Religious Discourse and Radical Right Politics in Contemporary Greece

Abstract

Building on the ‘pathological normalcy’ thesis (Mudde, 2010), the paper aims at exploring the ideological relationship between the ‘institutional’ Greek Church and the neo-Nazi ‘Golden Dawn’ party. To this end, the paper explores two interconnected themes: a) the significance of the religious value system within the party’s ideological structure (the ‘supply side’); and b) the religious political discourse as an actor for the party’s growth (the ‘demand side’). The method of analysis employed is the Essex School discourse theory pattern (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Overall, the paper argues that: a) Golden Dawn has expanded its social influence partly via setting religion as a salient issue for its agenda and as a marker of national identity; and b) the church has not substantially contributed to the establishment of a ‘cordon sanitaire’, due to its longstanding discourse that has operated as the breeding ground for the social legitimization of the party ideology.

Key-words: Neo-Nazism, Greece, Golden Dawn Party, Orthodox Church, Politics and Religion
Introduction

The role of the religious factor in relation to Golden Dawn party (hereafter GD) electoral success is the topic of the present paper. GD might be classified at the ‘autocratic-fascist’ category (Minkenberg 2013: 12) of the radical right party family, advocating an anti-systemic propaganda and having an authoritarian internal structure with strong leadership. Its ideology is articulated on the basis of ultra-nationalist, xenophobic, populist, and racist features, as reflected at its extreme anti-immigrant and welfare chauvinist discourse, while violence and grassroots activity have formed traditional practices of its members (Psarras 2012).

The paper is divided in three parts: a) the analysis of the political context; b) the analysis of the ‘supply’ side; and c) the analysis of the ‘demand’ side. First, the paper examines the current political conditions of party volatility, and elaborates on the special status of religion within Greek political culture that explains why the Church forms a factor for public policy planning and electoral behaviour. The ‘supply’ side part, seeks to explore the place of the core religious values within the ideological structure of the Golden Dawn party. Building on the ‘pathological normalcy’ thesis (Mudde 2010), the paper argues that the inclusion of traditional value frames within GD discourse has had a legitimized effect for the religious oriented segments of society. The part elaborating on the ‘demand’ side, aims at exploring the discourse of the Orthodox Church of Greece (hereafter OCG) as a factor for the development of the GD. First, it elaborates on the hypothesis that religion, as a ‘cultural structure’ has worked as an indirect factor for radical right strengthening (Minkenberg 2003; Minkenberg 2008: 22-28) via mediating ethno-phyletist and authoritarian value systems, which constitute primary elements of the party ideology. Secondly, the paper argues that in actual terms the current stance of the OCG towards the party is ambivalent. Instead of averting the religious electorate from voting for it, the OCG has preferred not to participate actively in the ‘cordon sanitaire’ against GD. In effect, it worked indirectly for its de-stigmatization allowing the expansion of its influence over the religious electorate. The sources to be used as data for the ‘supply side’ are: a) party documents; and b) the political discourse of party officials on religious policy. The sources for the ‘demand’ side are: a) the official decisions and documents circulated within the church organization (membership orientation); and b) the public discourse of the religious establishment (external orientation to society as a whole). The method of elaborating the material will be built on the theorisation of the so-called Essex School of discourse analysis (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Phillips and Jorgensen 2002: 24-59).
Socio-Political Context

Greece, due to the subprime crisis and the endemic problems of its administrative structures, has entered since 2010 into an economic vicious circle. At the same time, ineffective immigration policies linked with increasing crime rates have increased xenophobia and racism among the population. At the political level, Greece might be portrayed as a ‘post-democratic’ state (Crouch 2004): a polity obliged to follow the directives of an international bureaucratic mechanism with limited social legitimization, the so-called Troika, which has imposed controversial structural reforms and severe austerity measures as a condition for the bailout, the so-called Memorandum. This state of affairs has actually led to a ‘structural break’ in the domestic political arena.

The parliamentary elections of 2012 might be considered as producing a ‘party system change’ (Mudde 2014: 2) for Greek politics. The traditional divide between the highly pillarized and segmented electorates (Bardi and Mair 2008: 156) actually collapsed. One of the effects of the voters’ massive de-alignment was the breakthrough of the People’s Association- Golden Dawn (GD), which rose its constituency from 0.29% of the vote (2009 parliamentary elections) to 6.97% in May and 6.92% in June 2012 elections respectively. In the European Elections some weeks ago it rose its voting share to 9.4, despite that its leadership is in prison. Golden Dawn is not, therefore, a one-off ‘protest vote’, but an ‘institutional’ pole within the Greek political spectrum. Undoubtedly, the main structural factors for the radical right strengthening are currently extremely salient within the Greek social space: ‘Economic voting’ (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2012; Nezi, 2012), immigration scepticism linked with high criminality (Rydgren,2008) or dissatisfaction with the deficient democratic function (Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002), have been trends of major importance for the function of the political system. In addition, the GD has also exploited the political opportunity structures by organizing grassroots activities and creating local strongholds (Dinas et al. 2013; Georgiadou 2013).

Figure 1

Party dealignment and the aggravation of the radical Right ‘signature’ issue of immigration have rendered the religious factor of special importance in party politics. First, because a potential loosening attachment of religious people to ND party, is likely to strengthen their political links with the radical Right (Arzheimer and Carter 2009). Second, because of the growing popularity of xenophobic attitudes, religion might not actually become a restraint but an additional catalyst in GD favour, like its political counterparts in Belgium, Norway and
Switzerland (Immerzeel, et al. 2013). In this respect, the neutral stance of the OCG has in practical terms a twofold result: a) it has a legitimizing effect for party propaganda; and b) because of the relatively convergence between the mainstream parties not to align (at least officially) with rigorist measures, it leaves the door open for GD to cover the respective political space, via representing the alleged protector of the religious body on salient issues for the collective conscience. The centrality of the religious factor lies on its ‘hegemony’ within Greek society, both from an institutional (legal) and a structural (social and political) perspective.

Greece is one of the most ‘institutionally’ de-secularized states in Europe. It has a State Church, enjoining various legal and financial privileges. Except for its ‘public’ status, however, OCG is obliged to operate as an ‘interest group’ as well (Warner 2000). In exchange for the preferential treatment, the Church constitutes historically a pillar for shaping social consent. Put it cynically, it is an actual ‘trade off’. From a structural perspective, the Church’s dominant status should be perceived as path-dependent, linked to the lack of a ‘pluralized’ religious landscape, the confessional cleavage between ‘East’ and ‘West’ in mediaeval times, the small impact of the Reformation and the Enlightenment cleavages to the orthodox commonwealth (dominance of Patrimonialism), as well as its invented role for the construction and crystallization of the Greek national identity. In effect, religion have been represented as the cohesive element of the collective subject, the symbolic reference point of the national group in time and space. The reproduction of Church’s ‘hegemony’ rendered in turn its social position unquestionable. This status is clearly reflected in the population’s level of religiosity. Figures 2-8 indicate altogether an advanced state of religious commitment, confirming the thesis that Greece is an outlier in comparison to the other EU societies (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 148).

Figures 2-8


On the one hand, the religiosity factor, though in decline, is proven to be a relatively strong predictor for structuring partisan alignment, as it is the case in many EU countries (Knutsen, 2004; Elff, 2009; Broughton and ten Napel, 2000). In short, the electoral preferences of the Greek constituency might be explained along the religious/sectarian divide.

Figure 9-11
On the other hand, since the traditional value system is part of the ideological position of the median voter and the various catch-all parties articulate their discourse and implement their policies on the basis of his perceptions in order to gain popular support, the maintenance of Church’s position has not been seriously disputed.

However, the ‘framing’ effect of the pro-religious policy of the political mainstream, does not mean that the Golden Dawn is excluded from this pool of voters. In fact, there has been created some political space for GD to intervene. To this end, the GD did not confine itself to participate in the mainstream debates, but interfered in affairs of high symbolic significance for religious collective conscience, for which the other catch-all parties have been reluctant to openly advocate due to the risk of alienating the more secular voters.

The place of religion as an ideological element of GD normative frame and the party’s outlook in respect to certain themes of religious interest has taken different forms within its historical development. While it articulated an openly anti-Christian political discourse (1980s), there was a reorientation of the party’s strategy to exploit church’s social influence and the alignment of religious officials to an ultra-nationalist agenda from the 1990s onwards (Zoumboulakis 2013). The shift of the GD church policy is evident as far as its positioning on religious themes is concerned. In particular, any change of the existing state of affairs between state and church is out of the question. The church-state ‘non-separation’, however, does not imply the maintenance of the quasi-autonomous operation of the church, but is conceptualized as a mere state institution whose hierarchy, activation and function should be controlled by the temporal power. The idea of religious freedom is made null and void, since it should be limited to those not affecting the ‘Greek tradition and History and not corrupting the power of the Nation’ (Golden Dawn, Political Theses); Thus, almost to no-one, since for GD any other faith is considered in principle to be an ‘existential enemy’ for the mono-cultural structure of Greece. Religious class should be structured on confessional lines and be mandatory. Moreover, morning school prayer and school church attendance are regarded of special value. GD supports the adoption of a strict legal framework against the abortion, which is a ‘mortal threat for the nation’ (Golden Dawn, Demography and Abortion), putting at risk its demographic well-being and historic continuity. Family is viewed as the nucleus of society and civilization while homosexuality is not acceptable and a stigma (Mastoras 2013).

The above views, however, are not based on a religious background, but should be conceptualized instrumentally within the context of the party’s phyletist project. The position of the religious ‘signature’ themes within the structure of the GD political programme does not
mean either that they form core features of GD ideology, or that should be treated separately, as autonomous premises of the party’s value system. In contrast they should be elaborated within the context of ethno-phyletism, namely that their actual meaning is derived from their relation with the *nodal point* of the party’s discourse. Consequently, questions, such as state-church separation or abortion, are advocated or opposed not on the basis of their intrinsic or moral significance, for being a first order condition for the proper political function or acts in line with the orthodox value system, but according to their instrumentality for the alleged national progress. However, taking into account convergence between the mainstream parties regarding the respect of the church’s dominant position, the room for electoral gains for GD has been quite limited. In addition, therefore, to the ordinary advocacy of OCG status, GD has adopted a more extreme strategy, supporting measures of rigorist character in an effort to aligned itself with the respective groups within the religious body and fill the gap of their representation in the political spectrum. To this end, it interfered in affairs of high symbolic significance for the religious collective conscience, mobilizing its apparatus in favour of views, which the other parties, as catch-all political groups, have been reluctant to openly advocate due to the danger of alienating the more secular segments of their constituency. The problem, however, is that the rigorist agenda is not considered marginal within the Church organization, but is actually approved by a large part of its bureaucracy. In effect, GD found direct as well as indirect support even from high clerical officials (Sakellariou 2013).

The construction of a Mosque in Athens and the issue of the Citizen Card were issues in which GD invested politically through developing a false image of the protector of the ethnic and religious superiority as well as the custodian of doctrinal ‘purity’. Athens is probably the only European capital without a Mosque, despite its growing Muslim population. The underlying reason for this was probably the fear of electoral loses for the ruling parties, due to the Church’s reservations, expressed currently even from the moderate archbishop Hieronymus (2013). As regards the issuing of the Citizen Card, it was viewed by religious circles as part of one big conspiracy, planed by the ‘hostile’ Roman-Catholic West against the orthodox faith. This type of apocalyptic argumentation has been very common within the church tradition and popular eschatological literature, especially among the influential Mount Athos community. GD made these questions ‘signature issues’ of its mono-cultural agenda, lodging formal requests in the Parliament against both as an endeavour to corrupt the ‘national homogeneity’.

Particularly, GD considered the Citizen Card as a gesture in favour of the immigrants and the Jehovah Witnesses, which put the orthodox Greeks under persecution; confirming, thus,
the prophetic visions of the Book of Revelation as well as the spurious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Golden Dawn 2012). Moreover, the Mosque was viewed as a development towards the national submission to the evil power of globalization, which promotes the ‘creation of amorphous and weak social masses having no self-determination’ (Golden Dawn 2013). Since the Mosque threatened national homogeneity, the ‘people’ should decide through Referendum about its construction (Naftemporiki 2013). In this way, the Mosque affair is conceptualized in populist terms, as part of the perpetual divide between the elites and the masses, which has altogether a special place in the Radical Right ideological repertoire (Mudde 2007). In effect, both issues were represented as an instrument of the alleged internal enemies against the nation, and as a part of the international conspiracy for the establishment of the New World Order against national integrity. In this way, GD established ownership over themes of alleged religious interest, while transforming their character inline to its racist project; its discourse was not structured on the basis of the religious value system or stereotypes *per se*, but reflected the party’s populist ideology and referendum agenda, establishing at the same time GD as the political representative of the islamophobic and anti-immigrant strataums of the country’s capital. Thus, allegedly protecting religion has not been the aim, but the means to an end.

The two most important GD interventions ‘on the ground’ in respect to religious themes were its mobilization against the play ‘Corpus Christi’ and the so-called ‘Pastitsios’ affair, which were both regarded as offensive by OCG bureaucracy. As regards the first, GD organized violent protests against the play in collaboration with rigorist groups, threatening the actors and the director, who were at the same time persecuted for blasphemy. The outcome of the reaction was the actual withdraw of the play. The ‘Pastitsios’ affair has to do with a facebook account, which was perceived to ridicule a most venerable religious figures, the elder monk of Mount Athos Paisios. GD pressed charges against the administrator of the account and made official request in the Parliament for deleting the account. The result was the persecution of the administrator and his conviction for 10 months on parole. One important point is of special interest in respect to these obscure and reactionary acts: The Church as an institution, as well as certain clergyman individually were either actively involved or endorsed them unofficially (Sakellariou 2013). Except for the institutional aspect of the affairs, which consisted a blow for European legal culture and the respect of human rights, GD activation had a special political outcome: that the party was not anymore regarded as an ‘outcast’, but for a part of the religious collective conscience has acquired the ‘one of us’ status, representing the protector of the honour and authority of the church and its flock.
Overall, religion has been employed by the GD party as a marker of national identity and/or as the pool of traditional value setting (Zaslove 2004). This fusion between racist ideas with old orthodox stereotypes and the conceptualization of religious traditional premises within a nationalist framework has probably led to the enlargement of GD political audience and made possible the expansion of the party’s social influence and electoral power. The questions that arises then is why the Church has accepted GD’s endeavour to exploit its symbolic capital? Which has it been its reaction towards the contemporary growth of the Golden Dawn?

The Religious Discourse towards the GD

The current critical juncture has created a new ground for political action by the Church via contributing to the production of social consensus in respect to the implementation of unpopular decisions. Within this context, archbishop Hieronymus has adopted a strategy of controlled compromise, i.e. the flexible management of issues and the selective acceptance of (or at least non-reaction against) reforms, which have so far been perceived as ‘sacred cows’ for Greek society, in exchange for maintaining OCG its various privileges (K. Papastathis 2012).

Although Hieronymus has many times expressed his disagreement with the Troika policy and its practical outcomes at the social sphere, this did not signify a substantial reaction against the existing state of affairs. In other words, OCG did not actually mobilize its mechanism, but its reaction was practically neutral and of limited fervour. More particularly, while the religious bureaucracy conceives the current political state of affairs as extremely difficult, the endemically ineffective domestic administration by the elites or the problematic foreign patronage were represented not as the main causes, but merely as factors, among others such as the immoral way of life, for the country’s financial breakdown (OCG 3/2/2014). It is characteristic that the OCG reacted dynamically only when the government made considerations to intervene in the management of the religious bank deposits (Papachristou 21/1/2011). In its Declaration to the People, Greece was portrayed as being under occupation by its creditors and the ruling parties were represented as merely the tool of foreign imperialism against the country’s own interests (OCG Nov. 2010). After the governmental retreat, the encyclical of the Synod returned to its accommodating style, ‘praying for God to give the politicians, who administer the public affairs within this critical period, strength, inspiration,
prudence, creativity and fighting spirit to find solutions and improve and modernize the social institutions’ (OCG Mar. 2011).

The religious discourse, far from being anti-systemic, followed actually the normative vocabulary of the political establishment, according to which the crisis was an opportunity for westernizing the Greek political and social order. This accommodating tactic has allowed the OCG to build a moderate representation as a responsible political actor, and to improve its relations with the ruling elites after their partial deterioration under archbishop Christodoulos reign (Manitakis 2000; Molokotos-Liederman 2003; Prodromou 2004a). The achievement of a harmonious co-operation between them has in turn repulsed the intentions of a fundamental religious reform against the Church’s essential interests. This defines actually a ‘give and take’ relationship between the two spheres. The condition for the OCG support or neutrality in domestic politics is the protection of its dominant status. Taking into account the unstable party politics framework and power balance volatility, the acceptance of this ‘trade off’ by the ruling establishment has been an imperative in order not to face the opposition of a powerful ‘societal veto player’ (Fink 2009), as well as to secure the voting preference of a large part of the conservative constituency, which is altogether critical for its fragile cohesion.

After 2011 elections the Church’s political role has been extended to contribute more actively in electoral politics via preventing the religious-centred social segments from voting for GD. To this end, the conservative prime-minister Samaras has repeatedly spoken in favour of OCG and its officials and praised its social activity. It goes without saying that any consideration of changing the Church’s privileged status is out of the question. More interestingly, the initial reluctance to implement the European Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA against racism is characteristic of the governmental reluctance to come at odds even with religious circles accustomed in articulating a xenophobic discourse, which considered the Decision to be a ‘muzzle’ for the people and a violation of the right of freedom of speech (Amvrosios 20 May 2013)! Not to mention the governmental refusal to put in effect the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, which condemned Greece for not acknowledging legally the right for same sex cohabitation. Moreover, the Government has enacted certain legal acts, satisfying old OCG demands, such as Law 4182/2013 that allows the clergy to manage the religious real estate without facing major impediments by the state.

On the other hand, OCG has been reluctant to actively oppose Golden Dawn and to take part in the created social alliance against its expansion. In contrast, the participation of parish priests in GD gatherings has not been a rare phenomenon. Moreover, the Synod has not made
a clear statement against the party. Actually, there was not a straightforward and homogenous critique of GD, but the orthodox officials expressed diverse views, while their relevant statements were in general lines abstract, vague and full of generalizations. On the one hand, there are clerical voices which perceive GD to be hostile in principle to all what the Orthodoxy stands for. A relatively small group of bishops have spoken against the party’s practices, pointing out that for the Church all humans are brothers, despite their differences; as such, all people, natives and immigrants, are equals before God and should be treated with dignity and respect (TVXS, 27/10/2012). The problem, however, is that even these prelates, with the exception of only one, have not targeted explicitly GD, in the sense that they did not dynamically and clearly stigmatize it. The primary aim was not so much to strike the party, but to discard any idea of identifying it with their institution. Archbishop Hieronymus, despite the fact that he has repeatedly expressed his aversion to violence and racist behaviour, positioned himself not openly through a concise declaration but though a press leak from ‘circle’ close to him. In particular, without naming the Golden Dawn, he observed that the OCG does not need any party protection, urging the young citizens to think twice before taking their voting decision (Kalantzis 2012).

On the other hand, there are other bishops advocating directly or indirectly in favour of the GD political activity. Most characteristic example is that of bishop Amvrosios, who reached the point of regarding the reactions against GD as reflecting the democratic deficit of the country’s political operation (Amvrosios 21/5/2012). While the friends and foes of GD within OCG have more or less expressed their views, what is striking is the great number of these prelates, who have not taken a clear position. Taking into account that OCG prelates reach the number of eighty-two, these who have kept a quasi-neutral stance form actually the majority. In effect, OCG has not contributed to a large degree to the establishment of ‘cordon sanitaire’, but limited its actions merely at a rhetorical level, without mobilizing practically its apparatus. Overall, OCG has not declared a War against GD, but limited its intervention at the lowest possible level. By the term ‘War’, is meant an open clash against GD practices and ideology as well as an active propaganda within the social body to counteract its influence.

The paper introduces the following typology as far as the views of the hierarchy is concerned:

a) **Complete identification**: Bishops openly declaring their support or even participating in party gatherings.
b) Selective identification- Bishops, who have cooperated with the party, but have not openly declared their support.

c) Cordial neutrality- Bishops, who do not co-operate with GD, but view in a positive manner its activity.

d) Negative neutrality- Bishops, who are against GD, but do not openly oppose it.

e) Controlled hostility- Bishops, who do not condemn clearly GD, but denounce certain elements of its activity.

f) Open hostility- Bishops, who openly declare GD as a threat for democracy and define it as an essential enemy of Orthodoxy.

It might be argued, however, that OCG as an ‘institution’ is first and foremost accountable not for the individual views of its prelates but for the decisions of its administrative bodies. From an ecclesiological perspective, a bishop embodies the qualities of the Church, but that does not mean that he officially represents it as a whole. The only body with the power to speak in the name of the Church as an institution is its Synod via the canonically legitimate process of collective decision making. According to this perspective, OCG as an organization should not be the target of the critique, but each bishop is liable personally for his discourse and practices. On the other hand, even if the credibility of this view is not disputed, the Synod has never condemned GD neither in terms of its ideology nor as a political group promoting violence and prejudice. It is characteristic that even in the event of the cold blood assassination of the hip-hop singer Pavlos Fyssas by GD members, the OCG reaction was very mild. Even when all parties of the political spectrum, including the conservative ND certain officials of which had previously left room for a possible political alliance with the GD (Kamp. 2012), decided at last to create a ‘cordon sanitaire’, the Synod actually made a weak statement expressing abstractly its aversion for violence without even naming the party whose leadership was put in jail for that reason (OCG 11/10/2013).

A possible explanation for this discourse is that OCG motives are political. On the one hand, the gains from GD activation might be viewed as significant, since the latter forms a medium for the Church to preserve the existing modus operandi, as far as its place within the Greek power structure is concerned. Particularly, the GD electoral threat renders OCG political help of the highest importance to the ruling parties, which in turn secure the maintenance, if not the improvement, of its institutional and economic status. However, within the critical social
and economic crisis, it is not the GD that guarantees the Church’s position, since no mainstream party of the political spectrum, including the Left, put on the table the possibility of its change. As such, GD should be viewed merely as a second-order factor for the Church, not a necessary condition for its well-being; it may support instrumentally OCG to impose its views on some policy issues, but it is not its political bastion. An open condemnation of the Golden Dawn would probably deprive OCG from the help of a political actor, which can mobilize a powerful mechanism in its ends and even do the dirty work for it, but it does not seem that would have a negative effect for its interests. In contrast, it seems that the actual gains for OCG might be even greater, if it takes more actively the side of the other camp. The moderation, therefore, of the religious bureaucracy towards GD should probably be attributed to ideological motives.

OCG and Radical Right Ideology

Building on the idea that the ideological core of the Golden Dawn is not alien to the mainstream, the so-called ‘normal pathology thesis’, but a radical interpretation of the dominant ideas and values within Greek society, the ‘pathological normalcy’ thesis (Mudde 2010), the paper argues that the Church cannot oppose effectively a political group, whose ideology and internal structure has as its central features the core elements upon which it has established its ‘hegemony’. In other words, if it articulated an anti-nationalist or anti-authoritarian discourse, OCG would actually be inconsistent with its own political tradition. The link between OCG and the extreme right has strong historical roots. From 1944 until 1974, OCG sided unequivocally with the ultra-conservative ruling establishment acting as its ideological pillar against the Left, supporting the various political persecution in the name of the alleged national defence and the protection of Orthodox tradition (Karayannis 1997; Makrides 2010). OCG played a special role during the dictatorship, i.e. GD ideological and political ancestors, legitimizing the regime and generating social consensus for its actions. However, its open pro-military junta stance did not lead in persecuting the vast majority of Church officials, who collaborated actively with the regime, after the restoration of democracy. There are still bishops, who had participated in these events and instead of expressing their regret have continued articulating a radical right discourse and kept close links with LAOS, i.e. the dominant radical right group within party family until 2012 elections.

Being the Church a factor behind the formation of the dominant ideological setting, it has actually worked as the legitimizing ground for the social acceptance of values, which
constitute primary elements of the GD party ideology. In short, religion might be viewed as the ‘cultural factor’ behind radical right strengthening (Minkenberg 2008, 22-28). The analysis is based on examining the degree of their ideological proximity through elaborating OCG political discourse in respect to the central and second-order features of GD value-system, such as authoritarianism, nationalism, populism, anti-westernism, or anti-immigrant attitude (Hainsworth 2008, 67-89; Mudde 2007)

The place of authoritarianism, within the orthodox value system is a controversial topic. On the one hand, it is argued that Orthodox Trinitarian theology takes a largely positive view of democracy, and fosters social freedom and equality (Prodromou 2004b). In contrast to other denominations, the high clergy is not in principle above the flock. Paraphrasing Bulgakov, the replacement of the Church- as a spiritual unity - by the principle of concentrated spiritual power (e.g. the doctrine of papal infallibility) is a heresy. As such authoritarian spirit is opposed to orthodox ecclesiology and unanimously condemned (Bulgakov 1988, 60-61). On the other hand, it might be advocated that the concept that the ideal order of things should be founded on the existence of a highly centralized power structure embodied in the absolute authority of the leader is represented within the ecclesiastical institution at two levels: a) the political theology; and b) the institutional framework regulating OCG operation.

As regards the first level, the power system established and sacralised in the Orthodox East has been defined as ‘caesaropapism’. This messianic political ideology, was founded on the axiom that the temporal power exists for the establishment and expansion of Christianity; the Head of state is the image of God on earth, and hence His representative. Thus, disputing his power and decisions is condemned by God. The society, therefore, should be subjected to his authority, as the chosen one to act on His behalf and not act for changing the status quo (Runciman 1977, 5-50). Furthermore, OCG, instead of applying the equality principle among its members, operates in practice according to a centralized ‘from top to bottom’ structure; consequently, the relationship between the spiritual head and his flock is not ‘conciliatory’, but highly authoritative. The absolute power exercised by the Bishop has produced the so-called despotocracy system, i.e. centralized rule of the Bishop over his canonical territory, and extremely limited participation of the laity and the parish clergy in the decision making process and the finances. Overall, Orthodox political theology coupled with a centralized administration has prepared the ground for the social acceptance of authoritarian spirit in the sense that the churchgoers are more accustomed to authoritarian attitudes.
The second ideological feature of the Radical Right party family to be examined in relation to OCG is nationalism. Overall, their close link is well established, founded on the narrative of *helleno-orthodoxia* from the midst 19th century onwards. *Helleno-orthodoxia* is a theoretical pattern, according to which Greek history should be distinguished in three stages: pagan antiquity, Christian middle ages and modernity. The three stages approach, however, does not mean that the national history was divided, but in contrast indicate the timeless and linear unity of the ethnic group, which was ‘awakened’ in contemporary times with the support of the Church. As such, there is an institutional relation, a complete identification, between Greek identity and orthodoxy; in order someone to be considered a member of the national body, he/she should by definition belong in the Church; Greek means orthodox and *vice versa*. The conclusion of this development was the implementation of the principle ‘a national Church for each Orthodox nation-state’ and the establishment of different national Orthodox Churches (Payne 2007; Walters 2002). The sacralisation of nationalist ideology has contributed to the distorted representation of Orthodoxy as the cohesive element *par excellence* of the collective group; constructing thus an image according to which OCG forms the protector of the nation, and its imagined self-fulfillment lies on promoting the alleged national ‘good’. As such, ‘nation’ has become the *nodal point* of Church ideology, being actually the signifier from which the other elements of its discursive structure acquire their meaning. In other words, the ultimate criterion for defining an act as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ is not determined on the basis of its moral value but on its instrumental utility for the national group and the attainment of its goals.

This ‘mono-cultural’ rational, however, produces important political effects: defining the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ distinction along religious lines means that any creed except for the orthodox one is more or less demonised, and should be treated as a corrupting element. Its adherents, as ‘out-groups’ form an ‘enemy’ for the national integrity and for the spiritual well-being of the population. The centralization of *helleno-orthodoxia* within the Greek political culture in conjunction to OCG public advocacy of nationalist politics has led to the gradual re-legitimization of the Radical Right in the public sphere. Their ideological convergence does not mean that OCG has contributed directly to GD strengthening, but to the reproduction of a reactionary value system, which has worked as the breeding ground for the party’s social penetration. In this respect, the discourse of late archbishop Christodoulos (1998-2008) probably had a major influence.

Christodoulos openly propagated ideas very close with those of GD party. He was an authoritarian personality, who conceived himself as chosen from God to be the supreme leader
of the nation and responsible for its salvation; he endorsed nationalist movements and
advocated jingoist ideas, creating a public image of a strong nationalist character (Vasilakis
2006, 288-302; 430-434). Another central element of his discourse was populism. The populist
feature of his agenda became apparent on the event of his quest for introducing a plebiscitary
political operation through organizing an unofficial referendum against the governmental
decision to exclude reference to religion from identity cards. OCG officials perceived
referendum as an instrument for the people to express freely their preference against the alleged
‘coup d’ état’ legislated by the government (Vasilakis 2006, 356). Since, however, for
Christodoulos the Church could speak in the name of the ‘people’, whose will ‘is above the
parliament and the constitution’ (Vasilakis 2006, 364-365), the membership in the polity,
should not depend on citizenship, but on religious identity per se. As such, ‘the voice of the
people’, did not signify the body of the Greek citizens, but was conceptualized instrumentally
as the body of the ‘faithful’. The outcome of this analysis was that that Greeks support in
principle OCG in its socio-political activity regardless of the stance of the democratic elected
government (Stavrakakis 2004). Thus OCG was not perceived as a mere institution operating
within the framework defined by the rule of law, but above law, as the authentic and ultimate
representative of the ‘people’, having the sacred duty to protect it against its alleged ‘enemies’
(Stavrakakis 2003). By invoking the great majority of the constituency, the religious officials
gave theoretically credence to the Church portraying it as the custodian of democracy, while in
practice it violated the democratic principle of representation (Stavrakakis 2002).

The conceptualization of the signifier ‘people’ in actually elitist terms indicates OCG
affinity with the GD ‘populist frame’ (Caiani and Della Porta 2011) or ‘faux populism’
(Mammone 2009): while, being part of the ‘people’, OCG was self-proclaimed as their
protector, since they cannot react for themselves and need guidance to emancipate from
passivity. The aim, therefore, was not to touch the hierarchical structures within the society, but
to replace the political establishment with his apparatus. As such, Christodoulos’ project was
not a step towards democratization, but the pretext for imposing his authority. In relation to this
elitist populism, Christodoulos’ discourse had an exclusionist character as well, representing
the ‘heretic’ West and the Islamic East as the existential ‘enemies’ of Greek society. In short,
on the basis of an alleged moral and cultural gap Christodoulos perceived both actors as the
‘evil’ external other that threaten national unity.

On the one hand, the Europeans have been overall conceived as unethical, who dispute
the national value system, and are behind the globalization conspiracy for castrating the national
spirit (Makrides 2009; Ramet 2006). Within a Schmittian ‘friend and foe’ political pattern, Christodoulos categorized anyone acting against him, such as the ‘self-proclaimed’ intellectuals who propagated the sordid western values, as an instrument for the establishment of the New World Order; i.e. as the internal ‘fifth column’. By legitimizing such ideas Christodoulos made the public accustomed to conspiracy theories, giving them credibility, and paving the way to their current flourishing. In effect, Golden Dawn, or other parties, did not have to create ‘out of the blue’ a conspiracy minded audience, but only to fuel it. The problem is not that OCG does not continue to express such views, which still affect a part of the religious body, but that it initially contributed to their articulation and establishment.

On the other hand, islamophobia and the anti-immigrant prejudice, linked with the idea of ethnic superiority, was an explicit characteristic of the religious rhetoric. For Christodoulos, national homogeneity, perceived as ‘God’s blessing’, was at stake due to the incoming immigrants who threaten the historical continuity of the ‘distinctive DNA of the Greeks’ (Vasilakis 2006, 200-201). In this respect, the concept of multiculturalism became central to his critique, regarding it as the medium that would render Greece as a ‘branch of Albania’ (Vasilakis 2006, 210) and turn gradually the natives to become ‘immigrants to our own country’ (Vasilakis 2006, 178). It is characteristic that even the construction of a Mosque in Athens was viewed sceptically, causing the reaction of the Synod, which established a committee to follow the affair in order to block its function (Vasilakis 2006, 213). Moreover, through reproducing a negative image of Turkey as the ‘Asian barbarian neighbour’ and ‘enduring enemy’, which has ‘nothing to contribute to the European culture’ (Vasilakis 2006, 288-292), Christodoulos contributed directly to the generation of orientalist stereotypes socially directing to the exclusion of the Muslim ‘other’, being stigmatized in principle as the ‘hostile’ foreign. In this respect, of special value is the empirical testing of the social impact of the religious elite’s discourse regarding migration by Karyotis and Patrikios (2010). The authors demonstrated that despite the softening of the xenophobic rhetoric of the political apparatus, the pro-securitization public attitudes on migration survived, due to the anti-immigrant OCG positioning. Since Church attendance is positively correlated with strong anti-immigrant feelings, the respective divergence between religious and political discourses indicate even the supremacy of the Church over the other socio-political actors on the securitization question. In short, the religious discourse during the first decade of the third millennium has been a crucial factor for the negative social trend towards migration (Karyotis and Patrikios, 2010).
Concluding Remarks

The similarities between the GD agenda and the OCG discourse are more than evident, since nationalism, authoritarianism, populism, or exclusionism, have been central reference frames of both actors. It might be argued then that their early promotion by the OCG has contributed to the late social acceptance of the GD propaganda, in the sense that it worked as its ideological breeding ground and created the respective political space. In effect, the current ‘neutral’ religious policy is not grounded on the alleged political gains the OCG acquires from the party activation, but mainly due the fact that an open clash with the GD would bring it at odds with its own invented myths and ideological founding traditions. In this respect, it should be emphasized that Christodoulos was not a mere Church official, but probably the most influential and popular religious figure for the last fifty years. Taking into account that the time distance from his death (2008), it should not be surprising that his discourse is still present in Greek social life. The problem is that very few of his spiritual heirs are eager to oppose GD endeavoured to represent it.

References


Bulgakov, Sergius N. 1988. The Orthodox Church. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.


Orthodox Church of Greece (OCG). November 2010. “Statement to the people: ‘the Church for the current crises’ [in Greek].” n. 44.

OCG. October 10 2013. “Press release of the second assembly of the Permanent Holy Synod in October [in Greek].”

OCG, February 2 2014. “Statement to the people [in Greek].”


Annexes

Figure 1


Figure 2

Belief in God
Source: EVS 1981-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>79.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>20.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3

How Important is God in Life
Source: EVS 1981-2008

Greece | Europe
--- | ---
Not at All | 5 | 15.26 |
1 | 2.1 | 5.2 |
2 | 2.5 | 5.63 |
3-4 | 2.8 | 4.2 |
5 | 7 | 10.64 |
6 | 8 | 7.5 |
7 | 9.8 | 15.4 |
8 | 10.9 | 15.37 |
9 | 12.3 | 12.3 |
Very Important | 34.3 | 25.93 |

Figure 4

Religious Person
Source: EVS 1981-2008

Greece | Europe
--- | ---
Religious Person | 84.3 | 68.08 |
Not Religious Person | 12.4 | 26.92 |
Convinced Atheist | 3.3 | 5.09 |
Figure 5

**Church Attendance**

Source: EVS 1981-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>more than once</td>
<td>3.36%</td>
<td>14.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once a week</td>
<td>14.17%</td>
<td>21.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once a month</td>
<td>21.20%</td>
<td>10.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only on special</td>
<td>44.14%</td>
<td>17.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other specific</td>
<td>3.86%</td>
<td>5.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once a year</td>
<td>6.72%</td>
<td>16.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less often</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never, practically</td>
<td>5.87%</td>
<td>29.53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6

**Pray Outside Religious Services**

Source: EVS 1981-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>every day</td>
<td>40.89%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than once a week</td>
<td>27.51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once a week</td>
<td>13.16%</td>
<td>13.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once a month</td>
<td>7.77%</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>several times a year</td>
<td>4.96%</td>
<td>6.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less often</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never, practically never</td>
<td>13.14%</td>
<td>28.27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7

Politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office
Source: EVS 1981-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agree strongly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>13.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree nor disagree</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>19.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>31.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree strongly</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>25.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8

Better for the country if more religious people held office
Source: EVS 1981-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agree strongly</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>8.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>19.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree nor disagree</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>23.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>30.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree strongly</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>18.32</td>
</tr>
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### Figures 9-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement on left right scale:</th>
<th>How often attend religious services apart from special occasions?</th>
<th>How religious are you?</th>
<th>How often pray apart from religious services?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Left</td>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>Not at all religious</td>
<td>Every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 More than once a week</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2 More than once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 Once a week</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3 Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 At least once a month</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4 At least once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 Only on special holy days</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5 Only on special holy days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6 Less often</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>6 Less often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7 Never</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>7 Never</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1 Every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2 More than once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-Right Wing Self Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.262***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Religious</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.201***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.197***</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.197**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.092)</td>
<td>(0.091)</td>
<td>(0.093)</td>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.117***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>-0.142</td>
<td>-0.137</td>
<td>-0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.169)</td>
<td>(0.169)</td>
<td>(0.169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>1938</td>
</tr>
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<td>----------</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obs</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>1938</td>
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<tr>
<td>R-square</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.094</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (i) Data come from the 5th round (2010) of ESS for Greece; (ii) Robust standard error estimates, clustered at the dimension of the country of origin, are reported in parentheses; (iii) *** denotes statistical significance at the 1 percent level, ** at the 5 percent level, and * at the 10 percent level, all for two-sided hypothesis tests.