

CIVIL RELIGION IN GREECE. A STUDY IN THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE MODERNITIES

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Abstract

The article examines the moral sources and the cultural codifications of civil religion in Greece as this has been shaped by a series of historical contingencies and social forces. It identifies a certain developmental process from a “sponsored” by state and church civil religion (1830-1974) to an autonomous civil religion (1974-today). This development was not the result of an automatic process of social differentiation, but a cultural mutation caused by historical contingencies and the presence of charismatic social elites that instigated the change. Following the premises of the theory of multiple modernities, the analysis identifies foundational cultural patterns on which both sponsored and autonomous civil religions are based upon, patterns that can be traced back to Orthodox religious ontological and cosmological principles as well as visions of the moral self. These premises became the modality of a modern and secular, yet, schismogenetic civil religion that functions simultaneously as a force of social cohesion and of social rupture.

Introduction

Either as a spontaneous social product (Durkheim 1912/1961; Bellah 1967), or as a manufactured political resource (Rousseau 1762a/1973), civil religion is assumed to be as a mechanism for achieving social cohesion. From Rousseau and Durkheim, to Bellah, Coleman (1970) and Cristi (2009), the concept is envisioned to reflect a moral binding force which allows the formation of the body politique as a moral force behind civic virtue. Yet, this is an analytic assumption rather than an empirical observation, based upon Durkheim's claim that “religion” is the mechanism that necessarily creates social cohesion. This supposition led to analysis focusing on the forms civil religion might take (e.g., Coleman, 1970; Jacobsen, 2009) or its sheer existence (Flere 2009), rather than on the substantive qualities that animate and distinguish it.

Yet, the substantive qualities of a certain civil religion could be, analytically speaking, as important as its external form, since “religion” is more than a functional prerequisite for social cohesion. Rather, it formulates particular and, more or less, specific ways of linking the individual and the collectivity to the ultimate source of morality, meaning and salvation based upon the

particular theological-ritualistic complexes that characterize each religion. And even though civil religion as a manufactured political resource is in principle a matter of voluntaristic political engineering (for example in the form of state-sponsored nationalism), as a spontaneous social product is strongly related to the corresponding church religion (e.g., Bellah *ibid.*, Cristi, 2001). In other words, the ways individuals and collectivities are shaped as moral entities by church religion should have an impact on the qualities of citizenship and civil religion itself. And these qualities, if significant at all, should reflect on the ways the body politique is institutionally organized.

A theoretical perspective that indeed pays attention to the ways religion, as a complex of cosmological and ontological principles, are related to the formation of the body politique is the theory of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 2003). The theory, based upon the Weberian analysis of religions, interwoven into a neo-functionalist cultural model, suggests that cosmological and ontological principles, religious or secular, are necessary components of social organization as they solve the problem of the organizational and symbolic “indeterminancies” (i.e., uncertainties) of the social order. This is achieved by the substantiation of these principles to organizational “ground rules” and their subsequent institutionalization that crystallize (a) the institutional boundaries of the collectivities, (b) the criteria of regulation of access to resources, (c) the rules of distributive justice, and (d) the definition of the purpose and meaning of the various collectivities (Eisenstadt, 1995).

In other words, cosmological and ontological principles do participate in civil religion by specifying the ways social cohesion manifests itself in social structures by shaping the various contours of collectivities. It suggests that notwithstanding the homogenizing forces of modernity and the heterogenizing forces of historic contingencies, different societies will comprehend modern social organization in different ways, based upon different conceptions of the political community, its constituent parts, its historic role and its moral purpose. Morality is central to this notion of civil religion, since in this form, civil religion is consisted of deeply internalized “schematic processes” which act as a moral guidance for the formation of ethical orientations and the corresponding ground rules.

As it will be argued in this essay, there might be patterns of civil religion which, while they “relate man as citizen and his history in world history to the ultimate conditions of his existence” (Coleman, *ibid.* 69) they do so in a self-negating and self-destructive way. In the following pages it will be argued that Greek civil religion constitutes a case of such a condition. It will be shown that

civil religion in Greece is a schismogenetic¹ force, holding together a society just to split it apart *ad infinitum*. This occurs when the moral cum political ideals civil religion crystallizes, such as freedom, equality, fraternity, justice, etc., are perceived in such a way that their materialization is impossible; a case of social solidarity that notwithstanding its attractiveness, it cannot be achieved (cf. Alexander 2006).

In the following pages I will endeavor to broadly sketch the contours of such an explanation: That Greek civil religion visualizes democracy as the direct and undifferentiated participation of the People in decision making in all matters of public interest; and that this participation is envisioned in imagistic and emotive rather than rational-methodical ways. It is exactly the impossibility of materializing such ideals and the irrationality of the vision of the good society that leads to all kinds of social pathologies and economic underdevelopment that characterize the Greek social system Hausman, Ricardo et al. (2011).

Civil Religions, Doctrinal and Imagistic

Social structures—formal, institutional, or vernacular as these might be—cannot be arbitrary, suspended on thin air. Rather, they need to be anchored in moral imperatives of right and wrong, in visions of the sacred and the profane, and be embedded in cultural codes (Alexander and Smith 1993). These moral imperatives are both internalized and disseminated, becoming a common property of a given society by public rituals, speeches, ceremonies, commemorations and festivals. They constitute the building blocks of a civil religion, “a set of beliefs, rites and symbols which relate an individual’s role as a citizen and his/her society’s place in space, time and history to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning” (Coleman, 1970:70). It constitutes a *moral* evaluator of the political self as it informs us of our responsibilities and obligations to ourselves as citizens but also to our fellow citizens as well. It suggests commitment to certain “constitutive” goods, or “ideals”, which allow us to evaluate political processes, events, programs and promulgations.

But civil religion is not only in the mind of the beholder; it infiltrates everyday social structures in the form of “ground-rules” that specify: (a) the symbolic institutional boundaries of collectivities; (b) the criteria of access to resources

1 The term was coined by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1935) to describe forms of self-destructive competitive social interactions. I use the term rather differently, to describe impossible moral imperatives and promulgations, which nevertheless lead to similar outcomes.

and power; (c) the rules of distributive justice and equity, and the distribution of rights and obligations; and (d) the definition of the broader purpose or meaning and collective goals of any collective activity (1995: 344). It is also a framework: It allows for the co-existence of more than one interpretation of a hypergood and its manifestation, and how it should be materialized, and thus it allows for multiple political discourses to co-exist and compete with one another. Yet, it is obligatory and requisite: It functions as both the rules of the political game as well as the arena onto which the political game takes place. Without it, political discourses are unintelligible to the contesters, and no debates or clashes, no alliances or collaborations are possible. And for this reason it could be a force of integration, or equally possibly, it could be a force of strife and social fragmentation.

The possibility for a civil religion to be a force of strife and social fragmentation, rather than of social cohesion, arises when it is primarily animated not by texts and speeches but by images. Texts and orations encourage rational reflections of the sacred and the profane to the extent that they describe and delineate a good society and methods of cultivating civic responsibility and civil sentiments (e.g., Robert Bellah's American civil religion). In contrast to this "doctrinal mode" of transmitting principles of the sacred and the profane, the Greek civil religion is "imagistic": Instead of depending on texts and orations, it is animated by emotive images, symbols, and memories infused with moral meaning; and it is these "fixed symbols" of lasting revelations that depict the virtuous society and its political ideals.² As they pay attention to simplified, instantaneous and emotive notions of the good and the evil, imagistic depictions of the good society tend to encourage equally simplified notions of time and space which become historically disembedded; time loses its temporality and society becomes an undifferentiated mass of assimilated individuals. As such, an imagistic civil religion gravitates toward populism, i.e., images of the undifferentiated people as the source of the sacred (Ramfos, 2011). Such imagism could, in principle, have many sources, modern and pre-modern, diffused or commanded. In the case of Greece, I will argue, imagism derives from religion, from the Orthodox theology as well as its liturgical modalities. For this reason, civil religion in Greece today, while democratic to its core, is also, paradoxically, the cause of democratic instability. Making sense of this paradox is crucial to our understanding of problematic social structures.

2 The terms "iconistic" and "doctrinal" refer to the two terms used by Whitehouse (2004) to distinguish between the two mutually exclusive systems of transmitting moral codifications of the sacred and the profane.

From a Sponsored to an Autonomous Civil Religion

From the inception of the Greek state and up to the ominous year of 1974 civil religion in Greece was not an autonomous entity; instead it was sponsored by the state-church ideological complex according to which the Greek citizen *was* a Greek-speaking Orthodox faithful (Gazi, 2011; Veremis, 1983). The individual who experienced the Christian-Orthodox truth was at the same time experiencing the condition of citizenship. As Paparizos insightfully put it,

[N]o clear distinction between the concepts and the relative perception of a human being, an individual, a citizen, a Greek, and a faithful, as there is no clear distinction between the rights of man, the individual, the citizen and the faithful. Thus, it becomes clear from this point of view, that the attribute of the faithful and of the indigenous person constitute the main and primary features of the Greek from which all rights proceed (Paparizos, 2000:97-98)

The “nation” and the “Church” were identical: the nation became a sacred entity that was perceived in transcendental terms similar to the religious ones (Demertzis, 1994). Karamouzis, reviewing the literature of the effects of the Eastern Church on Greek citizenship, concludes that anything national by definition became sacred and inviolable and vice-versa: the good Christian *is* the virtuous citizen, but, crucially, we would add, *not* vice-versa. Religious behavior is an efficient verification of ethical civility:

...[I]n this way, a peculiar type of citizen was established, a citizen who ought to comprehend his/her political presence in the modern Greek society through a set of rules which were legitimized only through religious duties which defined the virtuous citizen.” (Karamouzis, 2009: 92-93)

Thus, to understand the Greek citizen we need to understand Greek identity through both modern Greek nationalism and Orthodox religiosity. According to the prior, a modern Greek is the direct offspring of ancient Greece and medieval Byzantium, and the bearer of the glory of both. As the bearer of the glory of ancient Greece, the modern Greek learns that he is the descendant of those who (a) defended the West against eastern (i.e., Persian) aggression, (b) invented reason through philosophy and science, and (c) invented and practiced democracy in its purest form, that is, the Athenian model of “direct democracy”. As for Byzantium, modern Greeks next of being the bearers of its imperial glory, they are Byzantium’s cultural practitioners. They become so not by being taught so, but by experiencing the religion and the religious practices of their Byzantine ancestors as they immerse themselves into Byzantine-inspired Orthodox rituals and religious modalities. To understand the imagistic mode of these rituals, and their significance in cultivating an imagistic civil

religion we need to get to the core of the Orthodox theology. John Meyendorff summarizes the theological corner-stone of Orthodoxy as he specifies the theological differences between east and west:

“Wherever the responsibility may lie, it is clear that the theological estrangement between East and West goes back to Augustine’s anti-Pelagian polemics. Opposing the anthropological optimism of Pelagius, Augustine developed his doctrine of the original sin and of justification by grace, thus setting the essential frame of later controversies in the West. The categories, in which a Western Christian viewed salvation, became those of justification from an inherited guilt, and of merit, made possible by “created grace”. The reformers, on the other hand, rejected the idea of merit, and insisted upon salvation *sola fide*. Meanwhile, the tradition of the Eastern Fathers, if it mentioned at all “guilt” and “justification,” did so only in a wider setting; it considered the very concept of *nature* as implying participation in God’s life; *it understood original sin not as an inherent guilt, but as a break of the original communion between God and man and as an enslavement to Satan; and it interpreted salvation, first for all, as a restoration of the lost communion with God, as sanctification and deification*. The relations between God and man are thus viewed in the East in terms of organic participation, and not juridical obedience: salvation is not a simple state of forgiveness, granted when certain conditions are fulfilled, it is true life, true joy, true humanity, which can exist only in the communion of the Holy Spirit in Christ.” (Meyendorff 2012, emphasis added)

This theology of “deification through communion” encourages the perception of the self as a vessel destined to shine by divine light, while the desirable *grace-full* state of being is to grasp the unified meaning of the world by emptying the self from daily concerns and activities. As the inner self is encouraged to remain in a state of passive contemplation, the individual self remains uncultivated while the collective self, fostered by the collective effervescence of the rituals, retains its primacy. In Weber’s words:

The core of the mystical concept of the oriental Christian church was a firm conviction that Christian brotherly love, when sufficiently strong and pure, must necessarily lead to *unity in all things*, even in dogmatic beliefs. In other words, men who sufficiently love each other, in the Johannine sense of mystical love, will also *think alike* and, because of the very irrationality of their common feeling, *act in a solidary fashion* which is pleasing to God. Because of this concept, the Eastern church could dispense with an infallibly rational authority in matters of doctrine. (Weber, 1978: 551; emphasis added).

The Weberian understanding of the Eastern Orthodox Church is verified by recent research on the subject. For example, Tomka (2006) in a sweeping over-

view of the faith identifies six peculiar to the Orthodox Church characteristics that dissociate it from its Western equivalents: (a) informal institutionalization; (b) liturgical intuition; (c) religiosity as being part of a social/symbolic universe; (d) mythical view of the religious and the profane realms; (e) mystical style of participation; and (f) unity of faith and polity. In the same vein Makrides (2013), even though vehemently rejects essentialist explanations, identifies otherworldliness and irrational theology as two factors responsible for the Orthodox lack of *systematic* social teaching. Systematic social teaching is absent since it implies a comprehensive, rational, approach to salvation *inside* the world. But the ideal of salvation as a mystical communion between the faithful and God is incompatible with systematization.

The irrational-imagistic mode of perceiving and expressing religious ideals such as salvation, redemption and brotherly love became, by being officially approved by the state, the way to perceive and experience civil and civic ideals such as citizenship, political participation, national identity, and civic responsibility: through the emotive impressions of images, mottos, and symbols. Since the cultivation of the inner self was ignored, solidarity remained by large pre-modern: the individual evaluated itself through its collective identities and ascriptive roles (e.g., kinship, local community, and guild) rather than vis-à-vis some inner universalistic moral principle (Taylor, 1993). But in moments of crisis, in liminal situations, the same individual would “experience the truth” in apocalyptic, messianic, visions of right and wrong. Thus the Greek self entered modernity as a Janus figure: as both a pietistic conformist and as millenarian zealot. The constant rifts, divisions and civil wars that characterize an otherwise deeply conformist population might be explained through such an anthropological reading of the Greek self as a generalized tendency to perceive interest and identity in exclusive, non-negotiable and polemic terms.

The high tide of this “Church-State sponsored” civil religion that went unchallenged for little less than one and a half century was the period the country was ruled by a military junta (1967-1974) following a coup d’état led by a group of right-wing colonels. During this period, state-sponsored and Church-blessed popular (especially in the country-side) parades, festivals, ceremonies and commemorations celebrated the virtues of the fighting/resisting/revolting freedom-loving Greek people through history (usually during the same event) while the regime intensely promulgated itself as the latest bearer of the “Greek-Orthodox civilization”. State-sponsored movies exalted the military virtues of the nation (e.g., *Pavlos Melas*, *Ochi*, *Second Lieutenant Natasa*) and church para-organizations gained immense power and direct access to the educational system (*O Sotir*, *He Zoi*). Military parades and ecclesiastical processions were

completing the ecclesiastical-military complex of what could only analytically be called “civil religion”. Alas, the seven years of the dictatorship, the *Military Revolution*, as it was officially called by the regime, also proved to be the swan song of this sponsorship. The crashing and shameful downfall of the regime in July 1974 as the result of its inability to react to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus (itself a reaction to a Junta-sponsored coup in Cyprus), also brought the demise of the hitherto “undifferentiated” civil religion, unintentionally giving birth to an original and autonomous civil religion (cf. Diamantouros 1993).³

This new civil religion that emerged out of the Junta ashes was inspired by a political discourse that was centered on the *suffering democrat*. Inspired by the ominous fate of many Greeks who resisted the Junta regime, the suffering democrat, unwilling to compromise his ideals “he” (even though females were as many as males) was hunted down, jailed, tortured, and in some cases murdered defending his moral principles. And though there were many isolated examples of such martyrdom, the political discourse in question focused on and exemplified the ‘Polytechnic Uprising’, the bloody revolt of a few hundred university students against the regime in November 1973; a revolt that lasted a few days and was crushed ruthlessly by a combination of army and police forces. In 1974, and after the Junta surrendered power to politicians, the event became the symbol of democratic resistance and eventually a *Myth*⁴: The few hundred students came to symbolize *the People* who were subdued and suffered under the Junta’s yoke until they finally rose and defeated their various international and indigenous enemies, which according to particular narratives, ranged from Zionism to capitalism and foreign powers, and from CIA conspiracies to the dark role Kissinger, the King and his cronies played in keeping the People subdued (Vopulgaris, 2008).

In short, the Polytechnic Myth became the symbolic center of a new narration and a new symbolic framework to comprehend past, present and future through a particular cultural codification as it allowed the formation and crystallization of a new set of ideals, secular visions of the good society and the good citizen, based upon a new formulation of old cultural, cosmological and

3 Diamantouros distinguishes two trends in Greek culture: a pro-Western liberal democratic trend and an “oriental” egalitarian populist one. I consider these trends, if they exist at all, to be ideological rather than cultural, emic rather than etic, since no such distinction has been identified in matters of cultural attitudes and propensities.

4 A forceful description of ‘myth’ is provided by Bellah: ‘Myth does not attempt to describe reality; this is the job of science. Myth seeks rather to transfigure reality so that it provides moral and spiritual meaning to individuals or societies. Myths, like scientific theories, may be true or false, but the test of truth or falsehood is different’ (in Alexander and Sherwood, 2002, p. 11).

ontological, principles. It was a product of cultural codifications of certain social networks of “progressive” artists, performers and writers that met in the public space, as bits of a performative giant jigsaw puzzle, to produce the new civil discourse; a synthesis of numerous symbolically compatible discourses in which the ‘People’ were portrayed as a transcendental entity experiencing Christian-like stages of suffering and resurrection in a secular-political eschatological reading of Greek history.⁵ These discourses and popular social performances were structured in highly emotive terms, as they dramatized past political events that had traumatized Greek society, reversing in the process the meaning of historical events and bringing forward new popular heroes. The triumphal and traumatic events and the national heroes that served as identity-markers of the old, sponsored, civil religion, such as the heroic and defiant PM Metaxas who said “no” to the Axis forces in 1940, and the “glorious victory” in 1949 against the “treacherous communist insurrection”, were erased. They were replaced by the repression of the people by the post-cold war corrupted and US-sponsored governments, and the traumatic interventions of foreign powers in Greece (1830, 1922, 1936, 1944, 1949, 1965, and 1967). As for the national heroes of the War of Independence against the Turks and the “Macedonian struggle” against the Bulgarians, they either faded away (e.g., Pavlos Melas) or they were relocated to the narrative of the new civil religion, becoming people’s heroes (e.g., Makrigiannis). But the new civil religion gave birth to new heroes as well: The civil war leftist guerilla, exemplified by the image of defiant Aris Velouhiotis, became a symbol of popular resistance against the Axis powers of occupation; the imprisoned and execution of left-wingers in the postwar period, exemplified by the joyful image of Nikos Belogiannis, “the man with the carnation”, and the pacifist center-to-left MP Christos Lambrakis who was assassinated by right-wing paramilitaries, came to exemplify the injustice and cruelty of the postwar regime; and the noble image of Nikos Panagoulis, who during the dictatorship tried to assassinate the colonels and for this reason he was jailed and tortured, stood for the pure and unadulterated democrat. This narrative exemplified neither party nor ideology, but exemplary prophets emerging from the bosom of the common people, fighting for freedom, justice and equality, a people constantly being betrayed by foreign powers and the treacherous political elites of the country.

Such a restructuring of key historical events and of the moral codification of the old civil religion ideals of “fatherland, religion, and family” became possible

5 In spite of its strong leftist undercurrents, this civil religion did not emerge out of a leftist party – in fact the Communist Party, the arch-enemy of the Junta regime, at first strongly opposed the Uprising and condemned it as reactionary-provocative.

because the new civil religion was infused with and animated by an avalanche of poignant social performances and artistic creations (movies, theatrical plays, music compositions, literacy works, etc.) that were narrating the suffering of the people and were celebrating its eventual vindication and innate virtues: freedom, equality, heroism, endurance, and above all its democratic spirit and its passion for social justice. It successfully restructured the political codification of “democracy” and “freedom”, their meaning and their purpose, their moral imperatives and their enemies. Democracy meant now not only parliamentary procedures and elections, but also power to the people, social justice and access to power centers; and freedom meant not only *national* freedom, but *social* freedom as well, the right of expression and ability to turn particular visions of the good and the just to tangible reality (Voulgaris *ibid.* 68-79). As for their enemies, they were the corrupted social elites, the capitalists, and the imperialists. Its internal unity came from the polemic, anti-junta discourses; but it became hegemonic, turning the previous one to an under-dog, because the junta itself defamed, and thus neutralized, the conservative imperatives of national strength, national unity and national integrity. As all three of them crumbled down due to the failed general mobilization that was supposed to counter Turkish aggression, the treasonous inaction in Cyprus, and the revelations of the brutality of the Military Police against civilians. Under these devastating facts, the conservative classes that had sided with and participated actively in the dictatorship regime could not offer any resistance to the avalanche of the new grand narrative.

Slowly but surely a new civil religion was coming of age: a set of political ideals embedded in certain beliefs, rites and symbols which gave a certain meaning and purpose to the idea of a democratic citizen, a democratic civil society and a democratic state; a secular collective conscience, autonomous of the State and the Church. It replaced the old, heteronomous civil religion, delegitimizing particular social structures and legitimizing novel ones: authoritarianism, obedience and discipline were ousted as echoes of political despotism, and were slowly but steadily replaced by personal expressivity, communal identity, and a readiness to elevate any social issue to a vital matter of social justice. This is not to say that the new discourse was rejecting the nation or the Orthodox religion. Instead, it was rejecting their parochial and authoritarian institutional organizations, while it incorporated both the nation and the religion in a populist, ethnic, experiential context. Thus, the new civil religion both reframed and replaced the older one by stripping the old civil religion from right-wing nationalism and clericalism and by rearranging past social traumas. What was left behind, the defiant and revolutionary ethnic community, its enemies and

its aspirations, was merged in public spaces as social performances which celebrated and exalted the will of the People, that is, the undifferentiated people. These social performances were not occasions for self-reflection, i.e., political events whereas the constitutive elements of civil religion were structured in doctrinal mode such as speeches or pamphlets. Instead, they were imagistically structured celebrations of the People, events that were experienced in massive ad hoc concerts held in stadiums in cities all over Greece. It was indeed a people worshipping itself in religious-like ceremonies.

Songs and movies were the main means civil religion, its worldview, and its moral imperatives were transmitted and internalized in rites of communal effervescence. The sense of injustice and betrayal, of suffering and redemption, of struggle and resurrection all found their place in songs and movies written from the late 60s onwards by the high priests of the new religion: Mikis Theodorakis (music composer), Odysseus Elytis and Giannis Ritsos (poets), and Theo Angelopoulos (movie director). All of them, from their own perspective, and through their particular artistic means, managed to link ancient, medieval and modern Greek identity as a diachronic ideal of a community-in-struggle. One of the most emblematic songs of the era, “There are two, there are three of us” speaks of the people emerging as out of nowhere, determined to bring justice to the world:

There is two, there is three (of us)
 there is one thousand and thirteen (of us)
 Riding we go to the time
 with the weather, with the rain
 the blood clots in the wound
 the pain is like a nail
 The avenger, the redeemer
 there is two, there is three (of us)
 there is a thousand and thirteen (of us)⁶

And another one, “The bells will ring” speaks of the eternal community of the living and the dead, a timeless community of the soil who are holding their breath as resurrection is close at hand.

With so many leaves, sun is beckoning you ‘good morning’
 With so many flags is shining, the sky is shining
 And those inside the irons (the rails of prison) and those inside the soil
 (ground)

6 Taken from <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/eimaste-duo-eimaste-treis-there-are-two-there-are-three-of-us.html#ixzz3HBgJJ6oo>

Be silent, in some minutes the bells will ring.
 This soil is theirs and ours.
 Under the soil in their crossed hands
 they are keeping the bell's rope
 They are waiting for the time, they are waiting to ring the resurrection
 This soil is theirs and ours
 No one can take it of us
 Be silent, in some minutes the bells will ring
 This soil is theirs and ours⁷

And probably the most evocative of all, the song “Don't Cry for Romiosyni” (i.e., the Greek people) is a haunting elegy for the righteous Greek people seen as a trans-historical entity whose fate is a constant cycle of rise and fall:

Don't cry for Romiosyne
 There where it goes to bend down
 With a knife in the bone
 With a belt on the neck
 Look, it jumps up from the start
 And grows stronger and furious
 And hits the beast
 With the harpoon of the Sun.⁸

These are *secular* songs, yet soaked into Christian eschatology, purporting vibrant, chiliastic, urgency, struggle, passion, death and resurrection. The imagistic instances portrayed in these songs, the faceless community of the righteous, the vague but just cause, the emotiveness of an unspecified struggle that leaves its meaning open to interpretation, the absolute conviction of the uprightness of the cause, forcefully heighten emotions, nourish the collective spirit, and turns the audience into small mystics united by visions of “a new heaven and a new earth”.

In the secular rituals of the time people *become* history in short yet epic dramatic events. But this is a peculiar type of history: it is not linear, whereas a self-assured individual organizes its actions to achieve a desirable outcome. As in the case of the religious icons, history is an ever-present vision made of emotive lasting revelations. Together, Theodorakis and Aggelopoulos could be seen as the two sides of the same coin: the melancholic beauty of timeless passivity-in-struggle and the wild beauty of timeless struggle-in-uprising.

These were some emblematic snapshots of the new civil religion. The issue here is not that foundational songs, poetry and movies that gave a deeper moral

7 Taken from <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/10-tha-simanoun-oi-kambanes-bells-will-ring.html#ixzz3HBlakFiM>

8 <http://hellas-songs.ru/en/song/300/>

meaning to traumatic (Junta oppression, Turkish invasion of Cyprus, national humiliation) and exhilarating (return of democracy) events were imagistic, a-temporal, and emotive (after all, someone will suggest, it is art!), but that they were not accompanied by political prose that would rationalize the imagistic codifications and place imagistic notions of ideals (“democracy”, “the people”, “freedom”) inside a historical process rendering them methodical; that is, to turn imagistic notions of the democratic citizen and the democratic society to in-worldly civil and civic practices and viable social structures. But I am afraid that lack of prose is not accidental; an imagistic, a-temporal and emotive mode despises the routinely mode of doctrines and method. And even though it should be clear by now that there is method in this madness, still this is not the methodical ethical behavior that Weber identified in the Protestant spirit. In effect, this differentiated civil religion remained amorphous.

When democracy was established in 1974, the new secular civil religion had no obvious political impact. Or so seemed to be the case: the old, pre-Junta political elites that came out of the political wilderness the dictatorship had forced them to, came back to power in 1975: the moderate Conservatives under the popular and authoritarian rule of Konstantinos Karamanlis, the loosely united Centrists under spiritless and aged politician George Mavros, and the outdated Communists. But there, in the politics-as-usual Parliament, holding 8 seats out of the 300, was the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) of Andreas Papandreou; l’ enfant terrible of Greek politics, son of the deceased centrist and populist ex-prime minister George Papandreou, American citizen, Harvard-trained academic and economist, and a left-wing radical.

The charismatic dimension: How a civil religion becomes a political program

Charisma is the way by which new institutional structures are created and crystallized. As Eisenstadt states “..[A] crucial role is played in the crystallization of institutional frameworks by people who evince a special capacity to set up broad orientations, to propound new norms, to articulate goals, to establish organizational frameworks, and to mobilize such resources necessary for all these purposes as the readiness to invest in the appropriate activities” (Eisenstadt 1995: 132). Such a person was Andreas Papandreou. He managed, in a period of seven years (1974-1981), to construct, promulgate, and expound a new worldview in which knowing events were portrayed in original and con-

vincing ways to suggest a certain explanation of the political reality, offering at the same time political solutions to perennial social problems and existential anxieties. His grand narrative was threefold: (a) the world is made of two combating forces: The evil imperialist/capitalist camp of the West (the US and the European Communities) vis-à-vis the depended and deprived periphery; (b) Greece is sold out to the imperialist/capitalist camp by the treacherous establishment that serves their interests; (c) PASOK represents the under-privileged who are victims of the establishment and it is the means for the People to come to power (Pappas, 2009: 77-158).

Papandreou wished to present his program as a radical departure from politics-as-usual. For this purpose he developed a master narrative which he promulgated using theatre-like cultural performances⁹ in which he presented himself as a prophet, coming from the desert, denouncing the devil, and promising a world of liberty, equality and justice for all. To distinguish himself from the politicians of the day and to underlie his radicalness he was always dressed in polo-neck top instead of the proper shirt-and-tie. To underlie though his intellectual/academic identity (thus his rational faculties) he always had a pipe casually hanging out of his mouth. And to underlie his political persona as “L’ami du peuple” he delivered his speeches not from a balcony high above, as it was accustomed, but from a podium, only a few meters above the ground just in front of the crowd. His appearance was staged meticulously by a director who was making sure that a full and successful performance was to be performed: Popular songs were plaid beforehand; an excited voice was announcing his entrance; arms extended he was embracing the gathered; flares and flags turned the square into a celebratory event; to the political slogans of the crowd he responded with short slogans of his own giving the impression of an one-to-one conversation; his voice in low pitch, steady and certain, he presented in simple and clear terms his triple message: “We change Greece, and we side with the just, the righteous, and the under-privileged”. His great success was that in his stage performances he managed to turned disjoint, individual, frustrations and anxieties to a collective conscience; he was the revealer and the doer; the insider, as a Harvard professor of economics, and the outsider, as the accuser of American wrong-doings. In his speeches he managed to appropriate the symbolic meaning of the word “patriot” from the right-wingers, and of “freedom-fighter” from the left-wingers; he turned the phrase “center-and-periphery” from a scientific concept to a political concept with apocalyptic connotations; and he used the slogan “change” in such a way so he convinced the followers

9 “Cultural performance is the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the the meaning of their social situation” Alexander, J. (2004).

that a full revolution of things evil to things just was to take place the day PASOK will win the elections. In all, as a true charismatic person he disjointed and then re-jointed the elements of the political codes into a new narration. His son Nick Papandreou (2014) analyses the method of engaging as such:

“(Nick Papandreou:) He speaks with caustic humor. The Right did everything it could to please the United States, but even then the United States was not happy. The Right could not “command” the Greek people. Andreas continues his narrative from the perspective of the American:

(Andreas Papandreou:) Something has happened here. This people have woken up. We (note: *meaning we the Americans*) defeated the communist led National Liberation Front with a civil war, and the Karamanlis period followed. We had said that maybe things would settle down. Then along came the first “Unyielding Struggle” (*led by Andrea’s father*) and we said, let’s see if we can manage things. Then came the second “Unyielding Struggle.” (*led this time by Andreas with his father*) Well, things didn’t work out. These people cannot be held back except with the heavy presence of arms... There is no other way.

(NP:) We see here how he sets up the story — sets up, that is, his version of contemporary history, a version that begins with the National Liberation Front fighting the German Occupation, and then moves directly to the Center Union and to his father’s First and Second Unyielding Fights of the early 1960s. He implies that, in the current phase, the torch has been passed on from the civil war guerrillas, to his grandfather, and now to his very own resistance movement, with Andreas himself the leader of such.”

This was the way Papandreou manipulated his audience that were ready to see the world through the looking glass of the new civil religion: through struggle, victory, and resurrection. Was it not the people who had thrown out the colonels and their dictatorship? The answer of course is “no”, but in the post-Junta era it was a rhetoric question. Interesting enough, the conservative governments of Konstantinos Karamanlis were addressing the “real” issues of the day quite successfully: they had consolidated the democratic transition, imprisoned the colonels, re-legalized the Communist Party, nationalized many big corporations, and they had introduced distributional politics for the benefit of the weaker social strata. In fact, for Greeks of socialist inclinations, the conservative party was a safer bet compared to the unpredictable and quite risky promulgations of PASOK (to leave NATO and the EC, and declare war to Turkey at first opportunity). But the Greeks preferred the symbolic politics of Papandreou (the party *was* its leader) over the pragmatic but banal politics of the conservative, centrist, and the communist parties. They preferred the prophet-like Papandreou who was (literally) embracing them over the patri-

arch-like Karamanlis who was (literally) pointing the figure to them. Fifteen years ago authoritarian Karamanlis was accepted as the leader of a people who were trying to recover from a destructive civil war. But now he looked outdated as law-and-order had its day and was disgraced by the Junta; Papandreou, who was not promising them order but expression was closer to their hearts. They voted overwhelmingly for PASOK (48% of the votes in 1981 elections) and thus Greece entered an era of high expectations and crushing disappointments; of unprecedented levels of EU-induced prosperity and of depravity, immorality and cynical egotism.

Obviously, the verdict against Andreas Papandreou today is negative; relying on imagistic ideals, and corresponding cultural codifications and their symbolic structures, he developed a populist-statist political program that offered justification and legitimation to various demands that claimed to represent and promulgate “people’s will”. But one man, no matter how charismatic he is, could hardly be responsible for a particular path a whole country followed for more than thirty years; Papandreou first gave shape and then cynically manipulated but he did not create the hegemonic new civil religion. We explain: Going back in time populism was a legacy of at least the Junta period: in its effort to find some source of legitimacy, it intentionally turned its back on the established elites and their westernized cultural norms and instead exalted the instinctive ‘Greekness’ of the simple people in as many occasions as it could. This mode remained alive, even after 1974, though radically restructured to accommodate the new symbolic order.

The latter had a power of its own that no ruler could control effectively. For example, when conservative PM Konstantinos Karamanlis in 1977, four years *before* Papandreou’s PASOK first came to power, attempted to change the legal framework of the operation of the Universities (the High Temple of the Polytechnic Myth) he came against the fierce resistance of the “students’ movement” (the High Priesthood of the Polytechnic Myth) and was forced to withdraw it without second thought (Voulgaris 1998: 115). Thus, we can claim with some certainty that if Papandreou exceeded somewhere, it was his ability to find a way to ride the wave and, through his political action, legislation, and economic policies to put substance in it – not to create it.¹⁰ And he was able to do so because he was ready to be radical; only a radical could manipulate an imagistic civil religion on the making.

Thus, the problematique shifts from riders to waves. While the elements of

10 In 1982 Andreas Papandreou did change the legal framework of the Universities but, contra Karamanlis, he did so by incorporating into the legal framework the students’ demands. The new legislation remained operational with minor alterations up until 2012.

the cultural system are drawn from actual events, the symbolic transformation of them into tangible objects or images is an arbitrary process, the material to 'fill in' the structure of a cognitive code that needs to be explained in its own terms. The charismatic mode of the Eastern-Greek cultural system is a low-intensity infiltration of social structures with an emotive, "flashbulb method" of reaching ideals. This code-orientation encompassed and incorporated in its own symbolic structures historical memories giving a particular meaning and purpose to the national community, thus turning collective conscience into a purposeful political unit.

This symbolic structuration of history is best seen in national holidays. Alongside the 25th of March (the start of the War of Independence in 1821, a date which coincides with the religious Annunciation Day) and the 28th of October (the start of the war against the Axis Powers in 1940), the Polytechnic Memorial Day completed the triptych of the national Myth of defiance, martyrdom and resurrection. While other nations also hold myths of martyrdom and resurrection (e.g., the Irish Myth of the Easter Uprising 1916), 'defiance', to go against the odds as a gesture of celebratory defiance, is quite unusual and suggestive.¹¹ It is unusual since it stresses the emotiveness of virtually irrational (against-the-odds) initiatives; it is suggestive since as historic moments worth of national commemoration could have been chosen the happy outcomes of the same events: the establishment of the Greek state (22 January 1830), the liberation of Greece from the Axis powers (12 October 1944), and the re-establishment of the Greek republic (23 July 1974). Yet, no-one is aware of these dates, and if we dare say, no one cares to know them. In fact, there has never been a public suggestion or debate to stress political results rather than armed defiance; they would not make sense to a civil religion that stresses emotive struggle as a means to reach imagistic ideals.

The emotive mode of constructing political visions for the future and recollections of the past runs through the political spectrum and constitutes the core of the political discourse. Music composer Mikis Theodorakis, the iconic figure of the new civil religion, only recently stated: "as far as I am concerned, Revolution means Resurrection".¹² The political rhetoric of the parliamentary opposition, which is indicative of the wider political culture, is built upon cultural codifications of this Manichean-chiliastic symbolism of light and darkness, of a fight against the odds, of struggle as a hypergood in itself. And Alexis Tsipras, the leader of the major opposition party SYRIZA, addressing dis-

11 The only case that comes close to this pattern is the Serbian defiance to NATO's bombing campaign in the second Yugoslav war.

12 <http://newpost.gr/post/100406/theodorakis-epanastasi-simainei-anastasi/>

tressed farmers declared: ‘we only have one option: either to fight and undo everything, or to fall fighting’.¹³ Between Thermopylae and the Marathon, the cultural system today, unlike the ancients, is moved by the symbolism of the prior.

More important, projected emotive states onto historical memories are confused with methodical political programs. Such fixations of ideals when confronted with reality are *not* checked and modified, but are justified by invoking the ideals of righteousness defiance and sacrifice, and the inadequacy of the political personnel; under this reasoning, it is not the ground-rules that need to be changed, but the individuals in charge proven to be inadequate for the task. Though this could be explained away as hypocritical, still, it does not explain the wide acceptance of such argumentation by the public (unless everyone is a hypocrite). One reason for the great difficulty of modernizing and rationalizing the various functions of the state is the blocking of improving or correcting legislation, not only by lobbies, special interests and bureaucratic inertia, but even by the legislators themselves for fear of compromising such kinds of ideals. Imported western ideals, as *individual* rights, are understood in such an undifferentiated and total way that in practice they are interpreted as the rights of individuals who are part of collectivities (e.g., the rights of individuals to occupy a public building in defense of a collective hypergood, such as “free education”). In Weberian terms, formal rationality becomes barren formalism when it stands alone, unable to be infused by the deeper meanings of substantive rationality. As nature detests vacuum, practical rationality takes over: clientelism, private lobbying, and nepotism fill the gap as they provide the only available method to turn ideals into middle-range life-goods, such as salaries, pensions, welfare provisions etc.

How the imagistic political program infiltrates social structures through ground rules

Whereas the highly emotive rituals and democratic celebrations of the immediate post-Junta period subsided in the following years, the cultural patterns and practices that first emerged in 1974 did not. As they became the cultural patterns of the civil sphere, they produced code-orientations and ground rules

13 <http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=498360>

that were incorporated into the political and the administrative structures, as well as to the outlook of the public sphere.

The most important positive effect of the new civil religion to political life was the acceptance that there is one people not to be divided between proper citizens (i.e., nationalists) and pariahs (i.e., leftists); and that potentially everyone deserves the paternalistic protection of the state. Yet, at the same time a series of ground rules and code-orientations strongly influenced by imagistic notions of citizenship also infiltrated political life as follows:¹⁴

1. *Symbolic Politics*. Political issues tend to be perceived as particular manifestations of high moral principles. This cultural pattern urges political actors to focus on the moral dimensions of the issue at hand rather than its usefulness. Even then, this struggle over symbols is barren and unproductive. I explain: If by symbol we mean the figurative and/or representational crystallization of a catholic truth, to be useful symbols need to encapsulate the present social condition, thus to be temporal. This is not always the case in Greece: The polemic crystallization of the new civil religion as the antithesis and the rejection of the older one has turned “the Polytechnic Myth” ideals (anti-capitalist, anti-individualist, anti-bureaucratic) into eternal truths. Thus many modernization efforts have failed due to invocation of the sacred truths of the new civil religion which is duly accepted by the media and the public opinion.

2. *Piecemeal Administrative Procedures*. Laws, explanatory circulars, and constitutional articles are routinely ignored, circumvented or altered at will. This is justified by invoking principles higher than “pedanting bureaucratic formalities”. Such high principles are “people’s just demands”, “previous mistakes”, “humanistic reasons”, “substance above formalities”, “the concerned state”, or “past unfairness”. Since emotiveness is the way to feel the presence of a hypergood, such an invocation is enough to explain to the media and the public arbitrary actions as long as the political actor, individual or collective, performs successfully.¹⁵

3. *Multiple Centers of Responsibility*. Institutional co-responsibility and the functioning of parallel and multiple centers of authority are based upon a cultural pattern of allowing for the coexistence of multiple understandings of institutional boundaries of collectivities, of collective goals and collective activities. This reasoning could be associated with the “undifferentiated people” principle who can manifest itself in many instances and with many faces. Un-

14 OECD Reviews of Regulatory Reform – Regulatory Reform in Greece (2001); P. Karkatsoulis (2004).

15 Karkatsoulis, Panagiotis. (2004) Το Κράτος σε Μετάβαση passim. [The State in Transition] . Αθήνα: Σιδέρης.

avoidably, it leads to the presence of conflicting ground rules which in turn leads to institutional inertia.¹⁶

4. *Maximalist Initiatives.* Usually ministers, but also the parliament, like to introduce major alterations of institutional regulations, bills, even the Constitution. This cultural pattern urges the social actor to materialize a certain hypergood not by methodical, gradual, procedures, but through immediate, one stroke acts. This, in turn, animates ground rules that encourage and justify radical, but usually sloppy, alterations of institutional rules and regulations over methodical, though, time-consuming improvement of existing ones. This tendency resembles the theological principle of “liturgical time” according to which social action is perceived as being embedded not in linear time, but in a-temporal present time.¹⁷

5. *Politics as Piecemeal Voluntarism.* According to this, the rule of law could be inhibited, or a new regulation could be introduced, paying only lip service to institutional procedures, by a “political decision”. Political decisions of this sort are piecemeal reactions to various crises or urgent responses to political developments. The term is used indiscriminately to denote uncoordinated voluntaristic political actions that “feel good”, either to the government, the people, or any party involved in the process. It is a cultural pattern animated by the same imagistic spirit that stimulates “maximalist initiatives” but this time not by materializing a hypergood in its totality, but only certain, minor, aspects of it.

6. *Archetypal Collectivities.* As a member of the EU, Greece is obliged to follow certain administrative and institutional rules and regulations. The political system usually finds ways to bypass these rules making room for the satisfaction of various pre-modern (e.g., nepotistic) and modern (e.g., party cadres, unionists) social groups. This accommodation is justified (and most importantly accepted by the public) as serving the “needs of the people”, thus revealing a cultural pattern according to which various social groups could stand as tangible and immediate representations of the undifferentiated “people”.

7. *Methodical Action as Non-routine Action.* All of the above do not denote *inability* to act methodically, rationally, or scientifically. Time and again, when in need, such as to avoid economic collapse, to fall in line with EU major

16 Typically, urban parks are under the authority of three to five different authorities. License to construct a building requires the involvement of more than twenty authorities. Other kinds of licenses may involve up to a hundred authorities and permissions. Karkatsoulis, op. cit.

17 In this context, particularly interesting, though anecdotal as it may be, is the frequent change of the number and the names of Ministries, the calling of general elections much more often than the Constitution dictates, and the frequent change of Ministers and the number of ministerial appointments during a single administration period.

regulatory directives, or to meet urgent fiscal or organizational targets (e.g., entry to the euro-zone, the organization of the Olympic Games) Greece has responded remarkably well. Yet, these efforts are understood as such: As *efforts* rather than as routine social action. As soon as the target has been met, political life falls back into imagistic politics, that is, politics informed and grounded on the imagistic civil religion.

8. *Melodramatic Media Debates*. Political debates on air coordinated by seemingly impartial reporters follow a certain and recurrent theatricality which aims at eliciting emotive responses, personal and offensive comments, ad hoc accusations, insulting language, etc. The staging resembles the well-known coffee-houses indifferent discussions of common people commenting on the political news of the day: A large number of guests (representing all the parties in the parliament) fight amongst each other, while the coordinator takes a back seat urging them from time to time to continue fighting, a setting that guarantees short responses, constant interruptions, and superfluous if not mystifying analysis. Interviewees never have to deal with matters of accountability, sincerity, professionalism, etc.

9. *“Symbolic” Violence*. Violence, or the threat to violence, is considered a legitimate action to any governmental actions that threaten the democratic rights, or democratic “conquests” of the citizens (i.e., anything considered to have been achieved through struggle against the “system”). It constitutes the most “theatrical” part of the institutionalization of the civil religion, since the social actors need to (a) convince the audience for the righteousness of their demand, (b) to bring together the theatrical components of the act, and (c) to manage to get on air on the evening news thus making their “struggle” known, attracting the sympathy of the public opinion and the parliamentary opposition.

10. *Large Scale Violence*. Large scale violent acts, acts of civil disobedience, such as the one during December 2008 that paralyzed Athens, the interruption and the insulting of national parades by enraged crowds, the occupation of large number of schools by students, are also justified by the media and the public opinion as reasonable reactions of a people who are harmed by the government. Such acts are not prosecuted by the State, but instead they are let to “run their course”. During these periods the police force withdraws allowing people to express their democratic right to protest (Kitis 2013).

11. *Popular Terrorism*. Terrorism has become an “organic” part of this civil religion, as the conscience of the People against the evils that the compromised “political system” does not dare to face and tackle. This terrorism is morally supported by the leftist media (paying lip service to rejection of violence as

counter-productive to the struggle against the enemies of the people) and a large part of the public opinion that agrees with the rationale of the terrorists but disagree with the means they employ. Most of the terrorist organizations (17th of November, People's Revolutionary Struggle, Anti-state Struggle, Fire Nuclei, May Organization, Revolutionary Nuclei, Sect of Revolutionaries, Revolutionary Solidarity, Revolutionary Combating Left, etc) employ the Polytechnic Uprising discourse to justify their acts and they consider themselves to be the continuation of that struggle. In other words, terrorist organizations are seen as “mystics”, (in the Weberian sense of the term), as righteous vengeance incarnated (Mandravelis, 2012).¹⁸

None of these factors constitute a Greek prerogative. Yet, the combined presence of them all suggests certain cultural patterns and subsequent ground rules that penetrate and characterize the heart of the Greek political life, and consequently, of the Greek civil society.

These eleven cultural patterns could fall into two moral imperatives. The first one is the Manichaeian moral imperative that characterizes the symbolic codes of the macro- and the micro-level of the political discourse. It entails the absence of middle-range goods that specify a way to reach the moral imperatives, the ideal vision of a just society. It cultivates a sense of a low-intensity endless civil war occurring inside the Parliament, precluding any by-partisan agreements and sense of political normality. Moral ideals are understood by various political parties in such different and antithetical ways that morality itself disappears from the picture.

The second is the non-methodical, non-linear, imagistic way to materialize a political ideal. This moral imperative or moral modality, demands to set the law aside, to ignore it, or to bypass it, for the sake of reaching a moral ideal immediately, without going into the trouble of cultivating, constructing, or nourishing dull and tedious middle-ground goods; without going into the trouble of being self-disciplined, or demanding the others to be disciplined for this matter – the Junta regime had reverted the meaning of the term from something sacred to something profane. Thus, a relativity stance toward law-and-order was cultivated, a stance that eventually became a standard, a matter of a peculiar common sense: *the rights of the people are above the law*; and, to the extent that fiscal responsibility was clashing with demands for pecuniary demands (e.g., salary increases to the public service sector, compensation increases to farmers, etc), the motto became: *people before numbers*. Both of these lines became the contested codes around which all political clashes and

18 Mandravelis, P. (2012) “The ideological Component of Violence”, in *Violence* (collected essays). Polis: Athens, 51-92.

struggles unfolded after 1981, following the ascendancy of the new civil discourse with Andreas Papandreou in power.¹⁹

In all, the underlying cultural foundation of all of the above eleven aspects of imagistic cultural patterns and code-orientations is the lack of methodical, long-term, *implementation* of abstract and universal rules in the field of public administration; indirectly, it suggests lack of methodical substantive rationality. Thus, we can induce from available evidence that the cultural patterns and the ground-rules of the administrative system are informed by a cognitive mode that is a blend of individualist and collectivist prerogatives; and while the moral premises of the legal system seem to be rational-individualistic, its details are particularistic, emotive, and piecemeal evaluative. Such an infiltration of rationality by emotiveness functions as a Trojan horse that allows all kinds of pressures, external (clients, voters) and internal (guilt feelings, anxiety, empathy, fear), to infiltrate and distort the abstract rules and processes of the bureaucratic, formal, logic. For these reasons public disobedience is not prosecuted, and if it is, it triggers major political reactions and public outcry since it evokes memories of the Polytechnic events and the Polytechnic spirit (street marches, occupation of public buildings and state facilities, revolutionary songs, passionate speeches etc.). Occurrences of public disobedience are seen as instances of *volonté general*, genuine piecemeal occasions of the general will of the People manifested in specific time and place. The fact that such *systemic* “disfunctionality” *does* take place suggests that the problematic interaction between law, parliament, the media and the public is deeper, a matter of particular cultural understanding of the ‘rule of law’, of the moral foundations of civil society. In fact, we could argue that the certain gap that exists between ideals and middle-range life-goods, and between formal and substantive rationality, constitutes a basic ingredient of the Greek civil religion.

The effects of civil religion in the era of Metapoliteusi

The new civil religion penetrated and altered the code-orientations and ground-rules of the old civil religion with great easiness. It managed to do so because it absorbed and incorporated the cultural patterns of the old civil religion turning them from pietistic to zelotic. The old civil religion was transformed into the new one through a political program, the PASOK program, but ten

19 For a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of the cultural codes and moral foundations of the Greeks see: Marangudakis et al (2013).

years later it had become autonomous, forcing not only PASOK but the rest of the parties as well to acknowledge its existence and its demands. There is nothing metaphysical in this process: The new source of political and economic power the country found as a member of the EEC/EU (1981) made it possible: the imagistic civil religion was able to survive its internal contradictions and, actually, for a while to thrive, using the European institutions and funding as pressure and tension absorbents (Ventouris, 1991).

Three political institutions became the pinchers for the political implementation of the public life-goods that emerged out of the new Metapoliteusi ideals: The parliament, the syndicates of state-owned corporations, and the local municipalities. Through them the parties, from the various positions they held as government, major and minor opposition, and as trade-unionists and municipal council members, advanced particular legislative and practical measures and actions that radically altered social structures entrenching them in new symbolic and cultural frameworks.²⁰ The various parties and social groups that emerged and were crystallized in the following years comprehended and internalized newly formed middle-range life goods differently, according to their particular location in the social division of labor, their cultural heritage, historical background and ecological settings. Thus they advanced rival constellations of middle-range moral goods, variations of the hegemonic ideals that were implemented through particular institutional means in the next three decades. Yet, their symbolic codifications remained similar, thus the extreme but also very peculiar type of rivalry that was developed amongst the parties²¹: The rivalry did not involve fights over antagonistic ideals (as in the previous period 1950-1967), but fights over a singular set of ideals that it boiled down to a catchphrase: “to serve people’s needs”. Thus the rivalry evolved into a mockery, a theatrical play of virtual brawls and accusations unfolding daily in the television studios: an all-out struggle between the “honest party” and the rest, the “hypocrites”. This rivalry that started in earnest in 1985²² unfolded as a pattern,

20 The percentage of the national vote the various parties held in the Parliament was not necessarily similar to the percentages the parties enjoyed in labor unions or in municipalities. The latter varied according to the regional or occupational specifics. See Mavrogordatos, George (1993) “Civil Society under Populism” in *Greece, 1981-89 - The Populist Decade*, Richard Clogg (ed.). NY.: St Martin’s Press. pp.47-66.

21 There were two exceptions to this rule in the Metapoliteusi era: the Mitsotakis’ Conservative government (1990-3) which promoted new-liberal policies, and the first Simitis’ Socialist government (1996-2000) which implemented modernization politics. The prior’s effort was blocked and its protagonists were swiftly marginalized by the Conservative party itself; the latter was undermined and subdued also by the internal, populist, party “opposition”, the populist PASOK («λαϊκό ΠΑΣΟΚ»).

22 Its starting point is symbolically identified with the famous incident, during the election

with the government trying to maneuver between its election promises and governmental fiscal necessities, and the opposition outbidding the government in promises for benefits and provisions to “the people”.

The new code-orientations symbolically structured around the motto ‘People in Power’ managed to radically alter the contours of post-1981 collective identities, and of the social division of labor, such as solidarity, trust, and membership criteria, civility and its various orientations by specifying new middle-range life-goods and labor organization and ethics, as well as means and ways to implement them. Paradoxically, even though the ideals the Myth promulgated were collective, the middle-range life-goods that were eventually produced were selective and exclusive: as the Myth favored the undifferentiated ‘People’ and its unspecified ‘Power’ over less messianic and less emotive methodical principles of government, civil society and public goods, any social group could claim to embody the People, and any particular demand could signify “People’s Power”.²³

Thus, there were no normative sources able to specify criteria for the public distribution of private goods, no specificity over what constitutes public good, or whether the resources should be in immediate or long-term exchange. The only rule of prioritizing the satisfaction of various demands was the political leverage particular social groups could exert. The clientist networks (varying from family relatives to fellow-townsmen, voters, and befriended magnates and robber barons) and the political power syndicates enjoyed in running the monopolistic statist companies (electricity, telecommunications, railways, airlines, education, professionals etc) became the major means to achieve selective benefits.²⁴ Thus there developed a two-gear *vertical* social system comprised of those with access, and those without access to the political center. Under these circumstances short-term rationalization of resources in moments of necessity was followed by widespread distribution of resources

campaign of 1985, whereas Papandreou ordered his minister of finances, Dimitris Tsovolas, live on air, to “give everything” to the people («Τσοβόλα δώστα όλα»).

- 23 Nikos Demertzis (1990: 81) notes a basic institutional contradiction: While the citizen despises bureaucratic mediation, still accepts the state as the only valid redistributational mechanism and guarantor of his social status and economic security.
- 24 For example, union representatives became by law members of the executive board of directors of all statist enterprises. Only recently, after the economic crisis came down on Greece, high levels of corruption were identified amongst them. Also, union representatives became members of the ad hoc committees that were to examine cases of possible corruption amongst workers in these statist enterprises. Apparently, no such examination (in the few cases when indeed it took place) resulted in the serious punishment of the culprit. The actual realization of the hypergood resulted into protecting the sectarian privileges of the syndicate against the wider public, or the labor movement itself.

(in possession or borrowed) under the pressure various social groups could exercise.

Conclusions

The system functioned smoothly for thirty five years because of the deep cultural-turned-political vision of right and wrong that united the vast majority of Greeks into a fatal moral trap that are still caught into. It all comes down to “psychological premiums” (Kalberg, 1994:39) and “psychological bonuses”: decisions that “feel right”, as they refer to ideals that no-one questions, decisions such as “the rights of the workers are self-evidently just”, “the wish of the people is sacred”, “the tactics might be wrong but the cause is just”; and decisions that “feel wrong”, as they refer to moral evils, decisions such as “austerity measures hurt the weak and the innocent”, or “the haves should pay before the have nots” and so on. Arguments of this kind were used by various social groups to justify or to condemn specific political decisions, usually with the ardent support of the opposition and the press: it was making sense. The loophole in the system was that the social groups that belonged to the statist sector were ‘organizationally outflanking’ the rest. The reason why the outsiders did not revolt against statism was, again, cultural: Having similar moral convictions, sharing the same ‘cultural code’ with the insiders, they became victims of their own devise. They recognized their condition as a hellish one, and of the insiders as a heavenly one; they just needed to find a way, for them or their children, to pass over to the bliss offered to the lucky insiders. And statism was, for a generation, heaven on earth.

This is not to say that governments could not see, or respond, to perils that were visible to them: austerity measures to respond to clear and present dangers were taken in 1984, 1991, and 1998. But they were, as they still are, “pragmatic” responses to fiscal crises with no deep moral convictions. The “natural” tendency was to see these austerity measures as a necessary evil, as a bitter medicine, that needed to be taken to exit the danger zone. As soon as this was achieved, the people, the vast majority of the political world, the public opinion and the press demanded fiscal relaxation for the “good of the people”. Today, we experience such a pragmatic response from the coalition government, but not a change of civil religion’s cultural-moral building blocks; thus the necessary, though humiliating, presence of the troika. But this pragmatism is weak, once again understood and internalized as a matter of necessity. Greece will remain

problematic as long as the imported western-type rationality fails to come to terms with the domestic eastern-type morality.

This condition should not be seen as a peculiar idiosyncrasy, as a *sui generis* phenomenon; rather, it should be identified as an extreme instance of a rather normal condition of modernity. I explain: As Eisenstadt noted, Western “restlessness” is the result of frustration caused by salvationist impossibilities, when political elites or social collectivities *fail* to see that the reason for their failures is not human incompetency but problematic spiritual modalities (Eisenstadt 1985, 1989c). Greece is a country, in which this modern mechanism for restlessness is not a low key motivating factor that Weber exalted, but a routine source of endemic frustration and the underlying cause of political instability. Constant frustration for failing to achieve the collective good opens the gates for all sorts of egotistic, exclusive, and hypocritical social structures; and the gates for all sorts of messianic, revolutionary, and nihilistic social movements. In a way, Greece constitutes a country where Western restlessness runs amok.

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