

The immigration discourse of a Greek radical right party

A common observation in Greek political discourse on immigration and asylum in the late 1990s and early 2000 was that, unlike other European countries, there was no populist radical right party in the Greek parliament. The explanations for this particular absence varied. Greek politicians debating immigration were quick to attribute this to a lack of racism and xenophobia in Greek society, and to a widespread tolerance towards immigrants. All this changed when the party of Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos (LAOS, Popular Orthodox Rally) was elected to the Greek Parliament in 2007.

Its electoral success has been attributed at least partly to the disaffection with traditional two-party politics in Greece (Kovras 2009) and its populist rhetoric in conditions of economic crisis. In its manifesto, Laos presents itself as a Greek-centric party that 'prioritises the interests and the protection of non-affluent Greek people' and denies that it is either a racist, populist or extreme right party (LAOS 2007). Nevertheless, it has come to be identified as such in Greek political life due to its anti-immigration stance, defence of national identity and culture, anti-american rhetoric (Gemenis, 2008; Kovras 2010)

In terms of immigration policy and discourse, LAOS has positioned itself as an anti-immigration party, arguing for stricter entry controls, immigration quotas, and rejecting legislative proposals which extend access to citizenship and other rights (for example voting in local elections) to immigrants (Kovras 2010). Like other radical parties in Europe, LAOS has made immigration one of the core issues of their manifesto and parliamentary activities, reflecting the unease of Greek society but also capitulating on it. In terms of their discourse of immigration, they have often been accused –by other political parties and the media – of being having racist views towards immigrants and using immigration for their populist agenda.

This article aims at providing a systematic analysis of the discourse of LAOS in the Greek parliament. Its aim is threefold. First, it tracks the main themes and argumentation strategies in the discourse of LAOS. Secondly, it locates the discourse of LAOS within the Greek political context and compares LAOS discourse of immigration with that of other political parties. Thirdly, it places LAOS in the context of anti-immigration radical right parties in Europe.

The article draws on the analysis of 386 parliamentary documents, which include debates on immigration and asylum policy and proposed laws, and oral and written questions submitted by MPs to the government since the election of LAOS in 2007. These documents were located through the search engine of the website of the Greek parliament using the

keywords 'immigration' 'illegal immigration', 'asylum' 'refugee'. As since 2009, the replies to written questions are included in the documents in a form that cannot be read by the search engine, all debates were scrutinised individually in order to ascertain whether they included any relevant content. The documents were then coded manually and by using NVivo qualitative software. The analytical approach for this work is Critical Discourse Analysis, aiming at situating LAOS arguments within the context of Greek society and politics and dominant discourses on immigration and identity, and at critically engaging with their themes.

LAOS in the parliament

LAOS' preoccupation with immigration is reflected in their activities in the Greek parliament. Between October 2007 and October 2011, they submitted 46 oral and 55 written questions to the government, more than any other party in the parliament. The significance is more striking if these results are compared to figures for the other two opposition parties, the Communist Party and the Radical Left Alliance. The latter, as a party that has an agenda of defending immigrant and refugee rights, submitted 16 oral and 16 written questions, while the KKE only submitted 2 and 7 respectively. In addition, LAOS submitted 8 further questions – which initiate debates – on immigration, more than the figures for all other parties together. The topics of these questions also differed among parties, with LAOS focusing on issues such as crime, public order and economic implications of immigration, while the left wing parties focused on topics that concerned migrant rights. Another indication of LAOS' focus on immigration is the number of times they mentioned it in debates on other issues. The NVivo analysis shows that LAOS was the only party bring up immigration in debates and oral questions 84 times in the 126 documents.

Table 1: Oral and Written Questions

Party	Written Questions	Oral Questions	Further Questions
LAOS	55	46	8
ND	15	22	2
PASOK	22	2	1
KKE	2	7	0
SYRIZA	16	16	0
IND	0	1	1

Table 2: Coding Frequencies

Themes	Numbers of Documents	Frequencies
us versus them	92	171
crime/criminality	66	142
burden on country	88	133
need to prioritise Greeks	47	97
public order	44	87
threat to the nation state	34	76
prioritising immigrants	52	72
cultural difference	32	71
welfare	35	51
Threat to economy	49	70
Threat to employment	43	60
multiculturalism	27	42
threat to state security	31	41

Table 2 offers a summary of the frequencies of the themes explored in the paper. The most frequent one, named 'us versus them' indicates an instance when the rights and entitlements of the citizens are juxtaposed to those of immigrants. The analysis of the debates in the rest of the paper will focus on the above themes.

A Framework of illegality and problematisation

Since the 1990s, immigration and asylum seeking in Greece have been framed in political discourse as *lathrometanastefsi* - 'illegal immigration'. The word can be roughly translated as 'smuggle migration' and, as in other languages, has strongly negative connotations suggesting illegality and deceit. Speakers of the main two political parties have used the word 'illegal immigrants' to refer to both asylum seekers and labour migrants with irregular residence status (Karamanidou 2009). LAOS maintain and even reinforce this framework, as they overall construct the majority, if not all, immigrants as illegal.

MPs of LAOS also use 'illegal immigrant' as their main term of reference in debates, but the way they use different categories tends to imply the belief that the distinction between different categories is not significant. The following statement from a debate on the 2010 citizenship law is a case in point:

It is surprising, Minister, how in five months you managed to turn economic immigrants, meaning illegal immigrants, into citizens.'¹

In the above quote, labour migrants are collectively renamed – indicated by the word 'meaning' – as 'illegal immigrants'. In another debate, a LAOS MP employs the phrase 'Immigrants, illegal immigrants, call them whatever you want'² the informality of which again demonstrating that the distinction between 'legal' and 'illegal' is of no significance. In other extracts, they appear to relate their use of the term 'illegal immigrant' to the manner of entry:

I heard the word 'immigrants' in this room. They are not immigrants, they are illegal immigrants. Those who enter the country illegally are illegal immigrants.³

Conversely, categories such as asylum seekers or 'refugee' are rarely used by LAOS to refer to immigrants. In one instance, for example, a speaker refers to the 'illegal immigrants of Lavrio', despite the fact that 'Lavrio' is a well-known refugee accommodation centre.⁴ Moreover, while LAOS MPs do occasionally refer to refugee generating causes, such as wars and human rights abuses, these acknowledgments do not translate into the recognition that at least some of the irregular migrants entering Greek territory might have a claim to refugee status. It is argued for example that '*political refugees don't exist. This is the reality.*

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² PG 08/05/09

³ PG 11/01/2011, p. 3431, G. Karatzaferis

⁴ PG 11/02/09

*The UN, having surrendered to those left wing notions, uses an expanded definition of a refugee'*⁵

The choice of the label 'illegal immigrant' is a political one which occurs in the discourse of political parties and institutions across Europe, and by other Greek parties in parliamentary debates (Karamanidou 2009; Story 2005; Zetter 2007). In the case of LAOS, stressing the 'illegality' of migrants is part of their overall strategy of opposing attempts to the regularisation of migrants, and their overall exclusionary attitudes towards migrants.

Unsurprisingly for a radical right party, LAOS construct migration as a negative phenomenon. '*For us, [immigration] is a problem*'⁶ states an MP soon after Laos' election and elsewhere, '*the biggest national problem in the country*'⁷. In that, they adopt a framework of securitization where immigration is represented as problem and a threat to the security and wellbeing of the national community (Bigo 2005; Huysmans 2005). The next section focuses on four constructions of such threats - to state and ontological security of the state, to public order and safety of Greek citizens, to employment and economic life – before discussing constructions of difference and exclusion.

Migration as a threat to the (nation) state

One of the most salient threats that the LAOS MPs invoke is that to the nation and the nation state, in the sense that it threatens the national, ethnic and cultural identity, and therefore poses an ontological threat to its existence. In such statements, immigration brings about a change in the ethnically Greek identity of the population which, for LAOS, has implications for the sovereignty of the country. Added to this are concerns regarding the security of the state in relation to external enemies. The following quotation summarises some of these concerns:

You want to turn a humanitarian problem [...] into a national problem [...]. There are today in Greece 450 thousand immigrants with work permit, residence permit and an unspecified number of illegal immigrants which is rising daily and is estimated at 500 to 700 thousand. We have a total of people who correspond to 12% of the Greek population. [...] The intention to grant citizenship to the children of immigrants creates minorities in the Greek society, and most of them are Muslim. In this way,

⁵ PG 11/01/2011 p. 3422, A. Plevris

⁶ PG 11/01/08

⁷ PG 24/06/2009, A. Plevris,

Greece will be transformed into a multiracial, multi religious multicultural country and will lose its national identity.⁸

A first issue mentioned above is the preoccupation with the increasing number of immigrants (of non-ethnic Greek origin) in Greece, which for LAOS will result to the adulteration of the previously homogeneous character of Greek society. Elsewhere, similar concerns are expressed under the designation of the problem as a 'demographic' one, where the Greek character of the state is undermined by the low birth rates of the Greek population and the rising number of immigrants.

A second threat is a cultural one – losing the national identity of Greece. This negative view taps into long-standing historical narratives where Greek identity is constructed as a matter of common descent and shared culture, and is homogeneous. For LAOS the existence of immigrants in the country and the attribution of political rights to them through legislation undermines this order. The reference to multiculturalism in the quotation suggests the negativity with which LAOS speakers see this concept. It is argued that multiculturalism 'against nature'⁹ an American [...] ideal¹⁰ which goes against LAOS view of 'the Greek state' as 'nation, a state of Greeks'¹¹

A third threat expressed in the quotation is a political one – the creations of minorities. In Greek nationalist discourse, minorities threaten the security and homogeneity of the Greek state and such concerns have dominated post-war politics and discourse on minorities in Greece. In the first quotation, the speaker makes a reference to the Islamic religion of new immigrants. LAOS see Islam as something that unites the indigenous Muslim minority with new immigrants in a way that threatens the security and political order of the country:

Turkey saw that it's not going to enter Europe (EU) and changed its tackle. It looks like this. It enters Islam. [...]Greece must have four million Muslims here. [...] Isn't there going to be a Muslim party like there is in Bulgaria? Right now we have about two hundred thousand Greek Muslims who refuse the label 'Greek' and want to be called 'Turks'. You know what kind of battle we're going to face. You're going to add another five hundred and no Muslim party will exist?¹²

The above quote states the possibility that the Islamic connection is going to be exploited by Turkey, in order to create a 'Muslim party' and thus undermine Greek political order. As the

⁸ P. Markakis, P. 10/03/2011 p. 4792

⁹ Velopoulos, 09/03/10 Parliament Gazette 4739

¹⁰ [Karatzaferis, 11/03/2010 p. 4892)

¹¹ 09/12/08

¹²

same speaker comments elsewhere this association could 'start a situation like Kosovo'¹³, a breakup of the Greek state along ethnic lines. The statement by the MP assumes that religion will provide common ground between the Muslim minority of Thrace and immigrants for political claims. The conflation of the two seems to happen on the basis of religion exclusively, and ignores both citizenship status as members of the Muslim minority are Greek citizens) and differences of ethnicity (Muslim immigrants to Greece come from a range of countries apart from Turkey, and do not necessarily speak Turkish). It also relies on the implicit understanding that the Muslim minority is used by Turkey to undermine the Greek state.

It should be noted that threats from other states are not based solely on Islam or Turkey. Albania is also depicted as a threatening neighbour which could exploit the Albanian migrants in Greece – the most numerous immigrant group – to undermine Greek political order. *'If tomorrow five towns in Epirus elect Albanian mayors' argues a LAOS MP, 'what will happen? Whose interests will they serve?'*¹⁴ Elsewhere, high profile migrants are *'trained by the United States'*¹⁵, an extreme statement which clearly draws on the anti American discourse of both left and right.

LAOS tends more strongly than other parties to link immigration to terrorist threats.

Do I have to remind you what happened in July 2005 in London and a few months later in Glasgow, who was responsible? Genuine, in quotation marks British citizens of Pakistani origin, fully integrated who however moved against their new homeland.

¹⁶

Unlike other political parties, the MPs of LAOS make very explicit connections between Islam, terrorism and immigration. Such references were largely absent from the political discourse of other parties, even post September 11, and it could be argued that Islamic terrorist threats in Greece are minimal if not imaginary. It is noteworthy that when LAOS MPs use this particular construction, they refer to the experience of other states – as the UK in the above quotation – rather than Greek reality. They, in a way, use references to experience to legitimate an argument regarding potential threats through immigration to Greece.

Migration as a threat to citizens security and public order

¹³ G. Karatzaferis, 01/02/10)

¹⁴ (Anatolakis, 09/03/10 p4749).

¹⁵ Chrysanthakopoulos, A. 09/03/2010 p. 4736

¹⁶ Korantis, I. 10/03/10 p4759)

The main representation of migration as a threat to public order and quality of life evolves around its association with crime. LAOS MPs tend to state very strongly that any rise in crime rates in Greece is due to the rise in (irregular) immigration. 'The main reason for the increase of criminality is illegal immigration'¹⁷ In a similar fashion two years earlier, another MP says that 'KKE [the Communist party] wonders why we have criminality. I'll say why because I'm not afraid. Il-le-gal im-mi-gra-tion [emphasis in original]'¹⁸

Both extracts express a strong association between crime and immigration. Interestingly, in the second extract 'illegal immigration' is presented, whether by accident or design, as the only reason for the existence of criminality – a phrasing that suggests there was no crime in Greece before immigration became noticeable. In both cases, it is illegal immigration the speakers refer to, which is the most common designation LAOS uses, although not an exclusive one – some extract mentioning criminality refer to migration in general.

Apart from what they call a 'quantitative' change – an overall increase in crime rates, LAOSMPs focus on 'qualitative' change. This is associated with an alleged increase of violent/serious crime whereby immigrants are overrepresented. 'How many Greeks' queries a LAOS MP 'and how many foreigners are in prison for murder, rape, drugs and robberies? Because [...] crime rates in prison might be 50-50 but not for serious crime'¹⁹. In a later quotation, illustrates the same point through the use of statistical data:

'Participation of aliens to robberies is 51%, to thefts 51%, to homicides 35%, to sexual exploitation 51%, to rape 50%'

Partly, the qualitative increase in criminality is attributed to the irregular status of the migrants. As an MP puts it 'in conditions of anonymity, in a country to which they [illegal immigrants] have no connections, [...] criminality will develop more easily.'²⁰ Occasionally there are also references to the economic and political context of migration. It is stated, for example, that 'we have conditions of extreme poverty for immigrants and of course mainly for the citizens of Athens, immigrants who become become the object of exploitation by their compatriots, and participate to all those activities.'²¹ Elsewhere, the overall 'quantitative' rise in crime is associated with the current economic crisis as '*in conditions of economic crisis we are going to have a rise in criminality [...] in crimes related to the survival of a person.*'²²

While this type of quotation shows an awareness of the impact of broader economic

¹⁷ (Aivaliotis, 19/11/10 p. 1420).

¹⁸ 09/07/08.

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²⁰ {Plevris 19/11/10).

²¹ (A. Plevris 11/08/2008 check 11/01?)

²² (Plevris 19/11/10 p. 1414).

conditions, it also acts as a moderating statement for statements on the 'qualitative' type of change.

However, another construction, specific to LAOS, is explaining the alleged rise in criminality in cultural terms:

'The qualitative element has nothing to do with biological characteristics, it has to do with value characteristics. When illegal immigration originates from countries where value systems are entirely different to the values of our country and of European civilisation, you understand that the tendency to a form of criminality is easier [...]When we have people whose values are that human life is worth 30 and 40 euros, we'll have much more easily a tendency towards criminality.²³

Immigrants are argued to have values different from those of Greece and Europe, and therefore a greater propensity towards crime. Constructions of cultural difference are a salient theme in the discourse of LAOS, which will be explored later in the paper.

The alleged rise in crime and criminal activities has for LAOS a negative impact on the quality of life of Greeks by threatening public order and social cohesion, and affecting their sense of security.

The Greek society is shaking with fear! It is rightly shaking with fear!It's shaking with fear because it's being mugged, it's shaking with fear because it's being burgled at night, it's shaking with fear because it's being raped, because it can't go anywhere in Athens after 9.00 in the evening'²⁴

The above statement depicts the capital as a place of lawlessness and fear because of the criminal activities of immigrants. It encapsulates in a sense the populist rhetoric of LAOS by touching upon issues of crime, which are a central concern in securitising discourses of immigration (Huysmans 2006; Tsoukala 2005) but also in language that is highly emotive and depicts society as a victim through the use of passive voice.

Immigration as a threat to employment

Immigration as a threat to the employment of Greek citizens is one of the most dominant themes in the discourse of LAOS. Immigrants, legal and undocumented, are portrayed as sources of cheap labour, undermining the wages and employment of Greek workers.

²³ Plevris 19/11/10 p. 1415)

²⁴ DBLWIM 13/09/11

To begin with, immigration is linked to increased unemployment among the 'native' workers by creating a surplus of labour. As one speaker argues,

[t]he mass entry of illegal immigrants increased to a great extent the availability of labour. So we had the reduction of jobs, but at the same time, for these very few jobs left in the economy, we had an enormous competition.'²⁵

Although the financial crisis is not explicitly mentioned in the above quote, and is not always linked to this particular theme, it is suggested by the reference to the loss of jobs.

Unlike academic research and mainstream party attitudes which have represented migrant labour as contributing to Greek economy, LAOS sees it as a direct threat to the employment of Greek workers. It is argued, for example, the 'research shows that 35% of foreign labour force, in time, takes the positions of skilled labour force [presumably Greek]. Therefore it threatens positions of skilled labour force'²⁶ and elsewhere, again based on research findings, that 'for every five illegal immigrants entering Greece, two indigenous Greeks lose their jobs.'²⁷. While the research quoted in the extracts is unnamed, its use serves at strengthening the claim regarding job losses.

For LAOS, employers show a preference for immigrant workers because they are cheaper and more open to exploitation:

Statistics: 82% of those who worked for the construction of airport 'Eleftherios Venizelos' were immigrants who were paid with smaller wages, [...] with black money [cash-in hand], without insurance. I would like the 82% to be Greek wages, of those in the long-term unemployment.²⁸

The above extract offers an explanation for the preference for immigrant labour: that of the large informal sector of the economy which is not sufficiently regulated by the state. As it is argued in an oral question, 'employers, exploiting the weaknesses of controlling mechanisms, employ mainly illegal immigrants.'²⁹ While LAOS depicts irregular migration as the main source of threats to employment, it also draws on the recognition of domestic problems. At the same time, their employment undermines the rights of the Greek labour

²⁵ (DBOT060710).

²⁶ (Rontoulis 15/10/11 p.2247)

²⁷ (Rontoulis, 11/12/08)

²⁸ (G. Karatzaferis, 11/01/2008, p.3310)

²⁹ (Voridis, 10/11/2008, 1540).

force . As speaker argues, '*some use illegal immigration [...] as a pressure level against the indigenous labour force*'³⁰

Representing immigration as a threat to the employment of citizens is an area where LAOS often adopts a left-wing discourse. LAOS MPs do occasionally recognise that foreign workers are victims of exploitation and poverty. It is argued, for example, that 'the irregular migrant [...] is far more vulnerable than the Greek worker'³¹ or 'a tool for additional profit for the capital'³². LAOS MPs frequently signify employers, business interests, political elites or abstract entities such as the capital or globalisation as the agents of a exploitation of both migrant and citizen labour. This is a representation of employment relations most commonly adopted in Greece by leftwing parties, most notably the traditional communist Greek Communist Party. The fact that LAOS adopts this discourse, to the extent that speakers explicitly or implicitly refer to the work of Marx and Engels, can be seen as part of their effort to attract voters from the poorer strata of the population, as well as of their broader anti-elite and anti-globalisation identity (Geminis and Dinas 2010; Kovras 2010)

However, in contrast to left wing parties, LAOS adopts a Marxist perspective only up to a point. While they depict immigrants as an army of surplus labour, their solution is not for the workers to unity against employers but for the state to protect the rights of Greek employees. It is stated, for example, that

40 % of our young people up to 25 years old are unemployed. [...] But you make provision [in the law] for the seasonal employment of third country nationals. Don't we have any workers looking for a job in this country?³³

This type of statement is an example of one of the most commonly used argumentation strategies of LAOS speakers, that of juxtaposing the rights and interests of Greek citizens to those of immigrants. LAOS positions itself as the defender of 'ordinary' Greek citizens, and opposed legislation which they see as enhancing the rights of migrants at the expense of Greeks.

Immigration as a financial burden

Another very salient construction of immigration is representing it as a burden to the county and the citizens. There are several ways in which LAOS argues that immigration and asylum

³⁰ Rontoulis 15/10/2010, p. 2248).

³¹ (Voridis, 10/15/2008, 1540)

³² (G. Karatzaferis, 11/01/2008, p.3310)

³³ (DBLWIM130911)

seeking constitute a burden. First, constructing immigration as a burden consists of representing migrants as a drain on the finances and resources of the state. The reception of irregular migrants (or refugees and asylum seekers) is singled out as significant area where the drain for the Greek state occurs. In a debate, a LAOS MP bring up the issue of reception by stating that ‘the Greek taxpayer gives 30.000.000 euros annually only for the food of illegal immigrants,’³⁴ a figure given earlier in the same debate by another speaker as 26, 7 million.³⁵ Elsewhere, it is argued for example that asylum seekers and irregular migrants ‘will be fed for a year in a reception centre.’³⁶

The passive voice in the above extracts reinforced the impression that migrants do not contribute but are a financial burden to the Greek state and taxpayer. Questions regarding the human rights obligations of the country, as well as humanitarian imperatives are not discussed. The following extract is an indication of LAOS’ position on the matter:

We should take care of the people. We are hospitable not with our money, but with the money of those who are interested [in asylum seekers and irregular migrants]. The UN, Europe. We shouldn’t suffer, we shouldn’t go bankrupt, we shouldn’t beg or applaud that we found money with 5% interest so that we look after those who [in number] increase daily³⁷

The quotation suggests that it should not be the Greek state that pays for the reception of asylum seeker and, intentionally or unintentionally, that reception of asylum seekers or undocumented migrants is not an obligation that Greece has. Calling for greater support from the European Union in matters of asylum is an argument that all parties employ; in contrast to LAOS, however, they tend to recognise to a greater extent the human rights obligations of the country.

The issue of burden also extends to the constructions of burden on the welfare state. While this particular theme has been a core feature of immigration discourses of western European states, it has not featured prominently in Greek discourse, possibly because of the weak welfare state in this country. Two areas that feature prominently are those of welfare payments and pension contributions. LAOS MPs have opposed giving the ‘social solidarity benefit’ to immigrants. An MP states that ‘A stange [paraxenos] gentleman called Aliu Kutzim [...] pocketed 400 euros.’³⁸ Designating the recipient ‘strange’, in conjunction with his name, suggests both foreign origin and potential illegality or deviance, also implied by the

³⁴ 01/12/09

³⁵ 01/12/09

³⁶ (DBLA 110111)

³⁷ 11/01/12)

³⁸ OQ 101011

use of the word 'pocketed'. Elsewhere, giving this benefit to immigrants is characterised as 'a great affront'.³⁹ In other documents, LAOS MPs protest against immigrants from Bulgaria and Romania – recent EU citizens 'making [pension] contributions of 80 euros or 100 while they live there,[but]coming here and getting from us 500 euros.'⁴⁰

While depicting immigrants as a burden to the welfare state has been a core feature of immigration discourses of western European states, it has not featured prominently in Greek discourse, possibly because of the weak welfare state in this country (Karamanidou 2009). However, it features prominently in the discourse of LAOS and reflects their positioning as a defender of ordinary citizens.

A second subtheme revolves around the idea that the presence of migrants results in the loss of income for the Greek state. One manifestation of this construction focuses on the loss of income through migrant remittances.

Do you know how much money leaves every year because of immigrants, legal, illegal, semi-legal, working legally or illegally? Ten billion a year go abroad, they go to Albania and build the Albanian miracle, they go to Afghanistan, they go to Pakistan.⁴¹

The issue of migrant remittances is almost exclusively raised in parliamentary debates by LAOS. What is noteworthy in the above example is that all categories of migrants are blamed for the loss of income rather than the customary category of 'illegal immigrants'. The allusion to Albania, one of the designated enemies of the country for LAOS, suggests that this also can also harm the broader interests of the country.

A further burden for the Greek state occurs through the loss of taxation. In this sub-theme, LAOS MPs often focus on illegal trading, which it singles out as another area where state income is lost, as 'illegal immigrants [...] deny the Greek state an income of 4.000.000.000 euro in direct taxes.'⁴² Elsewhere, it is also suggested that presumably legal businesses owned by immigrants do not pay tax:

'There are 20,000 immigrant businesses in Greece. Do you know how many pay tax? I'll tell you. Out of twenty thousand, three thousand thirty eight pay tax, 500 Euros each. Twelve thousand nine hundred eighty two pay zero tax. Don't they evade tax? It only ours who are tax evaders?'⁴³

³⁹ DBOT01/12/09

⁴⁰ 01/02/10 DB

⁴¹ 021209

⁴² DB130410

⁴³ PG 19/04/10

The above quotation touches on the matter of tax evasion, which has been a core issue in ongoing debates on the Greek economic crisis. The rhetorical questions and the use of the pronoun 'ours' suggest that an unfair emphasis is placed on the tax evasion of Greek businesses in comparison to migrant ones. Suggesting that Greek citizens are treated or perceived unfairly by other parties is a core argumentation strategy of LAOS which will be discussed in a later section.

Constructing difference

A very notable feature of the immigration discourse of LAOS is the persistent emphasis on difference between the 'native' population and immigrants. I will focus on two manifestations of this theme – the construction of difference between Greek emigrants and immigrants to Greece and the emphasis places on cultural differences.

Referring to refugee and migrant experiences of both immigrants and citizens has been a feature of the discursive strategies of other political parties in Greece - as well as in other countries with a history of emigration, such as Ireland (Garner,2004; Karamanidou 2009) and serves in legitimating policies of immigration and asylum. In the discourse of LAOS, however, such references are aimed at highlighting the differences between immigrants and Greek emigrants. For example, the Greek migrants abroad are depicted as wanted by other countries and therefore lawful.

'It's important that they are illegal immigrants, entered the country illegally. They didn't follow the legal procedures. And don't compare our own emigrants to Germany or America. Ours used to go to the Embassy, they did their medical tests, they went to a particular place with a particular job, with a specific address.'⁴⁴

Similar sentiments are expressed in a later debate: 'They went there [Belgium] respecting the laws of the country where they found themselves. They didn't barge in, like some did to our own country'⁴⁵

In the above quotation, Greek emigrants are constructed as lawful, in the sense that they followed immigration procedures rather than entering illegally as the first quotation suggests and the second states clearly through the use of the word 'barge'. Apart from depicting all immigrants as 'illegal' and disregarding difficulties and complications in acquiring legal status in Greece, the statement offers a de-historicised version of Greek emigration, ignoring that it took place at a time of European history where the labour need of industrialised countries dictated a liberal immigration policy.

⁴⁴ DBOT 23/12/09

⁴⁵ PG 26/10/11

Another way the difference is highlighted is through references to Black Sea and Asia Minor refugees of ethnic Greek origin who, as a result of nation-building in the beginning of the 20th century, were expelled to Greece .

[...] the green paper [of the citizenship law] identifies refugees from the Black sea and Asia Minor with Pakistanis and Afghans! This is what you did. Exactly this, dear colleagues. We asked the Committee to withdraw this article, which insults all of us which have Asia Minor and Pontic Greek origin.⁴⁶

This argument taps into constructions of Greek experience of displacement which are very central to Greek identity (Voutira 2003). However, contrary to other speakers, who have employed such references to legitimate policies by drawing on the commonality of experiences, this MP tries to do exactly the opposite: to delegitimize the proposed law by stating that this historical origin is so important that it should not be compared to the experience of the current immigrants. The highly emotional tone of these statements – the reference to the ‘soul’ of MPs, the word ‘insult’ – shows that the MP attempts to authorize his position by taking the moral high ground through a reference to emotionally significant history. Such references are a common strategy of legitimation in debates on immigration (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999; Van Leeuwen 2007)

However, highlighting ethnic, religious and cultural differences is the most salient way in which LAOS constructs relations of difference. Such references are widespread, and they tend to focus on Islam and Muslim immigrants, whose religion and values are depicted as alien to European, Christian and Greek ones.

For Muslims, the western way of life, western principles and values are something that is condemned a priori. In the mind of Muslims the Christian is a devil that needs to be condemned. His way of life needs to be condemned .⁴⁷

The above quotation not only clearly states that Islam is alien to western values, but that it actively opposes Christianity. As the above quote illustrates, Muslims are seen as a homogeneous group with little internal differentiation amongst them. While this is a problem in itself, it is far more significant that LAOS not only depict Islam in a highly negative manner but they also claim that they have a better knowledge of it than other MPs:

⁴⁶ (Georgiadis, AG, 09/03/10, p. 4730)

⁴⁷ 06/09/11

Do you know what Islam means? I'll tell you since you talk about philanthropy and human rights. [...] there are sects that live in Greece and right now that perform genital mutilation under Omonia [...] I ask how can you tolerate the burqa, and women to be a thing, res [in latin][...] I'll tell you something more, because I know Islam [...] they gather outside mosques and they slaughter animals. It's a custom [...] they slaughter thousands of sheep outside the mosque, paint their faces with the blood and jumping around [...] We cannot allow eating cats and dogs, because this is a dietary habit in Afghanistan and Pakistan [...] I'll tell you one last thing, because I have studied Islam [...] They cannot accept the constitution of any country [...] because above the constitution is the Quran and Islam.⁴⁸

In an oral question regarding the creation of a Mosque in Athens, the speaker employs some extreme, and quite possibly untruthful, images of Islam. These are interspersed with claims to the knowledge of this religion, emphasised by the word 'know' and the claim to have studied Islam. Rather unsurprisingly, speakers of LAOS deny that statements such as the above are racist, an accusation often addressed by MPs of other parties, arguing that they do not adopt biological explanations of differences⁴⁹.

A discourse of exclusion

The position of LAOS on immigration is one that supports the exclusion of immigrants. As an elected party, LAOS has opposed the granting of voting rights to immigrants, and law facilitating the liberalisation of granting citizenship, as well as an array of other legal developments they perceive as granting rights or benefits to migrants. Their argumentation is full of such instances of exclusion. Following from the constructions of cultural difference, for example, LAOS MPs argue that the integration of migrants is impossible:

This muslim population, which has started to flow into Greece, can it be assimilated?
No it cannot be assimilated, it cannot be integrated, because they have a different cultural identity, they have a different culture.⁵⁰

While conflating assimilation with integration, the above statement makes it clear that neither of them are possible, because of differences in culture. To support this argument, LAOS refer to the experience of other European countries. 'Why Arabs in Paris haven't integrated?' asks an MP. 'Why haven't Turks integrates in Germany after all those years?'⁵¹Beyond

⁴⁸ K. Velopoulos, 13/01/11 p.3744

⁴⁹ Plevris 19/11/10 p. 1415)

⁵⁰ FQLA 16/03/09

⁵¹ 09/03/10

cultural differences, LAOs MPs justify their exclusionary positions not only on culture, but with a construction of national identity based on shared culture, ethnicity and belonging.

[...] There is a common descent, a consciousness of common descent, which is lost in the depths of time. Everybody here, we feel that we are Greek. Nobody is asking for a blood test, whether you are Greek for three, four or five or six centuries. We all however, have as a point of reference this common origin that is lost in the depths of time and because of this we feel a sense of communion with what we call the Greek nation. Someone who has come here, because their father belongs to a different nation, doesn't have this consciousness just because he went to a Greek school. He loves Greece, he feels that Greece is his second home, but he doesn't have this consciousness of a common origin⁵²

The above quotation is very revelatory of how LAOS perceive Greek identity. Being Greek is seen as a matter of common descent and the realisation of common origin. This is a well known construction of national and ethnic identity where being Greek is seen as a matter of common origin and descent (Herzfelt 1987; Tzanelli 2006). The language used by the speaker however, goes beyond this – the words 'feel' and 'communion' suggest an emotional and almost mystical attachment, and as the last sentence suggests something that cannot be learned.

A further exclusion occurs in the area of rights. For LAOS, the rights of Greek people are constantly prioritised in discourse over the rights of immigrants, and migrants are excluded from rights and benefits that are seen as belonging to Greek citizens. For example, in a debate regarding military service, a speaker states that

'There are issues of individual rights [of immigrants] by I separate them from human rights and I contrast them with the political rights of Greek people, who are Greek citizens, who respect the law, love their country and serve it.'⁵³

The positive construction of Greek citizens in the second part of the phrase implicitly creates the impression that immigrants, even naturalised ones. At the same time, the speaker suggests that because they are citizens, their rights have priority over the rights of Greek citizens.

At the same time, this discourse of exclusion incorporates a strategy of juxtaposition, where citizens and migrants are in competition over resources. In an oral question regarding the National health system the speaker wonders if

⁵² Plevris, 11/03/10 p.4889

⁵³ Chrysanthakopoulos, 16/09/2010 p. 1531

[...] in all this march towards sacrifices the government has called the Greek people to make, we should include sacrifices for those people who came to the country without an invitation [...] whom we Greek taxpayers have to carry on our backs all these years [...] how much many does the National Health system spend, how much do the Greek taxpayers pay per year for the healthcare of all these people?⁵⁴

By using the pronoun 'we' in front of the designation 'Greek taxpayers' and contrasting it to the phrase 'all these people', the speaker reinforces the idea of competition over resources and of burden to Greek people. This extract reflects how such constructions can be magnified in times of economic crisis and become part of an anti-immigration discourse.

LAOS MPs take this argument further by frequently accusing the government of being discriminatory and even racist towards Greek people. In the oral question on the National Health system mentioned above, the speaker moves on to say:

'When a Greek person goes to the hospital [...] they pay a minimum charge. When an economic migrant goes, they don't pay this minimum charge. Here we have racism against the Greek people [...] When we say we are against racism we mean that we are against discrimination. Here however we have discrimination against the Greek people⁵⁵

Accusing the government of being racist towards Greek people is a novel argument in the context of the Greek parliament and first appears in the discourse of LAOS. Greek people are presented as the victims of discrimination by political elites, especially, as in this case, left wing ones - who do more for the rights of immigrants than for native Greeks. It is a construction that fits the image of LAOS as an anti-elite party defending the interests of ordinary people.

Conclusion

In many ways, the immigration discourse of LAOS, despite being an extreme right party, is not entirely dissimilar from the discourse of the other parties in the Greek parliament. Some of their more prominent themes are shared among Greek parties, especially with the two major ones, the Panhellenic Socialist Party and the conservative New Democracy. All these parties frame migration as 'illegal immigration', and a phenomenon that need to be controlled (Mavrodi 2007; Skordas and Sitaropoulos 2004). A securitising framework, where immigration is associated with a number of threats including crime, fear and insecurity among the 'native' population and threatening social cohesion has also been a prominent

⁵⁴ Georgiadis, 14/10/2010 p. 303

⁵⁵ A. Georgiadis, 14/10/2010 p. 303

one in the discourse of the mainstream parties in before the election of LAOS (Karamanidou 2009; Tsoukala, 2005). In that respect, the election of LAOS has not radically changed the immigration discourse of the Greek parliament, or public discourses of immigration.

Other themes, specific to the debates studied here, are also shared among parties. Apart from the theme of control, LAOS and the conservative New Democracy both oppose the extension of voting and citizenship rights to immigrants because of concerns regarding national identity and cultural difference. Concerns regarding multiculturalism are shared by LAOS, New Democracy and the Communist Part, albeit for very different reasons. The discourse of LAOS and the Communist party presents, up to a point, certain similarities in the way they perceive the relations between immigration and employment. Their emphasis on constructions of immigration as a threat to employment and welfare, for example, is not shared with other Greek parties, and has more in common with both mainstream and extreme immigration discourses in European countries (Schuster 2003)

What separates LAOS from other parties is both the manner of the articulation of discourses, which is more emotive and extreme than that of other parties, as well as the adoption of discourses that are exclusionary, xenophobic and populist. Several of these themes and strategies can be found in the discourses and agendas of populist, radical right parties across Europe (Schain et al 2002). As a populist party, LAOS discourse of immigration incorporates the idea of defending 'ordinary' people against the government and political elites (Albertazzi 2009; John and Margetts, 2009; Schain et al 2002). The emphasis placed on constructions that place citizens and immigrants as competing over resources (der Brug and Fennema 2006) reflects the attempt to represent the part of the Greek population that has been most affected by the economic crisis. In doing so, they draw on discourse from both left and right ideologies (Albertazzi 2009). Their discourse of cultural difference, their negative representation of immigrants' culture and ethnicity, and especially of Islam, and the way they construct European and Greek identities as incompatible to the religion and culture of immigrants is a further characteristic of radical right concerns (Vossen, 2011). While not openly admitting racist beliefs and attitudes, LAOS' discourse raises doubts in that respect. In this manner, it reflects the differentialist racism of similar parties in Europe.

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