



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/CDZS3895>

‘Effie Karageorgos, Quiet Protest: A New History of Activism During the Vietnam War’

Jatinder Mann

To cite this book review: Jatinder Mann, ‘Effie Karageorgos, Quiet Protest: A New History of Activism During the Vietnam War’, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 6 (September 2026): 219-220, <https://doi.org/10.52230/AUII5222>

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Effie Karageorgos, *Quiet Protest: A New History of Activism During the Vietnam War* (UNSW Press, 2026), 320pp. Paperback. A\$49.99. ISBN: 978-1-7611-7026-3.

This wonderful book by Effie Karageorgos uncovers a hidden history of a subject that has been well-studied in Australian history: protest Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War and the conscription of Australian men. But whereas most of the historiography thus far has tended to focus on the famous moratorium marches that took place across Australia, especially in Melbourne and Sydney, *Quiet Protest* instead explores the much larger number of Australians who supported the campaign from behind-the-scenes or from afar. Karageorgos very rightly emphasises that this latter activism was crucial to the success of the campaign and Australia ultimately withdrawing all troops from Vietnam in the early 1970s.

The book highlights the significant role played by organisations such as the Committee in Defiance – which encouraged and facilitated Australian men publicly expressing their opposition to registering with the authorities for their potential conscription (this operated on a lottery system) in the Vietnam War. By so doing they were in contravention of the *Commonwealth Crimes Act* 1960 which could result in a heavy fine and/or imprisonment. The Committee in Defiance encouraged as many Australian men as possible to refuse to pay the fine and opt instead for imprisonment in the hope that this would clog the court and penal system. Karageorgos points out that it was effective to some extent in this goal.

The book also illustrates that without financial contributions, often small individual ones, organisations like the Committee in Defiance could not have even functioned. Karageorgos provides a very poignant example of Mabel Wilson, an old-aged pensioner who sent A\$5 (a third of her weekly pension – so a substantial sum) to the organisation to support its activities. Mabel's sacrifice was not an isolated incident by any stretch of the imagination, and she along with countless others supported opposition against Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War in any way that they could. Mabel is a very good example of where someone's age could possibly prevent them from participating in moratorium marches, but they still wanted to help in other ways that they were able.

The gender dimension is also another prominent theme of the book. Karageorgos shows how women also played a crucial role in the protest movement, although this was usually in the form of clerical organisation behind the scenes as gender patriarchy at the time preserved more public roles for men. However, anti-Vietnam War organisations would not have been able to exist without the work that women performed in their effective functioning. Furthermore, a direct result of women dominating the clerical organisation of many of these was the fact that they preserved an incredibly detailed archive, without which *Quiet Protest* could not have been written.

I absolutely agree with the former Australian Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon's advance praise of the book that it is more than a history book. Karageorgos consistently relates her historical study to more contemporary protest movements and makes several suggestions on what the latter can learn from the former, whether we are talking about environmental protests or protests Israel's genocide in Gaza and ethnic cleansing in the occupied West Bank. On the latter Karageorgos talks about her own role in these protests. And she makes the fundamental point that protest can take many forms, i.e. not just publicly marching but also expressing support on social media. It all makes a difference.

The book really resonated with me personally as I would certainly consider myself a 'Quiet Protestor'. Due to being extremely uncomfortable in large crowds as long as I can remember (I have always believed that I might be agoraphobic but have never got myself tested) I have never been able to join large protest marches, but I have always tried to use whatever platform that I have to express my support and raise awareness. I also want to comment on Karageorgos' writing style before ending this review, she writes in a very clear and easily comprehensible way. This is something that I always appreciate and do not take for granted, having read no shortage of academic books in my career of the opposite ilk. *Quiet Protest* is an extremely impressive book, based on detailed archival research of the best kind, and its message that activism which is not always readily visible or loud is also incredibly valuable, especially at the current time, is such an important one. I wholeheartedly recommend this book to readers, both specialist and general. You will not regret it.

Jatinder Mann, University of Reading