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UNVEILING THE “VEIL DEBATE” IN THE GREEK PRESS

1. INTRODUCTION

The postmodern contemporary societies are very often called to cope with complex issues where religion and politics intersect. Therefore, inevitably, they are confronted with challenges concerning the validity of their previous certainties which are based on Westphalian values. This paper presents the results of research on how the Greek newspapers *Kathimerini* and *Avgi* narrate the (un)veiling debate (an “old” issue in the light of postmodernity) that takes place in France and Turkey. It poses and discusses the following questions. Firstly, does the political ideological orientation of each of the newspapers that constitute the research body affect the narration of the debate and how? Secondly, do the choices of the aspects of the discussion that are communicated through the papers obey the liberal, conservative or socialist schema or go beyond? And finally, does the French and the Turkish context interrelate with the narrative that each of the two newspapers provide?

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Contemporary Europe has to deal with the mass-challenges of the refugee/migrant crisis and terrorism. Compared to these, the “veil debate” seems to be a minor issue that has provoked bitter controversies in the near past (especially in France) and that garners publicity every time a European state wishes to regulate what Muslim women should (or should not) wear. A recent example is Chancellor Angela Merkel’s remarks about the veil when she announced her candidacy for the office in the 29th Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Conference in December 2016.¹ A monocausal approach based on Huntington’s thesis of civilizational clash would argue that the aforementioned are attributed to Islam.² But any essentialist interpretation pales when one recalls the period in history “when Europe loved Islam.”³ At that time (early 20th century till the 1960s) Europe was building mosques (the Wilmersdorf mosque in Berlin, the Shah Jahan Mosque in London, the Grande Mosquée de Paris, etc.), many Europeans embraced Islam and changed their names, and many Muslims lost their lives on European battlefields. Even if we accept that by doing so Europe was exercising soft power propaganda, we have to admit, first, that Europe and Islam can coexist (they have done it in the past), and second, that in the aftermath of 9/11 the relation between Europe and Islam has entered a tentative phase, facets of which are performed through acts of terror, closed borders and a ban on covering.

My decision to deal with the issue of covering (and not the refugee crisis or terrorism which attract much more attention) is the result of personal interest, curiosity and the realization that the current “refugee crisis” will soon force Greece to take a position toward veiling. Greece is experiencing the arrival of a great number of refugees/migrants coming

¹ “The full veil is not appropriate here, it should be forbidden wherever that is legally possible. It does not belong to us,” said Chancellor Angela Merkel. See Sheena McKenzie, “Angela Merkel calls for full-face veil ban in Germany” (December 6, 2016), <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/12/06/europe/angela-merkel-full-veil-ban-germany/index.html> [accessed: 18.08.2016]

² Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the New World* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

³ Marya Hannun and Sophie Spaan, “When Europe loved Islam,” *Foreign Policy*, May 5, 2016.

from war-torn countries and poverty-stricken areas, many of whom are Muslims carrying the most visible sign of Muslim difference, that of the veil, and who are possibly going to stay in Greece for a long period of time. Thus, sooner or later, Greece, a nation-state with a (more or less) homogeneous society bound with religious and cultural ties (unlike USA, Canada or Australia which experience multiculturalism) will be forced to deal with the “covering issue.” This paper, though focusing on the covering controversies that took place elsewhere, actually tries to present the public discussion streams followed in Greece, regarding the veil. Does the argumentation mediated to the Greek public construct a pro or contra stance towards covering?

Before I proceed, I must present various limitations: first I will confine my study to the press and not to other media; second, even though the “veil debate” has been discussed by almost all Greek newspapers, I have chosen to focus on two “old”⁴ national daily newspapers, the liberal, center-rightist *Kathimerini* and the leftist *Avgi*.⁵ *Kathimerini* is a representative sample of its political ideological affiliation with a very high circulation⁶ (the highest circulation among the “liberal” press) that has dedicated more articles on the covering issue than the rest of the “liberal” newspapers. *Avgi* is politically affiliated to the political party of SYRIZA (it is the official party’s newspaper); third, I will concentrate on the “veil debate” in France and Turkey mainly because these two countries hold the leading cases of the “covering controversy” and because their similarities (both states declare to be modern, secular republics) and their differences (historical, religious, political) allow comparisons.

⁴ *Kathimerini*’s first edition was published in 1919 and *Avgi*’s in 1952.

⁵ Even though the weaknesses of the linear and the horse-shoe spectrum are known, and notwithstanding a growing body of literature advocates abandoning the left-right divide altogether, see Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). I use the terms “center-right” and “left” because they give an idea of where these two newspapers are positioned in the ideological spectrum. After all, the purpose of this paper is not to get deeper in the discussion of how to describe political ideas and beliefs.

⁶ There is no data on *Kathimerini*’s daily edition circulation, since the newspaper has prohibited press agencies to release such data. Its Sunday edition had a circulation of 95,007 in January. According to *SimilarWeb* *Kathimerini* attracts over 3 million visitors per month.

2. THE FACTS

The “veil debate” took place in the republics of France and Turkey. In France two public confrontations were performed in 1989 when three covered girls were expelled from their school in Greil, and in 1996 when twenty-three girls were also expelled from their school upon the decision of the Conseil d’Etat. More recently, however, a third round of debate took place in France in 2003 when the Stasi Commission was appointed by President Chirac to review the working of the legislation recommended by the code of *laïcité* to outlaw the wearing of headscarves in state schools. The *de jure* final act was enacted on 15th March 2004 when the French National Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority to ban the wearing of all religious symbols at public schools.

In Turkey’s past the ban of the veil is closely connected with Atatürk’s aspiration to modernize Turkish society by distancing it from religion’s public representations. The headscarf has been an apple of discord throughout the modern political history of Turkey following the schema of intolerance and ban (by hardline secularist, anti-religious Kemalist parties) versus acceptance and promotion (by traditional Islamist parties (with some vacillation phases in between)).⁷ With regard to the recent past (2000 onwards) during Sezer’s Kemalist Presidency (2000-2007), the AKP (an Islam-inclined) governing party systematically avoided the Kemalist military. Thus Turkey supported the view that the abolition of the headscarf would indicate a modern secular society. In 2007, however, the Islamists came in power via the presidency of Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan, allowing for the reopening of the headscarf debate. Therefore, in 2008 a constitutional amendment took place lifting the ban in universities, however, a few months later this was annulled as being against official secularism. Erdogan never ceased his efforts to re-implement the amendment, despite the High Court’s decision. Thus, since 2013, female civil servants are allowed to wear headscarves. The ban remained, however, in places of work of judges, police and military personnel. In 2014 Turkey lifted the heads-

⁷ Merve I. Kavakci, *Headscarf Politics in Turkey, A postcolonial reading* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

carf ban in state high schools and allowed girls as young as 10 to cover their head. This amended previous laws that prohibited the wearing of headscarves by students.

Greece, as mentioned above, has not directly confronted the issue of covering – there is no regulation, no passionate public controversy has taken place (yet), and of course no social or political division has emerged. So far Greece remains an observant that registers and comments on the argumentation that is formed elsewhere and the political practice that is adopted by other states (European and non-European).

3. THE LITERATURE

There is a rich literature on the “veil debate” in France and Turkey which emanates from different disciplines and reveals different perspectives.⁸ As far as Turkey is concerned, the case of Merve Kavacki (a young parliamentarian who was elected in 1999 and was not allowed to take the parliamentarian oath because she wore a *hijab* and in the aftermath was stripped of her Turkish citizenship) generated some excellent studies in recent years. Merve Kavacki herself offers a “postcolonial reading” of the “Headscarf Politics in Turkey” by following the traces of the political history of Turkey and the genealogy of the ban.⁹ Her study is an example of situated knowledge produced by

⁸ To name but a few publications: Amélie Barras, *Refashioning Secularisms in France and Turkey* (London – New York: Routledge, 2014); Sabine Berghagn, Gül Çorbacıoğlu, Petra Rostock and Maria Eleonora Sanna, “In the name of Laïcité and Neutrality: Prohibitive Regulations of the Veil in France, Germany and Turkey,” in *Politics, Religion and Gender: Framing and regulating the veil*, eds. Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), 150-168; Claire Hancock, “Spatialities of the Secular: Geographies of the Veil in France and Turkey,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 15/3 (2008): 165-179; Banu Gökarıksel and Katharyne Mitchell, “Veiling, Secularism, and the Neoliberal Subject: National Narratives and Supranational Desires in Turkey and France,” *Global Networks* 5/2 (2005): 147-165; Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer, *Politics, Religion and Gender: Framing and regulating the veil* (London – New York: Routledge, 2012); Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁹ See Kavacki, *Headscarf Politics*.

a scholar who happens to be a pious-Muslim-Turkish parliamentarian and a covered woman. From her perspective the “veil debate” in Turkey is closely connected on the one hand to the modernization process of the Turkish state and its wish to become a role-model as a modern Muslim state, and on the other to political opportunism. “Covering” became a religious symbol in Turkey (she argues) and an instrument for gaining political power. Peres Richard also draws a clear framework around the issue by showing the deep-seated conflict between seculars and practicing Muslims in Turkey.¹⁰

With regard to the French case, the feminist scholar Joan Scott discusses “The politics of veil” looking at French republicanism (especially expressed as the binary religion/*laïcité* opposition) and gender-sexuality, through a culturally sensitive prism.¹¹ Christian Joppke compares the French, British and German responses to covering, approaching the topic from the perspective of the political ideologies and political regimes of the European states.¹² Linda Woodhead, drawing from cognitive science, linguistics and moral philosophy, offers a cultural analysis of the “veil debate” focused on values.¹³ She differs from Scott mainly because she considers the debate not as a “clash of discourses” (*laïcité*/covering, Islam/West) but as a “clash of values” within the “European narrative of secular progress.”

The way Greece responds to the “veil” has not become a subject of inquiry so far because, as mentioned, the “veil” issue has not demanded immediate political action until now and the discourse about covering is less intense in Greece than elsewhere. But there are many newspaper articles dedicated to the topic, making the Greek public aware of the problem and shaping public opinion.

This article differs from other studies in focusing on Greece’s response to the “Muslim veil controversy” taking into consideration the

¹⁰ See Richard Peres, *The Day Turkey Stood Still: Merve Kavakci’s walk into the Turkish Parliament* (Ithaca Press, 2012).

¹¹ See Joan W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹² See Christian Joppke, *Veil: Mirror of Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

¹³ See Linda Woodhead, “The Muslim Veil Controversy and European Values,” *Swedish Missiological Themes* 97/1 (2009): 89-105.

state’s peculiarities (Greece discusses publicly “the veil” without being directly involved in the debate; Greek society is more or less homogeneous and it certainly is perceived as such by most Greeks; religion is tightly interwoven with Greek national identity; modern Greece coexists with the public presence of religion). I adopt Woodhead’s viewpoint that the “veil debate” is a clash of values. I value the results of her cultural analysis of the debate, while I feel strongly attracted by Gray’s provocative analysis of the failure of traditional liberalism to keep up with the complex political realities of today’s increasingly divided world as well.¹⁴ Gray explores “the two faces of liberalism,” the face that looks towards the realization of the liberal project of a universal civilization through consensus and the other that looks for a *modus vivendi* in order to reconcile different ways of life with the aim of peaceful coexistence. Even looking from different perspectives, the empirical findings of the first author and the philosophical contemplation of the second researcher provide rich soil for advancing my research (at least regarding the discourse in *Kathimerini*).

I also align with Joppke in seeing the “Islamic headscarf as a challenge to liberalism”¹⁵ and I agree with him that French republicanism delivers a “liberal response” to the issue of covering one’s head. “French liberalism” turns its face away from the existing diversity of ways of life, it does not bother to find a *modus vivendi* and there are times that the French response to covering leaves a taste of “liberal fundamentalism.” “Turkish liberalism” imitates “French liberalism” by embracing *laiklik* (“the only foreign word to the Turkish culture”)¹⁶ by ostracizing religion from the public sphere. The difference between the French and the Turkish case is that in France the headscarf is a religious symbol creating mainly a deep social cleavage between citizens who are pro and contra head-covering (regardless of their political orientation – with the exception of the extreme right), while in Turkey, apart from a religious symbol, the veil is also a powerful political symbol leading to polarizing political divisions (Kemalists vs. Islamists). The similar-

¹⁴ See John Gray, *The two faces of Liberalism* (Polity Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Joppke, *Veil*, X.

¹⁶ Kavakci, *Headscarf Politics*, 59.

ity between the two states is that both (France and Turkey) experience a religion-like secularism and a “kind” of liberalism.

4. DATA AND TERMS

This paper is an effort to scrutinize the argumentation that is presented from the 1990s onwards on the issue of the “veil debate” by the center-right *Kathimerini* and the leftist *Avgi* via policy discourse analysis¹⁷ and considering the papers’ political ideological alignment.¹⁸

Kathimerini has dedicated seventy-three articles in total to the “veil debate” from 1994 to 2015. About two-thirds of them focus on France (23 articles) and Turkey (23 articles). The remainder refer to other European countries or report veil incidents in Muslim countries. Muslim Feminism is also introduced in two articles. *Avgi* published twenty-four articles in total with reference to “the veil.” Fourteen discuss the case of France and three are devoted to the case of Turkey. The rest also refer to other European countries and Muslim feminism.

As the word “veil” often substitutes the words *hijab* (headscarf) and *niqab* (face-covering) in the newspaper articles, while sometimes it is referred to as *burqa* (full covering), I would like to note that in this paper I look at how the Greek press narrates controversies mainly about the *hijab* and the *niqab*.

5. POLICY DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Vivien Schmidt’s policy discourse analysis¹⁹ seems to be the most appropriate methodological instrument for “unveiling” the Greek stance toward covering.

¹⁷ See Vivien Schmidt, *The Futures of European Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ For the sake of making all information accessible to the reader, the original Greek titles of articles published in *Kathimerini* and *Avgi* have been translated into English.

¹⁹ Schmidt, *The Futures*.

Schmidt argues that as new modern pressures emerge and demand change of policies and practices, the role of discourse is crucial. It serves to generate ideas, to articulate them and also to legitimize them.²⁰ Policy discourse has a dual dimension; the ideational and the interactive. In its ideational dimension, discourse performs both a cognitive and a normative function. The first addresses logic and tries to "prove" the necessity of a policy program. The second exposes the appropriateness of the policy program by calling upon national values and norms. One of the parameters of the success of policy discourse is the existence or absence of ideology. In the first case, ideology provides coherence to the proposed policy while serving the legitimization of the proposed norms and values. In the second case, policy discourse, even though it appears more obscure, being unconnected to any specific ideology, is free to levy any policy concept, norm, instrument and method that can be effective.²¹ In this study the ideological basis is given from the very beginning. It comes with the choice of the newspapers that will be discussed. I also argue that when one approaches the "veil debate" from a newspaper-narrative perspective, it is inevitable to ignore the parameter of political ideology (since newspapers usually are politically affiliated to an ideology).

Discourse is an interactive process that involves the construction of ideas as well as their communication to the public.²² So in its interactive dimension, discourse performs a coordinative and a communicative function. Through the coordinative phase, the political actors are looking for a consensus (an "agreement" between each other based on a common language and ideational framework).²³ During the phase of communication, political actors' concern is to gain the needed legitimization in order to proceed to the implementation of a policy. The public should be persuaded through discussion which will proceed along cognitive and normative lines.²⁴

Even though there is no "veil debate" in Greece, the existing public discussion as part of the communicative procedure provides arguments

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

²² *Ibid.*, 230-239.

²³ *Ibid.*, 230.

²⁴ See *Ibid.*

to the newspaper readers so that they can further support their viewpoints (in a probable more dynamic discussion in the future).

The institutional context of policy discourse matters a lot too, as it tends to frame the interactive dimension of policy discourse.²⁵ Schmidt argues that countries where power is concentrated in the executive (such as Greece) are more likely to be privileged by the communicative discourse to the public than the coordinative discourse, while in countries where power and authority is more dispersed the communicative discourse is quite thin and the coordinative discourse is privileged.²⁶ Building on this fact one can argue that the press in Greece is given the power to construct opinions and convince the public. *Ergo*, even though the dynamic phase of the discussion around the Muslim veil has not started in Greece yet, by studying the way the press deals with it we can acquire a foretaste of the Greek version of the “veil discourse” that, sooner or later, may occur.

6. THE FINDINGS: THE IDEATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE GREEK DISCOURSE ABOUT THE “VEIL DEBATE”

6.1. KATHIMERINI

The place to start with is the examination of the main reasons invoked by the center-right *Kathimerini* against head-covering. There is argumentation with regard to both cases – that of the French and Turkish – which will be examined by taking into consideration its cognitive (and) or normative function.²⁷ Needless to say, the vast majority of the newspaper articles are written by non-Muslims.

6.1.1. KATHIMERINI: THE ARGUMENTATION AGAINST COVERING

Kathimerini delivers very few normative arguments against head-covering regarding France and many concerning Turkey. The vast majority

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See *Ibid.*

of the arguments revolve mainly around the axis of the values of secularism and freedom (especially women's freedom and women's liberation).

Concerning secularism, the headscarf is a symbol of Islam and as such runs counter to official secularism.²⁸ In France the principle of *laïcité* (secularism) is considered to be respected by all French citizens independently of their religious or ethnic background.²⁹ Consequently, the state is obliged to ban the headscarf in public buildings and schools in order to protect its very nature.³⁰ In respect of France (especially) "A woman wearing the *niqab* is a statement of separation from the society."³¹ The headscarf is also seen as an effort for the introduction of a strong Islamic identity into society (especially the Turkish society).³² Head-covering at university venues "transforms them into institutions questioning the principle of secularism and social solidarity."³³ When later these covered students graduate, they will start working, and still remain covered³⁴ and "within two years Turkey would sink into conservatism."³⁵ The Turkish society will be transformed from modern to conservative religious³⁶ and the Turkish state from secular to conservative-theocratic.³⁷

Women's freedom is considered to be threatened by covering as it hinders their path toward liberation (and emancipation). *Kathimerini* delivers the contra covering argumentation that was voiced by

²⁸ "New Round on the Veil Debate," *Kathimerini*, October 21, 2010, p. 95; "A New Round on the Veil Debate in Turkey," *Kathimerini*, February 14, 2006, p. 10.

²⁹ Brian Knowlton, "The USA Allows School Girls to Wear Head Scarf," *Kathimerini / International Herald Tribune*, April 3, 2004, p. 16.

³⁰ Burak Bekdil, "The Head Scarf, the Ulama and the Real Erdogan," *Kathimerini*, November 30, 2005, p. 3.

³¹ "France Banned the Veil," *Kathimerini*, July, 14 2010, p. 7.

³² Marianna Tziantzi, "The Big Veil," *Kathimerini*, October 9, 2005, sec. Apotipomata, p. 4.

³³ "Life is «Difficult» for the Minorities in Turkey," *Kathimerini*, January 18, 2008, p. 8.

³⁴ Sabrina Tavernise, "The Head Scarf Brings Back Social Classes' Prejudice," *Kathimerini / The International Herald Tribune*, February 20, 2008, p. 9.

³⁵ Alexandros Massavetas, "The Head Scarf Issue in Turkey and the Fears of the Liberal Intelligentsia," *Kathimerini*, September 15, 2007, p. 10.

³⁶ Alexandros Massavetas, "The Head Scarf Issue," p. 10; Alexandros Massavetas, "Virginity, «Honor» and Love in Turkey: Social Conservatism and Hypocrisy About Sex," *Kathimerini*, March 29, 2007, p. 13.

³⁷ Tavernise, "The Head Scarf," p. 9.

a group of eighty Turkish women organizations under the leadership of KADER (*Association for Supporting and Training Women Candidates*). They oppose the proposed constitutional amendment that would ease the lift of the ban on covering by pointing out the inconsistencies between the Islamists' rhetoric and their acts. They (the politicians) invoke progressiveness and further democratization in their rhetoric, and do exactly the opposite. First, the proposed constitutional amendment (especially Art. 9) uses the word "equality" without identifying among whom "equality" should be promoted. There is no reference either to "equality between men and women" or to "gender equality." Second, it stereotypically categorizes men as strong and women as in need of protection and special treatment. Third, it does not introduce *gender quotas* at Universities, National Assembly and public services. It simply generally refers to "non-discrimination;" and last but not least, it is against Art. 2 of the Constitution (as amended in 1995).³⁸ "The proposed amendment brings the state many years back to a state of patriarchy."³⁹ As for France, *Kathimerini* argues that all the arguments carried by covered Muslim women (covering is a sign of modesty; averts from perceiving women as sexual objects; prevents sexual harassment; is a symbol of pride in an Islamophobic world, etc.) are nothing more than "a dubious postmodernist conception of power according to which whatever a woman undertakes to do is liberating as long as she thinks that she is engaged in some form of 'resistance' or self-assertion, no matter how misguided."⁴⁰ And it is reminded that the role of the state is that of a protector of women (especially under-aged girls) from culturally defined patriarchy.

The cognitive function of the discourse lights up the political opportunism hidden in the efforts of lifting the ban on covering. Erdogan fogs the view of the forthcoming anti-democratic reforms that will deceler-

³⁸ Art. 2. The Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state governed by rule of law, within the notions of public peace, national solidarity and justice, respecting human rights, loyal to the nationalism of Atatürk, and based on the fundamental tenets set forth in the preamble.

³⁹ A.M., "Equal ... But Under Protection the Turkish Women Fight Against the New Constitutional Mandate," *Kathimerini*, October 26, 2007, p. 8.

⁴⁰ "Letter to the Muslim Women," *Kathimerini / the Economist*, June 27, 2010, p. 34.

ate the procedure for Turkey's accession to the EU⁴¹ by bringing the covering issue to the foreground⁴². He even gives a new meaning to the term "secularism" in an effort "to fulfill his political ambitions."⁴³ The economic scandals of the government are also shadowed by the thorny "veil discussion."⁴⁴ Kemalists in Turkey use the argument that they do not want Turkey to become "Afghanistan."⁴⁵

6.1.2. KATHIMERINI: THE PRO COVERING ARGUMENTATION

Kathimerini publishes just a couple of articles with a pro covering argumentation regarding the Turkish case. One of them reminds us of arguments that support covering in the name of secularism in Turkey, as they contradict the government's decision of the compulsory teaching of Islam at schools.⁴⁶ The other focuses on teachers, and brings to mind the first sentence of Kandel's paper: *Entscheidend ist nicht, was auf dem Kopf, sondern was im Kopfst* (It matters not what someone has on his/her head, but what is in it),⁴⁷ "when a pious teacher takes off the headscarf before she enters the classroom and puts it on immediately after (when she leaves school), does anything change in her mentality and the ideas that are delivered to the children?"⁴⁸ Moreover, if teachers act as role models (especially to young children), then what is the perfect profile for a teacher? "Should smokers or homosexuals be prohibited by law to become teachers?"⁴⁹

When the newspaper moves from the Turkish context to the French one, it shifts its orientation from a contra covering position regarding

⁴¹ "Turkey: Divisions Over the Veil Consensus," *Kathimerini*, February 8, 2008, p. 8.

⁴² "Is the Headscarf a Democratization Symbol?" *Kathimerini*, September 21, 2007, p. 9.

⁴³ "«Yes to the Headscharf» from the National Assembly of Turkey?" *Kathimerini*, February 7, 2008, p. 8.

⁴⁴ "The «Fight for the Turban» has Already Started in Turkey," *Kathimerini*, February 5, 2008, p. 8.

⁴⁵ "The Law About the Veil Heightens Discussion in Turkey," *Kathimerini*, February 12, 2008, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Meritz Ozgiune, and Cleo Papapantoleontos, "The Ban of the Veil," *Kathimerini*, May 29, 2008, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Johannes Kandel, "Auf dem Kopf und in dem Kopf, Der Kopftuchstreit und die Muslime," in *Islam und Gesellschaft* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2004), 3.

⁴⁸ Ozgiune and Papapantoleontos, "The Ban of the Veil," p. 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

the Turkish case to a pro covering stance when France is concerned. Once again the normative function of the discourse (as it is narrated by *Kathimerini*) is quantitatively and qualitatively more dynamic than the cognitive function. The pro covering arguments mainly deconstruct the contra ones by showing off their weaknesses and by pointing out their inability to provide legitimacy to the French law. The principles of French republicanism (or French liberalism) are being “attacked”: secularism, universalism, individualism, equality, freedom of religion, women’s freedom. The palette of the pro covering arguments looks like a list of paradoxes that arise within the liberal regime.

First, French universalism is “accused” of being a model of virtual homogeneity that covers the reality; multicultural societies consist of people of various ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds.⁵⁰ The state’s integrity is threatened by head-covering, which is perceived as the “tip of the iceberg of Islamization of France.” But the number of covered women is small.⁵¹ An article, published a few months after the adoption of the ban refers to the incident of two French journalists being abducted by the Islamists in Iraq. The perpetrators had declared that their deed was a response to the measures taken by the French state against head-covering. The French Muslim community deprived the Islamist deed of its reason, by following the law on the first school day (with just a few exceptions). The message sent was: “Muslim and French identity can coexist without the former undermining the latter;”⁵² “the law would only serve to [...] heighten the serious ethnic and religious differences in French society.”⁵³

Secondly, the dichotomy between public and private also appears problematic. The French law defines places outside homes (state buildings, public transportation, streets, schools, and even companies and shops regardless of being private property or not) as public space.⁵⁴ But

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ “France: Burqa in the Foreground Again,” *Kathimerini*, October 1, 2009, p. 12.

⁵² “First School Day Without Head Scarf: French Muslim School Girls Followed the Law,” *Kathimerini*, September 3, 2004, p. 8.

⁵³ Sandeep Gopalan, “Ban,” *Kathimerini*, January 30, 2010, p. 9.

⁵⁴ “France Banned the Veil,” p. 7.

"where are the borders of the public space?"⁵⁵ There are a variety of viewpoints about where the "public space" is located. It is difficult to delimitate abstract constructs such as private and public spheres.⁵⁶

Third, the pro covering arguments show that *laïcité*, the main principle of French republicanism, "kills its own kids" (individualism, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, women's freedom, etc.). The French state sacrifices its espoused values on the altar of *laïcité* when it perceives secularism as just the extinction of religion from what is defined as public.⁵⁷

Fourth, Woodhead's observation that freedom and rights are mentioned together⁵⁸ is proved here as well. The French worry about the restriction of their rights (freedom of religion, freedom of expression, women's freedom) without sufficient legitimization.⁵⁹ As Sandeep Gopalan, head of the Daekin Law School puts it in an article (re) published in *Kathimerini*, "what is proposed is a serious invasion of personal liberty without reasonable justification. To be sure, individual freedoms can be legally curtailed when circumstances such as security, crime prevention or violence justify it. But the justifications given for the restriction of the religious freedoms by the *burqa* ban – equality, repression of women, protection of French cultural values – do not seem to be on the same footing."⁶⁰ Intolerance, religion-based discrimination, and Islamophobia, which are promoted by the law against covering, also hurt the value of freedom of religion that French republicanism espouses.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Joaquin Prieto, "The Chador War Reaches Enterprises," *Kathimerini / El Pais*, December 11, 2002, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Steven Erlager, "The War of the Veil is Inflamed," *Kathimerini / New York Times*, September 6, 2009, p. 23.

⁵⁷ "The Ban of Muslim Veil," *Kathimerini*, December 19, 2003, p. 13.

⁵⁸ See Woodhead, "The Muslim Veil."

⁵⁹ Steven Erlager, "Burqa's Public Ban: the Ban Supporters Consider the Ban as a Step Towards the Preservation of the French Culture," *Kathimerini*, April 17, 2011, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Gopalan, "Ban," p. 9.

⁶¹ Ozgiune and Papapantoleonos, "The Ban of the Veil," p. 12; Xenia Kounalaki, "Burqa, a Piece of Cloth?: West's Interest in Muslim Symbols Strengthens Islamophobia," *Kathimerini*, August 29, 2009, p. 16; Erlager, "The War of the Veil," p. 23.

As regards women's freedom and liberation, the statement that "the veil" can be a symbol of liberation and the result of free choice is used in response to those arguing that covering equals repression.⁶² Moreover, the pro freedom French state is "accused" of pseudo-feminist concern⁶³ that will end up in intersectional stigmatization based on gender and religion.⁶⁴

When the cognitive function of the discourse is activated, a reason given against the French law invokes Sarkozy's political opportunism. The French president is said to have constructed imagined enemies (covered women and the religion of Islam)⁶⁵ in order to divert the attention of the French public away from other more serious problems the state was facing⁶⁶ and to gain legitimization for the state's participation in the war in Afghanistan. The law has been argued to be just a part of a political game played in the terrain of women's human rights. Sarkozy followed the *Bush Doctrine*. On the one hand, he wished to promote Muslim women's human rights (in France) while on the other, the frequent use of the word *burqa* (which was associated with Afghanistan) instead of the word *niqab* (about which was the debate) "spread a negative, scary image."⁶⁷

6.2. AVGI

Avgi has published twelve articles about the "veil debate" in France (four of them are contra and seven are pro head-covering) and two about the covering issue in Turkey (they are both newspaper reports). As it

⁶² Gopalan, "Ban," p. 9; "The First Fine for Wearing Niqab," *Kathimerini*, September 23, 2011, p. 7.

⁶³ Kounalaki, "Burqa, a Piece of Cloth?" p. 16; "France: Burqa in the Foreground Again," p. 12.

⁶⁴ Erlager, "Burqa's Public Ban," p. 18; Ozgiune and Papapantoleonos, "The Ban of the Veil," p. 12.

⁶⁵ "France Banned the Veil," p. 7.

⁶⁶ "The First Fine," p. 7.

⁶⁷ Erlager, "The War of the Veil," p. 23.

happens, along the lines of *Kathimerini*, *Avgi* also presents a strong normative function of the discourse.

6.2.1. *AVGI*: THE CONTRA COVERING ARGUMENTATION

When it comes to the argumentation introduced to support the French law that bans covering, *Avgi* publishes a long interview taken by Allen Touren. He mainly argues that "the law has prevented a political threat;" using his own words: "the Muslim veil contradicts the principles of secularism, reason and rationality and hinders the progress [that is close related to science] in the name of religion."⁶⁸

The universality of women's human rights is also brought up in the discussion. From this perspective the headscarf is seen as a symbol of women's subordination.⁶⁹ The feminist columnist Melina Volioti (president of Greece's oldest women's rights organizations, pen name: Soula Panaretou) argues that "women's human rights are universal and we either respect them as a whole or we deny them; their partial acceptance or rejection is impossible."⁷⁰ After all, "respect to diversity should end where violation of human rights begins."⁷¹

6.2.2. *AVGI*: THE PRO COVERING ARGUMENTATION

Avgi, by advocating in favor of head-covering in France, attacks "French liberalism." The "liberal state" is its first target. *Avgi* states that the principle of state neutrality is damaged by the "anti-veil" law. The state presents discriminatory behavior against one of the religions existing in its territory. There are two paradoxes here (argues *Avgi*). First, the state, while demanding a religiously neutral public sphere (by banning head-covering) allows the existence of places of worship in the public space. Secondly, the state, without being neutral itself, asks from

⁶⁸ Alain Touraine, "The Law Moved Away a Political Threat," *Avgi*, February 13, 2004, p. 33.

⁶⁹ "Integration Yes, Assimilation No," *Avgi*, February 15, 2004, p. 48.

⁷⁰ Melina Volioti, "Kriton Sigan," *Avgi*, January 10, 2004, p. 8.

⁷¹ Athena Kotsampasi, "Cultural Differences and Gender Based Discriminations," *Avgi*, December 24, 2004, p. 1.

the citizens to be neutral and in order to ensure their neutrality, imposes restrictions on their freedom of self-expression.⁷²

In other words, the law demands homogeneity in the public sphere. It tries to kill off diversity while preaching equality. But as “contemporary France is neither white, nor Catholic,”⁷³ “equality that connotes homogeneity diverts to racism in a «progressive» gift wrap.”⁷⁴ It stigmatizes the Muslim community and religion per se.⁷⁵ The French *laïcité* exhibits a strong “inclination to absolutism” via xenophobia, and Islamophobia.⁷⁶ The ban on head-covering is not a remedy to the problem of integration of the Muslim population. It aims at assimilation and leads to marginalization.⁷⁷

Avgi also speaks against the liberal notions of the abstract individual, and the abstract public/private dichotomy. Students have bodies, argues *Avgi*. As human beings, students have incorporated values constructed by their own families and cultural milieus. The role of the state and especially of the school is threefold: first, to respect diversity (otherwise it would act against the European principles),⁷⁸ second, to assist students on their way toward emancipation, and third, to help them integrate.⁷⁹ As regards the public/private dichotomy, *Avgi* points out that the normative basis of the law is rotten due to the fact that it axiomatically accepts the public/private dichotomy as the ontological core of secularism.

Women’s freedom – connected to the principle of equality – is also hurt by the law. *Avgi* states that it is gender-biased: a) it perceives the veil as a symbol of subordination and b) it stereotypically perceives women as unable to meet their own decisions. *Avgi* argues that there is

⁷² Michalis Vourekas, “The «Battle of the Veil»: Racism in Progressive Gift Wrap,” *Avgi*, June 19, 2011, sec. Enthemata, p. 26.

⁷³ Helen Tserezole, “Three Different Women’s Voices,” *Avgi*, November 11, 2007, p. 20, 37.

⁷⁴ Vourekas, “The ‘battle of the veil’,” p. 26.

⁷⁵ “Burqa as «Weapon»,” *Avgi*, January 31, 2010, p. 43.

⁷⁶ “The Burqa Ban did not Liberate,” *Avgi*, July 21, 2011, sec. Politiki, p. 2.

⁷⁷ “Integration Yes,” p. 48.

⁷⁸ Kotsampasi, “Cultural Differences,” p. 1.

⁷⁹ “The Islamic Headscarf in the Religiously Neutral School,” *Avgi*, January 4, 2004, sec. Synantisis, p. 1-2.

a paradox in the French law; while it aims to liberate the "victims," at the very same time it ostracizes them from public life. The law's feminist concern is fake. Instead of changing the existing power relations that push women into a lower hierarchical position, it renders any signs of "subordination" invisible. At the same time, it denies women's right to carry multiple identities (i.e. Muslim, French, African, etc.). *Avgi* also criticizes Western feminism on the basis of its passionate advocacy against head-covering on the grounds of human rights universality, as it "covers the Western imperialistic tendencies and the wish of achieving global governance." "Universal values should not be narrowed in the evocation «emancipated women do not wear a headscarf» [but they should be supportive to the motto] «emancipated women wear whatever they wish»."⁸⁰

The appropriateness of head-covering is also argued by focusing on the Muslim feminist arguments that Islam is neither responsible for women's subordination nor a drawback for the feminist claims of equality.⁸¹ *Avgi* in one of the articles advocates that "armed conflicts, Western foreign policy, terrorism, and conservatism feed the world with masculine values."⁸² But while Muslim feminism as a social movement works for the promotion of social change, "Western feminism" seems to accommodate imperialist tendencies.⁸³

On the cognitive side of the discourse, *Avgi* sees Sarkozy's political opportunism. He frames the covering discourse as a security issue hoping to win the forthcoming local elections.⁸⁴ The problem is that by doing so, he causes a domino effect. He pushes French-Muslims to radicalization and he feeds Islamophobia, which may be to the benefit of Lepen's *National Front*.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Vourekas, "The «Battle of the Veil»,," p. 26.

⁸¹ "Zaina Anuar: For the Women in Islam," *Avgi*, March 12, 2006, p. 38; "Discrimination Against Women is a Drawback for the Development of the Arabic World," *Avgi*, December 8, 2006, p. 11; Tserezole, "Three Different," p. 20, 37; Dionysis Gousetis, "The Death of a Fundamentalist Feminist Woman," *Avgi*, May 13, 2000, p. 41.

⁸² "Discrimination Against Women is a Drawback," p. 11.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ "Burqa as «Weapon»,," p. 43.

⁸⁵ Helen Tserezole, "The Veil Law Puzzles...", *Avgi*, January 25, 2004, p. 31.

7. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

7.1. KATHIMERINI'S PROFILE

Kathimerini's ideological orientation is more or less liberal (conservative) but it is not exclusively linked to a specific political party so as to support one party's politics and to perceive its target audience as the party's electoral body. Its story is part of the recent history of the press in Greece.

When venture capital entered the media market in Greece (at the beginning of the 1980s), the traditional press enterprises transformed into undertakings. As a consequence the press and undertakings' interests started to converge. The undertakings had various activities, from tourism to construction and shipping. So the press (in a similar way to other media) was put at the disposal of the shareholders who wished to promote their interests. The press became an instrument through which pressure was put on the government in order to gain an advantage in obtaining contracts for projects and procurement on behalf of government and public enterprises. During the 1990s the term *diaplekomena* (related interests) appeared, which connoted the triangular relationship between the government (which was put under pressure), press (that exercised pressure) and undertakings (which owned the press and were interested in public sector projects).⁸⁶

One should also take into account the fact that the "big" newspapers (*Kathimerini* being one of them) gained economic independence. So the more they became economically independent, the more they could act freely, independently from any party's wishes. As Psychogios puts it "they became politically multi-collective."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Aggela Ntarzanou, "Journalism and Media: A different reading of the research," in *Public Opinion in Greece*, ed. Christoforos Vernardakis (Athens: Livani Publishing Organization, 2002), 245-268. Psychogios even talks of a "Greek peculiarity" arguing that "only in Greece the Media are perceived as the main factor of corruption and as the major medium through which big economic interests manage to impose their will on governments." See: Dimitris Psychogios, *What are the Mass Media?* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2003), 141.

⁸⁷ Psychogios, *What are the Mass Media?*, 445.

In March 1987, *Kathimerini* was sold to a businessman called Koskotas (whose name was later connected to an economic scandal). Soon after (in 1988) it became owned of the ship-owner Aristidis Alafuzos, and became part of his enterprises.⁸⁸ During the years 1990-1993, Aristidis Alafuzos clashed with Konstantinos Mitsotakis (the Prime Minister and President of *Nea Demokratia* – ND – at that time). From that point on and until 2002 *Kathimerini* kept an arm’s length relationship with the party of ND. During that period of time it turned more to the center. After 2002 *Kathimerini* reached a rapprochement with ND,⁸⁹ although it never became the party’s mouthpiece.

7.2. KATHIMERINI: CHALLENGES TO LIBERALISM – LIBERAL TENSIONS

The analysis of reasons for and against head-covering in the case of the “liberal” Greek press shows, first and foremost, that the normative function of the discourse is much stronger than the cognitive, and second, that the values that come through on the discussion table (secularism, freedom, liberation, equality, justice, etc.) are employed on both sides of the debate. So my findings support Woodhead’s thesis that the controversy has to do with values.⁹⁰

However, the conflict between values which is narrated here neither follows Huntigton’s proposed hypothesis about the clash of civilization⁹¹ nor obeys his typology of conflicts according to which apart from “the core states conflicts” (1st type) and “the international fault-line conflicts” (2nd type), there is “a domestic fault-line conflict” (3rd type) between groups belonging to different civilizations within the

⁸⁸ *Kathimerini* still belongs to Alafuzos family. Themistoklis Alafuzos (the son of Aristidis Alafuzos) and his brother Ioannis Alafuzos are the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the administrative board respectively.

⁸⁹ Dimitris Psychogios, *The Print Media. From clay to internet* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2004), 487.

⁹⁰ See Woodhead, “The Muslim Veil.”

⁹¹ See Samuel Huntigton, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* (1993 Summer); *Id.*, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking*.

same state.⁹² He mostly means tensions caused by Muslim immigrants in many Western states. My findings support the viewpoint that the veil controversy has not been narrated as caused by a cleavage on the line of Muslims vs. Europeans which would match the Huntingtonian schema of Islamic vs. Western civilization. *Kathimerini*'s narration of the "covering controversy" deconstructs the myth of Islam moving against the Christian West. It even cuts across the established categories of analysis such as religion, class (at least in the case of France), gender, age, political ideology, ethnicity, etc. People that align in the pro or contra covering strands are not presented to belong to one or the other of the alleged conflicting civilizational blocks. *Kathimerini* does not narrate a "clash of civilizations."

The liberal narration of the covering controversy by *Kathimerini* also proves Francis Fukuyama partly wrong. He argued in *The End of History and the Last Man* that the end of the Cold War and the defeat of communism would be experienced as the end point of mankind's socio-cultural and ideological evolution, the universalization of Western liberal regime and the final form of human government.⁹³ He is partly correct, as the liberal model of a representative government combined with market-based economics has spread throughout the world. What Francis Fukuyama failed to foresee was the "side-effect" of globalization on liberalism; the endogenous tensions that liberalism has to deal with in the postmodern world at a theoretical and practical level. Veiled women (among others) are aware of the social contract which has been known to operate in the Western democracies where they live. So they voice their demands for freedom (of religion, of expression, women's freedom), justice, toleration, etc. But by doing so they generate tensions within liberalism that are reflected both on a practical and theoretical level. States and societies face difficulties in responding positively to their expectations and demands, calling upon the very same principles

⁹² Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sadler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 119.

⁹³ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Book, 1992).

and values. Dealing with "liberal" values in a globalized world is difficult in both, practice and theory.

When the liberal *Kathimerini* discusses the covering issue by presenting pro and contra arguments, I argue that it actually presents a series of challenges to liberalism coming from various sources. These challenges cause liberal tensions that are articulated as "a clash of «liberal» values;" a liberal value contradicts another or the demands of a single right (or the related value) collide with each other.

7.2.1. FEMINIST CHALLENGES TO LIBERALISM

Feminist language applies the very same values in the pro and contra covering argumentation.

The reasons given against head-covering invoke the liberal values of justice, so head-covering is read as a return to a state of inequality (patriarchy) between men and women and women's subordination; of freedom through which "the veil" is a sign of un-freedom; of individualism perceiving head-covering as a sign of repression of sexual self-expression; of liberal state which is under threat of losing its secular identity, its integrity, and even its role as protector (security provider). Covering is also said to hinder women's progress.

The pro covering arguments appeal to the very same liberal values and reveal liberal tensions. Head-covering is a liberation act. Emancipated women exercise the individual right of self-expression by freely choosing their attire. Ban on head-covering violates liberty (the supreme individualistic value). Women experience a restriction of their rights and freedoms (mainly of the freedom of religion and freedom of expression). As a result they suffer multiple discrimination, based on gender and religion. The restriction of women's rights is unjust. The ban on head-covering prohibits veiled women to have access to education which is considered a good in itself. That has a domino effect. A bunch of liberal principles such as individualism, justice, formal equality, equality of opportunities, reason, progress and the liberal state itself, are injured. How can a person (a woman) flourish to the fullness of her potential, have the same chance to rise or fall in society, unleash an "age of reason," and advance, when she is deprived of the right to education? And even more: how can a state save its liberal identity,

when the individuals (irrelevant of their gender) do not enjoy the same formal status in society, particularly in terms of the distribution of rights and enlightenment?

The feminist critique of the liberal public/private dichotomy on the grounds that it restricts women's access to the public sphere comes up again within the framework of the "veil debate" through the question: "Where is the public located?" Access to the public realm is also related to equality and the equal rights agenda, which would enable women to compete in public life on equal terms with men, regardless of sex.

7.2.2. MULTICULTURALISM CHALLENGES LIBERALISM

As *Kathimerini* unfurls the argumentation developed to support or condemn head-covering, it actually presents the dilemma that contemporary liberalism is forced to deal with (not only in the case of the "veil debate"); which of its two faces to trust? The one that sees tolerance as a means to a universal civilization, an enlightened tool towards homogeneity, or the other that wishes to establish a *modus vivendi* among the different cultures of our time, to reconcile conflicting values and ways of life that have opposing views of the good?⁹⁴

Context is an important parameter for making its decision. France is a multicultural society which has to deal with cultural and communal diversity. When *Kathimerini* discusses the French case it expresses a pro covering position, and presents the agony of "liberalism" (the resemblance between French republicanism and liberalism has been mentioned before) to adapt to the new circumstances of the globalized world, to redefine their principles, and to find a *modus vivendi*. When it addresses the Turkish case it shifts to a contra covering stance, arguing that secularism, modernity and democracy have to be safeguarded. Now liberalism turns its face toward promoting a single way of life. Of course, the Turkish context is different from the French, and Greek geopolitical interests and fears differ regarding each of these cases. As to the context, *Kathimerini* sees the "covering controversy" in Turkey as an aspect of the political dispute between Kemalists and Islamists who (both) appeal to national values to support the appropriateness

⁹⁴ See Gray, *The two faces*.

of their position. Moreover, it communicates the “veil debate” more as an issue of value of pluralism than that of cultural pluralism (the French case). With regards to the geopolitical dimension, one can read between the lines of *Kathimerini*’s articles and find Greece’s interest to have a neighbor that conforms to the European standards of liberal, democratic, and secular state. *Kathimerini* follows the meta-narrative of Greek foreign policy’s objectives.

7.3. *AVGI*: FAITHFUL TO SYRIZA

SYRIZA was initially founded as an electoral confederation of radical left-wing political parties and extra-parliamentarian organizations in 2004. Its main constituent, Synaspismos (established in 1992), presented the convergence of the Eurocommunists and the “critical communists” who had acquired a distinct presence after the split of KKE in 1968. SYRIZA’s confederated structure constituted its strength and its weakness.⁹⁵ On the one hand, it increased its electoral body and its influence on politics, while on the other, the party’s cohesiveness and ability to generate fresh programmatic thought weakened, especially prior to its conversion into a unified party.

Former KKE (Communist Party) members, Troskysts, a number of former PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) and Ecologists Greens can be found among the members of SYRIZA. As expected this has led to a polyphony; contradictory opinions are often expressed and differentiated stances are adopted, while the ideological cohesion of the party comes under considerable stress.

Avgi, as aforementioned, is the official SYRIZA’s newspaper and, as far as it this study is concerned, it narrates a lot about the “veil debate” in France but it provides a limited discussion about head-covering in Turkey. The reason for that cannot be restricted to the fact that *Avgi* does not have a Turkey-based correspondent (as in the case of *Kathimerini*). An answer as to the possible reasons is not an easy task and

⁹⁵ Gerassimos Moschonas, “A New Left in Greece: PASOK’s Fall and SYRIZA’s Rise,” *Dissent* 60/4 (2013): 33-37.

only speculations can be expressed. However, the effort to provide the answer leads us to a twofold reading of the phenomenon.

7.3.1. FIRST READING: THE GREEK-TURKISH DISPUTES

The disagreement between SYRIZA's majority and the minority factions over key strategic issues produced divisions and frictions within the party.⁹⁶ The left wing (30 percent of the membership) radicalized (even proposed an exodus from the Eurozone and an opening to socialism), while a kind of leftist nationalism gave rise to differences concerning challenges that the country had to face due to the geopolitics of the region. The settlement of the Cyprus problem, and the relations with Israel and Turkey could act as dynamite to the party's unity when in power.⁹⁷

Needless to say, as long as the longstanding bilateral disputes over the delineation of territorial waters, continental shelf, Flight Information Region and even the sovereignty of some islets has not been solved, disagreements will remain within the party. Some will argue in favor of Greek-Turkish rapprochement and multilateral compromise solutions for Greece's bilateral disputes with its neighbors, and others will position themselves against a compromise solution, and will stand by their view that a solution can only occur if Turkey backs off from its positions. As expected, the intra-party tensions were further amplified when SYRIZA chose ANEL (Independent Greeks – a conservative, nationalistic, right-wing populist party) as the government coalition partner and Panos Kammenos, the president of the ANEL, became Minister of Defense.

The fractionalization of SYRIZA and the coexistence of a variety of stances and opinions about foreign policy issues (among them the Greece-Turkey relations) within the political party makes the expression of a common opinion difficult and puts *Avgi* in an awkward position as to how to narrate the story of the “veil debate” when it comes to the

⁹⁶ Moschonas, “A New Left in Greece,” 36; See also: Michalis Spourdalakis, “The Miraculous Rise of the Phenomenon SYRIZA,” *International Critical Thought* 4/3 (2014): 354-366.

⁹⁷ See: Spourdalakis, “The Miraculous Rise.”

Turkish case. It is difficult to achieve both; to follow the supranational discourse of the Greek foreign policy and to take a clear stance about covering. The only way out is to remain silent.

7.3.2. SECOND READING: THE TURKISH CONTEXT BAFFLES *AVGI*

Debates are part of the socio-political and cultural framework within which they occur. They are products of multiple intersections which have to be taken into account in the effort to understand and narrate. The second reading reflects on the peculiarities of each case. It proceeds to compare the French and the Turkish contexts, focusing more on the Turkish context itself and the difficulties that it causes to the leftist narrative of *Avgi*, and pushes the bilateral relations (between Greece and Turkey) to the background.

It is probably due to the fact that the French context draws clear lines to the framework of the discourse and that it seems to be compatible to the left-wing ideology from where *Avgi* draws; that does not create obstacles in narrating the veil debate in France. French republicanism (or liberalism) and the multicultural French society has to deal with value pluralism. The left ideological toolbox provides the equipment needed to deal with the issue without any dangerous leeway. The Turkish context is different. In Turkey “the veil” is not a symbol of cultural diversity, it is a religious and mainly socio-political symbol. That throws a spanner in the works of *Avgi*.

The veil is undoubtedly a religious symbol irrespective of the contexts (French or Turkish in this case) in which it is used. But in each cultural and political context the religious symbolism of the veil intersects with other symbolisms that this piece of clothing bears. Between the lines of *Avgi*’s leftist narration we observe different ranking of the veil’s symbolisms depending on its reference. So when it refers to France, it informs that the intensity of the veil as a religious symbol is overshadowed by a set of other symbolisms (covering as a performance of tolerance, of equality between indigenous and migrants, etc.). When it supports covering in France, it simultaneously narrates the leftist hierarchy that ranks multiculturalism, tolerance and equality at a higher position compared to secularism (in its connection to the religious symbolism of the veil). Secularism is not ranked as the most important

value to be preserved, when compared to migrants' rights in the French context. Equality and tolerance are. *Avgi*'s pro covering stance fits the leftist narrative of supporting minorities and migrants as well as their rights. So there is no dilemma to be faced.

The Turkish context is different. The absence of the migration issue leaves space to the religious symbolism of the veil to become one of the main elements of the discourse in Turkey. There are not immigrant rights to be protected, so the support of head-covering can easily be perceived as alienation from secularism and alignment with religiousness (closely related to nationalism).

Apart from that, in the Turkish context the "veil controversy" runs on the line of a social-and-political cleavage between the modern/progressive-urban and the conservative/backward-rural. The veil (in its multiple manifestations) becomes in Turkey something more than a religious symbol. It represents *ötekı* (the other Turkey) that differs from "modern Turkey" which is "made up of the Kemalist urbanized elite and its replicated versions in the upper-middle or middle classes" that adopts a westernized way of life.⁹⁸ The veil in the Turkish context is a symbolic social sign that denotes (apart from religion) gender, class, and even provincialism (closely related to backwardness).

This also intersects with the absence of the migration parameter in the Turkish case. As long as the "veil debate" remains related to the migration issue, *Avgi* supports covering, citing the need that immigrants' rights should be protected and respected, and highlights the threat simmering beneath the efforts to achieve homogeneity, the acceptance of the public/private dichotomy, the ostracization of veiled women from public life, etc. (arguments used in the French case). SYRIZA's ideological opposition to nationalism, and supportiveness of international solidarity and cosmopolitanism constitute a fruitful source for *Avgi*'s argumentation. But veiled women in Turkey are not immigrants. Any invocation to the migrant status and the rights attached to it appears to be irrelevant. That baffles SYRIZA and *Avgi*. If *Avgi* supports head-covering, it will be probably accused by its (leftist/SYRIZA) readers of assisting conservatism and backwardness, and even express-

⁹⁸ Kavakci, *Headscarf Politics*, 41.

ing a nationalistic tendency. That contradicts SYRIZA’s claims to be a progressive party. If it takes a positive stance towards banning, it will run the risk of being regarded as acting against human rights (freedom of expression, freedom of religion, etc.), and even being conservative-friendly (aligned with Erdogan’s aspirations). To avoid being trapped in this complex dilemma and to remain faithful to SYRIZA, it chooses not to refer to the “problem.”

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Both *Avgi* and *Kathimerini* discuss head-covering controversies running mainly along the normative lines rather than cognitive lines, regardless of their reference to either France or Turkey. The Greek press communicates a clash of values at the heart of the “veil debate.” The veil, apart from reenergizing the “old” rivalry between secularism and religion, constitutes a dynamic object that forces modern democracies to revise their abstract values.

Avgi and *Kathimerini* draw their argumentation mainly from their affiliated ideology. *Avgi* appears compatible with the leftist rhetoric that revolves around the axis of anti-imperialism, anti-militarism, and cultural relativism. It aligns with the arguments that are drawn from Muslim feminism, it is in favour of integration not assimilation, whilst it also preaches tolerance for cultural diversity (even when it has to do with religious performativity). *Kathimerini* discusses the “veil debate” in France as a case for the deliberation of the various challenges that liberalism has to deal with. In its articles the liberal dilemma of “which of the two faces of liberalism to adopt” is reflected. Regarding Turkey, *Kathimerini* follows the supranational discourse of the Greek foreign policy; Turkey remains a dangerous neighbor and the closer to the European principles it stays, the better for Greece. Any “liberal dilemma” vanishes into thin air when it comes to the Turkish context.

Each socio-political context (the French and the Turkish) has its own peculiarities and apart from constructing and experiencing different veil symbolisms, it is also subject to different readings depending on the perspective that the observer (or narrator) adopts. The context inter-

sects with the narrator's (*Kathimerini*, *Avgi*) subjectivity in the process of either voicing stances or producing silences.

I also conclude that when (and if) Greece is called to deal with the "covering issue," the discourse will be a challenge both for the liberals and the social democrats. The former will be called to redefine their principles and values and the latter will be called to respond to the "thorny question:" are human rights universal or not?

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ANALIZA DEBATY DOTYCZĄCEJ (MUZUŁMAŃSKIEJ) PRAKTYKI
ZAKRYWANIA GŁOWY W GRECKIEJ PRASIE

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia i analizuje narrację dotyczącą dyskusji poświęconej praktyce zakrywania głowy we Francji i Turcji, przyjętą przez dwie greckie gazety: liberalną *Kathimerini* i lewicową *Avgi*. Celem opracowania jest po pierwsze ukazanie związków między orientacją polityczno-ideologiczną obu gazet a przyjmowaną w nich narracją. Po drugie, zamierzeniem Autorki jest naświetlenie kwestii, w jaki sposób specyfika kontekstu społeczno-politycznego krzyżuje się z interesami i preferencjami narratora dotyczącymi kształtowania ram prowadzonej w Grecji dyskusji publicznej. Jednym z wyprowadzonych wniosków jest to, że grecka narracja dotycząca praktyki zakrywania głów we Francji i Turcji ma charakter normatywny (bez względu na ideologiczną

afiliację danej gazety), kwestionuje ważność westfalskich wartości, odzwierciedla wzajemną zależność kontekstów społeczno-politycznych i uwzględnia ponadpaństwowy dyskurs greckiej polityki zagranicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: muzułmańskie zakrycie głowy; Francja; Turcja; grecka prasa; SYRIZA, wolność religijna

Key words: Muslim veil; France; Turkey; Greek press; SYRIZA; religious freedom

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