Anarchism and the New Greek Civil Society: Examining the Rise of Modern Athenian Youth Politics

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Abstract

Since the country’s return to democracy in the mid-1970s, Greece’s youth population has endured increasing disenfranchisement, a worsening education system, and fear of an unfruitful future. A weak civil society and political party involvement in student unions and other youth-centred organizations have ensured the concerns of this population remain effectively unrepresented and largely unaddressed. This, of course, does not mean that the youth of Greece have been politically disengaged or idle, as evidenced by the December 2008 riots.

The disaffection and anger expressed by Greek youth during the riots grew along with the spread and increasing incorporation of internet and mobile phone technology in their daily lives since the 1990s. From coordinating gatherings over text message to reading the blogs or chat-room postings of friends and strangers experiencing similar problems and enduring similar anxieties, the internet and mobile phones, and the publics they mediate, have become central to Greek youth sociality. It follows that individuals have also come to feel a part of a larger informal anti-establishment collectivity based on small interconnected groups of similarly affected individuals. This is having important political consequences.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted since 2003 among secondary school-aged children to young adults living in Athens, and among anarchists situated in the political dissident neighbourhood Exarchia, this paper examines the rise of a new mode of political engagement and civic action undertaken by the Greek youth population. It will first situate the spread of an anti-establishment ethos among the youth within a process of social change and modernization. This will be followed by an in-depth examination of the role of mobile and internet technology in youth sociality, particularly in the spread and mediation of various anti-state publics. Finally, this paper will examine the use of technology by domestic insurgent groups such as anarchist organizations, paying particular attention to recruitment and the coordination of public action.

This paper will posit the emergence of a new civil society representative of an anti-establishment youth community, and will outline a number of important implications for Greek social policy, activism, and processes of social and political change.

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