

SOCIAL COHESIVENESS

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NATION STATES NEED A HUMANE SECULAR NARRATIVE

All societies need a narrative that helps bind together members for their mutual benefit. This has traditionally been of a religious nature, but a religious narrative must necessarily be replaced by a secular narrative in a modern multicultural nation in order to prevent interfaith conflict.

Such a narrative must be inclusive and tolerant, thus promote the humane values that underpin social democracy. Humans are social beings who naturally seek a democratic consensus that protects the shared interests of all, thus social democracy is the natural political system of humanity.

Some groups have tried to replace their nation's religious narrative with disastrous consequences, as was the case in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Namely xenophobic political ideologies that demonized non-believers and cultures that were antagonistic to these ideologies and used as scapegoats; which naturally led to ethnic cleansing, politicicide and genocide.

Popular culture has an important role to play in promoting the humane social norms that are needed to maintain a cohesive and peaceful society. It can also offer a vision of what society can become if we are able to put aside our differences and work together. A prime example of the latter is the *Star Trek* franchise that was created by Gene Roddenberry.

William Shatner, noted for his lead role in the original *Star Trek* TV series (1966-1969) as Captain James T. Kirk, said: "There is a mythological component [to pop culture], especially with science fiction. It's people looking for answers – and science fiction offers to explain the inexplicable, the



Anne and Margot Frank on beach (c. 1935).

same as religion tends to do... If we accept the premise that it has a mythological element, then all the stuff about going out into space and meeting new life – trying to explain it and put a human element to it – it's a hopeful vision. All these things offer hope and imaginative solutions for the future."

The enduring popularity of *Star Trek* is due to the underlying mythology which binds fans together by virtue of their shared love of stories involving exploration, discovery, adventure and friendship that promote an egalitarian and peace loving society where technology and diversity are valued rather than feared and citizens work together for the greater good. Thus *Star Trek* offers a hopeful vision of the future and a template for our lives and our society that we can aspire to.

The medical personnel in *Star Trek* best embody the humane values embedded in this franchise; the most notable of which is Kes, thanks in large part to Jennifer Lien whose remarkable performance brought to life a beautiful child-like being (Ocampa) whose short lifespan and humanity reminds us that the most important element in a life worth living is a loving connection with our fellow human beings.

In the TV mini-series *Arabian Nights* (2000) a storyteller played by Alan Bates told his daughter: "We need stories more than bread itself. They tell us how to live, and why." Our interactions with others also tell a story. If we act in a way that negatively impacts others we are contributing to social dysfunction that can harm people we love.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Societies which lack a humane narrative that helps bind together members for their mutual benefit are prone to instability and violence.

RECOMMENDATION

Nation states must create a secular narrative that helps bind together their disparate elements in a manner that promotes social democracy and the humane values that underpin this political system. An objective that can be aided by popular culture, notably TV shows and movies which promote these values and offer a vision of what our society could be like if we can put aside our differences.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures, Leonard A. Scott, Berkley: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

William Shatner talks 'Star Trek,' sci-fi and fans, Glen McDonald, The News & Observer, March 12, 2015.

