

H-Net Reviews

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André Gerolymatos. *An International Civil War: Greece, 1943-1949.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. 432 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-300-18060-2.

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André Gerolymatos has written a comprehensive study on perhaps the most important period in modern Greek history. His volume provides a nice balance between showing the reader the larger historical significance while still venturing into detail that brings the story some life. Specialists in Balkan/Greek studies should find this study inclusive and accessible while nonspecialists should appreciate the adequate context throughout the narrative that neither strays too far afield nor ends up trapping the reader in tangential specifics. This book accomplishes for Greek history in the period of World War II and the earliest years of the Cold War what Stevan Pavlowitch has done for Yugoslavia in the same period (*Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia*, 2008). In that way, Gerolymatos chronicles just how chaotic the Nazi occupation was for Greeks, especially those in Athens, and sets up how this chaos spurred the challenge over creating a post-Nazi government.

Divided into nine substantive chapters, the book provides a complex and nuanced topic with a logical platform. Gerolymatos starts with an overview of the creation of the modern Greek state and gives some contextual notes regarding the political situation in Greece on the eve of World War II. This sort of background clearly helps nonspecialists but I think this is actually one of the weaker sections of the book in part because it misses an opportunity. Specifically, these introductory remarks set up how divided Greece was, especially given the refugees from Asia Minor by the 1920s, but it does not go into enough detail regarding the history of Marxist groups during this critical period. Since the civil war in Greece took on a form that roughly corresponded to a generic

Left versus Right, it would have been instructive to learn more about the few Greek Communists who operated prior to World War II. Were these thinkers or writers in exile between the wars, did they spend time in the Soviet Union, were they educated in Vienna? There may have been only a few Communists, but this is a critical point when considering aspects of the civil war once the Nazis retreated. For instance, how could the Communist Party of Greece (Kommounistiká Kámma Elládas, or KKE) construct a legitimate government, win support from or be powerful enough to bully the people, or simply act as a puppet of foreign Communist powers? All of those dilemmas posed serious challenges to the KKE's potential success, but in a broader sense the lack of a powerful domestic movement would likely have doomed the KKE regime to resemble the Nazi puppet state during the war.

There are a host of names, acronyms, and groups in this story—something that undergraduates would surely bemoan—but Gerolymatos does a nice job of keeping the reader on track. Chapters unfold in a largely chronological fashion, which makes the book easy to follow. This reviewer had the most interest in the later chapters, especially when one considers the larger Cold War struggle that had already emerged by 1947. Intersected with the Cold War contests for power, issues of identity become apparent in this history, as Greeks continued to struggle over not only what type of political system they would follow (i.e., which system had legitimacy by the end of the war) but also who they were as Greeks. A nice background to this aspect, including the so-called Macedonian Question from the nineteenth century, helps us understand how important identity politics had become in

the 1940s. These two realms—the political and the personal—were intertwined; for instance, Gerolymatos recounts how the BBC’s Kenneth Matthews reported on how various sides used identity as a test: “Is Thessalonica a Greek or a Bulgarian City?” (p. 225).

Thessalonica, of course, was not limited to a contest between Bulgaria and Greece but also included the motivated Yugoslav regime in the north. Josip Broz Tito had a hand in nearly all of the major events in the region, from activity in Austrian Carinthia and Trieste in the north to the domination of Enver Hoxha’s Albanian state and support for the KKE in its struggle for power in Athens. Yugoslavia’s expansion not only in Vardar Macedonia but farther south would have been a boon to Belgrade’s domestic legitimacy and represented an ambition to “dominate the Balkans” (p. 200). We see key players mentioned briefly in this volume, including Sveztozar VukmanoviĀ-Tempo, who oversaw Tito’s plans for the southern reaches of the refashioned Yugoslavia, but it is important to note that other key Yugoslavs had been hard at work to control Albania since 1943. Milovan Djilas was involved in planning that determined the postwar Albanian state budget, and other Partisan veterans were trying to figure out how and where to invest in Albania to maximize economic output. Given the porous border Albania shares with Greece, a Yugoslav presence in Tirana would help Tito dominate other junior Communist part-

ners in the Balkans. Despite all of that, it is curious, given how completely Yugoslavia dominated Albania until the middle of 1948, that Gerolymatos expounds without critique on Nikos Zachariadis’s claim that his KKE could count on the support of Albania (p. 265). Hoxha was hardly in control of his own state, even after the Tito-Stalin split, let alone thinking about aiding a rebellion on his southern border. This critical juncture is precisely why more detailed information on Greek Communists during the 1920s and 30s would have added to the larger historical narrative; it could have clarified the limitations on the KKE and its historical relationship with neighboring parties.

Finally, the book helps illustrate that the early Cold War was instructive as a testing ground for policymakers. Tito learned a lot from these escapades—a result, his flexibility with respect to policy became a hallmark of his regime. Stalin and Truman learned a lot too, as Gerolymatos points out, in terms of how to deal with other flash-points in what would become a global cold war: “If we are tough enough now,” Truman said, “and stand up to them like we did in Greece,” then the Soviets would restrain their foreign policy (p. 295). Linkages like those with Tito and the superpowers make this story relevant for people who want to understand better the role of ideology, power, and statecraft in the twentieth century.

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