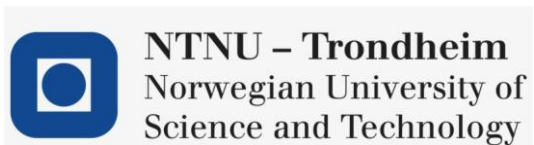Eleanna Symeonidi

Exploring children's participation in Christian orthodox liturgies, ritual practices and their perceptions of religion

Abstract

This research delves into the intricate intersection of Greek Orthodox dogma, childhood conceptualization and children's participation in the rituals of the Greek Orthodox Church. The study aims to unravel the dual role children play in religious rituals, ranging from protagonistic roles in mysteries like baptism to auxiliary roles in events such as the Sunday liturgy with altar boys. In alignment with the paradigm shift in Childhood Studies, emphasizing the value of children's perspectives, this research addresses a notable gap in the existing literature concerning children's own accounts and experiences in orthodoxy in Greece.

This thesis examines how children actively participate in church activities, offering admiration and respect from adults. The study scrutinizes the integration of religious teachings, experiences during ceremonies and the impact of supplementary activities on children's everyday lives. The research sheds light on the significance of the Church as a hub for communal interactions and religious educational support, revealing the multifaceted ways in which children are engaged within this religious context in a relational manner which explores mutually constitutive roles and relationships affecting the religious community as a whole.

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Preface

The summers of my childhood were spent at my grandmother's house in a rural, mountainous village. I vividly remember the night when I woke up crying from extreme pain in my ear. My grandmother woke up and came by my side to assist me. After I told her what I felt, she went on to light a censer – the one that she used to bless the house as a tribute to the Saints on their name day or to commemorate the dead. She stood by my side, the one that hurt and she started to wisher prayers while simultaneously forming with the censer the sign of the cross. I remember the sweet smell of the incense and the smoke shapes vanishing in the air. I also remember feelings of confusion as I could not understand how the doings of my grandmother were of any relation to my pain. She repeated the same ritualistic movement several times. Oddly enough, the pain faded away quickly. I stopped crying and my grandmother asked me if I could still feel any pain. I nodded negatively and she advised me to say a prayer to God and then fall asleep. So, I did and I fell asleep almost immediately. The next day I was up on my feet and the day was one of the typical summer days with my cousins, which meant a lot of energy and playing in the yard and the garden all day long.

Even though I was about 6 years old, this incident troubled me for quite a while. I asked my grandmother what it was that she had done. She told me that through prayer and by the blessing of God, my pain was cast away. However, when I asked her to teach me how to do that, the response was negative as these things were not meant for children. I feared that if the pain came again, I would not be able to deal with it. She reassured me that if I prayed, God would listen as He always listens to the prayers of children because their souls are pure. I took such comfort in her words that I did not persist anymore. As I trusted my grandmother, I trusted that prayer is a powerful tool and all I had to do it remember to do it.

When I returned to Athens, where my family lived, I narrated the incident to my mother and asked if grandma ever did something like that to her, if she knew how this worked and if she knew how to do it herself. In my mind the question was simple "why did my grandmother do something that I have never seen my mother do?". My mother's answer puzzled me more. She told me that she did not know how to use the censer therapeutically but as a child she had experienced the same thing many times as well as her siblings but only the elders knew how to perform this as their faith was much stronger and deeper. As I could not wrap my head around this distinction and I could not understand what faith actually meant, I tried to come up with different alternative answers as for example, if the censer contained a special herb that could heal ear infections or if the smoke had killed the "ear germs". My mother assured me that this was not the case even though the elders knew how to use healing herbs and she had witnessed many times when someone in the village would save a traumatized animal or person by minor improvised procedures or remedies as there was total absence of doctors or pharmacies anywhere near the village back then.

In my mind, it seemed extraordinary to know how to heal without a doctor or a drug. In my question as to why grandmother hadn't taught her these tricks, my mother explained to me that these were not tricks and the people of her generation who chose to move to the capital or other big cities, did not have the opportunity to learn many of the things the elders knew simply because this knowledge was not taught as it happens in schools but it is experienced according to relevant incidents that may occur in the life in the village. Since that incident, I became more interested as to what was happening in my village and I began to observe what the grown-ups did much more carefully for the years that followed.

I do understand the risk of presenting a memory with such a convection of its accuracy. I do not claim to remember any details such as the exact time of the year or how many days passed between my staying in Crete and my return to Athens, nor do I remember any events that surrounded this incident. In an effort to check the accuracy of my memory, I discussed the incident with my mother and my grandmother asking if they could remember what I was describing in the present, almost 29 years later. They both remembered and my grandmother told me that what I remembered was not a single occurrence. There were many times when she had used the censer to treat my cousins, my brother and even me. The memories of the same ritualistic movement performed to my brother and my cousins came to my mind but were vague and weak. Only this first time that happened to me was clear and vivid enough as a memory for me to narrate...

The narration of our stories turns us into vessels of memory. Without narration we would be burial grounds of memories. We must narrate our experiences even if we narrate them to ourselves. However, I could not have predicted that a narration of this incident would ever find an audience in Norway, let alone in the academic environment of the NTNU in Trondheim. In the August of 2021, I found myself narrating "the censer story" almost three decades after it happened, in an auditorium as part of an exercise of self-presentation of our childhood in the context of the Childhood Studies master's program. The task was to briefly present ourselves and our childhood as we perceived it to our fellow classmates and professors whom we would meet for the first time. The censer story was significant to me for many reasons as it marked the point when as a child I began to observe the world around me from a different perspective and I began to experience my annual movement between the rural and the urban not as a linear mobility but as two different spheres of life style and wellbeing each with very different and often contradictory features.

During that presentation, it was mentioned that there was the possibility to find inspiration about our master's topic of research. When the time came to choose a topic, I went back to the presentation's material and sought inspiration. What stood out was how I perceived life in the rural areas in contradiction to the highly urbanized space of Athens. Seeing rural areas as idyllic is quite common and it has often been the topic of discourse in geography studies. However, the vividness of the memory with the religious content urged me to consider a relevant topic. Thus, the idea occurred to do a research about children's conceptualization of religion and their participation in religious practices. Going a step further, I asked myself what is the place of the Child as a conception in the field of Christian religion as a whole. I found this topic fascinating as it propelled me to view religion from a different perspective while focusing my attention to an element of the child. I was impressed to realize that even though I had an experience of a religious practice as the aforementioned and I did attend the Church with my grandparents and my mother, as an adult I had taken the place of the child for granted and it had never occurred to me to consider it as a distinct category in religious matters.

In the present thesis, I explored the conceptualization of the child in the orthodox dogma and the experiences of children concerning their participation in it as well as the views of their parents and the priests of their community.

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List of Abbreviations

ELSTAT   Hellenic Statistical Authority
NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSD   Norwegian Centre for Research Data
NTNU   The Norwegian University of Science and Technology
OECD   Organization for European Economic Cooperation & Development

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this research, I attempt to explore the conceptualization of the child in the Greek orthodox religion and the participation of children in the relevant rituals of the Greek Orthodox Church. In addition, I explore the broader part religion holds in children's lives and their families.

To construct the context for delving more profoundly into the manner in which Greek Orthodox dogma envisions the child and its position in the spiritual conceptualization of life, I will explore in greater detail. There seems to be a duality in the part children hold in the orthodox religious rituals as their role can be either protagonistic or auxiliary. Some mysteries place the child as the center of the process such as the baptism, while others, offer children a merely auxiliary part where the mystery can be performed even without their participation such as the Sunday liturgy with the altar boys.

In accordance with the paradigm shift in Childhood Studies which views the opinions of children as valuable and rightful for proper research, I seek to fill a void in the current research literature. Children's place in the Christian religion is a subject that has not been adequately researched even though it has received some scholarly attention such as the work of Dillen & Pollefeyt (2010) that explores children's voices in theology and religious education or the master work of Baby (2012) who explored children's perspectives on religion in Tamil Nabu to name a few. In the Greek orthodox dogma, the child is present in the iconography and the literature. In iconography, it is present mostly in the form of Jesus as an infant in the arms of Mother Mary while in literature the child is being addressed as a receiver of advice and guidance.

However, children's own perceptions on religious matters, their experiences of participation as well as their views and opinions have not been researched in the Greek orthodox dogma. I believe that exploring children's relationship with religion can be valuable as it can reveal the manner in which aspects of their lives are intertwined in several different yet interconnected contexts. In the Greek context, the Church often operates as an intersection for families and different parts of the community to interact and find common ground through religious practices forming a network which extends its activities in aspects of everyday life such as charity, act of solidarity towards more vulnerable people in the community, playful group activities for children and even supplementary schooling for those who cannot afford tutors.

A child can participate in most of these activities. Usually, children who are active as participants are addressed with admiration and respect by adults. I this thesis I research how these children integrate in their thought, what they experience during the ceremonies, how they perceive the teachings in the "Sunday school" (if they attend) and how the additional social activities influence their everyday lives. At this point, I should clarify that not all Churches are organizing youth activities and charities as these matters often rely on the good will and persistence of the priests and the bonds they form with the broader community.

1.2   Research questions

In this master's thesis, the exploration unfolds into the intricate dynamics of children's participation in the rituals and mysteries of the Greek Orthodox Church. The fundamental inquiries guiding this study are formulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the aspects inherent in the intersecting facets of faith, tradition and childhood.

The main research questions of this research are formulated as follows:

1. Which roles are children assigned during their participation and how is this participation expressed in relation to their age and gender?

2. Which are the children's experiences on religion and what kind of significance does it have in their life?

3. How do children's perspectives on religion intersect with the views and opinions of their families and the religious gatekeepers within their community regarding their participation in religious activities?

The primary research questions guiding this study encompass a multifaceted exploration into the intricate intersections of children's participation in religious practices within the Church. The first question seeks to identify the specific mysteries of the Church in which children actively engage. Following this, the second inquiry attempts to elucidate the roles assigned to children during their participation, while acknowledging the nuanced expressions of this involvement with regard to age and gender. The third question seeks to shed light on their experiences and their subjective perception on religion and discerning the significance it holds in their lives. Lastly, the fourth question widens the scope to include the perspectives of families and religious gatekeepers within the community as they are part of the same social fabric with children and therefore, their views and opinions regarding children's participation in religious activities is quite valuable. To summarize, the current study seeks to address the complexities of how children participate in religious rituals, aiming for a complete picture that considers individual perspectives, societal roles and family influences within the religious context.

1.3   Theoretical reflections

For the analysis of my findings in this particular research, I have employed specific theories and concepts from the field of Childhood Studies that I thought were relevant and luminating in my attempt to interpret the gathered data.

In the course of this study, I have drawn upon various theoretical frameworks to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena under research. These theories include social constructionism, cultural intensification and relational agency. I have also considered the Apollonian and Dionysian conceptualizations of children to offer valuable insights into different aspects of childhood experiences. By employing this diverse range of theories, my aim has been to explore the interplay between social structures, human agency, cultural context and the collective identities of children – meaning the sense of belonging as they interact with peers, families and communities. This approach has allowed me to illuminate the complex factors that shape their lives.

1.4   Methodology
Initially, I studied the relevant bibliography in religious matters of the Greek orthodox dogma as my knowledge was very limited. My inadequacy of knowledge, however, was

both a weakness and a strength. A strength because I entered the research field with genuine curiosity holding no ontological or epistemological biases and preconceptions apart from some basic ideas on what the dogma generally represents. A weakness because I had to study a lot the literature of a completely different field, that of religion, as I had to form a solid theoretical frame of reference in order to navigate through the conversations with the participants – a process fruitful in knowledge but consuming in available time.

I sought guidance by a priest of my community in Athens for sampling. To have a community gatekeeper vouch for the researcher is very important. The priest helped me form a bridge of communication with the parents and the children in the community. More importantly, it came easier for parents to overcome feelings of suspicion and reluctance since I was introduced by a respectable person of the religious community. To verify my role as a researcher, I provided the gatekeepers and children themselves with the official consent forms bearing the NTNU sign and my personal information. This procedure assumes that all ethical clearance issues have been appropriately addressed (NSD). I contacted the priest Father E. and he accepted my request offering to introduce me to the people responsible for the youth programs of the Church including the Sunday School and the group activities children do in their spare time in Church premises. He stressed the importance of my providing with the proper paperwork ensuring my position as a researcher, mostly to assure children's parents of my work.

With the parents and the religious gatekeepers, I conducted interviews and focus group discussions while with the children I also used drawings. More specifically, concerning the methods: interviews allowed for personal communication, exploring a variety of topics and asking for clarifications on the spot. I chose semi-structured interviews while adapting the method to the participatory approach concept, delivering control to the participants allowing them to define the direction of the conversation, even enriching its content with material that I may had not considered. Such adaptation allows interviews to operate as an interactive tool to mutually construct knowledge, thus revealing the subjective nature of this process fulfilling the metaphor of the researcher as a traveler (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Drawings are a useful tool to research with children as they are a pleasant activity (providing that the children are familiar with such activity) while no literary skills are required, thus making the process inclusive to children of all ages and educational levels (Beazley & Ennew, 2006). Individual drawings will allow the child to express themselves on a personal level while maintaining control of the content. Careful registration of the participants' age, sex, educational level, any particular characteristics and their reasoning behind the depictions was necessary as nothing on the image could be considered self-explanatory (Ennew et al. 2009, manual 5).

Focus group discussions were promoted among participants. Artifacts such as the group drawing (if permission was given), photographs of relics and objects were used to stir the conversation and give participants the opportunity to talk with each other, elaborating on their views. As it is highly advised that the participants in this activity bear similar characteristics in terms of age, gender and social identity (Ennew et al., 2009, manual 5, Lloyd-Evans, 2017), I saw that the groups met these criteria to avoid any power imbalance in the group. The advantages of this method concern the possibility to identify group perspectives either commonly agreed upon or contradictory. The data transcription though was more challenging and "messier" (Lloyd-Evans, 2017, p.367) and required some clarifications during the process which I managed to attain through supplementary contact with the participants. The inclusiveness of the method works balancing in contrast to any challenges it may bear.

1.5   Outline of thesis

The first chapter of the thesis includes the introduction in which I explain what I seek to achieve with the current research and which are the research questions. The second chapter provides contextual information about Greece, the country in which the research was conducted so that the reader can get a general picture of the country and Greek society. The third chapter addresses theoretical concepts that are employed in order to interpret the data and understand the conceptualization of childhood in the orthodox dogma. The fourth chapter considers the methodological approach that was selected, the methods that were used and the ethical considerations that need reflection. The fifth chapter contains the analysis of the research where I present my findings and the data gathered by the participants before including theoretical interpretative discussion. The sixth chapter is the concluding chapter in which a summary of the research is given alongside with considerations for further future research.

2   Context Chapter

2.1 Introduction

The chapter starts by giving an outline of the country so that the reader may shape an image of Greece geographically and politically. Then, I move on to mention the basic social values that are commonly shared by the Greeks while giving a picture of what is considered as a typical childhood in the Greek context. In this framework, I describe the place religion holds in the country's context including the relationship between Church and State while moving on to present the mysteries of the orthodox dogma. Lastly, I present some of the current challenges the country is facing. This would mean that I included not all the challenges of the country but mostly those which were mentioned by the participants in a distinct manner in their narrations.

2.2 Outline of the country

Greece or Hellas is a Mediterranean country in the southeast part the European continent. Looking at a map, one can easily understand why it has the longest coastline in the Mediterranean basin as it has literally thousands of islands of impressively varying sizes. On the country's east is the Aegean Sea, on the west lies the Ionian Sea, and on the south, there is the Sea of Crete and the Mediterranean Sea. The country is often described as the crossroad of the West, the East and the African continent.

The country's regime is democratic and more specifically, a unitary parliamentary republic holding elections every four years and the nominal head of the state is the President of the Republic with a five-year term. There is a division of powers guaranteed by the Constitution into legislative, judicial and executive branches in order to avoid having a branch of a government become too powerful and potentially tyrannical. The current constitution was established in 1975 and since then, it has been revised three times in 1986, 2001 and 2008. The content of revision was always a subject of discourse among the political parties.

As a political entity, Greece became a member of the NATO in 1952, of the European Union in 1981 and entered the Eurozone in 2001. The currency used since 2002 is the

euro replacing the former national currency drachmae and leading to closer ties with the European Union and the European Economic Community. These memberships affect Greece politically, economically and strategically in various manners.

According to the census published in 2022, the country's current population is approximately 10.7 million, with a tenth of it comprising immigrants of various ethnicities. Children between the ages of 0-14 years make up 14.53% of the population (male 794,918/female 745,909), and teenagers along with young adults aged 15-24 years represent 10.34% (male 577,134/female 519,819) (ELSTAT, 2021). Athens, the capital city of the country named after the goddess of wisdom Athena, is home to around 700,000 people. The expansion beyond the municipality to the metropolitan area of Athens, which includes the four regional units of central, north, south, and west Athens, encompasses one third of the country's entire population due to a progressive urbanization process.

2.3 Social values in Greece

Greek society today is diverse and dynamic and there are many different values that are important to different individuals and communities within Greece. However, some common values that are embraced by many Greeks are these of the family, hospitality, respect to tradition, education, the notion of community and resilience.

2.3.1 Family ties and values

The family in Greece is considered as the most important aspect of one's life and the cornerstone of society as it is the source from which socialization begins and the teaching of moral values. Even though the distinction of the nuclear family than other familial forms is clear, what a Greek would consider as his/her family is also the extended network of relatives such as grandparents, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews, cousins, etc. This list also includes the spouses of relatives who despite the distinction of not being related "by blood" they are considered as equal family members with the right to intervene in family matters as they wish. It is expected by the family to offer support throughout the life of its members. The grandparents and the parents are the members who should receive the outmost respect while the most precious members (sentimentally speaking) are the children. The arrival of a baby in a family is considered the most significant reason for familial celebration.

The Greek term for family is "οικογένεια" (/i.koˈʝe.ni.a/), the etymology of which breaks down in to two words: "οἶκος" (/ˈy.kos/) literally meaning "house" and "γένος" (/ˈʝe.nos/) meaning "generation" in relation to the bloodline as the word is of the same root with "γέννηση" (/ˈʝe.ni.si/) - "birth" (A Greek-English Lexicon, Liddell et al., 1940). Therefore, the combination of the two in a compound word, means the generation of the house or living in a house and belonging to the same bloodline. In addition to this, it is common for Greeks to consider as family very beloved friends with whom they have shared important moments in their life and who have proven that can fulfill the same supportive role as the family (Kaldi-Koulikidou, 2007). To consider someone as family while there is no blood relation nor marriage, is an honor that bears trust and a mutual intention to help one another while going the extra mile so to speak, to do things that one would not do for others. Often, to express this familial love and trust towards friends

or significant people in one's life, people chose to make them members of the extended familial network through the process of "koumbaria" (sponsorship) which means to become a couple's best man/groomsman or the godfather/godmother of their child. On the other hand, to have mistrust towards family members or quarrels or to be estranged or any sort of negative behavior, are not of course uncommon but they can be perceived as quite bad indicators for one's social life.

2.3.2 Hospitality

Hospitality is a value that is considered sacred. This belief is not a modern social construction in Greece but rather a social value with ancient roots. It was believed that Zeus was the protector of the people in need of shelter and care and his wrath would be brought upon the ones who refused to treat with hospitality those in need but his wrath would also strike those who dishonored and disrespected people offering hospitality and shelter. This value was brought up by the participants in relation to the bible parable story of the good Samaritan.

2.3.3 Education

Education is another value highly appreciated as it is a part of a citizen's life. To begin with, all educational matters are regulated by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Enrollment and attendance in schools is mandatory but the books are administered without charge and the attendance in public schools is free of any kind of tuition. It was mandatory to attend school from the age of 6 to the age of 18, yet since 2020 the government broadened the age of attendance to 4 years old and made it compulsory to enroll in preschool.

Since 2020, the educational stages are divided to four categories: preschool for the children of 4 to 6 years old (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten), primary school consisting of 6 grades for the ages of 6 to 12, gymnasium (lower secondary school) for the ages of 12 to 15 years old and lyceum (upper secondary school) for teenagers of 15 to 18 years old. The lyceum is non-compulsory and is divided into general lyceum and vocational lyceum. In order to proceed to tertiary education, a student must have successfully completed lyceum and achieve a certain grade in the panhellenic exams. Universities have no fees for bachelor programs and some master programs may also be tuition free.

Parents place a lot of stress on their child's education and it is considered a common goal to obtain a university degree. As public education may be free but lacks a good reputation for quality, the parents who are wealthier prefer to send their children to private schools. Parents who cannot afford private schools, try to help their children by sending them to afternoon classes called "frontistiria" (the word etymologically means the place that offers care), which have monthly tuition and professors offer support and supplementary teaching of the school curriculum. In addition to this, private tutoring is also quite common. In recent decades, the frontistirio or any form of extra-curricular help, is considered a necessity and many parents rearrange the family's expenses in order to be able to spend on educational help. This practice is also widely spread for learning foreign languages even though English is a part of the curriculum along with

French and German as additional options and the learning of a musical instrument or other forms of art or sports even though music, arts and sports are part of the curriculum for the mandatory school period.

As many parents are unable to afford supplementary educational assistance for their children, especially after the years of the financial crisis, the inequality between the different socioeconomic classes grew further. According to Tsakloglou & Cholezas (2005), education is the most important factor correlated to the distribution of income and a chance to a better socioeconomic placement in the Greek society but at the same time the current educational process is promoting inequality. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have less chances of succeeding in the exams and are thus, underrepresented in Greek universities (Tsakloglou & Cholezas, 2005).

Despite the difficulties, Greece is in the fourth place in the tertiary enrollment among the OECD countries (OECD, 2019). Many Greeks choose to continue their studies in foreign universities either by seeking scholarships or combining work with their studies or by utilizing the financial support that the family can perhaps provide. Therefore, it is not uncommon for families to keep supporting their adult children during their tertiary studies.

2.3.4 Sense of community and resilience

As the family works as a support network and a provider of help, the sense of belonging and socializing often extends to the surrounding community. It is a feature of the greek character one could say, to seek socialization and friendly encounters within their community. A very common sight is the gathering of groups or friends or/and neighbors in a cafeteria to hold either brief or prolonged discussions for a variety of topics stretching from personal problems to political issues or historical subjects even to pure gossip. It is of course, quite possible for small talk or conversations as the previously described to end in tense quarreling.

In the space of neighborhood, one learns to coexist with different ethnicities and people of various cultural backgrounds, especially in areas as densely populated as Athens. Such interactions contribute to cultivating a sense of familiarity. Consequently, the network of support expands to a level that is presented in a very popular saying which translates as "a good neighbor is better even than a brother" ("ο καλός γείτονας είναι καλύτερος κι από αδερφό"). This saying combines the importance of time and space as the neighbor lives close to you and may offer immediate support or help while the brother may live far away and therefore, the familiar bond won't be adequate in a situation of immediate need. A good neighbor can be trusted with tasks otherwise entrusted to family members such as babysitting or accompanying a child to school or an elder to a hospital.

The combination of promoting strong family bonds and extending the network of support to friends and neighbors contributes significantly to what White has analyzed as "relational well-being" (White, 2015). According to her theory, positive and supportive relationships with others can lead to greater levels of happiness, personal growth, and resilience in the face of life's challenges. This has been of crucial importance for the Greeks during the times of socioeconomic crisis. However, processes of individualization

promoted by the neoliberal economic agenda has challenged relational bonds on every level.

2.3.5 Gender differences

The Constitution in actions holds no segregation towards women as citizens. The rights granted (or won) to women making them equal to men under the law, were a result of a gradual process of historic and social processes. According to Avdela & Psarra (2005), the educated middle-class women seized the opportunity to express themselves on the urgent political matters of the time through the newspaper published by Kalliroi Parren in 1887 ("the ladies' journal") which addressed exclusively to women. The newspapers, through tis articles, paved the way for women's emancipation. Following various discourses, it wasn't until 1952 that women got the right to vote and to participate as candidates.

Dellios (2008) points out that the involvement of Greece with the European institutions and the UN brought progress concerning the rights of women as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women was signed and ratified. However, she claims that institutions may promote equality but to achieve it practically, gender equality should be approached holistically by involving various actors and not only governmental.

As part of the Ministry of Interior, operates a general secretariat for gender equality which published a "National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020". In the objectives included, one can understand the problems women still face in society. Reading through these objectives, it is apparent that there are cases of gender-based violence and discrimination. Among the generally expressed aims, there is the issue of balancing work and family life. The last aim presents a difficulty faced by many women as due to economic insecurity, the working hours were prolonged at the expense of family life. However, as Lalou (2020) stresses, this Plan falls into two pitfalls as it seems to be in accordance with the neoliberal principles which aggravate austerity while it also focuses on a victimization narrative perpetuating stereotypes.

Academic discourses, ratification of treaties and political programs are positive steps towards equality. However, the manner in which all these are translated into women's everyday lives does not always reflect their intentions. A woman's life in modern Greece is affected by a variety of factors and by no means there can be a claim of absolute homogeneity. To draw a general picture, women are affected by the economic crisis as the unemployment numbers are increasing affecting them more than men (EIGE, 2019). For women who are mothers as well, there is a double role to be fulfilled: that of the worker and that of the care giver of both the children and the elderly of the family. The help of grandparents and of the extended family is very important in order to manage such a challenge. Social policies despite their public commitment to support women and families, have not fulfilled their declarations. What is described as "double burden" affects not only Greek women but women of other nationalities who live in Greece and are parts of the same socioeconomic system as is the case of Albanian women who have to provide for their families both as workers and care givers (Xhaho et al., 2020).

Women participants in this study often brought up the struggles of trying to managing the multiplicity of their roles while taking care of the family and providing for their children. The help from the grandparents and other members was mentioned as crucial for the household everyday life. Additionally, some of the women participants are Albanians in their ethnicity, married to Greek men, who were struggling with the aforementioned hurdles but their different ethnicity was not emphasized in the analysis as the topic concerns orthodox people who participate in the Church and were part of the diocese where I did my research.

2.3.6 A typical childhood

In the aforementioned context, a child's life can be affected by the environment of upbringing, the parents' socioeconomic status and their cultural beliefs, to name some of the basic factors. Therefore, it is difficult to make claims of homogeneity. As the parents are the child's gatekeepers, any state policies or socioeconomic changes affect children indirectly through the effect such changes may have on their parents. The only cases in which the state takes the right to directly intervene between parents and children are cases of proven abuse when the social services can remove the child and assign placement to a foster family or a public welfare institution as a last resource.

The birth of a child is traditionally perceived as a source of joy. As it is the child who transforms the couple into parents, it becomes the center of familial life, thus rearranging the familial priorities above individual needs. As was mentioned previously, the parents are expected to care for the child's needs materially and psychologically with affection (Evason, 2019). Traditionally, the child follows the parents' religion and is baptized according to their chosen dogma.

During the first years of the child's life, the aim is to fulfill the biological needs and the desire to play. The creation of myriads of toys for each particular age group is an indicator of the emphasis put upon this activity. It is important in the Greek context, for the kid to spend time not only with the parents but the grandparents as well (Evason, 2019). The grandparents are often considered as primary care givers along with the parents. For this type of relationship, there is a popular expression translated as "my child's child is twice the times my child" ("του παιδιού μου το παιδί είναι δυο φορές παιδί μου"). This expression can be heard either by the grandparents or the parents (as a form of a tender complaint) when the former show more affection to their grandchildren than they showed to their own children.

As the child grows up, school attendance is mandatory. There is no discrimination among boys and girls as far as school attendance is concerned in comparison to previous periods when the boys were favored over the girls. Progress in school is very important and children may often feel pressured, especially as they grow up when they have to balance school and extra-curricular activities with their own social life (meeting with friends for example). Some parents prefer to enroll their children quite early in music classes and sports, the kind of which is usually negotiated between parents and children, even though such negotiations can be tense as the parent provides the economic resources for the activities but the child may express their agency into agreeing or disagreeing to attend the activity.

To receive support for school subjects and to learn English are among the top educational priorities. Therefore, children begin to attend frontistia/private afternoon schools or receive tutoring. Especially during the years of lyceum, as the panhellenic exams for entering tertiary education approaches, it is quite common for teenagers to have a full day beginning with school attendance, then frontistirio attendance for school, followed by frontistirio for a foreign language (often two foreign languages) and/or classes of arts and/or sports. This program can be easily supported by wealthy families but low-income families go through major struggles to provide such support for their children.

The inadequacy of public education to deliver all of these subjects adequately so that the families won't have to go through this ordeal, has been the topic of discourse. Both parents and children often state to feel exhausted and stressed as school or school-related activities seem to preoccupy the largest part of their day for many years (half a lifetime one could say if proceeded on the academic path).

Parental supervision is usually very strict and expands in every aspect of the child's life. Granting higher levels of mobility and freedom outside the house without parental supervision usually comes through the teenage years in recognition of the teenager's striving for independence as an expected and healthy behavior. The strict supervision seems to be a characteristic of highly urbanized places as in rural areas children may have a different life less "institutionalized" with so many regulated activities, depending again on the status of the parents.

Extensive education and dependency on the parents-especially in areas with high unemployment rates of young people, has led a generation of adult people to live with their parents under the same roof for an extensive period prolonging their status as a dependent child. Market inflation and increase in the estate market while the salaries are plummeting, has led a lot of people to live with their parents even if they are employed. It is a peculiar phenomenon that needs further research as people in this social category experience a double social status of both child (in terms of dependency) and adult (in terms of age and social expectations).

2.4 Religion in Greece

In this context, one can understand that religion holds a particular place in the Greek society, as people attempt to hold a balance between modern life and tradition. Nevertheless, to understand better religion's role in Greece, it is necessary to briefly and generally review some historical elements that contributed to its interaction with society and the state.

The geostrategic importance of Greece's position has drawn conflicts upon the country resulting in the participation in both World Wars, the Balkan Wars and a civil war in the efforts of various political powers to establish dominion or influence over the country (Clogg, 2013). If we stretch further back in time, Greece was under the dominion of the Ottoman empire for approximately 400 years and before the fall of Constantinople/Istanbul was the center of the Byzantine Empire for about 1500 years. The transition to the Byzantine era was a result of various transformations of the Roman Empire as Greece was under roman rule since 146 BC. which was the year that signified the end of the free and autonomous Greek kingdoms. Prior to the Roman conquest, Greece had a long history of autonomous city-states and expansion far beyond its

borders with the peak of it during the kingship of Alexander the Great whose empire stretched to India (Thomopoulos, 2012). As tempting as it would be to elaborate on Greece's complex history, it is quite beyond the context of the thesis. However, such information, even as condensed as it is presented, could be helpful for a reader to form a broad and general picture of the country's line in time. It also offers an explanation as to why a visitor can see the Parthenon in the same region where he can see an Orthodox Cathedral, a Catholic Cathedral, a Synagogue and a Mosque.

The religion of the Greeks in ancient times was polytheistic with predominant divine figures the 12 Olympian Gods. Temples arose in their honor with statues and depictions of scenes derived from myths, public annual festivities were celebrated as part of their worship, mysteries (such as the infamous Eleusinia) were performed for the initiation of the followers and private rituals were part of the everyday life of the Greeks. The conversion to Christianity was a gradual process beginning in the 1st century AD with the traveling of apostle Paul to preach in the biggest Greek cities and becoming official in the 4th century AD when emperor Constantine declared Christianity as the official religion of the Eastern Roman Empire (later on known as the Byzantine Empire). Ever since, Christianity is the dominant religion in Greece.

2.4.1 Religion in the Constitution

Theoretically, the fundamental principles of a state and its governance system are determined by the Constitution in force. Greece is one of the countries where religion in mentioned in a definitive manner within the constitution. Article 3 of the greek Constitution of 1975 (including the amendments of 2008), recognizes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as the dominant religion in Greece while mentioning that the Greek Orthodox Church considers Jesus Christ as its head. Under the same Article, the close ties with the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople and the other Churches of the same dogma are respectfully acknowledged and self-governance ("autocephalous") is clearly stated. It is also stated that the Holy Scripture must not be altered and that any official translation must be sanctioned by the Autocephalous Church of Greece and the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople.

Article 13 guarantees the freedom of religion and that every person is entitled to civil rights regardless of one's religious faith. Under the same Article, it is recognized that all "known" religions have the right to exercise their worship rites as long as these rites do not offend the public order nor undermine the rights and freedom of others. It also clarifies that using religion as a pretext to carry out unlawful acts is prohibited. The same paragraph forbids proselytism which is the effort to convert a person through coercion. The Article also states that all religious ministers are subjected to state supervision and carry the same legal obligations (Constitution Project, 2008).

2.4.2 Relationship of the Church and the State

Although Greece is a secular state, the recognition of orthodoxy as the prevailing religion is an aspect found in all previous constitutions. The number of citizens identifying as Greek orthodox within the state is estimated around 90% (Pew Research Center, 2017) placing orthodoxy unquestionably as the dominant religion. However, it is inevitable for one to notice that the percentage cited in articles even a decade earlier, was higher reaching 97% (Karagiannis, 2009, p.147). The statistical fluctuations and the factors driving these changes are beyond the scope of the thesis even though it would be very interesting for one to examine what led to such a decline.

As both the Church and the State are subjected to sociohistorical dynamic changes, their relationship is bound to be turbulent. The Greek case bears certain peculiarities concerning the entanglement of religious affairs with the state in its various forms. The Church, from an undisputed force during the Byzantine empire, became subjected to the Sultan's authority after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. As in the Ottoman empire, the division of people was done according to their religion, Christians belonged to their own millet supervised by the Patriarchate of Constantinople which in its own turn was subjected to the Sultan. Drawing from that era, the Church projects its legitimate importance in maintaining the cohesion of the Greek national identity.

After the Greek Revolution of Independence in 1821 and the formation of an independent Greek state in 1830, the role of the Church should have been part of the political discourse of the time. Kapodistrias as a governor set the basis for an independent Church while later on, royal advisor Maurer and his advisors published the "Organic Law of the Autocephalous Church of Greece" in 1833 pushing the Patriarchate of Constantinople to officially recognize the autonomous nature of the Greek Church in 1850 (Stamatopoulos, 2004, p.38). It is important to note that such transformations concern only the administration and not any dogmatic deviations. During that period, the teaching of religion at schools became mandatory and morning prayer was established as an everyday activity within the school premises (Karagiannis, 2009).

The debate surrounding the relationship between the Church and the State persisted despite attempts at self-governance, remaining a contentious issue through various regimes. The period from 1850 to 1950 saw instability and conflicts, including wars, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and debates over events like the burning of Smyrna and the Greek Pontic genocide, creating tensions with Turkey. Greece underwent multiple regime changes, with monarchy abolitions and restorations, coups, dictatorships, and civil war following WWII. The 1967 coup by nationalist army officers, known as the Greek Junta, persisted until 1974, coinciding with the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. These events, including ongoing occupation, contributed to enduring political instability in Greece (Clogg, 2013).

The Church's role throughout the history of Greece can be seen through different lenses. Moreover, it is a common occurrence to witness contradictions when examining the sources originating from the Church, sources written from scholars of various beliefs and political affiliations and the manner in which these discourses are perceived by the public which comprises by heterogeneous groups of various backgrounds. The elite hierarchy of the Church is often portrayed as compliant to the governmental authorities, for example to the authorities of the Axis during WWII or Colonels of the Junta (Karagiannis, 2009, p.155). This position, if seen only as a statement of accusation, is oversimplifying the maneuvering of the Church during times of political and social turbulent changes as further research goes beyond stereotyping and monolithic statements. During the WWII for example, Anastasakis (2014) reveals that the Church's role was much more complex

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and what seemed like compliance by some factors of the clergy was strategized moves to obtain minor compromises while resisting policies harmful to the country and maintaining cohesion among their religious followers. Karagiannis (2009) explains that the Church is among other things, an organization that needs to seek ways of survival while maintaining an influential role and its acceptance by the public. Also crucial for the Church's policy is the affiliations and the ideology a priest carries when climbing the hierarchy ladder. Some archbishops are widely popular and commemorated even after their death while others seem much less popular and controversial. For example, Archbishop Christodoulos whose public speeches and the mass demonstrations he called upon for the issue of the identification cards/IDs, are still points of reference in both academic and public conversations (Karagiannis, 2009, Chrysoloras, 2019).

The element of the Church that has been researched and discussed widely and profoundly, is that of its role as the guardian of Greece's national identity for historic, social and linguistic reasons (Chrysoloras, 2019). During the era of the Ottoman empire, the Church was considered to be "an institution that embodied the Greek nation" but after the autocephalous (self-governing) it shifted to a "state authority" (Stavrakakis, 2003, p. 165 as cited in Karagiannis, 2009, p. 149). This feature of the Church was a recurring theme of the arts during the 19th century and early 20th century while the artists seem to focus on the relationship of the common priests and the beliefs of the dogma rather than the higher levels of the Church. The examples that seem to be the most popular are these of the Christmas stories by A.Papadiamantis (1851-1911) and the painting of "Kryfo Scholio"/"Secret School" by N.Gyzis (1842-1901) which depicts an elder priest teaching to a small group of 6 students (5 children and a young adult) in a circle all looking attentively to the priest as the source of knowledge.

Nevertheless, the process of secularization of the modern democratic states and the globalization processes could not leave the Church unaffected. As the changes in politics and economy are interwoven affecting society in a reciprocating manner. The Church is a regulatory factor and a cog within society that either tries to maintain a delicate balance or upholds a reactionary defensive role depending on the context. In the ID cards controversy for example, the socialist government sought to change the identification cards and erase the section that mentioned the religion of the person identified. Archbishop Christodoulos called for a massive demonstration and the participation of the people who attended was unprecedented to the history of the Church as its effort to collect signatures reached 3million (Karagiannis, 2009, p.136). The government moved on to the changes decided regardless of the protests but the influence of the Church and its callings to the people were a strong message to the secular authorities. During the years affected by covid-19, the Church took a different stance with the Archbishop Ieronimos and bishops calling the people , the "flock" to comply to the lockdown and all the measures taken by the government even those that meddled with the rituals (that of the communion for example) even though there was expressed consideration that the government and the secular state posed efforts to minimize the power of the church and to discredit it in the eyes of the people in the pretext of the pandemic.

The fact that there is dialogue between the State and the Church on matters that affect society, is perhaps a proof on its own merit that even though Greece is a secular state, the Church is a social institution with significant power and influence. The nature of this relationship and the dialogue is shaped by the personality, the beliefs and aspirations of the people in the hierarchy and the context in which the dialogue is conducted. After all,

the Church of Greece "always thinks in context" (Karagiannis, 2009, p.163) while shaping its own stance towards the state and the public.

The mutual dependence of the Church and the State is manifested in two significant facts, one of practical and one of symbolic nature. On one hand, the salaries of the priests are paid by the State, so the financial dependence of the clergy has often been used as a lever benefiting the State while the Church responds to this claiming that the state provided salaries are justified due to the fact that the Church's land property has been decreased by 96% due to confiscations and expropriations since the state was founded (Pylarinos 2002, as cited in Karagiannis, 2009, p. 151). On the other hand, the inauguration of the President and the government officials, occurs in the presence of the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece. In a similar manner, the Minister of Education and Religion is present during the election of the Archbishop's (Karagiannis, 2009). Symbolically these processes could indicate the State's presence and even supervision over the Church's affairs while acknowledging the role of the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece – a title signifying his authority for overseeing the Church's activities in Athens, the capital city of Greece, as well as throughout the entire country.

The effort to publicly demonstrate that State and Church co-exist is a result of progressive secularization of the country – a challenge that demanded the Church's adaptive mechanisms to function in this direction. An additional challenge is that of globalization as well. According to Roudometof (2008), the Orthodox Church of Greece presents a persistence to view nationality and religion in close frame and therefore, considers globalization a threat to its value. The different stance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, which views globalization as an opportunity to transform itself into a supra-territorial institution, has led to a tension between the relationship of the two Patriarchates. These different stances are affecting society and the body of the followers of the Church as they have an impact on the social cohesion and the sense of bonding between the followers who live under the two Patriarchates. Nevertheless, awareness of context and adaptability (not a synonym to compliance), are mechanisms for an institution, or an organization as Karagiannis would put it (2009) to survive and remain relevant and the Patriarchates may see different solutions to common problems and therefore respond in various manners. The point of the autocephalous is to provide freedom to express institutional agency, if one could express it as such.

However, the different stances on common problems are not the only problem that has shaken the belief and the devotion of the people. There are severe concerns about the corruption traced in the hierarchy of the Church and scandals that have affected its trustworthiness. Scholars have pointed out that the correlation between the widespread corruption of the public administration and the escalating corruption in the Church cannot be ignored (Karagiannis, 2009). Moreover, the argument goes on to suggest that Church corruption is a result of its association with the corrupt Greek public administration and the people's mistrust in return, is causing the Church to become more dependent on the state for its survival.

2.4.3 Orthodox Churches in Greece

It is estimated that the number of churches and monasteries count to approximately 10,000 (Lakasas, 2017). However, it is highly likely that the actual numbers are quite

larger as the report does not include small churches built in private churches nor chapels in cemeteries. Therefore, the presence of such temples is a common sight both in urban and rural space.

Every church is considered a sacred place and it is dedicated to a particular Saint or the Holy Mother Mary or even the Cross. The word Church itself in Greek is Ekklesia which transcribed in Latin is Ecclesia and it can be translated as "gathering of those summoned/assembly" (Lewis & Short, 1879). The words church/ecclesia and temple can be used interchangeably but they do carry a difference in their meaning. A temple is referred to the structure and its material aspects while the ecclesia is referred to the place as a whole including the people who attend the Church and in a broader sense, all the Christians. In his article, Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, mentions a social approach to the theological significance of the Holy Trinity that could be experienced by those who participate in the liturgies of the Church. According to modern theologians, one could perceive the "inter-subjectivity" of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in a manner translatable to the Church and society meaning that the love and the bonds between the three divine elements could be experienced among the believers in the Church during the holy rituals (Kallistos, 1995, p.53).

All orthodox churches share a common structural pattern regardless of their size. Whether it is a small, 1000 years old church like the temple in Kapnikarea (in Athens) dedicated to Mother Mary or a freshly built temple in a private property in order to honor a saint, the spaces of highly important, symbolic significance must be present in a proper church. The Sanctuary which is also called Altar and most commonly Holy Place is where the Priests prepare the holy communion and keep the relics for this preparation. As a space, it is only allowed for men and altar boys to enter and it is not open for the public view. The holy communion is prepared with wine and bread which symbolize the blood and body of Christ and is administered to the people at the end of the liturgy with a spoon from the chalice- "*diskopotiro*". After one has received communion, he gets a piece of bread called "antidoron"- a gift for the gift one has offered. As the preparation is not open for view, the sanctuary is covered by a curtain (Manic et al., 2015).

The central part of the temple is called nave and it is the space where the people who attend a mass can gather. The size of the nave varies in accordance with the size of the whole structure. Between the nave and the altar, there is the templon or iconostasis which is covered with icons. There are no statues in the orthodox temples and the byzantine style of the art is quite different than the style of the western Christian art. The templon will usually have three doors where the central one is used only by the priests while the altar boys, deacons and servers can enter from the side doors to assist the priests. The curtain or door in the center opens and closes during the liturgy as the preparation of the communion is progressing. The central door is called the Beautiful Gate while the two on the sides are called Angel doors or Deacon's doors. The most outstanding icons will be those of the Christ, Mother Mary holding Jesus as a baby and St. John the Baptist. The narthex is the area opposite the altar and is the space in which people can enter or leave the temple. The walls are usually decorated by icons or wall paintings of Mother Mary holding Christ as a baby, saints of both genders, archangels and divine figures as the Seraphims and the Cherubims. The Archangels are a group of angels of a higher rank than regular angels and are often depicted carrying swords while the Seraphims and Cherubims are depicted as angels with six wings – the first serve as attendants of God while the latter are guardians of holy places such as the gates of the garden of Eden. On the dome, the most common depiction is of Christ.

2.4.4 Mysteries and rituals of the Orthodox Church

In the context of the current study, the child assumes a central role. As a consequence, the presentation of information concerning the orthodox dogma and its associated practices contextualizes the child. The presence of children is quite apparent in the orthodox dogma, yet often it is overlooked due to familiarity with the subject on behalf of the believers. Initially, it is useful to state that the depiction of the children and the conceptualization of the child as a theological entity within the dogma are two different issues.

Within the Orthodox Christian tradition, children are visibly depicted in various religious contexts. Iconography, a hallmark of Orthodox religious art, frequently features children. For instance, the iconic representation of the Nativity showcases the infant Jesus in the manger, underscoring the significance of the visual portrayal of the child's birth. Additionally, children actively participate in rituals, most notably in the sacrament of baptism. Furthermore, the Orthodox tradition values childlike faith, emphasizing the purity of heart often found in children. This understanding underscores that children, as theological entities, possess a unique place in the spiritual fabric of the Church. The Church is also deeply invested in the spiritual growth and development of children, aiming to guide them in their journey toward spiritual maturity by nurturing their understanding of the faith.

To examine children's participation in the practices of the Church, it is necessary to define what these practices consist of. Greek Orthodox Christianity adheres to the Nicene Creed and the Seven Ecumenical Councils. These creeds and councils establish the fundamental doctrines and beliefs of the faith, emphasizing the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the importance of the sacraments and the veneration of saints.

In the Orthodox Church, there are Seven Mysteries or otherwise referred to as the Seven Sacraments which play a central role in the spiritual life of the faithful. These sacraments are considered sacred rites through which the divine grace of God is bestowed upon the participants. These are the Baptism, the Chrismation, the Holy Eucharist, the Confession, the Holy Unction, the Holy Matrimony (marriage) and the Holy Orders.

Baptism (Βάπτιση, Báptisi) is the sacrament of initiation into the Christian faith. It involves the ritual cleansing with water, symbolizing spiritual rebirth and the forgiveness of sins. Through baptism, an individual is incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church. A Greek Orthodox baptism is a profoundly significant event that marks the initiation of an individual into the Greek Orthodox Church. Traditionally, the baptism is performed on infant children but there is no age restriction for a person to be baptized. The ceremony takes place at the temple's entrance or narthex and begins with prayers and blessings by the priest. The child is anointed with holy oil to renounce evil and symbolize consecration to Christ. After undressing, the child is immersed three times in a baptismal font, reciting the Trinitarian formula (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) each time. A white garment is then donned to represent the purity and new life in Christ.

Then follows the sacrament of Chrismation (Χρίσμα, Chrísma) also known as Confirmation or Chrism, anointing the child with holy chrism on specific body parts to seal the Holy Spirit's presence. During this sacrament, the newly baptized person is anointed with holy chrism (consecrated oil) by the priest. It signifies the sealing of the Holy Spirit and the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. A procession, the recitation of the Lord's Prayer and a blessing complete the baptism, while a meal or celebration with

family and friends typically follows. The godparent's role remains integral to the child's spiritual upbringing after this significant rite of passage. Usually, the godparent is a person significant to the family, not a relative but a close friend or someone from the community that shares the same faith.

The Holy Eucharist (Θεία Κοινωνία, Theía Koinonía) often referred to as the Divine Liturgy in the Greek Orthodox tradition, is the central and most important sacrament. It involves the consecration of bread and wine, which become the true body and blood of Christ. Communion is received by the faithful as a means of spiritual nourishment and unity with Christ. In order to receive it, the person must have been baptized.

Confession and Repentance (Μετάνοια, Metánia) is the sacrament of repentance and forgiveness of sins. It involves the private confession of sins to a priest, who acts as a spiritual guide and offers absolution on behalf of God. The penitent is granted God's forgiveness and is encouraged to lead a life of repentance. However, it is usefeul to mention that this concept does not concern children as it is relevant for people who have a progressed life course and have committed sins for which they want to atone and lead a different life.

The Holy Unction (Άγιο Ευχέλαιο, Ágios Euchéleo) as sacrament involves the anointing with holy oil for the healing and forgiveness of physical and spiritual ailments. It is typically administered to the sick and people in need of spiritual healing. Sometimes it is performed in places as someone's home or grave in order to receive blessing or cleansing if the believer feels they need it.

The Holy Matrimony (Γάμος, Gámos) is the marriage which is a sacred union under the Orthodox Church. The sacrament of matrimony involves the exchange of vows and the blessing of the marriage by a priest. The man and woman to be married are united in a lifelong commitment under God and the marriage is considered a reflection of the union between Christ and the Church. The wedding typically takes place within the sanctuary of the temple and commences with the bride and groom being crowned with intertwined crowns, symbolizing their spiritual union. The priest offers prayers and blessings. The couple participates in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony with the exchange of vows, the blessing of wedding rings and the sharing of a common cup of wine. This act signifies the sharing of joys and sorrows in life together and then follows the procession around the altar, symbolizing their first steps as a married couple. As in many Orthodox traditions, the newlyweds may be presented with a Bible or other religious gifts to guide their life together. The wedding concludes with the priest's final blessings and well-wishes and it is customary for the couple to receive congratulations and join their families and guests in a joyous celebration.

The Holy Orders (Ιερωσύνη, Ierōsýni) as a sacrament pertains to the ordination of clergy, including bishops, priests and deacons. Through the laying on of hands by a bishop, individuals are consecrated to serve the Church and its sacramental life. Each level of ordination carries specific responsibilities and duties within the Church.

These Seven Mysteries are considered essential elements of the Greek Orthodox faith and provide a framework for the spiritual journey of the faithful within the Church. They serve to connect believers to God and strengthen the community of the Church while offering grace and guidance in their lives (Kallistos, 1995).

The child's position in the dogma and its practices holds significant bearing, dictating their role within the Orthodox community. Understanding how orthodoxy perceives children is crucial for determining their place in the religious community. In orthodoxy, the child is perceived as an innocent creature closer to God by nature. In contrast to the western dogmas of Christianity, the original sin of Adam and Eve is not perceived as

inherent and therefore people are not born in sin but they chose to act sinfully during the course of their lives (Kallistos, 1995). Therefore, children are considered an integral part of the religious community.

2.4.5 Sunday Schools

In the Greek Orthodox tradition, Sunday School, often referred to as "Κυριακάτικο Σχολείο" (Kyriakatiko Scholeio) in Greek, plays a vital role in the religious education of children and their attendance and engagement in the various activities is considered religious participation.

During a typical Sunday School session, children engage in various activities aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of Orthodox Christian beliefs and practices. The curriculum includes religious instruction on fundamental tenets, scripture study with emphasis on the seasonal festivities of the Church and exploration of the structure and significance of the Divine Liturgy and the other religious services.

Catechism classes may cover more advanced theological concepts, offering a comprehensive education on Orthodox doctrine depending on the age of children. Classes are age segregated for educational and social reasons mostly on developmental foundations. More specifically, the level of complexity concerning the content of classes as well as the activities designed for the children, are planned according to what is considered age appropriate. For example, for children up to the age of 12 activities include storytelling, drawing, choir, theater and group-based games depending on the Catechist's creativity. There are also various excursions for the whole family, depending on the willingness of the adults to engage in such activities. Excursions of this kind will be usually held in a place of religious significance that will also have premises for children to play (Chatzipavlidou, 2020).

For teenagers, activities may include collage, artifact creation, theater, choir and group discussions for various theological and social topics. It is very often that Catechists engage in conversations with teenagers for various quite challenging topics that may concern them such as drugs, pornography, domestic violence or moral dilemmas they may face with their friends at school. Some of these topics, children may find difficult to discuss with their parents and Sunday School transforms in a safe space providing that there are relationships of trust among their peers and their Catechists. As compass for such discussions are the teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Church, the Bible and the Gospels (Chatzipavlidou, 2020).

Therefore, Sunday Schools in the Greek Orthodox tradition play a vital role in the religious community by emphasizing religious education alongside cultural and social activities which aim to enrich a sense of community. Through these concerted efforts, Sunday School becomes a cornerstone in shaping the spiritual development, cultural identity and community engagement of the younger generation alongside with their families within the Greek Orthodox Church.

2.5 Current challenges
2.5.1 Economic crisis

During the past two decades, Greece seems to be in a constant economic crisis the origin of which started to become apparent in the late 1990s as the levels of public debt and inflation (Manolopoulos, 2011) kept escalating leading to government debt crisis in 2009. As a result, a series of Memoranda was signed in agreement and under the supervision of

the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The austerity measures taken led to further unemployment and sociopolitical instability. These top to bottom abrupt changes challenged the cohesion and the bonds of society resulting to sky rocketing levels of anxiety and depression which led to unprecedented suicide rates (Kubrin, 2022).

2.5.2 Mass immigration crisis

Another urgent problem is the massive immigration (namely "the refugee crisis") focused mainly on the islands and the capital. This unregulated inflow has created a chain of reactions. Politically, a new kind of insecurity to the public was manifested allowing for the rise of far-right political entities to gain popularity as a reaction to the creation of hot spots (structures to host large numbers of immigrants and refugees throughout the country, mainly funded by the EU) and the poorly designed immigration policies (Kassimis et al., 2015).

2.5.3 Covid-19 crisis

A current very problematic situation is the aftermath of the covid-19 pandemic and the measures taken by governments worldwide. The Greek government took measures which were criticized as particularly strict raising discussions even about the legal nature of many of them and their accordance to the constitution (Karavokyris, 2021) while some exclusionary measures, especially towards unvaccinated health care personnel, created social turmoil and severe ethical considerations (Mavridis et al., 2022).

The impact of the prolonged lockdowns caused unemployment rates to skyrocket alongside loss of property and debt. Furthermore, children were particularly affected as the measures extended to schools and the extracurricular activities as well putting them to a halt which also included the Sunday Schools. According to Magklara et al. (2022), the lockdowns in particular had an overall negative effect to the well-being of children including adolescents and their mental state in relation to socioeconomic factors such as the parental employment status and the level of conflict in the families.

The Church as an institution was heavily impacted as well. Attendance and performance or religious rituals such baptisms and marriages were prohibited. After the lockdowns, people were asked to attend wearing masks and present negative diagnostic tests or vaccination certificates to enter the temples. Children between the ages of 4-17 were expected to present a negative diagnostic certificate. The Sunday Schools or Catechism schools as they are called, were halted and all the activities for the children stopped. The tension that was created among the clergy and the people towards the government was intense.

In many cases, priests refused to comply to the state mandates even at the face of legal consequences. The example that stood out the most was the case of the Metropolitan Nektarios of Corfu who held a mass and offered holy communion to the attendees and he was brought to court. His trial ended with acquittal decision of the court triggering a heated debate on the conflict of duties to the mandates of the secular law. Another example that stood out was the effort of the Church of Crete to negotiate with the

ministry of education to negotiate the terms of the Easter celebration in 2020 as they refused to comply to the ministry's directives and celebrate the Resurrection of the Christ and the deliverance of the Holy Light at 9pm instead of midnight as it has been done traditionally (Howitt, 2021).

2.6 Summary

This chapter attempted to provide the reader with information concerning Greece geographically, politically, historically, sociologically and religiously in order to form a wholesome picture. For this purpose, special emphasis was placed on the social values of Greek society such as the concept of family, familial ties and values, the importance of hospitality, the educational system children attend, the sense of community and the element of resilience that are cultivated through these social institutions and what a typical childhood consists of in Greece. Moving on, the religious context was presented with sociopolitical and historical elements. In this context, the main mysteries of the Church were presented in order to understand the practices in which children participate. To conclude, there were presented current challenges the country is facing which affect the citizens and were brought up as severe concerns.

3 Theory Chapter

3.1 Introduction

Since the present thesis is conducted within the field of Childhood Studies, it is reasonable to present the key features of the field and some information concerning its emergence and evolution. Additionally, I will discuss the main aspects of the discourses that have shaped the field so far in relation to the theories I have chosen to engage with in my research.

Initially, I present the dominant conceptualizations of childhood prior to the establishment of the field of Childhood Studies in relation to children, of philosophers such as Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau as they were influential on conceptualizing childhood. Then I moved on to examining the influence of the developmental sciences on the treatment of children as well as Parson's socialization theory. Later on, I moved on to explaining the emergence of the "new paradigm" upon which the field of Childhood

Studies developed and the 6 key points of the "new" field. Further on, I present the concepts which I utilized for this specific research. However, the presented information is by no means exhaustive nor representational of Childhood Studies as a whole.

3.2 Historically dominant philosophies of childhood

Children and childhood have always been an integral part of societies throughout history. From prehistoric findings of children side by side with adults in working activities in potential hazardous environments such as salt mines (Werner, 2019), to philosophical and conceptual efforts such as Plato's Republic (circa 380 BC) and Plutarch's "The education of children", to Rousseau's "Emile" and up to current discourses of rights. It is quite clear that intellectuals have preoccupied themselves with the nature of children and their place in society or what this place should be. However, what has changed, and still undergoes changes, is our perception towards children and childhood and what it means in any given society to be a child.

The main sources that seem to have fueled the discourse in the field of Childhood Studies stretch back mostly to the Enlightenment as some of the most widely used terms originate from the work of relevant philosophers. The following list includes the part of their work that effectively affected the understanding of childhood and fueled the need for further studies – it is not representational of their whole philosophical work.

3.2.1 Philosophers of the Enlightenment

John Locke (1632-1704) claimed that humans are born as tabula rasa – a blank slate suitable for all sorts of influences. No inherent good, no inherent evil. He believed (in contrast to Plato for example), that the human mind at its birth is devoid of innate ideas or knowledge which have to be acquired through experience and education - the vehicle to shape one's character and the content of which should aim to produce citizens with individual rights to life, property and liberty. According to Locke, parents had a natural right to authority over their children which should be exercised with care and benevolence (Nazar, 2017).

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) on the other hand, believed that humans were born in original sin and as a consequence, they have inherent tendency towards malevolence driven by a desire of self-preservation. In this context, it has been argued that due to his grim view of the human nature, he considered children to be evil with mischievous inclination in direct need of parental discipline attributing to the parents - mothers especially- a necessarily authoritative power over the child (Tesar et al., 2021). For Hobbes, children and adults were driven by self-interest and an urge to satisfy their immediate needs and desires which inevitably results in conflict and violence. Therefore, in a macro-scale an external state authority should impose order and in a micro-scale the parents should impose discipline and order on their children through punishment.

Contrary to Hobbes, Rousseau (1712-1778) believed that humans were born inherently good, innocent and pure. It is society (the adult shaped world may I clarify) that later on strips away children's innocence and corrupts them. Consequently, it is society that needs to be changed and not the children. Furthermore, he claimed that children should develop naturally at their own pace with education being a gradual, individualized process and adult educators should be facilitators and offer guidance according to the child's individual talents, interests and needs (Zuckerman, 2017).

3.3 Apollonian and Dionysian – a dichotomous childhood

The concepts of the apollonian and dionysian child lie on two oppositional perspectives of childhood. The importance of conceptualizing childhood is manifested in the influence it has on the formation of child rearing practices and the making of state policies and in the western world, these two images of the child seem to have had quite a strong impact (Ansell, 2017).

As it was stated in a section above, Hobbes and Rousseau presented two diametrically different conceptualizations of children and childhood. For Hobbes, society should see how the mischievous child would be constrained and disciplined while for Rousseau the innocent and uncorrupted creature should be set free to develop in its own measures and be protected by the corruption of adults.

Inherent good, inherent evil, the battle between these two forces and their claim upon men has been a topic of various works in arts and philosophy. Therefore, the discourse over such oppositional elements was and is ongoing. Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) through his thorough study of Greek tragedies, places the concepts of the two images of lightful innocence versus the devilish mischief in the stage of Greek theater and presents in his Birth of Tragedy, the apollonian and the dionysian elements in human nature. The names were chosen after Apollo the god of light and Dionysus the god of wine and were both fundamental in the birth of theater. According to Nietzsche, through the dionysian state can offer men through an "orgiastic joy" the unification with nature and the experience of emotions to the fullest through self-forgetfulness. Apollonian state on the other hand, signifies individualism, and beauty but offers men a superficial knowledge of reality where order is illusionary. Therefore, Dionysus represented emotion while Apollo represented reason (Rand, 1999, p.140).

Ayn Rand (1905 – 1982) utilized Nietzsche's conceptualizations and the labels he created based upon Greek mythology, to describe the manner in which such "symbolic figures" are useful for men to integrate in their mind's complex abstractions. For Rand, reason and emotion are not mutually excluding but it is important to regulate one through the other (emotion through reason). Theoretical concepts, however, have quite a real effect on individual lives as they often guide our actions and may consequently lead to social changes through our interactions within various social structures. For Rand, the apollonian state represents the prevalence of reason and a target driven life that leads to accomplishments while the dionysian state leads to an aimless life guided by primordial whims, emotions and the pursue of instant gratifications, using the launching of Apollo 11 and the Woodstock concert as examples for her claims (Rand, 1999, p.139, 141).

Jenks observes that the dionysian model of the child that bears corruption and evil, can be linked to the original sin of Adam and Eve while the apollonian state resembles to the state of man in heavens before his fall and so the child in this view is the "heir to the sunshine and light, the espouser of poetry and beauty" (Jenks, 2005, p.64-65). In the modern western world, the apollonian image has prevailed. The child is precious, must be protected and nurtured in an aim driven manner yet in accordance with its individuality, needs and talents. Protective laws for children including the unborn, nurturing and guiding education systems (at least that is their stated purpose), age related prohibition of work and of substances that are considered harmful (yet allowed for adults in exchange for money), and so on.

Jenks links the two views with prevalence of certain social structures overall. The dionysian concept worked in favor of the cohesion of a society that held brutal child rearing practices in a manner of sacrificing childhood for a future adult society (Jenks,

2005, p.70). The apollonian concept on the other hand, encourages the formation of social practices "permeated by panopticism" (Jenks, 2005, p.70). While Jenks examines the connection between Bentham's panopticon (prison with a system of an internal surveillance) and Foucault's all-seeing social structure, he concludes that the view of the child as apollonian leads to the creation of self-regulatory systems for children. As apollonian children are encouraged to manifest their individuality and explore their uniqueness, it is becoming more challenging to operate in a context of shared ideas, beliefs, values and cohesion. The focus on internal life progressively leads to self-regulatory behaviors and "shame is replaced by guilt" (Jenks, 2005, p. 70).

Such concepts are both grounded in a present state of being and a future state of existing with all its potential. The hypotheses of these dualities lie on the belief that if the A approach is taken in life (apollonian/dionysian) then the B result will follow as an outcome (achievements/recklessness) and thus, measures will have to be taken either to prevent or punish in accordance with what is considered socially desired and accepted. Dionysian and apollonian seem to serve as umbrella terms that may differentiate slightly according to the theoretical background of the scholar that utilizes them.

Ansell (2005), building on Jenks' writings on the matter, has categorized the attributes that each of the two models bears in the western world. The apollonian childhood is an age of play, passiveness, happiness, innocence and in need of protection from the world while the dionysian child should be "seen and not heard", disciplined and in need of protection from itself. She moves on to identifying the common points of these two models as in both, the child is vertically differentiated from the adult world, a creature of nature, incomplete and belongs in the familial context (Ansell, 2005, p. 11). Such views also led to a disregard of what actual children had to say and also to the formation of designated spaces separately from the adult spheres. Even though modern western societies have tried to overcome the stereotyping of children, media representations often focus and project the apollonian image leading to further perpetuation of the stereotype of innocent and vulnerable (Ansell, 2005, p.13).

In my perception, it was necessary to initially explore the origins of these concepts and then move on to their use by sociologists in Childhood Studies. Such analytical presentation will be useful for the reader as later on in the analysis the occurrence of such concepts, perceptions, contradicting dichotomies and images were invoked by the participants in their narrations and their explanations of their choices and experiences. The Sunday School, for example, is a designated space for only children as participants in order to receive guidance and knowledge of the world. However, in orthodoxy, which is the context of my research, the terms dionysian/apollonian are not used in the same manner nor do I imply that participants have used them. They are terms utilized in the literature of childhood studies and provide concepts that are helpful to understand the decisions and choices made by both children and adults.

The religious gatekeepers who participated in the research, expressed concerns which fit this discourse as they stated that through shaping the religious environment in which children participate, they sought to achieve an individual flourishing through communal interaction and the formation of community bonds. Therefore, the focus on internal life and self-regulation would result in constraining the "weaknesses of the flesh" (Kallistos, 1995, p.61)

3.4 Childhood studies and the "new" paradigm

The importance of children's accounts preoccupied the work of some scholars in the 20th century in a systematic manner that led to the creation of the sociology of childhood as a distinct field.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between conceptualizing and envisioning children's "proper" position and their potential utility in a society to taking their actual accounts into consideration. To only consider a proper position concerning their future citizenship means that children were valued only for their potential to become adults. What this future adulthood would mean affected state measures and social behaviors towards them in their current status of childhood creating historical contexts for childhood overall.

The 20th century had a remarkable significance for children in social, economic and political aspects through some quite turbulent processes: from the Moscow declaration of the rights of the Child (1917-1918 during the Russian revolution of the Bolsheviks) which stressed the need to politically establish children's rights (Liebel, 2016), to the discourse in the USA about children as an economic labor force (Zelizer 1994), to the manner in which the authoritarian regimes of the century-nazism, fascism and communism-envisioned the place (utility) of children and youth in their "new world order(s)" through various youth organizations and targeted political measures (Ericsson & Simonsen, 2005), to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC drafted in 1989).

It can be understood that the sociopolitical systems in the past created spaces for children and attributed certain characteristics to childhood. Children had their own part in the social, economic and political landscape but not their own voice. This realization was quite eloquently condensed in Hardmann's words of children being "muted voices" (Woodhead & Faulkner,2008, p.3).

The '80s seemed to mark a turning point of differentiation from the previous pre-sociological discourses. In the following two decades, theorists moved towards recognizing children's agency and active participation within the social fabric as well as the fluidity that characterizes childhood. In an effort to move away from positivistic approaches and power dominated authoritarian theories and ideologies that often objectified children, pioneer scholars created a "new sociology of childhood" by making the necessary paradigm shift in their approaches. James and Prout (1997, p.4) managed to articulate into 6 key points the basic principles of what was considered as the new paradigm:

1. childhood is not a natural phenomenon but rather a social construction
2. it is a social variable which should be examined alongside other variables such as gender and class
3. children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of being studied in their own right
4. children are active participants in society and agents in their social lives
5. ethnography provides essential methodological tools for researching childhood
6. the new paradigm contributes to reconstructing childhood as a social phenomenon

As one can understand, the new paradigm takes nature, rationality, universality and deterministic theories out of the picture and offers quite a different approach than their predecessors. As scholars are children of their times so to speak, we should take into

consideration that these principles were conceived in highly industrialized and globalized societies that allowed more space for the exploration of cultural differences.

The aforementioned principles work as compass for researching childhood while acknowledging children's agency instead of addressing them as passive recipients of adult influences and studying their experiences in their own right and merit. Would it be possible to form such a field and fuel ongoing research without these acknowledgments?

However, it seems to have been quite challenging for scholars to provide a solid and universal definition of what are childhood studies (though it could be seen as ironic to abolish universalism and yet seek for a universally accepted and applicable definition). Even though fluidity and flexibility bear advantages, it is useful to have a commonly accepted definition without excluding concerns and criticisms. The debates of the field seem to concern the level that the used terminology is accurately representative. For example, it is a matter of concern which terms describe the field in the most representational manner if words such as "interdisciplinary" or "multidisciplinary" bear their own nuances (Smith & Greene, 2014, p.8).

Scholars and contributors in Childhood Studies come from a variety of scientific fields. Therefore, scholars such as Prout and Thorne call for dismantling any "unproductive dichotomies" of the past and engagement in a productive dialogue of the various disciplines (Smith & Greene, 2014, p.9). Thus, the effort of contemporary scholars to reimagine childhood studies by incorporating perspectives of modern fields and current discourses which attempt to stretch and challenge traditional boundaries while promoting inclusivity and exploring in various cultural contexts what it means to be a child of the 21st century (Spyrou et al, 2018). To maintain such vigorous reflexivity and awareness may ensure ongoing contributions to the field.

To do research in the context of Childhood Studies about a religious context in contemporary Greece, brought challenges in some aspects. To employ such concepts during the interaction with participants initiated interesting conversations and made it easier to identify how participants conceptualized childhood and what aspirations they had for the future.

3.5 Structural functionalism and socialization theory

Apart from the influence of developmentalism, during the '60s, the most influential theory concerning childhood, was Talcott Parson's structural functionalism (Smith and Greene, 2014). Structural functionalism addresses society as a complex system with interdependent parts that operate with each other in order to achieve stability through social conformity. This conformity can be achieved through socialization which in its essence, is a lifelong process of internalization of the values, norms and social expectations and integrating them into their own behavior and reasoning.

His theory emphasized the importance of the family in socializing children as a preparation for their role in society as adults. Family was understood as an integral interrelated part of society along with education, forms of government and religion. These institutions contributed to maintaining social stability and consistency. Through socialization, children internalize the values, norms and social expectations in order to reproduce them as adults later on and contribute to the social equilibrium in their turn (Fenn, 2009). However, the theory received criticism for reproducing gender stereotypes and neglecting to examine issues of diversity and relations of power and inequality.

The parsonsian theory, however, has been heavily criticized for conceptualizing children

as passive beings who merely internalize the external world. This view significantly strips children of their agency. The reason I make use of his theory in the thesis is attributed to the fact that most of the adult participants emphasized the cultural effect on their children while often neglecting their children's agency. They also underscored that they consider religion a suitable vehicle for proper socialization. Briefly, Parsons' theory may have been academically criticized, but what it offers as a concept is present and utilized in the minds of adult gatekeepers.

3.6 Social constructionism

This particular theory seems to face challenges in forming one accepted definition that describes the content of the theory. Consequently, it becomes necessary to elaborate on its principles to make it understood.

As a theoretical approach, it rejects positivistic thinking, and it propels the research to consider his/her own biases when conducting research as it claims that there can be no unbiased interpretation (Burr, 2015). According to the theory, meaning is not inherent in objects nor event. Instead, it is a matter of individuals and communities to negotiate any constructed and attributed meaning. For a wholesome understanding (if such thing is possible), it is important to acknowledge that experiences are influenced by an individual's sociocultural and historical surroundings. Furthermore, with this context and in interaction with the aforementioned factors, language and discourse are tools for (co)creating meaning and shaping social reality. Inevitably, the theory accepts the possibility of multiple interpretations of reality with equal validity. However, this notion of equality does not mean that social constructionism fails to acknowledge unequal power dynamics that may result to marginalization of certain voices and groups. Quite the contrary as through challenging universal categories, it seeks to reestablish the balance among different voices (Burr, 2015).

Two main dimensions of social constructionism that operate as lenses of different focus are the micro social and the macro social constructionism (Burr,2015). Regarding childhood studies and the current research, the micro level is utilized to interpret children's interactions in their everyday encounters and how they negotiate meaning. The macro level focuses on social structures that give space to interactions among groups and individuals.

In my understanding, social constructionism can be utilized complementarily to the rest of the theories despite their differences as they address different aspects of the social world and they emphasize the importance of the relationship between individuals and society. Social constructionism highlights how language, communication, and shared meanings create social reality, while relational agency underscores the role of human agency and social practices in the ongoing reproduction and transformation of social structures.

3.7 Intergenerational perspective and relational agency

The two notions of intergenerationality and relational agency are examined together in the manner that children and adults belong in different generations with each generation sharing different experiences yet, through expressed agency they affect the members of other generations. Such interactions operate in a manner of mutual shaping and constraining social institutions.

In exploring the dynamics of generational relationships and their impact on social structures, this discussion revolves around the conceptualizations offered by scholars such as Alanen. The concept of a generation is multifaceted, encompassing not only biological relationships but also shared experiences and socialization processes. Alanen's insights provide a lens through which we can understand generation both in terms of kinship systems, involving various family members across different age groups and as age cohorts—groups of individuals born in the same year who undergo common historical and social events. This discourse examines Alanen's definition of generation and its relevance to intergenerational relationships, particularly focusing on the interactions between children and their parents.

Alanen's perspective on the concept of generation and generational relationships is that a generation can be understood through systems of kinship, encompassing individuals such as children, parents and grandparents. She proposes two ways of understanding the meaning of generation: one as a group of people born the same year and another through generational orderings which describe age groups or cohorts. Drawing on Mannheim's ideas, she suggests that age cohorts, representing people born in the same year, share common historical and social experiences, leading to the development of a collective consciousness making them an "actual," active generation (Alanen, 2009, p.164).

Within the scope of the thesis, generational relations pertain to connections between individuals at distinct life stages, with a specific emphasis on the parent-child dynamic. Utilizing Alanen's viewpoint enriches the comprehension of generations and the interactions between them, underscoring the significance of common experiences and shared socialization processes.

The expressed agency of each generation influences and shapes the experiences of others. This mutual interplay operates as a mechanism of both shaping and constraining social institutions, bridging the concepts of intergenerational order and relational agency within the broader context of societal dynamics.

The notion of relational agency in childhood studies refers to the understanding that children are active agents who construct their identities, make choices and navigate their social worlds within the context of their relationships and interactions with others, including adults and peers (Burkitt, 2016). This concept challenges traditional views that perceive children as passive recipients of socialization or as individuals entirely shaped by external influences.

While the agency of individuals is widely recognized, the relational approach to agency links the individuality to a group's dynamic highlighting the interdependency of human lives. Within this context, the interdependency between children and their social environment is emphasized as their agentic expression is intertwined with their relationship with their parents, their teachers, caregivers, peers and any other significant people in their lives. The influence among them may be varying but mutual. The opportunities and constraints for agency may vary depending on the cultural, social, and institutional contexts in which children live and interact. Relational agency is therefore context-specific (Raithelhuber, 2016).

Children actively engage in processes of identity formation. They develop a sense of self and their position within social categories such as gender, race, and ethnicity through their interactions and relationships. There is, however, the possibility that children may find different ways to express their agency depending on their age and their temperament. Therefore, it is important to ethically consider showing respect for

children's differences as agentic factors and find ways to include them in any decision making that may affect their lives.

3.8 Cultural intensification theory

Cultural intensification theory is a concept originating from cultural anthropology and sociology that describes how cultural practices and traditions are emphasized and become prominent in times of social change and/or transition. According to this theory, certain cultural elements may be intensified as a response to social, economic or political factors. Processes of globalization, migration or modernization (cultural or economic) could trigger the becoming more salient of practices linked to traditions and established cultural values.

Within this context, relevant cultural symbols may act as sources of a group's stability and identity expression. A religious ritual for example, that uses objects of symbolic significance universally recognized by its participants/believers, "also integrates texts and drama, and often enhances this pervasive process", (Davies, 2008, p.7). As a theoretical approach employed withing a religious topic, it can be useful to explore how individuals make meaning out of their social experiences and how this meaningful interpretation is influenced by their personal characteristics such as temperament and cognition.

According to Davies (2008), religious traditions may be rooted in historical contexts, but they can adapt and undergo certain shifts in order to address contemporary challenges. In such cases, religious leaders attempt to maintain a balance between keeping tradition (which strengthens the group's cohesion and resilience) while reinterpreting and recontextualizing religious teachings. Davies highlights that religion can simultaneously respond to and shape cultural dynamics in transitional times, becoming a cultural force in itself.

In my research, this is a useful theory as it explains the rising participation in liturgy attendance and the enrollment in Sunday Schools following a turbulent period of economic crises, mismanaged immigrational flow and covid related restrictive measures. Additionally, it explains the effort participants are making to maintain social cohesion by forming bonds and taking up activities within the religious context, while trying to find meaning and gain strength by the Church's teachings.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter, I presented the theories and concepts I utilized in order to interpret the gathered data. Each theory and concept had its own utility to synthesizing my interpretation and make meaning out of adult's and children's narrations.

I began by presenting some of the historically dominant philosophical ideas concerning childhood including the work of Locke, Hobbs and Rousseau. I then moved on to exploring the notions of the apollonian and dionysian child which lead to a dichotomous conceptualization of childhood. Next, I presented the developmental school of thought to which the reactionary paradigm shift led to the "new" paradigm in Childhood Studies. Additionally, I described Parsons' structural functionalism before moving on to describing Alanen's conceptualization of generational order while combining it with the notion of relational agency. Furthermore, the theory of social constructionism was presented before closing the chapter with reference to cultural intensification theory.

4 Methodology chapter

Each of these concepts sheds light to a different aspect of the participants' relation to religion as well as the facets of the interaction between them as actors of the same community.

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe the methods and the reasoning for their choice in order to conduct this research. To clearly state the principles of the adopted methodology as well as any challenges that occur, is fundamental for building the validity of research findings.

4.2 Methodology and knowledge production

4.2.1 Aspects of methodology and knowledge production

In Childhood Studies, the driving principle of the field is that children are competent social actors with expertise about their own lives and valuable input for research. The shift that led to conducting research "with" children rather than doing research "about" them, let alone "on" them in some fields (Woodhead, 1999), resulted in methodological changes and the development of a set of tools in accordance with this paradigm. The various sociological fermentations of the '70s and '80s along with the academic discourses that led to this shift, strongly relied upon the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Beazley & Ennew, 2006). Consequently, the vocabulary of "rights" was incorporated in the academic discourse leading to different conceptualizations of what scientific research should be, including Childhood Studies.

The "right to be properly researched" as Ennew et al. (2009) would phrase it, seeks to address children as active participants in the matters that concern them. The right to be properly researched refers to the ethical and respectful treatment of children in research, which is grounded in the principles of children's rights and well-being. Ennew et al. (2009) argued that children have the right to be properly researched, which means that research should be conducted in an ethical and respectful manner that prioritizes the well-being of children. This includes obtaining informed consent from children and their caregivers, protecting their privacy and confidentiality, ensuring that research is conducted in a safe and non-harmful manner and that the findings are communicated in a clear and accessible manner that is sensitive to their needs. The authors also stressed the importance of involving children in the research process, recognizing their agency and expertise, and giving them a voice in the research process. As rights are to be practiced in order to be respected, I kept the principles in mind while devising my research plan and during my presence in the field.

Furthermore, to include them in research and allow for space to have their voice expressed (which is what giving voice practically means), leads to favoring participatory approach for this type of research. However, "participatory" as a term itself, comes with

its own discourse concerning the level of engagement on the part of the participants as well as the aim of the research. The variations of participatory research stretch from viewing children and gatekeepers as participants and designing techniques to include them to including them in all levels of the research from the design to dissemination and to actively bring social change (Grant, 2017). Overall, participatory research places importance on acquiring insights from the point of view of the individuals for whom the researcher initiated the research, rather than solely relying on the researcher's perspective. Participatory methods facilitate the recognition and addressing of the specific cultural, historical, socio-economic, geographical and political factors that impact a community's practices (Beazley & Ennew, 2006).

4.3 Doing research with children

It has been widely perpetuated among scholars that children are a marginalized group within society and within research. While this could accurately paint the picture on many occasions, I think it can be debated that as a perspective it is not the case for all contexts universally. Children may hold different positions than adults in society without this meaning that they are necessarily marginalized as a different position may bear various liberties, responsibilities, expectations and authority.

In terms of research, children would not initiate a research (Christensen, 2004), at least not in the academic context as an adult researcher would do. Scholars in favor of including children as much as possible, claim that their participation in research would broaden the academics perspectives and enrich the knowledge about children's lives. Furthermore, the necessity for conducting research focused on children and childhood and the development of Childhood Studies will always remain relevant for several reasons. Initially, children are an organic part of every society and their social worlds evolve along with the dynamic changes within the culture they live. Secondly, the interest to understand children is at its core an effort to better understand human lives overall whether one adopts the developmentalists' perspective or the social constructionists' approach.

However, research with children may differ than research with adults which makes it important for a researcher to reflect upon the matter. Punch (2002) stresses that this differentiation can be attributed not so much to actual inherent differences between children and adults but mostly to their marginalized position within society and the adult perceptions and bias towards children. Considering this observation but also the discourse on children's rights stretching from protectionism to emancipatory schools of thought (Hanson, 2012), I reflected on my own stance towards children, at least within the research framework.

Such reflections came in handy in the fieldwork as some of the adult participants were a bit puzzled by the fact that children were asked to give consent and sign a form for the research. The adequacy of adult consent stemmed from three basic cultural beliefs in Greek society: a) the parent is fully responsible for the child, b) the parents want their children's best interest and c) the parents should protect their children. Therefore, if the parent gives consent, it means that any potential hazards have been considered and the situation has been evaluated as good for the child. The child's expressed consent was

thought of as probably unnecessary and excessive. This stance was not a disregard of the value of their child's consent but the officiality of reading and signing a document in the same or a similar manner an adult had to do it for the research was an unusual element for them.

In childhood studies children are often asked to consent orally rather than through signing. However, since both parents and children were open to discuss about the significance of informed and formal consent, it was a handy opportunity to break the barrier that placed lesser significance in the signature of the child and utilized it as a power balancing tool. Moreover, children participants expressed that the fact of having to sign a paper was entertaining for them as usually only adults were asked to sign on their behalf.

To have reflected upon such matters, drawing from the discourses of the field, provided me with the ability to hold relevant conversations on the matter without patronizing or manipulating them into giving consent or conveniently obliging but actually addressing their concerns and putting them into context as I thought it was important for them to fully understand the process.

4.4 Access and recruitment process

Access in the field is often described as one of the most difficult parts of one's research project (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). When considering which manner would be probably the most efficient for me to gain access to the field, I concluded that it would be best to start from what was familiar to me and map possible gatekeepers that could function as mediators on my behalf.

The reason for doing this is that recruitment of a gatekeeper who is appreciated in the community of interest, could be quite beneficial in terms of establishing rapport and achieving a level of communication beyond the absolute formalities. However, to utilize the familiarity of a gatekeeper with the members of a community, does not on its own guarantee neither rapport nor unobtrusive access to participants. It is merely a first and more convenient step into getting introduced to the people of a community in probably less time than it would take otherwise.

Choosing a familiar person to act as a mediator for one's research is an important process as the researcher brings into the project another person that may influence the outcome of involvement in various ways. The person whose help I considered asking was very active within the religious community with an extensive network of contacts and was considered trustworthy and friendly. In addition to these features, he had also received religious training and had knowledge of theological and institutional matters. During our communication, I explained the aim of my research and the voluntary nature of the participation.

An additional reason for choosing to start by contacting a familiar person for advice and guidance is that the field I knew in Athens, could have changed during my absence in Norway, in ways of which I could be unaware. For example, the levels of participation in

Sunday schools fluctuated after the covid-19 measures and it was one of my concerns at the beginning of the research. This changed progressively as I was informed that things were restored to their initial function. Furthermore, the priest I had contacted while deciding to choose this topic, had been transferred to a different diocese by the time I was cleared to proceed for fieldwork. My contact was most helpful by guiding me through these changes by introducing me to a priest who was currently in charge of the youth programs of the diocese of my fieldwork.

4.4.1 Data collection and fieldwork

Professional obligations in Norway during the period I had to conduct fieldwork, set a constraining limitation concerning the time I could spend in Greece. Utilization of digital means of communication became a necessity as we had to keep in touch with the participants. Via emails, phone calls and instant messaging, I sent the proper documentation to the gatekeepers and organized the meetings I would have to do in Athens.

After the fieldwork, we kept in touch with the participants discussing the research questions even further as well as the findings or any other concerns they may had. However, distant com munication through phone calls is a kind of communication that bears its own challenges stretching from the conditions under which one answers a phone call to the absence of facial and bodily expressions (Psathas, 1995).

Beyond discussions and exchange of written text, we had the opportunity to exchange photos of material. Children would send me more drawings they made on the research topic or through their gatekeepers-either parent or Sunday School teacher if they were too young to have internet access.

The gathering of data was completed in two phases. Initially, I arrived in Greece for fieldwork in December 2022 and stayed for two weeks. A friend of mine who was very active in the religious community, brought me in contact with the Priest who was responsible for the Sunday Schools in this particular diocese. After we were introduced, I described the nature and the aims of my research and he agreed to participate. However, to ensure the legitimacy of the process on his behalf as a gatekeeper, he requested that I get authorization from the Metropolis responsible for the temples of the diocese. Due to the festivities in honor of Saint Nicholas, their program was overloaded and my efforts to contact them were not fruitful. Therefore, I decided that due to the time restriction I had, it was necessary to proceed alternatively and redesign my approach. I asked the person who assisted me to introduce me, if possible, directly to the families of children who participated in the Church. The consent forms were distributed and I held initial introductory meetings with the parents who were interested in participating. After these, we scheduled visitations to proceed into conducting research utilizing the methods.

During the process of the data I had collected, I realized that the children who participated were boys who had experience as altar boys. The participation in liturgies require more involvement on their behalf and their participation is more visible. In order to include girls as well as to work in a larger setting, I contacted the Mitropolis again in a time that involved no major events or celebrations. This time they responded by handing me an official document of their authorization for me to conduct research in the community. I returned in the field on March 2023 for a second round of data collection for two weeks. The Priest who was responsible for the Youth Programs brought me in contact with the volunteers of the Sunday Schools and he informed the parents as well for my research. He also distributed the consent forms so that the potential participants would be well informed quite before I returned to Greece for fieldwork. As they had my

information, those interested contacted me and asked further questions for clarification. As in the first phase of my fieldwork, we scheduled a meeting to introduce ourselves and talk further about how to proceed. It was a good opportunity to talk in detail with the activities they do and how to fit my research in the Sunday School's program.

With all the participants, I tried to discuss the content of my research questions, the methods I chose and ask for their insight. I encouraged them to make recommendations in order to apply the principles of participatory research. It was fruitful to have such discussions as the participants were able to understand what I was interested in and they could communicate about it with the parents and the children in a clear manner. The participatory approach was very valuable as their experience and their knowledge helped me broaden my perspective and understand better the research setting. This turned out to be particularly useful as my time to conduct research was limited and with their contribution, I managed to avoid potential pitfalls and adapt quicker to the setting.

It is possible that the terms "participatory" and "inclusion" may seem like an easily used mantra but there is much value in this approach. A collaboration of insiders and outsiders, in this case the gatekeepers of the religious community and myself, to jointly work on the research instead of having the solemn control as a researcher can lead to a more fruitful contribution to answering the research questions and this could lead to a change of the research questions during fieldwork. To examine a setting under the scope of a research may contribute to a shift of understanding for them as well. An approach of this kind also addresses ethical concerns of representation and accuracy of the interpretation of the findings as it makes it possible for the participants' perspective to be part of the public or in this case, the academic *voicescape* through the writing hand of the researcher*.*

4.5 Research setting and participants

The research setting was described in the background chapter in more detail. The specific diocese in which I did my research is in an urban setting somewhat close to the center of the city. The temple is considered relatively sizable with the congregation' numbers varying depending on the festivities and celebrational occasions. The number of children attendees was not stable and it could vary from no children attendees in some liturgies to   ten attendees including the altar boys who participated in the ceremony.

In this section, I will refer to the Sunday School more specifically. The role of a Sunday School in the greek orthodox setting, is to educate children in various religious matters about God, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and Mother Mary, the Saints and the Holy Scriptures, the sacraments, the traditions and practices of the Orthodox Church.

In addition to learning about the Orthodox faith, Sunday School also aims to have an important role in building community ties and fostering fellowship among people in the Church. It seeks to provide an opportunity for children and youth to develop friendships and relationships with others who share their faith and to participate in activities and events that are relevant to their spiritual development. In the specific setting I did research, some of the activities performed for the aforementioned purposes, were sports tournaments and theater performances with religious thematics as well as excursions for its members.

The Sunday School is held after the Sunday liturgy in the morning and noon hours while the session for the adolescents is during afternoon and evening hours. The classes are divided into categories according to age related criteria. While some Sunday Schools may divide the groups also according to gender criteria in boys' and girls' classes, the Sunday School I researched held mixed groups. The children in nursery schools had their own class, the children in primary school their own and the teenagers their own. It is possible for classes to join for common activities as it happened for the sake of my research at a point and it was obvious that children were all familiar with one another.

The number of participants depended on the particular setting. The number of attendees in the Sunday School and the number of research participants was different due to three main reasons: a) some Sunday School participants were not consistent in attending and therefore it was purely a matter of chance to find them, b) some had to leave early due to parental obligations and c) some consistent participants were absent due to unexpected reasons such as illness. Due to anonymity and to avoid giving features that could lead to identifying the actual diocese, I do not refer to specific numbers of the children who have enrolled and are registered in Sunday School. Yet, in this research, 20 children participated with whom we met initially on Sunday School where I was introduced to them by the priest and their Catechists. Of these participants, 10 in number were boys and the girls were 10 as well (for details, see Appendix 6).

The adult gatekeepers and participants of my research presented various levels of interest and engagement. I faced no actual difficulty with anyone and they all assisted me. On my part I tried to interfere with their program as little as possible. The ones that we kept in contact with by utilizing digital means of communication, called me "a friend of the community" and they wanted to share with me content of their activities relevant to holy festivities of each season. This type of communication was not based on any type of discrimination towards other gatekeepers. On the contrary, it was based on the free volition of each individual to choose their level of involvement in this project and their engagement to me personally. On my part, I felt comfortable maintaining such communication as well since it was based on free will and consent. In numbers, there were 10 adult participants out of whom 6 were men and 4 were women.

4.6 Researcher's role and position

The role of the researcher is a multifactorial issue depending on the nature of one's research and the setting in which it is conducted. Sharing common ethnic and cultural grounds results in easier understanding communicating with them compared to how it would be in a foreign setting. On the other hand, this may come with a disadvantage as well because there were things that could be taken for granted and overlooked due to familiarity (Berger, 2015). Therefore, I tried to distance myself and develop a new perspective in the field. I utilized the parts of identity that would make it easier to establish connections and at the same time my role as a researcher allowed me to ask for questions and clarifications on matters and terminology that could be considered as common knowledge. I reminded myself that for a researcher in the field there is no common knowledge to be taken for granted.

At the beginning of our meetings and activities, we all introduced ourselves by stating our name, age and any related information we wanted to share. I realized that my age of 35 propelled both adults and children to make their own assumptions for me. In the case of the adults, it meant that I must have been through complexities in life that would make my ears prone to listen to concerns and personal issues closer to middle age. Children had their own assumptions and expectations as well. I was young enough to feel they could share even "silly" concerns and old enough to think that it was a bit strange to be a student again. It is interesting to see that what has been described by scholars as social constructions of childhood and relevant expectations by adults, also applies to children. By observing their surroundings and the society in which they live, they form their assumptions and apply them according to certain criteria. For example, for many children it was bizarre that I was an adult who chose to become a student again or that I did not have my own family. It contradicted with what they are culturally accustomed to according to which one finishes their studies during their twenties, then they get to work and have a family. Even the addressing of some issues as "silly" when telling them to me could reveal a contradiction of wanting to share something of importance but deem that a person of this age and status (academic researcher in my case) would consider them "silly". The basic difference is that adults would not pose any personal questions about me while children would ask for clarifications in an open manner, especially during personal interviews or small group focus group discussions. Their genuine interest was refreshing for me.

As a student of a foreign university, I was asked a lot of questions about the institution of my studies and Norway. Adults were more interested in matters of everyday life while children were more curious about mythology and the snowy landscapes. More specifically, during the phase of our introduction, they shared with me what they knew about Norway from movies and documentaries. In addition, they felt like they should be more careful and proper towards me but as we got into the activities, this formality that could put distance between us, was overcome and children seemed to forget or put aside what seemed to fascinate them at the beginning. Thanks to the assistance I received from the Catechists, children felt comfortable to see me as part of the activities program and let the activity schedule unfold.

4.7 Tools and methods used

4.7.1 Introduction

In the following section, I analyze the methods I used for the present research which include individual interviews, focus group discussions and individual drawings. I present the reasons why I made the specific choices while also mentioning the challenges each method presented during fieldwork and how these were addressed.

4.7.2 Interviews

Interviews are a tool towards which I'm very favorably inclined as it is a process I enjoy and I'm familiar with due to my past experience in projects of Oral History. However, it was necessary for me to reconsider the nature of the interviews I would have to conduct on the fieldwork in order to utilize this experience rather than allowing bias to intervene

in the process. In addition, my experience with interviews was mainly with adults concerning their past experiences and memories. In this case, the nature of interviews had a different focus with minors included as well. Semi-structured interview is the preferable tool as it allows space for the participant to take upon an active role concerning the flow and the content of discussion.

Qualitative interviews require careful design of the interview guide, yet the researcher should be attentive and prepared to follow up on interesting points raised by the participants even if these points seem to deviate by the initial plan of the researcher (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). During fieldwork, this was quite a common occurrence. Almost every interview exceeded the time frame we had initially set with the participants due to the good flow the conversations turned out to develop. It was also very common to have much additional information added by the participants after the switching off of the recording device.

The presence of such a device seemed to be noticed mostly at the beginning and the end of the interview as the pressing of the button would symbolically initiate a process which had started long before. The officiality of the research was reflected in the swift of the posture and attitude of the participants due to the awareness of the recording of what would be said. However, we managed to gradually relax and have a conversation in a friendly manner. The recording device would become noticed again when I had to turn it off and this seemed to put participants in a state of thinking what more they could have said or shown to me. This resulted in more intimate and personal sharing of information in some cases or the presentation of more material. In such cases, I asked if I could take notes of our conversation and if participant agreed, I did so while keeping the discussion ongoing. The most challenging part was that I had to decide on the spot which information was too sensitive to include regardless of relevancy. To keep the process within ethical and deontological boundaries, I presented my notes to the participants if they wanted to see them and asked if I had understood correctly what they had shared. Needless to mention that if they asked me to not share or take notes on something, I did not do it.

In some other occasions I could receive messages with additional material by the participants even days or weeks after the initial interview. These occurrences led me to reconceptualize a conversation and perceive it not necessarily as a fluent interaction with distinct beginning and end in time and space but rather as an open-ended and even fractured puzzle with delivered pieces requiring synthesizing to make a whole.

Qualitative interviews typically require a comprehensive analysis of the gathered data, which entails coding, categorization, and interpretation to uncover prevalent patterns and themes. The soundness and consistency of the findings of qualitative interviews are largely influenced by the thoroughness of the research design, the caliber of data collection and analysis, and the degree to which the outcomes are rooted in the perspectives of the interviewees (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005).

Participants of interviews were the priests, the volunteers of the Sunday Schools, the parents of children and children themselves. The difference between interviewing children and adults is that children would be interviewed not alone but with a sibling or a friend with whom they would feel comfortable. This was done in order to allow children to make their own choice of setting and to make the whole process friendlier and pleasant. Additionally, it would also work as an ethically protective factor for myself as a researcher to have adults present at all stages of the activities meaning that even in the case where I would be with the children drawing or talking, an adult of the familial environment would always be present in the premises even if not participating directly in our activity.

In the case of interviewing parents and their children, the interviews would be conducted in their home while using different rooms. For example, with the parents we would use the kitchen premises to talk while drinking a hot beverage while their children would play in their room or be absent from an extracurricular activity or school. Then, with the children we would use their own room or the living room while the door of the room would remain open and the space always accessible to the parent. With some of the Catechists and some of the children, we held our conversations with the premises of the Sunday School. The choice of the place was left entirely upon the participants. On the total, I interviewed 7 adults and 10 children.

4.7.3 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussion is a tool that I used supplementarily to interviews as within the group, topics may arise through the interaction of the participants that may have remained unexpressed during the individual interview. This could be attributed to several factors such as the group dynamic that can be manifested where people can express their opinions and thoughts while listening to others and add information or interfere to correct what they think is misperceived or even challenge the other participants in a manner that the researcher will not attempt to do for the sake of the validity of the data (Evans, 2017).

In occasions of occurring conflicts, I sensed that as a researcher I would have to work as a moderator to diffuse any negative tension without choosing sides by expressing personal opinion as this could affect the participants' behavior towards me. I paid attention to the reason that fused any conflicts as I consider such occurrences valuable providers of knowledge. To diffuse a conflict of participants for the sake of the overall discussion without passing judgment or expressing personal opinion could be trickier and more complex than it sounds initially as the familiarity that is being developed during interactions with the participants could easily lead to decreased awareness and propel spontaneous behavior.

Familiarity could also lead to overlooking some topics as it is aforementioned but a FGD can be very useful on this matter. A specific example on this topic can be provided from an incident during fieldwork while we were holding a FGD and talking about the reasons children chose to attend liturgies and/or participate in the rituals and their activities in the Sunday Schools, I only interfered to ask for clarifications on their sayings or ask for supplementary questions to enable the flow of their narrations. As the discussion seemed to come to an end, a mother observed that I had neglected to ask about the role of family in the children's relationship with religion. I was surprised that I had neglected to ask about such a crucial matter as I thought of it as a given by that point. To paraphrase the popular saying, familiarity may breed neglect. In that particular setting, the influence of the mother's affiliation to religion over her children and her parents' religious practices had been thoroughly discussed during our interview and this is why it came so easy to me to take that aspect for granted. Without her intervention, I would probably neglect to put it as a topic of discussion for the group.

At this point, it would be important to mention that FGD as a tool can be quite tough to handle, especially if one lacks relevant experience in handling group dynamics within the context of academic research. As conversation can be a fluent process and develop organically among participants, it may become less "focused" while enabling the emergence of new topics and provide with material that could lead to altering interview guides or create the need for supplementary discussions. An example of this can be

given by a FGD about children's feelings towards the volunteers who ran the Sunday School classes as children compared them to some of their schoolteachers and mentioned that they felt much closer to them (the Catechists) and more comfortable to ask them questions and express their opinion in their discussions in contrast to the school classes. This urged me to discuss with the adult participants how they remembered their participation as children in Sunday Schools and how the experience affected the way they approach their own and their children's participation in the present. Through this process, I detected a differentiation and a contrast between the thematics expressed about the past and the present the details of which will be described in the analysis part.

The FGDs were initiated in various ways. One of them was by giving topics stemming from the research questions. I also used artifacts such as the children's drawings, a crafted wooden cross a Catechist gave me as a gift and pictures of Saints. As I had clarified and discussed the participatory methodological approach with the participants, some of them presented their own artifacts and took initiative to mention topics for conversation. It was quite satisfactory for me to see that the research material itself was used as material to initiate group conversation as one of the Catechists mentioned that the consent forms I had given them were used as a topic to discuss the importance of consent as a concept in life overall. When we held the FGD together, this was mentioned in order for me to listen to what they had discussed during their meeting and ask any further questions I may have had.

During my introductory meetings with the participants, I was very attentive in order to observe the dynamic between them and think ahead of the formation of the groups. We held three kinds of FGD: a) children with their peers, b) adults and children and c) adults with their peers. On the total, there were four focus group discussions held: one with adults of both genders, one with children of both genders of ages up to 12 and one with teenage girls up to 16 and one with teenagers of both genders between the ages of 12-16 and adult parents and Catechists. All of these discussions were held within the premises of the Sunday School.

Holding these types of FGD allowed the participants to interact in various ways and a plethora of topics unfolded. Opting to facilitate a discussion within a mixed group comprising both adults and children, with participants who share confidence and comfort, provides an intriguing opportunity to amalgamate the voices of both age groups in a balanced conversation. What is required for this, is to have clear aims and to understand the nature of the method as it could be easy for adults to adopt a guiding or "teaching" role or for children to remain silent or react intensely in order to be heard. In my estimation, if both parties are open and willing to hold such discussions, the outcome can be very fruitful.

4.7.4 Drawings

Drawings were included in my chosen methods mainly because I was aware that children in Greece are quite familiar with drawing as arts is part of the school curriculum both in primary and secondary grades. Additionally, my experience stemming from the years I had worked as a tutor had provided me with the opportunity to observe that children and adolescents found comfort in externalizing their thoughts and feelings through drawing in various occasions including boredom for example or to express their agency by doing something alternative to what is instructed. Through this technique, children (and participants in general) may be able to express "the unrecognized, unacknowledged or 'unsayable' stories that they hold" (Leitch, 2008, p.48 as cited in Spyrou, 2011, p. 153).

Of course, this technique bears its own challenges as it is necessary to interpret children's drawings in the context of their cultural and social background. Therefore, to avoid potential misinterpretation, the collection of drawings as data cannot be completed without registering the child's explanation of the drawing, what it depicts and the meaning attributed to it. Alongside with this, the child's sex, age and cultural information are important features to catalogue. However, if a picture was "self-explanatory", the depiction of a cross for example, I would avoid the risk of "insulting" the children by asking something obvious (Punch, 2002, p. 332) and move on to asking the reason for choosing this or that and what it meant to them.

During fieldwork, I noticed that the context in which the researcher may ask children to draw is of importance. In the first phase of my fieldwork when I conducted research in the setting of the participants' homes, I noticed that some children were more confident to draw while others would be hesitant due to a claim of incompetence in drawing: "I'm not good at drawing, my hand is completely worthless at this" (Costas, 12), "I can't make it, it never looks on the paper as what I have in my head" (George, 14). In the face of such statements and a reluctant behavior, I did have the dilemma of whether to let these participants refrain from the production of drawings in respect to their statement or find a way to encourage them without giving a patronizing or compulsory sense. I used humor to address such concerns and the confession that I wasn't so good at drawing myself while explaining that it wasn't material for a class or a competition to have judgement passed upon and that I was interested in the uniqueness of their expression and not the straightness or blurriness of a line. At the same time, I reminded them that it was not compulsory by any means and they could refrain from the activity and relax if this is what they wished to do. Taking this approach proved to be fruitful as it turned out that the expression of reluctance was a call for encouragement because these participants eagerly started to draw in a focused manner.

In Sunday Schools, as drawing was within the children's activities and consequently there was no reluctance on their behalf. It is also possible that the presence of many of their peers in the same activity made any prominent hesitance disappear. In both cases, after the completion of their drawings, I always thanked the children for sharing their work with me and I asked for verbal elaboration of the depictions.

4.8 Ethical reflections

Ethics play a crucial role in the integrity of any type of research. It's important for researchers to present their line of reasoning concerning the ethical principles followed during the designing of the research as well as to present any ethical dilemmas that may have emerged during or after fieldwork.

To understand the importance of ethics, one can consider the ways a research can go wrong or the manner in which a research may unfold with the absence or total neglect of

ethics. Without ethics, a researcher (or anyone for that matter), would have no boundaries at the expense of others, whether these are participants or colleagues in order to achieve their goal. Having no boundaries regarding the means and the end for which they are used, can easily lead to abusing participants or "subjects" (as past schools of thought in research used to call them), under the pretext of scientific progress.

Of course, what can be seen as abuse of morality and a violation of ethics in current times, was permitted and accepted as valid scientific methods of their time. Such examples come in abundance from the fields of medicine and behavioral psychology and are still ongoing in our era as acceptable to lab animals. Examples such as the "dome" or Skinner's behavioral experiments put children in the place of the observed test animal to be measured and conditioned (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). Initially, it may seem that Childhood Studies are in a separate sphere in relation to the aforementioned fields but the discourse about children's rights and children's position within research led to the paradigm shift which addresses children not as participants or even fellow researchers in cases of child-led research.

To keep matters specific, a good compass is a clear definition. Research ethics encompasses a core set of scientific norms that have been developed and institutionalized in the international research community. These norms are based on the principles of transparency, commitment, integrity and honesty, which are essential for ensuring quality and reliability in research (NESH, 2016). In order to guide and assist researchers in Childhood Studies in accordance with ethical principles which address children as participants in their own right, expert researchers and scholars devised research manuals one of which presents a list of 11 ethical rules (Ennew et al. 2009, manual 2) a researcher should follow to ensure the ethical commitment of one's work. I did try to abide by these rules and reflect upon the importance of ethics as a whole.

In this context, the voluntary character of the process was an integral element of the study. There were three different consent forms addressing the priests, the Catechists, the parents and the children. I made sure that everyone understood that they could ask any additional questions they may have had and that they had the right to withdraw at any point or recall the material associated with them (interview recordings for example or their child's drawing).

Some participants gave their consent and they seemed quite pleased and comfortable with the whole process, yet some seemed bothered with the detailed consent document and preferred to have it explained orally and provide with an oral consent during the recording instead of signing. The consent form for the adults was indeed a bit lengthy as it included the information of the university, the nature of the program, the purpose of the study, the methods chosen, the reasons for choosing the specific diocese, their rights as participants and the NTNU service they could address in case of complain, my supervisor's and my personal contact information. In addition, the consent document which was written according to the requirements of the Norwegian national research ethics committees (NSD) provides a professional safety net as it reassured the participants for the validity of the process. I also clarified that all the personal identifiable data would be erased after the completion of the project.

Despite these being useful material for them to know, the discomfort expressed by some towards paperwork and signing came from the overloading bureaucracy of the Greek state which very often is most distressing for the citizens. Therefore, the negative association made in their mind was something I became aware of and had to address. Again, I used humor to ease any tension and explained the reason for requiring consent

and why having a detailed form was for their benefit. In cases of ongoing frustration, to have the content of the document explained orally and receive oral consent was a preferred alternative by the participants.

I noticed that matters of a clear, official consent was a priority for the people involved in the Church administration and public services while on the other hand, participants such as parents or the Sunday School teachers, especially during the first phase of the data collection, did not seem to consider of much importance the officiality of a consent form nor the preservation of their rights over their material. Children seemed to reflect upon what such a consent form meant and they responded in a manner similar to that of the adults.

The interpretation I can offer to the aforementioned, is that people who work within administrative mechanisms and are often obliged to file reports or be subjected to regulations and controls or evaluations and may have dealt with bureaucratic obstructions or had to officially deal with complaints. As a consequence, they are more aware of the importance of issues of consent. The rest of the participants were not bothered nor restrained by administrative protocols and similar matters. In addition, they expressed their trust in me and that they felt comfortable enough to talk about the topic freely by their own choice. Nevertheless, as a researcher I had to consider all the aspects of the process even if these seemed of minor importance to them.

For example, such issues included anonymity apart from consent. It was very encouraging to witness people feeling confident enough to bear the responsibility of their sayings to the point of not caring for anonymity. However, among a researcher's ethical responsibilities is to reflect upon not only the present but on possible conflicts in the future to which the material could potentially expose them (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). For this reason, I anonymized all the data while keeping the ethnicity, the sex and age accurately registered. I also limited the description of information concerning the location of the Sunday Schools and the Church and mentioned features that could apply to many places sharing the same features in the same area.

Religious faith is a sensitive issue for several reasons and some people could feel that they are exposed to criticism or to the subjective interpretation of their data on the behalf of the researcher, risking being misunderstood. Any concerns and worries about the future use of any given information is fully understood. Parents and other gatekeepers feeling anxious about any exposure of their children and the handling of their information by a researcher and an institute with whom and which they themselves are unfamiliar is quite reasonable and respected. Therefore, respect towards these concerns throughout all the stages of the research was necessary. Additionally, it was important throughout the research to affirm that my role was not to place judgment on their choices nor insult any of their beliefs and the place of religion in their lives but rather to explore, map, record and present them.

4.8.1 Personal ethical risks and considerations

Morrow & Richards (1996) put emphasis on the importance of keeping in mind ethics throughout the whole research process and not considering ethical guidelines as a separate stage of the research. Yet, Hills (2005) states that there is a number of factors such as limitations in time and resources that could put a researcher into the temptation of not fulfilling all the ethical guidelines. These constraints however "are perhaps too easily used as excuses to cut corners" (Hills, 2005, p.71).

In all due honesty, I faced a point of such temptation during the first phase of my field work when contacting the administrative factors and gatekeepers in order to gain authorization to do research in the diocese's Sunday School was not successful and I had a limited time window before I had to return to Norway. To overcome such temptations of "cutting corners" and sacrifice the integrity and transparency of the process for the sake of a result, what I did was to identify why I thought of it in the first place. Utilizing ethical reflection, I identified that overwhelming stress was the trigger of such thoughts. As a next step, I conscientiously reminded myself that even though it is I who is conducting the research, there are many people associated with it as well as the integrity and reputation of the academic institution under the name of which this research was conducted. These considerations put me back on track and led to my designing an alternative approach by following the ethical guidelines upon which the project is based. I believe that it is a useful approach for a researcher if he/she feels tempted to breach ethical guidelines, to responsively consider the rest of the people and the plethora of factors associated with the whole project.

4.8.2 Power imbalance

Issues of power imbalance are a common occurrence and a popular topic of discourse among scholars and researchers. According to O' Kane (1998) power imbalance will be a constant challenge among children participants and adult researchers. The implications of this issue can manifest in the manner in which a researcher applies each method. Participatory methodology offers concepts that could address power imbalance quite effectively. The success of conducting research of this sort requires extensive and profound experience. I tried to utilize this approach by inviting participants to share their thoughts about the methods and the content of the activities as well as suggesting their own activities or questions for research.

To mention an example of a specific method, in interviews for example, issues of power depend upon "the model of the child the researcher invokes" (Westcott & Littleton, 2005, p.139). In other words, how one views the child – the perceptions one may have about children drives the power dynamics in the specific content of a method. To view the child participant as a passive source of knowledge or as a competent actor within the research process characterizes the nature of a researcher's work. The same applies to adult participants but it seems to be a common acceptance that children are in a particularly vulnerable position, especially if they are acknowledged as marginalized voices.

In the context of my research, I did not see that children were a marginalized and vulnerable group, quite the contrary. However, vulnerability may also be considered in terms of lack of knowledge concerning the process one may be part of as a participant. More specifically, what I mean by this is that the researcher inevitably has much more in-depth knowledge of the research process he/she had designed and its aspects in a wholesome manner while the participant may not have such knowledge. To bridge this gap, the solution is not to try and inform them on the content of complex academic analysis but to clearly inform them what is method is about and discuss how it will be used.

Nevertheless, on a personal level, I find the concept of power asymmetry a bit vague. It seems that it is hard to find literature that clearly identifies what "power" means exactly within Childhood Studies especially in differentiation with adult-to-adult research

participant. If we exchange the word "power" with "influence" or "authority" perhaps it becomes a clearer issue. One party may try to exercise their authority or power but the other parties can express agency and accept this power, reject it or negotiate and adapt. In the project's context, however, I did not seek to exercise any kind of power and I acknowledged all participants as rightfully equals, yet in different roles and positions than myself.

As experts in their field and their own life with knowledge to share and as gate keepers, participants were in a position of authority to either assist me or halt my research and access to the field. On my end, I had to reflect upon the authority I had which lied upon the part of processing the data and choosing which to include and how to present them. These issues can be addressed by mutual communication and transparency of the process. Therefore, I thought it would be best to discuss openly with the participants my research design and methods and ask them to share their thoughts. Afterwards, I trusted my perception of them as competent, social actors with the ability to express agency and my skill to sense any signs that would tell otherwise. However, the lack of adequate and proper training in ethical issues is a common concern for many researchers (Hills, 2005, p. 72), myself included, which makes the need for reflection and constant awareness always relevant.

4.8.3 Ethical considerations when utilizing the digital means of communication

When utilizing digital means to communicate through the internet, certain considerations arise. It requires a lot of careful consideration to find ways to balance the right of participation with the necessity to protect against potential harms (Livingstone & Third, 2017) on platforms that leave "digital traces"-the use and potential outcome of which we cannot know.

As some scholars have pointed out, digital means may be used by children in a reactionary manner to maneuver power imbalances in the adult world (Livingstone & Third, 2017). In order to avoid triggering suspicion or discomfort as an adult communicating with minors through the internet, I left it up to the children to communicate with me within the context of the research. During the process, I kept in mind the importance of reflecting beyond the "mantra of more information" by qualitatively assessing what children would send me (Stoilova et al., 2016, p.462). Additionally, I informed the parents for the communication while cautiously maintaining confidentiality towards children.

In terms of inclusiveness, digital communication cannot be fully successful. The reason for this is that it is accessible only to those who can afford it. Moreover, guardians usually set an age limitation before getting hardware gadgets for their children to use. Consequently, sources and age are limiting constraints, even quite rightfully so. Therefore, in my research digital means played a supplementary role and not a path I could rely on.

4.9 Data analysis

As a researcher with limited experience, I initially tried to work in reverse. I attempted to study different theories of sociology, ethnography, anthropology, theology and then move on to the data. This approach could lead to a biased view as I could have adopted a lens before considering the data per se. Additionally, it is inefficiently time consuming and a risk to derailing the focus of the research.

Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) have pointed out that data are to be regarded as resources for contemplation and analysis. Therefore, I reversed the pattern of my work and allowed the identification of theory to emerge from the data. This is by no means a linear process. To go "back and forth, between the data" in a "dialectical" manner can be part of the research process and even allow novel concepts to emerge (Christensen, 2012, p.62)

After collecting the material that was produced through the aforementioned methods and the notes in my research diary, I had to move forward to interpretating and synthesizing the findings by utilizing the theory. By listening to the recordings of the interviews and the discussions, going through the texts we exchanged, observing the drawings in combination with my field notes, I attempted to identify thematics that occurred and patterns or contradictions that emerged.

5 Analysis Part I

5.1 Introduction

In the current chapter I begin by exploring the forms of participation starting from the private form of participation through the ritual of prayer before moving on to the participation in communal forms of rituals while examining factors of exclusion and inclusion of children either because of age or gender. Further on, I present the reasoning of priests and parents concerning children's participation in religion. I also present children's accounts according to age and mystery in which they participated. I move on to examining factors that affect participants concerning ethnoreligious identity and what it means for them before moving on to address patterns of frequency in participation.

After adequately presenting the participants accounts and narrations, I interpret the data utilizing concepts of generational order, relational agency and theories such cultural intensification, social constructionism before moving on the prism of the dichotomous images of apollonian and dionysian child.

5.2 Participation and exclusion of children in the Church

In some of the aforementioned mysteries, children are a central part without the presence of which the mystery cannot be performed while in other mysteries, their role is auxiliary. However, there are also rituals in which children are not included as participants and these are rituals related to death and the passage to the afterlife. Additionally, they cannot be ordained in priesthood nor in the Church's administrative hierarchies.

This section is divided in two parts. In the first part, I start by mentioning the form of religious participation that participants do most frequently, many of them daily. This is the practice of prayer which according to narrations, holds a significant role in the everyday life of a believer. Then, I move on to describe children's participation in ceremonies and the roles they acquire according to their gender. Furthermore, I present the kind of rituals and ceremonies children are excluded from as well as the reasoning behind such exclusion. Later on, the opinions of the priests and the parents concerning children's participation are presented before moving on to the narrations of children concerning their experiences in various rituals. Teenagers' accounts on the same matters are examined separately than those of younger children. Then I move on to examine the frequency of participation in the Church's activities and I form three relevant categories while presenting the participants' accounts and reasoning over their choices with distinct reference to the significance of their ethnoreligious identity.

In the second part, follows the discussion according to the chosen theories. Participants' narrations are seen through the theoretical lenses of social constructionism, the concept of socialization and how adults link it to respect and then I move on to the concept of relational agency and the generational bonds among the participants. Lastly, I present the concepts of the apollonian and dionysian image in regards to the significance it holds

withinn the religious community and how it affects choices made.

5.2.1 Prayer – a form of private participation

Prayer was a prevalent and reoccurring topic during the interviews, the focus group discussions and the drawings. It was very common for both adults and children alike to present the same motivations and the same content concerning the desire and urge or habit to pray. The most common prayer is the Pater Nostrum/Our Father/Πάτερ Ημών (Pater Imon) and it is the morning prayer at schools. Many children often repeat it at night and afterwards they add their own words. All the participants knew how to pray from a very early age, before they went to school as either their parents or their grandparents had taught them.

Prayers as Our Father which are said in school as the morning prayer, are optional and children can be excepted if they wish so. The characteristic of this is that it is a routinized process. Some children see meaning in this, especially if they participate regularly in the Church's mysteries and in Sunday School while some others address this as an automated process.

Petitionary prayers seem to be the most frequent according to participants' narrations. In this type of prayer, the believer asks God, Jesus, Mother Mary, Saints or Archangels for a favor, for protection, for strength to overcome adversities, for an epiphany in the face of confusion and dilemmas. The petition could be for the person who prays or their beloved ones such as their family. Some participants pray for their dead and their ancestors asking God to grant them peace and to communicate their gratitude towards them.

Children pray for protection very often both for themselves and their family. The urge comes from a mixture of fear, insecurity and love while they understand that protection of themselves and their loved ones escapes their own capabilities. "*Whenever I hear on tv about a crime, a burglary and so on, you know, I pray the same night for my family. I'm very much afraid that something like this can happen to them*", George 14. "*I take great comfort in the fact that Archangels hold swords! This way I know they can protect my family*", Costas 12. Moreover, children often pray in case their parents or someone they love face adversity. This brings to light that children are very much aware of the situations their parents and familial environment face, they assess the situation, think of possible solutions and ask for divine intervention to ease the problems. "*Sometimes I pray we had more money but then I feel kind of bad to ask God for money and then I pray for forgiveness and that He understands that it's not for myself but for my parents to solve their problems*", Anna 10.

"*I wish I could do more but when I see I can't and I see how hard my mother has to work and how tired she returns home, I pray for her, for her safety and to find something better*", Catherine 11. Catherine's drawing was depicting her praying to Jesus Christ in front of an icon the family has in central place in their living room.
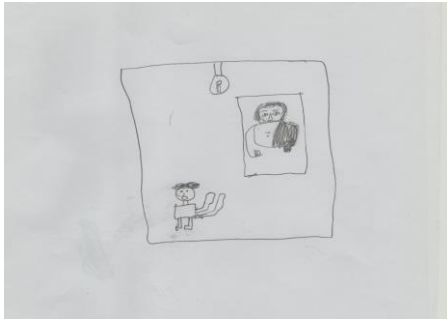
Figure 5.1

Confessional prayers are closely linked to prayers for forgiveness but they were not very common amongst children, rather among adults. Quite often religious artifacts are utilized such as icons and/or candles and/or rosaries but it is not obligatory to use an artifact to pray.

The significance of prayer has been a subject of numerous studies which seem to find a correlation between praying, resilience and well-being. The importance of prayer in religious life was mentioned by almost all the participants. Prayer in Greece is both a public and private matter. Public places of prayer are schools and churches. Traditionally, the schools begin their day with morning prayer. People who belong in religious groups other than the orthodox may abstain from this process. Morning and public prayer have its own discourse and participants seemed to have their own opinions on the matter.

"For me, it is very important. As a child it kept me focused but I could not comprehend its importance. As an adult, I understand that morning prayer keeps me strong, away from nihilism", George 48. As this was mentioned during a family discussion of the participants, my request to explore this, furthermore, led to numerous encounters which allowed me to observe the concept of prayer in the environment of a single family and trace motifs and differentiations.

"I mean that it is easy when things don't come your way or you face a lot of problems, to just give up or become pessimistic. But if you begin your day with praying, you have prepared yourself for this. You pray for gratitude towards God and for strength. Why do you need strength for? Problems and hurdles. This is why both me and my wife have taught our children how to pray", George 48.

"In my times, meaning when I was my son's age, we did not even consider if what we had was a problem or not. We dealt with what came in our way and we thank God every day for the bread on our table and the breath in our lungs", Nick 78. It is quite easy in these cases to see the concept of requiring strength from a divine source to the gratitude and thankfulness for the provision and life given.

"I understand what they say but when I pray I don't think of problems, I feel happy! At night though, I pray for something different, I pray for God to protect my family", Manolis 14. When asked what he would like to draw, Manolis' chose a depiction of his night prayers as this ritual before falling to sleep, helps him relax and feel safer.
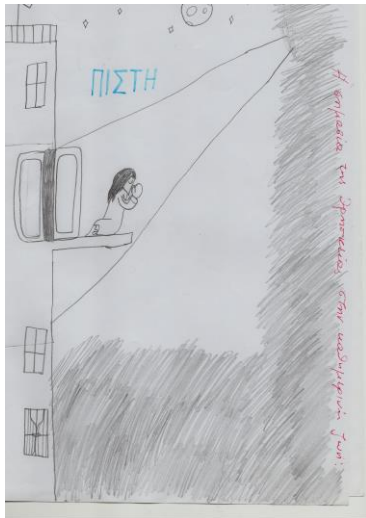
Figure 5.2

The concept of protection of the family and the beloved ones, was condensed in a mother's words according to which:

"Besides all this, prayer gives you comfort. When I leave the house, my children are left there and God only knows if something will happen with all the crime rates. And when they are at school, or outside with their friends and so on. I cannot protect them. I pray to Mother Mary to the Mother of all mothers, to protect them, she understands. I'm raising my children on my own with the help of God. So far, I'm only thankful for the provision and protection because (thoughtful pause), you wouldn't believe how many times we overcame misfortunes and problems of such magnitude that I thought God is by my side, I cannot explain it otherwise", Mary 38.

Mary eloquently captures the deeply personal and comforting role that prayer plays in her life as a mother. Her poignant reflection reveals the genuine concern for her children's safety in the face of societal challenges, emphasizing the solace she finds in invoking divine protection, particularly through prayers to Mother Mary. Mary's acknowledgment of overcoming significant challenges with a sense of gratitude further underscores the profound connection she perceives between her faith and the resilience in navigating life's adversities. Her perspective offers a glimpse into the transformative power of prayer and the reliance on spiritual strength amid the uncertainties of life.

Prayer is a ritual mostly private for the participants, it is learned by other yet the content can be both a stereotypical invocation such as "My Mother Mary", "Jesus Christ save me", "Our Holy Father" in combination with very subjective and very personal content as was aforementioned through the participants accounts. Most importantly, it is a ritual that due to its individuality can be performed anywhere with no restrictions depending on the spiritual need of the participant without holding criteria of inclusion or exclusion as is the case with the rest of the rituals and mysteries.

5.2.2 Role of children in ceremonies

In the rituals and mysteries when the person becomes part of the orthodox community and the celebrational festivities, children are an integral part. The first memories a child can have of orthodoxy, are related to their baptism and the baptism of others (Kallistos, 1995) if they are baptized as infants. Otherwise, those first memories could come from a variety of stimuli such as visits to a temple or even icons at their home.

In baptism and chrismation, the child becomes the center around which the community gathers while at the same time this very center is welcomed as the new member in their new community. The child as a member of a family, also becomes the member of the orthodox community. Theologically, all people are children of God. However, after baptism, one becomes the member and the receiver of the orthodox tradition and is expected to follow the orthodox path and perform the orthodox rituals. Free will is an integral part and therefore, nothing is obligatory and the believer may participate in their own volition. Therefore, one is free to participate in Confession of the Eucharist at their own desired frequency (Kallistos, 1995). It seems that it was not always the case that baptism should be performed to infants (McGrath, 2006) but this gradually became a tradition that could perhaps be connected to high mortality rates of infants in the past and as a consequence it became necessary to baptize them early on. In case an infant dies before baptism, the soul is not condemned (as opposed to Western Christian beliefs of inherited sin), as it is believed that children have their souls in the natural state of pureness – corruption comes later on as the person grows older and can be tempted into sin.

In the mystery of the Holy Matrimony, children often participate in various significant roles, contributing to the rich symbolism and family-centered nature of the ceremony. Young boys may serve as ring bearers, carrying the wedding rings to the priest, symbolizing their role in safeguarding this essential element of the marriage sacrament. Young girls, typically dressed in white or pink, may act as flower girls, scattering flower petals or carrying baskets of flowers, symbolizing purity and the beauty of the occasion. Candle bearers, often children, carry lit candles during the procession and stand beside the bride and groom, signifying the light of Christ and the couple's journey together. In some cases, older children or teenagers may carry a decorated wedding cross, emphasizing Christ's presence in the marriage. The level of children's involvement varies based on the couple's and families' preferences.

In the Eucharist, children receive communion in the same manner as the adults, yet they are often prioritized in line towards the priest as a recognition of their pureness and their being closer to God compared to adults. During field observation, it was noticed that if people in the temple did not make space for children to come forward and receive communion first, the priest would often ask people explicitly to make space for children by using the microphone (if they use microphones).

During the liturgy before the Eucharist and during the liturgies in other ceremonies and festivities of the Church, the boys may participate as altar boys in an auxiliary yet significant role by the side of the priests. They wear special clothing, similar or identical to the ones that priests wear, in a smaller size. According to the boys I interviewed, every boy is welcomed to participate if they wish so and there is a period of preparation as they must be taught what it is that they participate in and they must be instructed by the priest or older boys who are more experienced as to what to do during the ritual.

The girls cannot participate in the same manner as the boys in the liturgies as there is no such thing as altar girls. However, there are other positions in which they participate. During the festivities which are considered landmarks and the biggest celebrations of the year in which the state also appoints days off for schools and public services such as Christmas and Easter, girls are appointed to decorate the temple and, in some cases, distribute flowers or candles to the attendees. In Easter, both girls and boys follow the Epitaph's litany around the temple and the neighborhood. Boys are helping the priests and the girls, who participated in the flowery decoration of the Epitaph, carry the myrrh and are therefore, called 'myrrofores'- the ones carrying the myrrh.

The distinction between the roles of boys and girls can be considered as a micrography of the distinction between the roles of men and women in the Church as women can only be ordained in monastic orders and not as priestesses nor hold administrative positions which hold religious significance. However, women are an integral part of almost every participation in the preparation of the festivities. Especially in the ceremonies concerning life and death, such as the baptism, matrimony (the etymology of which is based on the word mater-mother) and the burial rituals, women hold significant and irreplaceable roles. In my question as how girls and women perceive this distinction and how they feel towards it, I received quite interesting answers which I will present later on.

5.2.3 Altar boys in liturgies

In Orthodox Christianity, boys who serve as altar boys, also known as acolytes or servers, play significant roles during religious services. Their responsibilities include assisting the clergy and performing various tasks within the sanctuary or at the altar. Common duties for altar boys may include carrying liturgical items, such as candles or the processional cross, assisting with the preparation of the altar table, and participating in processions. Additionally, they often support the priest during specific rituals, helping to create a reverent and organized environment during worship services. There is no age restriction to who can be an altar boy.

"Being an altar boy is really something special. When I'm up there, carrying the candles and helping with the cross, I feel like I'm part of something important, you know? It's not just about going through the motions – it's a real sense of responsibility. If I mess up, everyone will notice and I will embarrass they priests who trusted me. Besides, you get to learn so much about the liturgy and all the little details that make our services meaningful", George 14.

"I love doing this, especially if I'm with my friends. We get to go in every part of the Church, my sister is jealous because she is not allowed to enter the altar but I can. We feel very proud with my friends. I can see my dad smiling at me and that feeling is the best. I know I'm doing something important", Costas 12.

When I asked how they know what to perform and when, the boys answered in the same manner. Priest and catechists prepare them by telling them what to do and when. Days before their participation, they go through their outfits, the relics and the significance of their moves in the space is explained.

5.2.4 Exclusion and optional distancing

There are rituals and practices in which children's participation is denied and they are excluded or not expected to happen. Traditionally, children are not expected to fast in the same manner as adults as they are considered pure of sins and there is nothing to be cleansed. In the same manner, they are not expected to confess. As children are educated about these practices and their meaning, some have asked to confess. Priests with whom I discussed, address such requests with benevolent condescendence as they believe that such requests are the result of children's eagerness to participate in all the mysteries they learn about and to mimic adults.

Confession and repentance are considered of grave importance as people come in humbleness and awareness of their mistakes and sins, in need of finding lightness in their hearts and guidance to change their ways to a righteous path. It's a process during which a person opens their heart in the face of God and admits to their most vulnerable

and shameful moments. To acquire a change of heart and mind and then act accordingly is one of the hardest processes one must deal with and often people fall back on the same mistakes or succumb to temptation. This is why confession is a repetitive ritual and it is expected (but quite often neglected or avoided) to happen before one proceeds to receive communion. There is no age restriction to confession yet, it is not expected from children to confess as they would not be expected to have committed sins. *"What would a child have to confess? And even if they did something wrong, it wouldn't be a result of willful malevolence"*, Father G. However, if a child approaches a priest to confess, they will hold a conversation. *"Children often come with questions and concerns and we are more than happy to talk with them. Confession however, dear, is a process of catharsis. Children do not have to worry over this yet"*, Father E.

Burial rituals concern death and the passing to the afterlife (Paradise or Hell). When a member of the Greek Orthodox Church passes away, the body is traditionally washed, anointed with oil, and dressed in clean white burial garments. This process is a sign of respect and is usually conducted by family members (especially in the countryside in which some community members close to the family may participate) or funeral professionals (mostly in highly urbanized places or if there are none or unwilling family members to do so). This is the 'preparation of the deceased' and children are traditionally forbidden to attend or participate in any manner.

The funeral service itself is typically held at the church. The casket is placed at the front of the temple and the priest conducts a solemn and prayerful service. The service may include readings from the Bible, hymns, and prayers for the deceased. The priest also delivers a eulogy which may offer spiritual guidance and comfort to the mourners. Children are not explicitly excluded as attendees but they are not participants in the rituals. However, it would be quite a rare sight to see children in a burial ceremony and those would be very close family members. Traditionally, children are kept away from funerals and burials, even as teenagers. Children who are family members may attend a memorial service if adults allow them, usually depending on the level of grievance that is expected to happen. Such services are conducted in a repetitive cycle: three and nine days after death, then three and six months and then a year after.

Interestingly enough, the significance of death is quite vivid during the history of Greece from the ancient times to the present, with the rituals holding a lot of similarities. Children were always to be kept away though. Attendance to death is considered a matter of adults.

5.2.5 Reasoning of inclusion or exclusion

In the Greek Orthodox Church children are included as participants in the rituals and ceremonies as a reflection of the theological beliefs, cultural traditions and the commitment to nurturing the faith of the youngest members of the community. This participation reinforces the Church's role as a spiritual and cultural foundation for individuals and families. Simultaneously, the Church sets itself as the glue that may bring the community together as for children to participate a net of adults must come to action, from family members to godparents and gate keepers of the diocese.

The reason why opinions of all three groups of participants are presented, is simply because the participation of children is not a matter that concerns solemnly their own wish but it is a result of a network of agents. For example, some children are compelled by their parents to participate even though the priest would explain to them that the matter of free will and to come to Church in one's own volition is of outmost importance, while some other children would compel their parents to take them to the temple and give consent for their participation.

The involvement of children in liturgical processes does not inherently imply a guarantee that they will remain as adult members of the Church or that their participation serves as a means to ensure their future belief. This is not the primary motivation for creating space to incorporate children in liturgical activities. Various opinions exist among priests, parents and children themselves regarding the importance of including individuals of all ages in liturgies. For instance, people of all ages may contribute as cantors during masses, with the understanding that vocal demands may often necessitate the participation of adults. These diverse opinions may not always align with one another.

5.2.6 Gender based differentiations

The exclusion of girls from participating in the same manner as altar boys in certain religious traditions often stems from historical and traditional practices rather than explicit theological reasons. Various religious denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church and certain Orthodox Churches, have maintained this practice based on longstanding norms (McGrath, 2006).

Traditional interpretations of sacred texts, influenced by cultural and societal norms, have been used to support the idea that certain roles within religious ceremonies, such as serving at the altar, should be reserved for boys. However, it's essential to note that interpretations of religious texts can vary, and many within these traditions are engaged in ongoing discussions about the role of gender in religious practices (McGrath, 2006).

The girls hold certain participatory roles such as myrrh bearers during the Epitaph and flower scatterers in marriages or baptisms. They can also hold a lot of responsibilities in the Sunday Schools in relevance to the level of willful participation. However, they cannot function as altar servers for various reasons. After discussions with the participants, various positions were expressed. Most of the participants accept this as tradition and do not seem to bother mostly because they do not think women are excluded or degraded because of the position Mother Mary holds as the Mother of Jesus, giving birth to the incarnated nature of God. Additionally, there is no discrimination between male and female saints. However, within such traditional concepts, there was expressed the idea of impurity due to the females' bleeding during period. The explanations for this were dubious. Some expressed that the bleeding per se is unclean and therefore women could not enter the altar and participate in making the wine for the Eucharist. Others gave a different explanation based on the fact that boys would take upon roles that lead to priesthood if one wishes so. Since women cannot be ordained (just monastically), there is no reason to include them in mysteries performed by priests.

The reaction towards these from girls varied from indifference as Zoe's statement towards the matter shows, *"I don't really mind. Boys have even more to do, I'm fine with what I have done",* Zoe 16, to reaction and rejection as shown in the word of Eva. *"It really pisses me off to see boys going in and out (the altar) and being told that I can't. I did go inside once when there were no liturgies and no one was around. Nothing happened, really. It was very quiet. I don't understand the fuss about it",* Eva 6.

5.3 Priests' opinions and reasoning

Coincidentally, all of the priests I discussed with, had children of their own, hence they were very understanding of the challenges the parents of their diocese are facing. Through our interactions, I could understand that they seemed to hold a genuine love and care for children and their families. They explained that a priest's commitment is not only to God but to his fellow men as well. Part of this fellowship and part of God's creation are children as well – even more, His most precious creation. Therefore, to care

for them, protect them and guide them is crucial. However, there was no unanimous accordance of opinions as to whether children should participate as auxiliaries in the mysteries of the Church or not.

Priests who are in favor of accepting children as altar boys and as auxiliaries during liturgies, believe that allowing them to operate by their side within the mystery will propel children to develop a deeper understanding of the process as a whole and they will develop a profound respect towards their religion. They emphasize the importance of children participating in the mysteries of the Church for the benefit of their own spiritual growth as the process nurtures a deeper relationship with God. Additionally, children are incorporated into the Christian faith showing them in action that they are integral members of the Church, strengthening their bonds with their community and their families, setting an example of faith and worship while providing them with early exposure to the sacred rituals of the faith, particularly the Eucharist. This inclusion helps children establish religious habits as well as it thought to contribute to forming a protective spiritual shield against sin and temptation in the future as they are guided by the grace of God from a young age.

Nevertheless, there is expressed awareness that there is no reassurance that this participation guarantees that children will remain believers as they grow up nor that they will resist a sinful way of life. As Father N. stresses, it requires continuous effort to live righteously and the spiritual fathers should assure on their behalf that they did their best towards children while accepting that their control is, nevertheless, limited over life.

'To live righteously is a constant effort throughout one's whole life, not a matter of moment or a period in your life. Especially in this era, temptation and sin are everywhere and never before in such a plethora and accessibility. We can only assure that on our behalf, we did all we could to guide our children and give them our best. The choice is theirs and we are all in the hands of God', Father N.

On the other hand, priests who have reservations about having children participating in the preparation of the Eucharist for example, while sharing the same concerns of the child's spiritual life, they have a different approach on their role regarding the sacraments. The main concerns regard the boys' level of training and readiness for their roles and even more, the possibility of inappropriate behavior or disruptions especially if those have been observed during previous services. Altar boys are expected to conduct themselves with reverence and decorum during the liturgy. However, this is not always the case as some children may act obtrusively.

As a result, priests who have witnessed disruptive behavior conclude that children are not emotionally ready to pay the respect required by the process nor are they mentally capable yet to understand the symbolic significance of what they are performing during the ritual. Father K. emphasized that children are not yet psychologically or mentally prepared to understand the severity of such procedures.

'They are innocent at heart and most of the time they are trying to do their best but at some point, they will start to talk and laugh and tease one another. One must go through the hardships of life, go through pain, heal, seek God and honor Him through this ritual. Children do not know the hardships of life yet nor has their soul cried for God in a moment of pain. They are unaware of their innocence and they are unaware of the fact that they are closer to God than the rest of us", Father K.

Through reflexivity and consideration for the reasons as to why children may act disruptively during a liturgy, Fater E. concludes that children are very intuitive and perceptive of their environment. Therefore, the behavior of children is often the result of the behavior and intentions of the adults around them. As a result, children do not

merely imitate the actions of adults, nor do they blindly follow instructions but rather adapt to the atmosphere they can sense around them. Father E. addressed the issue of leading by example and not just by instruction. In his words, one can understand that the standards set for children often vary according to the motivation of adults towards participation in religion which in its turn may depend on socioeconomic factors such as a stable salary in the public sector. Consequently, the severity of the ritual is degraded and not passed down to children properly.

'Priesthood is not what it used to be. Nowadays, many men become priests because they want to become public servants and not because they hear God's calling. So, if we as priests, do not operate with profound reverence and humility, what do we demand of children? If the altar boys, see the priests chatting or giggling in the Holy Altar while preparing the Holy Communion, will they do not do the same? God loves children, my dear, and Christ said 'Let the children come to me'. But the rituals were made by men, holy men who devoted their life in serving Him and their performance requires a severity that not only children but even grown men are not prepared to understand', Father E.

As far as the cases of exclusion are concerned, they unanimously stated the same reasoning. In burial rituals, children should not take part. Father K. expresses in terms of developmental maturity as he emphases that children's innocent nature is playful and not in a position to comprehend death which they will be able to understand as they grow up.

'A child is at the first stages of this earthly life and children have the natural proclivity to joy and playfulness. They are at their beginnings of experiencing this world. How can they conceive of death? As they grow up, they will be more mature to comprehend and deal with the pain it brings', Father K.

Moreover, in matters of dearth there is a sense of responsibility towards children, adults and the deceased as well on the behalf of the priests. This responsibility results in keeping children in a protective sphere to shield them from unnecessary (yet inevitable at some point in life) pain while also provide the adults with a space of expressive liberty and the deceased the possibility to have a proper passing. The priests shared the same views unanimously that death is not a place for children's participation, not even merely their attendance.

'Death is a time of grievance for the living and a time of passing for the dead. We are there to bid farewell to the soul and comfort the living. People at funerals suffer for their lost ones and grieve for the ending of earthly life because they forget that the soul is eternal. The pain you see in funerals would only traumatize a child. We cannot delusion ourselves that it would help them mature if we explained to them what the situation is. Such an approach would be irresponsible and superficial. It would show total disregard for the nature of the child's soul', Father E.

In orthodoxy, theology is intricately connected to the social aspects of life and rituals serve both a metaphysical purpose and a practical social function. Furthermore, the child is viewed as both a religious entity and a physical being undergoing stages of maturation. This process allows for a deeper understanding of human nature, mortality, and the intense emotional expressions that adults may exhibit during such moments.

The nature of the child as it is so often mentioned and its sensitive position make the possibility of the passing of a child macabre compared to the passing of an adult. Such precious nature (to borrow Zelizer's phrasing, yet under a spiritual tone), is what constitutes the realm of death incompatible to the child's nature as the beginning of life is linked with a future existence as Father N. phrases it.

'The rites of death, my child, are something for adults to deal with. Children are at their life's beginning. This is why we all mourn much more when a child dies and this is why the pain is unbearable compared to the death of an adult", Father N.

Moreover, Father G. stresses that the social functionality of the death rites would make a child's present impractical, let alone participation. In short, death rituals are no place for a child.

'How could a child assist in such rites? The child would be among faces burdened with grievance, anger even and they would try to comprehend why. Adults would have a hard time expressing themselves like this in front of children, someone would have to take care of them and make the preparations at the same time. It would be both sad and impractical and with no use for the child itself', Father G.

Another forbidden realm for children in the Church, is that of administrative authority and titles. In these matters, opinions aligned and the argumentation did not have to be as extensive. The question arose after considering why even though there are child Saints and since children's souls are considered to be in the natural, innocent state of the soul, closer to God than adults, there is no ordination of children or the possibility to obtain a rank within the Church's hierarchy. The answers were that the ranking and the administration system are manmade in order to serve the Church as an institution the purpose of which serves various reasons stretching from literary and academic studies to operating internationally either through missions of charities or negotiating with each state the authorities of the Church. Briefly, it is a system made by adults for adults. Children would not know how to navigate it but more importantly, there would be a high chance of them being used for political purposes or being corrupted or even abused.

Father G.'s words reveal a perception of an ideal childhood that should not be burdened with responsibilities that even adults find unpleasant. *"It resembles the organization of a state in a sense. Children should enjoy their childhood and not be burdened with responsibilities of bureaucracy nor games of political influence",* Father G.

Furthermore, it was expressed by Father E. that people of high ambitions were not likely to take a child seriously while stressing the dangers that could lurk for an innocent creature in a corrupt field that resembles politics where children could be abused or utilized for influencing public opinion.

"The Church and the people of the clergy are not as they used to be… Even though I have met a lot of respectful fellow priests, there are cases of corruption. A child in this system...you could not be sure in which hands they would land, dear… Besides, people who care about going up the ladder of privileges would not take a child seriously. It would be likely to be used to invoke feelings of sympathy as the children you see in photos with politicians smiling and giving flowers during their elections campaigns (laughs)", Father E.

5.4 Parents' motivation for including their children in religious practices

Parents often desire their children's participation in liturgies and other religious ceremonies for a multitude of reasons. Generally speaking, they see it as a vital step in their children's spiritual development, aiming to instill faith, values and a profound connection to their religious beliefs. Involvement in Church activities fosters a sense of community and belonging, nurturing relationships with like-minded individuals and a unity within the faith community. Additionally, many religious practices are steeped in

cultural and familial traditions, prompting parents to pass down their heritage. This participation also serves as a platform for religious education, enabling children to comprehend the history, rituals and teachings of their faith. Character development, the cultivation of virtues like compassion and humility, and the discovery of purpose are other considerations that drive parents to encourage their children's involvement in religious activities. Ultimately, it strengthens family bonds, provides spiritual support and guidance and equips children with a strong moral foundation.

It is important to understand that even though the dogma is unchangeable, some boundaries of the tradition have changed over time as a result of a constant interplay between traditional practices and the modern way of everyday life. People choose what is significant for them or engage in perpetuating some actions either uncritically or by conscious choice to maintain tradition as they received it.

5.5 Children's experiences of participation

Children's accounts of their participation in the Church's liturgies and rituals differed in accordance with their age and their motivation, though they all bare certain similarities. The meaning they made from their experiences was influenced by their upbringing, familial beliefs and their own personal experiences.

Initially, the research sample was designed for children between the ages of 6-16. However, since the Sunday Schools were held in premises were children of kindergarten and primary school were having their activities at the same time, for reasons of inclusivity, I interacted with children below the age of 6 as well and we were able to hold conversations and examine the artifacts they had produced during their session. Therefore, I had the opportunity to see similarities and differences in a wider age spectrum and include them in my data.

5.5.1 Children's participation in weddings and baptisms

Children up to the age of 6 shared experiences of participating in ceremonies such as baptisms and marriages as "helpers to the grownups" and Sunday School attendance. Their accounts, however, lacked religious significance but they were rich in comments of social observations. Children of that age seemed to understand what they witnessed more like a performance of severity, like a "serious theater" as one girl playfully stated. Some girls would even incorporate what they experienced in their games by reenacting what they saw through their doll playing.

Due to many differences between the narrations of girls and boys, I have separated the data according to the participants' gender and then I have included the interaction between these two groups in one joint discussion about their participation.

"I knew I was special because other children were not dressed like me", stated Jenny 5, who had participated as a flower girl in a wedding, pointing out the significance of clothes in such religious occasions. As several children stated, she initially did not want to participate because she would prefer to spend the morning at the park with her friends but she had a change of heart once she saw the outfit her mother had bought for her which was "princess like".

All of the girls I interacted with, commented on their clothes and the beauty of the bride. Many of them, related quite much to the image of the bride, imagining what color they would prefer to have on their gowns when they grow up and what flowers they would give to the flower girls. Later on, they would appoint roles to their friends, as to who

would be their maid of honor, invoking even images from fairy tales of horses carrying carriages and castles instead of an orthodox temple.

One of the girls invited me to her wedding, *"you can come to my wedding and do your research, I will invite my whole school and everyone from the Sunday School and there will be a lot of children to talk to"*, Chloe 5. Her invitation shows that she understands that marriage is an event of significance to her community and friends while time and growth did not seem to be a coherent concept at that age yet.

In their storytelling, they often provide intricate descriptions, sharing their observations from the entire wedding preparation process and the ceremony itself. They describe being present in the same room as the bride as she prepares, offering details about the dressing-up process. They also narrate their role in accompanying the bride all the way to the altar, where they scatter flowers and distribute ceremonial keepsakes to the guests. The girls, in their vast majority, stated that they enjoyed it a lot when they received what they described as "the same attention as the bride" when they makeup artist would pamper their face and the hairdresser would make their hair. *"I could tell this was no party like the others because we spent a loooot of time dressing up and my mom would never let me use her make up but this time the pictures were important"*, Sarah 4.

However, one of the girl participants expressed quite the opposite opinion. She did not want to participate because she did not like the idea of some many people looking at her while expressing her dislike of the couple to be married. "*I don't like them even if they are my parent's friends, I don't care. I don't like to dress like this, I think it's stupid and I think it's even more stupid to kiss a boy in front of everyone. It was humiliating and I hated it"*, Eva 6. In the hearing of accounts like this one, it was hard to hold back my laughter even though as a researcher I should be able to do so. My spontaneity though, seemed to trigger a "confession" on her behalf.

'You know what I did when I had to throw the flowers in front of her bride? Because she would have to walk on them. And by the way, we also give some petals to the women who sit on the sides, if we want to... I squeezed them so much in my hands that they got all wrinkled up and they looked so ugly at the end (pause to think) ...and I did not smile to the guests, only to a man who made a funny face at me and it was so funny', Eva 6. I asked if she was supposed to smile at the ceremony. *"Yes, girls are supposed to smile and look happy because it is a happy time and we have to look pretty. I don't like to look happy when I' m not"*, Eva 6.

Those girls, who were enthusiastic about such experiences described a game they played with their dolls, "playing marriage" as they called it in which they would make the dolls walk down the aisle and kiss. The kiss of the couple was unanimously deemed as "ewww, gross, why would she kiss a boy?". The groom in their minds was not a man but a grown-up boy and, in their age, that type of encounter between the sexes seems quite odd and "disgusting". Then, they would incorporate in their game a lot of social behaviors they had witnessed, irrelevant to the marriage itself, like arguing over groceries in front of the altar or who would take the children to school. They would bring everyday encounters in their game while at the same time humoring the situation by giving funny answers through the dolls.

On the other hand, most of the boys with whom I talked, did not seem to care that much about participating in weddings. Clothing did work as a marker of the severity of the situation but they did not care much about the colors nor the beauty the girls described. The correlations they made were different.

'I looked like my dad that day. You could tell because I was wearing a fancy jacket and a tie. But my tie was fake, a children's tie because you could see the rubber. My dad's doesn't have a rubber. I was supposed to be serious that day but I ended up running around the church and playing with my best friend', Mark 6.

"Running at weddings is not serious?", I asked.

"No, not at weddings. Not in the church in general. When it ends it's fun because they give us a lot of candy. This is why weddings are cool but only if there is chocolate in the sugarplums, I don't like the ones with the almond in the middle. If the sugarplums have almonds and not chocolate, then the wedding is boring", Mark 6.

Comments about the candy were the most common. Additionally, boys seemed to try and find ways of engaging with their own during these ceremonies. "There is not much to do, the girls are doing more. Then what? I have to stand there but it's boring. I pretend to care and I say I want to look around but I go to my friends. We whisper but then the parents scold us and we have to stay quiet", Joseph 5.

Being quite through the mouth though, does not mean that communication stops as children found alternative ways to communicate with each other, thus bridging the rules of adult authority.

"Only the priests are allowed to talk but some adults are talking all the time, I can see them. And then they say we make noise and fuss. So, fine. You know what we do? I make hand signals to my friends and this is more fun because they can't understand what we're laughing about", Peter 8.

On their part, boys did find it awkward to marry and kiss a girl, in the same manner as girls did. They did not characterize the kiss as disgusting, some even admitted to have tried to kiss a girl they liked at school. In the occasion that the parents or the Sunday School teachers had explained the concept of marriage, which was generally the life bonding relationship to another person in order to form a family, children had explicit opinions over the matter.

The girl who was the most reactionary, had a clear stated argument according to which marriage was a compelled action where she would have to perform chores and which was compelled by the female figures of the family.

"No oh no, no way I'm getting married when I grow up! I will not let a man tell me what to do all the time or wash his clothes or wear that stupid princess like dress and parade in front of everyone! I don't care what my grandmother and my mother say I'll do when I grow up", Eva 6.

Since she emphasized the role of the female figures in her family, I was curious to ask *"what does your father say?"*. At this point, she got softer and she explained that her father seems to understand her better. Therefore, she goes to him to address any concerns or quarrels she may have.

"Oh, he says it's ok and that I don't have to if I don't want to...(pause). But then he says it's a long time 'till I grow up and by then I may change my mind on my own but I should be very careful about the man I may choose", Eva 6.

The other girls who were more favorable towards the concept of marriage, focused more on the beauty of the ceremony and the time they would spend with their friends in the preparations. When it came to the groom, the description was contradictory as they would describe Disney like princes while stating that they would not marry a boy. Some exceptions to this statement came from children who may have liked someone from

school, in which occasion the statement would change into something hesitant but not exclusionary, like "well, maybe if it was him". The possibility of them being the center of the ceremony came mostly from preteen children and not younger.

Boys made different associations based more on what they observed in their surroundings, attributing their own meaning to such social encounters.

"I will marry my best friend you know because when you get married you spend all your time with that person and you live together. I want to spend all my time with my best friend and if we live together we can finally build that lego castle and play all the time", Jason 6.

Wanted to see if there were more associations with the concept of marriage, I commented that marriage happens between men and women though. At that point, he became skeptical and then asked why would he marry a girl since they don't play with legos, they don't play policemen and thieves and they are nagging all the time. "They are?", I asked him. "Well, my dad says so, so it must be true", Jason 6. It is therefore noticable that children may combine their own observations with the statements of parental figures in the effort to make meaning out of social encounters.

"Maybe grow ups like to get married but I won't do it just because they made me hold the candles (referring to the marriage he participated along with the flower girls). If I get married she (the girl he would have to marry), will make me play with dolls all the time and I don't like dolls", "Why dolls?", "Because at the recess, in school, girls play with dolls they bring from home. Sometimes I kick the ball towards to ruin their game because I think it's stupid and I laugh but they get mad", Chris 7.

As I noticed that the religious element was missing in their descriptions, I asked about what the priest was doing and saying and what is the significance of the ritual.

"I don't get it to be honest... I see the man and the woman standing there and holding hands, I see the priest giving them all the attention but I don't understand what he says. I don't really know why they have to stand like this or go around the altar at some point. Is it a dance?", Joseph 5.

"The priests are doing the wedding and actually, I was standing by them, holding the rings to give to the maid of honor, so I was seeing everything the priests did. It is really beautiful, it is different that the other ceremonies but I have no idea what the words meant", Georgia 7.

The lack of understanding of the language is quite common not only in children but in many adults as well since the hymns and the psalms in the Greek Orthodox Church are written in a more archaic and formal form of the Greek language, distinct from Modern Greek. Ecclesiastical Greek retain classical Greek linguistic features and include specialized religious vocabulary, serving the specific theological and liturgical context of the Orthodox Church. This form of language maintains a connection to the historical and theological heritage of the Church and it is forbidden to change the language of the Scriptures.

5.5.2 Common themes and differences in children's accounts

The narration and the observations when we talked about baptisms held both similarities and differences compared to children's perception and participation of marriage. Some of them had participated as flower scatterers and candle bearers as well while their previous

experience was very helpful. However, the levels of children's participation as auxiliaries in baptisms was significantly lower.

As children's participation in such ceremonies relies on familial traditions and the level of engagement to the community, adults' opinion on this was quite enlightening. In marriages, children are considered as a very beautiful and cute sight that also signify the couple's future as a family. Moreover, the ceremony is such that children can be monitored and handled by adults without serious challenges. In baptisms however, the adult community gathers around the baby the reaction of which is usually so intense like crying and fighting to escape the priest's hands, that require the attention of several adults to assist the whole process. Therefore, children as auxiliaries are not seen as often as in marriages. This of course, would depend on several factors like the child's level of participation experience, the family's willingness to engage their child and the priest's affirmation.

The discussion with children about baptism brought up a common narration as all of the children who had attended a baptism, vividly remembered the cries and reactions of the baby while the priest would submerse the baby in the baptismal font which has to be done three times. Same as in marriages, many of the children would comment on the candy served afterwards and state that they would try and find other activities to do with their peers, especially after the cries of the baby would subside and the adults would start dressing the child. As the adult attention is focused on the baptized baby, children would find it easier to engage in their own activities such as getting some of the bonbonnieres in advance while they are usually handed out at the end of the ceremony or perform spontaneous games with their peers withing the periphery of the church's grounds.

5.6 Teenagers' accounts

Teenager's understanding of participating in weddings and baptisms was different but it also bore some resemblances. Their accounts, however, were few compared to smaller children as it is preferable to engage children of younger ages instead of teens. As I was able to hold focus group discussions with teens, the opinions expressed were often in response to what was heard in the group. consequently, patterns emerged easier.

Teenage girls admitted that they imagine themselves in the wedding gown being the center of attention on such occasions and they decide with their friends about who the maid of honor would be or how the groom should look like. Yet, this stretches further to social and existential questions as to whether it is worth it or not to marry someone and they reevaluate their parents' situation and the marriages of the people they know. They make their own interpretations and their own meaning of what it should be like to be in a marriage in contrast to or in accordance with what they witness in their surroundings. "Half of the people I know have been divorced. Half of the ones who are married don't seem very happy. When I'm in a marriage ceremony, I smile but deep down I wonder how it will end up", Zoe 16. If they cannot find marital stability as they envision it in their own surroundings, they evoke it through religious stories: "In Sunday School we talk a lot about the stories of Saints and the story of Jesus. In marriages I think how Joseph and Mary supported one another and went through hell to bring Jesus to life. Do you think I'll ever find someone like Joseph?", Lena 14. At that point, the rest of the girls laughed reminding her that she should lower her expectations as Joseph was especially chosen by God to carry out such a mission. "You can't expect from men to be Josephs or you will wait forever, maybe 2000 years", Zoe 16.

Relics of marriage have their own significance and teenagers seem to be well aware of symbolism while giving their own opinion on the choices made.

"Marriage gowns are white to symbolize purity but why do grooms wear black suits? We usually wear black in funerals so sometimes I think that for the groom it's like a fancy funeral costume", Martha 15.

The concepts of loyalty and fashion in a religious ceremony and the significance in one's life were interwoven in a single dialogue with quite interesting remarks:

Martha: "I am always present at the preparations and I give my opinion on everything, from costumes to make up to candles. I love fashion! On weddings and baptisms you see such beauty, they are not just objects that day, this is why you store them forever afterwards".

Lena: "Yes, but if you break up, it doesn't matter if you wore a fancy gown or a simple one. You will have wasted so much money over nothing".

Zoe: "Not necessarily over nothing. You will have the beautiful pictures and the beautiful memories. You will be able to say 'ok, marriage didn't go well but the ceremony was a blast', right?"

When they became quite comfortable with me, they wanted to see my own opinion and I had to be diplomatic in order not to abstain from the conversation since they wanted me to become part of the group, yet not stir the conversation towards a direction. They looked at my fingers and saw that there was no ring, a gesture through which they asked a question without actually asking it and receiving the answer at the same time. This stimulated a conversation on rings and religious souvenirs.

"Rings are a symbol of a lifelong commitment. I mean it's a piece of metal but we have given this meaning to it. Yet, people who want to cheat take it off and put it on back again. Like you can take a commitment to God or your wife on and off, it's ridiculous. You turn it into a piece of metal again", Zoe 16.

Relics hold a special place in religion and it can be understood from what the girls said that the significance of an object changes once used in a religious ceremony while also holding a social meaning. Religious objects used in ceremonies are also utilized as memory keepers. As I had asked them to bring in our discussion, objects that are important to them or bear religious significance in a personal manner, the participants shared photos of their baptism and some brought souvenirs from that day such as their tiny shoes and their godfather's cross. "We have kept everything from that day and I often look at them you know. Sometimes, I have caught my mom looking at them in silence. I think she misses my time as a baby (laughs)", Lena 14.

It is not very common but it is possible for a minor to become a godparent. Zoe shared her experience as a godmother this year, a few months before my research. When I asked her to describe her participation in the ceremony, she corrected me by stating that participation on a mystery like baptism, starts before the actual ceremony.

"When the parents announce to you that they have chosen you for this, you realize that somehow you already have participated in their child's life and their own and they consider you so important that they choose you for something with unique significance. I started to pay attention to religion much more. I had to learn a lot things and actually mean them because now I am responsible for this child, I'm the godmother and if she (the baby) comes to me in the future for guidance and advice, I have to able to give it. When I realized this, shoes and ribbons didn't matter that much anymore", Zoe 16.

When it comes to baptism, narrations of girls and boys had a common and almost identical reference. They all stated that while witnessing a baptism, they were shocked by the baby's reactions and cries up to the point that witnessing a baptism in which they

baby does not cry strikes them as bizarre. During one of our discussions in the Sunday School, they recalled on the first time they had seen a baptism: *"I cannot forget the first time I saw a baptism. I was very close because they had me holding the candles, the big ones by the font and the baby was crying so loud, I froze but they kept going like it didn't matter"*, George 14. Helplessness was a feeling commonly described: *"First time I was shocked too. I was so looking forward to the food and the pictures afterwards but so much for that (pause), I couldn't eat a bite. I kept thinking why the baby cried so much and why everyone thought it was normal, I felt powerless, I had no idea what to do"*, Lena 14. Later on however, they gave a different meaning to what they had witnessed, even utilizing their experiences for the benefit of others of their community. "*This is why I was so (emphasized) careful when I was holding the baby as a godmother and during the baptism, I tried to caress it and talk smoothly to make it better"*, Zoe 16.

Even though, when I suggested drawing, the girls commented on the method as juvenile and "for kids", later on, some changed their minds and by utilizing the digital means, they sent me via email some of their creations. One of them was Zoe's very impressive drawing that she made after reflecting upon her narration concerning the baptism. The picture encapsulates the overall feeling she acquired along with the significance of the baptism which is to welcome the new member in *"Christ's family",* Zoe 16.

Figure 5.3

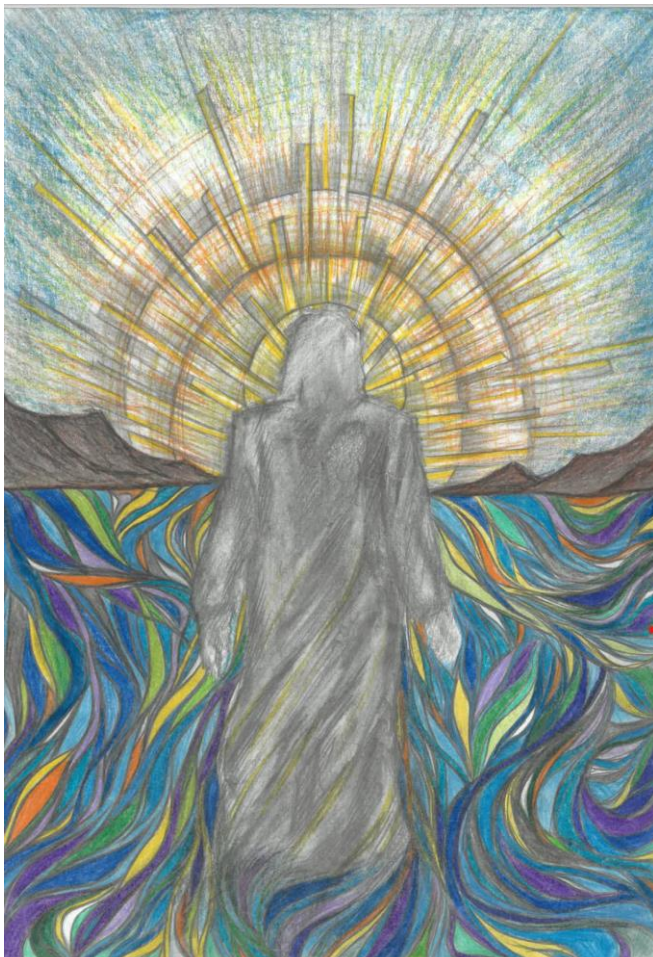Children who have not participated in other liturgies and ceremonies or rituals and had received no training or preparation from adults (as altar boys or girls decorating the Epitaph for example) or do not attend Sunday School or often attend liturgies in general, had much harder time to give accounts on what goes on during these mysteries and find it much harder to talk about religion and the meaning in their life.

5.7 Frequency of participation

When examining the frequency of attendance mentioned by the participants, three groups emerged: a. consistent participants, b. sporadical participants and c. participants who attend consistently only on the festivities that are considered religious landmarks such as Christmas, Easter and the Dormition of Mother Mary but not in other occasions. These categories include both children and adults. However, there is the desire of children to belong into a different category than the one the parents want and there follows an interplay of negotiations affected by power imbalances that ultimately affect the family's schedule.

5.7.1 Consistent participants

One would expect that consistent attendees present high levels of involvement in the activities. However, there are differences between attendance and involvement. People who are highly involved are the volunteers and the priests who organize the activities of the Church and Sunday School. Some of the people who attend become actively involved but not everyone. The factor that seems to affect this is time. By this, what is meant is that if the attendance is kept consistent through time, the person becomes much more familiar with the organization and the activities of the place and they develop a sense of belonging. This in its turn manifests through the desire to offer to the community actively and participate through contributions, not just attendance. Active involvement requires time and strengthening of community bonds as well as making the whole process meaningful to one's identity. Adults of this category become the community's central forces around whom others can gather. Yet, in some cases there is shifting in the level of placing responsibilities on one's shoulders while the process could be more communal and shared by more people. In other words, one does all the work while the rest receive the results instead of having the members work as a team and help one another. This is done because participants often perceive the person who takes the initiative to volunteer in a central position as the sole responsible for a task that addresses to many. Therefore, in their mind, attending to receive what that person prepared, is participation enough. Some Sunday School teachers expressed their wish that people who attend and seek the guidance of the Church, would be more actively involved in the preparations and the events for the children:

"I think parents often confuse us with schoolteachers. They don't understand that we have the same obligations as them, the same pressure, that this is not a school premise. It's strange because we see each other at school every day, they know I am not their children's teacher yet when it comes to Sunday, they leave me to do everything by myself even though I have encouraged them to be more actively involved and I have asked for help. It often seems that for them it is an event which they take their kids to rather than a religious process. I don't mind the tiredness or the expenses and effort. I do this with all my heart. I just feel discouraged by their attitude sometimes and I question whether I should keep on doing it or let it go and see if that gets them more active", Mary 38

Children of this category presented a particular interest in my eyes as they demolished the stereotype of the child who only wants to play and is too young to understand or feel God and they are too immature to present religious discipline. These children would wake up Sunday mornings, oftentimes before their parents and would mentally prepare themselves to participate in Sunday's liturgy and the Sunday School afterwards:

"I look forward to Sunday. I pray to God after I wake up, I thank Him for everything I have and this world and I pray for guidance to be worthy of His Grace when I will go to the Church, wear my garments and hold the liturgy with the priests. It is a feeling that I don't get with anything else in my life. And I have a beautiful life you know…(pause)… my family, my friends, I go out and have fun skating, I have my video games. I am happy with all this. God is above all and what I feel in Church is very different. I am not sure how to explain and I hope it does not sound silly. It's like I am absolutely concentrated and focused and everything in me is happy and serious at the same time", Costas 12.*

"Sometimes, I don't wait until Sunday. I love the Sunday liturgy but I can't wait for once a week. I leave home earlier on weekdays and before I go to school I stop by the Church and light a candle. If the priest is there I feel so happy and I talk to him. He always smiles when he sees me and I know the ladies there as well, they usually clean the temple and prepare everything. To be honest, when I light the candle and pray I want to be by myself", George 14.*

The sentiments expressed by Costas, aged 12 and George, aged 14, reflect a profound connection with their faith and the Greek Orthodox Church. Both testimonies highlight the anticipation and eagerness they feel towards engaging in religious practices, particularly the Sunday liturgy. Costas emphasizes the unique spiritual experience he encounters during liturgies, describing a deep concentration and happiness that transcends other aspects of his life. In a similar manner, George expresses a desire for more frequent connection, often visiting the temple on weekdays to light a candle and interact with the priest. Despite their different ages, both Costas and George convey a sense of joy and fulfillment derived from their active engagement with the Church, underscoring the significance of religious practices in shaping their individual spiritual experiences. Moreover, the accounts of these two children break the stereotype of the exclusively fun oriented child that would always prioritize play.

5.7.2 Sporadical participants

The second category of sporadical participants concerns people who participate in an irregular manner the pattern of which is characterized only by irregularities. People in this category bring their children to Church and/or Sunday Schools rarely. Their criteria for this are various but the common ground is that Church is among the lowest of priorities and the conceptualization of religion is not characterized by communal bonds or theological quests rather than personal opinions. "Church will always be there to welcome us. Everyday obligations though, will not wait…", Chryssa 38. The buzy everyday scheduels are emphasized for both the lives of adults and their children.

"I have so many things to do and so many problems… My kids' life is far more complicated than my life as a kid was. So many things to attend to, friends to see, dinners and at the end of the day, you just want to relax. You forget about the Church. It just doesn't fit the program", Panagiotis 48.*

The secular way of life and the fast pace of every day schedules were mentioned by all the participants. Many of them would express guilt for enrolling their children in so many extracurricular activities that it made sense to them to let the children do fun activities or anything they want in their spare time. "I see him (the son) on his tablet or my cell phone spending the whole afternoon like this but I think it's ok, he deserves it. Why drag him to Church? If he wanted this, he would have asked. Christmas will come I think then. We will go then", Thomas 43. However, if social pressure becomes a factor, then behavior can be changed and attendance becomes a priority. "If friends are waiting for

us in the Church, we have to go. What will they think of us if we don't? That we are too lazy or disrespectful? So, I dress up the kids and we go. Sometimes we fight over this but it doesn't matter because we have to go", Sandy 39. A behavioral shift of this kind signifies that Church attendance is linked to specific attributes such as respectfulness and a proper social behavior. On a different prism though, one can witness how relationality affects the choices of participants who were not highly motivated, religious wise, and the actions of friends affected their own participation.

Attendance doesn't mean necessarily participation. In cases where the children did participate more actively, it seemed to be again through the encouraging of friends making the friend's choice a factor affecting choices and agency.

'I wanted to be an altar boy too ("papadaki"). I knew my friend was doing it because he talked about it at school but I hadn't seen it. We rarely go to Church and this Sunday that he was there, we went and I saw him. I felt jealous and I wanted to be part of this too. The clothes were so different and he was doing things along with the priest and everyone was saying how good he is to this', Peter 8.

'Everyone was congratulating the mother for getting her son to be an altar boy so, I won't lie to you (laughs), that was a good motivation to let Peter do it (laughs). But still, I couldn't get him there often. I am very busy at the office, you can't imagine they days I have. But it's not like he was in the mood to do it often anyway. He did it sometimes and then his curiosity was satisfied', Helen 33 Peter's mother.

In celebrations such as Christmas or Easter when people are expected to gather at Church in large numbers and go home after the mass, the criteria of attendance and participation are affected by the personal condition at that specific moment and the social expectations of the event. "It depends if we are in the city or the village. In the village we must go because everyone knows everyone and they will wonder why you did not go? To prioritize food, sleep or other desires over going to Church is equivalent to moral decadence for them you see. In the city, it doesn't matter so much so many times we prefer to stay at home and have dinner earlier", Thomas 43. "It's ok to not go every year. Why this routine anyway? It makes no sense that what? Christ is Risen every year? He rose once. But anyway, even if we don't go to take the Holy Light (midnight on Easter), some of our friends pass by and deliver it to us", Helen 33. To hold some of the more commercial traditions and practices it is considered participation enough as long as these practices are attached with religious meaning. Christmas gifts for example: "we make the tree every year, we place the gifts, we celebrate Christmas and the kids' love it so much. If I had to postpone the gift opening to take them to Church, it would ruin their fun. But God knows our hearts so it's ok, I don't think it matters", Chryssa 38.

This irregularity affects children on the level of importance they attribute to religion. *"I asked to be exempted in the hour of religion at school. I don't see the point. I'd rather be at the yard with a friend. If we want to meet at the yard during class hours, some of my friends misbehave so that they will be sent out of the classroom and we can meet"*, Panos 13. *"I don't see the point. I don't believe in these fairy tales anyway. We go every now and then, it's fun, especially at Easter. I don't like missing Easter because of the fireworks we blow after the Christ has Risen moment. Other than that, it's the 21st century, why should it matter in my life?"*, Tasos 16. Furthermore, the manner in which believers express their faith is perceived differently. Skepticism is present in many of the participants of all three categories. Yet, participants with irregular patterns of attendance often expressed with comments of a demeaning way towards others. *"I go because others go. But frankly, when I see people doing the cross (hand movement) whenever we pass in front of a Church, I think they are idiots. Like it's too much, you know? What the hell does that even mean? I think they got it from their grandparents and they just*

repeat it", Xanthi 15. It was also obvious, that teenagers would pass judgment on others and try to form opinions in a manner that was absent in smaller children. In my perspective, teenagers need to have a strong sense of meaning in their actions in order to commit themselves to a community. Their agency was acknowledged by their parents much more compared to younger children in all the categories of participants. As Thomas commented on his teenage daughter that never goes to Church, negotiations are much harder with teenagers.

'f they're younger you can make them come. They'll protest a bit but what can they do? As teenagers now… Well, there is not much y o u (emphasized) can do. They'll slam the door and leave. And then what? Physically fight? It's like you deal with a grown person in the making, an adultish kind of being. Plus, they talk back much more than the young ones (laughs)', Thomas 43.

Complaining about morning wake ups and preferring to spend afternoons with friends, it can be a theme of its own both in teenagers and younger children. Thomas referred to the differentiation between having to negotiate participation with children of different ages. The reaction towards attendance and participance in children's minds is often strengthened by the comparison to school: *"it's not enough that I must wake up early every day and go to stupid school where at least I see my friends but on Sunday too? Weekends are school breaks, don't you see?"*, Catherine, 11. At the same time though, children who do not look forward to going and whose participation is enforced, find other ways to adapt and get the whole process more bearable to them, "When I want to leave, but we always have to stay until the end, unless dad has work to do, which is not fair because I also have work to do with my friends, I start to observe the carpets and the objects around me. They are very beautiful you know, and time passes faster", Anna 10. "We go now and then but when I'm not in the mood, no one and I mean no one can make me go. But I love going to Sunday School, I love the conversations we have there and the excursions we do sometimes. But it's the people who make it fantastic. It's like I have adult friends or extra aunts and uncles with whom I feel more comfortable 'cause they're not judging", Mary 16.

On other activities of the Church like the Sunday Schools and the excursions they make take, the pattern is also irregular in attendance yet regular (even predictable) in terms of motivation. *"If we hear it from a friend and they go, we may go. If the place is nice, if the price is cheap it's a good opportunity for us to get together"*, Chryssa 38. *"Between us, I sometimes take them to Sunday School because I have other things to do and attend to and I trust people there. I know they are responsible, I mean they have to be and we kind of know each other or will see each other at school. So, I leave my kid and I return to pick it up. You can't do that in a violin class (chuckles)"*, Helen 33. *"I like Sunday Schools. Especially if they have long hour excursions. It takes the wife and the kids off my head even briefly and I can take a breath (laughs)"*, Thomas 43.

"When my friend goes, I nag so much that they have to take me", Panos 13. Panos's account is in accordance with the accounts of several parents who admitted that they take their children to Sunday Schools not merely for religious reasons but mostly because their children put a lot of pressure on them in various ways such as nagging, complaining, crying while some even employ what could be seen as cunning psychological manipulation.

"I was just tired, I wanted to see my friend for coffee but she (the daughter) kept telling me 'you're a bad mother, it's painting day at Sunday School, my friends will be there and you're not taking me, I'll be sad all day because of you', and then she pulled a long face. I took her eventually and ok, I sat for an hour", Chryssa 38.

Consequently, one can see that pressure is a mutual interplay between parents and children depending on who has the strongest motivation and will to act vividly enough in order to bring a desired result.

5.7.3 attendees on religious landmarks

People in this category bring their children to Church and/or Sunday Schools occasionally. From their accounts, it was obvious that attendance was affected by criteria of prioritization as well. Daily routines and school schedule along with extracurricular activities and the desire to spend the available time left at the end of the day or week with the family, often leads to putting the Church in a low priority. This is also affected by what the participants feel they get from their religious involvement in contrast to what they feel they gain from their other activities. *"I understand that it is important to attend regularly but I cannot do what my mother did. We have different lives, we have so many things to do, schools and extracurriculars for the kids and then you're so tired you just want to have fun or relax in front of the tv"*, Kostas 45.

Some participants experience the contradiction between wanting to be a part of a religious community and attend something they find meaningful (otherwise they would not bother at all) while at the same time they want to attend other activities of different groups which leads to a collision between "community" and "groups of activities". To explain these better, specific examples are needed while bearing in mind what is a typical everyday life of a child in Greece as described in the context chapter.

"Kids have to go to all sorts of things after school, English, French, music lessons, karate lessons, how can I go to Church these hours? Besides, they also get to see their friends there or make new friends. They get to learn so many things that we pay for and you know the sacrifices we make for that knowledge. What would they gain from an afternoon in a liturgy?", George 42.

"Life runs, it doesn't just go by. Society is getting so competitive and we have to equip our children with the most we can. They have to be civil creatures. Languages, arts, sports can do that. At school you cannot expect any of these to be done properly. So, we can't go to Church often. At least we go on Easter and Christmas and we go and light a candle on the kids' name days. If it wasn't for these celebrations, we would have forgotten that we're Christians (laughs)", Kostas 45.

The contrasting viewpoints presented by George, aged 42, and Kostas, aged 45, underscore the tension between contemporary demands and religious practices within the context of parenting. George expresses the challenges of balancing the multitude of extracurricular activities that are often prioritized for children, citing the competitive nature of society and the desire to equip his children with various skills. In contrast, Kostas highlights the societal pressure to excel in different areas, emphasizing the practical aspects of language, arts, and sports as essential for a successful and competitive life. The compromises made, such as attending liturgies only on special occasions, reflect a prevailing sentiment that religious practices may take a backseat to the demands of modern, competitive lifestyles. These perspectives offer insights into the complexities faced by parents in navigating the contemporary landscape while maintaining a connection to their religious identity.

However, children face their own challenges within this challenging schedules. *"It is hard for me to remember everything I have to do when I get to be an alter boy only on Christmas and when I get to follow the Epitaph on Easter. My friend goes almost every Sunday and some weekdays as well. If his parents take me along, I join him"*, Ilias 13.

From Ilias' account, one can understand that members of the broader community (familial friends or Sunday School teachers sometimes as he explained further on) try to accommodate the child's participation and help the family's schedule. Furthermore, it seems that irregular participation does not accommodate the stable formation of the religious part of identity overall. Even though children like to not have to wake up morning on Sundays or trade an evening of computer games to attending a liturgy, at the same time, they feel that there is something more that they could be missing.

'Christmas and Easter are fantastic, I love them! The gifts, the tree, the fireworks, the food, oh the food! But we usually leave after we get the Holy Light and I feel a bit weird you know, I'm sure we're good Christians like this. Even when I open the wrapped gifts under the tree, I get so damn excited and after I get to toy around a bit, especially if it's a new phone or controller, I look at the manger and I feel sad (pause) like 'what have I done for You (meaning Christ)? Just go to Church for a couple of hours? But I don't want to stir the waters in the family so I don't bring this up', Paul 14.

Quite often, in participants accounts of this category, a comparison occurred which for adults was between their life as children and their life currently (in more contexts than that of religion) and for children was their life currently in the city compared to what they experience when they go to their village to stay with grandparents (something which is very common in Greece).

'Here (in Athens), we only go to Church on Easter to get the Holy Light and after midnight we return home to eat and I so look forward to that but it's different with my grandparents at (…). There, whenever I stay when school stops for Christmas and Easter we attend everything the Church does and I mean everything. My mother doesn't like waking up in the morning or missing her tv show in the evenings but she doesn't argue with grandmother - her mother and I actually find that so (emphatic) funny that I get more enthusiastic with the Church stuff. And I actually learn a lot, I had never seen a funeral before nor have I felt like this (showing his heart) when I go to Church in Athens. But then in Athens, we rarely ever go. In the village I got to know everyone through Church. In Athens it is a coincidence if I see familiar faces in the liturgy', Helen 15.

5.8 Participation and ethnoreligious identity

Reasons that affect the participants' attendance are closely linked to how they perceive the significance of religion in relation to their national identity and the matter in which they are mutually constitutive. In Greece, religion is often seen by many Greeks interwoven with their national identity. For many people, to be Greek is to be Christian while of course to be Christian does not require you to be Greek. To perceive religion as part of one's identity affects engagement and participation overall both in children and adults. Adults are more aware of this as they have informed opinions on various sociopolitical issues.

Many of the adult participants of all groups (parents, Catechists, priests), mentioned that they felt that this era of globalization and modernity not only threatens but attacks their identity. To destroy one's identity can be done by attacking one's religion: *"If you attack and destroy my belief and commitment towards God, what is left then? What is left for me to fight for? What will be the source of my strength? And who are you to place yourself above all this?"* Cosmas 48. Cosmas elaborated as to what he referred to and he explained that he sees some modern movements that push towards an ecumenical Church that will co-celebrate and include other branches of the faith, as a threat to the dogma because of the potential adaptability to serve inclusivity. The discourse around same sex marriage and child adoption by same sex couples was particularly mentioned.

'Life is held together through your love for God but you have to practice it, it is not just an abstract idea otherwise you can stay idle and just claim you believe but also you cannot and should not bend you ideas and your faith to the will of others. Church has its own rules and they should be respected. Religious rules and ethos held us united so far. Private life ok, it's one thing but you cannot push your deviations to the whole of society. I don't want my child to grow up like this. I expect from people of faith to hold our traditions', Marios 50.

Marios and Cosmas, hold quite strong beliefs placing religion as a gatekeeper of tradition and a certain moral fabric that works as a structural cog to hold social cohesion. They admitted to encourage their children to attend Sunday Schools and to participate in the liturgies and mysteries during the last 2 years as they believe that their children will learn to be respectful citizens who will uphold traditions while navigating their life in a manner that will reject modernity and mainstream norms that oppose their beliefs. Such negative influences are attributed to the degrading moral values of the West.

"We have been americanized in front of a screen. Vulgar music, plastic food, moral relativity and atheism. Even worse, ridiculing religion. I think this is worse than atheism. This is not us. This should not be us. I'm sick to listening to how progressed the other European countries are. Who is exemplary exactly? Germany who is responsible for the downfall of Europe? Should I listen to the Pope perhaps? No. I don't care how this may sound but no. The West should keep its corruption for itself", Marios 50.

Such anti-western feelings by some Greeks, don't seem to be a new phenomenon but rather they re-emerged after the turbulent period of economic crisis in Greece. According to Lis (2014), it is observed that in states of the Balkan which strongly hold their orthodox religious belief, images of a corruptive West were not uncommon. Quite the contrary, there have been ongoing discourses between theologists and sociologists as to the theological and philosophical differences eastern orthodoxy has compared to the western. To adopt principles of the latter or engage in and open dialogue, would work as a corrosive fluid for orthodox beliefs and therefore, no space is left for dialogue (Lis, 2014, p.165). Such conceptualization of the West seem to agree with the testimonies of those participants the reflexes of which, led to an increase of their religious engagement.

Apart from the anti-western feelings in terms of religious relations, the problems of mass migration and the incorporation of immigrants in the Greek society, is a concern as well. Marios who is a teacher, refers to an incident which enhanced his reactionary stance. *"They asked me to remove Mother Mary's icon from my classroom because it was offensive. Since when is the mother of God (Theotokos) offensive? All these people coming here, they should respect my religion, not asking me to hide it"*, Marios 50. Mary who shares similar concerns, sees potential co-existence under certain rules that would guard her faith's integrity. *"We can co-exist and we should. But not at the expense of my national symbols and my faith",* Mary 38.

A reaction of this nature can be explained through the lens of cultural intensification where individuals seek to increase their religious participation by reinforcing and amplifying the significance of religious practices within a community in regards to its national identity. As cultural elements become more pronounced or emphasized, individuals may be more inclined to engage in religious activities as a way of expressing and affirming their cultural identity, especially in the face of a perceived threat. If history emphasize this perceived threat, it is more likely for participation to be intensified particularly in the Greek context where often God and history go hand in hand. *"It is a miracle we have survived us Greeks. Just place all the wars and genocides we have been through in a timeline. By the grace of God we are still alive as a nation",* Petros 43.

It is therefore evident that for participants, tradition and religion are interwoven, forming a symbiotic relationship that significantly influences how participants experience and express their collective identity. The intertwining of tradition and religion is deeply rooted in historical

continuity, where customs and religious practices have become integral components of Greek heritage. Beyond mere rituals, there is a prevailing belief that religion serves as a guardian, functioning as a gatekeeper to the nation's traditions. This perception suggests that adherence to religious principles becomes a means of preserving a*nd transmitting cultural heritage from one generation to the next. As Mary clearly states, "I cannot pass down tradition to my children, without religion"*, Mary 38.

This belief was also one of the factors which led her to become a Catechist combined with a sense of social responsibility and an awareness that a religious identity holds a collective nature.

"But you see, our national and religious identity is also dependent on others as well. What value would it have, except individually, if I or my children could not hold our traditions with our fellow people? This is one of the reasons why Sunday School is so important to me. I want children to know their heritage. I feel so much admiration and love when I see them participating in the liturgies as well. I feel happy for all the children as I feel for my own (children)", Mary 38.

Turbulences like the covid related measures during which the Churches were shut down alongside an unrestricted, massive immigration flow led many to reactionary decisions. *"I wasn't much of a Church goer person myself but when I saw the state dictating whether we can go or not to the Church and how to take Communion I said, the hell you will! Something very fishy is going on here. So, I'm going with the kids as often as possible"*, Cosmas 48. *"Believer or not, the Church needs our support. When I needed surgery, it was the Church that helped me, not the state. My wife is a stronger believer than I am so she is in charge of taking the kids. I never objected again"*, Kostas 45.

Children were not just witnesses of these changes in Greece nor just passive receivers of their parents' opinions. In our discussions about nationality and religion, they offered their perspective. *"For me if you are a Greek, you're a Greek. I don't know if you are a Christian or an atheist or whatever. I know what I believe and this is what matters to me, I know what I have to do"*, George 14. *George's account seems to bring out an individualistic approach towards religion, yet his drawing presented an understanding of religion as integral to tradition as he chose to draw Hagia Sophia when asked to depict the meaning of religion for him.*
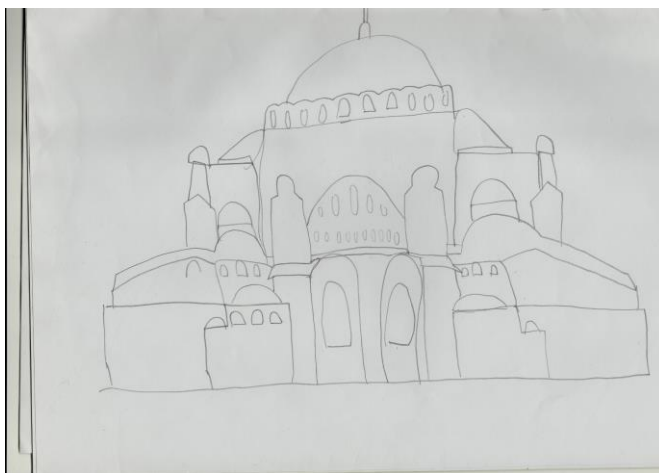
Figure 5.4

This temple holds particular significance as it was the first Church of such magnitude. Built in the 6th century under Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, Hagia Sophia became a cathedral in 537 AD and served as the landmark Church for the Eastern Orthodox Church for nearly a millennium until the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In July

2020, Hagia Sophia underwent a significant transformation when Turkish authorities decided to revert it to a mosque. This move sparked both domestic and international reactions, with concerns about the impact on its historical and cultural significance.

Therefore, when asked about the significance of religion, George 14, combined historical knowledge with the symbolic significance of architectural religious monuments that he felt to be in accordance with his self-perception as a member of the Greek orthodox community. "I can't think of a more representational thing to draw for what you ask me. It's representational for all Greeks and Christians", was his personal view and justification of choice.

"Sometimes I wonder about a lot of things, about religion and life in general. I doubt many things, many times, if I should believe this or that. When I see the cross on our flag, I know I'm on the right path. My favorite is when the teacher at school gets us to sing the Akathist Hymn (Hymn to the Most Holy Theotokos). I love that", Paul 14. For children like Paul, it seems significant for religion and nationality to be expressed through the school celebrations on national days and during marching parades in which they hold the flag or chant a hymn at school. To learn hymns at school, rely on the preferences of the teacher and is not part of the obligatory curriculum (Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2019).

"My mother puts on Christodoulos' speeches for me to hear to find a role model. She told me that this is how I will understand how to defend my nationality and my religion", Mary 16. Christodoulos was brought up in conversations quite often, especially for his struggle and massive protests to keep the religion as part of the ID cards and his famous quote "I fancy you" addressing the young people, encouraging them to go to the Church without letting some extremities of their appearance such as piercings (which were considered extreme and provocative during the '90s and not yet a fashion), make them feel excluded or ashamed.

"I actually felt quite at ease when I heard about it. I wanted so much to get an earring but then I wasn't sure if it would be Christian. Of course, I take it off if I go as an altar boy. They tell us to take them off and show respect through our appearance", George 14. Therefore, one can understand that people chose according to their own criteria whom they will consider as a spiritual leader. Others were mentioned as well and we held quite long discussions over matters of the current state of the Church, mostly with the adult participants including the priests. Yet, I have not included more of their testimonies in this thesis as they would be more appropriate under a different, Church-centric topic. Such conversations, however, helped me understand the narrations of the participants in a broader sense.

The actions and motivations of adults into forming a community around the Church in which they often try to address social issues concerning their children, are based on experiencing the love of God and making it part of one's life as well as attaining social skills and ethical values to navigate the world and its countless dilemmas.

6 Analysis Part II

6.1 Discussion

I chose to present my findings overall, perhaps in an extensive manner and then move on to discussing them through theoretical lenses instead of merging the data with theory in order to give comprehensive accounts of the participants' own narrations. Since the presentation of research is done by an author – the researcher, and not the participants themselves, the researcher becomes a mediator between the participants' voices and the reader. Therefore, I tried to give extensive accounts of the participants' actual words and include as many voices as possible in each theme I presented.

In this section, I will analyze the findings through concepts and theory which in my understanding provide conceptual frameworks to derive meaning in a broader manner from the participants' narratives while placing them within theoretical structures.

6.2 Generation and agency in religious participation

In the Greek context, it would be incomprehensible to isolate children's accounts and experiences from the familial context. During fieldwork, it quickly became apparent that decisions and actions are made and performed as a result of interaction amongst family members of different generations. Rather than considering family decisions as a top-down model, through participants' accounts, it was observable that children expressed agency which led to negotiation with the adults of the community. Adults on their behalf, would either reject or support their children's wishes but they would not or could not neglect them overall. Furthermore, adult performance, decision making and practices were heavily influenced by the effort to include children and make space for their participation within the community.

This was revealed through the narrations of children who initiated their participation, thus motivating their parents to get involved as well while managing to attain a certain level of independence by going on their own to Church before school. Similar examples come from children who wanted to go to Sunday School to meet their friends while their parents had other plans for their Sunday but ended up fulfilling their children's wish as the latter had employed effective techniques to stir the direction of action towards their own target. A reverse example can be seen to some children who did not want to go to Church while their parents wanted all the family to go. At some cases, the parents succumbed to the denial of their children rationalizing their choice through a burdened schedule that deserved a break while on some others, they made the children go in cases of external social pressure such as the potential scolding by friends in case of absence.

Children also play a role in shaping relationships, particularly with priests. Despite personal opinions on whether children should participate or not, priests adjust their

programs and behaviors to include all children who express a desire to be involved. Yet, in respect to freedom of will, they would put a halt to the parents' agency in case the child only wanted to participate due to parental pressure. Therefore, one can see a constant negotiation of the manner in which agency is expressed in various situations.

This dynamic stretches over generations as well bringing change in the institutions which results in people of different generations having different conceptualizations of how religious teachings are experienced. Grandparents and some parents for example, stated that they were receivers of strict behavior in Sunday Schools and during their participation in liturgies, a behavior that often led to feelings of fear mixed with respect. Their conscious decision to change their approach to transmitting religious teachings is a sign of expressed agency in a relational context which led to a form of Sunday School completely different than the one they had attended. To phrase it quite simply: same dogma, same religion, same institution, different approach, different choices (in fun group activities for example) and different experiences for the new generation of participants. Briefly, the dogma is non-negotiable but the behavior addressing it is. Consequently, we see changes in a social fabric consisting of generations both in terms of bloodline and in terms of cohorts with peers (Alanen, 2009).

These experiences led them to decide to make changes for the next generation – their children's generation. Same was the pattern with the parents who had similar experiences with the Catechists. Interviews provided with more personal details of individual experiences while focus group discussions revealed patterns of reasoning as to how participants would explain their experiences and what led to their decisions to differentiate their approach towards children. They found a link between the strict school educational policies towards children which not only allowed but encouraged physical punishment to a point of brutality so that the child would be conform through fear. In their Sunday Schools, fear was an element they would recall as well. *"We respected the priests but we also had fear in us if we misbehaved which we often did by reaction and my father's punishment would come with the rod",* George 42. *"I don't remember the priest ever punishing someone but he didn't need to, we entered in fear anyway. Fear of sins, fear of parental beating if we did something wrong. But overall, it was not a bad experience. I don't recall it with disdain",* Kostas 45.

Through a lot of reflection, they actively changed their behavior instead of reproducing what they had experienced. Therefore, their children's experiences in the Church were quite different. The potential for open and honest dialogue seems to be very important in maintaining familial solidarity in reference to God as well. *"God is love. How can I use fear to communicate this to children? Such behaviors have cultivated a lot of misconceptions about the Church and religion. And personally, I could not engage so much if not for love"* Mary 38.

This change is a brilliant example of exercising agency and reflexivity to bring communal change from one generational cohort to another which actually includes their own familial kins as well. Consequently, their children's experiences were very different, more pleasant and fun. Still, making participation optional for this generation brought irregularities and dropping down in attendance yet this is something that seems preferable compared to compulsive attendance. *"In our Church you reaffirm your faith every time you walk, this cannot be obligatory. Faith's foundation is to exercise free will and come by your own volition",* Father G.

Acknowledging children's agency and showing more sensitivity led to an effort to include children in a balanced manner according to which respect should be shown both to rituals and to the child's nature. Relational agency is manifested quite well in the following example. Priests despite their different opinions on children's participation, saw that they

would adapt their schedule and make space in the rituals in order to include children and accommodate them as much as possible. The decision to include them (since they have the authority to deny), proves that they recognize their agency and they want to have them as active members of the religious community and not merely as passive, routinized followers.

Moreover, the concept of relationality was strongly manifested in some children's narrations in which they referred to some of the catechists and priests in relational terms of kinship. "*With Father E. I feel like I have another grandfather, he is always so calm and I feel calm around him",* George 14. "*When I go to Sunday School to meet miss Mary, I always feel like I'm going to see a super aunt. I often tell her things I don't tell my mother"*, Mary 16. In mixed focus group discussions (with adults and children alike), such expressions on behalf of the children towards their catechists brought to the surface feelings of expressed intimacy and love which led to moving gestures such as hugging. The conclusion was clear. Intergenerational bonds are strengthened through consistent engagement within the religious community. This result is affected by two factors in addition to consistent participation which are the topics that religion brings to discussion, topics of profound existential meaning or opening up about social problems under a religious perspective and also the character of people who engage with children meaning whether they are genuinely friendly and committed to the process or not.

Mary's drawing of Jesus Christ holding children by the hand, walking through a dessert towards the sun, the light, signifies (as she explicitly explained) that the picture represents for her that all people are children of God and through the teachings she receives in the Sunday School, she is hopeful that she will always find the light in her life even if she feels sometimes alone *"like in a dry desert. But if you hold His hand, believe me, you will find your way",* Mary 16. For her, Catechists and Priests guide them to Christ and in a sense *"we are all children under guidance".*

Figure 6.1

Interestingly enough, the language used by the Church and often goes unnoticed due to familiarity, is based on familial terms of kinship. Priests are called "Fathers", nuns are called "Sisters" and humans in general, regardless of their affiliation or attribute, are called "children of God". Often times one can hear a priest calling the people in liturgies "my brothers and sisters" or "my children-'tekna mou'". This familial vocabulary bears generational significance yet not in the context presented above. The familial terms bear religious significance to enhance the role of the Church as a guide, protector and nurturer while creating an atmosphere for the participants to feel respect and love by using such terms. Such language is a social construction in a religious context, yet how social constructionism works in one's religious identity will be explained further on.

6.3 Exploring further children's agency

In understanding how children experience the Orthodox Church in Greece, we find that their ability to make choices and actively engage becomes a key focus. This concept of agency serves as a crucial tool for unraveling the complex dynamics at play in their religious encounters. Agency, defined as the capacity of individuals to act with intentionality and make choices that shape their lives (Burkitt, 2006), takes on various dimensions within the religious context.

As seen in their narrations, children are able to navigate their life in the Church according to their own character and their own desires and even if the latter is not successful, they do try to negotiate with adults or create pressure. Adults on their turn, may acknowledge their children's agency while at the same time they may act against it and demand

compliance. The idea behind such behavior is that it is preferable to sacrifice some desires (such as extra morning sleep for example or an afternoon with friends) in order to achieve cohesion of community and strengthening of the religious feeling through engaging their children either in active participation or at least attendance. Children on their turn, may choose to "translate" this participation as they seem fit, from stirring their attention to looking at carpets and the religious artifacts that adorn the Church instead of focusing to the liturgy as Anna did to going to Church on their own even before school as George did.

Moreover, children express agency when they differentiate their understandings from their teachings. It is a negotiable matter of keeping balance between maintaining community cohesion or bringing forth their different interpretation of their religious learning. This was addressed by choosing in which context to express themselves openly and in which to refrain. This context related agency can be understood as an opportunity for skillful adaptation to their surroundings after assessing according to their own criteria each situation and how to navigate it.

However, agency may often be conceptualized as the capacity for individuals to act independently (James & James, 2012) and make choices but it is crucial to recognize that it extends beyond a mere reaction to existing norms as it also encompasses a broader spectrum of actions, including those aligned with societal traditions. Therefore, agency is not solely manifested in acts of differentiation and resistance such as abstaining from morning prayers, refusing to attend Church even if the parents insist, etc. Instead, agency also manifests when individuals actively choose to conform to, comply with and even reproduce the established social traditions and norms (White, 2015).

In this expanded understanding of agency, individuals exercise their autonomy not only through actions that challenge the status quo but also through deliberate choices to align with prevailing cultural and societal expectations. This nuanced perspective acknowledges that agency operates along a continuum in which individuals may choose to perpetuate established norms in order to uphold traditional values and practices. Agency that would cause a lot of friction in a community would perhaps eventually dissolve the community itself.

6.4 Constructionism of religious identity

Interactions and relationships formed among children and adults in various roles within the orthodox religion, viewed through the lens of social constructionism, the way in which individual and collective realities are molded becomes evident. Studying the interactions between children, parents, priests, and other community members reveals how social dynamics influence children's participation including exploring how relationships contribute to the construction of religious identities and beliefs.

Children through their participation internalize and construct their own religious identities as members of the orthodox community. Religious narratives influence their moral and ethical frameworks and often provide them with a compass of navigating their social realities in other contexts of their lives.

Studying the interactions between children and priests during religious education classes or ceremonies can reveal the dynamics of authority and guidance within these interactions which contribute to the construction of the child's religious identity concerning their role within the religous community. Within this context, it is necessary to take into account cultural norms regarding gender roles which influence the participation of boys and girls in different religious activities within the Orthodox Church as there are cultural expectations that shape the roles and behaviors which are deemed appropriate for children in religious contexts.

Roles as that of the altar boy or the myrrh-bearer/myrrophore for girls, put children into a role quite different compared to what they are doing in the other parts of their every day life at school for example or in other extracurricular activities. Such unique roles, provide children with the opportunity to explore their spiritual world and to expand their understanding of how religious communities operate. The fact that their participation is optional and the priest would not accept to include them if the child explicitly express opposition to the parents' wish of participation is in accordance to their right of participation. Such a right includes both the ability to participate and abstain.

Through their narrations, one could see that their conceptualization of their part while performing a ritual or merely attending a liturgy, expanded beyond the religious part as they would give their own interpretation of the significance of relics and artifacts such as the marital ring or fashion choices concerning a bride's clothing. By incorporating social constructionist principles, it becomes clearer how children interpret and make sense of religious symbols, considering the cultural and social contexts that influence their understanding. Children's accounts of religious art and artifacts can be seen as socially constructed narratives shaped by their interactions with family, religious communities and broader cultural influences.

In the teen girls dialogue for example, the ring bears the attribute religious significance of a marital bond of the couple with God's blessing while at the same time, the girls would reflect on the manner in which they had witnessed this symbol being used by adults in various occasions - cheating on a spouse and taking the ring off and on was one instance they reflected upon. Therefore, children try to balance and make meaning out of what they receive in their religious teaching and how these symbols are used by other people whether inside or outside their community. Applying their own criteria to the situation reveals an effort to shape their own set of values for their own lives. The element of subjectivity in interpreting religious meanings and incorporating them in one's life is intense and plays an important role in negotiating one's identity and what it means to be Christian (Beckford, 2003).

Another interesting example of constructing symbols even out of plain material unburdened with any previous significance, was provided by a girl during Sunday School. She tried to explain the significance of symbols to me by showing me two pieces of wood they were using for art. "These are two pieces of wood. You can do whatever you want with them, look", she said and threw them on the ground, "what I just did doesn't matter but look now", she continued but getting a glue in order to glue the pieces together forming a small cross.

"Now it is a cross. Now you cannot throw them on the ground anymore because they are not just wood anymore. Now they are important and I will take them home to my mom. This is also how it works in Communion. Wine and bread are not wine and bread anymore. They become the blood and body of Christ after the priest blesses them. The same with the antidoron (the piece of bread received after Communion). You must eat it and not spill the crumbs. You cannot put Nutella or honey on top of it because it is not just bread anymore. Do you understand now?", Anna 10.

This significance is transferred from Church to other areas of their lives such as in school for example.

'Don't tell my dad but on the books that the teacher says we can leave under our desk and not take home, I draw a lot of pictures especially on the faces of pictures. I never do that on the book of religion though. I would feel very bad to go to Church afterwards if I had painted on the face of a saint. It's not the same', Peter 8.

6.5 Respect and socialization

The notion of respect may be emphasized through symbols including the space of the Church as a place of high symbolic significance where the children must learn to behave differently. Parents expect that their children's engagement in a religious system sustained by architectural structures, artifacts, hymns, celebrations, religious teachings and people who share the same principles will work holistically giving their children stimuli of various sources which will eventually inspire respect, self-awareness and socialization abilities.

The choice of smaller children to participate in weddings while giving different responsibilities to older children is a sign of compliance with the developmental stage of the child. In the same line is the fact that through parents' narrations the agency of teens was respected more than that of smaller children. Children themselves of course, reacted in their own manner towards such behaviors and expectations. Overall, however, children employed respectful manners given the severity of circumstances even if they had confronted their parents previously. *"It's irritating to hear all the time that I have to be respectful when I will go (referring to participation as an altar boy) as if I'm not! I want to get on their (parents') nerves but when I go I actually do my best"*, Costas 12.

While parents, catechists and priests through their various teachings and the activities they organize for children, form their own bonds with one another, it is interesting to see children's role in this under a different aspect. Adults are the organizational forces of the religious community, yet it is the role of the children that creates a gravitational center for this community to gather around. Even the seminars addressing exclusively to adults during evenings, concern family life, the well being and the development of children through a Christian path. Therefore, beyond the auxiliary role that children mostly have in ceremonies, their significance both in social and religious terms, works as a cohesive agent in the religious community placing them in a central position of importance.

Parsons' analysis on the factors that make a society cohesive can be quite useful on this subject. Through the lens of structural-functionalism, Parsons argues that religion integrates individuals into a shared system of values which in its turn leads to social stability (Smith and Greene, 2014). By incorporating children into the community and engaging them in the ceremonies as active agents, these shared values are internalized becoming part of the identity of future citizens. Tradition and cultural values of the orthodox religion are transmitted through education and rituals which contribute to strengthening the cultural values of children. This theory, in combination with agency, can explain all the effort put both by children and adults to form a community and to identify themselves as parts of it.

Additionally, Parsons' acknowledgement of the need for institutions to adapt to change sheds light on how the Orthodox Church navigates social changes while maintaining continuity in its religious principles. For example, by being flexible and open to the manner in which people celebrate their day of marriage or the irregularity of attendance and participation by many, it achieves to operate not exclusionary but as an inclusive community for those willing to be a part of it. The change of approach in Sunday Schools with family friendly activities is also a sign of such adaptation in favor of institutional stability and order (in the parsonian sense of the term).

6.7 Strengthening the bonds – reactionary factors

As it was aforementioned in the data, several of the participants who associate religion with their national identity, increased their participation in religious activities by

encouraging their children in the same way as a reaction to various measures taken by the government during the pandemic as well as in phenomena brought about by globalization.

Due to the perceived threat to their identity and what they deemed as social stability, individuals anticipated that the religious values they aimed to transmit to their children might be compromised. Consequently, certain reactions were elicited on their behalf. For instance, some individuals, who were infrequent churchgoers before these changes, reevaluated their perspective, now positioning the Church and religion as fundamental pillars of social cohesion.

This reaction is well explained by the theory of cultural intensification which takes into account both social changes and people's responses according to their "personal temperament" (Davies, 2008, p.8). Such theory, however, requires the definition of "culture". According to Davies (2008), to fully grasp and appreciate culture within a society or group, it is essential to consider and integrate both cognitive (intellectual) and affective (emotional) aspects.

In the context of Orthodoxy, understanding and experiencing religious practices involve both cognitive elements, such as knowledge of rituals and doctrines, and affective elements, including emotional and spiritual engagement. The integration of these cognitive and affective aspects contributes to a holistic comprehension and lived experience of Orthodox culture and faith. Participants try to achieve this state by attending the liturgies, practicing Confession and attending the Sunday School teachings.

In this context, rituals and ceremonies serve to strengthen and reaffirm a community's existing cultural values and norms. Under the prism of this theory, such rituals are called "rites of intensification" and play a crucial role in times of social change or uncertainty, serving as mechanisms to reinforce a sense of identity, shared values, and social cohesion (Davies, 2008). These rituals can include ceremonies, celebrations, or events that emphasize and celebrate the cultural elements deemed important for the community's continuity and stability. Some participants are consistent while others act sporadically while in both these cases, these rites serve in the same manner – to keep them as members of a religious community.

In the process of cultural intensification in religion, children play a vital role as they become active participants in absorbing and embodying the cognitive and affective elements of their religious culture. They contribute to the continuity of religious traditions by learning rituals, doctrines and emotional expressions within the faith. As they engage with religious practices, children internalize the knowledge (in a parsonian manner) while participating in the emotional and spiritual dimensions, fostering a deeper connection to the cultural and religious aspects of their community. Through their involvement, children contribute to the ongoing vitality and transmission of cultural and religious values within the context of orthodoxy. In this manner, adults address them as symbols of tradition's survival towards an uncertain future.

6.8 Born Apollonian…turning Dionysian?

Orthodoxy views the child with a perspective deeply rooted in theological principles. In Orthodox Christianity, children are considered precious creations of God, embodying purity and innocence as it has already been mentioned. The theology emphasizes that children are closer to God than adults in terms of this inherent purity. This viewpoint aligns with Jesus' words in the Bible, such as "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14).

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This suggests a high regard for children, placing them on equal footing with adults in terms of spiritual significance and even considering them higher in purity.

This perception is aligned with the theoretical concepts of the Apollonian child as described in Rousseau. Even though Rousseau did not place emphasis on theology at all but rather he viewed this idyllic, innocent and pure nature of the child through the scope of nature and not the grace of God. Nevertheless, this concept of pureness is utilized both in the eastern orthodox religious philosophy and the western lens which served as an interpretive tool in Childhood Studies.

Eventhough, the adult participants addressed the child as such through their teachings and by forming child friendly practices of inclusion, one can also trace a different image. Through the narrations of the adults who had themselves participated in religion as children, it was revealed that the behavior towards children was much stricter both in religious and school settings. The reason was that a hobbesian, dionysian image of the child was invoked. However, this is not entirely contradictory to the orthodox view in the sense that the potential of corruption and the turn to evil through wrongful practices is acknowledged as a tendency within the potentiality of humans. Therefore, one could say that behavior towards children depends on which aspect of human nature one puts emphasis on: to nurture the pureness of children through teachings based on the love for God as Mary 38 mentioned or to stress the dionysian potential to act recklessly and to diverge in a wrongful/sinful path. Each image employed results in different practices, either child friendly or strict and disciplinarian.

In the course of someone's life, the grace of the Holy Spirit that has been received through baptism, remains within the person. Yet, as cognition develops and the body matures, the flesh becomes a source of weakness and temptation – it represents the carnal nature prone to sin and is distinguished from the actual body (Kallistos, 1995).

Parents and priests, emphasize the importance of holding community bonds utilizing religion as a centrifugal force. Adopting the aforementioned theological stance, it seems that this emphasis is not only to celebrate and worship God in a communal manner but also to form a safety network around the children of their community and a path of guidance for their future lives during which they will inevitably encounter temptation and they will be called upon to make a choice.

During our theoretical reflections, a variation of the apollonian/dionysian approach was mentioned, that of Ayn Rand's which attributes creativity and progress to the apollonian image in contrast to the lazyness and recklessnes of the dionysian nature. Interestingly enough, this was encountered in the narrations of participants who faced challenges on how to balance religious participation and their children's school curriculum and their extracurricular activities in the chase of intellectual progress. In this context, there were also participants, both adults and children alike, who inclined towards absence in both, choosing to prioritize relaxation or fun as an escape from a pressuring everyday life of obligations.

It can be considered that the apollonian and dionysian dichotomous image with all their attributes, reflect a conceptualized duality of the world through a religious sense and to uphold and live according to one of those images leads to relevant consequences that can be seen in the following contrasting pairs: good/evil, righteousness/sin, heaven/ hell.

Apollonian	Dionysian
Good	Evil
Righteousness	Sin
Heaven	Hell

Therefore, to lead a good life of righteous choices leads to Heaven while to live in evil and make sinful choices leads to Hell.

Apollonian and Dionysian in essence, can be seen as directions and destinations simultaneously. The represent both a path and an end. Through the participants narrations it was understood that these images do not operate solemnly in an individualistic manner but rather they relate to the community as a whole since its members offer guidance, forgiveness and help towards what is considered a righteous path.

It is also necessary to note that committing to one of those two stances is not something permanent or stationary. As it was mentioned, there is a duality in human nature as understood through the orthodox lens: inherent purity versus a prone to sin flesh. It is expected that a person will make mistakes, commit sins, cause harm to themselves and their community (as in orthodoxy the person does not stand alone but is part of a whole and therefore, one's actions affect others), yet as long as there is will to change/repent, the community is there as a safety net. Sometimes this community can be taken for granted as seen in the words of Chryssa 38 "Church will always be there to welcome us", revealing strong communal bonds. For these bonds to remain strong however, it requires commitment by its members as seen in Mary's 38 words in her narration as a consistent participant.

The efforts of the people as individuals to uphold a community as a whole through religion, reveal an understanding of humans as communal creatures reminding the aristotelian concept of the man living outside of a community being either beast or god. To operate within this community according to certain ideas puts forward the desire to live and act up to certain standards represented in the aforementioned to images. The great emphasis given to children's role in this, operating as a factor of consistency since many of the Church's activities consider children and adults working together for this, clarifies that there are strong considerations for the child's spiritual life and how it will affect the social life both in the present and the future.

Jason's 6, narration on a relevant incident, sheds a lot of light on the importance of the battle between these two images of the self (with communal importance to emphasize once again) and how religious teachings and communal responsibility can affect a person's choices.

'once I fought with my brother so hard that both my mom and dad came to separate us. I was working so hard on this lego castle and after I finished it, he took it down because he wanted to built a road for his cars. When I walked into the room and the pieces on the floor, I got so mad that I attacked him and we started to punch and scratch each other. My parents punished me but they scolded him too and they said we should not fight 'cause we're brothers. That night I couldn't sleep because I was thinking I would rather have him die and I thought of a lot of ways to beat him up again. In the morning, we had Sunday school. I was still thinking how to beat him in the head but then I felt really ashamed and I wanted to cry', Jason 6. 'Why?'. 'Because I didn't want to be a Cain', Jason 6.

Jason's insightfulness on the story of Abel and Cain and the connection he made to his own feelings and the consequences of his potential actions would have, was quite profound. Images invoked by a biblical story helped him regulate his urge and impulsivity showing an imidate example of how children can utilize religious teachings. The choice he made on that Sunday afternoon, was to share the legos with his brother and build both a castle and a road for the cars.

6.9 Summary

To navigate through all this and to negotiate choices within the family while expressing individual agency requires a lot of reflection from both adults and children. The relational effects of each individual's choices was apparent in most of the participants' encounters. A distinct example comes from the child who was reflecting about the moral thing to do on Christmas according to his perception, which was to perform a religious act instead of celebrating merely by receiving the gifts, but he chose to put his desire aside in order to not "stir" the familial waters. In this example, the child presented heightened reflexivity in order to address a moral dilemma after judging the situation in criteria of value while simultaneously acknowledging both his wishes and the desires of his family. The boy decided to prioritize his family's comfort. Other children, in similar situations, expressed their opinions so intensely that familial plans were reorganized to include their desire. Both these children exercised their free will, assessed the value religious practices have in their everyday lives and acted according to their idiosyncrasy and their reasoning. Adults go through the same process with somewhat different dilemmas and from a different position – that of a provider either of materials or guidance.

The roles each individual bears holds its own merit and importance. Through the relational lens, the roles are mutually constituted. Therefore, to be a provider you need someone to provide, to be a Catechist, you need children participants and to be a priest, you need a community to participate in the mysteries. The utility of this approach is that it sheds light on the mutually constituting relationships while acknowledging the importance of the effects of the actions of each actors in the process of participation.

A strong factor in the motivation to assess the importance of religious participation in one's life is the level of perceiving religion as a part of one's identity and more particularly, part of national identity which is linked to ethnicity. Turbulent times may create a rise in participation through the process of cultural intensification if the person feels that this identity is threatened by certain socioeconomic or cultural policies.

Identity, sociocultural context, rituals, symbols and relics as well as gender and what it means to be a child regarding participation, are elements that are negotiated and reproduced through processes of social constructionism between participants of all ages. Dialogues of fashion among teenagers in the context of marriage, what the ring signifies or even what marriage means as an institution is challenged by children as they observe, interact and make their own meaning of their social realities.

Participation overall and the level of engagement is something fluid and dynamic as there are many factors affecting such situations stretching from the effect of the actions of others to state policies. Nevertheless, it is important to note that participation is not necessarily a criterion of a person's religiosity and inner spirituality, this is why I have addressed the issue from different perspectives.

7 Concluding chapter

Examining the roles assigned to children in their religious participation reveals a dynamic interplay shaped by factors such as age and gender as well as the conceptualizations of adults as to what the child's position in religion is. These factors can either limit agency or allow it to thrive, depending on the manner children themselves negotiate their participation. Younger children often engage in more observatory roles, attending religious events and rituals with their families unless there are assigned in assisting roles such as myrrh bearers or flower scatterers, roles which accent the child's innocent nature that can make a ceremony more beautiful and pleasant.

Older children may participate in religious activities that require more training and more demanding engagement such as being an altar boy, contributing to the community in diverse ways. Gender dynamics further influence these roles, with traditional expectations often dictating distinct roles for boys and girls within religious practices. In orthodoxy girls do not serve in the same manner and place as altar boys for example. Children negotiate these roles and they make their own meaning according to their judgement and their assessment of each situation they encounter.

Children's experiences with religion are diverse, reflecting a spectrum of significance in their lives. For some, religious activities form a fundamental aspect, providing a framework for moral values and a sense of belonging. Others may perceive religion as a less prominent factor, with its significance varying based on personal interpretations,

family influence and individual spiritual journeys. As observed through their narrations, some children initiated their participation because they experienced feelings of happiness and the sense of contributing to their community while participating in something significant for them. Others expressed their own criticism distancing themselves from beliefs of the dogma while constructing their own explanations for various religious topics.

The intersection of children's perspectives on religion with those of their families and religious gatekeepers unveiled a complex tapestry of both shared values, generational shifts as well as evolving traditions through self-reflexivity and reassessment of practices of previous generations in the same religious context. Children's views often resonated with familial beliefs, yet nuanced differences emerged, reflecting the impact of external influences, peer interactions and contemporary societal changes. Understanding these intersections contributes to a holistic comprehension of the evolving dynamics of children's participation in religious contexts and opens up new possibilities for future evolvement.

In shaping the trajectory for future research on children's participation in religious activities, several key potentials merit exploration. Since there are diverse ethnic groups in the orthodox community, a comparative analysis across diverse cultural contexts could offer a deeper understanding of the factors influencing children's engagement and the interplay between religion and ethnicity.

Moreover, given the rise of the digital age and the affluence of accessible digital means, investigating the influence of technology on children's religious learning and participation becomes crucial, considering the impact of online platforms and digital resources in everyday life.

The role of religious rituals, celebrations, and storytelling as mechanisms for fostering intergenerational bonds warrants attention. Research could delve into the ways in which shared religious experiences contribute to family unity and the transmission of values across generations. Additionally, exploring how differing religious beliefs within a family unit impact these bonds can provide valuable insights into the complexities of intergenerational relationships.

A crucial aspect for future research involves understanding the agency of children in shaping these intergenerational religious bonds and how they contribute to the continuity or transformation of family religious practices. By addressing these facets, future investigations can contribute to a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics shaping relational intragenerational bonds within families through the conduit of religion.

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9 Appendices

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Appendix 1: Letter of Introduction assuring my studies and its translation

Appendix 2: Participation agreement for children in english and greek

Agreement to participate in this research:

"Exploring children's participation in Christian orthodox liturgies, ritual practices and their perceptions of religion"?

My name is Eleanna and I am a student at a school called Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

I am asking for your participation in my research as I am interested to learn about your participation in the rituals and liturgies of the orthodox church. I am also interested in learning your views on religion and what you think about when you go to church or participate in a liturgy or other ceremonies. If you go to Sunday school I would also like to learn about your experience there.

If you participate in my research, we will have conversations, we will draw and we will visit a church where you could tell me about your experiences and thoughts.

I have asked permission from your parents and it was granted. However, it is important that you decide whether you want to participate or not. It is also possible to decide to participate now and withdraw later if for some reason you don't want to continue.

You can ask me any question that comes to your mind about my study and express yourself freely about what you think.

If you write your name at the bottom of the paper, that means you agree to participate. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form to take home with you.

Place and date:
Name (of the child participant):

Συμφωνία για συμμετοχή στην έρευνα:

"Ερευνώντας την συμμετοχή των παιδιών στην ορθόδοξη χριστιανική, λειτουργία, στα μυστήρια και τις αντιλήψεις τους για τη θρησκεία"

Ονομάζομαι Ελεάννα και είμαι φοιτήτρια σε μια σχολή που λέγεται Πανεπιστήμιο Επιστημών και Τεχνολογίας της Νορβηγίας.

Σας ζητώ να συμμετάσχετε στην έρευνά μου καθώς ενδιαφέρομαι να μάθω για την συμμετοχή σας στις τελετουργίες και την λειτουργία της ορθόδοξης Εκκλησίας. Ενδιαφέρομαι επίσης, να μάθω τις απόψεις σας για την θρησκεία, τι σκέφτεστε όταν πάτε εκκλησία ή όταν συμμετέχετε στην θεία λειτουργία ή άλλα μυστήρια. Εάν πηγαίνετε σε κατηχητικό σχολείο, με ενδιαφέρει να μάθω για την εμπειρία σας σ' αυτά.

Αν συμμετάσχετε στην έρευνά μου, θα κάνουμε συζητήσεις, θα ζωγραφίσουμε και θα επισκεφτούμε μια εκκλησία όπου πηγαίνετε για να μοιραστείτε μαζί μου τις σκέψεις σας για την σημασία που έχει ο χώρος αυτός για εσάς.

Έχω ζητήσει άδεια από τους γονείς σας και συμφώνησαν. Ωστόσο, είναι σημαντικό να αποφασίσετε εσείς αν θέλετε να συμμετάσχετε ή όχι. Επίσης, μπορείτε να συμμετάσχετε τώρα και αν αργότερα αλλάξετε γνώμη και δεν θέλετε να συνεχίσετε, μπορείτε να αποσυρθείτε.

Μπορείτε να με ρωτήσετε για οποιαδήποτε απορία έχετε σχετικά με την έρευνα και τις σπουδές μου και να εκφραστείτε ελεύθερα για όσα σκέφτεστε.

Εάν γράψετε το όνομά σας στο τέλος αυτού του χαρτιού, αυτό σημαίνει πως συμφωνείτε και θέλετε να συμμετάσχετε. Εσείς και οι γονείς σας θα λάβετε ένα αντίγραφο αυτού του εγγράφου που μπορείτε να κρατήσετε.

Ημερομηνία: 11/12/2022

Μέρος: Αθήνα

Όνομα: ▮▮▮▮▮

Appendix 3: Letter of information to gatekeepers and consent

<u>Σας ενδιαφέρει να συμμετάσχετε στην έρευνα:</u>

"Ερευνώντας την συμμετοχή των παιδιών στην ορθόδοξη χριστιανική, λειτουργία, στα μυστήρια και τις αντιλήψεις τους για τη θρησκεία";

Η παρούσα επιστολή έχει ενημερωτικό στόχο σχετικά με τη φύση της έρευνας, η οποία αφορά την συμμετοχή των παιδιών στις ελληνορθόδοξες θρησκευτικές πρακτικές όπως επίσης και την σχέση τους με την εκκλησία γενικότερα καθώς και την αντίληψή τους περί θρησκείας. Παρακάτω παρέχονται πληροφορίες για όσα αφορούν την συνεισφορά των συμμετεχόντων.

<u>Στόχος της έρευνας:</u>
Η έρευνα είναι μέρος μεταπτυχιακής εργασίας για το μεταπτυχιακό πρόγραμμα Μελέτες για την Παιδική Ηλικία στο τμήμα Εκπαίδευσης και δια βίου Μάθησης στο Πανεπιστήμιο Θετικών Επιστημών και Τεχνολογίας της Νορβηγίας (Childhood Studies-Norwegian University of Science and Technology , NTNU).
Ο βασικός στόχος της έρευνας είναι να εξερευνήσει την συμμετοχή των παιδιών στα μυστήρια της ελληνορθόδοξης εκκλησίας, την σχέση τους με τη θρησκεία και την αντίληψή τους περί θρησκείας. Το "παιδί" και η παιδική ηλικία στο δόγμα, είναι επίσης έννοιες που θα συμπεριληφθούν στην μελέτη.

<u>Υπεύθυνοι προγράμματος:</u>
Το Πανεπιστήμιο Θετικών Επιστημών και Τεχνολογίας της Νορβηγίας - Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) είναι υπεύθυνο για την έρευνα.

<u>Γιατί ζητείται η συμμετοχή σας:</u>
Για την συγκεκριμένη έρευνα, οι άνθρωποι που θα ήθελα να συμμετάσχουν είναι κληρικοί από την ελληνορθόδοξη κοινότητα, παιδιά τα οποία συμμετέχουν στα μυστήρια (ως παιδάκια για παράδειγμα) και/ή τα οποία συμμετέχουν στα κατηχητικά σχολεία και οι γονείς τους.
Έχω ακούσει ιδιαιτέρως θετικά σχόλια για τις δραστηριότητες που γίνονται στην κοινότητα του ναού της Αγίας Τριάδος και το έργο σας. Συνεπώς, η συμμετοχή παραγόντων της κοινότητας σας θα ήταν εξαιρετική βοήθεια για την έρευνά μου.

Είναι συχνό φαινόμενο η σημασία της συμμετοχής των παιδιών να παραβλέπεται σε διαδικασίες που διενεργούνται από ενήλικες. Η προσέγγιση αυτής της έρευνας θέτει στο επίκεντρο το παιδί ως μέλος της θρησκευτικής κοινότητας κι επιδιώκει να διαφωτίσει τις πτυχές της δραστηριότητας των παιδιών σε ζητήματα πίστης.

Η συμμετοχή σας σ' αυτήν την έρευνα θα σας δώσει την ευκαιρία να μοιραστείτε την άποψή σας, τη γνώση σας και την οπτική σας σε θέματα που θεωρείτε ενδιαφέροντα.

<u>Τι συνεπάγεται η συμμετοχή σας:</u>
Εάν θελήσετε να συμμετάσχετε στην έρευνα, θα διεξάγουμε μια ημι-δομημένη συνέντευξη πράγμα που σημαίνει πως θα διεξάγουμε μία συζήτηση για θρησκευτικά ζητήματα και για την συμμετοχή στην θρησκευτική κοινότητα. Ο χρόνος διεξαγωγής μπορεί να ποικίλει ανάλογα με το πόσο χρόνο έχετε εσείς διαθέσιμο και θέλετε να αφιερώσετε. Η συζήτηση θα καταγραφεί ψηφιακά εάν δώσετε την συγκατάθεσή σας γι' αυτό. Θα κρατήσω επίσης και σημειώσεις κατά τη διάρκεια της συζήτησης μας. Όσοι συμμετέχοντες το θελήσουν, μπορούν να έχουν αντίγραφο του καταγεγραμμένου υλικού.
Ωστόσο, όλο το καταγεγραμμένο υλικό θα διαγραφεί μετά την ολοκλήρωση της έρευνας, σύμφωνα με την πολιτική του πανεπιστημίου.

Επίσης, θα χρειαστώ από τους κληρικούς της κοινότητας να με συστήσουν στους μαθητές που συμμετέχουν στα Κατηχητικά και/ή να με συστήσουν στις οικογένειες παιδιών που συμμετέχουν σε λειτουργίες ως βοηθητικά μέλη. Το να με συστήσει ο κληρικός της κοινότητας είναι πολύ σημαντικό καθώς θα βοηθήσει στην εγκαθίδρυση εμπιστοσύνης ανάμεσα σε μένα και στους ανθρώπους των οποίων τη συμμετοχή θα θελήσω να ζητήσω. Σ' αυτό το σημείο, είναι σημαντικό να τονίσω πως η οποιαδήποτε συμμετοχή θα γίνει σε απολύτως εθελοντική βάση με δεδηλωμένη συναίνεση.

<u>Η συμμετοχή είναι εθελούσια:</u>
Η συμμετοχή στην έρευνα είναι σε εθελοντική βάση. Εάν επιλέξετε να συμμετάσχετε, μπορείτε να αποσύρετε την συμμετοχή σας οποιαδήποτε στιγμή χωρίς να είναι απαραίτητη κάποια δικαιολογία. Όλες οι πληροφορίες σχετικές με εσάς θα γίνουν ανώνυμες. Δεν θα υπάρξει καμία αρνητική επίπτωση σε περίπτωση που θελήσετε να μην συμμετάσχετε ή να αποσύρετε την συμμετοχή σας. Επίσης, σε περίπτωση άρνησης ή ακύρωσης συναίνεσης δεν θα επηρεαστεί αρνητικά η σχέση μεταξύ συμμετέχοντος και των προσώπων της θρησκευτικής κοινότητας ούτε η σχέση με την ερευνήτρια. Το δικαίωμα επιλογής να αφιερώσετε τον χρόνο σας εκεί που θέλετε και για όσο θέλετε, θα είναι απολύτως σεβαστό.

<u>Το ιδιωτικό σας απόρρητο – πώς θα διαχειριστούμε τα δεδομένα σας:</u>
Τα προσωπικά δεδομένα σας θα χρησιμοποιηθούν μόνο για τους σκοπούς που περιγράφησαν σ' αυτήν την επιστολή. Θα επεξεργαστούμε τα δεδομένα μ' εχεμύθεια και σύμφωνα με τον νόμο περί προστασίας ιδιωτικών δεδομένων (GDPR).
Οι άνθρωποι που θα έχουν πρόσβαση στα δεδομένα θα είμαι εγώ και η επιβλέπουσα καθηγήτρια Ίντα Μαρί Λίσα - Ida Marie Lysa η οποία είναι αναπληρώτρια καθηγήτρια στο Τμήμα Εκπαίδευσης και Δια Βίου Μάθησης στο Πανεπιστήμιο Επιστημών και Τεχνολογίας της Νορβηγίας - NTNU.

Για να διασφαλιστεί ότι τα δεδομένα σας δεν θα χρησιμοποιηθούν από άλλους, θα τα αποθηκεύσω σε εξωτερική μονάδα (σκληρό δίσκο) ενώ οι προσωπικές πληροφορίες όπως τα ονόματα και οι επαφές θα κωδικοποιηθούν ώστε να είναι ανώνυμα δεδομένα.

Οι μοναδικές πληροφορίες που θα δημοσιευθούν με ακρίβεια είναι η ηλικία των συμμετεχόντων και η κοινότητα στην οποία ανήκουν. Τα ονόματα θ' αλλάξουν εκτός εάν οι συμμετέχοντες θελήσουν να αναφέρονται τ' αληθινά τους ονόματα.

<u>Τι θα συμβεί στα δεδομένα μετά το πέρας της έρευνας:</u>
Η εργασία προβλέπεται να ολοκληρωθεί τον Ιούνιο του 2023. Όλα τα προσωπικά δεδομένα θα διαγραφούν σύμφωνα με την πολιτική του συγκεκριμένου πανεπιστημίου για τις μεταπτυχιακές έρευνες.

<u>Τα δικαιώματά σου:</u>
Εάν υπάρχει περίπτωση να αναγνωριστεί η ταυτότητά σας από τα συλλεχθέντα δεδομένα, έχετε το δικαίωμα να:
1.έχετε πρόσβαση στα δεδομένα σας που υποβάλλονται σε επεξεργασία
2.ζητήσετε τα προσωπικά σας δεδομένα να διαγραφούν
3.ζητήσετε οποιαδήποτε τυχόν λανθασμένα δεδομένα για εσάς να διορθωθούν ή διαγραφούν
4.λάβετε αντίγραφο των προσωπικών δεδομένων
5.στείλετε παράπονο στον Υπεύθυνο Προστασίας Προσωπικών Δεδομένων ή στην Νορβηγική Υπηρεσία Προστασίας Δεδομένων ως προς την επεξεργασία των δικών σας δεδομένων

<u>Τι μας δίνει το δικαίωμα να επεξεργαστούμε τα δικά σας δεδομένα:</u>
Τα δεδομένα σας σας θα επεξεργαστούν με βάση τη δική σας συγκατάθεση.

Με βάση την συμφωνία με το Πανεπιστήμιο Επιστημών και Τεχνολογίας της Νορβηγίας (NTNU), η Υπηρεσία Προστασίας Προσωπικών Δεδομένων έχει κρίνει ότι η επεξεργασία των δεδομένων στην παρούσα έρευνα είναι σύμφωνη με τον νόμο.

<u>Πού μπορείτε να μάθετε περισσότερα:</u>
Εάν έχετε απορίες για την εργασία ή εάν θέλετε να ασκήσετε τα δικαιώματά σας, επικοινωνήστε με:

• το NTNU μέσω της Ida Marie Lysa – Αναπληρώτρια Καθηγήτρια στο Τμήμα Εκπαίδευσης και Δια Βίου Μάθησης: ida.marie.lysa@ntnu.no
• με εμένα την ίδια στα εξής στοιχεία επικοινωνίας: elsymeon@gmail.com, +30694965105, |+4745396654.
• τον υπεύθυνο προστασίας προσωπικών δεδομένων του NTNU Thomas Helgesen μέσω email: thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no ή τηλεφώνου +4793079038.
• την Υπηρεσία Προστασίας Δεδομένων μέσω email: personverntjenester@sikt.no ή μέσω τηλεφώνου +47 53 21 15 00.

Μ' εκτίμηση,

Η επιβλέπουσα της εργασίας,
Ida Marie Lysa

Η φοιτήτρια,
Ελεάννα Συμεωνίδη

<u>Επιστολή συναίνεσης:</u>

Έχω πληροφορηθεί κι έχω κατανοήσει τα σχετικά με την εργασία **"Ερευνώντας την συμμετοχή των παιδιών στην ορθόδοξη χριστιανική, λειτουργία, στα μυστήρια και τις αντιλήψεις τους για τη θρησκεία"** ("exploring children's participation in Christian orthodox liturgies, ritual practices and their perceptions of religion").

Συναινώ στο:

[] να συμμετάσχω σε συνέντευξη/συνεντεύξεις
[] να συμμετάσχει το παιδί μου σε επίσκεψη σε μια εκκλησία
[] να συμμετάσχει το παιδί μου σε ομαδική ζωγραφιά
[] να συμμετάσχει το παιδί μου σε ατομική ζωγραφιά

Τα δεδομένα θα γίνουν ανώνυμα. Εάν ωστόσο, επιθυμείτε να αναφέρεται στην εργασία το αληθινό σας όνομα, παρακαλώ συμπληρώστε το παρακάτω τετράγωνο:

[] επιθυμώ να αναφερθεί το αληθινό μου όνομα

Δίνω την συγκατάθεσή μου για την επεξεργασία των δεδομένων μου μέχρι την λήξη της ερευνητικής εργασίας, τον Ιούνιο 2023.

Ημερομηνία: 11-12-2022

Ονοματεπώνυμο: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

Υπογραφή:

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

"Exploring children's participation in Christian orthodox liturgies, ritual practices and their perceptions of religion"?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore children's participation in the greek orthodox liturgies and ceremonies as well as their overall relationship with the church and their perception of religion. In this letter I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project
The research project will be part of a master's thesis for the master's program of Childhood Studies at the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. The main project of the research is to explore children's participation in the greek orthodox ceremonies, their relationship with the religion and their perception of the divine. The place of the child as a presence and the concept of childhood within the orthodox religion are also matters to be researched and studied.

Who is responsible for the research project?
The Norwegian University of Science and Technology - NTNU is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?
For this research, the people I will ask to participate are priests from the greek orthodox community, children of their community who participate in the liturgies (as altar boys for example) and/or attend Sunday schools and their parents.
As I have been a resident of Athens for more than 30 years, I am familiar with the exemplary work done by the community of Saint Nicholas in Pagkrati. Therefore, the participation of the people affiliated with this community will be of great help for my research.
Oftentimes, the participation of children is overlooked in activities managed by adults. Therefore, the approach of this project turns the focus of attention mainly to the child as a member of the religious community and seeks to shed light on the interaction between children and matters of faith. Contributing to this research by your participation, will provide you with the opportunity to share your views and opinions on matters you find important.

What does participation involve for you?
If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve a semi-structured interview which means that we will engage in a guided conversation about religious matters and issues of participation in the community. The time frame may vary according to the time available on your behalf. Your answers will be recorded electronically if you give your approval for this. I will also keep notes during our conversations. I am willing to provide all participants with copies of their registered work. However, all data gathered, will be erased after the completion of the research according to the university's data policy. Your permission for the participation of your child in my research, is required.
Children who will participate in this research, will be asked to draw individually and collectively upon different subjects and questions and elaborate on their depictions. The questions will be mainly for their participation in the mysteries, the routine they follow, how they feel about it and what they think of religion as part of their lives. I will also like to organize a group visit in the church with the children and hear what they have to say about the icons and the artifacts and spaces of the temple. Moreover, children who will wish to elaborate further and share more stories, can participate in individual interviews with me. You can accompany your child and be present during the research if you wish to do so. The children can keep the material they will produce if they express such desire and I can keep copies of them. However, as it was aforementioned, all data gathered, will be erased after the completion of the research according to the university's data policy.

Participation is voluntary
Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason.
All information about you will be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or decide to withdraw later on.
Participation or withdraw will not affect negatively the relationship between the participant and the gatekeepers of the religious community nor with the researcher herself. The right to devote your time and effort in the way you would like and for the time you would like, is totally respected.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

The people who will have access to your data will be myself and my supervisor Ida Marie Lyså who is an Associate Professor at the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning at the NTNU.

To make sure that your data will not be used by others, I will store them separately from my computer in a hard disc while all the personal information such as names and contact details will be anonymized and codified.

The only information which will be published accurately will be the participants age and the community they belong to. Names will be changed unless the participant requests otherwise.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?
The project is scheduled to end at June 2023. All the personal data will be then, erased according to the NTNU's policy for the master's program.

Your rights
So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:
- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?
We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology – NTNU, data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?
If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:
- NTNU via Ida Marie Lyså - Associate Professor at the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning: ida.marie.lysa@ntnu.no
- My contact information is available to the participants: elsymeon@gmail.com, +30694965105, |+4745396654.
- Our Data Protection Officer, Thomas Helgesen via email: thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no or phone: +4793079038.
- Data Protection Services, by email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 53 21 15 00.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader   Student
(Researcher/supervisor):   Eleanna Symeonidi

Ida Marie Lyså

Consent form
I have received and understood information about the project "Exploring children's participation in Christian orthodox liturgies, ritual practices and their perceptions of religion" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.
I give consent:

- ☐ to participate in an interview
- ☐ for my child to participate in individual drawing
- ☐ for my child to participate in group drawing
- ☐ for my child to participate in a visit in a church

The data will be anonymized. If however, you wish for your real name to be mentioned in the research, please check the following box:

- ☐ I wish for my real name to be used in the research

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. June 2023.

Full name: Sign: Date:

Appendix 4:

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ

Ἀριθμ. πρωτ.: Φ.6/3/81 Ἐν ████ τῇ 15η Φεβρουαρίου 2023

Πρός τόν Αἰδεσιμολογιώτατο Πρεσβύτερο
κ. ████████████ Ἐφημέριο –
Ὑπεύθυνο τοῦ Τομέως Χριστιανικῆς Ἀγωγῆς τῆς Νεότητος
Ἱερό Ναό τῶν Ἁγίων Τριῶν ████████████
Εἰς ████

Αἰδεσιμολογιώτατε

Ἐλάβαμε τήν ἐπισυναπτομένη στό παρόν ἐπιστολή τῆς
κ. Ἐλεάννας Συμεωνίδη, μεταπτυχιακῆς φοιτήτριας τοῦ
Πανεπιστημίου Ἐπιστημῶν καί Τεχνολογίας τῆς Νορβηγίας στό
Πρόγραμμα Σπουδῶν γιά τήν Παιδική Ἡλικία μέ τήν ὁποία
αἰτεῖται τήν ἔγκριση μας γιά νά πραγματοποιήσει ἔρευνα στά
λειτουργοῦντα Κατηχητικά Σχολεῖα τῆς Ἐνορίας σας, πού θά
ἀφορᾶ στό θέμα τῆς συμμετοχῆς τῶν παιδιῶν στήν ἑλληνορθόδοξη
παράδοση καί τήν σημασία τῆς θρησκείας στήν καθημερινή ζωή
τους.

Σᾶς ἐνημερώνουμε ὅτι ἐγκρίνουμε τήν διεξαγωγή τῆς ὡς ἄνω
ἔρευνας ὑπό τῆς κ. Ἐλεάννας Συμεωνίδη, ὥστε συνεργαζόμενος μετ'
αὐτῆς κατά τούς ἀναλυτικά ἀναφερομένους ὅρους στήν ἐπιστολή
αὐτῆς νά ὁλοκληρωθεῖ ἡ ἔρευνά της στά Κατηχητικά Σχολεῖα τῆς
Ἐνορίας σας.

Μετά πατρικῶν εὐχῶν.
Ο ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ

Κοινοποίηση :
κ. Ἐλεάννα Συμεωνίδη
(διά τῆς ἠλεκτρονικῆς διευθύνσεως elsymeon@gmail.com)

Appendix 5: Interview guides for the participants

Interview guide for children:

Themes to be addressed in the interview:

- participation in the mysteries and ceremonies
- personal meaning that they attribute to their participation
- relationship with the religion on an everyday level

Sample of questions:

- When did you participate for the first time in a religious ritual?
- In what ceremonies of the church have you participated?
- How did you decide to participate actively?
- In what ceremonies of the church do you participate currently?
- What do you do during your participation? Describe in detail how do you prepare and what you do afterwards.
- How do you feel during your participation and afterwards?
- Is religion a part of your every day life? In what manner?
- Has religion helped you in your every day life? In what manner?

Group interview:

Artifacts will be demonstrated and the children will be asked to elaborate on what they know of the artifacts, where do they use them, in what manner and what they mean symbolically.

For example, a censer or a religious stole will be presented to trigger a conversation.

Sample questions:

- What can you tell about these artifacts? What is their use and their meaning?
- In which ceremonies do you participate?
- How was the decision for your participation made?
- How do you prepare for the ceremonies in which you participate?
- What do you think during your participation? How do you feel?
- What do you think and how do you feel afterwards?
- What do you think when you see the icons and the ornaments in the church?
- What is an angel?
- What is a Saint?
- Do you go to Sunday School? How often?
- What do you do in Sunday Schools?
- From the things you have been taught in Sunday Schools, which would you decide to share?
- Do you think in your everyday life what you learn in Sunday Schools?

Interview guide for parents:

Themes to be addressed in the interview:

- participation of their children in the religious ceremonies
- aspirations they may have by allowing or/and encouraging their children's participation
- role of religion in the family life
- role of religion in their life as children (memories)

Sample of questions:

- In what types of ceremonies has your child participated in?
- How was the decision of participation reached? (to see if the child asked or was encouraged or if there was any kind of pressure)
- How was the daily program affected?
- How do you believe your child benefits from participation in the church mysteries?
- In what terms would you describe the role of religion in the family life?
- Did you participate in the mysteries and ceremonies as a child?
- If yes, do you spot any differences on how it was done then and now?
- What if the child objects or does not want to participate anymore? How would you address such an issue and why?

Interview guide for the priests:

Themes to be addressed in the interview:

- theological meaning and symbolism in the mysteries and ceremonies of the church addressing children
- participation of children in the mysteries and ceremonies
- children's attitude towards their participation as perceived by the priests
- attitudes of their parents as perceived by the priests
- matters of religious art and iconography depicting the child

Sample of questions:

- How does the orthodox religion perceive the child?
- What mysteries include the child and in what manner?
- What is the meaning of each religious ritual addressing the child?
- What do children usually say about their participation?
- How do the parents address their children's participation? Do they share any aspirations? (as long as answering does not break any kind of confidentiality)
- What is your personal opinion about children's participation?
- What does the religious art, especially iconography, usually depict when it comes to the child?

Appendix 6: table of list of participants and method(s) used

Nickname	Age	Gender	Method(s)	Status
Nick	78	M	FGD & Interview	Grandfather
Father E.	65	M	Interview	Priest
Father G.	60	M	Interview	Priest
Marios	50	M	Interview & FGD	Father, Catechist
Cosmas	48	M	FGD	Father,Godfather
Kostas	45	M	FDG	Father
Petros	43	M	FGD	Father
Thomas	43	M	FGD	Father
Father N.	42	M	Interview	Priest
Catherine	53	F	Interview	Catechist
Mary	38	F	Interview & FGD	Catechist, mother
Chryssa	38	F	FGD	Mother
Helen	33	F	FDG	Mother

Tasos	16	M	FGD	Student
Paul	14	M	FGD & Interview	Student
George	14	M	Interview, FGD & Drawing	Student, Altar boy
Manolis	14	M	Interview & Drawing	Student
Ilias	13	M	Interview & FGD	Student
Peter	8	M	Interview & FGD	Student
Chris	7	M	FGD	Student
Mark	6	M	FGD	Student

Jason	6	M	Interview	Student
Joseph	5	M	FGD	Student
Zoe	16	F	FGD & Interview & Drawing	Student
Mary	16	F	FGD & Interview & Drawing	Student
Xanthi	15	F	FGD	Student
Helen	15		Interview	Student
Catherine	11	F	FGD & Drawing	Student
Georgia	7	F	FGD	Student
Eva	6	F	Interview	Student
Jenny	5	F	FGD	Student
Chloe	5	F	FGD	Student
Sarah	4	F	FGD	Kindergarten student