The Youngsters' Participation in Extreme Right Political Parties in Greece: the Case of Students – Supporters of “Chrisi Avgi”

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Abstract The present paper is concerned with the standpoints related to the current economic and values crisis and which are articulated by the “Chrisi Avgi” supporters, also being teaching faculties’ students. The research was carried out during a period of intense political mobility, because of the double elections in Greece, in May and June 2012. The specific age group was selected due to their future contribution, as educators, to the Greek educational system. Reference is made to the future teachers’ perception of education and their role in schools in association with their choice to support the extreme right party. The research methodology was implemented in the form of repetitive semi-constructed conversations and in three marked determinant phases in which the students’ initial reluctance to express themselves was observed while, after the establishment of a more confident atmosphere, they were apparently willing to actively participate in the research. The outcome focuses on the consideration about the alteration of both the educational system structure and curricula as well as on the teacher’s dynamics to form “the Greek Character” ideal within a downgraded society.

Keywords: *country, extreme right, Greek character, religion, teacher’s role, wear values*

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1. Introduction

The topic of the present research is concerned with the Pedagogical and Teaching Faculties students’ perceptions. The research is confined to particular faculties’ students-members of “Chrisi Avgi”. The researchers’ interest is focused on this political party because it represents openly extreme right standpoints which appeal to young students. Throughout the 2011-2012 researches, the “Chrisi Avgi” voters’ number has been increased in all age groups as well as among youngsters’ category [1] attending Higher Educational Institutions. It has been considered that the students’ category should go under particular investigation, so that observations are collected for the interpretation of their choice to support and reinforce “Chrisi Avgi”.

The researchers’ interest was concentrated on the particular student group because they are directly associated with the education provided to the next generation and, therefore, the transfer of values, attitudes and behaviors.

The present research aims at examining in what way education is defined by the future teachers and, by extension, their role in schools and how they associate their role with their choice to be the adherents or supporters of “Chrisi Avgi”. It is estimated that the conditions are now mature enough in relation to such a

research because “Chrisi Avgi” are represented at the Parliament [2,3]. They are presented by the Mass Media [4,5,6] in which their viewpoints about issues discussed in the Parliament come into the public while at the same time the Greek society is preoccupied with their party events some of which are characterized by the typical, delinquent behavior whereas their everyday policy is contrary to political moral [7].

2. Theoretical Considerations-Findings about the Research

The present research was carried out throughout the Academic year 2011-2012. The specific period is characteristic of particular political mobility within “Chrisi Avgi” with special concentration on the migration issue. «Chrisi Avgi», being an extreme right party, articulates strong anti-migration standpoints. It is not only a xenophobic party like other political parties of the European radical right-wing Populist Party family, but it is also a political party which support racist ideas by distinguishing and classifying hierarchically migrants according to their cultural and biological features. In the big urban center neighborhoods where migrants live or work, many rows are generated and “Chrisi Avgi” gradually acquired the role of the Greeks’ protector

against the migrants [8,9] that receive violent reactions by the “Chrisi Avgi” members. Their behavior is indirectly legalized as it is accepted or at least tolerated by a significant part of the local society who gets the feeling that they are protected [10] by individuals interested in them [11].

It is characteristic that in the areas where “Chrisi Avgi” is activated, the Greek residents are mainly workers or low-pensioners all belonging to the lower social strata and feeling lesser, marginalized and powerless within the period of economic crisis being the specific threat both for them and their families. This gap is now filled by “Chrisi Avgi” in terms of eliminating the harassment against the Greek population. Should the individuals’ marginalization phenomenon be intensified by the economic crisis and the welfare state shrinking, “Chrisi Avgi” is the replacement of this “lack” through providing protection for those individuals who, through the artificial power, the outcome of their contact with the “Chrisi Avgi” members, feel more powerful against the migrants whom they pursue and confront as the cause of economic crisis and wear values [12].

If the lower social groups individuals’ choice to cooperate with “Chrisi Avgi” is interpreted through this model, what is left to be investigated is how students, characterized by a higher educational capital, attending faculties of humanistic studies and approaching the notions “man” and “society”, under psychological and sociological terms, support “Chrisi Avgi”. Pedagogically speaking, the question is how they eventually adopt another mode of consideration which, theoretically, defines both their existence and regulates their students’ personal and social development given the grounds that the particular party’s actions tend to formulate a different kind of political discourse in which emphasis is placed on the adoption of a spontaneous and authentic style of the “Greek discourse”.

Since these questions are of special consideration, concentration has been placed on a specific category that of Pedagogical and Teaching Faculties students as the humanistic educational framework is completely independent from the party’s ideological context. What has been deemed positive is that the research was carried out during a period of two electoral events. Thus, the research findings depicting the voters’ viewpoints, their voting attitude as well as more particular issues of the voters’ attitude on the basis of gender, age and profession were possibly examined.

The students group participating in the research was evaluated to show more interest, present more analytical viewpoints, with the corresponding emotional charge, during the period prior to elections. As a result, more specific elements regarding the students’ viewpoints, objectives and association of the “Chrisi Avgi” standpoints with their personal evolution and the role desired within such a political formation become perceivable. The students’ elections that happened between the two national elections and the particular mobility in establishing a student party were major events.

3. Methodology

The research was initiated by two students attending the Western Macedonia [13] Pedagogical Faculty. They were well-known among students, being called “Chrisi Avgi Fans” and they tried themselves, as it has been stated, “to meet the honor of being “Chrisi Avgi” members. Their external appearance was mostly concentrated on black clothes. They both tried to show their well-exercised bodies [14,15], thus, even during cold winter days their arms were uncovered so that their muscles [16] were well-seen.

Starting from these two students, one of whom carries out a degree work under the topic “Chrisi Avgi brochures content analysis”, the group of interviewees was expanded. The number of the sample eventually reached 22. Although this objective is not of interest at the present moment, the expansion of the group is pursued, even with other researchers, so that more elements are collected as our target group is of special interest. 7 out of the 22 sample individuals accepted a more permanent relationship with the researchers, so that repetitive interviews would be carried out. They were also available as a monitoring group in cases of more profound investigation. Throughout the research, the two initial interviewees produced data related to their organizations function, the brochures under circulation, the actions planned and their evaluations about the local society responses. Complementary elements about the organizations interconnection, the social networks utilization to project ideas and viewpoints as well as particular issues about their participation in events to project the organization’s special nature are of special interest.

As regards methodology [17,18,19,20], the repetitive semi-constructed conversations were chosen, anywhere possible, while at the same time, the collaborators – observers’ remarks were utilized concerning issues of describing students’ typical tactics of approach, namely facilitating other students in their everyday academic affairs, and their function inside and outside University. Throughout this time period, all kinds of material collected by the organizations in relation to posters, books [21], magazines [22], statements-declarations, as well as more specialized texts related to the party’s members presence in the Parliament has been under examination. The questionnaire was re-adjusted after data evaluation deriving from different methodology tools utilized. Remarks and articles by approved Greek researchers who carry out quantitative and qualitative researches on issues related to “Chrisi Avgi” have been concurrently studied.

There were three determinant phases in this research. In the first phase, up until the elections, particular problems were confronted in the sense that the individuals felt insecurity in moving within an outlaw political system with an intense fear of being disapproved. Their responses were laconic and ambiguous. Even individuals – members of the organization stated that “they vote for another party” and that they simply attended the “Chrisi Avgi” events “as something different”. The interviews of this initial stage were time-limited even in terms of content. Many of the interview candidates, when approached, refused their relationship with “Chrisi Avgi” and stated, therefore, that “there must be some mistake” or the researchers were told that there would be a discussion

with them “although we have nothing to do with Chrisi Avgi”.

In the second phase, after the first elections, the research seemed to have acquired a different content as the number of students willing to be interviewed grew and, as it was stated by the two initial collaborators – members of “Chrisi Avgi”, there was communication with students all around Greece that were willing to meet the researchers. During this phase, the interviews were more concise, the time duration was longer, the issues were analyzed and the individuals’ viewpoints were explicitly pushed forward as “the party’s standpoints” while they stated themselves to be members or fans.

The third phase commences after the second elections and still continues. The sample is expanded including students from all over Greece. Some elements regarding their different viewpoints in terms of gender have already been available. It is also regarded that the sample expansion and the collaboration of other researchers will be conducive to a larger number of elements about the students-members of “Chrisi Avgi” profile, their attitude, their role and pursuits.

The fact that the one individual doing his degree work truly systematically and trying to provide comparative data about the members’ function in “Chrisi Avgi” under the ideological pattern expressed through magazines, publications and organizations local material as well as the sub-groups’ unofficial one is considered very positive.

4. Discussion

In the first phase of the research, the sample students were invited mainly to answer questions on how education should be organized, according to their consideration. They were asked questions about the educational system crisis and answers should be provided regarding how this crisis is defined by them, which subjects units are suggested, what are the issues on which the educational discourse should focus and what kind of methodology should be implemented on education. It is noteworthy that the specific party’s education-related ideology is concerned with a radical change of the education system commencing from the educational carriers that should adopt a more national attitude and be more supportive to the re-construction of the educational system towards the elevation of the “Greek character”. They were also asked whether the pedagogical institutions meet the educational needs and what their suggestions would be in case of an eventual change of the syllabus. The elements of their responses were carefully integrated into the parties’ eventual programs, to help them declare which party, according to their opinion, could collect those traits matching the educational pattern already pushed forward. It is common sense that the ideology of “Chrisi Avgi” is concentrated on an essential change of the syllabus aiming at teaching Greeks their actual language and history so that their stances and attitudes are rounded up on the basis of the “Greek ideal”. The enterprise was particularly difficult, during this phase, because, as it has already been mentioned, the students were unwilling to identify with the particular area of “Chrisi Avgi”. Special time was dedicated to general educational questions so that an atmosphere of confidence could be established, research

data could be collected and collaborations could be secured, able to send the researchers to other “Chrisi Avgi” members or fans. In this initial stage, careful manipulations were more than necessary as, within the University Faculties students’ society, the tracing of population related to “Chrisi Avgi” or willing to participate in the research was very difficult.

In the second phase, after the first elections, the research seemed to be more efficient and less painful and exhausting as the students’ first responses expressing their enthusiasm about the elections result were apparent. Besides, they participated in political conversations in which their viewpoints about “Chrisi Avgi” were presented. The two members who were the initial interviewees, tried to gather as many students as possible for the researchers; two female students added as well. In comparison to the first phase, the second one is characterized by a larger number of willing students, the possibility of choice, since following a questions preliminary stage, students were selected to get particularly involved as it was estimated that they would be conducive to adding elements to the research and to forming attitudes and standpoints mainly about their role and expectations within such an extreme right political formation.

Even though, during the first phase, interviews with female students were pursued, they were not at all productive as they were unwilling even to participate in the research. During the introductory stage, the girls refused to participate even in a discussion about educational issues. The girls - participants in the second phase were estimated to have been conducive to material enrichment, while their language skills, expression and sentimental discourse depicted their position within “Chrisi Avgi” as a means to provide more data in comparison to the corresponding male group.

In the third phase, which commenced along with the increasing percentage of “Chrisi Avgi” after the second elections, the interviewees have been further expanded providing the opportunity to meet various students groups. There are, therefore, active students within their organization that is participating in events, attending enlightenment courses, collaborating with other organization members on a local level, participating in both solidarity and striking groups [23]. It is estimated that this phase will be especially fruitful to the researchers because the issue of the party legitimization, also forms the legitimization, of the members’ choices to participate in the party.

The researchers’ primary viewpoint that the members and adherents of “Chrisi Avgi” will express themselves more openly and will refer more analytically to their relationship with the organization and their role in the political and social life is reinforced by the last data provided after the post-elections gallops about the rise of “Chrisi Avgi” and their presence as the third party in the Parliament [24].

5. Conclusions

In the first phase and based on the discussion about educational issues, presented as special research findings in the conference of political science [25,26], what is

stated by the teachers is that during a crisis period the structures and curricula of the educational system should be readjusted. An organization and discipline throughout the bureaucratic structure should be formed. The discussion is indirectly brought back to despotism [27,28] and despotic behaviors. It is observed that the interviewees who mostly underline issues of discipline are doctrinaires, attached to a belief that the schematized pattern of theirs will be conducive to the formulation of a better future both for them and the Greek solidarity. In this respect, discipline to concrete institutions is deemed vital in eliminating forms of anomy and anarchy and increasing people's respect towards the national institutions. The teachers should be evaluated on the basis of whether they accomplish their objectives to form "Greeks willing to serve the country". A number of standpoints are observed to be under unification from the first up to the third phase. The crisis is defined by the interviewees with emphasis given on the values crisis within a contradictory pattern between globalization and "the Greek character" [29]. The definition of "the Greek character" [30] in terms of country, religion, family, and race purity is of special interest. The country is perceived in terms of geography and history. The notion of geography is the expression of the "Chrisi Avgi" viewpoints about the territorial integrity and the "economic recovery" through the utilization of the "Greek wealth-producing resources". According to the interviewees, Greece is under a threat and, being future teachers, they should contribute in returning to "the Greek character". The country issue is associated with the coming back to the "small Greece independent from the globalized threats". "Self-sufficiency" is an ideal, a necessity to maintain the Greek character in contradiction to the "consuming madness" intentionally imposed by the "globalized forms of authority".

Religion, the second element, is presented with an idiosyncratic content by elevating its functionality as the Greek tradition and doctrine. Thus, no distinction between the ancient religion and the Christian one is apparent. Moreover, it is presented as the continuation within time and the element of the Greek character makes it distinct from the others. Without any special references to doctrinal elements its Greek identity is underscored something which should be a teacher's trait and should be conveyed through education.

The two previous elements are connected to the third one placing emphasis on the family, as the value core, conducive to the coming back to values within an expanded draft in which all school, state and society will function within a framework of collaboration under co-ordinate interactions. What is important is that within the family structures and function relationships are under discussion pushing forward old authority and submission relationships. Focus is placed on an idiosyncratic form of discipline and respect in which all family members collaborate with each other yet their roles are distinct. At this point, special references to the introduction of globalized ideas about women are made. These ideas are deemed "devastating" for the traditional values. The issue of respect is deemed important mainly addressing the mother and with special emphasis on the traditional roles [31] undertaken by her. At this point, the girls presented a separated standpoint claiming that equality issues [32] are consolidated and no discussion should be made about the

return to a "relationships old status". A suggestion was made about the "Chrisi Avgi" profile according to which the organization should "combine the old with the modern". It was admitted that the organization's dominating standpoint about the relationship between the two genders is the "old traditional viewpoint about the women's submission" ascribing it to the "limited number of women".

The race purity, being the third element, is repeated by the "Chrisi Avgi" principles and standpoints about the "cities' devastation by the migrants", the "submission to the Muslims", the "population deterioration". Their standpoints about the migrants' presence in Greece in correlation with the economic crisis are of particular interest. A "threat not only for the lower labor force" but for the scientists, as well, is highlighted by the third research element. Emphasis is placed on the "open educational structures" providing the migrants the possibility to rise to the higher educational grades with expenditures on the part of the state. At this point, reference is made to the inter-cultural programs, reinforcing teaching and tutorials. What is underlined by them is that the Greeks, of the lower strata mainly, were deprived of resources which became available to migrants so that "they find themselves today in the same place with the Greek students". In the case of education, in particular, about subjects of Educational Policy, Inter-cultural Education etc., what is underscored is the non-function of the supportive educational carriers for the migrants. The scientific field as well as research findings is abandoned while the adoption of popularism ideologies illustrated by the representatives and brochures of "Chrisi Avgi" is apparent.

The issue of economic crisis is regarded as the "opportunity for reorganization". Education will be readjusted, the model suggested is about the curriculum focus on History, Geography, Religious, Ancient Greek and Physical Education while "the Greek character" is suggested as a special subject and, as it is mentioned by a female student, in a witty way, "the Greek character will be the combination of the cross-curricular and interdisciplinary approach methodology". The writing of new books is suggested with emphasis on the Greek history [33] and issues of Greek culture to promote national education instead of the intercultural one as a means to overcome the moral crisis. The issues of Greek culture should contain elements of the Greek art, customs and manners as well as the utilization of the suitable educational material from literature and the individuals' "narrations" being the witnesses of events or "account books". Intense reference is made at this point to the "role of the communists, socialists, internationalists and the submission to the principles of globalization". As regards the question about the past "communist threat", it is stated that the argumentation used should be utilized in order to notice the "threat" against the Greek civilization. Ancient Greek [34] should be taught along with Modern Greek. Their elimination from schools was conducive to the "missing Greek character" providing the migrants the opportunity to enter Universities". Ancient Greek is only for the Greeks because "there is a historical continuation in our genes". As regards the educational model, they are considered as the national workers that will convey the Greek values to Greek students. Most of the interviewees

underlined the fact that the positive aspect of the economic crisis is that “the economic crisis in Greece” sends away the migrants releasing the Greek state from conventions deteriorating their education. The man-citizen traits that will be formulated are related to the “values development such as body vigor and dynamic discourse against the others”. The mind vigor is expressed through insisting both to students and “teachers’ everyday exercise in order to cease being flabby and submitted to consumption”.

To recapitulate, it is observed that the role of the future teachers- members of “Chrisi Avgi” becomes dynamic during the third phase and they are identified with their viewpoints, ready to contribute to any level. As it has already been stated, a group of teachers is formulated willing to get involved with the organization theoretical framework. It is realized that a large number of members has played a significant role in the striking or intervention groups. What is believed is that they, being the “educated elite”, will be able to form ideological patterns, educational programs and formation of enlightenment material in order to intervene to other population groups. The answer to the question whether the teachers, as educated entities, should participate in groups against the migrants or, in general, in violent activities [35] was that “the members should pass through all the stages, there are no violent behaviors only national behaviors”. It is observed that the prevailing phase is that of the educators referring to the “charm” of the extreme right [36] and fascism [37] ideas, activating individuals to take action, “they find a role within society” within an educational system deemed to disdain them. Besides, what is felt by them is that through “Chrisi Avgi” they will be introduced under different terms while their role will be prevailing in Greece’s reformation on the axis of “the Greek character”.

This group of students-future teachers seems to play a significant role in the organization profile [38] related to education, as a number of interviewees-degree holders have already pursued to express their ideas through the associations of not-hired teachers, D.O.E. (Greek Teachers Association) and O.L.M.E. (Secondary Education Teachers Association).

An issue of consideration is the one related to reactions [39] and contradictions [40,41] of the “Chrisi Avgi” students-supporters against the left wing students, the communist party fans, in particular. It is characteristic that both organizations publish texts illustrating the turning of the one organization against the other. This is also an issue related to the elections outcome according to which there is a shift of voters from “K.K.E.” to “Chrisi Avgi” throughout Greece.

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