

Sacralization of Football: Example of iglesia Maradonia

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Abstract

This study aims to explain the emergence of Iglesia Maradonia, Maradona's role in this endeavor, and how they become sacred in this quest. In this study, which is based on qualitative paradigms, the method of choice is documentation. In this framework, firstly, the emergence of football and Maradona's place in football's history is examined. After that, the quest for Maradona's sacralization and how he became a cult is observed, and symbols belonging to Iglesia Maradonia are ethnomethodologically analyzed and interpreted. Iglesia Maradonia, Establishe by Maradona fans, is a religious constitution that puts Maradona at its center. Maradona, who is thought to be one the saints of football due to his extraordinary football skills, showcases his charismatic personality not only within the field but also outside of it. When the aforementioned religious/sacred constitution's character is observed, it could be considered a cult movement. However, when it is looked under the light of the objectivity principle of the social sciences, this religious constitution, being established more recently, seen in not only Argentina but different places in the world, and having Christianity-opposing beliefs and teachings, is more fit to be considered under the New Religious Movements. When the character of this religious constitution is observed, Maradona's goal against England, called 'the Hand of God,' plays a prominent role in shaping the beliefs and practices. Another point brought to light in this study is that, in the post-modern era, individuals or groups can resume their relations with the sacred without the traditional religious constitutions.

Anahtar kelimeler: Iglesia Maradonia, Sacred, Religion, Football.

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**Futbolun Kutsallaştırılması: Maradona Kilisesi
Örneği**

Öz

Bu çalışma, Iglesia Maradonia'nın ortaya çıkışını, Maradona'nın bu çabadaki rolünü ve bu arayışta nasıl kutsallaştıklarını açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Nitel paradigmalara dayalı bu çalışmada tercih edilen yöntem doküman analizidir. Bu çerçevede öncelikle futbolun ortaya çıkışı ve Maradona'nın futbol tarihindeki yeri incelenmiştir. Daha sonra Maradona'nın kutsallaşma arayışı ve nasıl bir kült haline geldiği gözlemlenmiş, Iglesia Maradonia'ya ait semboller etnometodolojik olarak analiz edilip yorumlanmıştır. Maradona taraftarlarının kurduğu Iglesia Maradonia, Maradona'yı merkezine alan dini bir anayasadır. Olağanüstü futbol becerileri nedeniyle futbolun azizlerinden biri olarak kabul edilen Maradona, karizmatik kişiliğini sadece saha içinde değil saha dışında da sergiliyor. Bahsi geçen dini/kutsal anayasanın niteliğine bakıldığında bunun bir tarikat hareketi olduğu düşünülebilir. Ancak sosyal bilimlerin nesnellik ilkesi ışığında bakıldığında, daha yeni kurulan, sadece Arjantin'de değil, dünyanın farklı yerlerinde görülen, Hıristiyanlığın karşıt inanç ve öğretilerine sahip olan bu dini anayasa daha uygundur. Yeni Dini Hareketler kapsamında değerlendirilecektir. Bu dini yapının karakterine bakıldığında Maradona'nın 'Tanrının Eli' olarak adlandırılan İngiltere'ye attığı gol, inanç ve uygulamaların şekillenmesinde önemli rol oynuyor. Bu çalışmada gün ışığına çıkarılan bir diğer nokta ise post-modern çağda birey veya grupların geleneksel dini yapılar olmadan da kutsalla ilişkilerini sürdürebildikleridir.

Keywords: Maradona Kilisesi, Kutsal, Din, Futbol.

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Introduction

In the competitive environment of the globalized world, states' success in the sportive context in the name of recognition from the world gives them an advantage. Today, one of the favorite sports in the world, football, gives its watchers incredible gaming pleasure, entertainment, power, sadness, joy, as well as national pride, but most importantly, it opens the door to a world where individuals and societies can express their identities. Social scientists have agreed that football is a social phenomenon that can motivate large masses. The most important identifier of this is how fans of different football clubs can both have intense conflicts within themselves while coming together to support their joint national team. It is thought that football provides social scientists with enough materials on societies' expectations, longings, and views on life with the features it has. At this point, we require a description for postmodernizm. Postmodernism, as well as being a criticism of the modernist approach, is a focus on not being defined by molds and labels and is a focus on symbols. It is explained as an approach that puts the individual first (Özdemir, 2007). It is observed that consumers of the postmodern era (in this study taken as the church members) looks for functionality, symbolism, and experientiality in product and services (Odabaşı, 2004). These are explained as Functionality; products that offer solutions to ongoing and potential consumption-related problems. Symbolic; products that answer to individuals' needs, such as self-improvement, role-playing, and being a part of a community. Experimental: products that respond to individuals' needs, such as joys that have spiritual undertones, expectations of enjoyment, and fantasies. In the post-modern era, it seems possible every humane endeavor that contributes to the individuals' semantic world and takes the place of traditional religions is a product of the search for what is 'sacred.' As one of these humane endeavors, football, especially in Latin American states, has helped create a national identity consciousness by becoming a life philosophy. What makes football players this important is that they have been allowed to factor the place of states in the world order. At this point, it is understood that, especially when the part players play in the success of their teams, they have been given important opportunities to position their place in the world (Albayrak and Karayel, 2022).

Diego Armando Maradona, one of these crucial players, has come to be known in Europe's and World's football sphere due to his incredible skills in the green field. Named one of the best of all time by multiple football commenters, Maradona became famous not only because of his unbelievable skills but also because of the ups and downs in his personal life and his rebellious personality. The topic of this study is the interdisciplinary observation of how the religious movement established by Maradona fans in Argentina, named Iglesia Maradonia/ Hand of God, came to be, how Maradona came to be sacralized, and how the belief system, rituals, and symbols of said church emerged.

Especially with the process of modernization and secularization, it was predicted that religion would lose its power over societies, religion would disappear from all aspects of social life, and maybe even cease to exist altogether. In the environment of religious pluralism that the post-modern/truth era created, it is seen that individuals are in search of something that can convey their religious feelings and personal yearnings. It is seen that individuals and societies are trying to fill this emotional void with non-religious saints that they collectively sacralized. As one of these saints, football instrumentally executes the functions expected from religion by aesthetically pleasing the watchers and conveying the secret yearning in society's collective memories to the green field. Today, it is seen that some fans identify some players that they thought to be important for their teams or country with extraordinary mythological heroes of the old times, and sometimes go even further and turn them into cult objects. The basis of this study is to answer the questions of how Iglesia Maradona came to be as a cult movement, what was Maradona's role in this process, and what were the steps of this sacralization's emergence. This research is a theoretical study that uses the documentation method. Within this framework, firstly, the history and functions of football are explained, and after that, Maradona's life and the process of his sacralization are examined. In the last part, concepts and symbols that affected the emergence of Iglesia Maradona's teachings and rituals are analyzed ethnomethodologically. In this analysis, the conceptualization of post-trust that emerged in the last quarter of the century in the philosophical world has been an important theme.

Football, which increases the attention it gains each year, has become an inseparable part of our lives. Today, football teams that trail large masses of people behind them with the global economic market are the cultural representatives of their respective countries in various organizations and international competitions. Maradona has been accepted as the God/Deity of Football because of his skills in the green fields and his capacity to meet the expectations of the Argentinian people and his team's fans. When the Iglesia Maradonia's character, the topic of this study, is observed, the new religious movement and the post-modern/truth era intersect in their fundamentals.

The Process of Maradona's Sacralization

First Years of Maradona's Career

Maradona, thought to be the god of football by many authority figures in the football world, was born on October 30, 1960, in one of the poorer districts of Buenos Aires as the fifth child. The Argentinian player, who gained attention from an early age with his skills, was signed to Los Cebollitas and then to Argentinos Juniors, where he would go on and sign a professional contract before he was even 16. Maradona takes the field with the Argentina's junior national team as his first professional match when he is 15. After a short time moving on to Argentina A National team, Maradona takes part in the preparation match with Hungary. The national team's coach at the time,

César Luis Menotti, didn't include Maradona at the 1978 World Cup Finals hosted by Argentina. This was an unexpected turn of events for Maradona. However, not giving up, Maradona, after his championship at the Argentina national under-20 football team, transferred to Boca Junior in 1981. After a bright season in Boca, he took his place at the A National Team in the 1982 World Cup hosted in Spain. It wasn't a great tournament for Maradona. Due to disagreements within the team and opponent team members consistently making foul movements to him, he loses his temper and gets a red card because he kicked the opponent team member in the match with Brazil. Argentina couldn't get out of the group and didn't get to play in the semi-finals. With the tournament ending in 1982, he transferred to one of the biggest teams in Europe, the Spanish team Barcelona. Spending two years here, Maradona gets subjected to faults from opponents constantly. Even though he won Spain's Super Cup while he played in Barcelona, due to his rebellious acts on the field and disagreements with team management, he left Barcelona and transferred to the Italian team Napoli (Maradona, 2006).

Napoli Adventure

Maradona left a good impression on his first season in Serie A. Napoli, who finished the 1984-85 season in the eighth place, came third the last year, and came first in the 86/7 season, earning their first championship (Ghirelli, 2020). The Years he spent in Napoli are seen as one of his brightest eras in his career. Maradona almost became godlike with his success in Napoli. When he started playing in Napoli, Diego Armando Maradona came to be seen as a saint in the eyes of the townsfolk, and his name was turned into Saint Maradona. Napoli's Saint Gennaro's name is changed to Saint Gennarmando. Flyers that portray him with the Crown of Mother Mary, the holy cloak on his shoulders, and his football shorts under them were hung on the streets while memorial bottles portraying Silvio Berlusconi with tears and coffins representing Northern Italy's teams were being sold. Children and dogs were walking around the streets wearing wigs that were reminders of Maradona's hair, footballs were put under Dante's statue, and mermaid statues were clothed in Maradona's Napoli uniform. Things start to sour when he announces his plans to leave Napoli; some people were seen sticking pins on his beeswax figurines and hanging them from their windows for sorcery proposes (Galeano, 2008). Maradona almost turns into a prisoner in the hands of townsfolk who see him as a deity and the mafia that controls the whole city. However, his deepening personal issues start to affect his career, too. The rumors about him using cocaine being heard worldwide and his relationship with Camorra¹ pins the start of his career's downfall (Iturriza, 2008).

¹ Camorra: It is the name given to the mafia group in the Naples region of Italy. It is claimed that Maradona was influential in the transfer to Naples (<https://onedio.com/haber/italyan-mafyasi-camorra-nin-futbol-dunyasiyla-iliskisini-gorunce-havretler-icinde-kalacaksiniz-975376>).

1986 Mexico World Cup and the Hand of God

The 1986 World Cup has been recorded as the cup that turned Maradona into a star. Argentina finished the group tournament in first place, took its place in the final 16 teams, and got matched with Uruguay. Eliminating Uruguay, Argentina got to be in the quarter-finals against England. This is the match where Maradona becomes the myth that he is. The June 22, 1986, quarter-finals at Aztek Stadium of Mexico have historical significance for both teams (Maradona, 2006).

The event that intensified the competition between the two states started in 1832. Two states fought a war because of the Falkland Islands, which England claimed in 1832, but Argentina took over in the 1960 (Donuk and Şenduran, 2020). An almost six-year-long war ended with a victorious England. During the war, 225 English and 635 Argentinian soldiers lost their lives. Although both sides suffered tremendous losses due to war, the conflict wasn't solved. After the end of the war, the Islands stayed with Britain. However, Argentina didn't give up its claims over the islands (Dogru, 2019). Argentina and England, who came face to face in the Falkland War, are now face to face in the Aztek stadium. Both sides saw this match as a continuation of the war. Argentina came victorious with a 2-1 score; however, what stood out in the match was the two goals that Maradona scored. Both of these goals had very significant meanings for the people (<https://www.birgun.net/haber/tanrinin-eli-golu-ve-bir-intikam-hikayesi-324395>). The first goal scored by Maradona allegedly scored with his hand instead of his head. And many England fans were persistent that there was misconduct and that the goal should be dismissed. However, what people expected didn't happen, and the goal was accepted. Years later, Maradona would answer the question 'Did you score the goal with your hand?' with 'It was the Hand of God,' and the goal would become one of the most important ones in football history (<https://www.ntvspor.net/futbol/once-tanri-nin-eli-sonra-yuzyilin-golu-5ef073dd255598c490f843ab>). In the documentary by Asif Kapadia for Maradona, Called Diego Maradona (2019), Maradona said about the goal he scored against England, which came to be known as the Hand of God, that the goal had a symbolic meaning, that it represented the revenge for the Falkland Islands. Mainly because the Englishmen celebrated the victory of the 1982 Falkland War by saying, 'God has landed us his hand.' In fact, Maradona took the revenge Argentinian folk were yearning for from England with his Hand of God goal by winning against them (<https://www.birgun.net/haber/tanrinin-eli-golu-ve-bir-intikam-hikayesi-324395>). Facing a lot of backlash from the public because of the goal he scored against England with his hand, Maradona said he would never apologize (Maradona, 2006).

Only four minutes after that goal, Maradona retook the field, dribbled past six English players, including the goalkeeper, and scored a goal one more time. This goal has been named the Goal of the Century by a majority of the football authorities. Argentina eliminated England with a 2-1 score and

got to play in the semi-finals (<https://www.haberturk.com/tanri-nin-eli-hikayesi-sembolik-bir-intikam-di-maradona-1986-dunya-kupasi-ndaki-golu-anlatti-2882076-spor>).

In the semi-finals, Argentina matched with Belgium and came victorious with ease, making them play against West Germany in the finals. German players marked Maradona one-on-one throughout the game. The turning point of this highly competitive match was the assist from Maradona to his team member Burruchaga. Burruchaga, who made most of this pass at him, made Argentina go ahead in the game and earned the World Cup (Maradona, 2006). Aztek Stadium was chosen to host 110,000 pilgrims for the match between Argentina and West Germany. The importance of this stadium is Pope John Paul II held prior religious meetings here. Maradona having and showing the championship trophy in front of the world was considered the post-modern version of Prophet Moses presenting the Ten Commandments to his people (Anaya, 2008).

Sevilla Adventure and Retuning to Argentina

After the end of his suspension due to his cocaine use, Maradona, transferring to Sevilla in 1992, couldn't perform as well as he did in Napoli. After his contract with Sevilla ended, he returned to Argentina and transferred to Newell's Old Boys (Maradona, 2006). In the 94 World Cup, Maradona was thought to return to his old glory until he was exported from the World Cup due to ephedrine found in his urine (Galeano, 2008). Maradona, who was banned from football due to usage of illegal substances, ended his football career in 1977 at Boca Junior, where he transferred in 1995 (Maradona, 2006). Maradona was one of the popular idols of the 20th century because of his extraordinary football skills. However, his extreme usage of drugs and weight gain caused by this ruined his reputation (<https://www.goal.com/tr/haber/diego-maradonanin-oeluem-nedeni-kaderine-terk-edildi/1xx67goytoxg617uo6506vm47z>). According to Galeno (2017) Maradona was a demi-god in the eyes of the public. According to the author, Maradona was an anti-hero, an anti-god who saw the bottom and rose again. The author described this holiness: 'Maradona was worshipped not just because of his marvelous skill but also because he was a dirty, sinful God, the Most human of all Gods (<https://birikimdergisi.com/guncel/10379/tanrilarin-en-insani-maradona>).

Iglesia Maradonia (Church of Maradona)

History of Iglesia Maradona

Although Maradana's goal against England was named 'The Goal of the Century,' his first goal gained more attention. The goal known as 'the Hand of God' was a rematch for the Falkland War for many Argentinians (<https://www.birgun.net/haber/tanrinin-eli-golu-ve-bir-intikam-hikayesi-324395>). So much so that, in 1998, Rosario city of Argentina, with the initiative of three fans of Maradona, Héctor Campomar, Alejandro Verón, and Hernán Amez (

<http://www.iglesiamaradoniana.com.ar/historia/>) a church called Iglesia Maradona was established (Iturriza, 2008). In an internet interview, Hernán Amez, one of the prominent figures in the church, answered the question of ‘Which one was better, Pele or Maradona?’ with ‘There is one thing for a fact that Pele is the king of football, Maradona is the God’ (Chiaretti, 2008). According to Iglesia Maradonia, Football is a religion. Like the way each religion has a god, football has one too, and this God of Football’s name is Diego Armando Maradona of Argentina (<https://www.indyturk.com/node/284946/t%C3%BCrki%CC%87yeden-sesler/maradon>).

These church members accepted Maradona as God and called him ‘D10S’. In Spanish, the word meaning god ‘DIOS’ is formulated as D+10+S by church members. The number 10 represents the number 10 behind Maradona’s football jersey (Sutil, 2008). The church even coined banknotes in the name of Maradona. In Argentina, on the doors of La Bombardona, the stadium of Boca Juniors where Maradona played, it says in Spanish “Boca es mi religion, Maradona es mi dios, la Bombonera es mi iglesia” (Boca is my religion, Maradona is my God, La Bombonera is my temple) (<https://www.birgun.net/haber/tanrinin-eli-golu-ve-bir-intikam-hikayesi-324395>).

Since 2007, the church has had the right to officiate weddings. In the ceremony, both the groom and the bride must wear the number 10 on their back and say their vow while holding a football ball by swearing their loyalty to Diego Maradona (<https://onedio.com/haber/ercan-altug-yilmaz-yazio-dunyadan-bir-maradona-gecti-944441>).

Rituals of Iglesia Maradonia

Maradonian Noel

Church members who call themselves ‘Diegorian’ consider October 30th, the birthday of Maradona, as sacred. They take the year 1960 when Maradona was born, as the beginning and celebrate each October 30th as Maradona’s Noel with a special ritual (<http://arsiv.ntv.com.tr/news/196032.asp>). On the night connecting October 29th to October 30th, Maradona fans drink wine and dance while singing songs written for Maradona. In the other part of the ritual, they sing hymn and prey together in front of Maradona idols they sacralized as God (<http://www.iglesiamaradoniana.com.ar/29-y-30-de-octubre-noche-buena-y-navidad-maradoniana/>; <https://www.indyturk.com/node/284946/t%C3%BCrki%CC%87yeden-sesler/maradon>). The hymn in this ritual goes like this: *In the name of Tota (Maradona’s mother), Don Diego (his father), and the fruit of their love...* after that, everyone accompanies the hymn by saying “*Diego!, Diego!, Diego!*” (https://twitter.com/SamilUslu_/status/1454795907736690693).

Maradonian Easter

The other day considered holy by the Iglesia Maradonia is June 22nd. According to the Iglesia Maradonia calendar, June 22nd is celebrated yearly as Maradonian Easter (<http://www.iglesiamaradoniana.com.ar/22-de-junio-pascuas-maradoniana-la-mano-de-d10s-y-el-gol-del-siglo/>). The significance of this day that is celebrated as a festival comes from the fact the June 22nd is the anniversary of the legendary goal, Maradona himself claimed was with the help of God's hand, scored in June 22nd, 1986 (<https://www.indyturk.com/node/284946/t%C3%BCrki%CC%87yeden-sesler/maradon>). On top of that, this is also the church's baptism day. Anyone who wants to be baptized first must swear loyalty to the book 'Yo soy el Diego' (I am Diego), considered the Bible or Holy Book of the church (<http://www.iglesiamaradoniana.com.ar/22-de-junio-pascuas-maradoniana-la-mano-de-d10s-y-el-gol-del-siglo/>). After that, the person who wants be baptized is made to try three attempts at scoring the 'Hand of the God' goal (https://twitter.com/SamiUslu_/status/1454795907736690693). The person who successfully imitates gets the privilege to be baptized by the church. After that, the person drinks a small amount of Muscato (grape wine) and a slice of Neapolitan pizza. After these, the person is now a new member of Iglesia Maradonia (https://twitter.com/SamiUslu_/status/1454795907736690693).

Latin, an American research journalist, portrayed his experience in the Iglesia Maradonia, which he partook in 2008, as this; 'When you first enter the church, there were some echoes. When we moved onto the church's main hall, we saw a priest reading something from the book in his hands. People there were trying to repeat after the priest. At that moment, everyone started to repeat this short prayer: *"Our Diego that lived in this world, you gave us miracles with your left foot; you will be remembered with the goals you scored."* The dimmed lights in the hall reminded me of the Catholic churches. After a short silence, six men wearing white cloaks with the number 10 written behind them walked in and towards the altar, we are used to from official churches. One of them took the football ball that's considered an icon, and symbolically tried to portray the football's cruel, painful, and suffering side. He started to cover the ball with barbed wire. After that, he poured a red liquid symbol of blood onto the ball. One of the people stepped up and started saying a hymn in a way everyone could hear: *"He was crucified, tortured, and murdered. He was forced to live alone. Not enough his legs got cut off.. But he came back; miraculously he was reborn."* At that moment, an old disciples of the church, affected by the spiritual atmosphere of the church, started crying. The words *"I'm Diego"* were echoing from his mouth. The priest started to calm him down. A short time later, preparations for the baptism started, and the men in white appeared again. A young couple with a three-month-old baby started walking towards the pope. While the priest poured the beer over the baby's head, the ritual was coming to an end. The priest ended the ritual with a focus

on the year they are in, saying, “*The year 48 DD we are in the house of our God Diego*”. ‘DD’ is short for “*Depues del Diego*’ in Spanish, meaning ‘after Diego’ in English (<https://www.esquire.com.tr/spor/2012/04/25/tanrinin-yeni-evi--maradona-kilisesi>)

The likeness of the Ten Commandments in Judaism also exists in Iglesia Maradonia. The church's disciples follow these ten rules, also known as the Rules of Maradona. These then rules are as follows:

1. The ball doesn't get dirty
2. Love for Football should be over all else.
3. Declare your unconditional love for Diego and Football,
4. Fight for Angantina's jersey.
5. Spread the miracles of Diego.
6. Honour the stadiums he played in and do not fault in paying homage to holy jerseys
7. Never associate Diego with one team.
8. Serve upon principles of faith of Iglesia Maradonia
9. The middle name of the disciples of Iglestis Maradonia needs to be ‘Diego.’ Also, disciples of Iglesia Maradonia shall name their firstborn son ‘Diego.’
10. Do not live outside of the reality and become useless

(<https://www.90min.com/es/posts/2692884-los-10-mandamientos-de-la-iglesia-maradoniana>; <https://memeo.org/iglesia-maradona-la-religion-tiene-a-maradona-como-jesus-y-dios/>).

Throughout the history of Christian tradition, it is seen that names of people who rose to saint status have been given to churches. It is thought that during rituals and ceremonies in the church, their spirit would add a spiritual atmosphere to the place. That's why the saints's clothes and other personal items are kept in the church and used as holy symbols. (Aydın, 2009; Polat, 2020). Some items considered sacred by Iglesia Maradonia are a football ball wrapped in barbed wire, shoes that symbolize the goal Maradona scored for Argentina, an imitation of the World Cup, and 34² beaded rosaries. Just like how holy items and icons are essential for the Spanish Catholic Church, the aforementioned items are also necessary for the rituals of Iglesia Maradonia (<https://ussporthistory.com/2017/04/27/the-d10s-phenomenon-diego-maradona-and-modern-latin-american-catholicism/>).

In 2016, Maradona officially announced that he recognizes the church that was attributed to him. He even wore the shirt worn by church members and filmed a video thanking them for glorifying his name. Maradona never attended the ceremonies of the church carrying his name. Instead, he sent

² It symbolizes the 34 goals scored by Maradona on behalf of the Argentine National team (<https://dunvalilar.org/en-tuhaf-10-inanis.html/>).

memorials and shirts signed by him to them. His passing away created a deep sadness among his fans. With Maradona's death, fans started associating Maradona with the Jesus of Nazareth, who died crucified, and the barbed wire football ball with the Barbed wire crown of Jesus (<https://memeo.org/iglesia-maradona-la-religion-tiene-a-maradona-como-jesus-y-dios/>).

Iglesia Maradonia, which emerged in the environment of religious pluralism provided by post-modernism, has hundreds of thousands of followers in many countries like Spain, Italy, Mexico, Brazil, and the USA, with Argentina taking the lead (<https://twitter.com/biansoifer10/status/1454573592205746177>). The church is known to have over 180 thousand followers on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/25009611969/>). With these in mind, the Catholic Church heavily judges this new religious movement. Some conservative Catholic groups in Argentina blame them for being heathens and argue that they should be excommunicated from the religion. As a reason for this, they show Matada's lifestyle. According to them, Maradona is unfit to be an example, let alone a god. Due to this, Diegonians are accused of sacralizing Maradona and being bad examples to younger generations (<https://twitter.com/SamilUslu/status/1454796101635170306>).

Conclusion and Evaluation

When examined mentally and culturally, it is seen that manifestation of holiness doesn't only appear in individuals' religious lives but also everywhere human initiative exists. Expectations and perceptions about the sacred could be different for everybody. In modern times, paralleling the changes in society's socio-cultural, changes in perception and manifestation of the holy can be observed.

Especially in the post-modern/truth era, the subjectivity of truth brought along an evolution in mindset. The perception that religious choice is not a destiny but a personal affair (Davie, 2005) paved the road for the emergence of secular (non-religious) holiness. Now, the portrayal of religious feelings could be re-arranged according to the needs and wants of individuals; this led to the sacralization of the humane phenomenon by associating them with holiness and emptiness in the meanings of what was one thought to be holy and sacred (Aydın, 2013).

In today's world, although it doesn't attribute anything to a transcendent and metaphysic being, the thought system that adds to individuals' and societies' semantic world due to its creative and deductive functions recognizes the philosophy of life as sacred. Due to it being a humane initiative, although it doesn't attribute anything to a transcendent and metaphysical, football, because of its creative and didactic functions, has an influential place in deciding on individuals' thoughts and acts. Game is a type of act with symbolic elements to help understand the existence of humans. Being one of these games, football is an essential factor in creating a collective identity and feeding personal

belonging by being almost a type of existing Latin American country, including Argentina. Iglesia Maradonia, the topic of this study, is a product of the Maradonian Cult that came to be a manifestation of holiness.

Iglesia Maradonia is a new religious movement established in 1998 in Argentina by three friends' initiative. It is seen that 'the Hand of God' metaphor has been effective in creating church rituals. By using the phrase 'the Hand of God' when referring to the goal he scored against England with his hand, Maradona meant that he received God's help; the holy used him (his hand) as the messenger to manifest itself. The fact that the goal was a blatant foul play, and even the referee didn't see Maradona's interception to the ball with his hand, reinforced this assumption. Maradona said that with his goal against England, he avenged the Falkland War in the name of Argentinians, and sacralizing the goal was seen as the representation of God's absolute justice in the eyes of the Argentinian public. Due to this, Maradona was declared a saint and even a deity of football in his people's eyes. Due to his outstanding football skills, he was associated with mythological heroes who defeated monsters of the old days.

Maradona, who is at the center of this religious institution, embodied a holy identity both in the collective memory of the Argentinian public and in the eyes of world football because of his outstanding football abilities. Every team Maradona played in performed with immense success. One of the critical factors that sacralized him is that the teams he played in represented the poor and oppressed minorities of society and his performance in these teams. In his football career, Maradona chose Boca Juniors, who had financial problems then, instead of Argentina River Plate. For his European career, he started with Barcelona, which had issues with the Spanish government because they supported the Catalan people. After his Spain journey, he transferred to Napoli in the south instead of the rich clubs in the North of Italy. During his time in Italy, he earned Napoli two championships in the Serie A and an UEFA championship in Europe. Maradona's ban from the 1994 World Cup, even though he admitted to using cocaine for years, is seen as a character assassination by FIFA President João Havelange (<https://ussporthistory.com/2017/04/27/the-d10s-phenomenon-diego-maradona-and-modern-latin-american-catholicism/>). Especially because Maradona started a political battle against FIFA and established the International Football Union (FIFRPRO) for the protection of players rights (Iturriza, 2008). All these portrayed him as a paragon of virtue who doesn't stay silent against injustice and stand with the oppressed, almost an innocent saint.

In this context, gollowersnof Iglesia Maradonia, use the the fact that Maradona used his hand to score the goal as a justification of solution for ongoing and potential problems. Church members-consumers, make use of, self-improvement, role playing and being a part of a community. Lastly, being a part of expectations to enjoyment, and emotional pleasures. This way it covers the funtionalty, symbolic and experimental search points of post-modern consumer.

A maradonian cult differs from other saints' cults in Latin America because it includes religious post-modern/truth and characters of honesty and truth. Maradona is considered sacred not only by the religious section but also by the seculars. (Sutil, 2008). From the perspective of Religion Sociology, established recently and offering its members a fiery religious, spiritual, and philosophical life (Kirman, 2010), Iglesia Maradonia can be considered under the New Religious Movements. Some characteristics of Iglesia Maradonia that resemble new religious movements are as follows:

- Iglesia Maradonia is a religious movement that emerged in the Post-modern era
- When religious practices of this church are observed, they differ from Christian mainstream. Ten rules, also known as Maradonian rules, should be followed to be a member of said church.
- Iglesia Maradonia has a different holy book (Yo soy El Diego) from a Christian holy book (the Holy Bible).
- Iglesia Maradonia is a syncretic religious institution where the love of football and Maradona is above all else. According to the church's teachings, football is a life philosophy, and Maradona is the deity of football.
- Iglesia Maradonia's teachings are primarily secular. Instead of a prominent look at life, it has an understanding of glorifying football and Maradona.
- Iglesia Maradonia is thought to be a cultist movement because of its worship of Maradona. As a bad example to the younger generation, Maradona's lifestyle has been seen as a public image issue by the Catholic Church.
- Although Iglesia Mardonia was established in Argentina, it is active worldwide now.
- Iglesia Maradonia represents an era in which postmodernist pluralism and diversity are in the spotlight. However, this era has come to be known with different names under postmodernism. The first concept of this approach, where sports, myth, legend, sacred, and the truth interlocked under a goal that was scored outside of sportsmanship doesn't overlap, and ethical sports was used by Steve Tesich in 1992. This concept is 'post-truth' defined as 'Against an objective reality, the mass' personal interests and feeling becoming more important while the truth fades and affects the public opinion.' The holiness form around Iglesia Maradonia is a typical example of sacred's meaning fading by different manifestations of sacred if that Hand of God doesn't exist!

Statement of Researchers' Contribution Rates

All authors contributed equally at all stages of the research.

Conflict Declaration

The authors have no declaration of conflict regarding the research.

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