

Bad Subjects

Political Education for Everyday Life

The Iraq War and Greek Anti-War Organisations

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In recent years, 'social mobilisation,' both its essence and its form, has become a contested issue in Greek politics. Until the mid-nineties consensus opinion described Greek civil society as atrophic — if not non-existent. A variety of reasons were given for this shortcoming, the major argument being that it could all be blamed on the specific socio-economic conditions prevailing in Greece — clientelism, nepotism, cronyism and the rest, themselves a result of the country's early parliamentarism and late industrialisation. Following such a rationalisation, Greece was assigned to a group of so-called 'semi-peripheral' countries whose destiny supposedly included populist leaders, military coups, and the absence of a strong civil society. The absence of any serious social protest, as well as the subordination of any minor movements to party politics, served as self-evident proofs of the non-participatory character of Greeks.

By the mid-nineties, this consensus broke down due to the rise of new social movements, especially environmental ones. Although it was quickly pointed out — and most probably is the case — that these protests were nothing more than *petit-bourgeois*, 'not-in-my-back-yard' kinds of resistance, their occurrence and volume gave food for thought. Before the argument died out, anti-/alternative globalisation and anti-war movements began to rise.

The protest events for these movements, as well as their sheer magnitude, challenge the predominant idea of the non-participatory Greek. Yet does this latest development imply that the Greek protests occurred and developed independently of the Greek political parties? In other words, has the Greek civil society managed to articulate an independent movement, springing from 'below', or have Greek political parties managed once again to subdue any horizontal, societal grievances to their vertical, political agenda?

The major Greek parties, the Conservatives and the ruling Socialists, have tried to co-opt both sides, the national audience on one hand and their

international supporters on the other, in a cynical attempt to ride the wave of popular discontent. Thus, during the Greek EU presidency, and while the (Socialist) Greek finance minister was hosting his EU counterparts, the Secretary General of his party was calling on the Greek people to march against "neo-liberal globalisation," and placing himself on the front line of the demonstration during the ECOFIN meeting. A similar event occurred during the latest war on Iraq: while the Greek Conservatives' leader was advocating "restraint and moderation" in dealing with Saddam Hussein, his party's MEPs were endorsing a declaration by the EPP-ED (European Peoples Party-European Democrats) approving US actions in Iraq.

To which extent then, can the latest anti-globalisation and anti-war protests in Greece occur independently of the parties' grasp and pose a challenge to existing political classes? Can we finally identify the emergence of a strong civil-society movement? What kind of people protest, how do they do it, to what do they aspire, and what are their claims? What are the alliances between different social movement organisations and what can they tell us concerning the strengths and prospects of the movement?

Researching Protests

In our work, first we examined newspaper reports of protest events dealing with globalisation and anti-war issues over the last five years. Second, we embarked on *in situ* research when major protest events occurred during the past year.

Media analysis shows — quite expectedly — that the overwhelming majority of protests occurring in Greece during the first half of 2003 concerned the war on Iraq and the EU summit. One way of 'measuring' interactions between social protest organisations is through network analysis techniques. By recording every organisation that participated in these protests, but also by recording instances of competing protests on the same issue at the same time but at different locations, we mapped a network of divergence or competition, and demonstrated a fundamental split within the movement: the competing factions grouped around the two major left-wing parties, the Coalition for the Left, versus the Ecology and the Social Movements (SYN) and the Greek Communist Party (KKE).

This phenomenon can be explained in two possible ways: either (a) the two blocs accommodate different kind of followers, both in socio-demographic and ideological terms, or (b) this was the outcome of a top-down approach, initiated by party leaderships, aiming to sealing off their own political space — and followers — from political rivals.

But which was the better explanation? We decided to use protesters socio-economic and ideological profiles: if analysis demonstrated that the rank-and-file of different blocs held competing beliefs, then the split would simply indicate pre-existing divisions among followers. On the other hand, if this turned out not to be the case, there would be good reason to argue that this was party politics. An opportunity to test our theory arrived with

the EU summit in Thessaloniki.

EU Summit Protesters and Ideologies

Our team went to the EU Summit meeting at Thessaloniki, Greece, June 19-21, 2003, and lived in open protest camps to do questionnaire-based research. Although other research teams have conducted similar research in different countries, our data differ in two important ways. First, the people interviewed were activists and not one-off demonstrators. We obtained insight into a quite distinctive and under-researched social group. Second, at the time, the war in Iraq was effectively over, while in other research data were collected prior or during the war. Accordingly, we sought to ascertain whether there was a time-effect on perceptions of the Iraq War and its justification. Did military 'success' justify the 'means'? We tried to estimate the echo of the Iraq War as juxtaposed to attitudes towards war in general. Finally, since different groups that hitherto had avoided any cooperation staged the Thessaloniki protests, we explored the extent to which this separation is due to distinctive socio-economic followings or rather to political resource mobilisation issues.

The 148 respondents were evenly divided between males and females. Local Thessaloniki residents predominated. Respondents tended to be under the age of thirty, either with high academic qualifications or currently students. Those active in the workforce tended to be highly skilled and employed in the private sector, especially in services and education.

Interviewees were seasoned protesters who arrived warmed up for Thessaloniki: nearly three-quarters had participated at a public protest the month leading to the EU summit. Although identifying a "democracy deficit" both at national and EU levels, respondents exhibited a great interest in politics (approx. 90% were 'very much' or 'very' interested in politics). The perceived "democracy deficit," however, must be disentangled from electoral participation. Controlling for those unable to vote in the last parliamentary election, there was a weak and insignificant correlation between "satisfaction with democracy" and voting. Although the response rate concerning the party voted for at the last general election was low (approximately 19%), those who did cast a ballot were evenly split between the two major Greek leftist parties, KKE and SYN.

War for What?

Does it make sense to interview protesters on war issues during an EU summit, especially when this war was already over and the EU was not directly involved into it? Surprisingly enough, the protesters themselves seemed to think that it was relevant. For almost 11%, war was one of the reasons for demonstrating at Thessaloniki. When juxtaposed against other prominent reasons, war's importance becomes even clearer, e.g., capitalism (10.8%), neo-liberalism (6.7%), globalisation (14.2%), the European Union

(8.8%), EU policies (10.8%), EU leaders' decisions and plans (4.7%). Furthermore, war had been an issue that had mobilised 87.2%, compared with much lower rates for social/trade union issues (67.6%) and anti-globalisation (66.9%), allowing for multiple responses.

The research questions included one on the Iraq War and a second on war in general, both with statements for agreement or disagreement. In the Iraq War question, the only statement that provoked significant counter-reaction was one stating "The Iraq regime had to come down in order to stop the suffering of the Iraqi people." Around 6% highlighted that this was not done by the Iraqi people themselves, indicating that for them a clear line is drawn between popular uprisings and foreign intervention. In the generic question on war, personal responses tended to highlight the difference between "a liberating, indigenous, popular, and/or class war" versus "imperialistic" wars, the former being condoned.

As far as the Iraq War, respondents overwhelmingly believed this was "a war for oil" (approximately 93%). Alliance claims that "Saddam was a threat to global peace" or that "his fall was necessary to stop the misery of the Iraqi people" failed to make an impression. The other side's claims, namely that this was a "Crusade" or a "racist war," were similarly rejected. The most important finding was the complete rejection of the United Nations as a mean for legitimising war, with over 90% disagreeing or disagreeing strongly that the UN could provide legitimisation. Does this imply rejection of the UN? This does seem to be the case upon comparing the level of trust respondents placed in different institutions: the UN scored very low — lower than the Greek public administration and national parliament, and similar to the media!

Analysis of the generic war question offers interesting findings. First, there is no correlation between the statement "war occurs due to interests" and any statement concerning the war on Iraq (contrary to anticipation of a strong positive correlation to the "war for oil" scenario). Second, there exists a small yet significant correlation between the statement "war is justified when bringing down a dictator" and "Saddam was a threat to world peace," and "The Iraqi regime had to be overthrown to end the suffering of the Iraqi people." A similar correlation exists between "war is justified when redressing an wrong" and the "The Iraqi regime had to be overthrown for ending the suffering of the Iraqi people." Among those who viewed war as "always unjustified," there exists a significant correlation with those who described the Iraq War as a "crusade" or "racist."

Political Ideologies in Conflict

At Thessaloniki — as was the case in almost any major demonstration against the Iraq War in 2003 — the major Greek social organisations decided to demonstrate on their own. How did this ideological choice between demonstration groups reflect differences between perceptions of war in general and the Iraq War in particular? We asked respondents to name the group they were to march with at Thessaloniki. Nearly three-

quarters of the protesters were demonstrating with a group, but only 46% named the group.

There was a small yet significant association between group membership and whether "war is always unjustified," whether "war is justified when bringing down a dictator," and whether "war is justified when redressing a wrong." Results point towards different perceptions concerning war and justice between followers of different groups. But this difference did not emerge on the Iraq war question, where there was no significant correlation with political group.

Greek political activists universally condemned the Iraq War, a result in perfect accord with the near-total rejection of the war by the Greek public exhibited in many opinion polls. Second, and more interesting, there was no reason for the major Greek anti-war organisations to opt for a non-cooperative approach on the Iraq issue. Their followers shared an amazing consensus both between themselves and when compared to the general public.

This is an upsetting finding, and one our team intuitively expected to monitor. If there is no theoretical reason for acting separately, then one has to account for the split in the Greek anti-war and anti-globalisation movements.

It could be that the split experienced by the movement is actually the outcome of inter-movement conflict for hegemony. If one takes into account that the two major political parties behind the anti-war/anti-globalisation umbrella organizations (that is, the Social Forum/SYN and DRASSI Thessaloniki 2003/KKE alliances) have spent the better part of the nineties — or, one could say, since the restoration of the democracy in 1974 — trying to secure leadership of the Greek left, it could well be the case that we are witnessing only the latest episode of the war for supremacy within the Greek left, cloaked under up-to-date anti-war and anti-globalisation slogans.

Is the movement then to remain subordinated to petty party politics? We offer no definite conclusions. After Thessaloniki a certain disappointment arose, stemming from the movement's apparent failure to capitalize on the social turmoil it created. One of the major left-wing parties, SYN, was quick to rename itself in June 2003 from Coalition for the Left and Progress to the Coalition of the Left, Ecology and Social Movements, trying to appear as the natural political patron for the 'movements.' On the other hand, groups originating within the extra-parliamentary left, such as Genoa 2001, created prior to the Genoa mobilizations, and 'Alliance Stop-the-War,' came together to create a new political party, the 'Anti-Capitalist Rally,' poised to compete in the national elections to be held in Spring 2004. It seems, then, that all routes leading from the protests are still open: accommodation within an existing left party, the establishment of a new and more radical party, or even the independent development (or withering

away) of the movement.

Developments in the coming year — and electoral performances — will offer more knowledge concerning this open question.



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- Botetzagias, Boudourides & Kalamaras (2003), *Perceptions of War and Justice among Greek Protesters: The Case of the Second Iraq War* available at <http://nicomedia.math.upatras.gr/conf/CAWM2003/papers.php3>
- Kalamaras, Botetzagias & Boudourides (2003), *Anti-Globalisation and Anti-War Protest Events during the First Half of 2003: Analysis of data from the Greek newspaper 'Eleftherotypia'*



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