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Greek Nationalism as a Case of Political Religion: Rituals and Sentimentality

*Nicolas Demertzis & Hara Stratoudaki**

Abstract: *»Griechischer Nationalismus als ein Beispiel politischer Religion: Rituale und Sentimentalität«.* In this paper, we will refer to the historical vicissitudes of the Greek national character since the 19th century signposting two main versions: an antinomic but no less unified national character characterized by internal contrasts vis-à-vis the alleged uni-dimensional canon of western rationality, on the one hand, and a clash of national habitus into two opposite national identities – two modal characters – on the other. Further on, we shall discuss the role of national symbols such as the flag and parades as emotional constituents of nationalism as political religion conferring fragile legitimacy to the state as long as their meaning is under negotiation.

Keywords: Political religion, emotional climate, orientalism, sacralization, crisis.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we discuss the shaping of the Greek national habitus as incorporated in the disputes about Greek national character or identity premised on constituting and long-lasting bifurcations brought about by Greece's path dependency towards modernity. We refer to a two modal characters thesis which was sharply articulated in the 1990s and adopted by the proponents of modernization requested by the imperatives of EU membership. As the sovereign debt crisis broke in 2010, the two modal characters were crystalized as mutually exclusive projects. It is within this framework that we attempt to understand two highly symbolic issues related to the national character at a macro, meso, and micro level: parades and flags. While experienced as sacred symbols of the national identity and therefore pivotal leverages of the national habitus, they have undergone a desecration process calling into question the unity of the national body politic resonating old time discordances. The burning of the flag became a symbolic element of far-left activism, while strong minded right-wingers were shocked to see immigrant students as flag bearers in

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parades. There have been emotionally charged struggles and negotiation over the meaning of nationhood.

These struggles have been waged in the background of the Greek national character that has emerged from the interplay of inward and outward self-interpretative gaze set by foreign writers, travelers, pilgrims, Crusaders, and conquerors' projections, on the one hand, and Greeks' own self-assumptions, on the other. In this respect, the Greek national character, and Greeks' national identity for that matter, are but a "construction" and an "invention" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) carried out in a way similar to other countries of the semi-periphery. Greece has a long but far from unified cultural past. Among others, its fragmentation is mirrored in the several names used to designate its inhabitants: *Hellenes* (denoting the ancient Greeks), *Romaioi* or *Romioi* (as a reference to the period of Roman rule as well as to the subjects of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires), and *Greeks* (for the rest of the West since Ottoman rule ended). Emerging from a successful separatist war of independence (1821-1827) against the centuries-long Ottoman dominion of the Balkans, the modern Greek nation-state was founded in the early 1830s, and its institutions, especially education, contributed to the construction of the national character. Disciplines such as History, Literature, Ethnography, and Folklore, as well as a host of organic intellectuals,¹ had a strong impact on the retroactive formation of Greeks' self-understanding in terms of national character which, despite significant socio-economic, political, and cultural changes that occurred over a long time span, is deemed as marked by some recurring and stable traits. Certainly, disputes over the national character of modern Greeks were taking place even before the sparking of the 1821 War of Independence, but it was the consolidation of the ideological apparatuses of the nation-state which really shaped deeply Greeks' self-image mirrored and mirroring the gaze(s) of the powerful European states and public opinion (Koumandaraki 2002; Bozatzis 2014).

It is impressive, though not unexpected, that these stereotyping gazes came to the fore during the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, and – more vigorously – since the 2010 sovereign debt crisis. They were reproduced in public speeches,

¹ The attempts to provide a unified vision of the Greek history, as the base for a unitary identity, was undertaken by historians like Konstantinos Papanigopoulos and Spyridon Zambelios in the second half of the 19th century. They were exemplar eminent organic intellectuals, who articulated a linear unitary narrative about Greek history, incorporating the Byzantine period which until then was considered as a continuation of the Roman occupation, and as the Greek counterpart to western dark Middle Ages. Inspired by the romantic ideals, they both restored the Byzantine era as a legitimate part of the Greek history, a source of national pride, and an integral part of the combination between Hellenism and Christianity. Their work is still the canon of the history taught at schools.

media rhetoric, and voter behaviour in Greece itself and abroad² and their power was such that two centuries after they were formed, they seem to have a stronghold over Greeks' collective consciousness.

Before moving into the main body of the paper, a conceptual caveat is needed herein. We use "national character" and "national identity" interchangeably and in a non-essentialist way. Either as the systematic result of anthropological research or as a part of lay people's mentality, national character is a selective construction sustained by national habitus (Heaney 2013). This construction is not made out of thin air; it is called forth by extant *longue durée*, meso, and micro political cultural patterns. Gone are the days of the romantic Herderian notion(s) of national character; ever since the contribution of the Culture and Personality School (Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, etc.), national character has not been thought of in terms of spirit but as a context of multiple core values and differentiated cultural patterns organized in relation to a dominant blueprint (Bateson 1972). Keeping essentialism at bay (Neiburg 2001), it might be better to treat national character as a "practical category used in the discourse and action of the social agents and groups which one seeks to understand" (Brubaker 1996, 7). Furthermore, post-Parsonian social and political theory, psychoanalytically informed or otherwise, has convincingly stressed that identity is not a stable and all-rounded personality attribute but a constructing dynamic set of identifications made up by the interplay between sameness and difference (Connolly 1991; Stavrakakis 1999, 29-39).

In our account, national character/identity emerges from national habitus which is understood alongside Elias' and Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus. Namely, as a form of practical knowledge directed by durable dispositions structured by social structures and structuring them at the same time (Bourdieu 1977, 86). Not reduced to the sheer individual level, it is a subjective impersonal system of schemes of perception, conception, and action common to the members of a group which ultimately make for the self-image and the social make-up of individuals in their indissoluble link with society. As a notion then, habitus – and national habitus for that matter – is a relational and process-sociology concept. For Elias, "the social habitus [...] forming the national character, is [...] both hard and tough, but also flexible and far from immutable"; the I- and we-identification is constructed through social habitus which is mediated by the "manipulation of feelings in relation to state and nation." The national habitus has many layers that make for the deep-rooted national characteristics which, however, provide the soil for individual

² Bibliography about the framing of the Greek crisis in global media is growing. See for example, Tracy 2012; Knight 2012; Mylonas 2012; Antoniadis 2013; Kutter 2014; Tzogopoulos 2016. For information about the national character during the crisis as reproduced in TV programs, see Aitaki 2017.

differences to flourish: “the individuality of the particular Englishman, Dutchman, Swede or German represents [...] the personal elaboration of a common [...] national habitus” (Elias 1991, 182-3; 209-10). In the same vein, the singularity of the “self” is being fashioned in and by social relations through habitus, says Bourdieu (2000, 134).

2. The Greek National Character in History

The 19th century was preoccupied with the idea of national character and Romanticism was deeply interested in all things Greek, even at a time when a Greek nation-state did not exist. At an earlier stage, the Enlightenment also turned to Greece in search for its intellectual ancestors as well as for symbols and metaphors to support its emancipatory rhetoric. The best source to get acquainted with such an ancestor were the classical texts, which allowed literate Europeans and philhellenes to project onto the Greek national character the traits they were looking after for their own peoples. Hence, they constructed an ideal national character, a canon and – at the same time – a utopia.

Nevertheless, when brave travelers visited the places associated with what they knew to be Greece – still a part of the Ottoman Empire – they were shocked to find a people of serfs, unable to understand the ancient Greek language; that was explained as a kind of “degeneration” (cf. Glykofrydi-Leontsini 2016). In fact, during their *tours d’Orient* they felt the same about their contemporary Italians. Eisner quotes Shelley writing about “two Italies”: “The one is the most sublime and lovely contemplation that can be conceived by the imagination of man; the other is the most degraded, disgusting and odious” (Eisner 1993, 12). Shelley was not alone in such a stance. David Hume was also comparing modern Greeks and Italians with their ancestors, to find that “the intelligence, industriousness and efficiency of ancient Greeks has nothing in common with the stupidity and laziness of the current inhabitants of the region” (quoted by Glykofrydi-Leontsini 2016, 359). Such prominent assessments imply that the West dealt with the then newly emerging nationalities in an over-generalizing way. After the country’s liberation, Greece was the younger nation state in South Europe, while claiming for itself the title of the cradle of European culture (Herzfeld 1989). Thus, in several ways – through written travelogues, academic texts, through painting and drawings – the West “imposed” an internal divide on the Greek national character, between the “noble” traits derived from the Hellenic (i.e., the ancient Greek) heritage – which could guarantee the Greeks a position among the brave new nations of Europe – and the “degenerate” traits handed over by the Byzantine theocracy

and Ottoman rule.³ In so doing, Western intellectuals treated Greeks in a typically “orientalist” manner.

After Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer’s claims about the racial discontinuity between ancient and modern Greece,⁴ the Greek organic intellectuals (historians, philologists, folklorists, and archaeologists), undertook the task to combine the “two Greeces” into a single national narrative, and the two characters into one, highlighting its cultural continuity from antiquity to modern Greece (Herzfeld 1986). To complete this task, they sought continuity and similarities between their contemporary national character, customs, and folk songs and those of their ancestors. Their studies were “in some way a response to the ideological needs of their emergent polity” (Herzfeld 1986, 9) and simultaneously formed the backbone of formal historiographic knowledge which, through the educational system, was transmitted as “truth” and formed the beliefs and self-awareness for the generations to come.⁵

Thus, the Greek national character was imagined as a combination of features and traits considered by the Europeans as opposites: on the one hand, an emphasis to the classical Hellenic heritage, and on the other the *romeiki*⁶ daily reality. In both cases, though, a common national character was singled out featuring agonistic and individualistic traits to be found in the character of other European nations to which the Greek political elites fiercely wanted to link with. Traits like egoism, bravery, and heroism were found in the *kleftic*⁷ folk songs, along with a supposedly permanent “personal revolt against every

³ The idea that the Ottoman rule was the reason for the negative traits of Greek national character was accepted by most Greek scholars before and after the War of Independence (see Glykofrydi-Leontsini 2016, 354).

⁴ “The race of the Hellenes has been wiped out in Europe. Physical beauty, intellectual brilliance, innate harmony and simplicity, art, competition, city, village, the splendour of column and temple – indeed, even the name has disappeared from the surface of the Greek continent [...]. Not the slightest drop of undiluted Hellenic blood flows in the veins of the Christian population of present-day Greece” (<http://www.albanianhistory.net/1836_Fallmerayer/index.html>).

⁵ On the role of the educational system in organizing and disseminating the national narratives and, indirectly, the national character, cf. Koulouri 1988; Frangoudaki and Dragona 1997.

⁶ The name adopted for the subjects of the Eastern Roman Empire was *Romaioi*, which “soon meant a subject of the Empire and an Orthodox Eastern Christian in rather confusing contrast to the Western Christians with their spiritual capital in Old Rome” (Leigh-Fermor 1966, 97). The same name was used by Ottoman Turks for their Greek subjects (Leigh-Fermor 1966, 98; Herzfeld 1986, 19). According to Herzfeld (1986, 20) there is a “difference between an outward-directed conformity to international expectations about the national image and an inward-looking, self-critical collective appraisal. The outward-directed model is precisely what we may call political Hellenism; the introspective image is the essence of the Romeic thesis.”

⁷ *Kleftic* songs are the “songs of brigandage under Turkish rule” (Herzfeld 1986, 36); they are part and parcel of the social banditry everyday culture. Herzfeld discusses extensively the ideological uses of the *kleftic* songs by 19th century scholars.

form of settled authority and law,” a social bandits’ cry of vengeance on the rich and the oppressors which is a nearly universal phenomenon in peasant societies in transition (Damianakos 1987, 60; see also Dermentzopoulos 1997; Hobsbawm 1959, 5; 13 ff). Patrick Leigh-Fermor found the same traits in the mid-1960s. Following previous research, he systematized the character traits into an extensive list of contrasting pairs, which make up what he described as “the Helleno-Romeic Dilemma.” He pointed out, though, that if a person had all the features of either the Hellenic or the Romeic side, he would be a “lop-sided freak,” since the real national character is balancing between the two: “Only enclosed in the arena of a single breast do they come to life” (Leigh-Fermor 1966, 113). As stable traits of the national character he pointed out the love for the country (“emotional feeling for Greece”) and the united stance before danger, reconciling “all the internal differences” but “when the emergency passes, cohesion too dissolves”; courage, self-sacrifice, and endurance up to a heroic level; self-reliance, (practical) intelligence, together with “honour” followed by an “easy-going moral code” (Leigh-Fermor 1966, 114), and eloquence; economic “capacity,” generosity even between the poor, understanding of the liquidity of situations, and – of course – *philotimo*.⁸ But also “thirst for fame; restlessness and extreme subjectivity” (Leigh-Fermor 1966, 113-114) are traits that are considered by a good many authors as central in unpacking the Greek national character. Hence, the national habitus evolved as an understanding of the national character with its antinomic elements, which produced a highly idiosyncratic self. The antinomy itself was pivotal to the national habitus: it was the incarnation of being the border and the bridge between East and West, participating in both but belonging to neither. Such a view was consolidated in the idea of a “brother-less” nation,⁹ an idea quite similar to that of a “middle block”¹⁰ between a Catholic West and an Islamic East. Nevertheless, that antinomy itself was experienced as a unitary rather dividing national trait.

Leigh-Fermor analyzed the Greek national character in turbulent times. Shortly after the end of World War II, a dire civil war tore the country apart (1944-1949). While coping with its short- and long-term consequences was of utmost importance for the (re)shaping of national and other identities and the restoration of the post-conflict society, its very existence was “silenced” in public discourse for almost three decades (Demertzis 2013). While the war was waged, both camps attempted to symbolically purge the Greekness of the other

⁸ “The self-imposed code of *philotimo*, or private honour – a whole apparatus of ancestral scruples” (Leigh-Fermor 1966, 115) is traditionally considered by all Greeks as an important trait of their national character.

⁹ This view was expressed in the mid-1980s by the then President of the Greek Republic, Christos Sartzetakis.

¹⁰ Elias (1996, 2-3) suggested that German speaking groups considered themselves as a “middle bloc” between Latin speaking western people and Slavonic speaking eastern tribes.

side; monarchists were depicted as traitors submissive to British and American imperialism while leftists were considered ex-patriots and spies lured by Slavic communism. The most overwhelming consequence of the civil war on the dominant political culture was the cleavage between the so called nationally-conscious (*ethnikofrones*), “healthy,” “clean,” and first-class-citizens on the one side, and on the other the “sick,” non-nationally-minded miasma, second-class citizens comprised of defeated communists, leftists, sympathizers, and non-royalists. The Right-wing monarchist side, who won the war and governed until the end of 1970s, promoted a more or less *Hellenic* national character, while the defeated Left – experiencing harsh social impoverishment, political marginalization, and physical casualties – moved towards a lay, *romeic* character.

Were thus the “lop-sided freaks” released free? For all horrors and traumas of either side, division and unbridgeable political rivalry were to stay as constant traits of the Greek national character as a whole.¹¹ In 1954, Kostas Axelos,¹² a prominent Greek-French philosopher who took part in the civil war and found refuge in Paris with some 200 other persecuted intellectuals, attempted a sophisticated account of the Greek national character by pointing out the dysfunctional link between traditional and modern cultural patterns.¹³ He insists that although Greece as a nation state is part of the modern world, it is not actually a modernity-driven society. Due to its Byzantine and Ottoman past, is unable to move towards modernity in an indigenous and authentic way; as a consequence, it imitates western models following no clearly set societal objectives. By and large, what characterizes Greeks in his analysis is efficacy but not efficiency, too much talking but too little doing, too much pondering about everyday concerns but limited reflection about the long-term condition of the nation, short-term historic memory, hellenocentric narcissism, and aversion to a realistic-practical spirit. These traits, he claims, permeate the entirety of society and the body politic.

It seems then that there has been a widespread belief in a single and overarching national character despite or even in virtue of internal discords and social differentiations. Actually, until the early 1990s, the way national character was understood by scholars and performed by ordinary people remained unchanged. Diverging from the usual offering a list of opposing pairs, in early 1980s the prominent Greek historian Vakalopoulos (1983) presented a list of national traits insisting on the balance points. The traits may

¹¹ Leigh-Fermor (1966, 113) found appropriate to note: “no wonder the verb *stasiazo*, ‘I am in a state of faction’, was one of the earliest verbs one had to learn at school.”

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kostas_Axelos>.

¹³ This article (Axelos 1954) was first translated into Greek in 1978; in 2010 it was published as a small book which only recently (2018) drew the attention of the wider public and the media.

sometimes have positive aspects, but they are usually negative since he lingers on the tendency of “Greeks” to exaggerate: nervousness (which may be expressed as anxiety or mobility, but also as ingenuity and economic capacity, which may turn into greed) and lack of discipline; egoism (personal, but also about family, place of origin or the nation itself); arrogance and conceit; lust for power; envy and discord leading to enmity and division; and ingratitude. In addition, he cites anxiety, curiosity, and eloquence as positive traits. Vakalopoulos’ list is based on historical sources from antiquity to the present day. By and large, he went along with the 19th century insights, incorporating – like Leigh-Fermor – the idea of an internal division of character at the individual and perhaps also at the collective level.

A bit later, Tsoukalas suggested that the 19th century path dependency of the Greek nation-building did not end up with a national character adhering to general rules and abstract values – as was the case in most western European societies – but to “attitudes and stereotypes that come out from the eternal landscape, the ethereal light and a music unheard-of floating in the air” (Tsoukalas 1996, 156-7). Hence,

Greeks consider themselves to be authentic “Greeks” when singing, dancing, dreaming, laughing, feeling, offering, falling in love or fighting, perhaps when they are smart, successful or cunning at the expense of others or the society as a whole, but never when they are pursuing, implementing or focused to collective or social rational purposes. They may be treated as heroes or as villains – or both – but not as sober and careful citizens. The essence of Hellenism is perceived as an eclectic and original synthesis of libertarian and anarchic individual skills. (Tsoukalas 1996, 157)

He thus emphasizes individualism and a “free rider” style of conduct that pertains to the body social all the way through from the inception of the Greek state up to the accession of Greece to the EU and onwards. What hinders character change, he claims, is the failure of the state to adopt “instrumental rationality” at a collective level, due to its limited institutional differentiation from society, on the one hand, and to the clientelistic intermediation of social interests which did not allow the de-personalization of the bond between state and society (Tsoukalas 1996, 152) and the conversion of individuals into citizens in the Western sense, on the other. Thus, from an operational point of view, “clientelism and patronage have had major long-term effects that have been responsible for an atrophic civil society and a hypertrophic state” (Demertzis 1997, 110).

3. The Two Modal Characters Thesis

Keeping a distance from Leigh-Fermor’s link between the opposing pairs referred to above, in the early 1990s a more dichotomous narrative emerged

with more socio-centric than atomo-centric overtones; Greek nationhood was depicted as being divided by two different traditions, two modal national characters. The architect of this narrative argues that the oldest of the traditions is a culture marked by a pronounced introversion; a powerful statist orientation coupled with a profound ambivalence concerning capitalism and the market mechanism; a decided preference for paternalism and protection, and a lingering adherence to pre-capitalist practices; a universe of moral sentiments in which parochial and, quite often, primordial attachments and the intolerance of the alien which these imply predominate; [...] and a diffident attitude towards innovation. (Diamandouros 1994, 14-15).

Contrarywise, the juxtaposed newer modernist tradition

draws its intellectual origins from the Enlightenment and from the tradition of political liberalism issuing from it. Secular and extrovert in orientation, it has tended to look to the nations of the advanced industrial West for inspiration and for support in implementing its programs. (Diamandouros 1994, 24)

Although he maintains that these two traditions run across Greek society and its institutions, there is a latent “geography” in his argument as far as their respective impact is concerned. Thus, the first tradition “can be described as a powerful underdog culture which, whether at the mass or the elite levels, became, over time, particularly entrenched among the very extensive, traditional, more introverted, and least competitive strata and sectors of Greek society” (Diamandouros 1994, 22). On the other hand,

the major social and political actors who became the primary carriers of [the second] culture, sharing and shaping its assumptions, adopting and adapting its imagery, have been (a) within Greece, the popular strata and elites more closely identified with cultural, economic [...], and political activities linking them to the international system; (b) the Greek diaspora communities [...]; and (c) their intellectual exponents, both inside and outside the Greek state. (Diamandouros 1994, 26)

Such a framework leaves no room for balancing and/or interplay. It acknowledges two modal national characters, reproducing within a single nation state the distinction between ethnic and national (civic) identity, between an “averse” and a “preferred” national character. It should be noted that this willy-nilly narrative justified the modernization policies implemented in Greece from the early 1990s until the mid-2000s inspired by an idealized and rationality-driven “Europe,” in the same way western Balkan countries nowadays approach the EU. Despite its anti-clerical character, an unintended consequence of Diamandouros’ scheme, which has been heavily used by news media framing, has been a moralistic or even paternalistic and orientalist interpretation that casts guilt over all those who felt belonging to the majoritarian, though “underdog” and *romeic*, side of national identity. In all likelihood, this dichotomous narrative of national character has mutually alienated individuals on both sides (Karapostolis 2011). Viewing, however, the two traditions from a different angle, Michael Herzfeld maintained that the

reproduction of “the stereotypical failings [...] whereby interventionist Europe decried the Greeks as flawed and corrupt” may also be part of the Greek catalogue of “Romeic things” (Herzfeld 1989, 110), i.e., an attempt to articulate a non-reactive identity opposing Western hetero-determination (Stratoudaki 2011, 128). In this respect, negative or even “deviant” traits such as cunning or the petty knavery may be forgiven, considered as occasional behaviour dictated by the circumstances and not as a constant character trait.

4. Testing the Two Modal Characters in Real Life

The logic underlying the two modal characters thesis coincides with the logic of the last modernizing project of the 20th century, launched at the beginning of the 1990s. During this project, a series of developments took place regarding the relation between the state and Greek society. Most importantly, the state diminished clientelism; an emblematic law in 1994 introduced a system of recruitment of civil servants on meritocratic criteria. Thus, the state found itself, for the first time, opposing society as the state would no longer be the “loot” of the election winner, hence making some more steps closer to the Western model. That was also a period when the borders of the former Socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe and, in particular, in the Balkans fell, and massive immigration to Greece took place. In the absence of an articulated immigration policy, the state remained a spectator, and as it did not establish ways of legal entry and stay, illegal and irregular entry into the country enhanced the black economy and tax evasion, while reducing the cost of wage labour in sectors such as construction and agricultural production. Thus, in its absence, the state created *ex contrario* the conditions of extreme exploitation of the immigrants, cultivation of fear in the lower social strata, and the development of xenophobia.

On top of that, the state did not dare to launch a real separation from the Church. Instead, it promoted a symbolic separation in the early 2000s, over the issue of (not) indicating religious denomination on civil identity cards. Thus, it left the then Church leader Archbishop Christodoulos to fight against what he thought to be the de-Christianisation of national identity, allowing the symbolic element to substitute for the real issue. That issue caused discord for many thousands of people; actually, the Church managed to organize a one-million-people demonstration in the capital city of Athens against the pro-secularization minority groups and the centre-left governing party in office. Although preaching the modernization of the country as an ideal, the then main centre-right opposition party was pushed to support the Church in that dispute.

Such developments created a climate of conflict between a part of society and the state. One could easily take this conflict as a continuation of the aforementioned trait of anti-authoritarian, anti-statist, individualistic national

character, allegedly formed during the centuries of the Ottoman Empire, praised at the *kleftic* songs, and transformed into resistance against and conflict with the modern Greek state apparatuses since the 1830s.¹⁴ Yet, the interplay between the macro-, meso-, and micro-cultural patterns is not that obvious; contentious political dispositions and overtly unconventional political behaviour might be more likely due to short-term fluctuations than to an eternal perpetuation of past political-cultural traits. Currently, what counts as pertinent effects of the national character, i.e., huge distrust of political and social institutions and of political personnel, a low level of bridging social capital (meso level), and widespread violent incidents in terms of political extremism, hooliganism, and street criminality (micro level) might be no less than an immediate response to austerity measures against the background of macro national character traits.

At the bottom line, what is at stake is the legitimacy of the state and political power relations for that matter. It seems that free-rider individualism, corruption, crony capitalist economic activity, and the estrangement of mass parts of the underdog electorate from political elites have brought about a severe legitimation crisis. As a result, a “de-sacralization” process with respect to the nation-state’s symbols is under way, along with a gradual change in the national habitus. The two modal character thesis is providing the ground for an oppositional understanding of national traits. This opposition was intensified during the 2010s, amidst a deep economic, political, and cultural crisis, providing a de-alignment from past collective identities and a re-alignment with the division between the westernizing, pro-EU, pro-modernization echelons on the one hand, and the allegedly reactive, defensive, East-oriented, and ethnocentric underdog strata on the other. Upon these lines, the national habitus is changing. Such a change is better understood in symbolic actions and the stances vis-à-vis “sacred” national symbols.

As in many other countries, state sentimentality is sustained through a number of sacralizing rituals, cementing the national “we” that is shaken during crisis periods like the one Greece has been facing over the last ten years or so (Jasper 2005, 127f.; Berezin 2002). These rituals point more to the political religious-like function of nationalism rather than to its mundane ideological discursive accomplishments. Yet, legitimacy conferred by national sentiment is not stable and fixed once and for all; it is contingent upon “political meteorology” (Deutsch 1966), i.e., it is instituted alongside open-ended hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes. In our case, it is premised differentially either on the Hellenic or the *romeic* tradition of national character. Amidst these processes nationalist discourse, and banal nationalism

¹⁴ The same traits were attributed in popular literature to social robbers until the early 20th century (Dermentzopoulos 1997). Circumvention of the law was still considered as a heroic or, at least, a socially accepted gesture.

for that matter, make recurrent use of emotional terms like “homeland,” “fatherland,” and “motherland” as family or kinship metaphors designating the nation-state. These metaphors convey emotionally charged fantasies of common blood ties, an intimate bond of horizontal fraternity. They also convey security, pride, solidarity, gratitude, and dignity when the national sentiment has to do with “us”; when the evaluative object is “them,” it is usually specified as hostility, distrust, antipathy, disgust, fear, hate, and envy for the national Other (Baringhorst 2004). This is better explained away through the performativity and the performance of nationalist rituals drawing from the Greek political cultural past and national character patterns. Before having a look at the ways these rituals are taking place in contemporary Greece, a short detour to nationalism as political religion is needed.

5. Nationalism as a Political Religion

The force of emotionality in making state legitimacy doable during modernity – and late modernity for that matter – can be better understood if nationalism is seen not only as a political ideology but as a version of political religion. This has been done more than once in the past.¹⁵ It is common enough to assert that the idea of political religion originates in Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (chapter 8, book IV). Premised upon his cardinal notion of general will, Rousseau (1968, 61, 64, 150) asserts that the public good is the sacred element of the nation *qua* body politic. Speaking of religion, he distinguishes, among others, the private Christian cult of the Gospel from the religion of the citizens established in a single country or nation (*ibid.*, 181-2). The first makes for a society of pure Christians which, however, is not a society of flesh and bones men. Since it would be the brotherhood of children of the same God, their other-world oriented religion would leave the law with only the force of the law because it would detach their hearts from the state, cultivating thus an ultimately non-social spirit. Anticipating Nietzsche, Rousseau held that a Christian Republic is a contradiction in terms, since Christianity “preaches only servitude and submission,” that “true Christians are made to be slaves” who may do their duty to the nation without passion (*ibid.*, 184).

The second sort of religion is also detrimental to the Enlightenment ideal of civil society professed by Rousseau. It may join “divine worship to a love of the law” making thus “the homeland the object of the citizens’ adoration” (*ibid.*, 181), but everything outside it is deemed infidel, alien and barbarous. The rights and duties of the citizens extend to its altars’ length and “it teaches

¹⁵ Perhaps the most notable case is Hayes (1960).

them that the service of the state is the service of the tutelary God” (ibid., 181-2). This religion is exclusive and “makes a people bloodthirsty and intolerant.”

For Rousseau, everyone has the right to have a religion with the crucial point being that the dogmas of this religion should not restrain one from being a good citizen in this life according to the requirements of the general will (ibid., 186). This premise leads Rousseau to his very notion of “civil religion” whose crux resonates Enlightenment’s universalism claim: civil religion is not exclusionary, it despises the saying “outside the church there is no salvation,” and sticks firmly to a single dogma: no intolerance. The “no intolerance” premise contradicts any sort of exclusive national religion and promotes sentiments of sociability, the love of law and justice, a love which may drive someone to sacrifice one’s life to his duty. In this way Rousseau can be viewed as foreshadowing civic nationalism.

To be sure, subsequent uses of “political religion” in the late nineteenth and the 20th century refrain from Rousseau’s archetypical idea of civil religion. The closest possible conceptualization was provided by Robert Bellah’s homonym term applied to the United States of America’s need for the social integration of various ethnic groups and of the legitimation of political institutions (Bellah 1967). According to Bellah, Americans embrace a common “civil religion” manifested in national ceremonies and beliefs about the special destiny of America parallel to, or independent of, their chosen religious denomination. “What we have,” Bellah noted, “is a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity” (1967, 8). Among others, the symbolic backbones of this civil religion are the President, the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights. In addition, American civil religion provides quasi-religious honours to its national martyrs, prophets, and apostles—such as Lincoln, Jefferson, Paine, and Franklin. Thus, the American nation turns into a sacred entity. Notwithstanding the religious-apocalyptic roots of Americanism, Bellah’s civil religion is very cognate with Rousseau’s idea since it conveys the version of *civic nationalism* in the USA. In all fairness, the point is not whether or not Rousseau’s or Bellah’s civil religions are actually political religions because they engulf political and not just civilian dimensions of the collective life – as Cristi (2001) claims – but the kind of politics and the kind of political-national community it supports. And the crucial difference here is that, for the most part, political religion has been used to designate the force of powerful ideologies like Communism, Fascism, and Nazism, and of course cultural nationalism and monological conceptualizations of the national character. Hence, it seems that it is better to attribute “civil religion” to civic nationalism and “political religion” to cultural nationalism and other political ideologies, provided that the latter fulfill Durkheim’s criteria for a minimal definition of

religion, i.e., the sacred-profane bifurcation, binding symbols, ceremonies, and rituals.¹⁶

This been said, it goes that nationalism as political religion and any other kind of political religion whatsoever are not to be found in Third World countries only; they characterize First World political cultures as well. According to David Apter (1965, 266-70, 287-97), political religion is formed when the secular political institutions – more notably the state itself – are elevated to the level of the sacred through “consummatory values” which play to three fundamental needs: (1) the necessity to accept death; (2) the necessity to establish personal identity; and (3) the necessity to identify objectives. In a sense, we would say that political religions function as secular theodicies which demand the absolute devotion of individuals *qua* subjects under the sacralized power of nation-statehood, the party, the leader, or History itself.

When it comes to nationalism *qua* political religion, the sacralization of the nation is ensured through the convergence and confluence of the subjects’ ideal ego by the use of rituals and symbols signifying the immortality of the nation and the invincible national psyche. That is why in every single nation-state there is a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and an organized mythology about the ancestors’ past pains and (chosen) traumas. This mythology, in Barthes’s sense, endows meaningful objectives, they offer “a heritage of glory and a grief to be shared” with regards to the past and “one common plan to be realized regarding the future,” as put by Renan (1995, 153). Also, “to have suffered, rejoiced, and hoped together” are greater consummatory values. And when it comes to emotion, Renan is explicit: “common suffering unites more strongly than common rejoicing. Among national memories, sorrows have greater value than victories; for they impose duties and demand common effort” (*ibid.*)¹⁷ In his review of psychological accounts of national sentiment, Snyder (1954, 89-94) refers to mid-20th-century analysts who had found close analogies between the emotional qualities of nationalism and religion (“nationalism is the religion of the state”) maintaining that modern nation-state replaces “the church as the center of affection, social solidarity, and security, as the core of basic in-group attitudes and values” (Snyder 1954, 93). It should be noted in passing that religious imaginings of (cultural) nationalism are not only evoked via its function as political religion. This would have happened anyway as long as modernity’s major political concepts are of theological origin (Schmitt 2005),

¹⁶ Smith (1971, 54-7) opposes theorizing nationalism as political religion because he holds that the crux of any religion is the dualism between “this-worldly” and “other-worldly” reference. Yet, this dualism characterizes only the soteriological traditional religions. On the contrary, the sacred-profane distinction permeates any kind of religion and thus makes for the concept of political religion *in toto*. Through this distinction any religion gives rise to cosmization, i.e., it confers meaning on the world of us humans.

¹⁷ The psychology of emotions has repeatedly documented that negative emotions have a much stronger imprint in long-term memory than the positive ones.

and due to the fact that “under some conditions politics and religion serve as alternatives to each other as symbol suppliers” (Edelman 1964, 182).

Much more salient injections of religious affectivity into the national sentiment come from the alignments of nationalism as political ideology with religious past and present practices (Anderson 1983, 9-12; O’Brien 1988). Oftentimes, churches become nationalized throughout the nation-building process (Smith 1986, 157-161; Demertzis 1996).¹⁸ An exemplary case is the Greek autocephalous Orthodox Church. In 1833 the Greek Orthodox Church was declared autocephalous from the Ecumenical Patriarchate; so, the Church was subjugated to the state once again. Of course, the same happened with other Balkan Orthodox Churches; Balkan nationalisms politicized various Orthodox Churches which, in turn, buttressed the domination of the nation-states. For that reason, either the nation appears as the defender of the Orthodox faith, or, alternatively, religion appears as the guardian of the nation (Makrides 1991). A “functional relationship” between Orthodox religion and nationalism implies a “radical nationalization” of the former, and, of course, entails its de-universalization (de-ecumenicalization) (Smith 1986, 159). An ecumenical religion, like Orthodox Christianity, cannot support the nationalist ideal unless it gives way to the latter’s particularistic meaning. The close-knit association between (traditional) religion and nationhood has brought about Greek banal nationalism (Billig 1995) either in terms of national-religious identity or as a mundane political religion.

5.1 Sacralization – Desecration Processes: Parades and Flags

The process of the social construction of the nation is carried out through the functioning of evocative condensation symbolism, i.e., myths, symbols, and rituals which render abstract entities, values, and ideas into emotionally tangible and simplified quantities and qualities (Firth 1973). It is replete with key signs which shape a more or less unifying experience of social reality and political realm. Such key signs are monumental buildings, national heroes, the flag, the national anthem, and the coat of arms. Usurped by the discourse of political religion, nationalist condensation symbolism acquires a quasi-sacred nature which is usually associated with popular contentment and quiescence regarding societal issues and problems that would otherwise arouse discomfort and concern. As Edelman points out, patriotic ceremonies affirm “the greatness, heroism, and nobility of the nation and the pettiness of doubts about the actions it undertakes” (Edelman 1964, 17, 97, 128-9).

¹⁸ To be sure, Smith is cautious as to the fact that “religion often provides the sociological material for nationalism to work on, but it does not and cannot explain the latter’s character or appearance” (Smith 1971, 57).

Yet, as already mentioned, the legitimacy conferred on the state through the use of sacred national-political symbols is not fixed once and for all. Instilling passions and profound emotions in its followers, nationalism as political religion competes with other political ideologies and political projects within the public sphere. Because of its articulatory nature, nationalism is frequently intermingled with left or right-wing ideologies which try to win historicity in concrete time space coordinates (Eriksen 1993, 107). That is why it renders a particular state legitimate in the eyes of its subjects/citizens whereas, when in opposition, the nationalist credo may challenge the legitimacy of the status quo via movement activity (Breuilly 1985, 371). According, then, to the fluctuation of political antagonisms, backgrounded by long-term national character traits, the meaning and the use of national sacred symbols vary to a considerable degree. In unstable nation-states or in regions with unsettled historical accounts (e.g., Northern Ireland) the flags and other national symbols often fail to fulfill their most important function as promoters of national unity and nation-maintenance (Kolstø 2006).

An interplay, then, between sacralization and desecration seems to be the case in all national habituses the valence of which varies between “hot” and “banal” nationalisms (Billig 1995). We shall refer to flags and parades as two key-signs of nationalism as political religion and try to show how they have been differentially treated over the last 15 years or so in the Greek politics before and during the sovereign debt crisis.

5.1.1. Flags Burned and Flags Carried

Ultimately, Billig’s distinction between unwaved and waved flags, namely the distinction between banal and hot (or overt) nationalism, is a relative one. It is contingent upon period and circumstantial effects which may either perpetuate the established meaning of a national flag or change its connotations with respect to the entire population or a particular social group. For instance, after 9/11 the Stars and Stripes has been waved far more frequently, compared to the more or less unnoticed way it had been flown before. More often than not, waved or unwaved flags serve as a functional equivalent of totem: flags should never touch the ground, never fly in the dark, should be hoisted at dawn and lowered at dusk, should not be polluted or destroyed. In the USA, the Flag Protection Act of 1989 made a criminal of any citizen who “knowingly mutilates, defaces, physically defiles, burns, maintains on the floor or ground, or tramples upon a U.S. flag except in relation to the disposal of a worn or soiled flag.”¹⁹ Similarly, the Greek Penal Code (article 181 – Insult of Greek State symbols) foresees that “whoever, to express hatred or contempt, removes,

¹⁹ <<http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/enlight/flag.htm>>. United States v. Eichman Issue: Burning the American Flag.

destroys, distorts or pollute the official flag of the State or the emblem of sovereignty, is punished with imprisonment up to two (2) years.” In addition, article 155 (Offence of Foreign State Symbols) anticipates that

whoever, to express hatred or contempt, removes, destroys, distorts or pollute the official flag or emblem of sovereignty foreign State which is at peace with Greece and is recognized by it or stops or impedes public playing of the national anthem, shall be punished with imprisonment up to six months or a fine [...]. The prosecution is exercised only following a request by a foreign government.

Needless to say, provisions like these are contested in courts for they are regarded as violating the constitutional right of free speech. Although in many countries, flag-burning and desecration is actually illegal, it is part and parcel of contentious politics, becoming a symbolic act of resistance to the political and moral establishment, or a deliberate act intended to offend the national, racial and religious Other. Not infrequently, flag desecration induces processes of moral panic not only for vexillodules, for whom love of one’s country is equated with unquestioning patriotism but also to vexillophobes who confess that “flag-waving terrifies me” to the extent they see the flag as a false god with diabolic powers (Eriksen 2007, 12).

A recurrent political rite of post-authoritarian Greece is the annual “Polytechnio March.” Since 1974, every November 17th, a large – sometimes really huge – march is organized on the anniversary of the 14-17 November 1973 revolt by students of the National Technical University of Athens against the dictatorial military regime. The main slogans of that uprising were: “Bread, Education, Liberty,” “National Independence,” and “Americans and NATO out”; drowned in blood, it stripped the colonels’ junta of any remnant of legitimacy. The junta collapsed in June 1974 as a consequence of its self-destructive foreign policy over Cyprus. At the anniversary march, streets along the route are closed to traffic and remain so until the end of the rally outside the US embassy where American flags are burnt. Ultra-leftist demonstrators fight with security forces either on the spot or around the central building of the University downtown.

Given the widespread anti-Americanism in Greek public opinion, the burning of the US flag on each anniversary passes almost unnoticed. This is so mainly because the anniversary has become a National Day which is itself for the nation a condensation symbol: a nation resisting the villainous Americans, if not the entire West. In this conspiratorial mode of thinking, Americans are regarded as responsible for the Greek military dictatorship as well as for almost every unfortunate event in world politics. This has been expressed over the last four decades in the slogan “Americans: Assassins of the Peoples.” This day has been declared a half-day holiday for the public sector and for schools and universities is a full break; public officials and party leaders pay their tribute laying wreaths and singing the national anthem.

Often, leftist and anarchist groups attempt to renegotiate the unifying national-emotional climate of this anniversary, defying the ensuing manufacturing of consent. Whenever this happens a seeping “us” versus “them” scheme is put into effect by the communication media, especially in cases where the flag is burnt in front of the cameras. An all too real flag panic arose in 1995 when the central building of the Technical University was occupied for three days by hundreds of far leftist activists who, among other acts, burnt the flag in a provocative manner. Journalists and politicians alike became anxious, disgusted, and angry over the desecration of the national emblem which was interpreted as equivalent to the symbolic dissolution of the state itself (Logotheti 2002). The activists were presented as rebels without a cause and those arrested were prosecuted under article 181 of the Greek Penal Code (see above).

In the same vein, every now and then, left radical activists destroy or burn the flag during periods of heated politics. Two turning points are worth mentioning here: first the early 2007 student demonstrations in relation to reforms of the country’s education system which resulted in violent clashes with the police. Second, the three weeks of riots in Athens during December 2008 in the wake of the tragic shooting of a 15-year-old schoolboy by two police officers. These events were followed by a spate of small-scale terrorist attacks. Ever since, and especially after 2010 when the sovereign debt crisis erupted, a climate of political violence or “street politics” (Economides and Monastiriotis 2009) has been cultivated which was followed by anomic civic action and disaffection (Davou and Demertzis 2013). Within this political-emotional climate, mainstream politicians and officials, news media journalists, and far right bloggers have been framing these activists as “political devils” in the sense that they defy and disrespect the national symbols and violate law and order.

There has been, however, an additional recurrent cause for the flag panic; it is the perceived “ethnic devils” who are supposed to contaminate the flag – the national totem. And who are these contaminators? They are pupils of non-Greek origin who are typically entitled to carry the national flag on the school parades at the National Days of March 25 and October 28. March 25²⁰ is both a national (independence revolution against the Ottoman rule) and religious holiday (Annunciation). There is a school flag parade in every town and village and a big armed forces parade in Athens. Similarly, October 28 is a commemorative national rite and refers to the Greek army’s successful defense of Greece against Italian and Albanian troops during the Axis invasion of 1941. The master signifier of this commemoration is the supposed “NO” uttered by

²⁰ School parades for that day started in 1936 under the Metaxas dictatorial regime.

the nation against its enemies; a stance supposed to enunciate the resisting national character of all Greeks.

Both rites have a strong emotional hold over the social imagery of the Greek body politic. Official regulations mean “to make the parade representative of the nation’s model on the bodily, mental and moral level, by seeing to it that only students who embody those ideals were selected” (Benincasa 2018, 4). The values promoted in the selection of students to participate in the parade, and especially the flag-bearer, are highly related to the rhetoric of national character. Traditionally, the Greek national symbol is handed to the best pupil of the school in recognition of his/her excellence. This was ratified by Presidential Decree 201/1998 (article 13), according to which participants such as flag bearers and wreath layers “shall be chosen among those who in the previous school year have accumulated the highest overall average score, calculated also in its fractional part.” Also, they had to follow the liturgy prior to the parade. It should be noted that every now and then, covert or overt discord occurs when it happens that the best pupil is not of Greek origin. In some cases, the candidates are so intimidated and humiliated that they give up their right to carry the flag. In other cases, where excellent second-generation immigrant pupils have carried the flag there were mixed feelings expressed or nationalist-racist reactions of a violent nature.

Sometimes these occasions of discord are made public in national news media reinforcing the stereotypes of Greek ethnic-cultural nationalism and highlighting the flag panic. “Foreigners” in a commemorative rite of such importance constitute a gross violation of the nation’s imaginary and “intimate space.” In 2003, at a small town in Northern Greece it was announced that the best pupil of that year was a boy from a family of Albanian immigrants. Two mothers of pupils from the high school voiced their reservations about his carrying the flag by shouting out during a local meeting “I will not let an Albanian touch MY FLAG or sing MY NATIONAL anthem!” (Tzanelli: 2006). Notably, that boy, Odhise Qenaj, had been the best pupil of his class in 2000 and he had encountered the hostility of his classmates and their parents then also. Then, as in 2003, he decided to withdraw from the parade altogether. Between 2000 and 2003, in an attempt to adjust and integrate more into the Greek society, Odhise was baptized into the Orthodox Church; in spite of this, and for all his appropriation of the Greek language and education system, he was never accepted by the local community. His case illustrated the extent to which foreign immigrants have become constructed as “other” by Greek nationalist discourse (Grigoriadis 2011).

In an attempt to bypass grievances of this sort and alleviate potential clashes in local communities, the coalition government of the Left leaning SYRIZA and the far-Right party of Independent Greeks, which took office in 2015, issued Presidential Decree #79/2017 to regulate conduct in primary schools. In article 3 it states that “the selection of flag bearers [...] and wreath layers is

done by drawing lots among the classroom students in the final grade.” Attendance at a liturgy before the parade ceased to be obligatory. After this, unrest was caused mainly by opposition parties and politicians since the provision of drawing lots was seen by them to be a breach of the principle of merit in the selection process and a sign that the education system was operating on the basis of the lowest common denominator. The counter argument of the Minister of Education, Research, and Religious Matters was that carrying the flag is not to be seen as a trophy but as a right and privilege of every single pupil on an equal basis; he also added that serving and honouring the motherland cannot be limited among a small elite of students.²¹

So far, reactions to the new regulation in local communities have been few; it should be noted by the way that the regulation applies only to primary schools and not to secondary education in the Gymnasium and Lyceum where case has not been the subject of public debate. It remains to be seen whether this “equalizing” system of selection will mitigate ethnic clashes in schools or whether social class differences will occasionally overlap with ethnic divisions.

5.1.2 Parades: For and Against

In order to elucidate the religious aspect of Greek nationalism, it might be noted that the main military parade for the commemoration of the October 28 “NO” takes place in Thessaloniki, the second largest city in the country, just two days after the day of celebration of its patron saint, Agios Demitrios, on October 26. On two occasions, then, March 25, and October 28, we see that there is a strong double message (secular and religious). The liturgy which precedes each staged parade and attended by all major state or local authorities is a clear indication of the sacred link between the state, the church and the nation (Tsaliki 1995). For several decades these parades were taken for granted and, apart from a handful of libertarian intellectuals and far leftist activists, they were unquestioned. That is why it was such a big surprise when the anniversary of the National Day on 28 October 2011 ended chaotically. Substantial numbers of citizens turned out in what was to be a tumultuous protest against the authorities, the austerity measures, the role of foreign creditors, and the alleged anti-patriotic line of the then socialist government of George Papandreou. In Thessaloniki, public officials, ministers, opposition MPs, and the President of Democracy himself were denounced as “traitors” amidst an emotional atmosphere of hostility. To avoid escalation the Prime Minister cancelled the entire event which was fully covered by the news media. The same happened in other cities.

The re-codification of the ritual was brought about mainly by left, far-left, and far-right groups. Political parties and organizations of the political left as

²¹ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHbAm7Rn8WE>> (accessed 18.10.2017).

well as the spokesmen of some national-populist groups defended the protest through a re-specification of the commemorated “NO”; its meaning was redesigned as symbolic resistance to the “new intruders.” It is under this pressure that Prime Minister Papandreou declared a Referendum for the bailout package. The political elite and mainstream news media unanimously characterized these incidents as a national disgrace brought on by hubris, but by any measure, the protest was perceived as a radical delegitimation of the political system *in toto* and as the turning point of a crisis of representation.

Since then, a public debate has been taking place (offline and online) about the meaning of the parades. On 29 October 2013, Nicos Voutsis,²² a powerful member of the SYRIZA party and later President of the Hellenic Parliament, told at a TV panel on the MEGA Channel that his party was against the student parades on both National Days, yet supported military parades. However, owing to budget cuts caused by the economic crisis, in the 2010, 2011, and 2012 parades, no tanks, helicopters, or military aircrafts were present. The estimated money saved amounted to 5.0 million Euros. That measure was accepted by public opinion, other than for some complaints in far-right circles. In the 2013 military parades, however, the economy measure was canceled, with no serious objections by either mainstream media or political parties. The idea of terminating the student parades was premised on their quasi-military style which subverted the usual spirit of youth festivity.

On October 27, 2014, a few months before SYRIZA won the 2015 election and took office, Tassos Kourakis, another distinguished party member and, later, deputy Minister of Education, told an interviewer from the ALFA Channel that his party was against both military and student parades.²³ A day later, Nicos Houndis, a SYRIZA member of the European Parliament, also expressed his own view and stated the intention of his party to abolish parades of this sort (MEGA Channel).²⁴ Contrary to these statements and declarations, when the SYRIZA-ANEL (Independent Greeks) government took office in January 2015, military and student parades on both National Days did not stop. It was the president of ANEL and minister of Defense, a populist far right politician, who denounced any attempt to terminate the military parades; SYRIZA, as a ruling coalition party was not prepared to take on the issue despite some questioning voices among members of its youth branch.

After the debacle of the 2011 military parade in Salonica, a vigorous online debate has been conducted in the social media, mostly between supporters of the far right and the left (including the far left). After 2012, the parades had not been high on the agenda of left and far left blogs. They confined themselves to repeating earlier statements about abolishing students’ parades as

²² <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjfMDJCvjHM>> (Accessed: May 21, 2016)

²³ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3l-qEYsWZ4>> (Accessed: May 21, 2016)

²⁴ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrHGNCeuZKE>> (Accessed: May 21, 2016)

anachronistic, having been a feature of the interwar period under Metaxas' dictatorship (1936-1941). On the other side of the debate, far right blogs continued to show intense interest in the parades, reporting and posting photos and videos of every occasion. They mostly praise the bravery of participants who display anti-establishment behaviour. They also praise traditional national character traits, such as anti-statism, endurance in times of crisis, national egoism (against the supposed occupation of the country by the Troika and corrupt politicians), and national pride. They underline that such traits are a constant feature of Greekness. They also use xenophobic discourse regarding the participation of immigrants in the parades, whether as flag-bearers or not.²⁵

After four years of coalition government, SYRIZA and ANEL terminated their collaboration in early 2019 following the settlement of the Macedonian Question by the agreement between Greece and North Macedonia. Ever since, SYRIZA had been able to secure a majority in Parliament through *ad hoc* party and MP alliances. Although now without pressure from a far-right populist partner, the SYRIZA government seemed oblivious toward the desacralizing stances over parades; the 2019 anniversary of the 25 March National Day was celebrated with a huge military parade in Athens and with many student parades all over the country.

6. Concluding Remarks

Whether in its civic or cultural/ethnic version, national identity – and national *habitus* for that matter – is invariably informed by internalized national character traits and patterns within each nationalist universe of discourse. These traits and patterns are replete with emotional energy instantiated in political emotional terms like “dignity,” “hope,” and “pride” employed recurrently during electoral campaigns by party leaders such as Alexis Tsipras. To put it bluntly, a national character is at the same time – though not exhausted by – an emotional culture (de Rivera 1992). As such, it has its own modal sentiments, structures of feeling, and seemingly stable rules which actually figurate what William Reddy (2001) calls “emotional regimes,” i.e., political emotions and complex emotional norms and rules enacted in political performances and collective rituals to sustain the legitimacy of political power structures. Two cognate notions herein are “emotional climate” and “emotional atmosphere.” According to de Rivera (1992; de Rivera, Kurrien, and Olsen 2007), as a background to emotional culture the members of a group may adopt an emotional stance during an extended – but no less delineated period of time

²⁵ The mainstream media coverage of the flag bearers' immigrant status has diminished compared to the coverage of the issue in the early 2000s (Benincasa 2018, 10).

– with a view to triggering events or rumours which make up an ambience/climate that shape moods shared by individuals and social groups. An emotional atmosphere is a more or less transient affective *milieu* formed in virtue of an instant which elicits shared emotions screened out by emotional climate. Thus, the emotional dynamics of national character operate throughout a funnel of three interrelated temporal planes: macro (emotional culture), meso (emotional climate), and micro (emotional atmosphere). This dynamic we attempted to describe by analyzing the Greek national character, on the one hand, and the Greek nationalism as a case of political religion, on the other.

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