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Ayhan Kaya & Ayşe Tecmen

To cite this article: Ayhan Kaya & Ayşe Tecmen (2019) Europe versus Islam?: Right-Wing Populist Discourse and the Construction of a Civilizational Identity, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 17:1, 49-64, DOI: [10.1080/15570274.2019.1570759](https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1570759)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1570759>



Published online: 20 Feb 2019.



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EUROPE VERSUS ISLAM?: RIGHT-WING POPULIST DISCOURSE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CIVILIZATIONAL IDENTITY

By Ayhan Kaya and Ayşe Tecmen

Situating culture and heritage within right-wing populist discourse is a seemingly simple task as both terms are used abundantly by political leaders to denote a specific period or to connote certain national traditions, values, and characteristics. However, a discourse analytic approach to the deconstruction of populist parties' culture policy reveals that there are various articulations of culture in different political and societal contexts. For instance, these references can be explicit or implicit, stated or implied, embedded in action or developed as a reaction.

In this paper, we look at the manifestos of the populist parties as well as their highly mediatized statements on culture, heritage, and national identity.¹ This paper reveals the ways in which five populist parties in Europe, Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany, National Front (FN) in France, Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy, and Golden Dawn (GD) in (Greece), employ fear of Islam as a political instrument to mobilize their supporters and to mainstream themselves. The study is conducted through a discourse analysis of the speeches and manifestos of the aforementioned

parties. Following the depiction of each political party, the paper displays some of quotations from the fieldwork to be able to explicate their common tropes about their Islamophobic, migrant-phobic, and diversity-phobic discourses of the supporters of populist parties. The main premise of the paper is to claim that these parties have recently generated a civilizational discourse in order to expand their electorate.

This paper is based on the findings of a Horizon 2020 project called CoHERE: Critical Heritages. The relevant Work Package in the

Abstract: This article reveals the ways in which five populist parties in Europe (AfD in Germany, FN in France, PVV in the Netherlands, M5S in Italy, and Golden Dawn in Greece) employ the fear of Islam as a political instrument to mobilize their supporters and to mainstream themselves. The study is conducted through a discourse analysis of the speeches and manifestos of the aforementioned parties. Following the depiction of each political party, the article displays some of quotations from the fieldwork conducted in the Spring of 2017 to be able to explicate their common tropes about their Islamophobic, migrant-phobic, and diversity-phobic discourses of the supporters of populist parties. The main premise of the work is to claim that these parties have recently generated a civilizational discourse in order to expand their electorate.

Keywords: Islam, Populism, Civilizational Identity, Europe

project (WP2) investigates public/popular discourses and dominant understandings of a homogeneous “European heritage” and the ways in which they are mobilized by specific political actors to advance their agendas and to exclude groups such as minorities from a stronger inclusion into European society. What notions of European heritage circulate broadly in the public sphere and in political discourse? How do the “politics of fear” relate to such notions of European heritage and identity across and beyond Europe and the EU? How is the notion of a European heritage and memory used not only to include and connect Europeans but also to exclude some of them? We are interested in looking into the relationship between a European memory and heritage-making and circulating notions of “race”, ethnicity, religion, and civilization as well as contemporary forms of discrimination grounded in the idea of incommensurable cultural and memory differences.²

Instrumentalizing the Fear of Islam

There is a growing fear in the European space alleviated by the extreme right-wing populist parties such as PVV in the Netherlands, FN in France, Golden Dawn in Greece, and AfD in Germany. This fear is based on the jihadist attacks in different European cities such as Paris (January 7 and November 13, 2015), Nice (July 14, 2016), Istanbul (January 1, 2017), Berlin (February 28, 2017), and London (2017) as well as on the atrocities of the Al Qaida, the Islamic State (ISIS), and Boko Haram in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. This fear against Islam, which has material sources, is also mitigated by far-right political parties. One of the interlocutors we interviewed in Rome among the supporters of the 5 Star Movement very explicitly vocalize such fears:

In a few years European culture will cease to exist, once the Caliph will have taken control of Europe. Then we will build a long memory of what we lost, something that was perhaps too weak. The takeover of the Caliphate was previewed by a clairvoyant, who said the Caliph will

control even the Vatican. Beyond the clairvoyant, there are signs that our culture is changing with every little cross being taken away from the schools. (interview with a 39-year-old-male, doorman in Rome, 16 May 2017)

Such fears were also reiterated by many other interlocutors in Germany, France, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands. A 70-year-old former saleswoman in Dresden expressed her feelings in a similar way when she was asked about the European heritage:

When we have an Islamic caliphate in Germany one day, the European heritage will be gone. Maybe it sounds exaggerating, but I think we should be very careful. Many of the Muslim refugees have dangerous thoughts in their minds. Otherwise you would not think of driving a bus into a crowd [referring to the attack on the Breitscheid-Platz in Berlin on 19 December 2016]. (interview with 70-year-old-female, pensioner in Dresden, 18 April 2017)

The construction of a contemporary European identity is built in part on anti-Muslim racism, just as other forms of racist ideology played a role in constructing European identity during the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Current anti-Muslim racism is formulated as Islamophobia. Use of the term “Islamophobia” assumes that fear of Islam is natural and can be taken for granted, whereas use of the term “Islamophobia” presumes that this fear has been fabricated by those with a vested interest in producing and reproducing such a state of fear, or phobia. By describing Islamophobia as a form of *ideology*, we argue that Islamophobia operates as a form of *cultural racism* in Europe, which has become apparent along with the process of *securitizing* and *stigmatizing* migration and migrants in the age of neoliberalism (Kaya 2015). One could thus argue that Islamophobia as an ideology is being constructed by ruling political groups to foster a kind of false consciousness, or delusion, within

the majority society as a way of covering up their own failure to manage social, political, economic, and legal forces and consequently the rise of inequality, injustice, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and alienation. In other words, Islamophobia turns out to be a practical instrument of social control used by the far-right conservative political elite to ensure compliance and subordination in this age of neoliberalism, essentializing ethnocultural and religious boundaries. Muslims have become global “scapegoats”, blamed for all negative social phenomena such as illegality, crime, violence, drug abuse, radicalism, fundamentalism, conflict, and financial burdens. One could also argue that some individuals and communities in the West presume that Muslims have greater social power. There is a growing fear in the United States, Europe, and even in Russia and the post-Soviet countries that Muslims will demographically take over eventually.

Germany's *Alternative für Deutschland*: Anti-Islamism as a Political Ideology

According to the leading figures of the party, the AfD has the “historical mission” to achieve cultural hegemony. Therefore, it is important to break the “terminological dominance” of the left and to stop the “social experiments” in terms of educational, gender, and migration policy. Germany is currently in a phase of “pre-civil war”. The present refugee situation is framed as an “invasion” meant to destroy Germany. According to this view, the German government is betraying the German nation, thus it has to be brought down in a major, illegal operation. To that end, the German army was asked by the AfD to act “independently” and occupy the train stations along the German border in order to put a stop to the “onslaught” of asylum seekers (Kemper 2016). AfD made a historic breakthrough in the 2017 General Elections, winning 13.5 percent of the vote and a projected 87 seats and becoming the first overtly nationalist party to sit in the Bundestag in 60 years. The party's performance marks a major shift in Germany's post-war politics that is likely to produce a very different tone and dynamic inside the Bundestag.

Compared to the populist parties and movements we investigated for this research, AfD is slightly different because while it is a national-populist party situated within the right-wing political ideology, there are diverging beliefs among the party leadership. This internal conflict leads to diverse views on the use of culture in their discourse. Nonetheless, AfD is an illustrative example of right-wing populism built on the discursive construction and promotion of cultural homogeneity to ensure the integrity of national identity. In doing so, *anti-Islamic sentiments are essential to this party*.

Similar to the other European populist parties, AfD began as an anti-establishment, anti-EU party. Over time, it has become more and more vocal and reactive to immigration. Importantly, the AfD has been *responding* to and mainly countering Angela Merkel's stance on migration and refugees to legitimize their stance, which combined their anti-establishment views with contemporary political and social issues.³ Therefore, though very different, AfD's discourse on immigration and refugees exists in the same discursive field as that of Merkel's. This stems partly from the fact that AfD is a relatively new party, established in 2013, which is still developing its political agenda and stance. As a populist party, its responses to the “mainstream” political views are used to ground their stances on current issues.

The AfD manifesto is centered on anti-Muslim sentiments as it declares “Islam is not part of Germany,” which was a stronger stance than the previous view to “stop Islamism but seek dialogue with Islam.”⁴ During the discussion of the principles of the manifesto, AfD leadership has also constructed anti-Islamism as a “political ideology.” As AfD spokesman Jörg Meuthen reasoned, “although religious freedom was an essential part of German culture, the Western, Christian world view was the guiding principle, and not Islam.”⁵ This emphasis on Christianity as the cornerstone of Western culture and civilization has been used to construct Islam as the foundation of Eastern/Middle Eastern culture, which then allowed for the articulation of a civilizational antagonism. This logic was also used in AfD's propositions to ban the Muslim

calls to prayer, religious attire, mainly the *burka*, while reinforcing representations of Christianity in the public sphere. These points of conflict are predominantly rooted in the historical antagonistic relations between the West and the East because there has been an everlasting struggle for cultural dominance. One example is the struggles of Muslim migrants to attain social and political recognition in Germany without being subjected to the process of “othering.” Moreover, under the “Islam is not a part of Germany” subheading of the manifesto, AfD declares that, “Islam does not belong to Germany. Its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are viewed by the AfD as a danger to our state, our society, and our values.”⁶

This statement articulates Islam and the culture of Muslim-origin communities as the “other” of the German culture. This exemplifies not only the process of “othering” utilized by AfD but also implies that German institutions should not attempt to accommodate Muslims. The use of “danger” is also significant as it not only uses the politics of fear but also perpetuates the idea that differences are a threat to national unity. Complementing this view are the party’s views on immigration and asylum-seekers. The manifesto proceeds to denounce the growing visibility of asylum-seekers, as well as the German government’s and the EU’s approach to managing migration and integration:

We want to change this: We demand a paradigm shift regarding 1) the influx of asylum seekers, 2) the way how the free movement of people is handled inside the EU, 3) the immigration of skilled labor from third countries, and 4) the integration of immigrants belonging to these three categories.⁷

The third statement in this excerpt is indicative of the socio-economic motivations behind the call for stricter border controls and the free movement of persons within the EU. This is the culturalization of socio-economic issues, or in other words the association of the competition for economic resources with a specific culture

drawing on a supposedly inherent cultural clash. By the same token, the manifesto highlights that “moderate” Muslims who are willing to integrate as “valued members of society.”⁸ As the AfD manifesto states:

An Islam that does not respect our legal system and even fights against it and claims to be the only valid religion is incompatible with our legal system and culture. Many Muslims live according to our laws and are integrated and are accepted as valued members of our society. However, the AfD wants to prevent the emergence of Islamic parallel societies with Sharia judges.⁹

AfD identifies two categories of migrants. Those who are willing to surrender their culture are received well while those who are not willing to do so are considered “threats” to German culture. In other words, there exists the “welcomed” Muslims who are willing to step outside their community and come into the German public space where a homogeneous German identity is dominant, as well as “unwelcomed” Muslims who seek economic gains while refusing to forego their cultural traditions in favor of German culture. Moreover, as Alicia Weidel, the current co-leader of the Party, stated:

From our perspective, the government’s policies offer no long-term, sustainable solutions and ideas for these problems at all ... There’s a lot of talk, particularly in election periods. But absolutely nothing gets done.¹⁰

As indicated in this statement, AfD exploits the Europe-wide concerns towards mass migration by criticizing the political culture in Germany, which legitimizes their anti-establishment views. In turn, party members have been promoting stricter border promotion as well as deportation of Muslims. As Alexander Gauland, co-founder of AfD, who was also their lead candidate in the 2017 national elections, noted, “German interests must be guiding principle ...” in deciding the approach to the refugee crisis.¹¹

AfD's stance on culture can also be understood through an exploration of their Islamophobic and Turkophobic statements. For instance, Alexander Gauland is an outspoken advocate of a homogeneous national culture and identity. In response to integration commissioner Aydan Ozoguz's observation that "a specifically German culture is, beyond the language, simply not identifiable," Gauland remarked:

That's what a German-Turk says. Invite her to Eichsfeld and tell her then what specifically German culture is. Afterwards, she'll never come back here, and we will be able to dispose of her in Anatolia, thank God.¹²

Gauland then stated that this was the official party rhetoric, indicating AfD's institutionalized racial animosity towards the "other." Similarly, speaking in Berlin the morning after the election results, he claimed that there is "an invasion of foreigners," more precisely the invasion of Europe by Muslims, which began with the influx of refugees.¹³ During the press conference, he elaborated that

One million people – foreigners – being brought into this country are taking away a piece of this country, and we as AfD don't want that ... We say we don't want to lose Germany to an invasion of foreigners from a different culture. Very simple.¹⁴

As indicated in this statement, AfD has been constructing a discourse centered on exploiting the so-called "Islamization of the West," which is predicated on deploying the fears about the domination of Western culture(s) by Islam, thereby disrupting the hierarchical relationship between cultures and more importantly "civilizations". In this context, Gauland has also remarked that

Islam is not a religion like Catholicism or Protestantism. Intellectually, Islam is always linked to the overthrow of the state. Therefore, the Islamization of Germany poses a threat.¹⁵

In combination with the AfD manifesto and the much-publicized statements of AfD leaders, this indicates that Islam is perceived as a threat and Muslims as dangerous because Islam is perceived to be defying the separation of religion and state. This also implies that AfD considers religion as the cornerstone of German and European culture.

France's *Front Nationale*: Islam as a Threat to the Secular Way of Life

The discourse of cultural antagonism in France's *Front Nationale* is similar to that of Germany's AfD. As AfD's regional head from the state of Thuringia, Björn Höcke, claimed: "Like the AfD, the National Front works to oppose further foreign infiltration and to maintain the identity of European nations."¹⁶ However, as opposed to the AfD, FN has a clearer and more tangible approach to culture and heritage. The agenda of the FN is clarified in the official website of the party, which is available in French only.¹⁷

Unlike the manifestos in other cases, FN has distinct subheadings detailing the party's standpoint on culture and heritage.¹⁸ These subheadings promote the preservation of the French language and the French culture against the perceived homogenizing effects of EU membership. This is an interesting departure from other countries we explored because FN prioritizes anti-EU sentiments over anti-immigrant sentiments. Similarly, language as one of the primary components of a homogeneously defined French nation is at the heart of cultural preservation. Under the heritage section, while preservation of French culture is reiterated throughout, the protection of national brands, such as French glass arts, embodied by the Baccarat brand, are promoted. Furthermore, Marine Le Pen

wants to instill this in every French child through arts education at all levels in school, including music and song to transmit French traditions to a new generation. She would pursue a protectionist approach, seeking to prevent the sale of historic buildings and major works of art to foreigners, and using state

funding to increase the profile of ‘popular’ art produced in France as an alternative to what she calls ‘official art’ in public galleries.¹⁹

While protection of “traditional arts” is often referenced by populist leaders in other European countries, these references usually remain vague, and without substance. This is because the FN has a long history in French politics and unlike the newer populist movements, FN has had the time and experience to modernize and professionalize its culture and heritage agenda. Nonetheless, the nationalist and heavily xenophobic tone of the earlier part manifestos continue in the present-day agenda. To illustrate, Jean-Marie Le Pen had also emphasized that

State action in the field of culture should be limited to the preservation of national heritage and to supporting artistic creations that privilege ‘tradition over rupture’ and ‘the rediscovery of national historical roots over tabula rasa’. (Le Pen 1986, 171)

Moreover, Marine Le Pen systematically advocates the national-protectionist agenda, which she constructs in opposition to “others” signified by immigrants and minorities. As she stated in the Grand Assembly of FN in Bordeaux on January 12, 2012, “Nothing is changing in our country, where nothing seems to be able to stop the great scourges that have plagued it for decades: indebtedness, rising unemployment, poverty, the weakening of our national identity.”²⁰

Although Le Pen’s main targets of criticism were the EU and the mainstream political parties, she also constructed “immigration” as a threat to national identity. She asserted that massive immigration “no longer allows assimilation, which is an aggression against our culture, our values, and our traditions . . . ,” claiming that mass migration was “the beginning of destructive multiculturalism and systematic communitarianism.”²¹ Le Pen’s statement is within the broader FN discourse of anti-immigration, which like AfD, welcomed

assimilated immigrants, while those who remained within their own community’s cultural parameters were unwelcomed. As we discuss in relation to the Netherlands and Geert Wilders’ Party for Freedom (PVV), FN’s objection is not only to immigrants of a certain ethnic or racial background, but also the increasing number of immigrants, which enables right-wing populist leaders to deploy politics of fear and anti-establishment/anti-mainstream views simultaneously. In this context, nationalist sentiments, anti-EU views, and anti-immigrant views are formulated in clusters to give credibility to FN discourse that articulates the “other” as a threat.

In the 2017 Presidential campaign, Marine Le Pen emphasized the “Christian roots” of France; so have François Fillon and (before his defeat), Nicolas Sarkozy (Brubaker 2017, 1198). In this formulation, secularism or rather *laïcité* is central to FN’s articulation of Muslims as the “other” due to the party’s articulation of secularism as a feat of the West. This is a conventional view, which exploits the connotations of Islam and Christianity, constructed within the clash of civilizations approach. As evidenced in Brubaker’s analysis, Le Pen’s main asset has been the principle of *laïcité*:

Given the distinctive French tradition of *laïcité* (or secularity), this might seem unsurprising. But the embrace of *laïcité* by the Front National under Marline Le Pen is new. This shift was driven by the preoccupation with Islam. Le Pen infamously compared Friday prayers by Muslims in the streets of certain parts of Paris to the German occupation, and she made the spread of Halal food a central campaign theme in the last presidential election. In the current campaign, she has called for banning the headscarf – along with the kippa and, for an appearance of equality, “large crosses” – in all public settings, including stores, streets, workplaces, and public transportation. Parts of the mainstream right have adopted a similarly assertive secularist posture. In

the name of *laïcité*, for example, the mayors of several towns controlled by Sarkozy's party announced last year that pork-free menu options – previously made available to accommodate Muslim and Jewish students – would no longer be offered in public schools. (Brubaker 2017, 1201)

Unlike the other parties analyzed in this paper, FN has not singled out Islam and Muslims but rather exploited the principle of *laïcité* to legitimize their isolation from the public sphere as an impartial consequence of it. Nonetheless, she has targeted Islam and the “culture of Muslims,” which were attempting to “invade” Europe and France. In 2015, Le Pen has also used terrorist attacks to single out Muslims, particularly Syrians, stating “France and the French are no longer safe” due to the influx of refugees, and the terrorists who entered into France holding Syrian passports.²²

To illustrate, on February 5, 2017 in Lyon, during her campaign speech, Le Pen used a more security-based approach in deploying a politics of fear. She stated that, “We do not want to live under the yoke of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism ... Islamic fundamentalism is attacking us at home.” Complementing this idea of “invasion” and “attack,” formulating the antagonism in military terms which connote a hypothetical “war,” Le Pen claimed that mass migration and the rise of “Islamic fundamentalism [was] an ideological ‘enemy of France’ to settle on its territory.”²³ Moreover, as it is the case for AfD and PVV, as Le Pen argued, FN is against the idea that France/French nationals should “adapt [to Islam], which cannot be reasonable or conceivable” as France was built on its Christian heritage which was being hijacked by Islam. Therefore, the antagonism is not just a result of a failure of multiculturalism but rather a struggle for dominance between Christian and Islamic civilizational identities. In this context, the former represents the secular ideal where Muslims who refuse to assimilate, particularly in terms of accepting and adhering to gender-equality, are considered fundamentalists.

Netherlands, *Partij Voor de Vrijheid*: Islam as the Anti-thesis of Judeo-Christian Values

The particular hallmark of PVV is its warnings about the “Islamization” of the Netherlands and immigration from Eastern Europe. Resentment towards Muslim citizens is articulated in particularly strong terms. The party thus appeals to the 50 percent of the Dutch who are against increased immigration from non-EU states. Dutch journalists, scientists, and politicians agree that Geert Wilders and his PVV are best qualified as right-wing populists. The denunciation of elites, and his strong affinity for conspiracy theories, are Wilders’ two basic tenets. These tenets are formulated and linked within an apocalyptic theory of an ongoing Islamization of Europe, which allegedly will lead to the subjection and transformation of Europe into *Eurabia*. Initially Wilders took a hardline position as a liberal MP against radical Islam. However, from 2003 to 2004 onwards he began to criticize Islam as a totalitarian ideology (instead of a religion), which should be placed on the same level as communism and fascism, and which poses a comparable threat to the West, hence his usage of the term Islamofascism (Vossen 2010, 2011). This ongoing radicalization can be attributed to the assassination of anti-Islamic filmmaker Theo van Gogh (November 2004), and the ongoing threats on Wilders’ life, due to which he has been under permanent security protection, and living at different addresses, ever since 2004 (Vossen 2010).

Unlike the other populist parties’ manifestos, Wilders’ PVV has a very short, one-page manifesto titled “The Netherlands is ours again.” The manifesto consists of 11 one-sentence long pledges. It is centered on anti-immigration, anti-Islam, and Euroscepticism. The first pledge of the manifesto, also the lengthiest, promises to “de-Islamize” the country, under eight short sub-headings stating their strategy.²⁴ This, in and of itself, reveals the centrality of an anti-Islamic stance to PVV.

The manifesto calls “for the closure of all mosques and Islamic schools, a ban on the

Koran”, and “no more immigrants from Islamic countries.” It also proposes a ban on “Islamic headscarves” in public, as well as the prohibition of all “Islamic expressions which violate public order.”²⁵ The manifesto does not make any explicit reference to culture but rather it articulates Islam as a threat to the Dutch culture thereby using a logic that equates them. As Brubaker (2017, 1194) argues, this stems from the idea that most populist parties construct Christianity “not as a religion but as a civilizational identity understood in antithetical opposition to Islam. Secularism is embraced as a way of minimizing the visibility of Islam in the public sphere.” This argument is supported by Wilders’ formulation of Islam as the antithesis of Judeo-Christian values where the former is superior to the latter. This helps the PVV generate a societal and political alliance among some segments of the secular, Christian, and Jewish segments of the Dutch nation.

Wilders’ statements during media interviews, and his public speeches to appeal to the PVV supporters, are essential to deconstructing this formulation. For instance, in 2008 he told the *Guardian*, “Islam is not a religion, it’s an ideology, the ideology of a retarded culture.”²⁶ As such, he articulates Islam as a product of a culture that has failed to progress as other cultures. This understanding of cultural progress is linked to the idea of a classical model of modernity, which is under Euro-American hegemony. Wilders goes on to say, “I have a problem with Islamic tradition, culture, ideology. Not with Muslim people.”²⁷ This statement can be better deconstructed in the light of Wilders’ likening of the “fascist Quran” to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. To that end, he said the following words:

The Koran is a fascist book which incites violence. That is why this book, just like *Mein Kampf*, must be banned. The book incites hatred and killing and therefore has no place in our [Dutch] legal order.²⁸

Geert Wilders and PVV intermittently refer to the past explicitly in their discourse but there is a consistent exploitation of Islam by formulating it as a threatening ideology. The above-

mentioned statement is one of the extreme statements on Islam. It also exemplifies the populist stance on ideologies that threaten their survival. In fact, likening the Quran to *Mein Kampf* is a way of using the past to legitimize PVV’s anti-Muslim sentiments through establishing a framework of reference.

Wilders’ main theme in communicating with his electorate is anti-Muslim prejudice. His articulation of Islam as an ideology rather than a religion has given credibility to his plans to shut down mosques and Islamic schools, to ban the Quran, to refuse refugees from Muslim countries, to deport Muslims, and to take away the citizenship rights of Muslims with a criminal record. Wilders has formulated an antagonism between Islam and Dutch culture in order to persuade his audience on the validity of his extreme strategies.

Furthermore, Wilders has been using historical clashes between Islam/Muslims and Dutch culture/Europeans to legitimize his stance. In this regard, one could recite his following statement:

Madam Speaker, there is no such thing as “moderate Islam”. As Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan said the other day, and I quote, “There is no moderate or immoderate Islam. Islam is Islam and that’s it”. Islam is in pursuit of dominance. It wishes to exact its imperialist agenda by force on a worldwide scale (8:39). This is clear from European history. Fortunately, the first Islamic invasion of Europe was stopped at Poitiers in 732; the second in Vienna in 1683. Madam Speaker, let us ensure that the third Islamic invasion, which is currently in full spate, will be stopped too in spite of its insidious nature and notwithstanding the fact that, in contrast to the 8th and 17th centuries, it has no need for an Islamic army because the scared “dhimmis” in the West, also those in Dutch politics, have left their doors wide open to Islam and Muslims ...

...

Madam Speaker, the Islamic incursion must be stopped. Islam is the Trojan Horse in Europe. If we do not stop Islamification now, Eurabia and Netherabia will just be a matter of time. One century ago, there were approximately 50 Muslims in the Netherlands. Today, there are about 1 million Muslims in this country. Where will it end? We are heading for the end of European and Dutch civilization as we know it.²⁹

Wilders' discourse, and by extension PVV's discourse, is centered on a supposed "pursuit of (Islamic) dominance" in the West as "evidenced" by Ottoman Empire's attempts to "invade" Europe physically and culturally. This idea of "dominance" is another example of the antagonism in the populist discourse in which past conflicts are expressed and remembered to perpetuate and legitimize current conflicts. In many ways, this is a trope of communication with the populist discourse. It breathes life into hypothetical situations, which have not any discernible basis in the present day. Wilders' reference to Islam as the "Trojan horse" as stated above, is a similar use of the past, in which fear of Islam is legitimized by alluding to a well-known story, which has been popularized as a phrase implying infiltration of an "enemy." Similarly, Wilders perceives Islamic incursion as leading to the "end of European and Dutch civilization as we know it." This bold statement is very problematic. It implies that there are two civilizations; European and Dutch without explaining the relations between the two. It also states that Islam, as an ideology, will cause the end of both.

Italy's *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S): Anti-Islamism as a Political Strategy to Align with Mainstream Political Issues

While the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* is grounded on an anti-establishment and anti-EU stance, compared to the cases we discuss in this paper it has limited references to culture and heritage. This stems from the fact that M5S does not offer an unyielding political program but

rather a developing political agenda built on addressing the discontents of the Italian public to protect national interests.³⁰ In turn, declining economic conditions, decreasing income, and rising unemployment have been the main topics of M5S, which called for a re-distribution of wealth. Beppe Grillo is not a politician in conventional terms and he deploys political satire and controversial remarks to communicate with his supporters. The lack of a clearly defined party program also accommodates his approach to politics and political communications. M5S's anti-establishment, Eurosceptic, anti-immigration, and pro-environment stance can be summarized under M5S's five agendas: "publicly owned water, sustainable (eco-friendly) transport, sustainable development, right to internet access, and environmentalism."³¹

The Movement's anti-immigration views became evident in M5S's responses to the influx of migrants in the recent years. This is a common theme in all populist parties/movements because while preservation of culture and heritage is an issue for all, the recent crisis has fueled discussions regarding both the cultural and the structural issues brought on by the influx of migrants. Preservation of heritage is commonly implied in appeals to preserve and protect national culture, but the crisis has provided a legitimate "other" against which this protection is needed. As such, the Movement's officials have called for limitations to the number of migrants coming in to Italy, for a modification to the Dublin Regulation and the rules on asylum, and for providing more assistance to the local authorities to accommodate the growing number of migrants.³²

Resentment against the growing social, economic, political, and cultural impact of immigration on the Italian society is one of the most outstanding sources of contemporary populist rhetoric in Italy. It is not only the M5S, but also the CasaPound initiative, established in Rome in 2003, which has capitalized on policies and discourses revolving around anti-immigration, racist, anti-globalist, and anti-multiracial projections of the contemporary Italian nation. For both organizations, M5S and CasaPound, globalization is considered the source

of all kinds of evil such as multicultural and multiracial neighborhoods disrupting the homogenous unity of the Italian nation (Toscano 2015). The growing number of Romanians, Albanians, Moroccans, Chinese, Ukrainians, and Sab-Saharan Africans is often exploited by the populist organizations, especially by CasaPound, which tries to portray the immigrants as the biggest challenge embodied against national, societal, cultural, and human security of the Italian majority.

Most importantly, Beppe Grillo has been very critical of the EU asylum application law known as the Dublin Regulation of 2013. This law states that each asylum seeker should apply for asylum in the country where the applicant first entered the EU borders. Grillo argued that this overloads Italy with a great deal of responsibility as far as the asylum seekers are concerned:

What's been happening in the last few days in relation to the Dublin Regulation should have happened earlier and this is the demonstration of the weakness of this government, left isolated by the EU as long as the immigration problem was simply an Italian problem, a problem of a government that was not capable of getting other member states to listen to it, a government without authority, a government that cannot make its voice heard.

Only now that the refugees fleeing war are knocking on Germany's door, is everyone noticing that there's a need to change the rules and that the burden of this mass exodus cannot be carried by a single country. If Italy had had a different government, and a decent prime minister, today we would not be in this situation and Italy could claim to be the one that found an effective and just solution to the tragic problem of immigration.³³

As we discussed in relation to France, Germany, and the Netherlands, the main issue about immigration is the high number of refugees and asylum-seekers entering Italy. As it was the

case in France and Germany, what we observe is the construction of an anti-immigration discourse framed as a consequence of the mainstream parties' alleged failure to protect national interests. Anti-EU sentiments also take the lead in M5S as party officials argue that the EU's negligent policies have forced the Italian government to fend for itself in terms of the refugee crisis. This formulation also legitimizes the argument that Italy has lost its say in the institutional structure of the EU. Nonetheless, as indicated in the statement above, M5S has a more humanitarian approach to the crisis.

As we noted earlier, M5S is not explicitly identity or culture-oriented but rather driven by socio-economic issues. The official M5S's discourse does not draw on the antagonisms we observe in other cases. In this case, discourses are "informally" constructed by the members of the party, particularly Beppe Grillo, who has expressed his support for populist leaders such as Marine Le Pen, Nigel Farage, and Donald Trump. Grillo is not a conventional politician, and he is well-known for his controversial remarks. For instance, in 2016 in Padua he joked about London's first Muslim mayor Sadiq Khan saying, "I can't wait to see when the new Muslim mayor of London blows himself up at Westminster."³⁴ Grillo also tweeted on the subject of immigration stating that new elections should be held before "Rome is swamped by rats, rubbish, and illegal immigrants."³⁵ While this is not unequivocally M5S's official discourse, it illustrates the anti-immigrant sentiments of the leadership under the guise of fear of terrorism.

Statements of Virginia Raggi, Mayor of Rome, are also illustrative of M5S's unstable stance on migration. Two days after M5S suffered a series of setbacks in municipal elections, Virginia Raggi called for a "moratorium on migration" to Rome, stating that,

Rome is exposed to strong migratory pressure — we can't go on like this ... We cannot allow the creation of further social tension. This is why I believe it is impossible as well as risky to think of creating other reception centers.³⁶

Until then the Movement was less driven than its right-wing counterparts on this issue. This then marked the party's veer towards the right, which was partly an attempt to align the Movement with mainstream political issues.

Although Beppe Grillo did not really speak out so much about migration related issues after his entry into the Italian Parliament, he had dealt with issues regarding immigration, work, employment, especially workplace fatalities and temporary employment, about which he even wrote a book, *Schiavi Moderni* (2014, *Modern Slaves*), based on accounts and experiences gathered on his personal blog (beppegrillo.it). His stance on sensitive issues such as public security or immigration have aroused controversy. In particular, Grillo has declared his opposition to the granting of citizenship to the children of immigrants born in Italy, according to the principle of *ius soli*, citizenship based on place of birth. Previously, he had strongly criticized the enlargement of the EU to include Romania, and the presence of Roma in Italy, evoking the sacredness of the borders of the fatherland. Such views are probably designed to tune in to the wavelength of the *Lega Nord* and other right-wing parties (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013).

Greece's Golden Dawn: Revitalizing Hellenism

GD adopts a biological conception of nationalism reminiscent of Nazi ideology. The 2012 ideological pamphlet produced by GD provides solid evidence of its extreme ideological views, frequently referring to "race." GD wants to preserve not simply the "nation-state" but the "nation-race" (GD 2012b). Commenting on the recruitment of a black Greek basketball player, Yiannis Antetokounmpo, by the National Basketball Association (NBA), GD leader Nicos Michaloliakos refused to accept that he is Greek. When told that Antetokounmpo waved the Greek flag when picked for an NBA team, Michaloliakos responded, "even in the zoo, if you

give a chimp a banana and a Greek flag, he will be Greek" (Cited in Ellinas 2015). Similarly, MP Elias Panagiotaros stated on television that Greek citizen Sophocles Schortsianitis, who is a player on the Greek national basketball team and also black, is not Greek. Panagiotaros said, "We do not consider Schortsianitis, according to the standards of the Greek race, to be Greek. His two parents have to be Greek and belong to the European race" (Cited in Ellinas 2015). In a debate in the Greek parliament GD MP Eleni Zaroulia, who is also Michaloliakos's wife, accused the government of "equating Greek expatriates with every sort of subhuman that invaded our country carrying various diseases" (Cited in Ellinas 2015).

The economic crisis exposed the failure of the Greek state to deal with immigration, providing opportunities for political agents to capitalize on pre-existing anti-immigration sentiments (Ellinas 2015). These sentiments were elevated even more after the Syrian refugee crisis started

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to hit the country in 2014. In the late 1980s, when migration patterns in Greece had just started to change due to developments in Eastern Europe, Greeks were largely positive about or indifferent to the presence of foreigners (Triandafyllidou and Mikrakis 1995). However, in the next decade, when large immigration flows started capturing media attention, attitudes turned negative—in fact, they were among the most negative in Europe. It was then only a matter of time before the exposed weaknesses of the Greek state, and the dire condition of the economy, became associated with the immigration issue. Politicians were blamed for years of failed immigration and refugee policies, and especially for ineffective border controls that allowed hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants from Asia and Africa to use Greece as a point of permanent entry to the European Union. Immigrants were blamed by the Greek majority society for alarming changes to the demographics of major urban centers as well as

for rising crime and unemployment rates. Although Greeks already displayed high levels of xenophobia, after the crisis anti-foreigner attitudes reached new levels.

Golden Dawn's steep rise is less surprising when the deep and protracted Greek recession is taken into account. The economic crisis has challenged the foundations of the Greek political system, giving rise to widespread protest against the political establishment. The crisis has also exposed the immigration challenges facing Greece, in part due to the failure of the state to control Greek borders effectively. GD was best positioned to benefit from the crisis, because its pariah status and violent tactics reinforced its anti-systemic profile at a time when the system had lost its legitimacy (GD 2012c). Moreover, GD's nationalist ideology allowed it to establish credibility on the immigration issue and to capitalize on growing public concerns about the effects of immigration in urban areas (GD 2012a). The media seems to have helped amplify its anti-system, anti-immigrant, and violent image, allowing the party to gain a much wider audience than its organizational resources would have otherwise allowed. In part due to the way the media have been covering its activities, since the 2012 elections GD has been able to sustain its anti-system profile, despite some evidence of collusion between the police and GD (Ellinas 2013).

The founder of the GD, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, is a vocal representative of the party's agenda and principles presented as Hellenism. In November 2016, he gave a speech to criticize the construction of mosques in Athens, which has become a symbolic way of protesting the emergence of Islamic faith in Athens. To illustrate, in 2015 parliamentary candidate Ilias Panagiotaras stated that, "We vote Golden Dawn so that there will be no mosques, not in Athens, not anywhere ..." ³⁷ Similarly, in 2016, following the "Fatherland, Honor, Golden Dawn" chants, Michaloliakos stated that, "The Janissaries will not pass ... Who do they [those who built a Mosque in Athens] work for? For their bosses, for the Islamists, for Turkey who directly threatens Greece." Referencing the Sunni and Shiite conflicts, he claimed that building

mosques would bring these animosities between these sects to Greece. He then asserted that mosques foster terrorists who are invading Greece. This follows the sentiments that he expressed in 2015 following the Paris attacks, when he stated, "Golden Dawn expresses her sorrow for the mass murder of innocents in Paris by Islamic terrorists. Europe is under attack. She must finally defend herself." As we argued above, the idea of "defending" Europe within the war analogy is a very common trope deployed by populist parties. In addition to revealing his anti-Islamic and intensely Turkophobic sentiments, he went on to criticize the anti-Hellenistic Greek government. Significantly, Michaloliakos systematically refers to the GD supporters as "nationalists" who stand against multiple adversaries including Greeks. ³⁸ This is also the case for the party's manifesto.

In comparison to the other populist parties we investigated, GD's manifesto is more definitive in constructing a homogenous national cultural heritage through deploying Greece's "glorious" history. In promoting the protection and commemoration of the past, GD labeled those who do not do so as anti-Hellenists. Among others, the British and, the Turks who have attempted to "destroy" Greek heritage sites have been included as the "other" in this adversarial construct. The party officials have also labeled left-wing and mainstream parties as anti-Hellenists for not emphasizing and glorifying the past. Thus, GD does not only promote preservation of the past, but also articulates any individual/group who does not do so as the opponent of Greek culture. This antagonistic relationship has been constructed as an "assault on the Sacred Symbols and National Memory." To that end, Nikolaos G. Michaloliakos, Secretary General of People's Association-Golden Dawn wrote;

Many years ago, no one would ever imagine the burning of the Greek Flag in the liberated Greece and desecration of Monuments, Tombs and Statues of our National Heroes, of the great men of Hellenism. Nowadays, all these constitute a dreary reality and the assault on the

Sacred Symbols and National Memory is more than evident. The duty of every Greek Patriot is the resistance at this challenge that threatens the existence of our Nation.³⁹

This antagonism between those who protect the Hellenistic past and those who do not is an interesting formulation. Other European populist parties often identified the “establishment,” the EU, national mainstream parties, and immigrants as the “other.” GD, on the other hand, has a different fault line centered on the past. As a result, the “other” comprises a large cluster of different groups. These different groups are identified in the manifesto.⁴⁰

In regards to the activation of the individuals to embody and defend the values of the GD, the manifesto states that

I embrace the moral imperatives arising from my worldview and aim to a radical renewal of the obsolete and counterfeit social values. My ideology is not looking to salvage anything from the installed economic and social interests that lead nations, peoples, and cultures in decline. So I'm an enemy of every power that perpetuates this sepsis that finds foothold in plutocracy, whether this power is a military-financial dictatorship or a parliamentary dictatorship, because those are the two sides of the same coin, and their purpose is tearing down national identity.⁴¹

The key theme in the manifesto is the construction of a national identity, which is supposedly under threat from various adversaries. In this sense, in addition to the “others,” capitalism and globalization are also constructed as being hazardous to Greek culture. As implied in the excerpt above, GD is very critical of the current global order rather than just national politics and the EU. Promoting a “social state” where the nation is constructed upon “organic” connections, the manifesto states:

I believe the only state that serves correctly its historical role is the social state, where political power comes from the people, without party promoters. Nationalism sees people not only as a numerical entity of individuals but as a qualitative synthesis of people with the same biological and spiritual heritage, which is the source of all creation and expresses its power in the social state, the only state that can represent the people as an organic and spiritual living whole.⁴²

As such, GD formulates the nation in a constricting fashion in which “biological and spiritual heritage” is governed by a social state. While “biological heritage” denoting racial and ethnic hierarchy between nations has been implied by many populist party leaders, GD explicitly states and promotes the superiority of the Greek people in a biological/racial sense. Significantly, this biological heritage is combined with a “spiritual heritage,” which then constructs the “nation.”

Conclusion

The growing affiliation of the supporters of right-wing populist parties with culture, nativism, authenticity, ethnicity/race, religiosity, traditions, myths, and civilizational rhetoric provides parties with opportunities to establish solidarity networks against structural problems. Our research indicates that populist political parties, particularly their leaders, seek to connect with such individuals who are, on the one hand, socially, economically and politically deprived, and on the other hand, are in quest for communities to defend themselves against the detrimental effects of globalization. In order to appeal to a socio-economically deprived electorate, right-wing populist discourses simplify, binarize, culturalize, civilizationalize, and religionize what is social, economic, and political in origin. Right-wing populist party leaderships across Europe seem to be strongly capitalizing on civilizational matters by singling out Islam. Our discourse analysis of the speeches and manifestos of the right-wing populist parties

in five countries goes in parallel with the observations of Rogers Brubaker (2017, 1208):

The growing civilizational preoccupation with Islam in European populisms has profoundly transformed the political semantics of self and other: the collective self is increasingly defined in broadly civilizational, not narrowly national terms. The civilizational-level semantics of self and other have internalized liberalism – along with secularism, philosemitism, gender equality, gay rights, and free speech – as an identity marker of the Christian West vis-a-vis putatively intrinsically illiberal Islam.

In parallel with the Huntingtonian paradigm of a “clash of civilizations,” the term civilization here is reduced to religious differences, and Christianity as a cultural form, but not religious form, to be celebrated by liberals, atheists, agnostics, and others versus the rise of radical Islam challenging the secular forms of life. The feelings of social-economic and political deprivation are not only expressed by means of resentment against multiculturalism, diversity, migration, and Islam, but also by means of resentment against the European Union institutions, which are believed to be imposing a unified transnational identity challenging national sovereignty and nativism. ❖

1. In doing so, we have faced several difficulties embedded in the centrality of language to populist movements. To clarify, preservation of native language is vital to the populist agenda. This also “prevents” the “others” who are traditionally ethnically or religiously different immigrants from accessing information in a way that further isolates them and perpetuates the idea of the “other” being on the “outside”. As such, both in theory and in practice, language is a key concept that we encountered in our research. It was difficult, and in some cases impossible to access the manifestos in English for which we consulted native speakers. This difficulty with primary sources was also present when accessing the statements of the populist leaders. Often there were highly circulated statements, which were confirmed through a review of several online news sites. However, there were also cases, particularly in the case studies on France, Italy, and Greece where confirming the credibility of the online sources was challenging.
2. This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No 693289. Information on the CoHERE project is available at: <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/cohere/>.
3. See <http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-populist-afd-party-seeks-to-reboot-migrant-fears/a-40176414> accessed on 1 July 2018.
4. Full text of the AfD manifesto is available in German at: https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/09/AfD_kurzprogramm_a5-hoch_210717.pdf accessed on 15 June 2018. Also see <http://m.dw.com/en/german-populists-afd-adopt-anti-islam-manifesto/a-19228284> accessed on 15 June 2018.
5. <http://m.dw.com/en/germanys-populist-afd-party-debates-islam-as-congress-continues/a-19227807> accessed on 15 June 2018.
6. <http://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2017/09/25/what-do-germanys-afd-want-heres-summary-from-their-manifesto/> accessed on 17 June 2018.
7. <http://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2017/09/25/what-do-germanys-afd-want-heres-summary-from-their-manifesto/> accessed on 17 June 2018.
8. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37274201> accessed on 19 June 2018.
9. <http://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2017/09/25/what-do-germanys-afd-want-heres-summary-from-their-manifesto/> accessed on 17 June 2018.
10. <https://www.google.com.tr/amp/amp.dw.com/en/afd-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199> accessed on 17 June 2018.
11. <https://www.google.com.tr/amp/amp.dw.com/en/afd-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199> accessed on 17 June 2018.
12. <http://www.dw.com/en/afds-alexander-gauland-slammed-over-racist-remark-aimed-at-minister/a-40277497> accessed on 18 June 2018.
13. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41384550> accessed on 18 June 2018.
14. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/german-election-results-afd-far-right-merkel-alexander-gauland-2017-coalition-invasion-of-foreigners-a7965886.html> accessed on 18 June 2018.
15. <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/8392/islam-belongs-to-germany> accessed on 18 June 2018.
16. <http://m.dw.com/en/a-comparison-of-germanys-afd-and-frances-national-front/a-19249980> accessed on 21 June 2018.
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27. Ibid.
28. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11469579> accessed on 2 June 2018.
29. <https://www.geertwilders.nl/77-in-the-press/in-the-press/1214-mr-wilderss-contribution-to-the-parliamentary-debate-on-islamic-activism> accessed on 2 June 2018.
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32. <https://www.google.com.tr/amp/s/www.cnbc.com/amp/2017/09/24/italys-five-star-movement-welcomes-support-from-rivals-but-says-it-wont-give-up-cabinet-seats-in-any-coalition-deal.html> accessed on 4 February 2018.
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About the Authors

Ayhan Kaya is Professor of Politics and Jean Monnet Chair of European Politics of Interculturalism at the Department of International Relations, Istanbul Bilgi University. He received his PhD and MA degrees at the University of Warwick, UK. Some of his latest books are *Turkish Origin Migrants and their Descendants: Hyphenated Identities in Transnational Space* (Palgrave, 2018), *Islam, Migration and Integration: The Age of Securitization* (Palgrave, 2012), and *Europeanization and Tolerance in Turkey* (Palgrave, 2013).

Ayşe Tecmen is a researcher at the European Institute, Istanbul Bilgi University. She has a PhD in Politics from the University of Bristol. She graduated from Emory University in the USA with a BA degree in Political Science and received her MA degree in European Studies with high honors from Istanbul Bilgi University. Her fields of interest include public diplomacy, nation branding, commercial nationalism, culture, tourism, and European identity.

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