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Yannis Stavrakakis

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Religious Populism and Political Culture: The Greek Case

YANNIS STAVRAKAKIS

The article examines how the relationship between religion and politics is played out in the case of contemporary Greece. In particular the aim is to describe and account for the recent politicization of Orthodox Christian discourse, following the decision of the Greek government to exclude reference to religion from identity cards. This issue dominated the public sphere in 2000–1. The analysis mainly focuses on the populist character of the discourse articulated by the Church of Greece and Archbishop Christodoulos. It also explores the implications of the phenomenon of religious populism for debates around Greek political culture.

Greek political life and media coverage during 2000 and 2001, the first years of the new century, was undoubtedly dominated by the bitter row between the government and the Orthodox Church of Greece. At stake was the deletion of the reference to religious affiliation on the identity cards that all Greek citizens are obliged to carry. Although this administrative amendment was promoted by the centre-left PASOK government as a further step in the modernization of the country, the Church – which claims the allegiance of the vast majority of the Greek population¹ – strongly opposed the decision. This opposition was coordinated by the newly appointed Archbishop Christodoulos, who had been elected as head of the Holy Synod of the Autocephalous Church of Greece in 1998.

A dynamic and articulate clergyman, Christodoulos, in stark contrast to his predecessor, relies heavily on the electronic media in order to cultivate and reproduce his image as a (religious) leader. Under his leadership, the Church interpreted the proposed change to the format of the identity cards as ignoring its own position as a constitutionally

This article is part of a broader project examining both the general relationship between religion and politics in our late modern age and, in particular, the history and implications of the ‘politicization’ of Church discourse in contemporary Greece.

'established' religion, threatening its role in Greek society and, ultimately, as undermining Greek identity itself. Its opposition was crystallized in a particular discursive formation, a series of arguments and rhetorical tropes, used to mobilize the faithful against the government. The aim of this article is to examine the exact nature of this discourse in terms of its internal structure and the way it addresses its audience, the Greek people.²

What better place to start this exploration than the speeches and articles of the Archbishop himself, the religious leader who personified the struggle and was presented as articulating and transmitting the official positions of the whole Church. There is no doubt that the discourse articulated by the Archbishop and the Church hierarchy – with very few but notable exceptions – was a discourse with very obvious political characteristics. In that sense, one can safely speak of a clear politicization of Church discourse during the period under examination. This is not a unique phenomenon in an age of global de-secularization in which religion and politics often produce highly explosive blends throughout the world. In fact, these trends have sparked a broader global debate on the role of organized religion in the twenty-first century.³ It was also no surprise to anyone with even a limited knowledge of the long tradition of almost incestuous relations between politics and religion, marking Greek history from the age of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires through to more recent times. This is not, however, to deny the unique characteristics and implications of this particular politicization. The question is where is this uniqueness exactly located?

The article begins by offering a brief account of the events surrounding the exclusion of all reference to religious affiliation from identity cards and of the role of the Orthodox Church in Greek society and its relations with the state. Thus, my argument in the first section of this paper constitutes an attempt to illuminate this issue. What seems indeed surprising and worth exploring in more detail is not so much the fact of the politicization of religion in contemporary Greece *per se*, as many commentators have noted with unwarranted surprise, but the specific character this politicization takes. The main hypothesis explored in this paper is that the politicized discourse of the Greek Church is thoroughly populist. This claim is substantiated in the second section of the paper through a detailed analysis of the discourse of Archbishop Christodoulos.

Finally, in the last section, I try to situate this new form of religious populism within the broader background of Greek political culture. My main reason for doing this in the context of this article is because an analysis pointing to the populist character of Church discourse can very

easily be misinterpreted as *unconditionally* vindicating a specific account of Greek political culture. This account would conceive of the recent clash between state and church as the latest embodiment of an ever-present cleavage between modernizers and traditionalists that crosscuts Greek society. However, without being completely misplaced, such a conclusion ultimately tends to simplify what is a much more complex social picture.

POLITICS AND RELIGION IN GREECE: THE IDENTITY CARDS ISSUE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The Identity Cards Crisis

After his second consecutive electoral victory in April 2000,⁴ Greek prime minister Kostas Simitis appointed his new government.⁵ In an interview given about a month later, the new Minister of Justice, Michalis Stathopoulos, aired a series of reforms aimed at modernizing the Greek legal apparatus in relation to issues of religious belief. He proposed, among other measures, the deletion of religious affiliation from identity cards (*Ethnos*, 6 May 2000). For Stathopoulos, a professor of law, as well as for other academics and commentators, this was a necessary measure in order to ensure respect for human rights and, in particular, to prevent discrimination against non-Orthodox Greek citizens. Needless to say, this was a view not shared by Archbishop Christodoulos. Setting the tone of what was to follow he responded that on this issue, 'only one factor exists and this is *the people*, that cannot and should not be ignored' (*Eleftherotyphia*, 9 May 2000).

Initially, nobody thought that this 'dogfight' would have any serious political consequences, given that most governmental attempts to intervene in issues related to religion during the 1980s and 1990s have ended in compromise for fear of alienating practicing Orthodox voters. These interventions included the introduction of civil marriage, which was eventually recognized in 1982 as *equivalent* to the more popular religious marriage, although the government had initially conceived it as a replacement or rather a prerequisite for religious marriage. Another issue was that of 'Church property', an attempt by the government to bring under public ownership much of the property belonging to religious institutions. After sparking a lot of tension, this issue culminated in 1988 in another compromise (Karayannis 1997: 195).

The more general question of the full constitutional separation between church and state has been discussed often since the restoration of democracy in 1975. But neither the New Democracy government that

drafted the 1975 Constitution nor the PASOK governments that have led the subsequent processes of constitutional revision (in 1985 and 2000) found the courage to push through such a measure. This is despite the fact that, by many accounts, this would benefit not only the state but also the church.

To return to the more recent events under examination in this article, everything changed when the newly instituted – and up to that time generally unknown – independent *Hellenic Data Protection Authority* convened on 15 May 2002 to discuss the issue. Its unanimous decision was that a whole set of sensitive personal data, including religious belief, should no longer be noted on citizens' identity cards. A few days later, on 24 May, during Prime Minister's Question Time in Parliament, Prime Minister Simitis confirmed that his government would stand by and implement the Authority's decision.

These developments triggered an extraordinary reaction on behalf of the Greek Church, a reaction that polarized Greek society and dominated political debates and media attention for most of 2000 and 2001. Archbishop Christodoulos led a campaign against the decision, articulating a discourse that was marked by a clear political profile. Starting from the premise that an identity card is not a mere administrative document but 'a proof of my personality' (Christodoulos 2000c: 321), he, *off the record*, characterized this change as a *coup d'état*, and started a struggle to overturn it.

This struggle included mass rallies in Thessaloniki and Athens, rallies that were attended by hundreds of thousands of people; interventions in the media – which started following him day in and day out in order to transmit his latest attack on the government; and a campaign to gather as many signatures as possible calling for a referendum on the issue. This was despite the fact that this was not the procedure prescribed by the Constitution for calling referenda. The polarization was also reflected within the political and party systems. *New Democracy*, the largest opposition centre-right party, almost unconditionally supported the Archbishop in what many journalists were quick to call his 'holy war'. Many of the party's MPs attended the rallies and most of them, including its leader, Kostas Karamanlis, signed the petition for a referendum.⁶

After almost a year of intense mobilization, on 28 August 2001 the Church announced that it had managed to gather 3,008,901 signatures asking for a referendum on the *optional inclusion* of religion in Greek identity cards. By any standards, the number of signatures was impressive, given that according to the 2001 census, the population of Greece is 10,939,605 persons (while the electorate – which excludes foreigners and children – was 8,976,135 in the last general elections of 2000).

However, two months earlier on 27 June 2001, an appeal by a group of theology professors and laymen against the deletion of religion from identity cards was rejected by the constitutional court (Συμβούλιο Επικρατείας or *Council of State*), which decided that any mention of religion (either obligatory or optional) was unconstitutional. A deep division was established in Greek public life and no obvious solution was visible, since both the government and the Church held firm to their positions. On 29 August, however, the Church received another, this time unexpected and much more politically significant blow – a blow that led to a suspension of most politicized activities on its behalf. After receiving the Archbishop and a delegation from the Holy Synod that informed him about the number of signatures collected for the Church petition, the President of the Republic, Konstantinos Stephanopoulos – a former conservative politician – issued a statement that included the following:

The conditions to call a referendum on the issue of identity cards have not been met. Everyone is obliged to abide by the rules of the current law and the signatures which were collected by a procedure that falls outside legally instituted procedures cannot overturn the provisions of the Constitution [*Kathimerini*, 30 Aug. 2001].

This statement was even more damaging because it was made by someone whose institutional position, huge popularity – greater even than the Archbishop's – and conservative credentials left no obvious strategy for the Church hierarchy to continue its struggle at the same level of intensity.

Making Sense of Politicization: Historical and Political Parameters

How can we, as political and social theorists and analysts, make sense of these events? The first conclusion shared by most commentators was that all these developments marked a 'politicization' of Church discourse. Indeed, this politicization is so open in the Archbishop's discourse that, by now, everyone in Greece is more or less used to it. Take, for example, his most well-known book, *Από Χώμα και Νερό* [From Earth and Water], published in 1999 and comprising a series of articles published in the 1990s. The titles of some of the articles are indicative: 'Nation and Orthodoxy: The Unbreakable Bond' (Christodoulos 1999: 145), 'The Volcano of Islamism – The Lava that "Burns" the Balkans' (Christodoulos 1999: 69), 'Lost Chances for an "Orthodox Axis" in the Balkans' (Christodoulos 1999: 100), etc. Here, instead of discussing strictly religious, theological or even moral issues, it is clear that the Archbishop is mostly interested in what he calls the "great" national issues,

especially those “related to the great horizons of our race” [γένος],⁷ our identity and our continuity’ (Christodoulos 1999: 13). In particular, he singles out the challenges posed by globalization and membership of the European Union, Islamic fundamentalism, etc. It is also clear that these texts are marked by a feeling of eschatological urgency. They are written as a warning and propose a set of measures to avoid ‘tragic consequences for Hellenism and Orthodoxy’ (Christodoulos 1999: 15) – two terms that are inextricably linked for the Archbishop. In the pages of this book, the Church is clearly presented as *the* institution that can offer a way to combat whatever threatens Greece and Hellenism with ‘elimination’ (Christodoulos 1999: 219).

Moreover, although the Church has sometimes vehemently denied that its discourse is politicized, the Archbishop himself has actually conceded this point. While in the past his view was that if Orthodoxy were to become politicized that ‘would entail its spiritual alienation’ (Christodoulos 1999: 116), in the Athens rally he stated explicitly: ‘they accuse us of speaking politically, that our discourse is political. We reply, *yes our discourse is political*, only in the ancient Greek sense of the term; it was never associated with party politics’ (Christodoulos 2000a: 66, emphasis added). He reiterated this view in a lengthy interview published in the newspaper *To Vima* on 11 February 2001, stating that ‘all our actions are political’ (Christodoulos 2001a: 17). In this sense, the ‘politicized’ nature of his discourse is not in dispute; it is not even denied by the Archbishop himself.

It is also the case that even a quick glance through some of his speeches reveals that not only are they political, but also that his discourse is *primarily* a political discourse. Furthermore, this ‘politicization’ seems to be premised on a particular understanding of the role of the Church within Greek society. The state is deemed by and large incompetent in performing its duty *vis-à-vis* Hellenism. Thus, the Church – which previously helped the state to fulfill this role – is left alone to accomplish the task. For the Archbishop it is clear that, with the strengthening of the European Union and Greece’s full participation in it, ‘the state has ceased to be the obvious guarantor of national identity’. As a result, ‘the salvation of Hellenism can only be the task and accomplishment of the Church’ (Christodoulos 1999: 222–3).

This recent politicization of religious discourse in Greece should not, however, come as a sudden surprise. First of all, it is not alien to the recent global comeback of religion, to what has been described as a trend of de-secularization (Berger, Sacks and Martin 1999). Most important, however, one should not forget that the heritage of the official Church in Greece is a heritage of *Political Orthodoxy* (Agouridis 2000: 360)

going back to the Byzantine and the Ottoman past, and given a new lease of life under the auspices of Greek nationalism and the direct control of the Greek state over the Church following Greek independence (1830). In fact, from its creation as an autocephalous institution, independent from the Patriarchate of Constantinople (1833), the Church of Greece has been invested with a political role. Its conversion to the secular values of Greek nationalism, its transformation into 'a secular doctrine and certainly one at odds with its own deposit of faith' (Martin 1978: 272), went so deep that 'the Church of Greece spearheaded all nationalist initiatives in the latter part of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century' (Kitromilides 1989: 166).

In the twentieth century, the open politicization of the Church took a variety of new forms. During the First World War National Schism, the Church sided with the king against the reformer Prime Minister, Venizelos, who was excommunicated and anathematized by the Archbishop in 1916. The Church played an active role in the ideological aspect of the struggle against communism during the Civil War (1946–49). It was also largely obedient to the quasi-religious ideology ('a Greece of Christian Greeks') introduced by the Colonels' dictatorship (1967–74).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The political legacy of the Greek Church can therefore be taken for granted, as can the political character of the Archbishop's discourse and the *primarily political role* that the Church – or some sectors within it – envisages for itself. The crucial question now becomes: what type of politics is put forward here? How is this role communicated and established? What is the discursive mode through which it addresses itself to its audience? In actual fact, the discourse of the Archbishop has been the object of numerous analyses. It has been praised and celebrated as patriotic and faithful to tradition, but also criticized on many lines: as nationalist, anti-democratic, fundamentalist, traditionalist, even reactionary, and, last but not least, as *populist*.⁸ It seems to me, however, that it is this last dimension that might be able to illuminate the aforementioned questions, not only in terms of the discourse's concrete content but also in terms of the discursive logics that structure it and the way it communicates its message to its target, that is, to *the people*.

The following parts of this text explore some of the particular characteristics and tropes of the 'politicized' discourse articulated by the Church. Taking into account the theoretical insights of Ernesto Laclau and others, it is argued that this constitutes a populist discourse *par excellence*. The last section of the article situates this discourse within the broader context of Greek political culture and especially its

conceptualization as the terrain of an antagonism between 'modernization' and 'tradition'. The term 'populist' is not used here in its *polemical* sense, as is often the case, but primarily as a tool of *discourse analysis*. Thus, before embarking on our analysis, we need to clarify, very briefly, what exactly we mean by populism, since this concept has been often attacked for its vagueness and its (lack of) analytical effectivity.

In defining populism, we take our lead from the theory of populism introduced by Ernesto Laclau in his texts *Towards a Theory of Populism* (Laclau 1977) and *Populist Rupture and Discourse* (Laclau 1980). What does Laclau argue regarding the analysis of populism? First of all, he argues that one has to take into account the political subject addressed and invoked in a given discourse: is it a nation? Is it a particular class or section of the population? Or is it 'the people'? According to Laclau, 'despite the wide diversity in the uses of the term, we find in all of them the common reference to an analogical basis which is *the people* ... it is certainly true that reference to "the people" occupies a central place in populism' (Laclau 1977: 165).

However, the central place of a signifier like 'the people' does not seem enough to justify talking about a populist discourse, although it does constitute a first important criterion. If the structural location of 'the people' were enough to define populism, then the majority of political discourses in modernity would probably belong to the populist family. Laclau was from the beginning aware of this problem; hence the introduction of his second criterion for distinguishing populism. 'For a popular positionality to exist, a discourse has to divide society between dominant and dominated; that is, the system of equivalences should present itself as articulating the totality of a society around a fundamental antagonism' (Laclau 1980: 91). As he has pointed out, 'the presence of popular elements in a discourse is not sufficient to transform it into a populist one. Populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an *antagonistic* option against the ideology of the dominant bloc' (Laclau 1977: 173, emphasis added). Surely what gives 'the people' its political salience and hegemonic appeal within populist discourses, is its antagonistic representation.⁹

Is the discourse articulated recently by Archbishop Christodoulos and the Church hierarchy a populist discourse? Does it fulfill the two criteria highlighted by Laclau: a central reference to 'the people' and an antagonistic discursive logic? Is it, in other words, organized according to a 'populist logic', a 'populist reason', to use the title of a forthcoming book by Ernesto Laclau? These will be the questions guiding our argumentation in the following section.¹⁰

THE DISCOURSE OF THE GREEK CHURCH:
CHRISTODOULOS' POPULISM?¹¹

'The People' as Central Discursive Reference

Let us initially explore the first question, the status of 'the people' in the Archbishop's discourse. Before the identity cards crisis, 'the people' is not assigned any privileged status in his discourse; signifiers like 'race' (γένος) and 'nation' (έθνος) are largely preferred. It was the identity cards issue that led to a radicalization of the Archbishop's discourse and to the necessity to address the people directly. This change of focus is also depicted in the officially published transcripts of his speeches in the rallies and in the Holy Synod, where 'λαός' – the Greek word for 'the people' – is printed with the first letter in capitals, together with words like 'God', 'Greece', 'Orthodoxy' and 'Church'. It is obvious then that 'the people' is now becoming central, one of the master signifiers at play; it also becomes a constant reference which is to be found in abundance, featuring in almost every paragraph if not in every sentence.

In the Athens rally, for example, the message is crystal clear: the Church 'assumes the role of the leader of the faithful People in its desperate attempt to defend its spiritual self-consciousness' (Christodoulos 2000c: 309). Christodoulos' main concern is that the Church has to fulfil its duty to 'the People of God' and the homeland (Christodoulos 2000a: 72). The Church represents and defends 'the people' against the attack of an atheist government that ignores and opposes an essential Greekness guaranteed by tradition. More significantly, the modernizing government is to be resisted on the grounds of its distance from the people. According to the Archbishop, contemporary Greek modernizers are characterized by living apart from 'the people', isolated from the 'everyday popular ways of life', 'from the soul and the heart of the People' (Christodoulos 2000a: 52–3). This is what, within this discursive universe, explains – and *condemns* – their anti-ecclesiastical campaign. This is also what serves to legitimize and justify his own position.

The Church is presented as eminently qualified to perform this task of representation, since there is no division between clergy and the people. 'Our clergy is part of the People, kneaded with the People, working for the People, coming from the People' (Christodoulos 2000c: 311). The clergy consists of persons 'devoted to God and its People' (Christodoulos 2000c: 322). Replying to the criticism that the Church has no right to speak on behalf of the people since it lacks democratic legitimation, the Archbishop re-asserts his right to do so. He vows to continue on the grounds that when he speaks about the Greek people,

he means the faithful of the Orthodox Church, the 'People of God', the 'People of the Church', and not the atheists or the heterodox.

There is no doubt that the notion of 'the people' does have certain theological connotations and a history within theological discourse.¹² However, it seems that the Archbishop uses 'the people' in a clearly political way. For example, he stresses the quantitative parameter. Since, according to him (and the available statistical data) atheists and heterodox comprise only two to four per cent of the Greek population, this is supposed to 'legitimize' his discourse on behalf of the Greek people in general, a people that 'every day judges and confirms its trust on us' (Christodoulos 2000a: 64; 2000b: 303). 'Nowhere else in the world are People and Religion so close' (Christodoulos 2000b: 292) and that is why the people expect support from the Church, 'that's why the Church speaks on behalf of this People' (Christodoulos 2000b: 303).

It becomes clear that 'the people of God' is not used in the ecumenical and theological sense, but as a statistical and territorial reference, a rhetorical device designed to mobilize supporters – through the establishment of a particular relation of representation – and to terrify opponents. The argument put forward is that *virtually* all Greek citizens, *virtually* the whole of the Greek people, support the Church in its struggle against the government. Such an instrumental, political conception of 'the people' is often retrieved when – and only when – the Church feels threatened and popular mobilization is required to defend it. This was also the case with the ecclesiastical property crisis of 1987. As soon as crises are over, 'the people' loses its value for the hierarchy and is returned to silence, to the margins of ecclesiastical life (Thermos 1993: 44).

The profoundly political references to 'the people' by the Archbishop raise the issue of the relationship between the people and God. By claiming to represent the people, the Archbishop knows that he enters a dangerous field: the views of the people can change over time, while his position (presented as the bastion of traditional Orthodoxy, and, ultimately, the word of God) cannot be seen to change. The result is a hybrid discourse. On the one hand, as a religious discourse, contemporary Church discourse is based on a strong foundationalism and a representationalism rather uncharacteristic of Orthodox theology (in its apophatic tradition).

The Word of God is beyond negotiation. It is a word which is authentic and revelatory, and which comes from our Lord Jesus Christ himself ... The Church thus, when it speaks with the word of God, is not doing so in the way a University Professor does for

his discipline or a politician for his ideology. The Church is not speaking a word of its own. It is transmitting the word of God [Christodoulos, *Συγγεντεύξη*: 54].

Elsewhere, the Archbishop states that, 'The Church is unmistakable, because Christ is leading it' (Christodoulos, *Church and Nation*: 9). It is hard to see how 'the people', in its profoundly political sense, can function within such a discourse that claims God as the first source of its legitimation. As we have seen, though, the Church operates both on the sacred and the secular level. Any confusion is resolved first by attributing to the Greek people the quality of the *chosen*, the people of God. The Greek people is always the 'blessed People of God' (Christodoulos 2000b: 290). On the other hand, a strong link is articulated between the voice of the people and the voice of God.¹³ If both of these are presented as overlapping, then the Archbishop can claim to represent both without any contradictions. Hence, the voice of the people becomes for Archbishop Christodoulos the voice of God: 'your voice is also the voice of God' (Christodoulos 2000c: 327), *vox populi vox dei* being a standard populist theme (Canovan 1999: 10).

Thus, the Archbishop becomes the direct representative of the voice of the people, and God ultimately acquires the role of the guarantor of this direct representation, having entrusted this role to the Archbishop. In the Archbishop's own words, 'I have received from God this responsibility, to move forward, and for you to follow your shepherd' (*Kathimerini*, 1 July 2000). Here, the metaphor of the flock is also revealing of the organizational aspect of this discourse: a direct relationship between the leader and the led without mediating mechanisms, with the priests and the Church hierarchy in the roles of mere transmitters (something, by the way, not entirely consistent with Orthodox patterns of church organization). In any case, the emphasis is clearly on the leader's charisma – cultivated by the intense media attention and the Archbishop's initially positive response to the challenge of mediatization – and on the necessity 'for direct, unmediated rapport between the leader and "his people"' (Mouzelis 1985: 334).

This stress on direct representation and on a populist style of organization explains the Archbishop's attacks on any other mediating mechanisms that would occupy and regulate the space between him and *his* people. Hence the typical populist distrust of Law and Rights: 'Laws, when the People does not want them, are not applied, they fall into inactivity and are essentially abolished. They are rejected by the consciousness of the nation concerning what is right and what is not' (Christodoulos 2000b: 298). In his Athens speech, he resorted to

examples from Ancient Sparta to justify his view that ‘laws are not unchangeable’ (Christodoulos 2000c: 322). Although undoubtedly true (since, at an ‘ontological’ level, constitutional and legal frameworks are social and political constructions), within the half-religious, half-political discourse of the Archbishop, this claim clearly functions as an attack on the constitutional basis of liberal democracy.

By legitimizing his role as the direct and only true representative of the people, it also invests the majority with a divine legitimation. ‘It is a powerful idea because it plays on the tension in democracy between the power of popular sovereignty and the possibility of a tyranny of the majority.’ To the extent that this tyranny of the majority can only be resisted through the introduction of legal and constitutional provisions, then populism – and Greek Church populism – becomes ‘hostile to a discourse of rights because, by definition, rights are tools of the embattled minority, while populism sees the majority as embattled and blames the excessive deference of the state to right claims of minorities for this injustice’ (Taggart 2000: 116). The crude majoritarianism of Church discourse, revealed in its mobilization behind the petition for a referendum, seems to be based on a neglect of the rights of minorities and an impatience with what are presented as ‘legalistic restrictions that may stand in the way of salvation’, to use a phrase by Margaret Canovan (Canovan 1999: 7–8). In other words, a populist modality of discourse is crucial for the Church, because it makes it possible to acquire democratic credentials without accepting the democratic politics of representation (Taggart 2000: 98).

In any case, we can safely assert that ‘the people’ does constitute a central reference in the politicized discourse of the Greek Church. In order, however, to ground in a conclusive way the populist character of this discursive hybrid – this ‘mixture of metaphysics and populism’ (Tsatsos 2000) – it is necessary to examine the discursive logic dominating its organization and articulation. Is the discourse of the Archbishop marked by the dominant operation of a logic of antagonism and division?

Antagonism as Dominant Discursive Logic

As with the references to ‘the people’, it is possible to view the identity cards issue as the crucial moment that signals a visible shift in Church discourse in this respect also. Describing the attitude of the Church before the crisis, the Archbishop himself points out that it was not antagonistic towards the state since that would harm ‘the People’, a people that in Greece is both citizen of the state and faithful to the Church (Christodoulos 2000a: 35). Consequently, after the crisis, we can

assume that it must be the same (populist) priority that obliges the Church to adopt an antagonistic attitude. The antagonism is always between the people (and their direct divine representative, the head of the Church), on the one side, and the state, the government and all the social forces supporting its decisions, on the other. The enemy is clearly the secular power that has been ‘autonomized from God and People and stop[ped] discussing with the Church on issues that concern the People’ (Christodoulos 2000b: 299). This claim is also historically contextualized: ‘History proves that the Church has always been attacked by the powerful of the day but has always emerged victorious. And it was attacked because it did not succumb to the secular power, because it did not “modernize” and did not follow its orders, orders that opposed the Law of God’ (Christodoulos 2001b: 8).

It becomes obvious here that it is particular attributes of the government and its social base that became the primary targets of the Archbishop. Furthermore, these targets are presented in the Archbishop’s dramatized quasi-eschatological discourse as comprising ‘the forces of evil’, fighting against ‘the Church and the will of God and trying to de-christianize our society ... only because they hate the Church of God and wish to push it to the margins of social life’ (*Eleftherotypia*, 26 June 2000). Now, generally speaking, what can be these forces of evil, the antagonistic enemy of the Church and the ‘people of God’?

Modernization is clearly one of them: ‘Modernization leads to the downfall of the nation and the ethical values of the land’ (*Eleftherotypia*, 8 Oct. 2001). The intellectuals often provide another target. Consider, for example, the Archbishop’s polemic against distinguished Greek intellectuals like Athens University professor, Constantine Tsoucalas, in his article ‘The Western-fed Intelligentsia’ and elsewhere (Christodoulos 1999: 186). In his Thessaloniki speech, this theme returns: ‘Unfortunately some of our intellectuals, the intelligentsia as they are called, want persistently to ignore ... the role of the Church in safeguarding our Tradition’ (Christodoulos 2000b: 296). And he concludes: ‘To these progressive technocrats, who want at all cost to transform Greece into a country that will not recognize Orthodoxy and will not lean on it, we say clearly: You are wasting your time ... The People of God will not follow you. You will be left alone again. You do not express the People ... All the other Greek People resist your plans’ (Christodoulos 2000b: 298). This anti-intellectualist attitude, coupled with the constant reference to ‘the people’ reveals again the populist mode of the Archbishop’s discourse. It is also the case that this is a typical populist strategy to the extent that populism in some of its

different forms has expressed hostility towards theory and intellectualism (Taggart 2000: 50).

Even more revealing than the antagonistic content of this discourse is its style and, in particular, the war metaphors, which are numerous. An antagonistic climate of war and struggle is dominant here, with the monasteries becoming 'involute fortresses' (Christodoulos 2000b: 291) in the struggle between 'Enlighteners' and tradition (Christodoulos 2000a: 59), and the people being urged not to lower the flags and banners (Christodoulos 2000b: 308). It is no coincidence then that the Archbishop himself offered the most graphic image of this struggle during the Athens rally when he held the banner of the 1821 revolution, a symbolically charged emblem of the struggle against the Ottomans. From a semiotic point of view, the aims of this move are obvious. A new antagonism is grafted on a system of signification pertaining to a different context and a different period in order to acquire some of its mobilizing power and popular appeal.

This is not the only time the Archbishop has utilized national myths and symbols in his discourse. In December 2001, he stated that the Greeks were facing a new battle of Marathon, with new Persians – apparently a metaphor for the government or the forces it is supposed to obey – threatening 'our faith, our language and tradition' (*Flash.gr*, 2 Dec. 2001). Of course, the struggle against the Ottoman Empire or the Persians is not the same as the struggle against the democratically elected Greek government. How does the Church bridge this gap in its antagonistic discourse?

Before the identity cards crisis, this antagonistic discursive organization was present in another form: in the form of all the forces conspiring against Hellenism. In fact, the Archbishop has spoken openly about the 'conspiracies of the enemies' of Hellenism (Christodoulos 1999: 54) – conspiracy theories being another standard element in populist discourses (Taggart 2000: 105). The Archbishop has constantly overstated the dangers of Islamization for the Balkans and Europe (Christodoulos 1999: 28–32) and the possibility of cultural obliteration and alienation due to membership of the European Union (Christodoulos 1999: 35). Panturkism, panslavism and the threat of 'Papal expansionism' were other usual references (Christodoulos 1999: 51; 108). In order to avoid all these dangers, he seemed willing even to consider an alliance between Orthodox countries (an 'Orthodox axis', mainly between Greece, Serbia and Russia), thus accepting a proposal put forward by Milosevič and Karadžić (Christodoulos 1999: 102).

The change occurring with the articulation of the Church's novel hybrid populism is that a new, powerful, but this time, internal enemy – the government – is added to these external threats. The danger here would be for the government and its supporters – who are Greeks and not foreign conspirators – to 'contaminate' the purity of the 'people of God' as presented by the Church. This possibility, however, can be avoided by attributing their actions to the influence of ideologies (Enlightenment, modernization, secularism) *foreign* to the Hellenic tradition. The agents of these ideologies are not deemed worthy of being Greek and thus the essential Hellenic identity defended by the Church retains its supposed purity and the symbols of past liberating struggles can be utilized in the new struggle without contradictions.

There is no doubt then that the discourse of the Archbishop is organized according to an antagonistic schema. It distinguishes between Us, the forces of Go(o)d (the *People* as represented by the *Church* under *God*) and Them, the forces of Evil (an *atheist, modernizing, intellectualist* and *repressive* government), thus constructing two chains of equivalences at war with each other.

In fact, the division introduced is so strong that the Archbishop falls short of assuming full responsibility for it. Presenting the mobilization of the Church as an automatic and justified reaction, he blames the government for the division. When he is accused of dividing the people he replies that, in fact, he is interested in the unity of the people: 'the division is not caused by us, but by those who created the problem. To them one should address the recommendations for the unity of the people' (Christodoulos 2000a: 70). Those who oppose 'progress' to 'tradition' are the ones to blame for the 'artificial' division of the people and the nation (Christodoulos 2000c: 313). Yes, a deep social rift is emerging, he acknowledged in his Athens speech (Christodoulos 2000c: 324), but this can only be due to the action of 'the atheists and modernizers of every colour, who believed they could easily ... [m]ake Greece a state without God and the Greeks a People without faith' (Christodoulos 2000a: 38).

Concluding our argument in this section, we can assert that both in terms of its references to 'the people' and its antagonistic discursive structure, the Church seems to be adopting a populist discursive style. Even if secularization and politicization are, more or less, unavoidable within the Greek historical background and current global trends, there is no doubt that this particular populist politicization poses some important questions for socio-political theory and political action within the framework of constitutional, representative democracy. It also raises some crucial issues about the nature of contemporary Greek political culture.

TRADITION VERSUS MODERNIZATION:
FROM CULTURAL DUALISM TO SPLIT IDENTITY?

Populism and Greek Political Culture

This final section of the article will try to situate the preceding analysis of religious populism within the broader discussion regarding the general profile of Greek political culture. In more general terms, the question of populism has been explicitly linked to an account of Greek political culture that understands political/cultural space as divided between two camps: modernizers and traditionalists. This argument, the 'cultural dualism' thesis, has been put forward, in its paradigmatic form, by Nikiforos Diamandouros (Diamandouros 1994; 2000).

In essence, this schema implies that the construction of a modern state in Greece, entailing the introduction of a variety of Western institutions with their accompanying logics and 'their grafting onto traditional and precapitalist, indigenous structures', led to 'intense social, political, and cultural struggles in which potential beneficiaries and potential losers in the redefinition of power relations within Greece played the central role' (Diamandouros 1994: 8). Two distinct cultural camps, two cultures, clearly emerged out of these struggles.

The first, the 'underdog culture', became particularly entrenched 'among the very extensive, traditional, more introverted, and least competitive strata and sectors of Greek society and was more fully elaborated by intellectuals adhering to this tradition' (Diamandouros 1994: 15). The younger of the twin cultures described by Diamandouros exhibits the opposite characteristics: it 'draws its intellectual origins from the Enlightenment ... [it is] secular and extrovert in orientation' (Diamandouros 1994: 17) and puts forward a modernizing project aiming at making Greece a Western polity and society. While the 'underdog culture' stresses tradition and is largely influenced by the Ottoman and Byzantine past, the modernizing cultural camp pursues social, political and economic reform in order to promote Greece's integration into the international system and the European family.

This general schema has been directly linked to the question of Greek populism, with Diamandouros assigning PASOK's populism of the 1970s and 1980s a place in the 'underdog culture' (Diamandouros 1994: 29). Thus, as Lyrantzis and Spourdalakis point out, although Diamandouros' work is not primarily focused on populism, it offers an interesting framework on Greek political culture within which populism can be neatly situated. In this framework, populism would be associated with the political culture of 'the underdog' (Lyrantzis and Spourdalakis 1993: 152). The same conclusion has been reached by Mouzelis. In his view,

like most societies that experienced a delayed development in comparison with the West, Greece is marked by a continuous and diffused division between two antagonistic types of political culture. He proposes there is a traditionally oriented, 'native' type, inward and hostile to Enlightenment ideals and Western institutions, and a 'modernizing' type that tries to adopt these institutions and catch-up with the West (Mouzelis 1994: 17). Mouzelis also situates populism within the 'underdog culture', by specifying two distinct types of the latter: the *clientelist* and the *populist* versions (Mouzelis 1994: 18).

Such a view is also congruent with the signifying realities of populist discourses themselves, in so far as in populism 'the people' are often presented as 'the underdog' which is oppressed, exploited or excluded from the *status quo* (Panizza 2000: 179). We have seen this pattern being more or less reproduced in the discourse of the Greek Archbishop. In fact, at least at a general level, the whole struggle around the identity cards lends itself very easily to an analysis along the lines of the 'cultural dualism' thesis. The two major actors seem to be leading two opposed camps: the modernizers struggling to reform Church-state relations are led by Prime Minister Simitis, described by Diamandouros in 1994, long before the current crisis, as 'a respected academic long an advocate of reform and rationalization' (Diamandouros 1994: 38). Meanwhile, the traditionalist camp is led by a representative of a supposedly outdated institution claiming its force from the Byzantine past. Not surprisingly, in the foreword to the Greek edition of his text, Diamandouros discusses briefly the identity cards issue as an example of the tensions arising between the two cultures (Diamandouros 2000: 15). Is this, however, the full picture?

*Limitations of the 'Cultural Dualism' Thesis:
Acknowledging the Complexities of Subjectivity*

Albeit an important instrument for understanding Greek political culture, the 'cultural dualism' thesis has been the object of some criticism. For instance, Tziovas has pointed to the fact that it is susceptible to the danger of all dualist representations: the sliding into a good/bad dualism which, based on a quasi-eurocentric logic, tends to downplay the complexity of the issues in question (Tziovas 1995: 347). Demertzis has questioned the dualist schema insofar as it simplifies the relationship between tradition and modernity and, in some of its versions, reproduces and uncritically justifies an unqualified pattern of transition from one to the other (Demertzis 1997: 118).¹⁴ Tsoucalas has also criticized the *essentialism* usually entailed in similar schemata in so far as the two camps are understood as being unified along the lines of two self-enclosed and given poles-essences (*tradition*, on the hand, and

modernization, on the other) (Tsoucalas 1983: 37). There is little doubt that the 'cultural dualism' thesis, however helpful in clarifying the issues at stake, seems to presuppose a particular conception of political subjectivity which indeed tends to simplify a rather more complicated social picture. We take it that, perhaps unwillingly, it implies that subjects can belong, at any given moment, either to the modernizing/reformist or to the traditionalist/underdog cultural camp.

On a fairly general level, both Diamandouros and Mouzelis seem to accept that the two different types of political culture correspond to different social identities (Mouzelis 1994: 17–18). Of course, Diamandouros has highlighted the cross-sectional nature of the two cultures, 'the tendency, that is, to cut across Greek institutions, strata, classes, or political parties in Greek society and not to become *exclusively* identified with any such structure across time or even at any given moment' (Diamandouros 1994: 9). This qualification is quite important but fails to address the problem at the level of the subject; it stays, so to speak, at the level of 'ideal types' of social identities, focusing on the ways in which social strata, institutions, parties and other *collective* entities relate to these ideal types.

Indeed, there is not much discussion in Diamandouros' text regarding the way cultural dualism is played out within subjective identity, apart from a very few references to what he calls the 'adherents' ('οπαδοί' in the Greek text) of the 'underdog culture' (Diamandouros 1994: 32, 36, 50; 2000: 86, 92, 122). In addition, he claims that the 'underdog culture', 'despite fluctuations, can be said to claim the allegiance of a majority of the Greek population since independence' (Diamandouros 1994: 16; 2000: 57). In that sense, though not explicitly stated or analysed, one of the possible conclusions to be drawn from Diamandouros' text is that, although allegiances often shift, at any given moment each person can either be a modernist/reformist or a traditionalist. In other words, they can be an 'adherent' of the one *or* the other culture.¹⁵ We consider such a conclusion justified not only on the basis of a careful reading of Diamandouros' text,¹⁶ but also based on his recent introductory comments. According to these, 'the heterogeneous social strata and the political alliances linked to them, which at any given moment function as bearers and expressions of the two traditions, exhibit a remarkable stability as far as their synthesis is concerned' (Diamandouros 2000: 13).

Such a picture, although possibly representative of certain subjective positions located at the extremes of the two camps, does not seem to take into account the complexities of subjectivity highlighted by contemporary psychoanalytic and post-structuralist theory. Most

important, it does not account in a sustained way for an empirical reality in which 'the contradiction between tradition and modernity penetrates all camps, any identity, and every individual or collective political actor' (Demertzis 1997: 118).

In Greece, it is not unusual for social subjects and institutions to behave in a 'modernizing' way on one occasion and in a 'traditionalist' way in the next. The same people who support Simitis' 'modernizing' government might be supportive of the Archbishop's position as far as identity cards are concerned. The same Church that seems to oppose modernization and Europeanization claims its share from European Union funds that are supposed to enhance modernization and plans to build hotels for the Athens 2004 Olympics (*Ta Nea*, 22 Dec. 2001). The same Archbishop who articulated the most anti-Western statements eventually agreed to receive the Pope in Athens and was 'rewarded' for this by being smacked in the face by an Orthodox zealot in front of the Athens cathedral. Such examples are indeed endless.

Mouzelis himself has suggested that there is a deep ambiguity marking Greek identity, which makes us simultaneously admire and hate anything coming from modernized Europe. The same ambivalent attitude marks our relationship to the 'homeland' which is at the same time 'whore' and 'Madonna', according to a psychoanalytic metaphor used by Mouzelis (Mouzelis 1994: 42–3). This situation cannot be attributed merely to the instability of the equilibrium between the two self-enclosed camps. On the contrary, this instability has to be accepted as a mark of each and every identity, each and every institution.

Here the role of religion is, once more, revealing. 'Religion is so overwhelmingly spread throughout the institutions, the rituals and ethos of Greek society, that it would be absurd to assume that it can easily be registered in one of the two cultural camps' (Demertzis 1995: 15). In other words, the relationship between tradition and modernization is not always an *external* relationship, a struggle between different (though variable) groups comprised of subjects with more or less fully constituted identities (either modernist or traditionalist). It is also an *internal* relationship, which marks every subjective identity insofar as every identity, to different degrees, *articulates* elements from both camps.¹⁷

The result is a series of complex subjective identities often articulating contradictory subject positions, leading to what Lipowatz, from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, has called *the split Greek identity* (Lipowatz 1994: 129). This way of seeing things does not necessarily entail that the two cultural camps do not exist as such. It merely suggests that, in their continuous effort to constitute and reproduce themselves as pure forms (the identity cards issue being a prime example and the

populist discourse of the Church one such effort), they often ignore or repress their internal tensions and interrelations – both at the subjective and the collective level. Our duty as critical theorists can only be to reveal these tensions and interrelations, no matter how often their traces are blurred by totalizing political or religious discourses of any type.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the clash between the Greek government and the Orthodox Church of Greece on the issue of the deletion of religious affiliation from identity cards, a clash that dominated the public sphere throughout 2000 and 2001. In particular, it focused on a detailed analysis of the discourse articulated by the Archbishop to oppose the government's decision. From this point of view, it was argued that it is not enough to point to the political nature of the discourse of the Archbishop and the Church hierarchy. What is crucial is to account in a theoretically informed way for the particular form this politicization of religion has taken in contemporary Greece. Operating within the general framework of a discursive theory of populism, and judging from the central structural position of 'the people' and from the antagonistic discursive logic which dominates its organization, we have concluded that the discourse of Archbishop Christodoulos clearly constitutes a populist discourse.

However, this conclusion should not be intuitively seen as *unconditionally* vindicating the account of Greek political culture known as the 'cultural dualism thesis'. This account understands the recent row between state and church as the latest embodiment of an ever-present division between modernizers and traditionalists that has cross-cut Greek society since the creation of the modern Greek state. Although undoubtedly important, this account does not illuminate the whole picture. According to our reading, it tends to simplify a much more complex social landscape and would greatly benefit from a more nuanced conception of subjectivity.

NOTES

1. Since 1951, no official data have been collected on the number of Orthodox Christians in Greece. According to the 1951 census, 96.7 per cent of the population considered themselves Orthodox (Georgiadou and Nikolakopoulos 2000: 149). A *Eurobarometer* survey suggested that in 1991, 98.2 per cent of the sample considered themselves as belonging to the Orthodox religion (Demertzis 1995: 12). Two crucial points are in order here. First, these numbers are representative of the situation prior to the influx of hundreds of thousands of legal and illegal immigrants during the 1990s. Second, identification with Orthodoxy does not seem to follow from the usual expressions of

- religiosity (such as church attendance). It is grafted, enshrined, and reproduced through a variety of other institutions and cultural activities (from state celebrations to the association of particular religious feasts with special practices, customs and foods – for example the *paschal* lamb – that a family traditionally *enjoys*). In that sense, far from functioning as a source of moral and spiritual guidance, Orthodoxy is primarily considered as an integral part of ‘Greekness’, a source of cultural and national belonging. ‘To a contemporary Greek, religion and nationalism are directly linked: being a good Christian means being a patriot and vice versa’ (Mouzelis 1978: 63).
2. Due to lack of space, related issues such as the reception of this discourse by the audience it targeted will not be explored in depth in this article.
 3. See, in this respect, the extremely interesting volume *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, edited by some of the most important sociologists of religion of our age (Berger, Sacks and Martin 1999).
 4. This was the third election victory for the centre-left PASOK since 1993.
 5. A self-proclaimed ‘modernizer’, critical of traditionalism and of the populist discourse characteristic of Andreas Papandreou’s PASOK in the 1980s.
 6. Of course, for parties to have links with Churches is not a rare phenomenon. Consider, for example, Christian democratic parties (Lamberts 1997) and especially the Italian Christian Democrats, whose primary aims included ‘safeguarding the role of the Catholic Church in the country’ (Leonardi and Wertman 1989: 4). However, due to the absence of a serious religious cleavage in the Greek political system, this was a move of considerable importance for Greek politics.
 7. In translating γένος as ‘race’, admittedly not an entirely satisfactory translation, I am taking my lead from Zakythinis (1976: 188).
 8. For example, the course followed by the Archbishop has been criticized by some bishops as leading to the formation of an ideology of ‘para-religious *populism*’ (Theoklitos 2001). Furthermore, the Archbishop has been often described as ‘charismatic and populist’, as the bearer of a ‘neo-rightist populism’ (Pappas 2001: 57), as someone who speaks ‘in the name of *the people*’ (Manitakis 2000: 140, emphasis added), thus articulating an ‘ecclesiastical’ (Dimitrakos 2000) or ‘religious populism’ (Sotiirelis 2001).
 9. In fact, Laclau’s discursive theory of populism seems to be the only one that offers theoretical sophistication without succumbing to idealism or to any kind of intellectualist reductionism, one that combines a thorough philosophical grounding with a sensitivity towards the realities of political struggle in a variety of contexts. Furthermore, ‘purified’ from its excesses (the class focus) and fortified by the subsequent work of Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), it can accommodate most of the criticisms to which it has been subjected (most notably that of Mouzelis). It has also been applied to an expanding variety of empirical analyses with satisfactory explanatory results (Lyrintzis 1987, Lyrintzis 1990, Sofos 1994, Westlind 1996, Barros and Castagnola 2000, Panizza 2000, to name just a few). For a detailed justification of our use of Laclau’s approach along these lines, see Stavrakakis (2003 forthcoming).
 10. Although the whole rationale of this exploration is based on the two criteria of Laclau’s discursive approach to populism, we will try to incorporate in our argumentation elements and additional criteria from other approaches (including those of Canovan, Mouzelis and Taggart) insofar as they can be grafted onto a discursive problematic.
 11. Given that during the period under examination, the hegemony of Christodoulos’ discourse over the official Church hierarchy was almost total (with a few notable exceptions), this article will, for analytical purposes, take Church discourse to be overlapping with his own. Recently, however, this hegemony has been shaken by the fierce opposition of former allies, co-members of the fraternity *Chrysopigi*, although this opposition had nothing to do with the Archbishop’s handling of the identity cards issue (*To Vima*, 2 Dec. 2001). *Chrysopigi* had functioned ‘initially as a means to promote its members into episcopal positions and then as a way to co-ordinate their work’ (Yannaras 1992: 388).
 12. See on this issue the special issue of the theological journal *Synaxi*, ‘People, Nation, Church’, no. 48, 1993. Also see Pinakoulas (2001: 44).

13. The crucial role of voice here should not escape the attention of deconstructionists and Derrideans.
14. Instead, Demertzis has proposed that what often takes place is a process of 'inverted syncretism' in which 'retaining just a formal status, modernizing patterns [lose] their original function while traditional ones [remain] intact or even [become] rejuvenated' (Demertzis 1997: 119). For evidence of this process, see Skopetea (1988: 244). In particular, for evidence from the domain of Church-state relations see Anagnostopoulou (2000: 352-53), Demertzis (1995), Makrides (1991: 287), Paparizos (1999: 144-7).
15. The choice of the word 'adherent' and, even more so, of the Greek word *οπαδός* clearly precludes the possibility of someone being associated with both cultural camps simultaneously, in the same way that a football fan cannot be a devoted supporter of two competing teams at the same time.
16. Also see his discussion of the social constitution of the two cultures in Diamandouros (1994: 15, 18).
17. Tziouvas has recently used the terms 'dialogism', 'hybridity' and 'syncretism' to refer to this type of relationship (Tziouvas 2001: 202). For the usefulness of syncretism, see also Lambropoulos (2001). Future research will have to evaluate the operational value of such insights and many more (including Demertzis' 'inverted syncretism') attempting to illuminate the nature of the relationship.

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