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**Political Instability and the Persistence
of Religion in Greece:
The Policy Implications of the
Cultural Defence Paradigm**

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Political Instability and the Persistence of Religion in Greece: The Policy Implications of the Cultural Defence Paradigm

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Abstract

This paper examines the implications of 'cultural defence' in the nature of democracy and the stability of the political system in Greece. It focuses on the Greek Orthodox Church's maintenance of power and political relevance by virtue of its strong link to national identity. The paper further explores three policy/politics areas: (1) political orientation; (2) religious pluralism; and (3) education. Both authors argue that the inhibition of secularization in Greece as a result of cultural defence has significant policy implications, especially in times of crises, when the role of nationalism as a cohesive factor against perceived threats is intensified. The aim of this paper is to show that there is a general trend towards the adoption of policies that are increasingly conservative, right-winged and discriminatory.

Introduction¹

In October 2012 a Greek theatre company prepared to stage its premiere of Terence McNally's *Corpus Christi* at a small theatre in central Athens. *Corpus Christi* is a passion play that tells the story of Christ and the Apostles, portraying them as homosexuals. The play was first staged in New York in the late 1990s and received a mixed reception because of its controversial message. Terence McNally received several death threats after the opening of the play in the United States. In October 1999, at the close of the London performance, McNally received a death *Fatwa* by a UK-based Islamic group. Thirteen years later, the play stirred a similar controversy in Greece. But this time, protest did not

¹ The order of the authors' names reflects the principle of rotation. Both authors have contributed equally to the whole work.

only stem from marginalised fundamentalist groups, but also from ordinary Greek citizens, clerics from the established Greek Orthodox Church, and some members of the Greek Golden Dawn- an ultranationalist, racist and neo-Nazi party which has been enjoying representation in the Greek parliament since May 2012. Many Orthodox Christians also protested outside the theatre, voicing their objection to the play's moral agenda. Some of the protesters, far from expressing their beliefs through peaceful demonstrations, did so through the imposition of violence and verbal abuse. These were notably Golden Dawn activists and Members of Parliament who also issued threats to the actors and their families. According to them, anyone who claims the right to choose their sexual orientation, who espouse a religion different to Orthodoxy, or indeed no religion at all, or who may be of a different ethnicity does not belong to the Greek nation. They objected to the play on the basis of it being blasphemous and countering the religious consciousness of the overwhelming majority of the Greek people. The premiere was cancelled and the play was eventually withdrawn.

Although it was the extreme right-wing Golden Dawn that radicalised the protest against *Corpus Christi*, all of the protests stemmed from an ethno-religious objection to the moral message of the play. This argumentation shared a number of common features: a moral conservatism; an intolerance towards minorities whether they be religious, ethnic or social; and a justification of this position on the grounds of defending Greek national identity. Steven Billington, the actor who portrayed Judas during the London staging of the play back in 1999, argued that *Corpus Christi* is "a very important play with a message about tolerance" (BBC 1999). The events that unfolded outside the Hytirio theatre in Athens over a decade later, revealed the extent to which intolerance, in terms of religious pluralism, freedom of speech and the acceptance of minority views, underpins Greek society. This intolerance is an amalgamation of religious and nationalist ideals.

This may seem particularly out of place in contemporary Western Europe, where the political relevance of religious values has been in decline according to the secularization theory. In Greece however, the secularization paradigm does not apply. The country belongs to what Martin (1978) has termed the 'cultural defence' or 'nationalist pattern', where secularization is inhibited because of a close link between religion and national identity. This theoretical framework helps explain not only the persistence of religious and moral conservatism but also its justification on nationalist grounds. The inhibition of secularization in Greece as a result of cultural defence is not simply a theoretical matter; rather, it has significant policy implications, especially at times of crises which tend to intensify the role of nationalism as a cohesive factor against perceived threats. If this is true, then we should expect that religion and nationalism, as well as related policies of religious and ethnic exclusion, would gain support and prominence during such times.

This paper aims to evaluate this proposition through the examination of a number of policies in crisis-ridden Greece. Drawing on Martin's (1978) theory and the identification of certain features of the cultural defence pattern, our focus will be on the following three policy areas (1) political orientation, (2) religious pluralism, (3) education. The objective is to show that there is a general trend towards the adoption of policies that are increasingly conservative, right-winged and discriminatory, and also to depict that there is limited impetus for reform, especially for policies that could potentially undermine the link between religion and national identity.

Secularization and cultural defence: the case of Greece

A variant of modernization theory, the classical secularization paradigm postulates that as a society modernises, it also becomes secularised. Secularization may be defined as: (a) the privatisation of religion in terms of the decline of its relevance in the public sphere, and (b)

as the emancipation of the secular spheres from religious institutions (Casanova 2007: 101). Secularization tends to be associated with modernization because the latter entails certain processes including social differentiation and/ or the rationalisation of thought (Martin 1978; Norris and Inglehart 2004).

The key to understating secularization as a process of structural differentiation is specialisation. In modern industrial societies, specific tasks are carried out by specialists, thus entailing the disentanglement of the Church from previously held social functions and its marginalisation to the private sphere. Institutions become differentiated in accordance with their function. This specialisation entails that institutions are no longer dominated by the Church (Dobbelaere 1981) and that the modern bureaucratic state takes responsibility for the social provision of welfare. Health and education, on the other hand, are officially channelled through the state and are run by professionals. Welfare support for underprivileged sectors of society in the form of unemployment benefits, pensions and disability allowances becomes the formal responsibility of the state, rather than being a Church charity.

Secularization, conceived as part of the process of rationalisation, goes back to the ideas of the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. The key factor here was the substitution of divine rule by democratic representation and accountability, and by the principles of pluralism and tolerance. The spread of enlightened, pluralist ideas challenged the cognitive monopoly of the Church, which held one single truth in society. The acceptance of the right to hold a plurality of beliefs within a given society entails the competition between different ideas and leads to the adoption of secular policies, which weaken the authority of institutions that lack democratic legitimacy. Similarly to modernization theory, the secularization paradigm emerged as a grand narrative attempting to explain the co-existence of modernity with the declining power of the Church. This theory was particularly prominent during the early and mid-20th century. However, certain developments, including the 1979 Iranian revolution and the rise of Evangelism and Islamic fundamentalism, have questioned the validity of this paradigm (Huntington 1997; Juergensmeyer 1993, 2000; Kepel 1994). These developments indicate that there is no necessary causal link between modernity and secularization. Although in some instances modernity may be associated with a decline of the social and religious relevance of religion (e.g. Western Europe), in others it is associated with either the maintenance or upsurge of its power (e.g. United States, Middle East and Latin America). Some European states that have not become secularised are particularly puzzling, especially since Europe is considered to be the paradigmatic example in the secularization literature.

Greece is a particularly interesting case, as the social and political power of the Greek Orthodox Church has been and remains very strong. In Greece there is no constitutional separation of Church and state. The Greek Orthodox Church became an autocephalous organisation when it was nationalised in 1833 following the establishment of the independent Greek state. It is effectively an institution of the state rather than a branch of an Ecumenical Church. It enjoys a privileged status secured by the Constitution, which includes legal prerogatives that do not apply to other religious groups. Greek clerics are paid as civil servants and are guaranteed a productivity bonus. The Church owns large amounts of land and property and enjoys preferential taxation. This has entailed both its constitutional accommodation to the Greek state and the reverse: a *de facto* disproportionate influence of the Church in political matters (Ramet 1988:13). This influence has been manifested on a number of occasions and Greece has often been the focus of criticism by human rights groups on the basis of discrimination and lack of religious freedom. In 2012 the US Department of State published an International Religious Freedom Report in which Greece appeared as a highly discriminatory and xenophobic society (US Department of State 2012).

Athens is the only European capital without a functioning mosque, leaving the thousands of Muslims who reside in the city without an official place of worship, praying

instead in garages and warehouses that do not meet health and safety regulations. The initiative to build a mosque in Athens began as early as 1940. Part of the problem is that the construction in Greece of a place of worship that is not of the Orthodox Christian faith requires the approval of local Church authorities, who tend to be reluctant to grant this. Even though the law has been passed, the construction of the mosque has also faced problems of implementation. The final decision of location was a lengthy process. The final design for the mosque, whose construction is still pending at the time of writing this paper and is expected to commence in 2013, is that of a modern European building rather than a traditional Mosque with minarets. Some members of the Church continue to oppose the initiative; notably the Metropolitan of Piraeus, Serafeim, who has sought to halt the process arguing that the law is unconstitutional and 'anti-Hellenic' (Ta Nea). The basis for opposing the construction of the mosque in Athens is therefore ethnic and religious, since the Church's justification is premised on the argument that such a development would undermine Greek national identity (Ta Nea 2013).

Muslims are not the only religious group who faces discrimination. Christian denominations, which are considered to be sects by the Orthodox Church, also lack constitutional privileges. For example, the canon law of the Catholic Church is not recognised, and other religious groups such as Jehovah's witnesses and the Baha'i's are not exempt from military service, as is the case of the clerics of other known religions. As a result, they have often been imprisoned for failing to enrol in the Greek army. The Muslim minority in Thrace is also discriminated against in terms of access to public sector employment (US Department of State 2012). Equally controversial has been the issue of the cremation of the dead. Following a long series of discussions, the law applying to non-Greek Orthodox religious groups, was only passed in 2006. Any Orthodox wishing to be cremated would have to waive the right to a Greek Orthodox religious funeral. Similar to the issue of the Mosque, the issue of cremation has also been facing problems of implementation. Despite the fact that the law was passed almost a decade ago, there is still no formal crematorium; instead, families of the deceased must take the remains of their relatives to countries such as Bulgaria, the United Kingdom or Germany to be cremated, which not only incurs high financial costs, but is also a highly emotive process (Kathimerini 2011).

The above instances not only indicate that religion remains politically relevant in a country that has been a member of the European Union for over 30 years, but also that this persistent politicization of religion to a large extent differentiates Greece from other Western European states where religion and politics are increasingly separate. To what extent should we have expected Greece to secularise like most of its European counterparts? Here, the identification of patterns may be particularly constructive since scholars have demonstrated that secularization is not a 'one size fit all' theory, but one that takes place differently, according to circumstances and domain-specific constraints (Martin 1978, 2005; Halikiopoulou 2011). The emergence of various patterns of secularization may be conditioned by factors such as the constitutional relationship between the Church and the state, the doctrinal stipulations of specific religions, political culture, the course of the process of modernization itself and the relationship between religion and national identity. This latter condition is of main interest for this paper as it serves as a valid explanation for why secularization has failed to take place in countries such as Greece, where religion and national identity are inextricably linked.

According to Martin's (1978) 'cultural defence' paradigm, secularization is likely to be inhibited altogether in cases where the Church has served as carrier of national identity. Cultural defence cases, including those of the Republic of Ireland, Malta, Israel and Greece are characterised by the maintenance of the social and political relevance of religion. Whereas certain cultural defence cases have commenced a process of secularization, thus gradually diverting from the pattern, for example Ireland (Halikiopoulou 2011), Greece remains a paradigmatic case of secularization failure, largely

due to the role of the Church as carrier of Greek national identity. The Church in Greece draws its power not only from its relationship with the state, but also and more importantly from its close relationship with national identity (Halikiopoulou 2011). National identity may be defined as

The maintenance and continuous reproduction of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations and the identification of individuals with that heritage and those values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions (Smith 2000: 796)

Scholars have distinguished between different variants of national identity. Starting with Meinecke's *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation* and Kohn's differentiation between the civic and ethnic aspects of national identity, Smith has made a distinction between the territorial and organic variants. Essentially, the civic/territorial variant of national identity draws on voluntaristic characteristics such as citizenship, institutions and common boundaries. On the other hand, the ethnic/organic variant draws on ascriptive characteristics such as blood, race, creed and language. Religion is associated with the ethnic, ascriptive criteria of nationhood, since creed tends to be something one is born into.

In the case of Greece, there is an ethno-religious understanding of national belonging. The signifiers of national identity are simultaneously both religious and ethnic. What defines Greekness is Orthodoxy and the Greek language. The role of Orthodoxy as carrier of Greek national identity is historical and symbolic in character. Religion has served as a symbol against imperial rule by preserving the Greek language during the Ottoman years (Georgiadou 1995). Although the support of the independence movement is often contested in specialized literature, the fact that the lower clergy did support the revolution (Smith 1999) has further symbolic implications, mainly that many of the clerics who fought in the war are seen as national heroes and celebrated as such. The role of religion was consolidated during the period of nation building, particularly by the Greek mass education system, which portrayed the Church as the main force for the preservation of Hellenism during the 'dark' years of Ottoman rule.

Given the role of religion in the construction of Greek national identity and the extent to which Church discourse draws upon Greek nationalism, the 'cultural defence' paradigm may explain the Greek case and its resistance to secularization (Martin 1978; Halikiopoulou 2011). In other words, Greece remains a society where secularization has been inhibited due to the close bond between religion and national identity. As a result, the Church-state nexus remains intimately secured by the Greek Constitution. Structural differentiation is limited, as is exemplified in the merger of Church and state affairs in the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Clerical status remains particularly high, while anti-clericalism is low (see table 1). Although there is a debate on the relationship between Church and state, in practice the role of the clergy remains largely unchallenged.

Table 1: Cultural Defence in Greece and implications at times of crisis

<i>Features</i>	
Church-State Nexus	Intimate/ constitutional
Structural differentiation	Limited
Clerical status	High
Anti-Clericalism	Very low
National belonging	Ethno-religious criteria
<i>Implications: stability of democracy is precarious</i>	
Political orientation	Mostly right
Religious Pluralism	Very low
Education system	Strong religious influence

Adapted from Martin (2005), in Halikiopoulou (2011)

Times of crises tend to reinforce the identification of ‘otherness’, and therefore present a political opportunity to institutions whose power is premised on nationalism. This means that such crises may prove beneficial for the established Church, as cultural defence and nationalism tend to heighten by uniting the members of a specific cultural group against a common perceived threat. According to Smith,

Times of crisis, when national independence appears to be under threat... produce more aggressive and chiliastic assertions of the national mission and evoke more powerful images of national exclusiveness and ethnic election (Smith, 1999: 348)

Since 2009 Greece has been undergoing a severe crisis, which although economic in its origins, has had significant socio-political implications. This has entailed an intensification of ethnic exclusivity with a rise in anti-immigrant politics, extreme right-wing parties, populism, blame-shifting (Vasilopoulou *et al.* 2013) and anti-EU sentiments. The Greek crisis and the intensification of nationalism have empowered the Greek Orthodox Church and perpetuated a culture of exclusion through the adoption of conservative policies. This has had important implications for the stability of Greek democracy. The fact that the Greek Orthodox Church remains highly politicised and deeply linked to national identity is not simply a matter of theoretical importance. According to the cultural defence paradigm, these cases typically exhibit an overall right-wing political orientation, low levels of religious pluralism and a strong religious influence in education (see table 1). Since we can expect nationalism to gain support in times of crises, and the Church to increase its prominence by virtue of its relationship to nationalism, then we should expect all related policies to reflect this increase. The policies most probably to be affected are those relevant to cultural defence, including the three broad areas outlined above: political orientation, religious pluralism and education. The following sections test this proposition empirically by examining these three specific political and/or policy areas.

A predominantly right-wing political orientation

The cultural defence paradigm expects that cases belonging to this pattern will exhibit a strong right-wing and conservative political orientation. Post-dictatorship Greece may be considered an exception to this rule, as political orientation in the country has not been predominantly right-wing since 1974. Ideologically, parties of the extreme right were discredited and did not enjoy parliamentary representation, mainly because of their perceived association with the dictatorship years. Although the centre-right New Democracy Party (ND) has been one of the two main parties competing for government, it has remained in opposition for most of the 1981- 2013 period.² Greece has a very powerful political left, and it is one of the few European countries with a traditional Communist party that is often granted parliamentary representation. The centre-left PASOK is the party that has been in power for most of the post-dictatorship era.

This however is not indicative of a liberal political culture. First, given the prominence of ethno-religious features in Greek political culture, the left tends to also be conservative and nationalistic (Halikiopoulou *et al.* 2012). Social liberalism is not necessarily associated with left-wing parties in Greece. The left tends to link its nationalism to civic ideals, including anti-Westernism and anti-imperialism (Halikiopoulou *et al.* 2012: 518). Secondly, after 1974, any far right-wing elements were contained within the centre-right New Democratic Party (ND). The first radical right-wing party to gain electoral representation in the Greek parliament after 1974 was the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS)

² Except from 1989-1993, 2004-2009 and from June 2012 onwards.

in 2007. The economic crisis has operated as a catalyst, bringing right-wing extremism to the foreground. The Golden Dawn, an ultra-nationalist right-wing party, which has existed since the 1980's but remained a marginalised group without parliamentary representation, was first elected in the Greek parliament with 21 seats out of 300 in May 2012. In the subsequent June 2012 elections, the party obtained the support of over 400,000 Greek citizens, thus consolidating its representation to 18 parliamentary seats. Another highly conservative and nationalistic right-wing party, the Independent Greeks (ANEL), formed in 2012 as a faction of ND, received 20 seats during the same elections. Together with the centre-right ND, all parties on the right combine a 45.7% of the votes cast in June 2012, occupying between them 167 out of the 300 seats in parliament. This exposes the underlying right-wing conservative nationalist political orientation in Greece. This does not mean that all parties of the right in Greece are similar, nor that it is constructive to equate the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn with the mainstream centre right ND. However, what is important to note is that religion and nationalism form the constitutive elements of the ideologies of all these parties, albeit to different degrees.

All of this illustrates that the crisis has intensified nationalism, which has manifested itself electorally, and most importantly that it has pressed the adoption of conservative and nationalistic policies. These policies enjoy widespread support and are legitimised by mainstream parties in government. An example is the introduction of an immigration policy known as 'Hospitable Zeus'. The main goal of this policy, introduced in August 2012, is to drastically reduce the number of illegal immigrants that reside in Greece. In part, this is a response to the rising anti-immigration sentiments capitalised on by the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party, which targets all foreigners on the basis of their belonging to different ethnicities and different 'infidel' religions. The implementation of this policy has been characterised by overt discrimination, racism on both ethnic and religious grounds, and human rights abuse. According to Kathimerini (2013), in February 2013 -six months after the introduction of this policy- 77,526 people had been detained, while only 4,435 were arrested on grounds of illegal stay. Therefore, a mere 5.7% were detained on the basis of actually being illegal. Those detained tended to be people who did not visually resemble those from a Greek ethnic background (in terms of racial origin and religious clothing for example). In this process, tourists visiting the country on vacation have also been targeted and have sometimes been assaulted on racist grounds (BBC 2013). These practices have been condemned by various human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, which has published a 52 page report entitled 'Unwelcome guests: Greek police abuses of migrants in Athens'. According to the author of the report, Eva Cossé, immigrants "*are regularly stopped, searched and detained just because of the way they look*" (Human Rights Watch 2013).

The problematic implementation of what is already a sensitive, and to an extent discriminatory policy such as 'Hospitable Zeus', serves to legitimise hatred towards ethnic and religious minorities. Cases of racist violence have increased in Greece. These often occur outside the unofficial places of worship of those who are not Orthodox; for example, the assault of an Iraqi immigrant outside an unofficial Muslim place of worship in August 2012 (Ta Nea 2012a). In isolation, similar events may take place in any democracy as simply another incident of crime. However, what is interesting in the case of Greece is the rising number of such events, as well as the extent to which they have provoked an outcry. This also illustrates the dangers of cultural defence, especially at times of crisis, when ethnic and religious discrimination is likely to become more prominent. Due to the fact that cultural defence rests on a perceived threat from a 'hostile' other, minorities become the enemy from within, increasing the risk of racism and discrimination.

Low levels of religious pluralism

A second feature in cultural defence cases is the low level of religious pluralism. This entails a general lack of acceptance of other religions and Churches as valid and legitimate. The Greek Orthodox Church claims to hold the one and only truth. Orthodox doctrine is therefore the only accepted doctrine. All other religions, including other Christian denominations, are seen as sects. As noted above, the granting of special status to the Greek Orthodox Church by the Greek Constitution institutionalises this lack of pluralism. All other religions are discriminated against on this basis, but to a different extent (US State Department 2012; Boyle and Sheen 1997). This lack of pluralism illustrates the weak foundations of tolerance in Greece. In a country where ethnic nationalism prevails and religion is hardly decoupled from politics, the boundaries of tolerance are precarious (Halikiopoulou 2011). Whether defined in more general terms as respect for religious opinions that are different from the established religion, or in the stricter legal sense as official recognition of the rights of groups or individuals who hold different religious beliefs, tolerance is compromised in Greece. Because of the merger of religion and nationalism in cultural defence, religious intolerance is a broad concept, implying ethnic and cultural intolerance as well. Often the lack of religious pluralism is ideological, and excludes all minorities that do not fit within the accepted definition of the Greek nation- i.e. ethnically Greek, Orthodox, native speaker of the Greek language, and conforming to certain socially accepted norms. Intolerance is a mix of religious and nationalist ideals with significant implications for freedom of speech and acceptance of minority views. The treatment of the Greek version of Terrence Mc Nally's *Corpus Christi* illustrates the extent to which this intolerance may become banal: a part of everyday life, a widely accepted master narrative, an almost self-concealing form of intolerance. What was at stake during the Hytiro protests was not simply the moral message of the play; it was the broader issue of the acceptance of the rights of others to hold beliefs that others may disagree with.

The Hytirio incident is not an isolated one. In September 2012, a 27-year-old Greek was arrested for 'malicious blasphemy' and 'religious offence'. His 'crime' was to publish satirical comments about a Greek holy man, Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, on Facebook. The indictment was prompted by the numerous complaints put forward by various Christian groups and individual citizens as early as July 2012 (Ta Nea 2012b). The arrest took place a few days after Golden Dawn MP Christos Pappas made a motion in the Greek parliament on the issue. However, Greek police denied a direct link between the motion and the arrest, arguing that the operation to intervene had commenced prior to Mr Pappas' motion. Regardless of whether the Golden Dawn party played a part in instigating the arrest or not, the issues on freedom of speech and tolerance go deeper: the fact that blasphemy laws exist in Greece, making 'blasphemy' a legal offence, illustrates the extreme extent to which religious pluralism is low. Another important point about this case is the reaction that it provoked. Interestingly, most opposition came either from individuals on the Internet and social networks or in a more organised manner from left-wing parties and factions such as SYRIZA and DIMAR, rather than the mainstream political centre. According to DIMAR's official statement, "*the character of the arrest was fundamentalist, reminiscent of theocratic regimes rather than European democratic states*" (Ethnos 2012).

Strong religious influence over the education system

Cultural defence cases tend to have educational systems that are heavily influenced by religion. This may take one of two forms. First, institutionally; for example, when the leadership and organization of schools is taken over by religious personnel; and secondly, in terms of content, for example the introduction of religious values in the curriculum. In the Greek case it is mostly the latter. Institutionally, the Church and the educational system

are interlinked through the *de facto* position of the Greek Orthodox Church within the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. This however does not imply the running of the school system by religious personnel, but rather the powerful role of the Church in terms of decisions and policies that affect the content of the curriculum. Because of the close relationship between religion and national identity, this content is heavily based on teaching the historical importance of religion for the preservation of the Greek nation.

The education system is fundamental for the maintenance and reproduction of nationalism and national identity (Smith 1991). The more centralised the education system, the more likely it is to promote the dominant version of the national narrative. This is because all pupils are taught the same curriculum: there is no variation in terms of region, choice of text-book editor or topic taught. The Greek educational system is highly centralised. Education is compulsory until the age of 15. The State is responsible for the provision of an official syllabus per subject, which is compulsory for all students. For each subject there is one official textbook (Fragoudaki and Dragona, 1997; Halikiopoulou 2011). Three subjects in particular are of significance for maintaining the link between religion and nationalism, and by extension are fundamental in the maintenance of Church power: religious education, Greek literature and history. All three are underpinned by the teaching of a dominant narrative- one single truth regarding Greek religion and its historical relationship to the Greek nation. Religious education focuses almost exclusively on Orthodoxy; other religions are largely overlooked. The few references to other religions in the official textbooks are left to the discretion of the individual teacher, who often chooses to bypass them. The teaching of the doctrine of Orthodox Christianity and the evolution of Orthodoxy (for example Byzantium), is taught in a highly nationalistic manner, with particular Saints portrayed as national heroes for example. With regards to Greek literature, the texts chosen tend to be ones that narrate the bond between Greekness and Orthodoxy, and/or focus on folk traditions that merge the two. Finally, in terms of history the main message is the evolution of the Greek nation in the *longue durée* and the significance of Orthodoxy for its maintenance, especially during the Ottoman years and the Greek independence movement.

Because of its role as carrier of Greek national identity, the power of the Church in the Greek education system is entrenched and uncontested. There is an overarching consensus that the narrative presented in school text-books is true, and any difference of opinion is met at best with contempt or at worst with active hostility. This has been evident in some reform initiatives that took place during the past decade, especially in 2006/2007. The controversy erupted over the adoption of a new history textbook for primary school. Maria Repousi, historian and author of the controversial textbook, attempted to produce a somewhat more balanced account of Greek history which omitted highly emotional language and overt references to Orthodoxy as carrier of Greek national identity (Halikiopoulou 2011). This initiative became highly contested by a broad coalition of actors which included not only the Orthodox clergy, but also politicians from both the right and left. The main justification for opposition to the book was that it sought to undermine Greek national identity and the role of the Church in its construction. The Greek Orthodox Church declared the book unconstitutional, on the grounds that it is the duty of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs to promote the national and religious education of Greek children, as stipulated by Article 3 of the Greek constitution (Kathimerini 2007). The textbook was eventually withdrawn in September 2007, illustrating the difficulties involved in instigating any reform that could potentially weaken the role of religion in Greek education. Despite its official withdrawal the controversial textbook has continued to be debated, especially following the eruption of the crisis, as an example of ‘anti-Hellenism’. Often the discussion focuses on minor details, even the choice of specific words. For example, Repousi had chosen to use the word *synostismos*, which may be translated as ‘crowding’ to describe the gathering of ethnic Greeks in the port of Smyrna, who were massacred during what is known officially in Greek history as ‘the destruction of Smyrna’.

The choice of word, despite having been promptly revised by the author herself, has sparked an ongoing debate and has been described as hugely inappropriate in the context of what is considered one of the most traumatic events in Greek history.

Conclusions

Does the ‘cultural defence’ pattern have implications for the nature of democracy and the stability of a political system? Essentially, the cultural defence paradigm stipulates that in countries where national identity is inextricably linked with religion, secularization is likely to be inhibited. Greece is a paradigmatic case of cultural defence, as religion has maintained its power and political relevance by virtue of its relationship to the nation. This distinguishes Greece from the Western European context, together with cases such as Ireland, Malta and Cyprus, because of the brake that nationalism has placed on secularization. This paper has examined the implications of the cultural defence pattern for the nature and stability of democracy, especially in times of crisis. Nationalism tends to intensify during such times because of the heightened sense of threat from the ‘other’. This presents a political opportunity to institutions whose power draws on nationalism, such as the Church in cultural defence cases. In these instances, the link between religion and nationalism may intensify intolerance and discrimination against minorities, i.e. those who do not belong to ‘our’ nation and by extension do not espouse ‘our’ religion. A substantive definition of democracy includes an emphasis on strong civil society, freedom of speech, tolerance and respect for human rights. In Greece, the political power of the Church has allowed it to intervene in matters which in liberal democratic countries are non-negotiable, and this has meant the espousal of intolerance by various groups associated with nationalism, like the Orthodox Church, the radical or the extreme right. For such groups, every act of ‘immorality’, every ‘blasphemous word’, every *Hytirio* is nothing but an attempt to ‘demolish the National ideal’ (Golden Dawn 2012).

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