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Public Intellectuals and Islamophobia in Greek Society: Entrenching the Discourses of Fear

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Abstract: The largest part of the existing literature with regard to Islamophobia in Greece focuses primarily on the policies, activities and discourse of politicians and political groups of the extreme right, Orthodox Church figures, state authorities, the media and the Internet. The purpose of this article is to cast light on an aspect which is frequently neglected in the study of Islamophobia, i.e., the role of public intellectuals, through a series of questions: Where do public intellectuals in Greece stand with regard to Islamophobia? What are the main themes in their public discourse with regard to Islam and Muslims? What is the role they play in the reproduction of Islamophobic views? Having in mind the debates over the concepts of Islamo-Fascism, Islamo-leftism, Islamophilia and Islamophobia, this article builds on the literature about the role of intellectuals in society with a special focus on their views about Islam. Analysing the discourse of three public intellectuals, the main argument is that Islamophobia in Greece is not an exclusive element of the extreme-right or the Orthodox Church. Self-proclaimed progressive or liberal intellectuals, through their public discourse, also contribute to the reproduction and entrenchment of the fear and moral panic about Islam.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia; Greece; intellectuals; public discourse; discourses of fear

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1. Introduction

The term Islamophobia dates back more than two decades and continues to give rise to heated debates in politics, the media and academia, especially, although not exclusively, in Western societies (Runnymede Trust 1997; Fekete 2009; Esposito and Kalin 2011; Morgan and Poynting 2012; Cesari 2013; Pratt and Woodlock 2016). In Greece, a predominantly Greek Orthodox society, where the Orthodox Church still holds close and privileged relations with the state, with a long history of Ottoman rule, a number of Greek-Turkish wars, a native Muslim community and a large number of Muslim immigrants and refugees, the emergence and rise of Islamophobia has come as no surprise. Similarly to the international field of Islamophobia studies, the greatest part of the existing literature focuses on the public discourse and activism of politicians and political groups, mainly of the extreme right, Orthodox Church figures, state authorities, the media and the Internet (Sakellariou 2015; Hüseyinoğlu 2015; Verousi and Allen 2021). Such an academic focus offers a vivid and accurate overview of Islamophobia in Greece, since the majority of Islamophobic cases—either hate speech or violent attacks—are indeed coming from and are related to the above-mentioned spheres.

Despite the above, paying closer attention to the dominant discourses about Islam and Muslims in the Greek public sphere, someone could observe that Islamophobia is not an exclusive characteristic found among the extreme right, some Orthodox Church figures and journalists or alleged specialists on Islam and Turkey on the Internet and beyond. There are also a number of self-proclaimed progressive or liberal intellectuals who through a popularised but also sophisticated, ironic and elaborated discourse reproduce and entrench fear and moral panic about Islam. At the same time, what needs to be taken into consideration in the approach concerning the role of intellectuals is that during the last few years, especially after the rise of the so-called Islamic state, many debates were raised

over the concepts of Islamo-Fascism, Islamo-leftism and Islamophilia. In the building process of these concepts, public intellectuals have played a crucial role (Hitchens 2007; Lévy 2009; Bruckner 2010; Julliard 2016). That said, it is important to thoroughly study public intellectuals' discourse and to cast light on their views about Islam, Muslims and Islamophobia. These public intellectuals' discourses should be considered as important as those reproduced by extreme right wingers or religious figures and academic attention should be paid in order to understand their content and place in the broader field. In order to undertake such an endeavour, a number of preliminary questions need to be put under scrutiny. For example, where do public intellectuals in Greece stand with regard to Islamophobia in general and Islamophobia in Greece in particular? Which are the main themes in their public discourse with regard to Islam and Muslims? Do they reproduce Islamophobic views and, if so, how do they frame them? Do public intellectuals make use and reproduce concepts such as Islamophilia, Islamo-Fascism and Islamo-leftism similarly to their Western counterparts? Consequently, the purpose of this article is twofold: on the one hand, to analyse the content of Greek public intellectuals' discourse with regard to Islam and, on the other hand, to examine any conceptual relations with the developments in other Western societies.

2. The Context of Islamophobia in Greek Society

Before discussing the context of Islamophobia, a brief note about Muslim communities in Greece is essential. On the one hand, there is the Muslim minority of Thrace, located in the northeastern part of the country, which consists of approximately 120,000 Muslims inhabiting the region together with a Greek Christian majority (Tsitselikis 2004; Katsikas 2012). Thrace's Muslim community, along with the Greeks of Constantinople in Turkey, are protected by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne which exempted them from the mandatory population exchanges between Greece and Turkey. Signed in the aftermath of Greece's defeat in Asia Minor (1922), the Treaty included a section on the 'Protection of Minorities', which contained a series of provisions to guarantee the rights of the minority populations in both countries. This group constitutes what has been described as 'old Islam', which is different from the recent waves of Muslim immigrants who are considered the 'new Islam' (Tsitselikis 2012).

The second group is composed of Muslim immigrants, who, far from being a unified group, belong to different nationalities. Although other national and religious communities already existed in Greek society, their number was negligible until 1991, when thousands of immigrants started arriving in Greece following the collapse of communism in Albania. Since then, Greek society has seen substantial increases in Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh, Iraq, Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria, Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere (Antonou 2003; Triandafyllidou and Kokkali 2010; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2013). In the summer of 2015, thousands of refugees and immigrants arrived and gathered for weeks in a number of regions of Greece, mainly the Aegean islands and along the borders with Balkan states, waiting to be transferred to other European countries. Since then, a large number of them did achieve their goal, but still thousands of them are staying in Greece either in immigration camps or in apartments and houses, mostly in big cities but in some rural areas or islands as well. According to some surveys (Pew Research Centre 2017), Muslims in Greece number around 600,000, while unofficial estimations bring this number to around 1 million, although official data are not available because religious affiliation is not recorded in national censuses.

The large number of Muslims and the need to protect their rights brought to the fore a series of issues, e.g., the construction of an official mosque in Athens (Sakellariou 2011; Verousi and Allen 2021), and created heated debates in the public sphere, especially in politics, the media and the digital space. As has been argued elsewhere (Sakellariou 2015; Sakellariou 2017; Hüseyinoğlu and Sakellariou 2020), those who reproduce Islamophobia in Greek society are predominantly coming from the fields of politics, the Orthodox Church, the media and the Internet. During the last 10 years, Muslims have been one of the main

groups scapegoated and targeted as a ‘threatening other’. Based on previous research and analysis (Sakellariou 2019, pp. 206–7) Islamophobia in Greece is not as serious as in other European countries, especially when it comes to violent attacks against Muslims and Islamic places. There are only a small number of openly Islamophobic attacks against Muslims recorded on an annual basis, although the number of assaults against immigrants and refugees, most of whom are Muslims, is still significant (Hüseynoğlu and Sakellariou 2020). On the discourse level, however, Islamophobia is more evident. Previous analysis (Sakellariou 2017) showed that parts of the political spectrum, particularly of the right and the extreme right, use Islam as a key element in their discourse, and they create a kind of panic and fear about Islam in order to obtain political gains and power introducing their xenophobic and nationalist agendas in the relevant policies, for example, about the construction of the mosque in Athens and immigration. When it comes to the Orthodox Church some of its Metropolitans have been outspoken against Islam, considering it a major threat for the West in general and for Greece in particular, arguing that Muslims in the future will contribute to the alteration or elimination of the Orthodox religion and culture (Sakellariou 2015, pp. 49–54).

Based on current observations, Islamophobia in Greece follows the Western pattern in terms of who are the main agents and what are the main arguments against Islam, namely, the threat of terrorism, the violent character of Islam, the forthcoming clash of civilizations and the inferiority of Islam as a religion compared to Orthodox Christianity. The main difference is that, in the case of Greece, Turkey as a neighbouring country plays a key role in the Islamophobic debates, either as a path for immigrants and refugees or as an Islamic country per se threatening the very existence of the Greek nation. In addition, Islamophobia has serious implications on Muslims’ human rights since the ‘fear of Islam’ has been used in order to put obstacles for the construction of the mosque in Athens, which opened only at the end of 2020, although the legislation was approved by the Greek Parliament in 2006; to the establishment of a Muslim cemetery in Athens, which still does not exist; and to immigration policies. Another interesting parameter, as comes from existing opinion polls from 2010 onwards, is that Greek society has little knowledge of what Islam is (Public Issue Survey 2010) and expresses negative views about Muslims and the construction of the mosque in Athens (Dianeosis 2016a, 2016b; Lipka 2017). It should be added, though, that despite the fact that Islamophobia does exist in Greek society, it is not the case that all politicians and political parties express and support anti-Islamic views, nor that the Orthodox Church as a whole stands against Islam and Muslims. There are also large parts of the society which have expressed their support and solidarity to Muslims and have tried to assist them in protecting their rights.

3. Public Intellectuals and Islamophobia

The role of intellectuals in human societies, especially during the 20th century has been extensively discussed and analysed in Western academia. Alvin Gouldner (1979) wrote about the future of intellectuals and the construction of a new class, Wright Mills (1963, pp. 292–304) wrote about the development of intellectuals in American society and the difficulty of being independent, while other scholars have stressed the decline and extinction of intellectuals (Jacoby 1987; Posner 2001), although not all seem to agree over such an argument (Etzioni and Bowditch 2006). The first who wrote about intellectuals, though, was the Marxist political philosopher, Antonio Gramsci, whose main argument was that “all men are intellectuals, but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (Gramsci 1972, p. 58). Based on this argument, Gramsci proceeded in his analysis, dividing intellectuals into two main groups in the transformation process of Western societies from feudal to industrial, i.e., traditional and organic intellectuals.

With regard to intellectuals and public intellectuals, a crucial question is raised: Is there a difference between them? It is not the place here to critically expand and analyse the relative discussions, but at a very first level, a public intellectual could be defined as someone who addresses a broader public, meaning that she/he could be a journalist, an

author or a university professor but not every journalist and author is a public intellectual nor are all university professors. According to [Etzioni and Bowditch \(2006, p. 1\)](#), it is mostly agreed that public intellectuals opine on a wide array of issues, are generalists rather than specialists, concern themselves with matters of interest to the public at large and do not keep their views to themselves.

There is another characteristic which is usually attributed to public intellectuals, i.e., that they are socially critical and they tend to stand by the outsiders, the marginalised and the oppressed. According to [Said \(1999, p. 32\)](#), the intellectual is somehow obliged to ask inconvenient questions publicly, to stand against any orthodoxy and dogmatism and at the same time she/he should represent people and topics that are basically overlooked or confronted as if they do not exist. Taking the above into consideration, in the case of the public intellectuals under scrutiny, it could be argued that they certainly do not comply with the Saidian characteristic. It seems that their role is much closer to what Shils has argued about intellectuals, i.e., that they will be either against the dominant social rules or they will—in balance with them—exist in order to secure the order and cohesion of public life ([Shils 1958](#), in [Said 1999](#), p. 55). From this point of view, public intellectuals are not only those who criticize the political and economic system or those who express their solidarity with the scapegoated and any repressed minorities.

[Said \(1999, pp. 50–51\)](#), however, has admitted that there are a number of intellectuals who disparagingly and irresponsibly talk about Islam and Muslims, without knowing what Islam is, meaning that there are intellectuals who do not stand in solidarity with the scapegoated and the oppressed. More recently, some scholars have examined the role of intellectuals in the reproduction of Islamophobia in Italy ([Cousin and Vitale 2012](#), pp. 47–65) and the United States ([Wajahat et al. 2011](#); [Lean 2017](#)). Enzo [Traverso \(2014, pp. 100–1\)](#) on his part has argued that the rise of the neo-conservatives brought the rise of neo-conservative public intellectuals who play a crucial role in the reproduction of Islamophobia and xenophobia. They denounce anti-racism as an expression of a ‘unified thinking’ and they propagate the myth of decay of modern multicultural societies which have lost their founding values and have cut off their roots. However, as it has been exceptionally argued, this is not a ‘privilege’ of the extreme right, and liberals have increasingly found themselves on the same side of the aisle as the right-wingers that they see themselves opposing in other instances ([Lean 2017](#), pp. 163–78).

One last point that needs to be addressed is the role of public intellectuals in the construction and/or reproduction of a number of novel concepts such as Islamo-Fascism and Islamo-leftism ([Kanji 2021](#); [Byrnes 2021](#); [Saad 2021](#)). In a study about Islamophobia in French society, [Geisser \(2010\)](#) has argued that French society is inhabited by some ‘Islamophobic trends’ that are found across almost every social group (popular, middle classes and elites, i.e., intellectuals, writers, journalists, political leaders). From this perspective, French Islamophobia can probably be characterised by its intellectual and elitist dimension. An example mentioned is the direct or indirect fallout of the widely publicised debates with regard to the prohibition of the Islamic veil within public schools in France, which played a significant role in ‘facilitating’ a latent Islamophobia. Journalists, columnists, philosophers and security experts are considered the main vectors of this latent Islamophobia, which takes advantage of the right to criticise religions and the freedom of conscience in order to draw stigmatising representations of Islam and Muslims. Having the above in mind, it will be interesting to examine the connections between Greek intellectuals and those in France or elsewhere in terms of citing their work and arguments in their own effort to reproduce anti-Islamic views, questioning Islamophobia and using terms such as Islamo-leftism and Islamo-Fascism.

4. The Material and the Methodology

The material of the analysis consists of the work (books, opinion pieces and interviews) of one female and two male public intellectuals. The first one is Soti Triantafyllou,¹ a 64-year-old award-winning writer, translator and columnist. Triantafyllou has a back-

ground in a variety of scientific fields such as pharmaceuticals and French literature in Athens and American history and culture in the United States of America, where she obtained her PhD. According to her curriculum vitae, she also conducted post-doctoral research on the philosophy of mathematics and on Russian history. Triantafyllou, however, has become well-known not because of her research and academic work but primarily through her literary talent. She is the author of more than 35 novels, more than 15 essays, she has participated in a large number of edited volumes and she has translated more than 100 books. Finally, Triantafyllou is a regular columnist of *Athens Voice*, a politically and economically liberal free press, and has also been writing texts in other newspapers. Triantafyllou could be described as progressive, open-minded, politically and economically liberal, and as a critic of all religions but mainly of monotheisms. She has written extensively about Islam and its place in Western societies and Greece in particular, the construction of mosques in European cities, multiculturalism and immigration. For the current analysis, 21 opinion pieces and interviews from 2010 until 2021 were selected as well as 1 of her books with the title *Multiculturalism, Pluralism, Integration, Assimilation* (Triantafyllou 2015d).

The second figure is Andreas Andrianopoulos,² a 75-year-old retired politician. He studied political science in Athens, Norway and the UK, as well as at Harvard University. Andrianopoulos served as an MP, a deputy Minister and Minister from 1976 until 1992 with the right-wing New Democracy party. He left the party in 1994 because he wanted New Democracy to become a pure neo-liberal party, contrary to the intentions of the then party leadership. He has served as a guest scholar and research and policy fellow in international academic institutes and has taught at the American College of Greece. Andrianopoulos has authored more than 25 books, mostly essays but some novels as well, and he has participated in a series of edited volumes. He is considered to be one of the most typical representatives of neo-liberalism in Greece and he writes extensively in a number of (neo-)liberal media (*Ta Nea, Liberal.gr, In.gr*). However, based on his writings, he could not be perceived as a political liberal and seems to better belong to the conservative milieu. Similar to Triantafyllou, his main interests, apart from financial issues, include Islam in Greece, the West and the Middle East, multiculturalism and immigration. The material under analysis consists of 12 articles published between 2018 and 2021 and 4 of his books which are focused on Islam: (1) *Islamic fanaticism and the dangers for Greece* (Andrianopoulos 1989), (2) *In the heart of Islam: From the steppes of Central Asia to Afghanistan* (Andrianopoulos 1998), (3) *The rage of Islam and the fanatics of Jihad* (Andrianopoulos 2015) and (4) *Islam of our future* (Andrianopoulos 2018b).

The last public intellectual is Takis Theodoropoulos,³ a 67-year-old writer, translator and columnist in the mainstream right-wing newspaper *Kathimerini*, who, in Paris, studied literature, theatre and anthropology of the Greek–Roman world. He is an award-winning writer and has written more than 30 books, mostly novels and some essays, and has translated another 6 books. In terms of political ideology, Theodoropoulos is usually placed at the centre of the political spectrum, although in terms of economy he could be considered a neo-liberal. However, Theodoropoulos could hardly be considered to be a political liberal. On the contrary, in my opinion, he should be more appropriately considered a conservative. Among the themes he has publicly written about are those of multiculturalism, immigration, Islam and other subjects related to the presence of Islam in Western societies. In this study, 33 of his articles, written between 2014 and 2021 in *Kathimerini*, have been collected and analysed.

A reasonable question is if Triantafyllou, Andrianopoulos and Theodoropoulos can be considered public intellectuals. According to the preliminary definition mentioned in the previous section, all three of them fit the main criterion of public intellectuals, i.e., they opine on a wide array of issues, are generalists rather than specialists, concern themselves with matters of interest to the public at large and do not keep their views to themselves. They present their views and ideas through opinion pieces and books, which are written in a non-academic style, while they also openly express their opinions through interviews in mainstream media. While in this article the focus is on their views about Islam and

Muslims, if one systematically follows them, he/she observes that there is a broader range of topics about which they write, e.g., politics and political ideologies, financial issues, social issues, international affairs, foreign policy and others. Furthermore, all of them are not academics in the strict meaning of the word, i.e., they are not affiliated with a university. Triantafyllou in the past held some academic positions and Andrianopoulos still serves as a director of an institution at a private college in Greece, but none of them, strictly speaking, belong in the category of university professors or academics.

The selection of Triantafyllou, Andrianopoulos and Theodoropoulos was made for a number of reasons. First of all, they are those liberal public intellectuals who publicise their critical views about Islam, Muslims and immigration on a long-term and systematic basis, either through articles or books. Secondly, Triantafyllou and Theodoropoulos are acknowledged and award-winning novelists with a large readership, since many of their books have become best-sellers. Andrianopoulos, on his part is also a very well-known political figure with a long history in the Greek political sphere. Thirdly, all three of them write in mainstream media with many online and offline readers. For example, although there is no systematic data, *I Kathimerini* and *Ta Nea* are two of the most historic and well-known newspapers in Greece. According to their Facebook pages, more than 281,000 and 160,000 people like them, respectively, while *Athens Voice*, where Triantafyllou primarily writes, has over 626,000 likes. Finally, mostly Andrianopoulos but Theodoropoulos as well are also active in the social media. Theodoropoulos has almost 5000 Facebook followers, while Andrianopoulos around 17,000 followers on Twitter and 5500 followers in a group created by some of his fans on Facebook.

The total number of the downloaded material, which consists in its vast majority of articles and opinion pieces and a very small number of interviews, was 170 pages, excluding the books under examination. The method applied to analyse the material was 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 effort to study and understand society and social relationships. That is why it was selected for this analysis. The main thematic categories are the following: (1) The religion of Islam: Politics and violence; (2) Multiculturalism and clash of civilizations: The re-invention of Huntington; and (3) Debating the concepts: Islamophobia, Islamo-Fascism and Islamo-leftism.

5. Debating the Concepts: Islamophobia, Islamo-Fascism, Islamo-Leftism

The first theme that comes out of the analysis is that of concepts. Islamophobia, first and foremost, is considered a term that should be used in brackets (Andrianopoulos 2021), meaning that it is totally rejected, as other studies about the role of intellectuals have shown (Lean 2017, pp. 173, 177). Islamophobia is commonly perceived as unfounded (Triantafyllou 2016b), as an invention (Theodoropoulos 2017e) “of some elites who at the bottom line are against critical thinking”. This is because

“It is not Islamophobia when one argues that Islam nowadays has a concrete political agenda and that the intention of various Islamic centres is to penetrate into Europe having as their main long term goal the strengthening and domination of the Muslim religion” (Andrianopoulos 2021).

It is also argued that the supporters of the term call every reaction to these plans Islamophobia (Andrianopoulos 2020d). That means that “while in Europe a kind of cleansing [against Western values] is taking place, the Europeans are worried not to stigmatise Muslims and Islamophobia becomes the major problem” (Triantafyllou 2020c). According to the main line of argument:

“All Europeans with an opportunity to speak in public in order to become likable underline that today the worse slip is Islamophobia. No, the worse slip is toleration, not to say the flattery of obscurantism. But it is not [just] a slip, it is a

crime, the crime of the conformist who follows the fascists because he wants [to keep] his privacy” (Triantafyllou 2017).

Furthermore, they place themselves together with an enlightened minority of intellectuals, the only ones who have understood the exact nature of Islam (Triantafyllou 2015c)—while at the same time, they present themselves as victims because they are accused of Islamophobia, a concept that nowadays “has replaced the good old accusation of anti-communism” (Theodoropoulos 2017e). This takes place through “a powerful pro-Muslim lobby”, which has “developed and exercises [a kind of] tyranny” in the West. Against this lobby stands a number of contemporary thinkers who repeat that “Islam is a fascist programme that instrumentalises a totalitarian religion” (Triantafyllou 2016b). At the same time, it is argued that if someone expresses himself or herself against Islam, this could lead to social exclusion and put in danger his or her life (Triantafyllou 2017). At the bottom line, Islamophobia, even if it is not accepted as a term, is considered a “natural and self-evident reflex action” (Triantafyllou 2015b):

“The same is now being attempted with Islamophobia. You dare not say that you feel that the aggression of Islam threatens the Western way of life and its values. You must first make it clear that Muslims are a blessing for European society. [. . .] Of course you also do not dare to wonder what the imams preach every Friday in the 100 illegal mosques that operate in Athens. [. . .] You are not a racist or Islamophobic when you contend that 21st century Islam is aggressive [. . .]” (Theodoropoulos 2020f).

Apart from Islamophobia, which is highly criticised, another concept very regularly used—positively this time—is that of Islamo-Fascism. On the one hand it is used to describe some countries in the Middle East, without naming them, as Islamo-Fascist (Andrianopoulos 2019a). On the other hand, it is used to imply that a specific part of Islam is Islamo-Fascist and that ‘moderate’ Muslims should react against it:

“Islamofascism is not a new phenomenon. [. . .] What we suffer today by the Islamists [. . .] is not caused by West’s ‘interventions’ in Eastern countries, but on the warlike and envious nature of Islam. My fellow citizens, Islam is not a religion as any other, it is a political programme, a barbaric ideology. I expect then, that all the good people of the East will go out in the streets in order to support Western democracy that protects and feeds them. If they don’t or if they do it half-heartedly it will be verified that they implicitly or ambiguously support Islamofascism” (Triantafyllou 2015b).

As mentioned already in the first section of the analysis about Islam, “today Europe not only underestimates Islamofascism, but also considers it as ‘reasonable’” (Triantafyllou 2020c). However, it is not always clear if Islamofascism is an exception within the religion of Islam or if Islam leads directly to Islamofascism and identifies with it.

The last concept which has created heated debates is that of Islamo-leftism. Islamo-leftism is a concept regularly used by the authors after being introduced in France and is being positively received (Theodoropoulos 2021c):

“What also creates a serious problem in European societies is the stance of the so called ‘progressive’ intelligentsia which insists on neglecting and downgrading the problem of the empowerment of Islamism. A wired ‘sacrilege alliance’ of Islamism and left intelligentsia provokes debates and obscures the [broader] image. The extreme-right of Allah goes hand in hand with the Left” (Andrianopoulos 2020b).

As a consequence, “Islam and Islamo-leftism destroy us little by little” (Triantafyllou 2020a), because “the Left which is stuck in Marxist analysis, uses economy as the main analytical tool and it doesn’t understand the content of life of the 21st century” (Triantafyllou 2017). The above resembles the term ‘regressive left’ coined by Maajid Nawaz (Lean 2017, p. 177) in order to describe progressives who do not understand the dangers coming from Islam and do not use modern analytical tools in their sociological and political approaches.

Politicians of the Left are included in this category of Islamo-leftists, for example, Segolene Royal, the former candidate for the French presidency, because she criticised the disrespect of the victim against Islam in the recent Mila affair⁴ in France (Theodoropoulos 2021a). This category of Islamo-leftism includes, obviously, the Greek Left:

“I am referring to the Muslim populations which poured into Greek society from Asia and Africa. They found us unprepared and incapable of receiving them. And after that an effort started on the part of the Left to convince Greek society that the rape [i.e., the arrival of immigrants] is an opportunity and this resulted in the colonisation of the centre of Athens” (Theodoropoulos 2021c).

It is also argued that there is indeed a problem in the universities, both in France and in Greece: “The university as an institution not only does not produce thinking, but also functions as a lever of modern obscurantism” (Theodoropoulos 2021d), implying that Islamo-leftism grows in academia, and this is a development that needs to be addressed.

The above make them openly stand against political correctness (Theodoropoulos 2021c), arguing that “many people lose their courage in the face of the pro-Muslim social networks and the ‘anti-racist’ observatories which promote the interests of political Islam” (Triantafyllou 2017). At the same time Islamophilia is another term less frequently used but still present in their public discourse and sometimes related again to the Left: “Islamophilia [is] the upper stage of Leninism” (Theodoropoulos 2020b), and also “antiracism and Islamophilia are a profession. With unemployment so high, no job is to feel shame for” (Theodoropoulos 2021b). However, the more interesting part is that they consider those who call Islamophiles or Islamo-leftists as traitors and compare them to those who collaborated with the Germans during WWII, again using the rhetoric and arguments from their French counterparts, such as Pascal Bruckner, who was accused of racist hate speech due to a public statement after the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack in 2015. Theodoropoulos (2017b) quotes and agrees with this statement:

“‘It is not enough to arrest the killers [of the cartoonists]. We must also open the file of their collaborators’. In fact, he [Bruckner] used the word ‘collabos’, a word that refers to the dosilogues [traitors] of the German occupation. He meant a group of politicians, intellectuals and journalists who call Islamophobia and racism any attempt of critical thinking towards aggressive political Islam and are concerned about the multicultural composition of European society”.

Similarly, Triantafyllou (2016b) argues that “the mass of traitors [dosilogues] is composed of individuals and groups who traditionally describe their enemies as traitors, never themselves”, and they do not see the crimes of the Islamists but only criticise people by stigmatising them as Islamophobes. Not only that but “the mass of the traitors encourages the challenges against modernity and supports obscurantism”.

The main conclusions drawn from this category are that, on the one hand, all three of them, but mostly Theodoropoulos and Triantafyllou who have closer relations to the French society and intellectuals, reproduce the arguments and concepts introduced in the French public sphere. On the other hand, while it is correct when they argue that all criticism against Islam is not Islamophobia, their public discourse proves that they very regularly identify Islam with Islamism and Islamo-Fascism. Furthermore, the following two sections on their views about Islam and the clash of civilizations will clearly show that their public discourse is not just criticism about Islamism or political Islam and extremism but Islamophobic discourse.

6. The Religion of Islam: Politics and Violence

A common theme of discussion in the discourse of all three is the religion of Islam. Apart from Andrianopoulos, who claims to have studied Islam and Islamic thinkers, the other two have no in-depth, historical, theological, ethnographic or other knowledge of Islam. Andrianopoulos’s approach is mainly orientated towards international relations and security studies. He seems to have studied the history of Islam and Islamic thinkers

(Andrianopoulos 1989, 1998), but he does not hold any academic credentials in Islamic studies. Triantafyllou, on the other hand, in an interview (Triantafyllou 2016a) about her book *Multiculturalism, Pluralism, Integration, Assimilation* arrogantly argues that “politicians should listen to the specialists. We all are ignorant [from one point of view], however, a few people have some knowledge in some fields”, implying herself. In addition, in her book (Triantafyllou 2015d, p. 41), she argues that she uses some examples from the UK in the discussion about pluralism and multiculturalism, but their structure could be applied in every European society, which is scientifically quite problematic, since she makes unsubstantiated generalisations. Apart from that, she also argues that she chooses to use the terms *Islam* and *Islamism* in order to describe the religious and political movement and not the religion, for which she prefers the term *Muslimism* (Triantafyllou 2015d, p. 43), a term that all prominent scholars and Muslims have rejected. Finally, although Theodoropoulos has not claimed any in-depth knowledge of Islam and the Islamic world, following criticism received from one of his readers, he ironically states that perhaps when it comes to serious issues, “we need to listen to sociologists as one reader advised me, who obviously knows about sociologies (sic) and stuff” (Theodoropoulos 2014). From the above, it could be concluded that despite the fact that none of them can be considered a specialist in Islam in general or in Islamic theology and Islamic history in particular, they express their—dominantly negative—views about the ‘true’ character and intentions of Islam and Muslims. Overall, the definition of the public intellectual as someone who can opine on a variety of topics, in some cases, even without having any knowledge about them, seems to fit in this case.

With regard to Islam, in most of their texts, all of them either directly discuss or imply that Islam is a warlike and violent religion responsible not only for the violence exercised via terrorist attacks perpetrated in Western societies but also for the historical conflicts between Christians and Muslims, such as the Crusades, which were caused because of Islam’s aggressiveness (Andrianopoulos 2018b, 2020e). Furthermore, it is added that nowadays this aggressiveness is cultivated in the mosques functioning in many European cities (Triantafyllou 2017). However, it is interesting that in a very small number of texts, an effort is made to differentiate the fanatics from the rest of the Muslim world. Andrianopoulos, for example, in a book published in 2015, while he argues that “the history of Islam is an evolutionary trajectory of violence and blood rivers”, he adds that “Islam is not a violent religion which propagates hardness and conflict” and that in many cases extremists took the control and started propagating violence and intolerance against religious and national others (Andrianopoulos 2015, p. 14). He further claimed that Muhammad never actually declared a perpetual war against the ‘infidels’ and presented in detail a number of groups within Islam, in Europe and elsewhere, which, although sometimes react when Islamic values are insulted, are more tolerant (Andrianopoulos 2015, pp. 27–30). Triantafyllou, on her part, in one of her articles (Triantafyllou 2014a) has argued that “all Muslims are not the same”, avoiding in this way grouping them all together as a mass, but in her analysis, she refers mostly to the secular or cultural Muslims. That is perhaps why in a later opinion piece she argued that the “large masses of Muslims are not actively ‘extremists’, but they are religious fanatics, prejudiced, completely cut off—by their initiative and responsibility—from the secular social body [of the West]” (Triantafyllou 2020a). Finally, Theodoropoulos (2017g) has also argued that “every Muslim is not an Islamist, but Islam recruits among Muslim communities”.

Having in mind the total number of articles and books that were used in the current analysis, it could be argued without proviso that the above examples are a minor exception to the rule of presenting the religion of Islam as aggressive and violent. Furthermore, an explanation for these exceptions could be that 2015 is a turning point because, on the one hand, the so-called Islamic State started to attack European countries and, on the other hand, large numbers of immigrants and refugees arrived in Greek society. From that time onwards, there is hardly a public opinion piece that would not stigmatise Islam and Muslims as inherently violent and brutal: “Islam is not a religion of peace. It expanded

with violence and invokes violence in order to prevail” (Andrianopoulos 2019a) [. . .], and of course, “Islam is neither tolerant nor moderate [. . .] crimes of child prostitution, rape and open violence are not punished [in Europe] in order not to offend supposed cultural sensitivities (Andrianopoulos 2018a). Triantafyllou (2015b) has also supported the lack of moderate Muslims:

“But I insist. As Marco Polo said, ‘a fanatic Muslim is one that cuts off your head, while a moderate is one who holds you in order to have your head cut off’ (sic). [. . .] Nowadays moderate Muslims are only the secular ones, i.e., those who have left their Islamic upbringing, like many Christians in the West have done”.

In support of these arguments, the authors regularly use statements such as the one of the President of Turkey, that “there is no moderate and extreme Islam, there is only one Islam”, or works of Western thinkers and novelists, such as Peter Townsend, Michel Houellebecq and Boualem Sansal (Triantafyllou 2016b; Theodoropoulos 2017c, 2017d, 2020d, 2020e; Andrianopoulos 2018a),⁵ who, in their opinion, offer an objective overview about Islam and its place in Western societies. Turkey and its President play a central role in these public discourses, arguing that Turkey is a key-player that culminates Islamic aggressiveness against the Christian world; for example, in the light of turning Hagia Sophia in Constantinople into a mosque (Andrianopoulos 2020f). In other instances, it has been argued that the Turkish President is interested in building the tallest minarets in Europe, which is a proof of Islam’s expansionism (Triantafyllou 2020c) and that he has as his main goal to colonise Europe through immigrants (Triantafyllou 2020a). In this last case, Triantafyllou argues that the demographic replacement of the West is not a conspiracy theory of the extreme right but a fact because the Turkish president has expressed this publicly, meaning that this should be taken as indisputable evidence.

Another argument for the absence of moderate Islam according to these narratives is that the so-called religious indifferent or moderate Muslims tend to hide when a terrorist attack takes place and they do not condemn it (Andrianopoulos 2020c), while there are no massive mobilisations on the part of Muslims against Islamist atrocities (Andrianopoulos 2019b; Triantafyllou 2016b). This argument is totally unfounded since a large number of Muslims, organised or not, have either demonstrated against terrorism with slogans such as ‘not in my name’ or have openly condemned violent acts that resulted in the death of innocent people. As a consequence, although it is accepted that many Muslims are frightened by terrorist attacks (Theodoropoulos 2020c), there is an open demand for peaceful massive reactions, either in Europe or in the Arab world, from these Muslims, who feel disgust about the atrocities of their co-religionists instead of leaving their imams to represent them in the public sphere (Theodoropoulos 2015a).

One last point that comes out of the analysis is that Islam is also considered a political system, “not as a dress or dietary choice or something exotic; it is a religion which deeply affects the political behaviour of people preventing them from participating in civil society” (Triantafyllou 2014a). This, however, overlooks current works in the field of Islamic studies which show that Muslims, especially young ones, do participate in civil society in a variety of ways (Lewis and Hamid 2018; Abbas and Hamid 2019). In the same line of argument, it is added that “the word Islam which means ‘submission’ specifies a way of life” (Theodoropoulos 2017c), and Islamic culture, even if there is no fanaticism, holds a theocratic perception of the world and does not acknowledge a separation between the state and the Church and politics and religion (Triantafyllou 2011b). The careful reader would observe at this point that Triantafyllou uses the scheme ‘State and Church’, although there is no such an institutional expression as a Church in the Islamic world, which adds to the argument about the authors’ lack of knowledge about Islam. According to Theodoropoulos (2016c), “Islam, fanatic or less fanatic does not tolerate any other religion and civilization which does not accept its principles” (Theodoropoulos 2016c). The Qur’an, however, tolerates other religions, basically the other two monotheisms, Judaism and Christianity, and accepts Abraham and Jesus Christ, for example, as sacred figures and prophets. In this case as well, the author does not offer an accurate analysis of Islam and Islamic culture.

Furthermore, even the contribution of Islam and Arabs in the global civilization is questioned or directly not accepted based on some recent publications ([Fernández-Morera 2016](#)), according to which the Muslim presence in Andalusia created more problems compared to any positive impact and did not avoid violence against minorities and women ([Andrianopoulos 2020g](#)), a position that was recently refuted ([Pearce 2020](#)).

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this category is that according to all three public intellectuals, Islam as a religion stands far away from the Western civilization and values because of its dogmas and teachings found in the Qur'an, the oral tradition (Hadith) and in everyday practice. Islam, especially in the post-2015 era, is perceived as expansionist, aggressive, violent and intolerant, and these are elements which are considered to be Islam's core principles. It then reasonably follows the discussion over multiculturalism and the clash of civilizations.

7. Multiculturalism and Clash of Civilizations: The Re-Invention of Huntington

Multiculturalism either as a theoretical concept or as a policy has been openly denounced by all three of the public intellectuals, as has been observed in other case studies ([Cousin and Vitale 2012](#), p. 50). Multiculturalism, of course, is directly related to immigration and that means that both topics are being used together in their public discourse. According to [Andrianopoulos \(2020h\)](#):

“[European] governments tried to hide their failure in the effort to control immigration towards their countries. They allowed their countries to become overflowed by waves of foreigners coming from different cultures, in the name of a weird construction under the name of ‘multiculturalism’”.

The central argument is that multiculturalism made it almost impossible for Westerners to admit that “the problem [with Islam] is deeply rooted in the religion of a specific minority which at the same time puts demographic pressure” upon European societies ([Triantafyllou 2015c](#)). Multiculturalism is considered to be the complete opposite of social cohesion; it puts emphasis on minority rights against those of the majority, it serves the interest of foreign countries (e.g., Turkey, Saudi Arabia), it constitutes a threat to civilization, identity and values and it is based on a flattened social anthropology of an “equality of all cultures” and so-called political correctness ([Triantafyllou 2014b](#)). According to [Theodoropoulos \(2016d\)](#) this “cultural relativism”, also present in other case studies on the role of intellectuals and Islamophobia ([Cousin and Vitale 2012](#), p. 57), has become the “religious belief of Western elites” and allows the killing of infants, torture, female repression, hatred against homosexuals, gangs and the death penalty. It is additionally argued that multiculturalism contributes to the preservation and reproduction of high rates of inequality and criminal activity, which are derived from the cultural characteristics of the minorities themselves ([Triantafyllou 2014b](#)), implying that Muslims are responsible for their social status and the problems they face. Similarly, when it comes to the question of why second and third generation immigrants are radicalised, it is argued that the state and the host society are not responsible but immigrants themselves, who, although they had all the necessary means to integrate, failed to become part of the West ([Triantafyllou 2015a](#)). So, overall, “multiculturalism is a fiasco” ([Triantafyllou 2010](#)), it has completely failed ([Theodoropoulos 2021b](#)) and will “lead us towards a malignant society” ([Triantafyllou 2015d](#), p. 31).

Immigration, which is mostly described as illegal ([Triantafyllou 2014c](#)), is considered an invasion to which Western societies need to respond to, because immigrants

“[A]re all Muslims, while in their own countries Christians are persecuted. Why do they come to the West? The Qur'an explains this in 93 verses. [In order] to conquer the infidels from the inside. The Islamic State declared this already in 2015 and then the unstoppable flows [of immigrants] started. [. . .] The majority of those who pass the borders are young men, 20–35 years old, i.e., people ready to fight and dynamically question our legal order. Those who come from Syria were undeniably supporters of ISIS [. . .]” ([Andrianopoulos 2019c](#)).

Immigration, according to [Theodoropoulos \(2020g\)](#), threatens what George Orwell has described as common decency. This is based on an unsubstantial argument: “we no more say ‘Merry Christmas’ so that our fellow citizens, Muslims, are not offended, [instead] we say ‘happy holidays’ in order to be modest ([Theodoropoulos 2016a](#)). However, this is more related to the secularisation process, to atheists and agnostics, and less to Muslims, especially when it comes to the Greek society, not to mention that most immigrants and refugees do not speak Greek.

From another point of view, though, it is argued that “Greek society is obliged [. . .] to accept people of different cultures, a part [i.e., not many] of which we need to assimilate, meaning to educate them” ([Theodoropoulos 2017f](#)). The acceptance of only a small number of immigrants has also been expressed in a rather racist way: “we should not forget that a large number of informal cells lead to a severe cancer” ([Theodoropoulos 2016b](#)), implying that a large number of immigrants is something like a cancer for Greek society. Regardless of the number, assimilation—not integration or multiculturalism—is the key term used ([Triantafyllou 2021b](#)), while they all hold negative views about the role of NGOs ([Theodoropoulos 2020a](#)) in this process. At the same time, taking as an extreme example the Sharia Law, which is perceived as a challenge for Greek society, it is argued that living together with people of different ways of life and different cultural backgrounds is incompatible ([Theodoropoulos 2019](#)). It is further claimed that Greece is not a multicultural society and Athens not a multicultural city: “We don’t see what is in front of our eyes. We don’t want to see what we see. Greek society is an assemblage of incongruous populations and communities that literally fight to find a place in the streets” ([Theodoropoulos 2017b](#)).

Nevertheless, it is argued that other European countries, for example, the UK, are in a worse position than Greece, for the extra reason that, there, Muslims have become a considerable political power, either because they now constitute a large part of the electoral body or because they can also be elected as Mayors or MPs ([Andrianopoulos 2020b](#)). In France, according to [Triantafyllou \(2021a\)](#), everybody cringes at Islam’s caprices ([Triantafyllou 2021a](#)). These caprices have been imposed on most of the institutions, including state mechanisms, schools, the justice system and even prisons, which have now become seedbeds of jihadists ([Triantafyllou 2020b](#)). This means that “unfortunately the West keeps her eyes closed” and that at the end, “we [the Europeans] breed the snake that at the right time will bite us” ([Andrianopoulos 2020a](#)). This leads to the conclusion that if the West will not react, it is highly probable that “Europe will be transformed into Eurabia in the future” ([Andrianopoulos 2019a](#)), a concept and argument mainly expressed by the extreme-right but by public intellectuals, such as Oriana Fallaci in Italy, as well ([Cousin and Vitale 2012](#), p. 48).

They all stand against the use of dress such as the burkini, niqab or burka, because such public appearances are “a political manifesto and an expression of difference” ([Triantafyllou 2019](#)). [Triantafyllou \(2016b\)](#) is also against those who argue that the burkini, for example, is a way of clothing adding that “the uniform of an SS soldier could also be a way of clothing, a style”. She also argues that the ban of religious symbols in France was a positive decision ([Triantafyllou 2010](#)). [Triantafyllou](#) is completely against the functioning of a mosque in Athens or anywhere else, arguing that the mosques “are not just places of worship, but places of proselytism and recruiting, Qur’anic schools where catechism takes place for the holy war against the infidels” ([Triantafyllou 2014d](#)). So, “since we live in the 21st century, the mosques, and all religious places, should be transformed into museums” ([Triantafyllou 2010](#)). [Theodoropoulos \(2017h\)](#), on the other hand supports the official functioning of the mosque of Athens but argues that all the other ones should be shut down immediately.

Despite criticism ([Sen 1999](#); [Said 2001](#); [Fox 2005](#); [Shahi 2017](#); [Harari 2019](#)), Samuel Huntington’s work on the clash of civilizations seems to be well-respected among all three of them: “The West needs to understand and admit that the war that was declared against her is a cultural one” ([Theodoropoulos 2016d](#)). Furthermore, it is argued that Western civilization was the first to admit that there are civilizations outside the West and tries

to understand Islam, but he questions whether Islam actually wants to understand or to Islamise the West (Theodoropoulos 2015b), because “the Islamic State and Islam do not recognise any other civilization” (Theodoropoulos 2017a). This claims to be the difference and superiority of Western civilization from the rest, such as Islam (Theodoropoulos 2018a).

The combination of different cultural and religious backgrounds and the ‘nature’ of Islam create fertile ground for the clash of civilizations: “From the moment the newcomers will become a majority in local societies and since they are all Muslims, introducing different customs and values, this will eventually lead to serious rivalries with the local Greek-Orthodox population” (Andrianopoulos 2020a). Triantafyllou argues (Triantafyllou 2016b) that “similarly to the rise of Nazism in Europe and Stalin’s crimes that most of the people were reluctant to acknowledge, today very few people see and recognise that on a global level a war takes place within our societies”. She also adds that “today we live in an era of irresponsibility that leads us to financial crises, nuclear accidents and to this obscurantist ideology [Islam] that sharpens the clash of civilizations” (Triantafyllou 2011a), [. . .] and that “we live in a world that sinks in a new Middle Ages, somewhere between the stupidity of political correctness and the stupidity of religious fanaticism” (Theodoropoulos 2018a). As a consequence, “the clash of civilizations that Samuel Huntington had foreseen 20 years ago, now starts to show its repulsive face” (Andrianopoulos 2020d).

Needless to say, the clash of civilizations is one of the main ideological trends among extreme right wingers and religious figures when it comes to Islamophobia in Greek society, as supported elsewhere (Sakellariou 2015, pp. 49–54). The only difference is that in the case of these (neo-)liberal public intellectuals, the expression of support of this theory is theoretically and verbally better elaborated compared to the raw way of the extreme right wingers and some Orthodox Metropolitan.

8. Conclusions

So as to avoid repeating any of the comments and conclusions made in the above sections, it is now the time to briefly summarise the findings of this analysis. Bearing in mind the questions asked at the beginning, the first concluding remark is that all three intellectuals play a critical role in the Islamophobia field, reproducing Islamophobia through their opinion pieces, books and interviews. An interesting point in support of the above is that in some of their texts—while they write about internal political affairs, e.g., the Left ideology and politics in Greece—they use Islam and some Islamic notions, such as Sharia or Jihad, in order to make literary metaphors. So, in order to underline the dogmatism of the Greek Left, they use Sharia (Triantafyllou 2013); in order to discuss domestic terrorism, they compare it with Jihad (Theodoropoulos 2018b); and for the expressed Euroscepticism of some parts of the Left, they have used as a metaphor the alleged hatred of Muslims towards the West (Theodoropoulos 2016e). These examples clearly demonstrate that Islamophobia has penetrated deep into their public discourse and Islam and Muslims have become a ghost that haunts them, using it in other topics they discuss publicly.

The second concluding remark is that these self-proclaimed progressive intellectuals reproduce almost the same themes found in other analyses with regard to Islamophobia in the extreme right or among religious figures (Sakellariou 2015; Sakellariou 2019). The first two categories, the religion of Islam and multiculturalism and the clash of civilizations, are topics which dominate Islamophobic discourses of Orthodox Church figures and right-wing extremists. The last category about the concepts used is also found in other groups reproducing Islamophobia, especially with regard to multiculturalism, Islamo-Fascism and the rejection of Islamophobia. That is why, as argued elsewhere (Lean 2017, p. 163) liberals have recently latched onto the issue and aligned themselves with some of the more raucous and dangerous voices that comprise the Islamophobia industry. Furthermore, it needs to be stressed that all three public intellectuals have not produced any innovative thinking, analyses or concepts and they primarily promote in the Greek public sphere the debates which take place in other Western societies. Nevertheless, what needs to be clarified is that

while the selected public intellectuals are indeed important figures in the reproduction of Islamophobia and they play a critical role in entrenching the discourses of fear and moral panic about Islam, there are others, mainly in academia, who stand against such prejudiced views, standing by the Muslim communities in Greece and protecting their rights.

Overall, this and other analyses clearly show that Islamophobia is not only a theme or a ‘problem’ of the political right, right-wing extremists and religious groups. Progressive individuals and groups are susceptible to Islamophobia, and in some cases, they play a critical role in its reproduction. Paying academic attention and conducting research about them seems crucial in order to understand a multi-faceted phenomenon from a broader perspective and without neglecting any of its aspects.

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Notes

- ¹ For a brief biography, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soti_Triantafyllou (accessed on 10 August 2021).
- ² For a brief biography, see https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%91%CE%BD%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%AD%CE%B1%CF%82_%CE%91%CE%BD%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%BD%CF%8C%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BB%CE%BF%CF%82 (accessed on 10 August 2021).
- ³ For a brief biography, see https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%A4%CE%AC%CE%BA%CE%B7%CF%82_%CE%98%CE%B5%CE%BF%CE%B4%CF%89%CF%81%CF%8C%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BB%CE%BF%CF%82 (accessed on 10 August 2021).
- ⁴ On 18 January 2020, ‘Mila’, a lesbian 16-year-old female singer in the Isère region in Eastern France, made a live-stream with followers and talked with them about their love life and answered to one of them that she indeed wasn’t ‘particularly attracted to Arab and Black women’. Later on the stream, a man hit on her inappropriately and she rejected him. The man responded with a series of misogynistic and homophobic insults in the name of Allah, including ‘dirty lesbian’ and ‘dirty racist’. Mila later made a story on social media stating that ‘there’s nothing but hate in the Quran. Islam is shit’. The video was copied and widely shared on social media. After her video clip went viral, she received over 100,000 hate messages, including death or rape threats and edited videos of her being hurt in various ways; the haters also published the address of her School. She and her family are consequently forced to live under 24-h police protection https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mila_affair (accessed on 20 August 2021).
- ⁵ It is very interesting that while Andrianopoulos suggests the book *The German Mujahid*, he even fails to spell out the author’s surname correctly, and instead of Sansal, he mentions him as Sachel.

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