

The Greek Peace Movement and the Vietnam War, 1964–1967

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Abstract

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, a peace and disarmament movement, which resembled similar movements at the time on both sides of the Iron Curtain, proliferated in Greece. In 1964, this movement set aside its anti-nuclear agenda and focused on protesting the US intervention in Vietnam. The political context of Greece at the time made Vietnam relatable to the experience of the Greek protestors. Two main themes facilitated this process: the problem of Cyprus and the call for democracy. The Greek experience is comparable to other antiwar and protest movements at the time, and the transnational links and encounters between them are noteworthy. Examination of the anti-war activity of this peace movement with communist affiliations enables a new perspective on the history of the 1960s.

Introduction

This article explores the way in which the Vietnam War was perceived and protested by the Greek peace movement from 1964 to 1967. It thus seeks to merge two historical topics by drawing from the literature of both peace movements and the Vietnam conflict. The war represents a pivotal moment in the history of the Cold War, since it developed as a proxy war between the two superpowers and in that sense represented the “climax of a period of confrontation” (Fink, Gassert and Junker 1998, 17), while at the same time the global movement that developed against it challenged the established consensus of Cold War bipolarity and the mentality of bloc confrontation. This antiwar movement is also inextricably connected with ideas of a global protest movement that developed during the '60s and the revolutionary moment of 1968, particularly in the US (Gallant 2009, 58).¹ From draft resistance in the US to the violent riots of the French May and mobilization in the Soviet bloc, Vietnam is ever-present and “has long

overshadowed the history of the 1960s” (Suri 2003, 163). In this regard, Vietnam worked like “an icon, a situation, a local condition [that] could be transferred, adopted, adapted” (Kornetis 2009, 38), framing domestic issues in postwar societies and accompanying dissent from the Cold War consensus. If the ’60s represents a conglomeration of diverse protests and patterns of transnational encounters, Vietnam stands as the main theme of the transnational aspect of this “Disorderly Decade” (DeGroot 2009).

Peace and disarmament movements of the late 1950s represent another important strand of social movements. These movements successfully challenged both the “confines of the post-war democratic consensus” by redefining the concept of citizenship and protest and “anti-communism as the ideological and emotional framework for Western security policies” (Ziemann 2007, 20) by contributing to the erosion of Cold War bipolarity. Peace movements have been regarded as precursors of the later protest movements: the networks of domestic and international protest they established and the practices they popularized proved indispensable in driving forward the youth antiwar movement in the mid-1960s (Frey 2008, 40–42). The seminal study of Charles DeBenedetti (1990) illustrates this by examining the interconnections of peace and antiwar movements in the US. This dual approach, essential for delineating the specifics of the antiwar experience, has yet to be applied in the context of the Greek peace and antiwar movement that developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The only published study of the Greek peace movement is Evi Gkotzaridis’ (2016) biography of peace activist Grigoris Lambrakis, in which the peace movement is only superficially explored, while Vietnam is almost completely absent from historiography in Greece.² By examining the way the Vietnam War was perceived and protested in Greece, we can understand how the Greek 1960s relates to the international experience as well as how Greece’s domestic issues framed the antiwar protest and vice versa.

During the 1960s, Greece was in a state of transition. Beginning in 1949, after the end of the Civil War and the defeat of the communist-led forces, the Greek political system operated in a “semi-apartheid” (Kornetis 2015a, 487) fashion: discrimination, along with physical and psychological oppression, was employed by the state and the right-wing victors of the Civil War against left-wing citizens and their milieu. This situation was reflected in the continual electoral victories of the conservative right from 1952 to 1963 (Nikolakopoulos 2001, 177–300). By 1964, however, a large social and political movement that demanded the end of the Civil War apparatus and the democratization of the political system managed to install the liberal-centrist party *Enosi Kentrou* («Ένωση Κέντρου») (EK) in power. The new centrist government passed a

number of laws, which saw a partial restoration of democratic principles in Greece. This process of political emancipation and reform, which also saw the development of other social and labor movements and the rise of new cultural trends, was termed the “Greek Spring” or “short sixties” (Rigos, Seferiadis, and Hatzivassiliou 2010), because the era ended prematurely with the 1967 coup. At the same time however, political, social, and military groups, invested in the anti-communist state, threatened this liberal experiment. It was during this exciting and turbulent period that the Greek peace movement expanded and Vietnam started to become a concern for the Greek public. It was also during this period that the fortunes of the island of Cyprus directly affected events in Greece. Already an issue of national interest for Greek politics, the surge of communal violence in 1963 between the Greek and Turkish ethnic groups and the destabilization of the London Treaty played a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of Vietnam.³

The aim of this article is to illustrate how the domestic context of Greek politics shaped perceptions of the conflict and made Vietnam relevant to the Greek experience and to situate this experience in the wider context of the global antiwar and protest movement of the '60s. In this regard, this study is interested both in comparing antiwar experiences and in trying to explore the confluences and intersections of “social, cultural and political formations . . . that are assumed to bear relationships to one another” (Werner and Zimmermann 2006, 31). However, I mainly adhere to the belief that, despite the existing and imagined links between the protest movements, the nation-state retains its primacy as the foremost determinant of the repertoire of protest (Ziemann 2007, 12). Thus I will start by exploring the national particularities and establishing the main characteristics of the Greek peace movement, as the notion of peace was framed by two longstanding themes: the question of Cyprus and the demand for the democratization of the political system. I will then demonstrate how these traits steered the movement’s engagement with the Vietnam War. My aim is simultaneously to reconstruct the relatively unknown history of the Greek peace movement and to narrate its evolution from a disarmament movement, preoccupied with nuclear weapons, to a fully-fledged antiwar movement, with a strong anti-US rhetoric.

Finally, this study aspires to recapture the repertoire, slogans, and cultural traits of the movement, rather than examining its social grounding, membership, or impact in Greek society. Thus, the focus will reside with sources and materials produced by the movement itself, employing primarily unpublished sources from the movement’s archives. The journals *Routes of Peace* (Δρόμοι της Ειρήνης) and *Our Generation* (Η Γενιά μας), which ran constant features

on the war and the global protest against it, provide an opportunity for understanding the transnational perceptions of the movement. I also examine the main newspaper of the Greek Left, *Avgi* (*Αυγή*), which extensively covered the war and, most importantly, the protests of early 1965. Athens, which witnessed the majority of the protests, will be the focus of this study.

*The Greek peace movement through 1964:
Parameters, alignment, and domestication*

Greece's official involvement with the global disarmament movement began in 1955, with an "Appeal to the Greek people, the Political Parties, the Social, Intellectual, and Political Elements of the Country," which was published in the mainstream press of the time (ASKI, EDA Archive, 256.00016). Seventy-seven important individuals, artists, intellectuals, and politicians, most of them associated with left-wing and centrist political formations, signed the appeal, and so gave birth to the Greek Committee for International Détente and Peace («Ελληνική Επιτροπή δια την Διεθνή Ύφεση και Ειρήνη») (EEDYE) or Peace Committee, which formed the backbone of peace, disarmament, and antiwar protest in Greece during the postwar period.⁴ The movement's perception of nuclear power resonated with the contemporary apocalyptic visions of German philosopher and peace activist Günter Anders in his pivotal article "Theses for the Atomic Age" (1962). EEDYE advocated "significant and effectively controlled disarmament" of nuclear weapons and supported multilateral disarmament through the United Nations (UN) (ASKI, EDA Archive, 256.00002). The UN was regarded as the cornerstone for the peaceful international world order the movement envisioned, not least because of its principle of self-determination, which made the UN a point of reference for the anticolonial struggle—a pivotal issue in Greece in light of Cyprus.⁵ The disbanding of military coalitions and the removal of their troops and bases from every country was also proclaimed as one of the movement's goals. The positions of the committee were further clarified during the crisis of 1957–1959, when the conservative government of Konstantinos Karamanlis attempted to acquire NATO-controlled Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) in the same way West Germany did at the time. During this period, the proposal to create a "nuclear-free zone" (Kourkouvelas 2011, 247) in the Balkans evolved as the movement's main "politics of security" (Nehring 2013, 2).⁶

A major event in the movement's history took place in late 1962, when the Bertrand Russell Youth Association («Σύνδεσμος Νέων Μπέρτραντ Ράσελ») (BRYA) initiated its own campaign, consciously and deliberately modeled after

the Committee of 100 in Britain, a splinter force of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and its president Bertrand Russell. In 1963, the Association proclaimed a peace march in the town of Marathon for the coming Easter, in the style of the Easter Marches held across the globe.⁷ The relations of BRYA with EEDYE represent a contested issue: Wittner (1997, 288–289) notes that initially there was friction between the groups, as the communist-led Peace Committee was trying to retain its monopoly on peace activism. However, from the vast number of references to support for the march found in the EEDYE archives, as well as the fact that the political rhetoric and demands of BRYA came with time to mirror those of EEDYE, it is evident that the two groups eventually cooperated closely within a larger network of peace activism and acted as part of the same movement. The march was banned, however, by the conservative government, and the brutal police reaction resulted in at least 2,000 arrests, as well as in the dissemination of the iconic image of MP and EEDYE vice-president Grigoris Lambrakis trying to finish the march alone (Gkotzaridis 2016, 118–200).

When attempting to situate the Greek movement in an international paradigm of peace activism, the issue of alignment arises as an imperative, yet ambiguous, question. Wittner applies the term to the alignment of a peace movement with the overall nuclear policy of the Soviet bloc or its agreement with government policies within this bloc, and generally treats pro-Soviet peace committees as mouthpieces of Soviet foreign policy (1997, 83). Günter Wernicke challenges this approach, arguing that no social movement can be truly independent of its social and cultural strata and that nonalignment came to represent another form of anticommunism and Cold War bipolarity (1998, 266). In the Greek case, Evi Gkotzaridis has arbitrarily branded the movement as nonaligned, assuming that Lambrakis' more independent political thought was shared by the whole movement (2016, 149). Delineating the movement's position regarding the Cold War enables us not only to critically re-approach the concept of alignment but also to better understand its connection with global networks and practices of protest.

In terms of its political affiliation, the movement appears very much aligned to the Soviet bloc and the communist Left. EEDYE, the primary peace organization until 1964, was an affiliate of the World Peace Council (WPC), the pro-Soviet peace network. The party of the Greek Left, United Greek Left («Ενιαία Δημοκρατική Αριστερά») (EDA) had significant ties with EEDYE, including the funding of the movement's journal, *Routes of Peace*, and there was overlap in the membership of the groups (Nastoulis 2014, 71).⁸ Overall, EDA seems to have been the driving force behind the peace enterprise and

although there is no evidence that it directly dictated the movement's policy, it certainly framed the movement with a socialist, pro-Soviet and anticapitalist perspective. In this regard, EEDYE should be associated with other mass organizations and initiatives in the labor or youth movements that were discreetly created, supported, and promoted by EDA at the time (Lamprinou 2017, 23).

The political affiliation of the Bertrand Russell Youth Association, on the other hand, appears more complicated. The fact that BRYA was modelled after the British Committee of 100 helped to drive home the image of a politically nonaligned movement. However, if we examine the political identities of the group's most prominent members, we find many well-known members of EDA's youth branch. One such member, BRYA's secretary Nikos Kiaos, paints a picture in his oral testimony of a semi-independent movement, working within the established frameworks of the left-wing youth: "Many of those [who were affiliated with BRYA] were old friends and had known each other from the student movement [of 1962] . . . Some of us were lads from EDA youth . . . but there was a spontaneous element in all of this" (Interview with Nikos Kiaos, 26 September 2019). Another member of BRYA insists even more on the role EDA youth played in the creation of the Association and recalls that "one night before [the creation of BRYA], Takis Mpenas (EDA youth's secretary) gathered them all around and put forward the idea of the Association. . . . All this was part of EDA" (Interview with N., 23 September 2019).⁹ Whatever the case, it is clear that BRYA originated from the cohorts of the student movement and the left-wing youth, and, like EEDYE, was very much associated with EDA.

The movement, however, also held very significant ties with the nonaligned network of peace movements. In a letter to BRYA circa 1962, Russell himself bestowed upon the new group the mantle of representing the Committee of 100 as the "Greek branch" (ASKI, EDA Archive, 258.00005). Moreover, EEDYE, a group branded by Wittner as aligned with the Soviet Union, was officially represented at the Oxford Conference and the founding of the International Confederation for Disarmament and Peace (ICDP), a coalition of non-aligned peace movements that strictly forbade the admittance of fellow travelers (ASKI, EDA Archive, 256.00014). These international networks of protest would prove indispensable in shaping perceptions of and protest against the Vietnam War, for the Greek movement communicated closely with activists on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

The IRBM crisis of 1957–1959 represented the high point of the movement's period of traditional peace activism, which protested the imminent danger of nuclear annihilation, represented by the potential acquisition of the missiles. In the early 1960s, a new period began for the movement, witnessing

its increasing preoccupation with domestic issues rather than global disarmament. It also continued the process of domestication of its peace agenda with issues that would come to define what peace meant in the Greek context (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 224–249). This turn partially reflected the impact of the early stages of détente, which began in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis and culminated in the Atmospheric Test Ban Treaty of 1963, which initiated the era of “nuclear peace” (Suri 2003, 37–43). Détente in the field of disarmament protest had the effect of depriving the movements of their main goal, thus redirecting their protest capital into domestic issues, like civil rights in the US (DeBenedetti 1990, 52–78). This period coincided in the Greek case with the rise of the political movement against the conservative government of Konstantinos Karamanlis and the post-Civil War apparatus.

The call for democratization of the political system was at the forefront of the Greek movement, albeit in a subtle way: “Democracy, although not mentioned outright due to the political climate, was the main issue for the movement” (Nastoulis 2014, 87). In 1960, EEDYE president Andreas Zakkas cunningly framed his speech for the 15th anniversary of the UN with this issue: “Even though our country has ratified this convention [The Declaration of Human Rights] since 1953 . . . the administration continues to take actions that violate UN principles and fundamental human rights and liberties” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 256.00032). The interconnection between peace and democracy was also reflected in a speech by Lambrakis during his election campaign of 1961: “Dear friends, we are running for election with two pursuits: peace and democracy. We want peace to make sure that no atomic missile base is ever established on Greek soil. . . . We want real democracy to put an end to arbitrary arrests, forced exiles and Third Resolutions” (Gkotzaridis 2016, 168).¹⁰ This viewpoint experienced a surge in support after the elections of October 1961, when the governing party made use of widespread violence and vote tampering (Nikolakopoulos 2001, 264–292). References to the democratic deficit became more frequent and now targeted the right-wing government of Karamanlis specifically as the embodiment of the repressive post-Civil War apparatus.

Lambrakis’s murder in the summer of 1963 by right-wing paramilitaries represents another pivotal moment for the Greek peace movement, initiating a period of politicization that affected the movement not only in terms of rhetoric, but also in its organization. It resulted in intensifying the critique of Karamanlis’s government and transforming it into an open challenge to the post-Civil War status quo, an “unyielding struggle to restore democracy” (*Routes of Peace*, June 1964). In terms of organization, by 1964 peace activism had come to be dominated by the presence of the new youth branch of EDA, an

organization named—after the murdered MP—Lambrakis Democratic Youth («Δημοκρατική Νεολαία Λαμπράκη») (DNL). DNL was the dominant force in the wider political, social, and cultural youth movement of the '60s in Greece (Papathanasiou 2008, 31–109), with peace and disarmament becoming a part of its program. This change was also reflected in the movement's journals. *Routes of Peace* was deemed “insufficient to address the issues of the youth” and was replaced with a new periodical, dedicated solely to a youth audience: *Our Generation* would become the herald of DNL and the most important journal of the peace movement (Nastoulis 2014, 70). This generational change and the new focus on a youth movement was part of a global trend in the peace movement in the early 1960s (Wittner 1997, 442–443).

In a way, peace had always worked as a vehicle for the Left to address the issue of democracy, but it was the unyielding struggle against Karamanlis that made democracy one of the trademarks of the movement. This development, along with the rise of DNL as the dominant peace group, reinforced the movement's political identification within the framework of the Greek Left, which would lead to the further adoption of the Left's anti-imperialist and anti-US perspective. In this regard, the domestication of the peace movement was decisive for the adoption of a political language that would prove fundamental for the shift from a peace agenda to an antiwar one.

Framing the conflict

It was new developments in Cyprus and the Greek political context that paved the way for the identification of the movement with Vietnam. In Cyprus, the spread of communal violence in early 1964 and tensions between the two custodian states prompted the US to intervene drastically, deterring Turkish interventionism and formulating the Acheson Plan, which called for the annexation of Cyprus by Greece, entry to NATO, and the establishment of British and Turkish military bases (Stefanidis 2008). US involvement was dictated not only by the danger of a split in NATO resulting from a Greece-Turkey War, but also by increased Soviet influence in the area and the siding of the Cypriot government with the Non-Aligned Movement (Di Nolfo 2010). Negotiations, however, eventually failed due to disputes between the Greek Prime Minister Papandreou and President Johnson over the terms of the agreement.

Cyprus had always been a major issue for the movement, but now its relevance for the Greek protesters and the public skyrocketed.¹¹ EEDYE was opposed from the beginning to the Acheson Plan: “A strange union this will be. One side a British base, the other Turkish. Even small children understand

this is not a union, it is a ‘tripartition.’ It’s not a solution of peace, but of war” (*Routes of Peace*, August 1964). The committee favored Cyprus’ “independence, according to the UN principle of self-determination,” which would enable its eventual union with Greece outside the network of NATO. American involvement in particular was perceived as an example of imperialistic policy, as EEDYE vice president Mihalis Kirkos explained in his influential speech of 1965: “The Americans are trying to wrap up the Cyprus problem quickly and according to their own imperialistic interests, which go against the interests of Greece and Cyprus” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 256.00006).

Back in Greece, the clash of Papandreou with the US, his contacts with the Soviet bloc, and the way he treated the issue of Cyprus fueled the restlessness of the anticommunist establishment, represented by the royal family, the conservative party and the army. This led to the clash between Papandreou and King Constantine over control of the army, the abdication of the government, and an extended political crisis in July 1965 (Mpotsiou 2008, 103–125). EEDYE, like EDA, immediately sided with the centrist government and issued a statement, condemning the “royal coup” on the grounds that the newly established, pro-monarchy minority government represented a threat to external security, revitalizing the familiar pairing of the concepts of peace and democracy: “Without a democratically elected government, there can be no peaceful policy” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 258.00012). The most common reference, however, was to the US involvement in the ousting of Papandreou: “The government of EK, even though it was basically pro-NATO and pro-US, was not suitable [for handling Cyprus according to US interests]. It had to be replaced by figureheads, obedient to the Court and to them [the US]” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 256.00006). The precious democratic restoration, for which the movement had struggled for so long against Karamanlis, was in peril—at the hands of the American imperialists.

These two issues shaped the perceptions of the US as an aggressive imperialist power that intervened in other countries by dictating their political regimes, as in the case of Greece, or by denying their independence, as in Cyprus. Mihalis Kirkos remarked, “I am convinced that our internal crisis and the dangerous escalation of violence in international affairs is the product solely of the aggressive American policy. . . . Where there is danger of disruption of peace, there you will find the American intervention, obvious or disguised” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 256.00006). In this perception of the US, the Greek movement echoed the rising trend of anti-Americanism in Western Europe at the time (Laliouti 2016, 57–58). In this context, explicit parallels between Vietnam and the Greek experience proliferated: in the New Year’s message of DNL,

the group wished that 1966 “will bring forth the struggle and wishes of all people to restrain the hand of imperialism, which, armed with the arsonist’s torch, spreads the fire [of war] to Vietnam, Congo, Cyprus, and the Dominican Republic” (*Our Generation*, 11 January 1966). Karamanlis, who was rumored to be returning following the ousting of Papandreou, was branded as “our own Diem” (*Our Generation*, 12 April, 1966), a reference to Ngo Dinh Diem, the former dictator of South Vietnam.

The political crisis of July, in particular, created an even more explicit connection with the war, according to the interpretational framework of American involvement in the ousting of Papandreou. It is a fact that the US, in its search to break its diplomatic isolation on Vietnam, officially requested the commitment of Greek troops, a request denied by the prime minister (Laliouti 2016, 138–139). Thus, according to *Avgi*, “The political crisis that the Court, the Right, and the Americans created is directly connected to the constant effort of the American Pentagon to implicate Greece in the dirty war they conduct in Vietnam” (*Avgi*, 10 July 1965). Even though this accusation was never substantially proved, the fact that it coincided with the division between Papandreou and the king augmented the general perception of the war’s relevance to Greek politics.

The realization of the proximity of Vietnam to the Greek experience subsequently gave rise to a substantial sense of solidarity with the Vietcong. Mihalis Kirkos reflected this notion when he stated that “besides our own area [Greece and Cyprus], there is another similar problem for world peace, the problem of Vietnam” and that “the struggle of the Vietnamese people has identical aims to the struggle of the people of Cyprus” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 256.00006). The Vietnam special issue of *Our Generation* reflected this attitude when it mentioned that “in Vietnam the future of every small nation that doesn’t want to become a slave to imperialism is at stake. In Vietnam the very future of peace is at stake” (*Our Generation*, 12 March 1966). Through the national matters of Cyprus and democracy, the Vietnam experience was integrated into the repertoire of the Greek peace movement and its activists “placed themselves within an international paradigm of resistance, recognizing inner connections between their cases” (Kornetis 2015a, 488), thus forming the basis for a community of solidarity.

It was this process of framing the conflict with familiar concepts from the domestic political context that enabled the movement to undergo its own period of “politicization and radicalization” (Frey 2008, 41), a process which marked the transition from peace protest to antiwar protest. This meant that détente and disarmament moved to the background and a straightforward

opposition to the US came to dominate the movement's rhetoric, a development accompanied by the adoption of a much more condemnatory and politicized language of anti-imperialistic critique. This direction of the movement was exemplified in an article by Stefanos Stefanou, published in *Our Generation*:

The Greek youth stands beside the Vietnamese patriots, beside the global anti-imperialistic movement. The struggle feels familiar. . . . The Greek youth **is aware** and everyday learns even more that the source of suffering in our country and all over the world is imperialism. And [it] comes out and shouts “enough with the Yankees, their bases and their murderous cliques, self-determination for Cyprus” . . . and meets with the Vietcong in the wide highway of anti-imperialistic struggle . . . until the imperialistic pestilence is no more, in Vietnam, in Greece, and all over the world. (*Our Generation*, 12 March 1966a; emphasis in the original)

This connection between the future of Cyprus, the political turbulence in Greece, and Vietnam persisted throughout the movement's preoccupation with the war. It shaped the way important episodes of the war were reported in its journals and the type of protests that took place.

Reporting the conflict

From the beginning of the war, the movement kept a close eye on the development of the conflict. From republishing news of military engagements, to reporting the statements of American policymakers, the movement's media kept the protesters and the Greek public well informed on the issue of Vietnam at a time when “one in four [US] citizens did not even know the United States was involved in fighting” (DeBenedetti 1990, 93). Unlike in Western Europe and the US, television and its immediate coverage did not proliferate in Greek markets until the end of the 1960s (Kornetis 2015b, 44), and thus the majority of the war's developments were transmitted through printed media. The detailed reporting in the movement's journals reveals the international networks of communication it maintained with its counterparts and news agencies on both sides of the Iron Curtain. It also provides an insight into its interpretational themes regarding US and Vietnamese politics and the global anti-war protest.

Vietnam appeared as a major issue in the Greek movement's journals at the same time that the official US military intervention began. On 5 August 1964, US President Lyndon Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnamese ports in retaliation for an alleged attack on American destroyers, an event that came to be known as the Tonkin Gulf incident (Young 1991, 165–169). By coincidence, another air raid two days later supplied a seemingly miraculous connection between the Vietnam War and the Greek movement: “First came

the bombing of Vietnam. . . . The bombers departed from the carriers of the seventh fleet and bombed destroyer bases and oil refineries. . . . Then came the bombing of Cyprus. The American example soon found imitators” (*Routes of Peace*, August 1964). The bombing of Greek-Cypriot positions on Mansoura on 7 August 1964 even saw the use of napalm bombs by the Turkish air force, thus creating an even stronger feeling of identification with Vietnam (Kostopoulos 2018).

One of the major interpretational themes of the US involvement found in the movement’s journals could be described as the “motif of lost morality,” according to which “the American people have deep democratic traditions” that dated back to Lincoln’s emancipation policies and culminated in Kennedy as the personification and martyr of this peaceful lineage. On the opposite side stood the forces of “fascism and violence” and the “agents of military monopolies,” which now dominated American policymaking and were responsible for the violent conduct of the war in Vietnam (*Our Generation*, 12 March 1966b). This framing of the US involvement, remarkably, mirrors one of the major arguments articulated by the US antiwar movement at the time—that the war was an immoral enterprise “contradicting America’s liberal ideals” and tarnishing the “moral superiority” of the free world (DeBenedetti 1990, 89–91). This interpretation of the war as an immoral act constituted the core of Greek reporting on the war. Emphasizing the air raids and the use of chemical weapons, the Greek editors helped drive home what Melvin Small concisely described as “the image of a modern air force raining down death on helpless peasants” (Small 2002, 19).

This image of an immoral, corrupt, and incompetent adversary stands in contrast to the heroic and refined representation of the Vietcong and of Communist Vietnam. The guerrillas are portrayed as heroic fighters who sacrifice themselves for the liberation of the country from US imperialism. Unlike the crumbling, American-sponsored South Vietnamese state, which by 1966 had “witnessed 13 coups and 9 government changes during the last two years,” the National Liberation Front (NLF) represented “the unflagging popular will of Vietnam” (*Our Generation*, 12 March 1966c). As Wittner remarks, this view of the Vietcong as conducting a just, anti-imperialist war against American aggression “was never in question” for the Soviet-aligned peace movement, and constituted the main representation of the Vietnamese side of the war (1997, 456).

Another major theme relates to the positive perceptions the movement held about the Soviet camp, representing the Vietcong as part of a progressive, culturally advanced, and peaceful socialist world order. This perception was

developed in part through the publication of reports from Soviet correspondents or other pro-communist reporters. Ivan Scendrov, a Soviet reporter, recounted how the “liberated zones,” the area of South Vietnam under VC control, were an idyllic place, where land had been distributed to farmers, gender equality was imminent, and every aspect of social, economic, and cultural life was improving (*Our Generation*, 12 April 1965). The Greek audience was also introduced to the protagonists of this struggle, with *Avgi* printing the interview of NLF chairman Nguyen Huu Tho with French journalist Madeleine Riffaud of *Humanité* (*Avgi*, 14 February 1965). Riffaud’s influential book, *Dans les Maquis Vietcong*, an account of her journey to Vietnam and her long stay in Vietcong-controlled areas, was later serialized in *Our Generation*, with the title *Among the Vietcong Guerillas* (*Our Generation*, 7 April 1965).

These reports were accompanied by extended photographic coverage, which depicted the everyday life of the Vietcong and their communities. Through these depictions, the journals familiarized Greek audiences with famous images of the guerrillas: their traditional clothing, iconic *non la* (traditional Vietnamese hats), and villages among the rice fields. These stereotypical depictions of the Vietcong adhere to the blueprint of “socialist chromatism” (Slobodian 2015, 24).¹² This chromatism, however, which is otherwise a trademark of the global peace movement, is rather subtle here, since there is very limited use of portraiture and drawings, the foremost techniques of this pictorial tradition.

The movement’s journals also included frequent reports on the global antiwar protest movement that was in the making. The transnational links of the movement and its division of labor proved very useful in providing multiple and diverse sources of information: EEDYE received the bulletins of the WPC-aligned *Mouvement de la Paix* and BRYA those of the VIETNAM INTERNATIONAL, a special publication of the ICDP, both providing information on the antiwar mobilization of their respective peace networks. These networks of communication and “dissemination of news . . . slogans and other symbols” were pivotal in creating a sense of shared experience and goals among the antiwar movement (Ziemann 2007, 24), strengthening the protestors’ belief in their struggle and creating the feeling of an imagined global community of protest. They also reveal the significance of the role that the well-established networks of the peace and disarmament movements played in driving forward protest over Vietnam.

The antiwar reports of the Greek movement were focused primarily on the movement that developed in the US, recognizing its primacy as the most vivid example of Vietnam protest, and the most relevant with regard to influencing the

course of the war. The student mobilization of spring 1965, the first large-scale protests in the US, took place at the Universities of Michigan, California, and elsewhere, and became famous for its sit-ins and the 36-hour antiwar course lectures. These protests were covered extensively in *Our Generation*, which commented that “all these mobilizations of the progressive American youth display such [remarkable] innovation” (*Our Generation*, 14 August 1965). The journal was also able to recapture and convey the new spirit of dissent that was proliferating in the movement: “We are witnessing the creation of a New Left. . . . More and more the American youth realizes the connections between the reactionary foreign policy of Washington and the fundamentally undemocratic conditions of American society” (*Our Generation*, 14 August 1965), a remark resonating with a famous statement made by activist I. F. Stone: “Our basic problem is not in Vietnam but in the USA” (DeBenedetti 1990, 101). In terms of the way the US movement is portrayed, the concept of morality remains the primary interpretational theme, with the students as the most prominent embodiment: “It’s time to let go [of popular perceptions of an apolitical youth] and appreciate this pioneering section of the American youth, which carries on the liberal and democratic traditions of its country” (*Our Generation*, 14 August 1965). Famous critics of the war, including Senator Wayne Morse, economist Hans Morgenthau, and writer Arthur Miller were constantly featured in the journal’s articles, “mourning the murder of [US] civilization and humanitarianism by Johnson’s Vietnam policy” (*Our Generation*, 12 March 1966b).

Protesting the war

Protest in Greece over Vietnam began during the spring of 1965, at roughly the same time that the student movement mobilized in the US. The first initiatives took the form of demonstrations hosted by the main peace groups in the theaters of the capital. The labor branch of the movement was the first to organize such an event on 12 February at the Veaki, just one week after the initiation of the bombing campaign against North Vietnam (*Avgi*, 11 February 1965).¹³ A month later, the other groups followed suit, with DNL organizing its own rally at the Gloria on 15 March and EEDYE on 29 March at the Hatzichristos (Kostopoulos 2018). The setup of those rallies was identical, with important individuals from the peace movement addressing other important left-wing figures, like EDA MP Leonidas Kirkos, who attended all three of the rallies, and with the signing of petitions and declarations condemning the war (*Avgi*, 16 February 1965). In terms of the rhetoric employed, the speakers at these rallies approached Vietnam primarily as “a problem for global peace” (*Avgi*, 11

February 1965), echoing the most common motif of protest among the global disarmament movement: the war in Vietnam was perceived as a threat to détente between the two superpowers, the very goal that the global peace movement had struggled for so long to achieve (DeBenedetti 1990, 90). Unlike Western peace movements, however, which refrained from picking sides and emphasized the need to cease all hostilities and begin negotiations for a political solution—a line slightly more favorable to the US policy (Nehring 2013, 125–136)—the Greek movement firmly declared its allegiance to the Vietcong.

Another major issue in the early stages of the protest movement was its preoccupation with the arrival of the Sixth Fleet of the US Navy at the harbor of Piraeus. The facts that news of the fleet’s arrival was published only days after the initiation of the bombings in Vietnam, and that the alleged US intervention in Cyprus was still an ongoing issue, created a strong connection between the Sixth Fleet, Vietnam, and Cyprus: “The Sixth Fleet, this wandering policeman of American imperialism, appears in the waters of the Mediterranean to ‘reason’ with peace-loving people, especially the people of Cyprus . . . like the Seventh, anchored in the seas of Vietnam” (*Avgi*, 12 February 1965). The news of the arrival of the fleet generated much uproar among the Greek movement at the time and culminated in a large rally organized by EEDYE to “greet” the arrival of the fleet on 11 April. At this rally, along with the other demands for disarmament and the call to block the anchoring of the fleet, EEDYE Vice President Mihalis Kirkos made Vietnam explicitly relevant: “Wherever there is a danger to Peace, peace-loving people should protest . . . The Americans have started a relentless war against the people of Vietnam to choke its will. Thus, rightly so, our people are protesting in order to enforce the right of the Vietnamese people” (*Avgi*, 13 April 1965).

It was in the Easter march of 1965 that peace activism for Vietnam reached its high point, since this well-established and highly popular practice of the movement proved the ideal medium to communicate solidarity with the Vietcong and the relate their struggle to the Greek experience. In the “Credo” of the 1965 march, a kind of manifesto of the movement translated into English, the protestors were “treading in the footsteps of Grigoris Lambrakis, side by side with Bertrand Russell, Linus Pauling, Luther King and Ehrenburg” and were marching “for the far-off martyred land of Vietnam” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 263.00057). The connection between Cyprus and Vietnam again dominated the slogans and materials of the marches: in a membership card distributed to participants, BRYA stated: “Marcher of peace, we salute you! Don’t forget that the struggle for peace doesn’t end today. That Vietnam will be bombed tomorrow as well. That Cyprus will be in danger tomorrow” (ASKI, EDA Archive,

261.0047), while one of the main slogans was the cry “Cyprus-Vietnam!” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 263.00063). The march of 1965, with its estimated turnout of half a million participants, proved the perfect terrain for the popularization of Vietnam among the Greek public (*Avgi*, 25 May 1965).

The archives from the organization of the march reveal the transnational scope of the protest and the connections of the Greek movement with groups and important figures of the wider peace and antiwar movement. The organizers sent letters to multiple leaders of the global antiwar movement, requesting their support for the march. Those leaders included Senator Morse and Martin Luther King (ASKI, EDA Archive, 263.00095 and 263.00096). Linus Pauling, a famous US activist, who persistently advocated for the political inclusiveness of the disarmament movement, gladly accepted the position of Honorary President of the Third Marathon March Organization Committee (ASKI, EDA Archive, 263.00104). Famous American singer and antiwar activist Joan Baez also sent her regards to the march, “in memory of Grigoris Lambrakis” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 261.00028).

The Easter marches, however, did not constitute the sole terrain of the movement’s transnational connections. The Washington march of 27 November 1965, the largest antiwar demonstration of the time (DeBenedetti 1990, 131–133), captured the attention of the movement. DNL sent a letter of support to the organizers of the march, reframing the otherwise liberal-oriented agenda of the letter with its outright support and “admiration for the heroic Vietcong” (ASKI, EDA Archive, 274.00037). In 1966, BRYA answered the call of the VIETNAM INTERNATIONAL initiative of the ICDP to host “silent vigils outside American Embassies and Consulates” on the anniversary of American independence (ASKI, EDA Archive, 261.00013). In February 1967, DNL received a letter from the Student Mobilization Committee (SMC), the group which formed the backbone of the largest mobilization in the US at this stage, the 15 April march (DeBenedetti 1990, 163–174). In the letter, the SMC appealed to DNL to aid them by organizing support for a corresponding march in Athens (ASKI, EDA Archive, 258.00030). Although the march never took place, probably because of the tense political climate in Greece during the days before the 17 April coup, the correspondence does reveal the range of the movement’s influence abroad.

One of the things that separates the Greek experience of antiwar protest from the corresponding movements in the US and Western Europe is that it lacked a “coalition of peace” (DeBenedetti 1990, 64), a broader platform that included liberals, pacifists, and religious groups. The polarization created by the legacy of the Civil War, the lack of pacifist groups and traditions in Greece, and the identification of all religious institutions and groups with the

anticommunist apparatus meant that the Greek Left, its sympathizers, and the EDA-affiliated mass organizations and initiatives constituted the sole agents of antiwar protest, just as they were the sole agents of peace and disarmament protest.¹⁴ Thus, Vietnam protest in Greece proliferated primarily within the already narrowly defined frameworks and protest networks of the Greek peace movement. The protestors were well organized, following a strictly predefined repertoire of actions and slogans, and they refrained from using violence or confrontational politics and practices. In this regard, the image of the protestors could be related to the concept of “middle-class radicalism,” not in the sense of the protestors’ social class, but rather in the way the term came to describe a well-mannered and organized crowd of respectable citizens peacefully exercising their constitutional rights (Ziemann 2007, 23; Nehring 2013, 81–82). This image of respectable and peaceful protest represented the main paradigm of the movement. However, Vietnam also acted as a catalyst for the emergence of more radical elements within the movement.

It was on 2 April 1965, during the march of the Greek National Student Union («Εθνική Φοιτητική Ένωση Ελλάδας») (EFEE) to the US embassy, that the peaceful consensus of the movement was put to the test.¹⁵ The previous day, a group of representatives of local peace committees and other antiwar groups had departed from their non-confrontational politics by attempting to deliver the resolution of the Hatzichristos rally in person and *en masse* to the American embassy (Avgi, 2 April 1965a). Their march was blocked outside the embassy by substantial police forces and tensions rose quickly, until the police eventually backed down and permitted individuals to deliver their resolutions. This incident should be considered as a prelude to the events that followed the next day. It is also an indicator of the lack of tolerance that the centrist government exhibited for more confrontational practices—especially those that could further endanger the Greece-US relations after the fallout over Cyprus. It was in this tense political climate that the EFEE-planned march to the embassy to protest Vietnam and Cyprus was banned by order of the police (Kostopoulos 2018).

In a turn of events strikingly reminiscent of similar protests in Western Europe and particularly the events of the French May at the Sorbonne three years later (Suri 2003, 165, 187–189), police repression and use of force transformed a protest rally about faraway issues into a fierce riot in the heart of the capital. The students responded to the ban by stating that they did not recognize “the right of police authorities to ‘approve or disapprove of’ the student mobilization in the historical area of Propylaia [the university administration building]” and called for the march to take place (Avgi, 2 April 1965b). Tasos

Kostopoulos remarks that the ban had the effect of “reversing the priorities of the march” (2018), placing the call for defending civil and academic liberties at the forefront of the mobilization and pushing Vietnam to the background. The result of the student-police confrontation was a 12-hour riot in the city center, indiscriminate police violence, skirmishes between police and protestors, and the deliberate beating of EDA MP and DNL honorary president Mikis Theodorakis (*Avgi*, 3 April 1965a).

The images of violent clashes and police brutality deeply shocked the public of the capital, since they constituted the first such event after the fall of Karamanlis and the inauguration of the centrist government over a year previously. They represented an even greater shock for the Greek Left, whose members felt that the government’s response of banning the march constituted a selling out of the independent foreign policy that it had once pursued. Leonidas Kirkos remarked:

THERE IS NO EXCUSE. There is only the shameful effort not to dissatisfy the Americans with the expression of the sentiments of the youth about their crimes in Cyprus and Vietnam. . . . All the big talk of the government and its president [in relation to the US] evaporated yesterday. What is left from the declarations of “national pride”? (*Avgi*, 3 April 1965b; emphasis in the original)

The events tapped into another issue familiar in the Greek political context and peace movement. Reminding the public that “the days of Karamanlis are not gone forever,” the left-wing press and political groups directly challenged the government on the issue of democratization and the dissolution of paramilitary groups involved in the incident. Even members of EK, particularly its youth, raised questions about the effectiveness of the government’s democratization measures (*Avgi*, 3 April 1965c). Thus, the events spurred by the banning of the march created a small-scale political crisis, threatening the political consensus between the Center and the Left and reinvigorating calls for more civil liberties. In this regard, too, the April 2 riot was reminiscent of protests that took place in Western Europe during 1968, when the issue of Vietnam framed and simultaneously initiated a youth protest against the perceived limits of political expression and state repression.

Conclusion

The history of Vietnam protest in Greece during the ’60s is inextricably connected to the story of the Greek peace movement. In many ways, the movement started as a typical peace and disarmament movement of the kind that

proliferated at the early stages of the Cold War, advocating for a peaceful world order based on a consensus between the two superpowers. By the 1960s, the intense political climate created by the movement for democratization, along with the Cyprus question, captured the energy of the movement, resulting in its politicization and the domestication of its demands and goals. This national context made Vietnam relatable to the Greek experience, thus putting the issue of the war at the forefront of the movement. In this regard, Vietnam protest represents the final chapter of the Greek peace movement, which saw its radicalization through its complete association with the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Left. The Greek case thus seems to further solidify the notion that peace activism created the groundwork for the emergence of the antiwar movement, initiating the “political activities that took the world by storm” during the global 1960s (Gildea 2017, 26).

The archives and media of the Greek peace movement testify to the truly transnational aspect of its protest: the movement coincided, interacted, and developed similar patterns of protest with its contemporary counterparts. Its perceptions of the war and the antiwar movement encompassed a wide range of events and actors around the globe, from the guerillas themselves in the jungles of Vietnam to student activism in the US. The Greek peace groups took advantage of their established networks with peace activists throughout the world and exhibited an array of initiatives with a clear international scope. In the spring of 1965, the Greek students mobilized for the same issue that made their counterparts in the US protest their government’s actions. Their confrontational tactics and the brutal police crackdown at the April riots transformed the call for peace in Vietnam into a metonymic call for political liberties back home, as was the case for French and West German students three years later. In this regard, the Greek experience does seem to fit the description of a global protest movement inspired by the revolutionary guerilla movements of the Third World.

However, Vietnam protests in Greece were also the product of the national particularities of the country, thus differing substantially from the experience of Western Europe or the US. To begin with, the post-Civil War apparatus created a much more restrictive and authoritarian political climate than that of Western democracies, thus making a case for Greece at the time to be considered as part of the Southern European or Mediterranean experience of non-communist authoritarian regimes (Gildea, 2017, 25). With the proliferation of the democratization effort, Vietnam was incorporated into the repertoire of a decade-long political and social movement. In that sense, the political climate of 1960s Greece was certainly very dramatic,¹⁶ in that it connected antiwar protest with an old and well established tradition of political protest

and activism. The role the Greek “Old” Left played in this antiwar movement is another differentiation from the Western experience, where protest against the war was generally carried out by either a loose alliance of liberals and pacifists with the New Left, or by radical student militants. In Greece, EDA itself functioned as the overarching platform of antiwar protest, with every aspect of the movement, from the peace initiatives to the DNL, even the student and labor unions, being incorporated in the party’s substantial administrative mechanism and political apparatus. Thus, a would-be (if not for the post-Civil War restrictions) Communist Party constituted the primary agent of antiwar protest during the Greek 1960s.

Observations such as these raise questions with regard to the way we remember and write about the revolutionary moment of 1968 and the ’60s more generally. All too often, the attention of historians is fixed on the actions and lives of young radical students, since this radical youth culture represented a breakthrough, introducing new forms of political expression that had a long-lasting impact on Western societies. The French May has come to serve as a metonym for all the protests of the ’60s, both for protestors and historians (Fink, Gassert, and Junker 1998, 18). This study, however, has focused on an entirely different network of protest and activism, which existed alongside the young militants. More traditional groups, with their origins in the 1950s and even further back, continued to play a substantial role in the antiwar movement, like “Old” Left communists, liberals, and pacifists. These groups, of course, were not sealed off from the new radicals in terms of practices and cultural traits, but rather interacted with them. Further research in this direction would enable us to more accurately reconstruct the experience of the ’60s.

The coup of 1967 and the establishment of the dictatorship of the Colonels abruptly ended the political crisis, along with antiwar protest and every other social movement of the 1960s. The story of Vietnam in Greece did not end here, however, as it escaped with many Greek students to Western Europe. There, the seeds of militancy that were planted by events like the April 2 riots flourished after coming into contact with the radical culture of their foreign counterparts. And back in Greece, the “Children of the Dictatorship” (Kornetis 2015b), the protagonists of the pivotal student revolt of 1973 that shook the regime of the Colonels, were coming of age, rediscovering not only Vietnam and “third-worldism,” but also the legacy of their precursors, the activists and youths of the social and political movements of the Greek “Short Sixties.”

NOTES

¹This study treats 1968 as a convention that stands for the wider protests and mobilizations of the decade.

²A more comprehensive, yet unpublished, study of the Greek Peace Committee has been written by Nastoulis Aggelos (2014). The Vietnam war and the related protests, however, represents a very small fraction of his work, which focuses on the period between 1957 and 1963.

³Cyprus was a British colony with two ethnic groups, a Greek majority and a Turkish minority. It witnessed from 1955 the fierce anticolonial struggle of the Greek population for independence and union with Greece. The conflict ended in 1959 with the London Conference, which recognized the independence of the island, prohibited any plans of partition between the two groups and integration to either Greece or Turkey, and placed the two states, along with Britain, as custodians of the new settlement (Hatzivassiliou 2005, 523–524).

⁴This tactic of gathering the signatures of important individuals was common in the formation of disarmament movements at the time, like the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) (Wittner 1997, 44–59).

⁵For the importance that the UN held for anticolonial movements at the time, see the work of Samuel Moyn (2010, 95–119).

⁶Nehring uses the term to describe how peace movements effectively challenged the established security doctrines of their respective societies by promoting alternative defense plans, based on the concept of nuclear disarmament (2013, 2–4).

⁷The tradition of Easter marches protesting nuclear weapons originates in the UK. In 1958, a four-day march took place from London to a nuclear weapons factory in Aldermaston took place (Taylor 1988, 48–49).

⁸It has to be pointed out that EEDYE had no fixed membership. The overlap between the committee and EDA derives from the existence of well-known EDA members among its ranks. (Nastoulis 2014, 105–111).

⁹This member of BRYA wishes to retain his/her anonymity and will be listed as “N.”

¹⁰Lambrakis here is referring to the repressive institutional framework of the post-Civil War Greek state, which allowed military tribunals to punish citizens indiscriminately on the suspicion of communist beliefs, imposing life imprisonments and death sentences without providing the accused with the right to appeal.

¹¹In 1957, EEDYE argued that the acceptance of IRBMs would create a restrictive framework in external policy that would hamper the country’s efforts for unification with Cyprus (ASKI, EDA Archive, 256.00017).

¹²Slobodian defines “socialist chromatism” as a particular strand of social realism found among the socialist states and the pro-communist peace and other organizations. This pictorial tradition relied on conventional perceptions of biological and ethnographic characteristics, like skin color, facial features, or traditional clothing, in order to visualize racial distinction in a rather orientalist manner.

¹³Operation ROLLING THUNDER, which initiated the air raids on North Vietnam, began on 5 February 1965.

¹⁴One slight exception is the role the centrist EK played in relation to the antiwar protest. Even though the centrist media and intellectuals were generally sympathetic to anti-imperialistic interpretations of the war, they kept their distance from protest activities while EK was in power.

The protest was perceived as making EK vulnerable to criticism from the Right for showing lack of control.

¹⁵The Greek student movement, albeit more independent from the Left than DNL, was still dominated by left-wing activists and largely adhered to the peace politics of the Greek peace movement.

¹⁶In contrast to Charles de Gaulle's famous remark of that, prior to 1968, France experienced a political period "certainly not dramatic," as quoted in Suri (2003, 186).

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