



An International Civil War: Greece, 1943–1949 by André Gerolymatos.

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Every country occupied by the Nazis in World War II faced a social and political reckoning when the Germans withdrew and the war ended.¹ Yet nowhere else in Europe do the wounds and divisions remain as open as they do in Greece. Historian André Gerolymatos (Simon Fraser Univ.) explains why in his ambitious new book. Its very title betrays one aspect of the difficulties he faces in telling to an Anglophone audience the story of an *international* civil war that began under the Italian-German occupation, eventually involved Greece's neighbors Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria, and saw Winston Churchill, Harry Truman, and Joseph Stalin play crucial roles over a period of time far longer than the seven years indicated in his subtitle.

The book begins with a dramatic set piece, one of several the author uses to increase tension in his story. It is 1922 and six generals and politicians are facing a firing squad for their part in losing the war with Turkey that cost Greece its foothold in Asia Minor. But almost immediately, the narrative leaps back in time to 1830 and the war of independence, when Greece broke free of Ottoman rule after four hundred years. But the sultans had “stifled political evolution and sustained an intellectual paralysis over most of the Greek communities in the empire ... and fostered regional social, economic and cultural particularism” (11). This crippling heritage scarred the nation's history ever after.

Following a short section on the complex ecclesiastical and economic conditions in nineteenth-century Greece, Gerolymatos turns to his main protagonist—the Greek Communist Party or KKE.² *An International Civil War* concerns the tragedy of the communists, who were led by a handful of men slavishly loyal to a Stalin who never reciprocated their devotion. World War II began for Greece with the Italian invasion in October 1940. Greece's small army not only repelled Benito Mussolini's legions, but pushed them back into Albania. Unfortunately for the communists, this took place during the Nazi-Soviet Pact, when Adolf Hitler and Stalin were nominal allies. While most Greeks thrilled to their army's success against the embarrassed Italians, the KKE was obliged to denounce it. This was the first of many positions taken by either Moscow or KKE leaders that cost them dearly.

Greece's military success was short-lived. Hitler came to Mussolini's rescue and the Wehrmacht soon defeated the Greeks and their British allies. The Germans took control of Athens and other cities, and the grim years of occupation began. While much of the population suffered from famine, some groups on the right collaborated with the Germans, while leftists in the mountainous countryside, especially in the north, formed resistance groups. This division endured to the very end of the war.

1. See, e.g., Carsten Holbraad, *Danish Reactions to German Occupation: History and Historiography* (London: U Coll London Pr, 2017), with my review at *MiWSR* 2017-082

2. Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας.

Gerolymatos does not provide a continuous narrative of the guerrilla war waged against the Germans and their Greek collaborators during the occupation and well into the early Cold War. Instead, he covers aspects of the struggle as they emerged, in rough chronological order. When the leftists briefly dominated Athens and other centers after the Germans withdrew, they savaged not just collaborators, but all those who opposed them. Policemen, soldiers, and conservative figures were liable to be tortured, shot, or marched off into the mountains. Later, when, helped by British troops, the right took charge, a no less ugly White Terror ensued. In both cases, Gerolymatos notes in painful detail, the acts of vengeance were very personal. Greece was a small country, and even in the cities people usually knew their neighbors. The author illustrates both the narrowness of Greek society and the dreadfulness of the terrors with the story of two actresses, Kaiti Economou and Eleni Papadaki. Both women had collaborated during the German occupation, but Economou switched sides in time and denounced her rival on the stage. Papadaki was executed—in truth, murdered—in the leftist terror.

Although Gerolymatos does not stress this, the action of the British troops, brought in as the Germans withdrew, shows how sharply Greece differed from the rest of occupied Europe. Churchill had ordered his soldiers to prevent the leftist guerrillas who had moved into Athens from taking power. Consequently, in December 1944, while British troops in Belgium were fighting the Battle of the Bulge, in Greece they were shooting guerrillas who had bravely opposed the Nazi occupiers. Churchill was determined to dictate Greek foreign policy and keep the country outside the Soviet orbit after the war. Stalin, for whom Greece was unimportant, willingly (and secretly) agreed to that arrangement.

When the war ended, the impoverished and exhausted British could not continue to prop up monarchist rightist forces in Greece. As they withdrew from Greece, President Truman, aware of the incipient Cold War, committed American resources—but not troops—to reforming the Greek army into an effective force that eventually went into the mountains and won crucial victories at Vitsi and Grammo, effectively ending the war. The eventual defeat of the guerrillas in 1949 left Greece in ruins, beset by an enduring legacy of hatred. Even as recently as 2013, Gerolymatos observes, “during a verbal altercation in the parliament, ... a [far right] Golden Dawn [party] member shouted the slogan ‘Sto Vitsi kai sto Grammo sas hosame stin ammo’ (In Vitsi and Grammo ... we shoved you in the ground)” (300), referring to those battles fought sixty-four years before.

An International Civil War will richly reward Anglophone readers interested in the resistance to German occupation during World War II, the beginnings of the Cold War, and, of course, modern Greek history, not least for making available a plethora of Greek-language documents written by partisans of both the right and the left over the past seventy years. André Gerolymatos himself seems to sympathize with the left. He certainly condemns the brutal Greek military junta of 1967–74. But, more than anything else, he laments the refusal of both right and left to move past their ancient fears and grievances.