

## **THE GREEK CONCEPTION OF THE OTTOMAN ERA: ISLAMOPHOBIA AND MUSLIMS LABELED AS *THE OTHER***

By ESRA ÖZSÜER\*

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To the Greeks, the Ottoman era was a “Dark Age” one that comprised a threat to their Greek Orthodox identity. The identities of Orthodox and Hellene were integral parts in the construction of their national history. In fact, the Morea Uprising, which began in 1821, was symbolized by a priest blessing the Greek flag in Aya Lavra Church. One of the most common national myths is religious oppression of the Christian population during the Ottoman Era, namely *Turkokratia*. They identified Ottomans as Asian barbarians who did not let Greeks practice their religion freely, and who furthermore forced them to change their religion. These kinds of beliefs, which might be taken as religious propaganda, are today still highlighted both in Greek textbooks and in publications supported by the church and books and newspapers published in their affiliated institutes. The underlying truth behind all these propagandist statements is Islamophobia. The existence of Islamophobia in the Balkans, where religious nationalism is intense, has caused nations to hold to these kinds of mythical beliefs. Most of the time the stories and narratives have been used for history building.

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the effect of the anti-Islam propaganda of the church in Greece on the state and the people using Greek sources.

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The references are Greek religious textbooks and books and newspapers published by church-supporting publishing houses.

**Keywords:** Ottomans, islamophobia, Greeks in the Ottoman era, western concept of Islam

## INTRODUCTION

One of the major factors during the formation of the modern Greek identity is Islamophobia, which includes fear of Turks as well. I believe that those fears have contributed to the building of national identity in the process of nation-building in Greece. Thus, this paper will deal with the development and role of Greek Islamophobia. In the present paper, I will first discuss how Islamophobia developed initially in Europe and in what fields it made an impact. Then I will examine the development of Greek Islamophobia which was influenced by the European one as well. This will help us understand the place and role of Islamophobia in modern Greek history and politics since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As for the sources to be used in this work, I will concentrate on publications produced by publishers supported by the Greek Orthodox Church. These will include books with religious content. They are mostly and clearly works of propaganda, although their authors might not necessarily intend it. However, one may not neglect their impact on their readers.

Beginning with the 18th century Enlightenment, a series of scientific and technological advancements took place in Western and Central Europe. As a result of these advancements, along with the massive transfer of wealth from the Americas to European landowners, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century some Western European empires had successfully established colonies in regions to the East. While previous assumptions about the outright hegemony the so-called “West” enjoyed over the “East” have been increasingly challenged, it is this epicenter of knowledge that most would agree has generated the criteria concerning “how it should be” in respect to use of technologies, methods of administration, and scientific and cultural practice. Indeed, the concession that “the West” serves as a model for the rest of the world has resulted in the imposition of these cultural requirements upon Muslim societies found throughout the East. As the West began to regard itself as the omnipotent representative of knowledge,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Onur Bilge Kula, *Batı Felsefesinde Oryantalizm ve Türk İmgesi*, (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür

an idea that we may also observe in Karl Marx, one of the most important European thinkers of the modern era, claiming “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs Arthur Balfour (during the Lloyd George government) maintained in 1910 that Western countries had always had the skill to govern themselves, whereas Eastern countries had never had the power to do so. In his article published in *The Edinburgh Review*, British statesman Lord Cromer explained the reason why the East had never enjoying autonomous power was that they were but a collection of “dependent races.”<sup>3</sup> All these assumptions and claims led to the birth of “Orientalism,” an intellectual, ideological and political frame of interpreting and representing the non-West that functioned to legitimize colonialism, which itself was nurtured and justified in parallel to concepts such as “Eastern determinism,” “Mohammedanism” and the inherent superiority of “the European mind.”<sup>4</sup>

While often admonished by intellectuals from the non-West, it would take the work of Edward Said in the late 1970s to shed a serious critical light upon this Orientalism. Its function to draw a sharp distinction between *the familiar* (Western, us) and *the foreign* (the East, them) helped provide both moral and scientific justification for capitalist imperialism to rampage over the world. Therefore, when compared to Eastern culture, Western culture was considered more powerful, and no matter if the West held the political position of the ruler or not, they definitely held the position of the stronger.<sup>5</sup> According to Hegel, Eastern states have long been identified with nothing but “complete frenzy,” “destruction and damage.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, in the eyes of the West, the East consisted of a herd of barbaric men.

Based on the ontological and epistemological distinctions often made between

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Yayınları, 2012), XVIII.

<sup>2</sup> In this quote, Karl Marx referred to French peasants of the 19th century. Edward Said has reinterpreted Marx’s argument in the context of the East. In his book *Orientalism* (1979), Said implied that the approach of the West towards the East is the same as Marx’s approach towards French peasants. Karl Marx, *Louis Bonaparte’nin 18 Brumaire’i*, Turkish translation by Sevim Belli (Ankara: Eriş Yayınları, 2012), 61.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, Turkish translation by Berna Ülner (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2013), 46.

<sup>4</sup> When describing race, Immanuel Kant (one of the most eminent philosophers of the Enlightenment) defined Europeans as superior to Easterners and black people, maintaining that the superiority of Europeans resulted from “the superiority of the European mind.” Kula, *ibid*, XX.

<sup>5</sup> Said, 49, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Kula, 111.

the East and the West, scholarly Orientalism also reflected the process by which Western interests asserted their hegemony over the East. In a sense, Orientalism was the manner in which Western “authoritarian ownership” could be claimed over the East. This meant various forms of Western political, economic, and cultural power worked to change the structural features of the East.<sup>7</sup> Ancient Greek culture and Christianity, both of which formed the foundations of Western identity, turned into the absolute reference of knowledge. This resulted in putting the East, particularly the Islamic East, into the state of being the quintessential *other* in the necessary binary that reaffirmed the West’s authority over global events. For many Enlightenment philosophers, especially Hegel, Leibniz and Engels, the East was identified in this distinctive way because it was almost entirely referred to as the center of barbarianism and Islamic fanaticism. This reference to religious difference proves historically the essential criteria for what would become a working model for Western Islamophobia for many centuries.

In Western philosophy, both Orientalism and the image of the East found their roots in the Crusades, thus dating back to the Middle Ages in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Critically, forms of Orientalism must not be understood in geographical terms that simply distinguish a geographic East from West. Rather, Orientalism was based on the religious differentiation between Christianity and Islam. It is interesting to note that Orientalist polemicists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century preferred to use the term “Mohammedanism,” in reference to Muslims whose devotion to the Prophet Muhammad was misconstrued to mirror Christian devotion to the Prophet ‘Isa-Jesus. The reference took on a more insulting and strategically othering function, necessary when political and cultural rivals needed to distinguish themselves from those professing their faith in God through “Islam.”

The obvious point of departure for this “othering” discourse, and one of the earlier functions of the Orientalist polemic, was that all other religions apart from Christianity, especially Islam, were regarded as “fake.” Islam was not accepted as a religion but defined as an ideology spread by a single man, the Prophet Mohammed. Orientalists worked into their narratives during the period the assertion that Muslims professed loyalty to a “fake prophet.” Some works in particular stand out. For instance, Voltaire’s tragedy *Fanaticism or Mahomet the Prophet* received many reactions and severe criticism due to the anti-Islamic depictions it included and the unfavorable description of the Prophet, who was eventually the representative of a certain

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.

religion and associated with the “East.” Voltaire described the Prophet Mohammed as someone who hypnotized the Arabs with his kind words and impressive appearance, realizing that the Arabs were easily manipulated due to their ignorance, and in reality, his one and only aim was to destroy Christianity.<sup>9</sup> The undertones of the work were so harsh that eventually the French church prohibited the book due to its anti-religious content.

Another prominent philosopher of the Enlightenment, Leibniz, adopted similarly offensive, dismissive tones. By describing Islam as a series of “vulgar and dull conceptions” in his book *Meditationes de Cognitione, Veritate et Ideis*, Leibniz first attacked the religious orientations of the pre-modern world generally, but then made specific reference to the increasingly frequent association with “the East” and intellectual backwardness.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the association with the East in the Orientalist way of thinking implied Arabs, Huns, Mongolians, and Turks, in addition to Muslims in general. Some would claim that Christians (in Eurocentric contexts, Christianity is associated with Europe) first met Muslims with the Prophet Mohammed’s Hijrah that took place in the year 622 A.D. It is with this encounter that Christians gradually laid the foundations of Islamophobia.<sup>11</sup> As Islam spread among former Christian, Jewish and pagan Arab and Berber peoples living throughout the Mediterranean world and the Turks, Mongolians and again Arabs in the East, European Christians increasingly associated Islam with them. In time, the peoples who once shared common languages and cultures no longer lived in conditions of peace but of war. In these increasingly

<sup>9</sup> Voltaire, *Türkler, Müslümanlar, Ötekiler*, Turkish translation by Cengiz Orhan (Istanbul: İğüs Yayınları, 2012), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Leibniz’s work actually predates Voltaire. In *The Dictionary of Philosophy* he wrote in 1765, Voltaire made use of the concept of *Mohammedanism*, which was used to scorn and then humiliate Muslims at the time. While not the first to use the term, it was Voltaire’s iteration that popularized this concept and has since become more prevalent in the Western subconscious and ubiquitous among those using an Orientalist viewpoint. Kula, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Although reference to Islamophobia emerged in its current form in the aftermath of 9/11, its origins date back further in history. The modern use of the term was likely first used in a report entitled “Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All,” issued in 1997 by the Runnymede Trust, the British race equality think tank. Despite its apparent recent use, as already noted, Islamophobia embodies an Orientalist epistemology that dates back many centuries in Western history. The report also states that the fear of and opposition to Islam led to the occurrence of 8 common opinions that Westerners share: Islam is a religion that has nothing in common with other religions; therefore, it serves as “the other.” In the eyes of the West, it is low, lame, irrational, and primitive. Its violent nature compels other civilizations into conflict with one another. Opposition to Islam is thus natural and normal. M. Ali Kirman, “The roots of Islamophobia: Is it Western or Eastern?” *Journal of Islamic Research*, 21(1), 2010, 24.

violent encounters, European Christians tried to understand the rules and nature of Islam. Both the Roman Catholic Church and Central and Western European Christian pundits found it necessary to launch propaganda campaigns to protect the further spread of Muslim influence into the still economically vulnerable Western European Christian world. By his time, the conditions of hostility were such that Voltaire referred to the ideas that supported this way of binary thinking. Voltaire even suggested many in the West claimed that the Koran was full of nonsensical expressions, while it was not true.<sup>12</sup>

For this reason, Islam was seen as a false religion in Europe in the Middle Ages, and the Prophet Mohammed was portrayed as a fake prophet who manipulated naïve people. What is more, the Christian world of both the East and the West reached a consensus in respect of promoting the idea that Islam was a cruel and fake religion. For example, both Europeans in the West and Byzantines in the East presented Islam as a pagan and polytheistic religion worshipping icons (the Kaaba, for instance), so that the distinction between Islam and Christianity was sharp and based on theology and practice. In the Byzantine world, many weird myths concerning Islam emerged after a series of catastrophic mistakes in the translations of the Koran from Arabic into Greek. An example of a mistranslation was that in a Byzantine text, the shape of God was described as “round,” and the text claimed that this description was taken from the Koran.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, according to Western historians, Muslims worshipped an ornamented metal icon called *Tervagant*, which made human-like sounds.<sup>14</sup>

Another misconception prominent in Byzantine narratives was that the stone al-Hajar al Aswad (the Black Stone, a rock set into the eastern corner of the Kaaba) in Mecca was originally the head of Aphrodite. The conclusion was Muslims actually worshipped the head of the Greek goddess. According to this misbelief, which was accepted without hesitation in Europe at the time, Muslims chose Friday as the holy day due to its association with Aphrodite. In French, the word *Vendredi* (Friday in English and *Dies Veneris* in Latin) derived from *Venus*, the Roman name for Aphrodite. Therefore, the holy day Friday actually meant the day of Venus. This misperception was so widely accepted in the West that the renowned French writer Vincent de Beauvais (13th century) made reference to Muslims’ worshipping the head of Venus

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<sup>12</sup> Voltaire, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Katerina Stenou, *Ēkones tou Allou, Ē eterotēta apo ton mitho stēn prokatalēpsē*, (Athens: Eksantas, 1998), 93.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

in his book *Speculum Historiale*.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in an icon in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* in the British Library, London, a reference was made to the round metal shape of God in Islam, and the idea that Muslims worshipped a half-animal, half-human creature called “Maumet,” with the head of a man and the body of a bull. In short, the West accepted the information that appeared in Byzantine reference books without much skepticism. In fact, they added new misconceptions to these earlier ones. According to a common misbelief in Europe during the Middle Ages, Islam was a polytheistic religion and Muslims worshipped false Gods named Tervagant and Mohammed. Eventually these distortions led to a general labeling of Muslims as the ontological “other” to Christians.<sup>16</sup>

Another common false belief about Islam in the European system of thinking was that Muslims used to sacrifice children. For instance, in another version of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, today located in the French National Library in Paris, and which is known to have been granted to Duke Jean de Berry as a present in 1413, an image depicts the sacrifice of a child to “Maumet,” the previously mentioned creature with the head of a man and the body of a bull. Such negative references made to Islam became more and more widespread throughout Europe via literature, especially during the Middle Ages. The French epic, *Song of Roland* (*Chanson de Roland*) is another case in point. It is an epic story full of negative references to Islam and its practitioners that depicts the struggle of a hero named Roland against Muslims.<sup>17</sup>

In the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Latin writers also began competing with one another to fill the demand for such tales. For those writers providing such material, it did not matter whether the arguments written against the Prophet Mohammed were true or not. According to them, Mohammed was a magician, a fraud; he was nothing but a fake, a pseudo-prophet. Furthermore, he had ruined the church, not only in the East but also in Africa, using his powers of magic. In these writings, Muslims were accused of worshipping icons, and of worshipping Mohammed instead of God. Their statues were made of precious stones. It was also often noted that Mohammed’s success had solely been based on his policy of liberating sex. In short, the writers presented Islam as an aggressive and destructive religion, full of sexual perversity, sinful lust, and extreme animal instincts and primitive ways of living.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>17</sup> *Roland Destanı*, Turkish translation by Bilge Umar, (Istanbul: YKY, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Yücel Bulut, “Oryantalizm”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi (TDV Encyclopedia of Islam)*, 33, İstanbul (1992): 429.

## THE ROOTS OF ISLAMOPHOBIA AND THE WESTERN CONCEPTION OF ISLAM

Throughout history, patterns of human behavior and specific approaches towards socio-political processes have served as roadmaps that chart the manner in which ideologies about others are formed.<sup>19</sup> In fact, religion plays a significant role in understanding what life is, and finding meaning to where humans stand in this universe. Regarding religion as “the opium of the masses,” Marx believed that a strong connection existed between ideology and religion. Religion, in general, creates an ambivalent feeling of dependency, serving humanity both as a force of hegemony and a safe zone into which one can take shelter. This feeling is an important motive that supports social solidarity and the sense of belongingness.<sup>20</sup> The roots of Islamophobia, therefore, may be found in the approaches, or more specifically, the ideologies that Christianity exhibits against the religion of Islam.

In the Western world, Islamophobia is the product of a variety of sources, religious, historical, political or social. Perhaps most outstanding is the spread of Islam, a process that clearly led to fear and anguish among many within the Christian establishment. This fear gradually turned into bias and prejudice. The etymology of Islamophobia includes the Greek term phobia (φόβος/fovos), defined as fear. The renowned Greek linguist Babiniotis explains the word phobia as a “feeling of threat despite its not being necessary.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, we might state that fear of Islam is based on imagined threats, consisting of fictional depictions as noted above and exaggerated anxieties.

Since this fear is directed against a religion and the members of this religion, Islamophobia reveals enmity and aggression against Islam and Muslims in general. According to this Islamophobic way of thinking, Islam is inferior when compared to Western culture, and it has no value among prevalent cultures on earth.<sup>22</sup> This is most evident in the depictions of historical events that attempt to account for the rise of Islam from within a predominately Christian world.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Şerif Mardin, *Din ve İdeoloji*, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015), 14-15, 25.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, 49.

<sup>21</sup> G. Babiniotēs, *Mikro Leksiko tēs Neas Ellēnikēs Glōssas*, (Athens: Kentro Leksilogias, 2009), 1224.

<sup>22</sup> Necmi Karşlı, “İslamofobinin Psikolojik Olarak İncelenmesi”, *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi*, 13(1), 2013, 81.

<sup>23</sup> The main reason for this connection is that the issue of “Us and Them” usually revolves around



Furthermore, Islamophobia bears a direct relation to history and theology, since these theological anxieties are blended with political and cultural worries.<sup>24</sup> The renowned French Marxist historian Maxime Rodinson also stated that Islam has always been a threat to Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Especially towards the end of the Middle Ages, the history writing concerning Islam fell short of providing accurate information, allowing the existing problem to grow deeper and deeper.<sup>26</sup>

In this way, the anti-Islamic discourse and propaganda of the church and Christian religious men led to a series of negative images that persist among Christians. Christian religious men and the church have been largely responsible for the existence of exclusionary, biased, prejudiced and aggressive works of history and literature.<sup>27</sup>

The narration of all encounters of Muslims with Christians in history has always included huge enmity and opposition against one another. First of all, the invasion of the Middle East and North Africa by Muslims following the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslims' conquest of Andalusia in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Crusades that took place in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the conquest of Istanbul by Muslim Turks in 1453, the 1538 Battle of Preveza, the naval Battle of Lepanto in 1571, and the numerous attempts by the Ottomans to invade Vienna between 1529 and 1683 all inevitably led to religious/political enmity between Muslims and Christians. Especially with the Crusades (1096-1272), the bias of the West against Islam grew fierce, ending up in the definition of Islam as "the religion of swords."<sup>28</sup> Such hostility stems from the fact cultural leaders in Western Europe did not have a great deal of direct contact with Muslims prior to the Crusades.

After the Prophet Mohammed died in 632, the hegemony of Islam became much more widespread in terms of military, cultural and religious power. Iran, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and North Africa were all invaded by Muslim armies. In the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, Spain, Sicily, and some parts of France were taken over. During the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>

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historical events. In fact, it is a concrete fact that this contradiction plays a major role in history. Roland Barthes, *Göstergebilimsel Serüven*, (Istanbul: YKY 2012), 37, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Hakan Olgun, "Tarihsel bir kurgu ürünü olarak İslamofobyası", *İlmi Dergi Diyanet* (Scientific Magazine Piety), Volume 44, Issue 3, July-August-September, 2008, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Kirman, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Olgun, 33.

<sup>27</sup> Nasuh Günay, "Luther'in İslam Algısı", *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 24, 2010/1, 81.

<sup>28</sup> Arthur F. Buehler, "İslamofobi: Batı'nın Karanlık Tarafının Bir Yansıması", Turkish translation by Mehmet Atalay, *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 55 (1), 2014, 134.

centuries, Islamic hegemony even extended towards India, Indonesia and China in the East. When faced with such expansion, it was normal for the West to react against this situation with fear and a feeling of terror. In this respect, the outcome of these events led to Muslims being associated with an image of “barbaric herds” simply because Islam had led to trauma in the West.<sup>29</sup>

When Christianity in the East lost power to Islam, politically, Christian authority centered itself exclusively in the West, the East being the domain of Muslims.<sup>30</sup> Islam was now regarded as a theological, political and cultural threat that was geographically distinctive.<sup>31</sup> The Western scholarly definition of Muslims as “the other” ultimately resulted in an Orientalist perspective. The works authored by missionaries and travelers during their travels to the East are especially full of biased opinions on Islam. Their descriptions and conceptions of Islam include the argument that it is a religion hostile to intellectual and scientific development, and that the Prophet Mohammed favors an ideology totally based on violence, lust and sexual abuse.<sup>32</sup> This schematizing perspective is clearly adapted in Dante’s description of “Maometto” who appears in *Inferno*.<sup>33</sup> The way Dante presents Islam in this book may be categorized as Orientalism shared by the West in general. A major tool of propaganda, prejudice against Islam and Muslims gradually become rooted in the collective memory of most societies.

## THE OTTOMAN IMAGE AND ISLAMOPHOBIA IN GREECE

As Islam became more widespread, the Western world developed a defensive attitude against Islam. Such sentiments manifested in various expressions of Islamophobia. Starting from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim Arabs established hegemony over the eastern Mediterranean lands which had formerly been under Greco-Roman rule, and continued to peacefully spread their religion over a wider geographical area between the

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<sup>29</sup> Said, 68-69.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 36, 39.

<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed study on the subject, see İbrahim Kalın, *İslam ve Batı*, İstanbul: İSAM, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed study on the subject, see Nasuh Günay, “Batı’nın Hz Muhammed’e karşı takındığı olumsuz tutumun tarihsel arka planı”, *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 21, 2008/2, 106-126.

<sup>33</sup> Said, 77-78.

11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>34</sup> In Asia Minor and southeastern Europe, Eastern Orthodox Christianity was overtaken by Muslim Ottoman Turks in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, a process that led to the Balkan region gradually developing a Muslim identity to parallel its strong Orthodox and Catholic Christian heritage.<sup>35</sup> However, according to reliable records of history, the Balkan Peninsula had already become a geographical area where Turkic ethnic groups (such as Proto-Bulgars, Pechenegs and the Uz) had settled since the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> In other words, Turkish peoples migrated to the Balkans earlier than Muslim Ottomans did.

Starting from 1354, after taking over the land of Gallipoli, Muslim Turks began to extend influence over the Balkan region. Following the invasion of Edirne, they conquered the feudal states in the region, including the three Bulgarian kingdoms, and continued to spread further westward.<sup>37</sup> Divided into many minor states and feudal autonomous regions, the Balkans witnessed many internal conflicts, which made it easier for the Turks to rapidly secure power in the region.<sup>38</sup> By 1718, the Balkans was wholly administered by the Ottomans.<sup>39</sup> The hegemony of the Ottomans in the Balkans was a testament to the capacities of the mighty Ottoman army. The spread of Islam in Asia Minor, the eastern Mediterranean region and the Balkans inevitably led to rising fears in Europe about the prowess of the military juggernaut. The traveler Rubruck, who came across Muslims in the Balkans, wrote “I watch in awe, trying to find out what type of devil brought the religion of Mohammed to this land,”<sup>40</sup> reflecting a larger trope in the literature of the era that assumed Islam was foreign and caused discomfort for the peoples of the Balkans. In a similar manner, the Orthodox Christian Church felt psychologically threatened by the expansion of Islam by way of large-scale conversion of its former Christian flocks. In response, the church leadership adopted stricter terms to which Christians of the region had to adhere in the

<sup>34</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *Dünya ve Garb*, Turkish translation by Emin Bilgiç, (İstanbul: Yeni Zamanlar, 2014), 26.

<sup>35</sup> The first Islamic community in the Balkans was established in the mid-13th century by Sari Saltuk, one of the soldiers of Horasan. The Turkomen community which was named after the soldier Sari Saltuk traveled to the Balkans and settled in a region close to Dobruca, with a total of 10-12,000 inhabitants. Kemal H. Karpat, “Balkanlar”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 5, İstanbul: 1992, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Halil İnalçık, “Türkler ve Balkanlar”, *Bal-Tam Türklük Bilgisi*/3, Prizren (September 2005), 20.

<sup>37</sup> Karpat, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Halil İnalçık, “Balkanlar’da Osmanlı Fetihlerinin Sosyal Koşulları”, *Adam Akademi*, 2011, (1), 2.

<sup>39</sup> İnalçık, “Türkler ve Balkanlar”, *ibidem*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Özlem Kumrular, *İslam Korkusu. Kökenleri ve Türklerin Rolü* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2012), 143.

face of the rising tide of Islamization. A stricter belief system thus emerged, the first symptom of which was the Christians' belief that they were being punished by God, punished for the sins they had committed. However, God's punishment was not to last forever, and would definitely end one day.

In this scheme, Christians would have to endure the torture of their subordination to Muslims as part of the ultimate salvation God promised those who remained loyal to the church. The myths, legends, and epic stories of the Balkan Christians began to be based on a future victory won by Christians against Muslims and the termination of Islamic rule. In this regard, the religious belief in salvation from Muslim rule became the primary landmark that signaled the formation of Islamophobia in southeast Europe. Orientalist discourse framed Muslim Turks as unsuitable rulers of the countries in the Balkans. For this reason, communities living in the region would resist Ottoman rule and their fight against Ottoman hegemony was taken as historical given. The European stereotypes of Muslims in Europe extended to Turks more generally. It was believed that the qualities of Turkish peoples were completely identical to Muslims in the larger Islamic World. In this way Turks became synonymous with the Muslim "other."<sup>41</sup>

Starting from Bayezid I, the Balkans came under Ottoman rule. The conquest of Salonica (1430) and Ioannina (1431) by Murat II, and the conquest of Athens (1458) by Mehmed II the Conqueror were the important turning points of this era in history. However, the real turning point in the region's history may be referred to as the conquest of Constantinople. It is also the date when the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which lasted for 400 years, began throughout the southern Balkans. This historical era, known in Greece as *Turkokratia*, lasted until the Morea Uprising of 1821. For the Greeks, when Ottoman Muslims conquered the holy symbols of Constantinople, represented by the trinity of the city, Hagia Sofia, and the Empire, the trauma caused by the event persisted not only in the collective memory of Greeks but also for many Europeans. For the Greeks, the fact that Constantinople and Hagia Sofia fell into the hands of Muslims was a great source of grief, even a "national requiem."<sup>42</sup> The conquest of Istanbul by Muslims was thought to have happened due to the sins of the Byzantium Empire, and the city was conceived of as a sacred place waiting for its salvation. The words "No Mary no mourn, the day will come, the tide will turn, and Constantinople will be ours again..." clearly depict the hope of the Orthodox

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<sup>41</sup> Kula, 168.

<sup>42</sup> Aleksandros Masevetas, *Konstantinoupolē: Ē Polē tōn Aponiōn*, (Athina: Pataki, 2010), 39-40.

Christians to regain power over the city.<sup>43</sup> However, the Greeks believed, such salvation is only possible with the will of God, not human beings themselves. At this point, national myths regarding the retaking of Istanbul and Hagia Sofia from the Muslim Turks led to an occurrence of anti-Islamic attitudes, reinforced by the propaganda of the Greek church. Such myths depended on victory over the Muslims and the termination of Islamic rule. The moment when God halted the punishment of the Christians, Istanbul would also be saved. In conclusion, Islamophobia in the Balkans is deeply rooted in the region's history. Perceived as the "other," Muslims were always seen as a threat against which precautions had to be taken.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the most concrete evidence of this is the structure of social life of Turks in western Thrace, Greece, regarding educational and religious practices.

In time, Islamophobia in modern Greece took on a new form. Fear and loathing of a Muslim presence, which may be regarded as a direct consequence of Islamophobia, created a psycho-pathological state of mind.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the discourse and bias against Islam in Greece generally manifested as psycho-pathological rhetoric. As a sociological phenomenon, Islamophobia is defined as fear directed towards Islam; however, anti-Islamism appears as an organized, intentional and well-founded form of enmity. In Greek historiography, the era marked by Ottoman rule is referred to as "the Dark Age," and associated with oppression, slavery and cultural regression.<sup>46</sup> Known as the father of Greek history, Paparrigopoulos added an Orthodox Christian character to it, combining Hellenism and Orthodox Christianity in the same melting pot.<sup>47</sup> Here we see two important elements of Greek nation-state identity—religion

<sup>43</sup> G.S. Grigoriadou, *To Dabtylidi tou Autokratora*, (Athens: Apostolikēs Diakonias tēs Ekklēsiās tēs Elladas, 2005), 140.

<sup>44</sup> Kadir Canatan, "İslamofobi ve Anti-İslamizm: Kavramsal ve Tarihsel Yaklaşım" (Islamophobia and Anti-Islamism: A Conceptual and Historical Perspective), Kadir Canatan-Özcan Hıdır (ed.), *Batı Dünyası'nda İslamofobi ve Anti-İslamizm (Islamophobia and Anti-Islamism in the Western World)* (Ankara: Eskiyenı Yayınları, 2007), 11.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, the newspaper *Eleftherē Ora* (Leisure Hours), which has a huge circulation in Greece, is known for its religious focus and publishes news that involves a conspiracy theory with an anti-Islamic perspective in more or less all its issues. For example, on March 2, 2016, its headline stated, "In a mosque in the region of Attica, the imam has ordered the Islamic community to freely behead all Christians."

<sup>46</sup> Esra Özsüer, *Oi Duo opseis tou idiou nomismatos. Ellēnika kai Tourkika Biblia İstoriķēs Mithoplasias gia paidiko Komo*, Ekdoseis Periplous, (Athens: 2016), 77.

<sup>47</sup> Ioannēs N. Grigoriadēs, *Kutsal Sentez, Yunan ve Türk Milliyetçiliğine Dini Aşlamak*, (Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi, 2014), 59.

and the concept of an ethnic nation—identifying the Turk and Islam as its opposite, standing as the “adversary other.”

In Greek history, Ottoman rule in what became Greece has always been narrated as an event that involved a high level of oppression, violence and intrusion. The Ottoman era has always been depicted as a major threat to Greek national unity and homogeneity. According to most Greek historical narratives, Muslim Turks threatened the two important ingredients of the Greek nation state: Hellenism and Orthodox Christianity.<sup>48</sup> All events have been interpreted through this prism. Therefore, the Morea Uprising of 1821 is treated as the Greeks’ desire to rescue Greece, the Orthodox church, their nation and liberty from the hands of Turks. The Greek War of Independence constituted such a struggle against the Ottomans, with the holy purpose of saving the land, rather than a simple act of revolt by those seeking freedom. Such an evaluation of history is, undoubtedly, the outcome of a biased and subjective attitude towards what actually happened, reflecting the “distorted and non-scientific aspect of the nationalistic viewpoint.”<sup>49</sup>

In Greece, the basic religious and nationalist ways of thought are based on anti-Islamic features. For this reason, some churches and preachers still hold onto an anti-Islamic discourse based on hatred and scorn of Muslims.<sup>50</sup> That is because Hellenism and Orthodox Christianity are the two important glues that unify society under Greek nationalism. The great majority of Greek citizens are Orthodox Christian. In any manifestation of the national struggle, Greeks are depicted as defending the homeland, religion and nation.<sup>51</sup> These two elements holding Greek society together form the typical “us,” whereas the adversary “other” (Muslim Turks) is represented by the typical “them.” Thus, emphasis on religion and ethnic nationalism became an

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<sup>48</sup> Anna Frangoudakē and Thalia Dragona, *Ti einai ē patriδα mas; Ethnikismos stēn Ekpaideusē*, (Athina: Aleksandria, 1997), 352, 367.

<sup>49</sup> Kemal. H. Karpat, *Balkanlar’da Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk*, (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2004), 7.

<sup>50</sup> The anti-Islamic discourse of Christian preachers in Greece may be exemplified by the speech given by the Thessaloniki Metropolitan Bishop Anthimos in 2014. Following a religious ceremony, he said, “The biggest problem of Europe is not economics. It is the spread of Islam throughout the continent. The developments once we could not imagine are coming to life these days, such as the rapid building of mosques all over Europe. We need to contemplate this issue seriously. The day we blend with Muslims and begin to unify with them throughout our nations is the day when we all reach the end.” <http://www.pronews.gr/portal/item/ανθιμουσ-«το-ισλαμ-ειναι-το-μεγαλυτερο-προβλημα-της-ευρωπης»> [09.03.2017]

<sup>51</sup> Esra Özşüer, “Tarihin Öteki Yüzü: Türkiye ve Yunanistan Örneğinde Tarihi Yeniden Algılamak”, *Türkisch History Education Journal*, 4/2, (2015), 180.

important feature of the popular history books that received financial support from the state.<sup>52</sup> In the formation of other Balkan nationalisms, Orthodox Christian beliefs played a vital role. As Maria Todorova stated, “One of the most significant veins that provides blood for the flesh of Greek nationalism is religion.”<sup>53</sup>

Religious belief and national ideology are the two important ingredients of the make up of a nation-state, and if one ingredient is missing, the nation state cannot achieve a complete ideology of its own.<sup>54</sup> Religion and nation are the two indispensable parts of a mechanism that enhances the nation-state ideology.<sup>55</sup> Similar to other Balkan nationalists, Greek nationalists have also described the Ottomans as cruel, intrusive and oppressive rulers. Religious men and intellectuals have played significant roles in the compilation of this hatred and enmity against Ottoman rulers.<sup>56</sup> In Greek historiography, Muslim Turks are barbaric and antireligious.<sup>57</sup> While Christianity is the religion of tolerance and love, Islam is described as a belief system that favors fanaticism and anger. In the literature, one can see detailed descriptions of alleged cruelties committed by Turks. For instance, “Turkish people have burned Greek rioters alive. Some of the Greek bodies were skewered while some others were brutally hung... They stripped the Metropolitan Bishop of Larisa of his skin. They filled in his skin, and carried the dead body from one town to another. Next, they sent it to Istanbul, hung it on a wooden cross and exhibited the poor bishop to the Sultan in his palace.”<sup>58</sup>

Muslim Turks were reported to have oppressed Orthodox Christians for a long period, casting them out and labeling them as the “Other”. Most of the propaganda

<sup>52</sup> In Greece, some publishing houses such as Zoi (Life), Elpis (Hope), Sotir (Saviour) publish religious books, backed up by the church. These publications also include popular history books, which are full of extracts that fuel the enmity between Turks and Jews. For a more detailed study on the subject, see Esra Özsüer, “Ellēnika kai Tourkika Biblia Mithoplasias gia paidiko koino: eikones kai proslipseis,” Panteion University of Athens, Political Science and History, Phd Thesis, Athens, (2015).

<sup>53</sup> Maria Todorova, *Balkanları Tabayyül Etmek*, Turkish translation by Dilek Şendil, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2015), 47.

<sup>54</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches,” *Nation and Nationalism*, 18, (2012), 2-20.

<sup>55</sup> Ellē Skopetea, *To prōto vasileio kai ē Megalē Īdea. Opseis tou ethnīkou problīmatos stēn Ellada (1830-1880)*, (Athens: Politipo, 1988), 205-217.

<sup>56</sup> Yaşar Nabi, *Balkanlar ve Türklük I* (İstanbul: Yeni Gün Haber Ajansı, 1999), 19.

<sup>57</sup> Greeks described the people who could not speak their language (Greek) and the sound they made while speaking with the sound “var var var,” which evolved into the word “barbars,” defining all the peoples that they were not familiar with. The meaning of the word “barbar” (barbaric) evolved into “cruel, violent” in time. Stenou, 55.

<sup>58</sup> Asēmina P. Dedousē, *Matōmena Stefana*, (Athens: Christianikēs Enōsēs ē Elpis, 2010), 25-26.

against the Turks was based on references to this religious oppression and highlighting the differences in the variety of beliefs co-existing in Ottoman times. Ottoman society was organized in the form of a “system of millet” (nation), in which Greeks were categorized as Orthodox Rum peoples. These people used to have a certain religious and cultural identity and a conception of self based on this identity. That is why the Ottoman period is often described as an era of oppression in terms of religion and culture.

Easier said than done: for three full centuries, the Greek people had to endure the oppression of Turks, who resorted to all kinds of oppressive acts with the purpose of reinforcing their power over the land. Without any restrictions or control, Turks took hold of not only Greek people’s property, but also their honor and their lives. They built up a dark future for our breed.<sup>59</sup>

In the history of Greece, another point of discussion about Ottoman rule was how the Ottomans prohibited Greek education and language, and how Greek bishops had to provide education secretly to their people in churches late at night. While historically incorrect, national myths such as Aya Lavra<sup>60</sup> and the Underground School have taken their places in the collective memories of Greeks. In short, the church is depicted as having protected Greek language and culture, which church authorities viewed as their main assets and heritage, against Muslim Turks whom they considered barbaric.

According to a thesis supported by Kant, Turks were identified with Islam. Similar to the prejudice against Turks in Europe in general, the Greeks also displayed negative opinions and bias against them. In the collective memory of Europeans, Turkish people were oppressive and destructive. They particularly held the “noble” Greek under their control and monopoly for a long time, resulting in Greek lack of advancement. Three of the prominent pioneers of such common conceptions, Hegel, Kant and Herder, frequently maintained the idea that Turks were barbaric in their relations with Greeks. This conception dates back to Philhellenism, which may be regarded as one of the most important concepts that Orientalism is based on.<sup>61</sup> In

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> According to official Greek historiography, the Greek Revolution started at the Aya Lavra Monastery when a priest called Palaion Patron Germanos raised the rebellion flag.

<sup>61</sup> Kula, 65, 67, 68.



the Balkans, many attitudes and bias against Turks were also based on this Orientalist point of view.

Undoubtedly, this systemized discourse of propaganda became effective at schools, which are the main laboratories of national ideologies. Thus, the collective memories ended up with young people coding the image of “the adversary Other” into their minds. In parallel with this view, the Muslim Turk in this context is equivalent to barbaric Asians. In particular, history was reshaped in the West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in this reshaping process, Turks/Muslims/Ottomans were presented as either a herd of Mongolians or the Gog and Magog of the West.<sup>62</sup> This situation also held true in Greece. In a variety of locations, names that were associated with Eastern despotism were in use, such as *Haldupis*, *Agarinis* and *Mongolis*. The Ottoman era was also recalled as a time when Greeks fell short of scientific and cultural improvement. “Turks are definitely against enlightenment, with all their primitive natures and tendencies. They try to extract the intense fire of spiritualism out of everything.”<sup>63</sup> In the Orientalist discourse, “destroying whatever is valuable” was one of the essential features that was regarded as inherent in Turks in general.<sup>64</sup>

In a variety of historical narratives, Turkish people are depicted as the ones who force Orthodox Christians to convert to Islam. They use the Greek word for the assimilation of Greek people who were forced into “turkevo” (becoming a Turk).<sup>65</sup> Using all methods of torment, Turks reportedly tried to make Greeks change their religion while Greeks resisted successfully, due to their strict ties with their beliefs.<sup>66</sup> In these narratives, Greek heroes and heroines who defend their beliefs get killed in

<sup>62</sup> Galip Çağ, “Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethinde İslam Kimliğinin Etkisi/Katkısı”, Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 3 (2), 2012, 126.

<sup>63</sup> Ioannēs Aleksiou, *Ethnomartyres* (Athens: Adelfotētās Theōlogōn i Zoē, 1981), 31.

<sup>64</sup> Kula, 39.

<sup>65</sup> The word “turkevo” in Greek means changing one’s religion, rather than meaning becoming assimilated and turning into a Turk. In fact, the Ottoman state was based on the millet (nation) system until 1856. In the Ottoman state “a millet was an autonomous self-governing religious community, each organized under its own laws and headed by a religious leader, who was responsible to the central government for the fulfillment of millet responsibilities and duties, particularly those of paying taxes and maintaining internal security. In addition, each millet assumed responsibility for social and administrative functions not provided by the state, conducting affairs through a communal council (meclisi milli) without intervention from outside.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/millet-religious-group>. Therefore, the religions were preserved. Thalia Dragona and Faruk Birtek (ed), *Ellada kai Tourkia. Poliēs kai Ethnos-Kratos*, (Athens: Aleksandrea, 2006), 21.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

the most violent ways imaginable.

Turkish man stabbed the poor Christian boy who did not want to convert to Islam. One drop of blood that slowly seeped out of the boy's heart fell onto the soil. He gasped, and died.<sup>67</sup>

Turkish people who endeavored to make Greeks change religion made no distinction, be they women, the elderly or the young. Christians of all ages and walks of life were tortured unless they yielded. They resisted in order not to leave the path of Jesus Christ, and in this way they became religious martyrs. Most of the saints' stories in the history of Greece depict religious heroes who resist the torture they witnessed during Ottoman times. Muslims keep on tormenting their bodies even after they die, while their spirits ascend into the heavens having turned into holy saints.

In the Balkans, when we consider the fact that Orthodox belief functioned as a proto-nationalism, nationalist propaganda carried out by the church and by other institutions was an inevitable consequence. Greek national identity was formed hand in hand with religion.<sup>68</sup> In the history written by the Greeks, Islamic and Turkish identities were perceived as a whole. There was no clear distinction between the image of Islam and the image of being a Turk. Thus, the fear of Turkish people was blended with the fear of Islam. For instance, in one of the history books written for secondary school 3rd grade, it states, "Turkish people do not learn a foreign language because the Koran has prohibited them from doing so,"<sup>69</sup> which is evidence proving how all Muslims and Turks are viewed as inseparable. These unrealistic arguments labeling Turks are based on the biased attitude that may be defined as Islamophobia.

## CONCLUSION

Dating back in history, Islamophobia stands as the main reference point of all the negative opinions, judgments and bias against Islam and its context in general. In many parts of the world, Islamophobia created an anti-Islamic atmosphere, label-

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<sup>67</sup> Ignatios Madenlidēs, *Any pobōritos Neomartyrs Larisēs Ag. Ioannēs o Monemvasiōtēs* (Athens: Adelfotētōs Theōlogōn o Sōtēr, 2010), 120-121.

<sup>68</sup> Hüseyin Sadoğlu, "Balkanlar'da Milliyetçilik ve Din", *Uluslararası Politik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 2(1), 2016, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Geōrgia P. Koulikourde, *Neoterēs Eurōpaiki İstoria, Sholiko Biblio, 3. Gymnasio*, (Athens: OEDB, 1989), 179.

ing Muslims as the other. Within the framework of “Us” and “Them,” Islam and Christianity were always regarded as opponents; thus, heavy discrimination against the members of each party became inevitable. Basically, the Orientalist viewpoint of Western leaders and religious men led to discrimination against Muslims. When the idea of nation-states first emerged in the Balkans, religion played an essential role, gluing people together towards one purpose and under the scope of one identity. Thus, anti-Islamic approaches have served the function of empowering national identity. The Turkish invasion that spread rapidly in the Balkans made it possible for Islam to become a part of the cultural identity of the region; thus, it inevitably began to be regarded as a threat to Christianity. As the most essential ingredient of Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek identities, Christianity took sides against Islam, due to the propaganda and critical discourse carried out by the church, bishops, preachers, and other religious authorities influential in the region.

However, one should note that Western Islamophobia and Greek Islamophobia have some different aspects. First of all, in Western Europe, Ottomans were seen as a political competitor as well as a religious enemy, while for Greeks, during formation of the nation-state and acquisition of ethnic identity, Ottomans were regarded as invaders and the other from whom they should liberate themselves. That is why ethnic and national identity was stronger in Greek Islamophobia than in Western Islamophobia, although for Greeks religious identity was equally important.

In Greece, the fear of Islam following the formation of the nation state and reconstruction of national history led to many negative narratives regarding Turkish people. The Ottoman era, which was defined by Greeks as the Dark Age, was depicted as the symbol of oppression, Eastern despotism and barbaric practices. Any kind of myth, legend and historical record that would maintain and enforce these negative judgments and exaggerated viewpoints took an indispensable part in history writing in Greece. Greeks were described as religious heroes who even sacrificed their lives in defense of their own religion against the oppression of Muslim Turks, who forced them to convert to Islam. In today’s world, the essence of the image of Muslim Turks in Greece is primarily based on negative images and stereotypes. The Greeks define their national identity through the concept of Orthodox Hellenes, which ties the people together in sharp contrast to Islam and the identity of being a Turk. Therefore, in both ethnic and religious terms, Turks play the role of the “adversarial other” in the collective memory of the Greeks.

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