural backdrop and reservoir (Makrides and Molokotos-Liederman 2004, 467). In line with its historical role, it is still recognized as the Greek state's official church[4] and has collaborated closely with the state to fulfill its functions (Sakellariou 2012, 205–207). Specifically, the Greek Orthodox Church has supported the ethno-religious understanding of national identity while highlighting its "historical" contribution as the nation's protector during centuries of Ottoman rule. Furthermore, the church backed the national narrative that the Greek nation is "blessed by God" through a long history that spans ancient Greece and modern times via the Byzantine Empire. The Greek state, for its part, has often given legitimacy to such historical claims – the very first constitutions (1822, 1823, and 1827) adopted after the revolution of 1821 defined the Greek citizen as an inhabitant who lives within the Greek territory and believes in Christ, thus laying the basis for a religious connotation to Greek identity. Not only was the Greek state established as an "Orthodox" political entity, but it was also created as an antidote to the Ottoman occupation and its flagship religion, Islam.

This form of uniform identity, which fuses nation, ethnicity, and religion, is key to understanding the evolving fears from real and assumed enemies, especially the assumed Islamic ones that imperil national coherence. The historical reading of Islam as the nation's "Other" is also replicated across other Balkan states with similar experiences of post-Ottoman nation- and state-formation (Osterman 2017).[5] In the case of Greece, much

as elsewhere in the Balkans, evolving political debates on Islam are deeply rooted in, and strongly intertwined with, the experience of the Ottoman occupation and collective interpretations of that experience. Ottoman rule was a serious trauma and crucial juncture for the creation of the imagined Greek collective identity, thus shaping predominant memories of the national self and "Other."

This collective memory and trauma was reinforced by ongoing conflicts between Greece and Turkey, particularly the Greek-Turkish War of 1897, the "Asia Minor Catastrophe" of 1922, and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, as well as more recent crises during the 1980s and 1990s. Hence, for many Greeks, Muslim Turks are the one and only enemy that constitutes a permanent threat to Greece's sovereignty and conspires against its freedom. Such deep-rooted interpretations of Greek's historical enemies are also found in the state's policies toward its Muslim population, who are frequently branded as foreigners to be expelled, stigmatized vis-à-vis the dominant ethnic group, or subjected to measures of assimilation (Elbasani and Roy 2015b). Still, Greece constitutes a specific case where memories of the past reverberate with experiences of the present, due to the country's common borders with Turkey and other Muslim-majority countries. Being at the frontline of massive waves of migration from the wider Muslim world has left the country particularly vulnerable to fears of the Muslim "Other." Specifically, political entrepreneurs, especially those that aim to safeguard the idea of a homogenous national identity, capitalize on these memories and recent experience of migration to sow a general climate of fear and panic. Those debates gained political currency during the emergence of the global and Europe-wide discourse on Islamic terrorism after 9/11.

Here the term "fear" does not indicate simply a reaction to a specific danger (Furendi 2006, vii), but is rather a broader cultural metaphor for a way of interpreting and making sense of various experiences. The culture of fear emphasizes instability and exacerbates distinctions between the friendly "Us" and hostile "Others." These emotions may be deliberately used for political gains, for example in starting wars and in straining relations with other countries, but also in building a kind of national solidarity. These kinds of dangers evoke different things at different times and such panic plays and capitalizes on the fears of the majority (Thompson 1998, 6). The major impact of the discourse of fear is to promote a sense of disorder and a belief that "things are out of control." As Ferraro has argued (1995, 12), fear reproduces itself or becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and is exploited by numerous claims-makers, including politicians, who promote their own propaganda about national and international politics (Altheide 2003, 9). Furthermore, (Robin 2004, 16) political fear can work when leaders or militants can define what is or ought to be the public's chief object of fear.

Given the historical and contemporary grievances related to Islam, this article argues that specific political actors in Greece capitalize on and nourish religious panic about Islam in order to advance their goals and gain electoral advantage. The experience of state-building has shaped a dichotomous long-standing discourse between the national Orthodox "self" against the Islamic "Other." That means that national identity and fear are related to the extent that they both make use of the past as a readily available pool of experiences, discourses, and events that exacerbate fear about Islam and Muslims.

Muslim communities in Greek society

Besides the historical dimension of the Ottoman rule, Greece is home to different Muslim communities, which are not at ease with the Greek national identity. First, there is the 120,000-strong Muslim minority of Thrace, in the northeast (Tsitselikis 1999; Ktistakis

2006; Katsikas 2012). Thrace's Muslim community, along with the Greeks of Constantinople, was protected by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which exempted them from the mandatory population exchanges going on between Greece and Turkey at the time. Signed in the aftermath of Greece's defeat in Asia Minor, the treaty includes a section on the protection of minorities in both countries. Even so, Muslims of Thrace faced problems that their Orthodox counterparts did not, due to their religion and ethnic background, which is mostly Turkish. This group constitutes "Old Islam," and is visibly different from the recent waves of Muslim migrants who are considered "New Islam" (Tsitselikis 2012).

The second group is generally composed of Muslim migrants,[6] who, far from being a unified group, belong to different nationalities. It is this group that has particularly disrupted the homogeneous Greek society and the basic criteria for inclusion in it, which consists of speaking the Greek language, professing the Orthodox faith, and sharing a common cultural heritage. Although other ethno-religious communities already existed in Greek society, their number was rather negligible until 1991, when thousands of migrants started arriving in Greece following the collapse of Communism in neighboring Albania. Since then, Greek society has seen substantial increases of Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, Iraq, Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria, Afghanistan, Syria, and Indonesia (Antoniou 2003; Imam and Tsakiridou 2003; Triandafyllidou and Kokkali 2010; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2013) arriving via Turkey and the Aegean Sea. Most are gathered in the Athens region, and the second largest group is found in Thessaloniki. However, during the summer of 2015 thousands of refugees and migrants gathered for 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.

Muslims, both old and new, who live outside of Thrace, especially in the urban areas of Athens, face two basic and common problems. They lack official places to pray and are therefore obliged to hold their prayer meetings in warehouses or basements of buildings, and in this way are treated as an invisible, even disturbing, element (Sakellariou 2011). The construction of a mosque in Athens in particular has raised serious debates, not only among members of the Orthodox Church but also among political parties and in the press (Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2009; Anagnostou and Gropas 2010). 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.

Acknowledging the problem: the need for a mosque

The problem of the construction of a central mosque in Athens dates to the 1970s (Tsitselikis 2004, 281–290). Given the lack of a proper mosque in Athens, Muslims operate prayer houses on their own. Some have argued that there are around 60 such prayer houses (Imam and Tsakiridou 2003), while more recent estimates put their number at around 100 all over the country. All these illegal places are near the center of Athens, where most migrants live, and all are illegal, as establishing a prayer house of any religion other than Orthodox requires a permit from the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The only legal mosques are in Thrace or on the islands of Kos and Rhodes. The first mosque, or official prayer house, in Athens was established in the early 1990s, on the roof of a luxury hotel in the city center. This served Muslim businessmen from the Middle East, most of whom had moved to the Greek capital during the first Gulf War. As the management of the hotel changed in the mid-1990s and most of these Muslims moved to other European countries, the structure was eventually removed (Antoniou 2003, 165).

The legal history of constructing a proper mosque is very telling of the panic that surrounds the issue. Back in 1890 the Greek government adopted a law that allotted a site in Piraeus for a Turkish mosque, but the law was never enforced (Law ΑΩΝΑ [1851], 1 June 1890, Official Gazette, A' 126). In fact, the third protocol (Article 4) of the Convention of Athens (1913) obliged Greece to build a mosque in Athens and four more in other regions of Greece, wherever necessary. But that resolution was also never implemented. In 1934, Law 6244 (25 August 1934, Official Gazette A' 274) provided for building an Egyptian mosque and the establishment of an Islamic Foundation – an Egyptian Institute – that was to serve Egyptian scholars in Greece. The Greek government offered a site in Athens, with the goal of improving relations with Egypt and improving the situation of the Greek community in Egypt, but this law was also never enforced.

Ahead of the 2004 Olympic Games, a law was passed (Law 2833, 30 June 2000, Official Gazette A' 150, article 7) providing for the construction of a mosque jointly with an Islamic center in Athens. This was also to promote good Greek–Arabic relations. The mosque was to be built far from the city center, near the new airport of Athens. This law was also never implemented and six years later, in 2006, another legal package was initiated regarding a mosque in Athens (Law 3512, 15 December 2006, Official Gazette, A' 264). In that law there was no reference to an exact location of the mosque, but Article 5 ensured that it was to be controlled by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs.

Mosque debates are common in other European countries (Alievi 2009). Athens remains the only European capital without an official functioning mosque. The mosque issue came to the fore ahead of the 2004 Olympic Games, when domestic but mainly international actors pressured the Greek government to build a mosque in Athens not only for the athletes, for whom there was a provision for a prayer house in the Olympic village, but mainly for visitors. This was one of the main reasons why the government, keen to prove that Greece was a functional democracy that respects religious freedom, decided to legislate on the construction of a mosque. During the first discussion in 2000 all the parties seemingly acknowledged the need for a mosque, despite any secondary issues raised. As a member of the then-ruling socialist party, PASOK, which in general had a more sympathetic view toward Muslims, argued:

> Finally, with Article 7 of this bill about the site of the Islamic Cultural Center, Greece, all of us who have legislative responsibility prove that we can be a modern democratic country that, in line with the Olympic Charter, does not accept discrimination based on gender, race, culture, religion, and political ideology. (Parliament Proceedings, 12 June 2000, Session A [1], 7)[7]

The right-wing, opposition party New Democracy, along with the Communists and the leftists, agreed on the necessity for a mosque, although some lawmakers questioned why the provision had to be included in legislation about the organization of the Olympic Games, arguing that it was irrelevant, while others took issue with the site where the mosque was to be built, near Athens' new airport, and others asked questions about the management of the mosque. In his speech in parliament the leader of New Democracy argued:

> We are in favor [of the construction of the mosque]. But this bill raises at least two serious questions. First, why does the establishment of the mosque come in a bill about the Olympic Games, since this is not related to them? It seems as if we are saying 'yes' to this establishment because we have to because of the [Olympic] Games, while in reality we accept it because we are a religiously tolerant country and we respect the free exercise of religious freedom [...] And the second, why are we establishing it in Paiania [near the airport]? Based on which study and with what purpose? (Parliament Proceedings, 13 June 2000, Session B [2], 46)

When the second bill about the construction of an official mosque came to parliament in 2006, the socialists (PASOK) were in opposition and the conservatives (New Democracy)

in government. This was after the attacks on the United States, London, and Madrid had taken place, but most members of parliament still agreed on the need for a mosque based on respect for human rights and religious freedom. The issues of terrorism and security were first raised during this period, but extreme voices were absent or at least marginalized in these discussions. Only secondary issues came to the surface, such as who would use the mosque, Sunnis or Shiites, why the state should control it, and where it would be built, since no reference was made to a specific location.

Since the parliament discussions of 2000 and 2006, three populist and/or extreme right-wing parties have entered parliament: the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) in 2007, Golden Dawn in 2012, and Independent Greeks (ANEL) in 2012.[8] The fragmentation of the political system, especially after the economic crisis of 2010, gave space to new political parties or empowered existing but marginal ones, which have placed the "problem" of migrants in general and of Muslims in particular at the top of their agenda. These parties have managed to gain influence in the wider public sphere, especially in the debates on Islam and on the construction of a mosque in Athens. While the economic crisis helped these political groups exploit anxiety about the incoming flows of refugees and migrants from the Muslim world, the first organized voices against Islam, Muslims, and the mosque entered the Greek parliament with the electoral success of LAOS in 2007, long before the crisis of 2010, which suggests that other factors were at play in triggering anti-Islamic discourses.

National identity and multiculturalism

A major issue in these parliamentary discussions about the construction of a mosque directly relates to the issue of national identity and multiculturalism. Even in 2000, when most legislators agreed on the need for an official mosque in Athens, arguments were raised regarding the selected site near the new airport. As a member of parliament from New Democracy, then in opposition, and later the leader of the extreme right-wing party LAOS, argued:

> I have a huge objection. [The mosque] should be constructed in the Olympic Village and not in Paiania. Airplanes are arriving and departing and the young American or Chinese will see a mosque right at the end of the runway for all the future years, all the future centuries. There is no reason to advertise the mosque [...]. (Parliament Proceedings, 12 June 2000, Session A [1], 22)

Similar views were expressed by other conservative members of parliament, one of whom asked, "Why must we build this mosque in Paiania? To give the impression to visitors who come to Greece for the first time that we might be a Muslim country?" (Parliament Proceedings, 12 June 2000, Session A [1], 27, 29)

The Orthodox Church also protested the erection of a large mosque near Athens' new airport. In a letter to the Foreign Ministry, Christodoulos, archbishop at the time, wrote:

> The selection of a site near the new airport and the considerable size of the installations [of the mosque] should be considered causes of confusion of the foreign visitors, who, upon their arrival in our Orthodox homeland will see immediately an impressive Islamic mosque. (Holy Synod 2003)

Despite the general agreement among the political parties, the perceived imperative to protect Greece's image as a Christian Orthodox country prevailed, and the idea of building a mosque near the airport was dropped.

Some years later the mosque issue returned to public debates in relation to the rising waves of migrants who were mainly of Muslim background. Furthermore, since entering parliament in 2007, LAOS has fueled the rise of anti-Islamic discourse in mainstream

politics as well as discourse on the threats to national identity. According to a LAOS member of parliament, migrants from Asia and Africa are characterized by "strong Muslim attributes and terrifying birth indicators" (Parliament Proceedings, 24 June 2009, Session H [8], 586). Another LAOS member of parliament said the increase of migrants will make Greece "a multi-race, multicultural country. In other words, it will lose its national identity" (Parliament Proceedings, 10 March 2010, Session ΠΑ [81], 4792). Similarly, a member of parliament from New Democracy said, "A person loses his/her autonomy within multicultural societies. Our society will be divided" (Parliament Proceedings, 10 March 2010, Session ΠΑ [81], 4817). Immigration opponents marshaled statements from European leaders to bolster the case against multiculturalism:

> Mrs. Merkel said it: "This so-called multicultural society didn't work." Mr. Sarkozy, who banned the burqa, also said it. Swiss people, who in their vast majority decided to say 'no;' to minarets, also said it. [...] Here we are in Europe. Those who come illegally to Greece should know that they come to a Christian country. [...] The bottom line is that a person who comes here from another country should be aware that there is no mosque. So if he doesn't want to come he shouldn't come. [...] If his religion is so important to him, he should go to a country where there is a mosque. Mr. Prime Minister, do not transform Greece into a Middle Eastern country. (Parliament Proceedings, 10 December 2010, Session ΛΘ [39], 2391; Parliament Proceedings, 21 October 2010, Session ΙΓ [13], 788)

The multicultural model was painted in dark colors while members of LAOS attempted to stoke fears of a multicultural future in opposition to Greek national identity and 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 burqas, with mosques and huge minarets, with different languages spoken, or do we want a society as we know it with one dominant nation? [...] We are going to continue defending the nation-state and the values and traditions of Hellenism as we learned them from our parents. (Parliament Proceedings, 10 March 2010, Session ΠΑ [81], 4788)

The leader of LAOS specifically argued that migrants want to change Greece's culture and wondered why they would come to a country knowing there is no mosque (Parliament Proceedings, 11 January 2011, Session NA [51], 30). A LAOS member of parliament offered a "solution:"

> Why don't you send them as a package to Saudi Arabia or Qatar, wealthy countries, to have as many mosques their soul wishes and every day lay their rugs and pray and leave us alone? (Parliament Proceedings, 2 August 2011, Session Pς [106], 140)

After the electoral breakthrough of Golden Dawn, a political organization of national-socialist ideology, such discourse became more intense and Islamization became framed as the principal threat to national identity. A Golden Dawn member of parliament vowed that the party would fight this Islamization, a new Ottoman rule, as something that contradicts Greek tradition and culture (Parliament Proceedings, 27 April 2015, Session ΚΗ [28], 49; Parliament Proceedings, 8 May 2015, Session ΛΗ [38], 264). Of course, anti-Muslim discourse was also expressed by members of parliament from New Democracy, who argued that Muslims are against the Western way of life (Parliament Proceedings, 24 June 2015, Session ΞΒ [62], 71). Members of parliament from ANEL, the other right-wing populist party, similarly argued that Muslims could not be acculturated to Greek society (Parliament Proceedings, 12 May 2015, Session Μ [40], 176). Altogether, in the right-wing discourse, Islam and Muslims are seen as a threat to the national identity and Greek-Orthodox values. Hence, the construction of an official mosque in Athens is out of the question.

Fear of Islam: criminality and terrorism

Apart from the general threat regarding Greek national identity, the identification of Islam with violence and terrorism was another major issue of discussion within the Greek parliament. Debates on the construction of a mosque, but also the presence of Muslims in Greek society, featured claims of Muslims' criminal activity in general and terrorism in particular. Political discussions of both the bills on the establishment of the Athens mosque highlighted the fear of criminal activities. In 2000, an independent member of parliament coming from the conservative party, and later the leader of LAOS, told parliament that the illegal mosques (prayer houses) in Athens were used as centers of proselytization and propagation, with the goal of ending the ethno-religious homogeneity of the Greek nation (Parliament Proceedings, 25 October 2000, Session M [40], 1503). In the 2006 discussion, a socialist members of parliament argued that preventing the new (official) mosque from deviating into fundamentalist circles would be very difficult (Parliament Proceedings, Session IZ [17], 7 November 2006, 903).

The rising danger of al-Qaeda and other fundamentalists infiltrating the new mosque featured prominently in the arguments of opponents (Parliament Proceedings, 10 December 2010, Session ΛΘ [39], 2389–90). Furthermore, a general fear of criminality around the new mosque was used as an argument against its construction:

> Look what's happening around Europe! We're not suggesting that these people shouldn't pray somewhere. However, it's impossible to build a huge mosque with muftis and minarets [...] and create a ghetto, a place where no one would speak Greek! And you know it, because you have experience from abroad, you've seen the dead ends they face in places where big Muslim mosques have been constructed. We can find alternative places without huge installations that could become an attraction for [dangerous] people in times of rising fundamentalism. (Parliament Proceedings, 19 November 2010, Session KΓ [23], 1415)

The connection of foreigners and particularly Muslims to the rise of criminality and attendant dangers was additionally underlined:

> Look what's taking place in prisons, Mr. Minister. Within the population of 60% of foreigners the majority is Muslims. Among the young prisoners 90% are foreigners. Radicalization has been diffused. These people are going to leave prison at some point and then you should control them, it's your responsibility. [...] I don't want to make bad prophecies, but look what happened in Spain in 2004 and in Great Britain in 2005 and learn by these cases, so that Greece won't follow in their place. (Parliament Proceedings, 19 November 2010, Session KΓ [23], 1419)

Attacks in Western societies were used to justify opposition to the mosque: "Serious terrorist incidents with many innocent victims have taken place in European capitals by Muslims who were born and raised in Europe" (Parliament Proceedings, 12 February 2015, Session M [40], 179). Accordingly, the suicide bombers in the UK came from similar mosques. In the same line of argument, an Islamic center could become a place of terrorist activities and a matter of national security (Parliament Proceedings, Session KΓ [23], 19 November 2010, 1422). The discourse in the Greek parliament thus redoubles a religious panic about Islam and Muslims that dovetails with concerns about national cohesion and the criminality and terrorism that have taken place in other European societies.

Links to Turkey and the past

This whole panic about Islam draws at least in part on fear about national security and the rise of fundamentalism worldwide. In this context, Turkey takes a special place given its role as the 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 reinforcing the

stereotype that Islam and Turkey are identical, while claiming that the rise of Muslim migrants or the construction of a mosque are related to the danger that emanates from Turkey (Sakellariou 2015, 49–54).

The menace from Turkey was not an important issue in the parliamentary debates of 2000 and 2006, given the broad consensus for the mosque. Turkey's role in the debate was limited to the pragmatic argument by some members of parliament that Greece should get something in return for building a mosque, as Orthodox Churches are ruined and have become stables or warehouses both in Turkey and in Northern Cyprus. These voices again came mainly from the conservative party and especially those members who later left the party to create LAOS. "We could gain something [for building the mosque]; I don't know if this would be the keys of [the Orthodox] Saint Sophia in Constantinople or the keys of the Theological School of Halki,"[9] one of them said (Parliament Proceedings, Session A [1], 12 June 2000, 22).

The electoral success of extreme right-wing and populist parties in recent years has elevated the Turkish threat to one of the most powerful arguments against the construction of a mosque:

> We should be extremely careful with Turkey. We give everything and we get nothing. We [as a country] have our own claims but we don't claim anything. We said, 'OK, let's build the mosque you're suggesting, but what are we going to get in exchange? (Parliament Proceedings, Session PI [110], 30 April 2010, 6467)
>
> You build a mosque in Athens when you have reciprocity [from the other side]. This means that you [first] take the opening of Saint Sophia as an Orthodox temple and then you build the mosque. (Parliament Proceedings, Session ΣΒ [202], 1 September 2011, 16132)

Golden Dawn has become the major exponent of a link between the fear of Islam and Turkey. Its members of parliament never miss the chance to stoke fear and religious panic whenever there is a parliamentary discussion regarding the mosque, migration, or any other issue that might be slightly related:

> Our country was always surrounded by enemies, of which the most important was Turkey. [...] Islamists have again invaded our country during the last years, contributing this way to the degradation of our nation more easily since the enemy is now inside. [...] At the same time we want to build a mosque. Behind this is actually Turkey, which wants to turn Saint Sophia in Constantinople into a museum or a mosque. [...] In Cyprus hundreds of thousands of churches are ruined and turned into stables, warehouses, etc. Here in Greece with European or our own money we rebuild mosques, [Ottoman] baths, and everything that commemorates Muslim barbarism and the invasion of our country [...]. (Parliament Proceedings, Session ΛΘ [39], 28 November 2013, 3081)

The party also complains that the government is too open toward 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 migrants coming to Greece. (Parliament Proceedings, Session ΞΒ [62], 24 June 2015, 264)

As a consequence, Turkey has again come to the fore as Greece's main enemy and as a reminder of the Islamic barbarism and brutality of Ottoman rule and other conflicts between the two countries in the past.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to analyze the debates regarding Islam and Muslims within the Greek political sphere using the method of thematic classical content analysis of parliamentary debates. The main issues the article tried to address included the way Greek

political parties reacted to public demand for the construction of a mosque in Athens, the rhetorical tropes the parties used during the relevant discussions, how the parties capitalized on current and old fears about Islam, the implications of this discourse on state policies toward Islam, and possible changes in this discourse over time. The analysis showed that parts of the political spectrum, particularly the right and extreme right, use Islam as a key element of their discourse, fomenting panic and fear about Islam in order to obtain political power and inserting their nationalist agendas into policies on the construction of the mosque in Athens and migration.

The main finding was that while some aspects of the political discourse about Islam remain unchanged over time, some have not. The historical past related to the Ottoman occupation of Greece for more than 400 years, the ensuing military conflicts with Turkey, and the view that Turkey is the main enemy of the country are consistent elements of the political anti-Islamic discourse. The role of this historical past on the construction of Greek national identity and the Greek state still figures in arguments against Islam. It seems inevitable that any discussion of Islam cannot omit Ottoman rule and its implications in the contemporary public sphere, making Greece an exception among other Western countries (beyond the Balkans) where such a historical legacy does not exist.

The new developments influencing parliamentary discussions about Islam are the migration flows that started in the 1990s and 2000s and have increased during the last few years following the Syrian crisis, and the post-9/11 rise in Western fear of Islam that has led to increased securitization. Finally, while anti-Islamic political discourse was around before the eruption of the economic crisis in 2010, it was fueled by the crisis in many respects. For example, opponents of the Athens mosque said the government had no money to confront the high unemployment and poverty rates but was willing to spend liberally on the mosque and the integration of migrants.

As a consequence, the period under analysis, 2000–2015, shows variations in political debates about Muslims and their place in Greek society. When the first bill about the Athens mosque came up for discussion and vote in parliament in 2000, there was unanimous agreement on the need for a proper mosque in the city in order to respond to international concerns, especially in light of the upcoming 2004 Olympic Games. However, in due course and after the fragmentation of the political spectrum, especially during the economic crisis, this unanimous agreement fell apart, and extreme right-wing political parties, like Golden Dawn, became the key players in the field of anti-Islamic rhetoric and practice. The article concludes that Islam and the Muslim "Other" are still playing a crucial role in the Greek public sphere.

Finally, this anti-Islamic political discourse has practical ramifications for Muslim communities in Greece from the moment it influences policy formation: they still enjoy less freedom to practice their religion than those of other faiths, clearly reflected in the lack of a proper place to worship and a cemetery to bury their dead, while they are considered a threat to national identity and to Greek society in general.

Notes

1. For more information see the UNHCR database http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php.
2. It should be noted that not all Muslims want an official mosque in Athens, since it raises issues such as who would control it, the background of the imam, the co-existence of Shiites and Sunnis, etc.
3. See www.hellenicparliament.gr.
4. According to the third article of the Greek constitution, the dominant religion in Greece is the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ. There have been huge debates over what this means, but the prevailing interpretation is that the Orthodox Church of Greece is the official church. The

law on relations between the state and the church gives the Orthodox Church a privileged role in public issues.
5. After the fall of Communism, most Balkan states witnessed a wholesale revival of Islam (Elbasani and Roy 2015a), at the intersection of grand narratives of national belonging, external agendas, and believers' own evaluation of their religious identity (Elbasani and Tošić 2017).
6. The national census does not collect data on religious affiliation. Any estimate is based on the nationalities declared in the census and on unofficial data, for example from interviews with representatives of Muslim organizations.
7. All the sessions of the Greek parliament discussions are numbered with Greek letters, but an Arabic number follows in square brackets for the non-Greek reader.
8. LAOS was founded in 2000, Golden Dawn in 1980, and Independent Greeks in 2012.
9. The Halki Theological School was closed by the Turkish government in 1971. The building is currently used for conferences. The school was founded in the nineteenth century on the grounds of the Patriarchal Monastery of the Holy Trinity that had occupied the site for more than 1000 years.

References

Alievi, Stefano. 2009. *Conflicts over Mosques in Europe*. London: Network of European Foundations.

Altheide, L. David. 2003. "Mass Media, Crime and the Discourse of Fear." *The Hedgehog Review* 5 (3): 9–25.

Anagnostou, Dia, and Ruby Gropas. 2010. "Domesticating Islam and Muslim Immigrants: Political and Church Responses to Constructing a Central Mosque in Athens." In *Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century Greece*, edited by Victor Roudometof, and Vassilios Makrides, 89–109. Surrey: Ashgate.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Antoniou, Dimitris. 2003. "Muslim Immigrants in Greece: Religious Organization and Local Responses." *Immigrants & Minorities* 22 (2–3): 155–174.

Bax, Mart. 1987. "Religious Regimes and State Formation: Towards a Research Perspective." *Anthropological Quarterly* 60 (1): 1–11.

Elbasani, Arolda. 2015. "Introduction: Nation, State, and Faith in the Post-Communist Era." In *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans. From Identity to Religiosity*, edited by Arolda Elbasani, and Olivier Roy, 1–17. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Elbasani, Arolda, and Olivier Roy, eds. 2015a. *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans. From Identity to Religiosity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Elbasani, Arolda, and Olivier Roy. 2015b. "Islam in the Post-Communist Balkans: Alternative Pathways to God." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 15 (4): 457–471.

Elbasani, Arolda, and Jelena Tošić. 2017. "Localized Islam(s) in the Balkans: Actors, Contexts and Practices." Nationalities Papers. doi: 10.1080/00905992.2017.1300792

Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ferraro, F. Kenneth. 1995. *Fear of Crime: Interpreting Victimization Risk*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Furendi, Frank. 2006. *Culture of Fear Revisited*. London: Continuum.

Grawitz, Madeleine. 2004. *Μέθοδοι των Κοινωνικών Επιστημών* [Social Sciences Methods]. Athens: Odysseas.

Hertzfeld, Michael. 1982. *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Holy Synod. 2003. "Προς τον Υπουργό Εξωτερικών σχετικά με την ανέγερση τεμένους στην Αττική" ["Letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs with regard to the issue of the construction of a mosque in Attiki"].

Howarth, David. 2000. *Discourse*. London: Open University Press.

Imam, Mehmet, and Olga Tsakiridou. 2003. *Μουσουλμάνοι και Κοινωνικός Αποκλεισμός* [Muslims and Social Exclusion]. Athens: Livanis.

Katsikas, Stefanos. 2012. "The Muslim Minority in Greek Historiography: A Distorted Story?." *European History Quarterly* 42 (3): 444–467.

Ktistakis, Yannis. 2006. *Ιερός Νόμος του Ισλάμ και Μουσουλμάνοι Έλληνες Πολίτες* [The Sacred Law of Islam and the Greek Muslim Citizens]. Athens: Sakkoulas.

Kyriazi, Nota. 2001. *Η Κοινωνιολογική Έρευνα* [Sociological Research]. Athens: Ellinika Grammata.

Makrides, Vasilios, and Lina Molokotos-Liederman. 2004. "Orthodoxy in Greece Today." *Social Compass* 51 (4): 459–470.

Osterman, J. Laura. 2017. "Negotiating Meaning through Costume and Social Media in Bulgarian Muslims' Community of Practice." Nationalities Papers.

Robin, Corey. 2004. *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sakellariou, Alexandros. 2011. "The Invisible Islamic Community of Athens and the Question of the Invisible Islamic Mosque." *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 4 (1): 71–89.

Sakellariou, Alexandros. 2012. "Greek Orthodox Church's Public Discourse: Balancing between Cultural Hegemony and Cultural Diplomacy." In *Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Imperialism*, edited by Martina Topic, and Sinisa Rodin, 203–218. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Sakellariou, Alexandros. 2015. "Anti-Islamic Public Discourse in Contemporary Greece: The Reproduction of Religious Panic." In *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity*, edited by Arolda Elbasani, and Olivier Roy, 42–61. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Thompson, Kenneth. 1998. *Moral Panics*. London: Routledge.

Triandafyllidou, Anna, and Ruby Gropas. 2009. "Constructing Difference: The Mosque Debates in Greece." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 (6): 957–975.

Triandafyllidou, Anna, and Ifigeneia Kokkali. 2010. *Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Greece*. Florence: European University Institute. Accessed February 9, 2016. http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/19781.

Triandafyllidou, Anna, and Hara Kouki. 2013. "Muslim Immigrants and the Greek Nation: The Emergence of Nationalist Intolerance." *Ethnicities* 13 (6): 709–728.

Tsitselikis, Konstantinos. 1999. "Η Θέση του Μουφτή στην Ελληνική Έννομη Τάξη" ["The Place of the Mufti in the Greek Law System"]." In *Legal Issues of Religious Diversity in Greece*, edited by Dimitris Christopoulos, 271–330. Athens: Kritiki.

Tsitselikis, Konstantinos. 2004. "Η Θρησκευτική Ελευθερία των Μεταναστών: Η Περίπτωση των Μουσουλμάνων" ["Religious Freedom of Immigrants: The Case of Muslims."]. In *Η Ελλάδα της Μετανάστευσης* [Greece of Immigration], edited by Miltos Pavlou and Dimitris Christopoulos, 267–302. Athens: Kritiki.

Tsitselikis, Konstantinos. 2012. *Old and New Islam in Greece: From Historical Minorities to Immigrant Newcomers*. Leiden: Brill.

Turner, Bryan. 1988. "Religion and State Formation: A Commentary on Recent Debates." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (3): 322–333.

Zervas, George-Theodore. 2010. "Resurrecting the Past, Constructing the Future: A Historical Investigation on the Formation of a Greek National identity in Schools." Unpublished PhD thesis. Chicago, IL: Loyola University.