

Austerity, ritualism and the rise of the Neo-Nazis in contemporary Greece: A short comment

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In the last century, the American sociologist Robert Merton tried to explain lawlessness / anomie and thus criminality as a result of the mismatch between goals and offered resources in modern capitalist society. More specifically, he first established conceptual human types: the innovative (that person who adopts the purposes of the society but not the means to achieve them); the rebel (the person who proposes other purposes and means to achieve them different from those offered by the class society); the retreator (the person who, refusing totally everything, is closed in on himself / herself); the conformist (the person who accepts the purposes of society and reproduces them through his / her actions); and the ritualist (the person who essentially accepts the available means offered to him / her – without making an appraisal of the purposes imposed from above – and s/he adopts these means as mainstream values). Merton believed that, from a forensic point of view, the first three types were the most interesting, leaving the ritualist out of the scientific microscope. Nevertheless, the reality would belie him, when, during the trial of Nazi war criminals in Nuremberg, the main justification of the murderers was ‘I was just following orders’, or ‘I did my duty that was dictated by others’.

A closer study enables us to reveal the psyche of such a man who adopts inhumane practices whilst at the same time believing that he is simply doing his duty. This man offends, humiliates, diminishes materially and belittles symbolically his fellow person; he may even directly or indirectly cause the loss of human life. Does he do that due to some inherent personality traits or psychological abnormalities? No! He is a man like us; when the authorities posted a job offer which would entail applying undemocratic and oppressive policies, he simply declared that he would immediately participate, shouting: *‘I’m going to assume my responsibilities’*. Nowadays, he declares himself manager of the problem, frames decrees and internal circulars, putting them on the wall behind his desk (the shrine of legality, as he calls it), and every day he negates one by one the human rights that were won through years of struggle, leading his subordinates (as he considers them) to a state of absolute misery. At last! ... The impersonal system has found its face / person! He declares that he is upset because he causes other people’s slow death, but *‘he has its hands tied’*. If you resist, he will call you an outlaw, a criminal, and bring those who are like him to punish you. But beware! If you, like him, tell him that ritualists of the present are the criminals of tomorrow (just like the SS officers, the *germanotsoliades* [lit. German-Evzones] Evzones who co-operated with the Germans during World War II and thus were considered traitors to their country, the para-state of the Right, the Junta torturers etc.), so he will return to his initial state, a frightened little man.

You meet these frightened little men nowadays (and not only) in every institution of Greek society, and their main feature is that of their ‘position of responsibility’. You meet them at school, at university, in justice, in the public and the wider public sector, at your workplace, even in the family and gender relations. You meet them when they invoke ‘legitimacy’ from above and shrug off collective decisions from below. You meet them when they write articles for the press against every form of dialectical relationship with society, when their elitism emerges from faith in the sovereign, be it either a person or an institution, or an idea, when

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they refuse to accept the historic constant, social change. It is really interesting to see whether the aforementioned features can characterize those who appear to operate beyond the official channels of power and even seem to be in conflict with them.

Of course, this discussion is about the neo-Nazi construct called 'Chrysi Avgi' (lit. 'Golden Dawn'), and another point of scientific analysis of its action, which sheds more light on its connection networks within the existing authoritarian structures of Greek society, explaining this growing electoral (and not only) influence.

First, their self-representation is a mix of avenger/vigilante and protector/guard. As their discourse is derived from and addresses people who have difficulty with complex thinking, they use symbols that reveal the desired identity, stereotypical symbols and colours. The avenger/protector Zorro, by concealing his face and the black colour, joins the avenger/punisher (wherever the hand of the law cannot reach)/guardian Superman, with the red symbol and lack of pants – and an easy collage is readymade. They feel they are superheroes, but never do anything to upset the broader social situation. Instead, they try to preserve and reproduce it by correcting its problems, exactly as others define the problems for them. The challenge for them is that law, order and internal and external security should dominate. In this case, they do not doubt hegemonic and mainstream values. None of them claims laurels for a creation of another legal system that would defend the interests of the oppressed working class. The main concern is to highlight and deal with violent actions, wherever the official state means are not enough to achieve its overarching goals. So for example, does the mainstream view speak about leftists that disrupt order and social peace of the state, with strikes and their protests? Let's beat them, because the police have become very soft. Does the mainstream view speak about criminality produced by immigrants and increase of unemployment produced by foreigners who take our jobs? Let's kill some immigrants. Do University teachers and students refuse to respect the law on Universities? Let's go into the university – there is no university asylum anymore (thanks to the government), and let's beat somebody. Does the official state believe that the debt problem is generated by street vendors who waive taxes (and certainly not by policies of exemption to ship owners and industrialists)? Let's go and break everything over there.

Blind faith in the means (e.g. state legitimacy, media ideology) becomes a value as exactly does blind loyalty to the leader become the mainstream value. And this means that critical questioning of faith in the means (which has also become a cornerstone of the social legitimacy of bourgeois revolutions and Enlightenment) is reduced to the highest offence that should be punished in an exemplary way.

The '(Z)ouperman *Chrysafgitis*' (: the follower of 'Chrysi Avgi') is the evolution of the authoritarian ritualist who 'executes orders' in his space. He is not a socially, economically or politically marginal element due to the consequences of the economic crisis, which are in open conflict with power and authority. Instead, economic crisis and the social roots of neo-Nazism have a common component: the authoritarian nature of a counter-revolutionary process that abolishes every right won by popular struggles. In a state of a miserable economic crisis imposed from the outside, a current structural distress is being cultivated within. The continuous disastrous collapse of the material foundations of society goes hand in hand with political counterrevolution that borrows from the programme of the revolution (curbing in this way the course of a real revolutionary transformation). Then, the 'discovery' of tradition pops up, the reformation of the past in a present that craves for order, hope and a new ritualism in new decisive national leadership.

The education level of these fascists may make them have obvious difficulty in understanding complex arguments and using syntax, grammar and synonyms, but do not underestimate them! They don't fish in muddy waters; they rather look for followers who are ritualists and frightened voters who have resigned from the dialectical relationship of their existence with the social scene for some time now. Authoritarian neo-liberalism produces both. The vicious circle is broken by two direct political actions and one purpose. Disclosure and exemplary punishment of proto-fascists-ritualists, in all workplaces and institutions of socialisation and social control (among them the paid journalists who reduces the faith in the mainstream ideology to messianism) are needed to cut the snake's head and finally to reposition social values so that legitimacy can be expressed from below. Only this will lead to working class justice, as produced by the struggle for a different society.