

**"Based on what you have learned in this course, how do you see the role of religion in an ever-increasing mediatized and globalised world?"**

The role of religion continues to be an issue of debate amongst scholars, as it has for centuries. Historical views, such as those of August Comte (1883), argued that religion is an outdated mode of seeing the world and would fade as secular cultures are established in modern society (Steger, 2003). Societies have indeed changed over time. They are today increasingly affected by globalisation and mediatization yet religion remains present. In order to understand the role of religion today, one must first understand this modern context. Globalisation refers to a set of social processes that appear to transform our present social condition of conventional nationality into one of globality (Steger, 2003 p10). Mediatization refers to media and mediated communications in transforming social and cultural life (Lundby, 2009). Keeping this modern context in consideration, this essay will explore the role of religion in modern Greece: wherein church is recognised by the state and the nation is continuously undergoing political and economic crisis. This example highlights the paradoxical role of the Greek Orthodox religion in shaping national identity and how this contributes to peace-building on a local and national scale but also how it can be attributed to further conflict and regress modernity.

In a highly mediatized and ever-increasing globalised world, religion can contribute to shape the global civil society. Little (2015 p.8) suggests that it helps define national identity or "peoplehood" thereby 'influencing the morals and values according to which the state is organised and legitimate'. The role of religious freedom in state policy can also influence civil society, as according to Clarke (2015) when a state policy includes freedom to practice religion, the role of religious personnel can mediate peace building within a nation. A representation of the Greek Orthodox Church influence on national identity is evident, simply by looking at the national flag, which contains the image of the Christian cross. This symbolises the interrelation between the church and state. Greece's Constitution recognises Greek Orthodoxy as the dominant religion and the state even provides the Church of Greece various legal and financial support (Karagiannis 2009). Religion was so synonymous with national identity that it had a place on Greek citizen identity cards. In the early 2000s, the period in which Greece joined the European Union, the removal of the entry of religious affiliation from Greek identity cards was considered a step towards modernity (Karagiannis 2009). Of course the church was not supportive of any of this. From a religious perspective: to erase the printed statement of religion on a plastic identity card, can be seen as a representation of the threat secularisation poses to conservative or traditionalist Greek Orthodox values. There was backlash from the church which garnered plenty of media attention and became a matter of public debate, especially as the late Archbishop Christodoulou of Athens and All Greece, made many public statements against the state decision and encouraged public rallies. The Church of Greece succeeded in collecting over 3 million signatures in support of holding a referendum on the issue of allowing optional entry of religious affiliation on the identity cards. This supports Marshall's (2015) claim that when agendas and visions of religious actors are at odds with those of the state, actors then may act independently to advocate against or contribute to deliberate social or economic change. Although it was not successful in asserting its will over the state, this example does demonstrate its strong capacity to mobilise and influence action within the nation (Karagiannis 2009).

Due to the continuous spread of global news, Clarke (2015) suggests that civil society organizations, the media and the general citizenry are now more informed and familiar with human rights and more likely to interfere or respond when the norms are violated and to injustice. This can be said to include religious actors as religious organisations, in regards to peacebuilding initiatives. They are more likely to reach out to rural or otherwise marginalised populations and can facilitate reception, understanding and distribution of care and social service (Clarke 2015). An example of this is Greece's support efforts towards Syrian refugees. These are individuals and groups part of an ethnoreligious society, wherein it is no surprise at all that in reference to their acts of compassion they refer to Christian values of morality and also altruism, as many Greeks

themselves, particularly those residing on islands near the middle east and large ports, come from Greco-Turkish refugee backgrounds (Vickery 2015). This can be seen as a positive reflection of a global civil society influenced by religion.

Juergensmeyer (2014) alluded that globalisation may bring with it social problems of identity, accountability and security. Religion offers 'illusory' solutions to all of these as believers feel a sense of belonging and social solidarity. This view may come into question however when considering, religious individuals facing severe conflict. To clarify, how can this illusory role of religion affect an individual in troubled circumstances, who fears only the transcendent notion of God? This, Juergensmeyer (2014) suggests, is what gives motivation to individuals engaging in conflicts related to global pressures and also gives meaning to those who struggle to act not as rebels but as 'sacred soldiers'. This was the case with Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi party in Greece which gained popularity and a seat in parliament in 2012 while the state was conflicted with political chaos: austerity measures, new presidency and violent political rallies (Wodak 2014). They began to gain popularity using rhetoric of nationalism as well as religion as they claim they 'serve those who offend God' with acts of violence and hate crimes against immigrants and political opponents (Kodak 2014). Though heavily extremist and going against Christian moral values regarding non-violence, the party, self-described as: 'having faith in the ideology of Nationalism' even garnered public support from local priests, who sought 'hope' in their extremist attitudes towards preserving conservatism (implying religion) and opposing secularity (Boesler 2012). This exemplifies religious views of thinking in terms of order and control and how the party used this to symbolically represent their argument (Juergensmeyer 2014, p.770) and affirms Little's (2015) claim that illiberal or ethnically exclusivist institutions increase the probability of violence. Though Golden Dawn did not represent a majority of the Greek population, they do reflect a negative aspect of national identity and religion.

Overall, this is an example of the socially negative empowerment which can be attributed to religious connotations but also of the power of mediatization. The neo-Nazis were not arrested or held accountable for their crimes as a criminal organisation until one of their members stabbed to death a victim who was not an anonymous immigrant but a media figure; specifically an anti-fascist singer. This was when media outlets report: 'the whole nation froze' (Boesler 2012). This implicates the power of mediatization in shaping events, possibly more effective than religious morality alone. This case also highlights complete absence of Clarke's (2015) proposed ideas about religious actors contributing to peace building by publicly reacting to moral injustice, as well as Little's (2015) theories of how religion at a national level can shape a 'civil' society.

Greece's blurred lines between church and state seem to reflect what may be involved in social tensions in the state's ability to progress as a modern nation. Globalisation and mediatization allows for such criticisms to be made as the nation is able to be compared to any other EU member state or any other country in the world in the tap of a button by academics, leaders or students. Religion plays a number of roles in Greece but one that is (currently) a strong constant is its influence in shaping national identity. Remembering the influence of religion on national identity in Greece is important for understanding events that take place and actions that occur by religious actors, political actors and even the general population. In regards to national development, through outlining the identity cards matter, it is evident that the Church of Greece has the capacity to influence large amounts of people to promote change and the audacity to do so in opposition to the state. This can be an important implication for national development and peacebuilding initiatives and though the identity card issue was apparently important to the late Archbishop, it can be seen, simply, as an act of resistance towards secularisation. Considering the ability the church and religious actors have to mobilise the people, this example of their contribution to political discourse, begs the question of whether the actions of the church truly prioritise peace-building. Social assistance such as that provided by Greek citizens and organisations reflects altruistic values in this national identity and a more legitimate peaceful function which may result from religious belief. The rise of an extremist, criminal, neo-Nazi group entering parliament and utilising nationalistic and religious rhetoric highlights the instability of Greece's current sociopolitical context as well as limitations in faith based ideology. The fact the group garnered support from religious

figures puts into question the role of religious institutions in mediating peace. Though religion may be used in society to form communities, identities, shape action against the state and illustrate a purpose in the context of modern Greece it is clear that as an ideology it is not always enough to avoid conflict and/or the cessation of crisis and the populism associated with it can even contribute to more violence.

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