

'THE JUNTA CAME TO POWER BY THE FORCE OF ARMS, AND WILL ONLY GO BY FORCE OF ARMS'

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE VOICE OF THE OPPOSITION TO THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP IN GREECE, 1967–74

Polymeris Voglis

Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology, University of Thessaly

ABSTRACT This article addresses the question of political violence and focuses on armed opposition groups during the military dictatorship in Greece (1967–74). It examines the diverse ideas about the use of violence among the opposition circles in Greece and abroad in order to place the political violence in its specific historical context and highlight their differences from their Western European counterparts. Also, using interviews of activists from several opposition groups, the article discusses how they frame their experience from the 1960s and lend legitimacy to their past actions.

Keywords: 1968, demonstrations, army, political violence, oral history

In the early hours of 21 April 1967 unfamiliar noises woke up the people in the cities. It was the sound of military trucks and tanks in the streets and then the sound of military marches on the radio. A voice on the radio announced that the army had taken over power to save the Greek nation from demagogues and subversives. The coup of Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos on 21 April 1967 came as a shock, just a few weeks before the elections that, according to all predictions, the Centre Union (Enosis Kentrou) would have won. There were rumours about a coup, but very few believed them and almost none was prepared for the eventuality. Seven thousand people were arrested and imprisoned in the first days, and one person, Panagiotis Elis, was killed while in custody. The colonels suspended the articles of the constitution that guaranteed civil liberties; freedom of expression was suppressed; the press was censored; political parties and unions were banned; and demonstrations were prohibited. In the following months many people, students in particular, fled and organized the campaign against the dictatorship in various European countries. Those who continued to live in Greece knew that there was no way out: if they wanted to fight against the dictatorship,

Address for correspondence: Dr Polymeris Voglis, Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology, University of Thessaly, Argonafton and Filellinon St., 38221 Volos, Greece. E-mail: povoglis@uth.gr

they had to form underground organizations. Clandestine printing shops were set up and militants mimeographed tracts, which were given out cautiously by hand or simply scattered in the streets during the night, painted graffiti on the walls, installed loudspeakers to broadcast slogans for a few minutes and hung banners in public buildings. Some militants moved one step further: they planted bombs to launch the armed struggle against the dictatorship or what they called 'dynamic resistance'.

The question of political violence is laden with different meanings and concerns a variety of historical contexts, regimes, motives, agents, beliefs, forms of action, organizational structures and goals. Political violence cannot be treated as a unitary phenomenon across continents and over time. This article prioritizes the analysis of political violence in a specific historical context (that of the military dictatorship in Greece) and focuses on the narratives used by the militants to highlight the experience of the armed resistance against a dictatorial regime. The use of violence was not justified by revolutionary ideas but rather was a specific form of reaction to an authoritarian regime. Political violence was a form of action as well as a process for the groups and the people involved. It concerned different groups at different times, some of which denounced the use of violence in the beginning but later decided to include violent means in their repertoire of practices. Other groups began combining violent and non-violent means, while after 1970 the armed groups were radicalized as they saw violence as a way to overthrow not just the dictatorship but the capitalist system altogether.

In the first section of the article I examine the opposition groups, pointing out their political characteristics and ideas and comparing them with other similar groups in Western Europe. The second section explores the subjectivity of the activists who took part in these groups and used violent means. This article is based on interviews with eight militants from seven different organizations. All but two of the interviewees were active in the armed opposition groups in Greece, were arrested for planting bombs, were tortured, convicted and served prison sentences that ranged from a few months to several years.¹ Their narratives are indispensable because they concern aspects of activists' subjectivity that archival sources seldom provide. In this article I highlight three aspects and I discuss them separately. The first is related to the individual trajectories of the militants and their experiences before the dictatorship and the armed struggle. The narratives emphasize the repression and conservatism of the post-Civil War years and the political turmoil of the early 1960s as formative for the subjectivity of the activists. The second concerns the language they use to discuss violence, in particular the way they legitimize the use of political violence. At the same time, the question of legitimacy allows them to establish their difference from other armed or terrorist groups in Western Europe and in Greece. In the last part, I turn to the framing of their experience, which is the way they make sense of and the meaning they attach to their political commitment and actions during the dictatorship. In this analysis 'experience' and 'framing' are interrelated. Through the activists' narratives we do not gain access to 'real' experience but rather to how that experience was framed 'then' and 'now', and thus oral history gives us the insight to study 'how conceptions of selves (of subjects and their identities) are produced'.²

I. THE WORLD OF OPPOSITION GROUPS

During the evening of 21 April 1967 the Greek students in Paris organized their first demonstration. After the demonstration the students gathered in a hall and the chairman of the Greek students' union addressed the audience to thunderous applause: 'The junta came to power by the force of arms, and will only go by force of arms'.³ On 27–8 May 1967, one month after the coup, Greek students studying abroad met for a conference in Paris to discuss the situation in Greece and what they could do against the dictatorship. The decision of the 1st Congress of Greek Students Abroad proclaimed that: 'The struggle against the dictatorship is at the same time a struggle against monarchy and against American imperialism, the instigators and supporters of this dictatorship. The overthrow of the dictatorship, which was imposed on Greece by force, requires the use of any means, violent or non-violent, necessary for the accomplishment of this goal.'⁴ The question of whether the opposition should use violent or non-violent means turned into a dilemma that drew the first dividing line between the different groups that fought against the military regime. Very soon the dividing line was blurred by groups that combined violent and non-violent means, and later the use of violence resonated with different ideological perspectives.

The major underground organization of the Left was the Patriotic Anti-dictatorial Front (Patriotiko Antidiktatoriko Metopo, PAM), established a few days after the coup by members of the Unified Democratic Left (Eniaia Dimokratiki Aristera, EDA) and the Communist Party of Greece (which had been outlawed since 1947). In 1968 the latter split into the traditional Communist Party of Greece (Kommounistiko Komma Elladas, KKE), loyal to the Soviet Union, and the reformist Communist Party of Greece Interior (Kommounistiko Komma Elladas esoterikou, KKE esoterikou). The traditional Communist Party condemned 'dynamic resistance' throughout the years of the dictatorship, whereas the reformist Communist Party changed its position. In 1968 the KKE esoterikou was crystal clear in arguing against the use of violence: 'For the Greek Communist Party and the Left, the old thesis that isolated actions and individual terrorism are inappropriate means in the struggle for liberation is well-known.'⁵ A year later, however, the position had changed. It was not a dilemma any more but rather the situation called for a combination of 'individual and collective resistance, militant and everyday resistance'. In other words, 'audacious, combative forms of resistance' should accompany forms 'that facilitate the broader participation of the people'.⁶

The idea of using violent means against the dictatorship was not confined to the Left. On the contrary, organizations that originated from the Centre, like the Democratic Defence (Dimokratiki Amyna) and the Panhellenic Liberation Movement (Panellinio Apeleftherotiko Kinima, PAK), were less sceptical about the use of violence in comparison with the established Left, which carried the burden of the Greek Civil War (1946–9). The acceptance of violence is illustrated in the 'Declaration of Basic Principles' of the Democratic Defence, in which it pledged 'to organize any form of struggle in the cities and to move to forms of armed resistance as soon as the objective conditions are suitable'.⁷ In an article published in 1970, the leader of the Panhellenic Liberation Movement (and future prime minister) Andreas Papandreou argued that

'only energetic and dynamic resistance can offer acceptable solutions' and emphasized the need to 'organize the army of the resistance'.⁸ The radicalism of the Centre mirrored the influence and the effect of the anti-colonial ideologies and national liberation movements which had spread throughout the Third World in the 1950s and 1960s. Most opposition groups framed the struggle against the dictatorship as a campaign for national liberation and held the United States as responsible for the coup. The introduction of a booklet for the underground mechanism of PAK reads:

The essence of the Greek problem is simple. Our country is a land under occupation. And that occupation is American ... We will not have democracy in Greece without the real, substantial, unconditional liberation from the shackles of American imperialism in the framework of the Atlantic Alliance. For that reason our struggle is for national liberation.⁹

Since the Greek Civil War the interference of the United States in Greek politics had nurtured the anti-Americanism of the opposition. Such rhetoric, far from being historically accurate, stirred the patriotic sentiments of the population and linked what was happening in Greece with US foreign policy in other parts of the world, and Vietnam and Latin America in particular.

Most armed groups before 1969 did not claim, explicitly at least, to profess a revolutionary ideology or to represent a specific social class; their goal was the overthrow of the dictatorship, the reconstitution of democracy and independence from US intervention. Among the first groups were the Democratic Committees of Resistance (Dimokratikes Epitropes Antistaseos, DEA), a decentralized network of cells rather than a group, which, albeit leftist, presented itself as a '*national movement of Greeks*, which continues the glorious traditions of our nation'.¹⁰ The case of Student Struggle (Spoudastiki Pali) was different. It was a resistance group set up by Trotskyite students in Thessaloniki in 1967 and its main activity was the distribution of mimeographed tracts. Student Struggle was among the very few groups in Greece at that time that was directly influenced by the 1968 events. Echoing the messages of 1968, they called upon Greek youth to be part of the 'international revolutionary youth' and to participate in the 'global revolution' against Western capitalism and imperialism and the bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe.¹¹ The group managed to escape arrest for two years and became quite strong. In the spring of 1969 it renamed itself People's Struggle (Laiki Pali) and decided to start planting bombs, but its members were arrested on the day they had set for planting bombs in Thessaloniki.

The armed groups continued their activity after 1970, but there was a change in their ideology and the rhetoric of armed struggle. Whereas in the period 1967–9 the goal of these groups was to overthrow the dictatorship, in the period 1970–3 some groups saw violence as a way to bring about revolutionary change in Greece. The use of violence became a way to demonstrate the difference between the revolutionary and the Old Left and therefore to establish a distinct political identity. The influence of Che Guevara, Latin American revolutionary movements and 'armed struggle' groups in Western Europe became more discernible in their analyses, albeit not in their actions. The ideological radicalism of the second period reflected a deep-seated disillusionment

with the situation in Greece, i.e. the stability of the regime, the failure of the Old Left and the inertia of society. A gap between a radical and a moderate wing appeared in some opposition groups, such as the formation of the radical group Aris within the Rigas Feraios, the youth of the KKE esoterikou. The aim of Aris was not just to overthrow the dictatorship but also the establishment of 'the people's power, founded by the agent of the final showdown, the sovereign and armed people'.¹² In the same vein, these groups turned against the established parties and argued that the fall of the dictatorship would simply reconstitute the pre-1967 political status quo. The 20 October Movement (Kinima 20 Oktovri) claimed that what the established political parties wished for was not a confrontation but rather a compromise with the dictatorship so that there would be a gradual handing over of power, keeping the people at bay.¹³

The most active period of the armed groups was between 1967 and 1969, when about a hundred bombs exploded in front of public buildings, ministries, military clubs, banks and hotels; cars, statues and electric power distributors also became targets. In the second period, despite their ideological radicalization, there was no real qualitative change in the practices of the armed groups. Militants took every precaution so that there would not be any casualties and, with a few exceptions, they managed it.¹⁴ Without the support of a protest movement and in a situation of constant police surveillance, these groups became relatively easy targets when they intensified their activities or had ambitious plans. Most groups were cracked down upon by the police, and their members were tortured during interrogation, tried by military tribunals and sentenced to heavy sentences. Their arrests and trials received a lot of (negative) publicity in the newspapers, and they acquired a mythic importance in opposition circles.¹⁵ The asymmetry between their acts and their significance in the censored press showed how important it was for the regime to assert its power to punish and its capacity to eliminate any form of resistance.

To many militants violence seemed the proper way to alert the people during the dictatorship. The logic of 'armed propaganda' was similar to that of many 'armed struggle' groups of the extreme Left in Western Europe in the late 1960s and the early 1970s – the so-called first generation including the Brigade Rosse and Prima Linea in Italy or the Rote Armee Fraktion and the Bewegung 2 Juni in West Germany. There were, however, two significant differences. The first was the different socio-political context. Because of the dictatorship, the opposition was deprived of legal means of action that democratic regimes in Western Europe provided. In other words, to many militants in Greece the use of violence was not necessarily a matter of ideological conviction, and for that reason people from all walks of life and of diverse political persuasion were involved. Secondly, in Western Europe the so-called 'armed struggle' groups emerged from protest movements. Their targets were related to the issues of the movements, and the armed groups presented themselves as spearheads of these movements. The aim of their actions was to demonstrate that 'violent means were more effective than the non-violent ones, and thereby to win support among movement activists'.¹⁶ Organizationally they had ties to the social movements, and their structures were more or less open to new members. On the other hand, because they interacted

with the protest movements (and sometimes in competition with other armed groups) their fate became uncertain when the movement lost strength. Isolated and fighting for their survival in the context of police repression, their actions could escalate and the forms of violence could become more aggressive and lethal: from bombs to bank robberies, then to kidnappings and finally assassinations. That was a path that the armed groups in Greece did not follow during the dictatorship.

II. GROWING UP AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

All those who were involved in the opposition to the dictatorship grew up in the shadow of the Greek Civil War and the defeat of the Left. After the end of the Civil War democracy was not abolished, as in Spain, but state repression against the Left was overwhelming in the 1950s. Most interviewees in their recollections reveal several aspects of repression and silence in their family histories from their childhood. Left-wing parents during and after the end of the Civil War ‘disappeared’ for some time, in the sense that they were in prison, exile or hiding. Giorgos Romaïos (b. 1947) was already five years old when he saw his father for the first time, and that was in the most unsuitable place: the court-room of the military tribunal. His father was a public employee who joined the leftist guerrillas during the Nazi occupation and after the Liberation was convicted and sent to prison until 1953.¹⁷ Antonis Sotirakos (b. 1946), son of a progressive priest, had his first ‘skirmish’, as he calls it, with the police at the age of ten, when he was falsely accused of smashing a communal fountain; six years later, in 1962, he was arrested by the police for participating in a demonstration and was expelled from high school because he was wearing a badge with the peace symbol.¹⁸ For persons coming from leftist families it was easier to establish a continuity between their own trajectory and the family background, especially their parents’ involvement in the Resistance – a continuity based on political discrimination and police repression. Not all militants, however, came from leftist families. Giorgos Glynos (b. 1946) was raised in a right-wing, religious, middle-class family, and his uncle had been killed by the communists in the Civil War. Radical ideas drove him to question the authority of his parents and thus establish a rupture or a discontinuity with the past. He speaks of his:

fascination with the forbidden Left, ideas challenging the establishment and everything that happened around me. I begun having arguments first with my grandmother, and then with my dad and mum, that is at home. Like people used to say later, you start the revolution at home and then you move outwards.¹⁹

Family backgrounds, like socio-economic conditions, provide some clues for the individual trajectories but in no sense can explain the choices the militants made. One has to move in a different direction in order to unravel the facets of subjectivity, that is to investigate the place of the ‘facts’ in militants’ narratives and the purpose they serve. The historian should focus not on the ‘objective causes’ but on the personal narrative, the way the individual makes sense of his or her life and how memory transforms life into a narrated history. From this point of view, militants’ narratives create their own

continuities and discontinuities. Memory seeks to construct continuity, in order to create the sense of a stable and coherent self. The goal of the historian is to analyse the interplay between continuity and discontinuity because, as Luisa Passerini has argued, 'to activate a true continuity, appropriate for the times, one has to go through discontinuity'.²⁰ For Glynos, the rupture with his family established a continuity with his later years, when as a student at the Business School in Athens he joined the Democratic Committees of Resistance and the extreme Left. This was a rupture which was quickly transferred from home to the public sphere in the form of a gesture that challenged the social and political conservatism of the time:

I started reading newspapers. In the beginning I was buying the *Ta Nea* [centrist newspaper] and reading it on the bus. Later I had the guts to buy the *Avgi* [leftist newspaper], to provoke people on the bus, who saw a high-school student reading the *Avgi*. It was a form of conflict, but also of courage. A young lad, eighteen years old, reading the *Avgi* on the bus, back then it was ... had a very strong symbolism. I remember the first time that I bought it and read it during the ride. I didn't understand what I was reading, because I was very nervous. The way people were looking at me ... and I was looking at them ferociously too. I didn't read the newspaper, rather I pretended that I was reading it.²¹

On the other hand, for Triantafyllos Mitafidis (b. 1947) the continuity lies in the connection with his family, who were refugees from Asia Minor (his father was a construction worker, his mother was an embroideress) and grew up in a poor neighbourhood in Thessaloniki, which at the same time was a stronghold of the extreme Right. He was expelled from school twice, the first time because he distributed leaflets supporting a teachers' strike and the second time because, although he was a monitor, he allowed his classmates to draw political symbols on the blackboard. The incident speaks for the politicization of youth and the repression of the early 1960s, but in his narrative he stresses an almost linear continuity in people's lives:

One day I was with someone else, he became a radio operator, now he is retired, we were the monitors of the classroom. The boys were in the classroom drawing. One of them, who was an altar boy in a church nearby, drew [on the blackboard] a hammer and sickle and another, who became a high-ranking police officer, drew – it is telling, the one became a trade unionist and the other a high-ranking cop – he draw a swastika. The religious instruction teacher reported us and went to the headmaster, who was someone you can't describe. Because we came from a leftist family, he traced the drawing of the hammer and sickle to us. We were expelled from the school for 'deserting our post', as if we were in the army, for concealing the truth, and they took us to the police station. All this happened in '65 during the 'apostasy', the apostates were in power, Papandreou had fallen earlier, earlier in the July '65 events. There was also a trial, because these were the so-called forbidden symbols at the time. We went to the police station and our schoolmates reacted; they refused to go to the classrooms.²²

Time and again in activists' narratives personal experiences are related to political events, which mark the flow of time in individual memory. The July 1965 events are clearly such a case. On 15 July 1965 King Constantine forced the prime minister and

leader of the Centre Union party George Papandreou to resign and the right wing sought to form a new government with defectors from the Centre Union (for this reason the July events were called ‘apostasy’). For a month the Centre Union, the Unified Democratic Left and student and labor unions organized demonstrations, while the most radical called for ‘spontaneous’ rallies against the interference of the king in the government and for the reconstitution of the elected government. Many of these demonstrations ended in violent clashes with the police and hundreds of people were arrested; one student, Sotiris Petroulas, was killed by the police. The huge demonstrations, the clashes with the police, the barricades and the firebombs, the conflicts within the Left (independent leftist groups criticized the Unified Democratic Left for its moderate political line during the events) created a whole new frame of experience: the activists used violence without feeling guilty because they thought it was legitimate. On 20 August 1965 the riots became very violent, and the Unified Democratic Left maintained that clashes were being staged by the police and agents provocateurs. Antonis Sotirakos, however, adopts a different perspective: ‘I think that [the fires] were started by agents provocateurs. But at that time we didn’t care who started the fires. The only thing we had in our mind was how to beat a cop.’²³ In a similar vein, Stergios Katsaros, later member of the People’s Struggle, comments in his memoirs on the effect that the clashes of 20 August 1965 had on his subjectivity and imagination:

It is not a small thing for a revolutionary to take part in an uprising. There is no other satisfaction for him rather than to be in the streets, to take a piece of wood, a stone or a Molotov cocktail, to be surrounded by the crowd, to be embraced and assimilated. To feel that he is a small cell of a gigantic fist that makes the cops run. It is like an orgasm. Only those who haven’t really fallen in love are unable to feel this supreme explosion of happiness. All this in a stimulating atmosphere of barricades, fires, tear gas and Molotov cocktails, with the crowd shouting ‘Sovereign the people’ as loud as possible.²⁴

Katsaros uses a metaphor describing the clash with the police as *jouissance*. It was like a new source of pleasure, the pleasure of agency and transgression.²⁵ The agency was reconstituted in a collective subject, the desire to be subsumed and to belong to a collectivity of people with the same ideas, values and needs. In this passage is described the moment of overcoming oneself and of identifying with the other, the anonymous crowd of students and workers, a process that did not extinguish the subjectivity but transformed it through revolutionary action. Transgression, on the other hand, was motivated by rage against the police (and what it stood for) and took the form of challenging the established norms, places, positions.²⁶ What was new in July 1965 was that the crowd did not disperse after the attack by the police but fought back. For a few hours the roles and positions had changed. The likening of transgression to *jouissance* shows to what extent violence fed the imagination about the qualities of the male revolutionary. One can read Katsaros’ passage, literally, as praise for violence. Nevertheless, what conditioned his recollection of the July 1965 events was the contrast with his own experience in subsequent years. After 1967 there was no longer the

collective violence of the demonstrations but individual acts of violence, while crowds were replaced by isolated underground organizations.

III. THE FRAMING OF THE ARMED RESISTANCE

When on 21 April 1967 the news about the coup spread, the first opposition groups were formed. The almost immediate decision to start fighting against the dictatorship seemed to many the only appropriate reaction. On the same day as the coup a group of young intellectuals and technocrats, loosely connected to the Centre Union, decided to set up a group called the Democratic Defence (Dimokratiki Amynta). Among the founding members of the Democratic Defence was Gerasimos Notaras (b. 1936), who had a PhD in political sciences from the University of Lausanne and at that time was a researcher at the National Centre for Social Research in Greece. For him: ‘Well, it is obvious. When someone comes and forces himself on you, what are you going to do? Are you going to wait for a political line?’ And he adds:

For us it was clear from the start, and this was the great difficulty in negotiating with the PAM. The PAM, justly, because it had borne the burden of the Civil War, for its members and public opinion as well, found it much more difficult to take such a decision. We didn’t have this kind of a burden. The vast majority of us came from the Centre and from the political analysis we did we knew that he who comes with a gun, will only leave at gunpoint. Anything else is a lie. If you really want to get rid of them – otherwise you compromise and let them stay in power. This was crystal clear and unanimous right from the start. Therefore, we didn’t face the dilemma whether or not ... The dilemma was rather whether we could.²⁷

What Notaras considers as ‘obvious’, that is the opposition to the dictatorship, and the armed struggle in particular, in fact requires further discussion. Notaras, like all the other interviewees, speaks from the standpoint of someone who considers his decision justified and his actions in the past consistent with his ideas, values and identity today. They do not regret their actions in a painful process of self-reflection and a new awareness. This is a basic difference with the majority of the militants from terrorist groups in Western Europe, such as the female prisoners whom Luisa Passerini interviewed and who distance themselves from their actions in the past.²⁸

At the same time the interviews also reveal the tensions between the past and the present. There is a certain anxiety in their narratives to dissociate themselves from later developments in Greece, namely the emergence of ‘armed struggle’ organizations after 1974. For example, Nikos Manios (b. 1947), member of the Movement 20 October, says: ‘For all the bombs we planted, with no exception, we took responsibility before their explosion. Something that certain organizations that pretend to be revolutionary and the like continue to do. But they do it afterwards.’²⁹ Establishing a consistency for themselves between then and now does not mean that they establish a continuity between the armed struggle then and terrorism today. On the contrary, none of the interviewees was involved in armed groups after the fall of the dictatorship, but the assassinations and the bombs of the ‘Revolutionary Organization 17 November’ kept

the questions of political violence and terrorism in the public debate. For many years the police maintained that the origins of this group were in radical opposition circles during the dictatorship and many of the militants of that time were repeatedly interrogated by the police. Finally, the members of the 'Revolutionary Organization 17 November' were arrested in 2002 and given heavy sentences; its alleged leader Alexandros Giotopoulos actually belonged to a French-based group that advocated armed struggle against the dictatorship in the late 1960s. Therefore, the question of terrorism conditions the memories and the narratives of interviewees regarding their activism in the past. The focus of my analysis will be on the way that militants made sense of their actions, or what social movement theorists call the 'framing process', that is shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their actions in order to legitimize them.³⁰ Such an analysis can shed light on the actions, motivations, ideas and emotions of the militants and highlight aspects of their subjectivity, in particular the relation between their actions in the past and their reappraisal in the present.

This framing process concerns the legitimacy of violence: the activists argue that armed struggle was legitimate then because it was directed against a dictatorship. We, however, should not take the legitimacy for granted but rather use it as a starting point to study their narratives. If resistance to an authoritarian regime is legitimate, the question of the means that the opposition will use to achieve this goal is more controversial. In fact, as we have already seen, in Greece opposition groups were divided on the question of violence. Instead of addressing theoretically the question of whether violence is legitimate against a dictatorship, I shall turn to the interviews to examine how militants ascribe legitimacy to their actions.

Giorgos Glynos was active in the first six months after the coup as a member of the Democratic Committees of Resistance, when the population was still in a state of shock and fear and the underground groups only beginning to organize. Giorgos Romaios went to Italy after the coup to study architecture at the university of Milan. He took part in Greek student committees against the dictatorship and became a member of Rigas Feraios, the youth of KKE esoterikou. Gradually he grew discontented with the line of the party on the question of violence and, together with other members, formed the group Aris. Both in their interviews insist that their goal was to spark a mass movement that would overthrow the dictatorship and that they combined violent and non-violent means.

Our previous apprenticeship in the Left had helped us to understand that we couldn't topple a government with bombs, change the system, etc. The bombs and the dynamic actions are a process of awakening. These actions should be combined with a process of agitation, communication, recruitment, etc., that would support the mass movement. In those times that thing played this role, people heard the bombs and said that something was going on, somebody is against the junta. It countered the fear, if you like, of the frightened Greek people. Our example was followed later by others; the Democratic Defence, Karagiorgas, Simitis, did similar things, a part of the KKE esoterikou. There was a split in the KKE esoterikou, Rigas Feraios split and one part was called, how was it called? Aris. The Aris of Rigas Feraios. I mean dynamic actions were meaningful back then.³¹

Giorgos Romaios says this:

The leadership said that we are beginning a long-term struggle, working like ants as they used to say, to get people organized, raise their consciousness so that we can build a mass movement, capable of sustaining a big strike or, I don't know, a mass mobilization to overthrow the junta. We, when I say 'we' I mean the majority of the rank-and-file and the cadres of Rigas Feraios then, because all of us were young, and we had different ideas on this subject. Without underestimating the importance of a mass movement, we said that when you have a regime supported by foreign powers that suppresses the people etc., it is like a foreign occupation somehow and, under such circumstances, all means of struggle can be used, even the armed forms of struggle. This doesn't mean that we are starting a guerilla war, but that these two things should go hand in hand. In other words, the work in the direction of a mass movement should go with some dynamic actions, let's say.³²

The relation between legitimacy and violence is crucial in the reasoning of the interviewees. The words militants use regarding violence are illuminating. They reject (as they did then) the term 'guerilla' because it was associated with the Greek Civil War and instead use expressions such as 'dynamic resistance' or 'dynamic actions'. Moreover, they downplay the effectiveness of the violent means and of the armed groups. Rather they underline that their view then was that only a mass mobilization could overthrow the dictatorship and that they were engaged also in other clandestine, non-violent activities such as distributing tracts, putting out banners and passing information to committees in Western Europe regarding violations of human rights.

Yet, political violence was 'meaningful back then', 'then' being the years 1967–74. The use of violence was legitimate against an illegitimate regime. It was illegitimate not only because it came to power through the force of arms but also because it was like a 'foreign occupation', the opposition argued at that time. The struggle against the dictatorship was thus at the same time a struggle for national liberation – it is not a coincidence that the name of the group Aris alluded to Aris Velouhiotis, the guerilla leader of the Resistance. In this way the struggle against the dictatorship was registered in the patriotic imagination and established continuities with the armed Resistance against the Axis occupation in the 1940s. Especially those who came from leftist families thought they were continuing the struggle of their fathers and mothers in the Resistance, rediscovering the missing link between the two generations. The significant difference was that the Resistance could claim that it represented the Greek people because of mass participation in its organizations, whereas during the dictatorship, after the mass arrests in the first days after the coup, only a few thousand people joined the underground organizations and considerably fewer the armed groups.³³ The acknowledgement of the Right to fight against the dictatorship could not conceal the fact that very few people did actually fight. In other countries militants were not involved in terrorist action because they believed that it did not reflect the will of the people.³⁴ In Greece activists avoided this question, claiming that the will of the people could not be freely expressed. The legitimacy of their actions was based on the premise that they were acting in the name of, and for, the people – part of an ideology which

viewed the ‘masses’ both as the objects and the subjects of emancipation.³⁵ Acting like a vanguard, they believed that the bombs could ‘awaken’ the society and trigger a mass movement. One can detect this in a certain competition among the opposition organizations concerning which one was established first and which set the example for ‘dynamic resistance’. From this viewpoint, the real source of legitimacy was opposition itself. Glynos’ argument is that the idea of armed resistance was widespread in opposition circles (including the former prime minister Kostas Simitis) and, thus, legitimate.

There is one more reason why militants consider their actions legitimate until today, and this concerns the forms of violence. Their actions were armed but their violence was rather symbolic. The bombs were of little destructive power (militants who disagreed with violent means called these bombs ‘firecrackers’) and, most importantly, they did everything they could to avoid casualties, which is one more significant difference from the terrorist groups in Western Europe or in Greece after 1974. The fear that innocent people might get hurt made them call off operations at the very last minute. Unfortunately, a few people were injured by bombs and four were killed in those years. On 2 September 1970 Giorgos Romaios, member of the group Aris, together with three other people attempted to plant a bomb in front of the US Embassy in Athens. The bomb exploded prematurely, killing two members of the group – Giorgos Tsikouris, a Cypriot, and Maria-Elena Angeloni, an Italian. Romaios and one other person survived, but they never spoke again about what happened that day:

I saw him once somewhere, at an event that the architects’ union organized, for he is an architect too. We didn’t talk, I don’t know why. Perhaps because these things were recent ... It didn’t happen. Neither did we discuss thoroughly the issue, and nor did we exchange experiences, views, memories, etc. It didn’t happen. And you know what? We didn’t want to talk about these things. Because from many points of view it was ... To begin with, it was a burden, let’s say. For many years I had this inside me ... that I was responsible for their deaths. You understand now ... maybe K. felt the same way. We didn’t want to talk about this incident. Looking back, I see that it wasn’t the case, but you can’t explain everything rationally. When you see the others a hundred metres away, when you see the smoke and the flame, say, it is not the best thing that can happen to you.³⁶

Most militants talk about their actions with pride and self-confidence or self-irony. Romaios’ narrative does not have this tone. The death of his two comrades was a traumatic experience that caused grief and pain, and the burden of the responsibility still conditions his memory and narrative. The uneasiness in his narrative reveals that the recollection of this event is upsetting, and one can detect a deep sense of regret. In fact, although he continued to be very active in the opposition against the dictatorship, he was never again involved in similar actions. Thus, the question of legitimacy is connected to individual experiences and to what extent these actions were in accordance with the militants’ ideas, values and identity.

IV. DEEDS VS. WORDS

During the dictatorship, activists could not admit the accommodation of Greek society with the dictatorship. On the contrary, the bombs were an attempt to show that there was resistance against the dictatorship. The bombs were a way to attract the attention of the media (especially foreign press agencies, which in the vast majority of cases were against the military regime). In addition, news about the explosion of a bomb easily reached Greeks who were active in committees against the dictatorship in Western Europe, which in turn would inform the public via the networks they had in many European cities, such as Rome, Paris, Berlin, London, Stockholm and also Trieste, Milan, Munich, Cologne and Hamburg. They printed magazines and newspapers, organized meetings, campaigns and concerts, raised funds and provided the clandestine groups in Greece with logistical support. Activists knew that only through bombs could they make the resistance 'visible'. Publicity created abroad an imaginary world of developing resistance in Greece and at home drove militants to perpetuate and intensify their actions. The result was a growing confusion between reality and imagination and a disparity between intentions and outcomes.

Militants who lived in Greece claim that they had a more 'down to earth' approach in comparison with the Greeks abroad. In the memoirs and the interviews there is a very clear difference between the 'theoreticians' and the 'practitioners' which coincides, in most if not in all cases, with the difference between those who lived abroad and those who lived in Greece. Moreover, in the case of large opposition organizations, the distinction between home and abroad reflected the difference between the rank-and-file and the leadership. Many militants in their narratives present their realist approach on the question of violence as a form of criticism of the leaders of the opposition. Questioning their authority abroad was a way to establish independence of action, room for manoeuvre separate from the leadership and the transfer of decision-making to the members of the groups. When Dimosthenis Dodos (b. 1948), a student at Panteion University in Athens and member of the Greek Democratic Movement (Elliniko Dimokratiko Kinima), which was affiliated to the Democratic Defence, travelled to Germany and France, he discovered that different reality:

When I got there [Germany] in July 1968, it was the time when Papandreou had just started talking about guerilla war, to begin a guerilla war in Greece. And we are astonished, say, flabbergasted here [in Greece]. What is this man talking about? I had always the opinion that, you know, guys, at some point we will get busted. Well, if we are to go to prison then we should do something serious, not because we scattered pieces of paper in the streets. So if you want bombs, here I am. If you don't, then let me be. I don't mess with papers, just to throw them. So, bombs are fine, but bombs not guerilla [war]. And the other guy was asking us, why don't you start a guerilla [war]?³⁷

In a similar vein, Antonis Sotirakos, member of the Democratic Committees of Resistance, probably the first group to plant bombs in July 1967, explains his actions:

Back then we believed that it [dynamic resistance] was the only way that could make the rest of the people do something, that the junta was not invulnerable. The

demonstrations abroad were good, the concerts too, but they didn't have an impact on the junta. The person who stays here and fights is a different thing. And one way to show that you exist were those explosions.³⁸

However, it would be a simplification to construct a dichotomy between home and abroad. During those years there were organizational networks, a flow of ideas and people between Greece and other Western European countries. In fact many activists who lived abroad travelled to Greece carrying brochures, mimeographs and explosives to help the underground groups. Therefore, I would suggest that the interviews point in a different direction, namely the meaning and significance of armed struggle against the dictatorship. Activists in their interviews talk repeatedly about the urgency of 'doing something'. There was a deep lack of belief in the effectiveness of clandestine propaganda. 'The question was,' Gerasimos Notaras says, 'paper war, paper war, what is going to happen with the paper war?'³⁹ He, like the others I interviewed, prioritized action over endless ideological debates and political manifestos, deeds over words. Moreover, when they refer to opposition activities, they argue for the superiority of armed struggle in comparison with other forms of activism. What was the meaning they attached to their actions?

All the interviewees claim that their actions served several purposes. They demonstrated that the regime was vulnerable and anyone could easily upset the state mechanism; they showed that there were groups of people who had escaped arrest and police surveillance and were not afraid to fight against the regime; finally, through this practice they established a distinct political identity, which was in competition with those underground organizations that repudiated violent means. Their objective, as we have already seen, was to 'spark' a protest movement. Yet, neither the violent nor the non-violent means of resistance wrought a movement against the dictatorship. The inertia of Greek society (at least until 1972–3) drove the militants into a precarious situation, one of helplessness and isolation. Triantafyllos Mitafidis was in the Student Struggle, an underground group that spread anti-dictatorial propaganda. He describes the sense of isolation that drove him and his group to consider violent means in 1969:

The turn to dynamic resistance was ... because the rule of the dictatorship continued, everybody was seized with fear and we said that we should change that, break that fear. We even went beyond that, we talked about armed struggle, etc., all sorts of things. We have found some resources [i.e. explosives], except those we had from Katsaros. In the meantime, and it has to do with what you asked me before, the May '68 movement was on the wane and the retreat of the movement gave birth to that phenomenon in Germany, the turn to individual terrorism. You can imagine how much easier it was for this thing to happen here, with this situation of repression. We tried to make contact with people abroad, we had quarrelled with the old guard in Athens because we had set up a front organization with the Maoists and others. We tried to make contact abroad, we sent them our tracts – they had set up the Workers' Internationalist League, they began abroad and later came here. We tried to make contact ... It was the isolation, the prolongation of the dictatorship, that pushed us to ...⁴⁰

The repetition of the phrase ‘we tried to make contact’ accentuates this sense of isolation. At the same time, the reference to isolation is part also of a ‘framing’ process that allows him to draw comparisons between Greece and West Germany. For him, political violence was not a matter of ideological conviction but rather an outcome of their failure to undermine the regime with non-violent means. Tasos Darveris was in the same group as Mitafidis. In his autobiographical novel *Darveris*, who committed suicide in 1999, puts forward one more reason for turning to armed actions:

The Resistance was just quixotic, and that was something that the broader strata of the Left and of the democrats in general had accepted. This was convenient to many people, because it was akin to theorization of their inactivity. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that it was valid. Reality was in front of your own eyes everyday: people went to work like they always did and the way of life for the vast majority of people hadn’t changed in comparison to the years before the dictatorship. There was no talking back [to the regime] except in the airwaves of foreign radio stations, some leaflets of poor quality that by chance you may have come across, the news of an arrest spread by word of mouth ... And if you looked deep inside you, you would find that the only reason that made you resist against the dictatorship was that sense of personal integrity, that from time to time shouted that it was a shame, if once you had believed in something, to let this ‘something’ be trampled under the boot of the colonels.⁴¹

‘Doing’ resistance was a way to reconstitute his own subjectivity. Disappointed by the inertia of society, Darveris considered activism as a way to assert his own agency or to restore a certain sense of ‘personal integrity’ which had been lost. There is no reference to the ‘mass movement’ but just the need to talk back or, rather, to fight back. The motives were self-referential and related to the construction of the self. From his novel there are two aspects of subjectivity that armed struggle reconstituted and that can be traced in the interviews as well. The first aspect concerns the construction of masculinity. When the interviewees speak about the bombs they prepared and planted, they talk about temper, pride, ‘guts’, being active, inventive and audacious – qualities assigned to male identity and performance. The second aspect of their subjectivity is the interconnectedness between the personal and the political. Darveris’ attitude is similar to that of the 1968 activists in Western Europe, characterized by ‘a high degree of individual commitment and personal engagement’.⁴² Activists in armed groups shared a sense that it was their individual responsibility and duty to fight against the regime, and in this way they could reconstitute themselves as political subjects. Strong commitment helped militants to overcome frustration, hesitation or fears regarding their actions and made their subjectivity more rigid, because the involvement in armed groups required vigilance and secrecy. The high risk associated with planting bombs and the publicity that these actions gained also made them consider this form of activism superior to non-violent means, namely the ‘paper war’.

In militants’ narratives one can detect disillusionment regarding not their actions but their effectiveness. Giorgos Kissonas (b. 1932), a member of the *Panellinio Apeleftherotiko Kinima* in West Germany and in charge of the contacts with armed groups in Greece, is the most bitter of the interviewees. Talking about his refusal to

attend the reception for the restoration of democracy that takes place every year on 24 July, he says:

Every year the President of the Republic sends me an invitation to go to the reception that takes place at the Presidential Mansion. The invitation reads 'for the restoration of democracy'. Every time I see it I get mad. I've never gone there. The first question, what sort of democracy did we have before [the coup] and we restored it? The second, and most important, who did restore it? We did? No, unfortunately, Ecevit did. So, what are we celebrating? To celebrate the return of Karamanlis? Let's celebrate it, no objection. But the restoration of democracy? With half of Cyprus.⁴³

Kissonas' remark that there is no need to celebrate the restoration of democracy shows that Greek society at large has not come to terms with its recent past, and in particular its accommodation with the dictatorship. A student movement emerged only in late 1972 and culminated in the 'Polytechnic School Uprising' of November 1973, which was brutally suppressed by the regime. The student movement regarded the militants in the armed groups as 'heroes', but it was an altogether new phenomenon: a different age cohort, spontaneous, innovative practices, weak ties with the underground political organizations, and mass appeal, at least among the youth. The student movement failed to overthrow the regime, and a few days after the suppression of the uprising Georgios Papadopoulos was succeeded by a hard-liner, Brigadier Dimitrios Ioannidis. The military regime finally collapsed in July 1974, when the Turkish army invaded Cyprus. Antonis Liakos, historian and member of the People's Struggle who, like his comrades Mitafidis and Darveris, was imprisoned for his activities, recalls that already in the mid-1970s there was among activists 'a diffused feeling that the expected revolution had not come and its time had passed'.⁴⁴ A sense of disappointment has persisted until today because neither the bombs nor the people overthrew the dictatorship. Although they feel justified in their actions then, their tone is not self-congratulatory. Frustration indicates that there is a distance from the past, which is a source of self-reflection, a new kind of awareness, about the meaning and the impact of activism in society then and today.

After 1968 many groups in Western Europe saw political violence as a means to an end, the 'spark' that would set society in motion.⁴⁵ The same happened in Greece but in an altogether different historical context. Activists' references in Italy, West Germany or Greece were similar, namely Guevara and Marighella, Cuba and Vietnam, but the crucial difference is that the armed groups in Greece emerged only after the coup and not before. The colonels imposed a ruthless dictatorship that deprived Greeks of the means of legal opposition, and thus for the activists any form of opposition was legitimate and just. Explosions of bombs, they believed, could destabilize the dictatorship, and at the same time these actions were a way to reconstitute themselves as political subjects. The question of the legitimacy of violence is prominent in their recollections and the way they make sense of their past. For this reason, unlike former terrorists in Germany or Italy, they don't express regret for their actions, but rather they feel justified – at this point the fact that the state after 1974 acknowledged the contribution of all these militants is relevant. Remembering is a process of self-reflection

and elaboration of past experience. In the case of the Greek activists, self-reflection, that is relating the subjectivity of the past with that of the present, concerns the place of the radicalism of the past in the era of neoliberalism and the global war on terror.

NOTES

1. Dimosthenis Dodos was a member of the Greek Democratic Movement (Elliniko Dimokratiko Kinima) and was arrested in October 1969. Giorgos Glynos was a member of the Democratic Committees of Resistance (Dimokratikes Epitropes Antistaseos, DEA) and was arrested in September 1967. Giorgos Kissonas was a member of the Panhellenic Liberation Movement (Panellinio Apeleftherotiko Kinima, PAK) in West Germany and had contacts with armed opposition groups. Nikos Manios was a member of the Movement 20 October (Kinima 20 Oktovri) and was arrested in October 1971. Triantafyllos Mitafidis was a member of the People's Struggle (Laiki Pali) and was arrested in September 1969. Gerasimos Notaras was a member of the Democratic Defence (Dimokratiki Amyna) and was arrested in October 1967. Giorgos Romaios was a member of the Rigas Feraios (the youth of the Communist Party of Greece interior) in Italy, participated in an action in Athens and escaped arrest. Antonis Sotirakos was a member of the Democratic Committees of Resistance (Dimokratikes Epitropes Antistaseos, DEA) and was arrested in October 1967.
2. Joan W. Scott, "Experience", in J. Butler and J. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London, 1992), p. 27.
3. Viktor Anagnostopoulos-Melkiades, *O pio skliros mys einai i kardia: Ego, o Alekos kai oi 'alloi'* (Athens, 2003), p. 38.
4. Contemporary Social History Archives, Giorgos Tsiakalos collection, Decision of the 1st Congress of the Greek Students Abroad, Paris, 27–8 May 1967.
5. *Rizospastis Mahitis*, 4, August 1968. This was an underground newspaper.
6. *Rizospastis Mahitis*, 9–10, July–August 1969, and 11, September 1969.
7. *Dimokratiki Amyna*, 20, December 1967. This was another underground newspaper.
8. Andreas Papandreou, 'To provlima tis Antistasis', *Nea Poreia*, 8 (1970), pp. 51–5.
9. Cited in Panagiotis Kritikos, *Antistasi kata tis diktatorias, 1967–1974* (Athens, 1996), p. 205.
10. Contemporary Social History Archives, Archive of Anti-dictatorial Leaflets and Brochures, Bulletin of the Democratic Committees of Resistance 'Help to Greece', 1, 19 October 1967. Original emphasis.
11. Antonis Liakos personal archive, 'The International Revolutionary Youth Call to Struggle', tract of Spoudastiki Pali.
12. Announcement of Aris, 12 September 1972, *I Epithesi*, 7, 25 October 1972, p. 4.
13. Announcement of the Movement 20 October, *I Epithesi*, 3, 31 January 1972, p. 16.
14. On 30 November 1967 Aikaterini Mylona, a passer-by, was lethally wounded after the explosion of a bomb at the Ministry of Justice. On 2 September 1970 Giorgos Tsikouris and Maria-Elena Angeloni, members of the armed group Aris, were killed when the bomb they intended to plant exploded. On 14 May 1971 Athanasios Konstantakas, a policeman, was killed when he attempted to defuse a bomb.
15. Kostis Kornetis, 'Student Resistance to the Greek Military Dictatorship: Subjectivity, Memory and Cultural Politics', unpublished PhD dissertation, European University Institute, 2006, p. 120.
16. Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 120 and chapter 5 in general.

17. Interview with Giorgos Romaios, recorded by Polymeris Voglis (PV), Athens, 23 February 2009.
18. Interview with Antonis Sotirakos, recorded by PV, Athens, 12 May 2009.
19. Interview with Giorgos Glynos, recorded by PV, Athens, 18 May 2009.
20. Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968* (Hanover, NH, and London, 1996), p. 31.
21. Interview with Giorgos Glynos.
22. Interview with Triantafyllos Mitafidis, recorded by PV, Thessaloniki, 26 May 2009.
23. Interview with Antonis Sotirakos.
24. Stergios Katsaros, *Ego o provokatoras, o tromokratis: I goiteia tis vias* (Athens, 1999), p. 56.
25. On the 'pleasure of agency' in a different context, see Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 234–41.
26. Kristin Ross, *May'68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago, IL, 2004), p. 25.
27. Interview with Gerasimos Notaras, recorded by PV, Athens, 14 April 2009.
28. Luisa Passerini, 'Lacerations in the Memory: Women in the Italian Underground Organizations', in D. Della Porta (ed.), *Social Movements and Violence: Participation in Underground Organizations* (Greenwich, CT, 1992), pp. 203–5.
29. Interview with Nikos Manios, recorded by PV, Athens, 30 June 2009.
30. Mayer N. Zald, 'Culture, Ideology and Strategic Framing', in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 261–74.
31. Interview with Giorgos Glynos.
32. Interview with Giorgos Romaios.
33. Trials may give us an idea about the strength of the underground organizations. According to the military regime, between April 1967 and August 1971 military tribunals tried 3,363 citizens, of whom 2,045 were convicted. See Giorgos Mitrofanis, *Politikoi kratoumenoi: Metemfyliako kratos, diktatoria' in Istoria tou Neou Ellinismou, 1770–2000* (Athens, 2003), vol. 9, p. 131.
34. Interview with Maren Sell, born 1945, recorded by Robert Gildea (RG), Paris, 21 April 2008.
35. Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Fraction and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and the Seventies* (Berkeley, CA, 2004), p. 139.
36. Interview with Giorgos Romaios.
37. Interview with Dimosthenis Dodos, recorded by PV, Thessaloniki, 23 February 2008.
38. Interview with Antonis Sotirakos.
39. Interview with Gerasimos Notaras.
40. Interview with Triantafyllos Mitafidis.
41. Tasos Darveris, *Mia istoria tis nyctas, 1967–74* (Athens, 2002, first published 1983), pp. 152–3.
42. Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford, 2007), p. 154.
43. Interview with Giorgos Kissonas, recorded by PV, Athens, 29 April 2009. The interviewee alludes to Mustafa Bülent Ecevit, who was the prime minister of Turkey during the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, which resulted in the division of the island until today.
44. Antonis Liakos, 'History Writing as the Return of the Repressed', *Historein*, 3 (2001), p. 50.
45. Ronald Fraser (ed.), *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York, 1988), p. 333.