

Paramilitarism, Social Transformation, and the Nation in Greece during the Civil War and Its Aftermath (1940s–50s)

Spyros Tsoutsoumpis

Lancaster University, UK, spyros_tsoutsoumpis@yahoo.com

In May 1950, a detachment of gendarmes attempted to arrest Kolio Tzima in his native village of Stavrochori in Epirus. A tall, gaunt man in his late 50s, he was locally known as “the captain,” a moniker he earned for his role in forming and leading nationalist paramilitaries during the Axis occupation (1941–44) and the subsequent civil war (1946–49), an activity that he combined with a wide range of illicit ventures. The gendarmes were unable to carry out the arrest as they were driven out by Tzimas’s supporters “who attacked us with axes, stones, and guns.” The following day the district commander contacted the head of the local gendarmerie and berated him for trying to arrest Tzimas. He noted that while Tzimas was involved in criminal activities that ranged from gun running to usury, he was nonetheless a “valuable asset,” or as a local peasant recalled, “a man of the state,” and therefore not to be touched.¹ This was not his first run-in with the law. Tzimas’s turbulent relation with the Greek security services dated back to the interwar period when he was tasked with raising a band to suppress local Muslim separatists.² In subsequent decades Tzimas acted as a hitman and body-guard for local notables, became involved with organized crime groups, and raised an anti-communist armed group that played a pivotal role both in the ethnic cleansing of the local Muslim minority during the Second World War and the subsequent civil war (1946–49).³

Tzimas’s turbulent career that saw him crossing the line from “man of the state” to outlaw dozens of times raises several pertinent questions about the role and contribution of paramilitaries to the state-building process: what led the state to delegate the local monopoly of force to an individual who was deeply involved in criminal activities? What was the impact of such activities on local political and social institutions? Moreover, what factors allowed this

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1. Genika Arheia tou Kratous (GAK), Archive of Preveza Prefecture (Arheio Nomarhias Prevezis), folder 90 (Report to the commanding officer of the Preveza gendarmerie [Anaforaston dioikiti horofilakis Prevezis, May 20, 1950]), page 1.

2. Hristou Kainourgiou, *Dafnes kai Dakria: Istories apo ten Ethnike Antistase ste Voreiodetike Ellada 1941–1945* (Athens, 1981), 198.

3. Ibid.

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violent subset of men to persist and influence the political life of the country for over two decades?

This article addresses these questions by discussing the role, activities, and legacies of paramilitary violence in Tzimas's home area of Epirus between the occupation years and the early Cold War (1941–52). The article focuses on two particular organizations, the *Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Sindesmos* (EDES; National Republican League of Greece) that was active during the Axis occupation (1941–44), and its post-war successor, the *Ethnikon Komma Ellados* (EKE, the National Party of Greece), a political-cum-paramilitary organization that was active 1946–52. While such paramilitary groups were present across the country during this time, the sheer size and influence of militias in this area made them stand apart. At the height of its power in 1946–49, the EKE was the fourth largest party in Greece and controlled a local militia force of over 2500 members. In some communities, over 80 per cent of adult males were full time members or militia affiliates.⁴ However, my aim is not simply to reconstruct the story of some local albeit important actors. Instead, using Epirus as a vantage point, this article purports to address a series of broader questions on the role of paramilitary actors in twentieth century eastern and southeastern Europe and their impact on and intersection with processes of state-building.

Tzimas's backstory is not a local peculiarity. Instead, it illustrates a pertinent yet often overlooked antinomy at the heart of the modern state. The hallmark of the modern state's existence is the ability to assert the legal monopoly of violence, which is established by displacing private armed actors. Yet as Charles Tilly demonstrated, in order to achieve this states often have to collaborate with the very same groups (gangs, bandits, militias, irregular warriors) that they set out to destroy. Private and state armed actors are thus not necessarily antagonistic but rather collude and coexist in these processes where the boundaries between legality and illegality constantly shift. As Tilly famously noted, "crime, gangland rivalry. . .policing, [and] war-making belong to the same continuum. . .the analogy between war-making, state-making, and organized crime is tragically apt."⁵ Recent studies of state making and violence in East Asia and Latin America have built on Tilly's arguments to unravel the complex relationship between states, private armed actors, and state-building.⁶ Similar approaches are much rarer in the scholarship of state-building in twentieth century Europe, where scholars have often "encircled

4. The National Archives (TNA)/Foreign and Commonwealth Office/Folde 161/138 (Non-parliamentary political parties in Greece/Greece, Political/views of some rightist circles on Zervas, May 8, 1945).

5. Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985), 170.

6. Aldo Civico, *The Para-state: An Ethnography of Colombia's Death Squads* (Oakland, 2016); Miguel La Serna, *The Corner of the Living: Ayacucho on the Eve of the Shining Path Insurgency* (Chapel Hill, 2012); Eiko Maruko Siniawer, *Ruffians, Yakuza, Nationalists: The Violent Politics of Modern Japan, 1860–1960* (Ithaca, 2008); Paul Staniland, *Ordering Violence: Explaining Armed Group-State Relations from Conflict to Co-operation* (Ithaca, 2021); Mariana Rivera and Gustavo Duncan, "Colombian Paramilitaries: From Death Squads to State Competitors," *The Global South* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 109–30; Joshua Lund

the state with a sacral barrier that bars cognizance of its profane margins—systemic violence. . . extra-legal state security [and] illegal social controls.”⁷

This article purports to re-examine this relationship. In doing so it contributes to a broader debate on paramilitary violence and nation making by scholars such as Robert Gerwarth, Umit Ugur Ungor, and Ryan Gingeras, among others who set out to understand the role of irregular warriors and militias in the processes of imperial collapse and nation building during the early twentieth century.⁸ However, while the article builds on this scholarship, it also differs in a number of ways from these works. These studies focused on the destructive potential of paramilitarism, looking at issues such as the strategic logic of militia violence and their role in the perpetration of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Considerably less attention has been paid to the “transformative character of paramilitarism. . . and the relationship between paramilitarism and nation-making.”⁹ Very little is still known about the interaction between civil society and the militias, and the impact of paramilitary mobilization on local and national institutions and processes of state-building. Moreover, these studies largely concentrated on the period of the Great War and its immediate aftermath (1917–23). This article instead shifts the focus from the battlefield to the social processes of paramilitary violence, which are defined in here as the “transformation of social actors, structures, norms, and practices at the local level” spurred on by political mobilization and paramilitary violence.¹⁰ More specifically, I focus on three processes: political mobilization, the militarization of local authority, and the fragmentation of local political economies. I explore the legacies of these changes on the dynamics of state and institution building. Furthermore, I follow a different timeline by focusing on the “interregnum” between WWII

and Anne Garland Mahler, “Men with Guns: Cultures of Paramilitarism in the Modern Americas,” *The Global South* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 1–27.

7. Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (Chicago, 2003), 38.

8. Ryan Gingeras, “Beyond Istanbul’s ‘Laz Underworld’: Ottoman Paramilitarism and the Rise of Turkish Organised Crime, 1908–1950,” in “Aftershocks: Violence in Dissolving Empires after the First World War,” a special issue of *Contemporary European History* 19, no. 3 (August 2010): 215–30; Ryan Gingeras, “Last Rites for a ‘Pure Bandit’: Clandestine Service, Historiography and the Origins of the Turkish ‘Deep State,’” *Past & Present* 206 (February 2010): 151–74; Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923* (Oxford, 2009); Robert Gerwarth, “The Central European Counterrevolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria and Hungary after the Great War,” *Past and Present* 200, no. 1 (August 2008): 175–209; Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York, 2016); Ugur Umit Ungor, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford, 2011); Ugur Umit Ungor, “Rethinking the Violence of Pacification: State Formation and Bandits in Turkey,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (October 2012): 746–69.

9. Thomas Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation Making in Lithuania 1914–1923* (Oxford, 2018), 127.

10. This approach has been shaped by the outstanding work of Elisabeth Jean Wood on non-state armed groups and state-building in Central America. See her *Insurgent Collective Action, and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge, 2003) and “The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (15 June 2008): 539–61.

and the Cold War, examining how mobilization for violence contributed to and affected the state building process.

In doing so this article has a twofold aim. The first is to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the character and origins of paramilitary violence in Greece during the Civil War and its aftermath. The second and inter-related goal is to rethink the postwar state-building process and the transition from the WWII to the Cold War within and beyond Greece. The post-war transition has attracted significant scholarly attention. Much of this scholarship analyzed this period as a watershed moment during which a centralized state and its transnational partners reestablished the legal monopoly of force and introduced radical political and social changes that transformed the socio-political makeup of the war-torn continent.¹¹ More recent studies have probed the idea of the interregnum as ground zero by pointing to institutional continuities between the wartime and the post-war periods and the persistence of political violence. Much of this scholarship focused on the continuities at the state level and the role of state actors (militaries, police) in the violence that continued to bedevil the continent in the aftermath of WWII.¹²

The article builds on and expands the purview of this scholarship by exploring the role of non-state armed groups in these processes. Existing studies argued that post-war transition was only made possible by the de-paramilitarization of law enforcement and the re-assertion of the state's monopoly of force over the various private armed actors (partisans, militias, gangs) that emerged during the war.¹³ This approach is congruent with contemporary studies of postwar transitions.¹⁴ The article challenges these assumptions by demonstrating how partnerships between state and non-state armed actors not only persisted in the post-war period but became a crucial part of the

11. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, 2005); Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914–1949* (New York, 2015); Victor Sebestyen, *1946: The Making of the Modern World* (New York, 2014).

12. Peter Gatrell and Nick Baron, "Violent Peacetime: Reconceptualizing Displacement and Resettlement in the Soviet-East European Borderlands after the Second World War," in Peter Gatrell and Nick Baron, eds., *Population Resettlement and State Reconstruction in the Soviet-East European Borderlands, 1945–1950* (Basingstoke, 2009), 255–59; Norman M. Naimark, "Violence in the European Interregnum, 1944–1947," in Ota Konrád, Boris Barth, Jaromír Mrňka, eds., *Collective Identities and Post-War Violence in Europe, 1944–1948: Reshaping the Nation* (London, 2022), 17–22; Norman M. Naimark, "The Persistence of 'the Postwar': Germany and Poland," in Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller, eds., *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* (New York, 2010), 13–29; Enrico Acciai, Guido Panvini, Camilla Poesio, Toni Rovatti, eds., *Oltre il 1945 Violenza, Conflitto Sociale, Ordine Pubblico nel Dopoguerra Europeo* (Rome, 2017).

13. Richard Bessel, "Establishing Order in Postwar Eastern Germany," *Past and Present* 210, supplement to no. 6 (2011): 139–157; Pierre Lagrou, "Regaining the Monopoly of Force: Agents of the State Shooting Fugitives in and around Belgium, 1940–1950," *Past and Present* 210, supplement to no. 6 (2011): 177–195; Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (London, 2012); Gareth Pritchard, "Power Relations during the Transition from Nazi to Post-Nazi Rule," in Nicholas Doumanis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 2016), 590–594.

14. Simone Tholens, "Winning the Post-war: Norm Localisation and Small Arms Control in Kosovo and Cambodia," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22 (2019): 50–76; Alpaslan Ozerdem, *Postwar Recovery: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration* (London, 2009).

state's repertoires of violence. Moreover, it argues that such partnerships, rather than weakening the state's function, allowed it to shore up its forces and extend its writ in hitherto problematic areas. Paramilitarism and the deployment of private violence was therefore not an obstruction but rather an integral part and contributive factor to postwar recovery and state-building. The mobilization of paramilitary groups facilitated the emergence of new ties and networks that connected state and periphery and brought marginal areas and populations closer to the national orbit, thus facilitating the state-building process that harked back to the early twentieth century. This approach challenges divisions between legal (state-sanctioned) and illegal (private) violence in the making of the postwar state both within and beyond Europe, and sheds new light onto continuities across the divide of WWII.

The study is divided into three sections. The first part investigates the origins and role of pro-state groups in the occupation period. The second section discusses the mobilization of pro-state groups during the civil war, exploring the relationship with the civil and military authorities and the impact of paramilitary violence in local political economies. The last section follows the path of the militias into the post-civil war period. It discusses continuities between wartime and peacetime practices and assesses the role of paramilitaries in the reconstruction of the postwar state.

War and Occupation

Epirus is located in northwestern Greece. The area that was incorporated into the Greek state from the Ottoman empire after the first Balkan War of 1912 had an ethnically and religiously diverse population that included Greeks, Vlachs, Jews, as well as Muslim Albanians. Before WWII, the area was marked by low levels of literacy and high levels of emigration. When WWII broke out, Epirus was economically marginal and politically insignificant.¹⁵ The local population, including the bulk of Greek speakers, viewed the central state with distrust and hostility.¹⁶ Such were the individuals that would play a significant part in the politics of resistance and occupation.

The Greek army capitulated in April 1941, upon which the country was divided into three different zones of occupation: Italian, German, and Bulgarian. Epirus was included in the Italian zone. The western edges of the area included a significant Albanian-Muslim minority that saw the occupation as an opportunity to shake off Greek rule.¹⁷ The division of the country

15. Both Epirus and the other "new lands" of Macedonia and Thrace that became a part of Greece after the Balkan Wars were governed in a semi-colonial fashion by an Athens appointed governor-general who enjoyed almost dictatorial powers, Elpidoforos Intzilbeis, *O Eleftherios Venizelos kai to komma ton Fileleftheron stin Ipeiro* (Athens, 2015).

16. The alienation of the local population and their hostility to the state was evident in the periodic outbreaks of social banditry in the area. In the late 1920s, the state reconsidered forcibly removing parts of the local population into southern Greece. See Ioannis Nikolaidis, *Ta Giannena tou mesopolemou, 1914–1926*, 10 vols. (Athens, 1992), 3:56–67.

17. Giorgos Margaritis, *Anepithimitoi Sibatriotes, i Katastrofi ton Meionotiton tis Elladas, Evraioi, Tsamides* (Athens, 2005); Vasilis Krapsitis, *Oi Mousoulmanoï Tsamides*

into zones of occupation and growing ethnic rivalries led to a surge in food prices and rising unemployment, particularly in rural communities that relied on seasonal migration for supplementing their meagre income.¹⁸ The rural population responded to this situation by engaging in smuggling and black marketeering while many young rural men turned to banditry.¹⁹

Organized resistance appeared in the area in the summer of 1942 in the guise of the *Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo*, (EAM, National Liberation Front), a coalition of communists, social democrats, and left-wing liberals. The *Ellinikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos* (ELAS, Greek People's Liberation Army), the armed branch of EAM, made its first local appearance in early 1943. The EDES appeared in the area during the same period. Its original agenda was nationalist, republican, and anti-monarchist. The nominal head of this organization was General Nikolaos Plastiras, a distinguished veteran of several campaigns. However, the real leader was retired colonel Napoleon Zervas, a veteran of the Balkan Wars with a long experience in paramilitary organizations.

The two groups followed very different trajectories in Epirus. The left was able to gather significant support in local cities and market towns but initially was unable to take root in much of the countryside. On the other hand, the nationalists of the *Ethnikos Demokratikos Ellinikos Sindesmos* were able to build a very significant force and monopolize local resistance in several mountainous areas. Their dominance was facilitated by Zervas's extensive familial and political ties to local elites.²⁰ Local elite groups provided the nationalists with funds, weapons, and access to local social networks that allowed them to recruit extensively among the peasantry.

This help of course was not completely disinterested. The presence of the left in the area was seen as a threat for the survival of their clientelist networks and political cronyism while it also challenged traditional conservative practices and customs.²¹ The left's program entailed the enfranchisement of hitherto marginalized groups such as youth, women, and minorities, as well as the introduction of a new mode of egalitarian and participatory politics.²²

tis Thesprotias, 15os–20os Aionas (Athens, 1986); Eleftheria Manta, *Muslim Albanians in Greece. The Chams of Epirus 1923–2000* (Thessaloniki, 2008).

18. Dimitris Kremmos, *Hroniko 1941–1944: To imerologio enos Elasiti* (Athens, 1994), 10–15

19. Arheio Mouseiou Benaki (Benaki Museum Archive, AMB)/Arheio Dea (Deas Archive)/Folder 4/263/ page 1 (Activite de la Commission de Gestion pour l'approvisionnement de L'Epire, 1943).

20. Zervas had ties with several influential families like the Mitrokostas and Kossevakis families in the uplands of Tzoumerka, and the Oikonomou clan in Thesprotia. These families owned significant tracts of lands and properties in the area. Their economic might effectively allowed them to control the local societies. For the role of family and kinship ties in the nationalist resistance, see Nikos Ziagos, *Ethniki antistase kai Agglikos Imperialismos*, 5 vols. (Athens, 1979), 2:30–55; Vangelis Tzoukas, *Oi Oplarhigoi tou EDES stin Ipeiro 1942–1944. Topikotika kai Politiki Edaxi* (Athens, 2013); Vangelis Tzoukas, *O EDES 1941–1945 mia Epanektimisi* (Athens, 2017).

21. Genika Arheia tou Kratous (General State Archives, GAK)/Mikres Silloges (Small Collections)/Folder 116/A, 7 (Imerologio Giannouli [Giannoulis Diary], 1943–1946).

22. On the cultural politics of EAM see Riki Van Boeschoten, *Anapoda Hronia: Sillogiki Istoría kai Istoría sto Ziaka Grevenon (1900–1950)* (Athens, 2003); Riki Van Boeschoten,

Such changes were seen with suspicion by local elites and the more conservative segments of the population who resented the intrusion of *the Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo* into village affairs. The nationalists adopted a more subtle approach. The organization steered clear from communal affairs which were tried according to customary law and co-operated with local authority figures—priests, elders, and monastics—who acted as mediators between the local population and the militiamen of the EDES. Alliances between this organization and local communities were made on an ad hoc basis. Some communities, for instance, agreed to raise a band under the condition that they would not be asked to fight outside their turf, or that bands from other regions would not be allowed to operate in their area.²³

While their model allowed the nationalists to expand their provenance it weakened their military capability and made them easy prey for the Wehrmacht. In the winter of 1943–44, the German army unleashed a series of counter-guerilla operations whose purpose was to destroy the socio-economic basis of the resistance organizations. In many areas the Wehrmacht used auxiliaries recruited from among the Muslim minority.²⁴ The presence of these groups gave these clashes the aspect of a local civil war.²⁵ The resistance groups were unable to stop this onslaught, and thousands of civilians took flight along with their families towards the uplands. The situation deteriorated further after the political tension, which had been brewing between the left and the right since the summer of 1943, escalated into full-blown warfare between the *Ellinikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos* and the nationalist groups of the EDES in October 1943. The nationalists were able to score some initial success. By February 1944, however, they had lost over 50 per cent of the territory they controlled to the left.²⁶

The fighting between the two organizations and their reprisals took a heavy toll on local societies. Over 800 civilians were executed, hundreds perished from hunger and disease, and thousands were left homeless and destitute. Thousands of animals were stolen or killed while crops were systematically destroyed. Poverty and suffering led to a significant decline in support. Some peasant communities declared themselves neutral and made public their decision to abstain from any kind of fighting.²⁷ Others turned

Perasame polles Bores Koritsi mou (Athens, 1998); Tasoula Vervenioti, *I Ginaika tis adistasis: I Eisodos tis Ginaikas stin Antistasi* (Athens, 2013).

23. Iosif Papadakis, *To Imerologio enos agonisti: Katoche-antistase-empfyllos* (Chania, 2009), 26–27.

24. Mark Mazower, “Military Violence and the National Socialist Consensus: The Wehrmacht in Greece 1941–1944,” in Hannes Heer and Kark Nauman, eds., *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II, 1941–1944* (New York, 2000), 151.

25. The National Archives (TNA)/War Office/Folder/204/9348, 5 (Greek-Albanian relations: Albanian minorities in Greece).

26. TNA/Folder HS5/695/ B6/108/ page 2 (Major Paul Bathgate, The Andarte Movement in Epirus, June 1943–February 1944, January 3, 1945).

27. GAK/Arheio Emmanuel Tsouderou (Emmanuel Tsouderos Archive)/Apostoli A/Folder 2/ page 3 (Ekthesi epi tis katastaseos ton piropathon periohon Iepirou kai Aitoloakarnanias [Report on the situation of the arson-afflicted inhabitants of Epirus and Aitoloakarnania], January 30, 1944).

openly against the guerrillas.²⁸ Violence also led local elites, professionals, merchants, and business owners to abandon their communities and seek safety in the local cities, thus leaving local societies without leadership during a severe crisis.²⁹

The EDES responded to these challenges by bolstering its military and political presence. The local armed groups were restructured along the lines of regular military forces. The nationalist leadership also made a sustained effort to enlist more fighters by promising monetary rewards and support for their families.³⁰ Furthermore, they tried to establish a greater degree of political control by replacing the traditional administrative structures with militia appointed “committees of national struggle,” which provided social services such as policing, education, and health care.³¹ Youths were organized in the *Ethniki Dimokratiki Enosi Ellinopaidon* (National Republican Youth Association, EDEE). These young people acted as an unofficial police force, helping in the transport of provisions, munitions, and food to the frontline.³²

Such efforts were combined with a renewed propaganda effort whose purpose was to bolster the legitimacy of the nationalists and rally the peasants’ support for the struggle against the left and the local minorities. In January 1944, the EDES established the “office for popular enlightenment,” which was run by the more educated guerrillas. The purpose of the office was to distribute nationalist propaganda and counter the ideological work of the left.³³ The propaganda that was disseminated via speeches, plays, and the press had a fiercely anticommunist nature.³⁴ Publications downplayed anti-Axis themes and began to underscore the “dangers of Bolshevism” to “the family, the country, and religion” while also extolling the monarchy.³⁵

These state-building efforts were funded by two sources. The first was the British Military Mission, which provided EDES with money and guns since they saw them as a potential bulwark against the dominance of the left in a postwar Greece. The second was a series of criminal activities that included raids against left-wing and Muslim communities, smuggling, and “protection” taxes imposed on itinerant merchants and nomadic pastoralists.³⁶ These efforts generated very significant revenue that allowed the nationalists

28. Georgios A. Romanos, *Mia Athinaiki vengera tou 1944: Imerologio apo tin Eléftheri Oreini Ellada*, introduction by Aristeidis Romanos (Athens, 2008), 98.

29. Stefanos Evangelou, “Simioseis mias Zois” (unpublished), 45.

30. GAK/Arheio Emmanuel Tsouderou/Apostoli A/Folder 2/ page 3 (Ekthesi epi tis katastaseos).

31. TNA/Folder HS5/695/Lt Col Barnes NZE/page 5 (Report on Zervas Andarte Movement/Epirus HQ/August14, 1944).

32. Diefthinsi Istorias Stratou (DIS) /Arheio Konstantinou Mavroskoti (Konstantinos Mavroskotis Archive) /Folder 1/101/page 1 (Diatagi peri antartikon omadon [Order concerning the guerilla groups], June 29, 1943).

33. TNA Folder/HS5/695/B6/108/page 2 (Major Paul Bathgate, The Andarte Movement).

34. Heracles Petimezas, *Ethniki Antistasi kai koinoniki epanastasi: Zervas kai E.A.M.: o agonas 1941–44 vasei ton archeion tis antistasiakis omadas Nikitas* (Athens, 1991), 43–44.

35. *Eleftheri Ellada, Periodos 1943–1945* (Athens, N/A), 17–18.

36. DIS/Arheio Ioanni Katsadima [Ioannis Katsadimas Archive] /Folder 1/ (Peri Egatalipsis ton taxeon stratou, [Regarding the desertion of the ranks of the army] August 1, 1944).

to expand their social welfare policies through the creation of hospitals, schools, and soup kitchens.³⁷

The combination of propaganda and aid helped to bolster support for the EDES and to bridge the social and cultural differences between the populations that supported them, thus undermining the notoriously isolationist and xenophobic attitudes of the villagers. Localism gave way to a crude but fiercely nationalist and anti-communist attitude that saw the conflict as an existential struggle between right and left. A local left-wing activist noted that the peasants “have imbibed all this propaganda, they believed we were going to kill the priests and burn their churches.”³⁸ Moreover, it allowed the nationalists to recruit thousands of new members for their guerilla bands. Between January and June 1944, the nationalists managed to enlist over 5000 local men. This rise in numbers was shaped in equal parts by joblessness and the promise of food and monetary rewards as the newly enlisted militiamen were paid two sovereigns per month.³⁹ The rapid expansion of the guerilla groups militarized local societies as thousands of men shifted from activities like agriculture and trade to mercenary service in the nationalist groups. By early 1944 almost one in six adult males in the area served in the nationalist militias.⁴⁰

Such changes reverberated in local governance. The flight of traditional social and political elites, and the concomitant militarization of local societies, empowered a new set of actors, militia leaders, propagandists, and education officers, many of whom came from marginal social backgrounds, to play an increasingly important role in the governance apparatuses of the EDES and the affairs of local societies. The popularity and influence of such individuals wrested on their military exploits against the left and their involvement in provisioning aid (and looted goods) to local societies.⁴¹ Militia leaders became the first port of call for peasants who sought relief, employment, food, and aid, which they provided in exchange for their support and enlistment in their groups. This reciprocal relation created “powerful” ties between the militia leaders and their communities “who looked at them with awe” and “followed them blindly.”⁴² Such men who according to one local peasant “were really nobodies before the war” seized the opportunity to “become real men of influence” and dominate local societies as members of a “new local elite.”⁴³

The combination of propaganda, social benefits and military allowed the EDES to bolster its support among local peasants and to slowly resume its military activities. By June 1944 nationalist troops attacked both the Wehrmacht

37. Vasilis Pavlidis, *Oi Alvanotsamides tis periohes Paramithias kai e katoche* (Athens, 2008), 97.

38. Kremmos, *Hroniko*, 154.

39. This is roughly equivalent to 4-5 months salaries for a mid-ranking civil servant.

40. TNA/Folder HS5/695/ Lt Col Barnes NZE/page 4 (Report on Zervas).

41. The rise of these “new men” is exemplified in the trajectory of individuals like Nikos Athanasiou, an unemployed journalist who became head of the nationalists’ propaganda section. In the post-war period, Athanasiou was elected MP with a succession of monarchist parties and minister for several governments; see Romanos, *Mia athinaiki*, 78.

42. *Ibid.*, 75.

43. DIS/Arheio Ioanni Katsadima (Ioannis Katsadimas Archive)/Folder 1/page 3 (Ekthesi epi tis katastaseos periohis Pargas [Report on the situation in the area of Parga], May 2, 1944).

and the local Albanian Muslim communities. The fighting between EDES and the Muslim militias took the aspect of ethnic cleansing. Guerrillas, galvanized by the promise of seizing Muslim lands and properties, attacked these communities with ferocity. The liberation of local towns was accompanied by several massacres in which the guerrillas replicated the tactics previously used by the Wehrmacht.⁴⁴

Nationalist bands also clashed occasionally with the left-wing partisans. Despite the best efforts of its leadership, however, the former was unable to challenge the *Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo*, or to recover lost territory. The liberation of the area resulted in a stalemate between the two organizations. Fighting resumed in the winter of 1944–45, when the leftist partisans unleashed an all-out attack against the troops of the EDES. The nationalists were unable to withstand this onslaught. Nationalist militiamen crossed the sea to Corfu while others took refuge in the mountains where they continued a campaign of low-level warfare against the left. While many rank-and-file guerrillas were able to escape unscathed, local elite men who supported the nationalists were decimated. Between December and January 1945, over 230 members of the EDES were executed by left-wing partisans.⁴⁵

The “exile” of the militiamen lasted briefly. The fighting in Epirus was part of a larger series of clashes between the left, pro-state forces and British troops that had Athens as their epicenter. These clashes, known as *Dekemvriana*, came to an end in February 1945 when the representatives of *Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo* and the government signed a peace accord that became known as the Varkiza treaty. The first civilians began to return to Epirus in mid-March 1945 and the relocation of this population was completed a month later. Many of them expected that their return would allow them to settle down and rebuild the area. However, these expectations were soon dashed as their return signaled a new round of conflict which was to last for four long years.

From Liberation to Civil War

On March 23, 1945, a small group of nationalist militiamen arrived in the small town of Igoumenitsa. They headed to the local headquarters of the left, which they proceeded to smash and plunder under the eyes of the gendarmerie, who made no attempt to stop them. This violence was not a local aberration but rather part of a broader, country-wide wave of repression against the left, which became known as the “white terror.” The emergence of the left had challenged the political authority and role of traditional elites at both the national and local levels, where power was still exercised by committees appointed by the *Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo*.⁴⁶ Other left and pro-left organizations,

44. Mark Mazower, “Three Forms of Political Justice: Greece, 1944–1945” in Mark Mazower, ed., *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece 1943–1960* (Princeton, 2000), 24–42.

45. Mihalīs Ntousias, *EAM Prevezas ELAS Zalogou, Souliou* (Athens, 1987), 210–12.

46. Genika Arheia tou Kratous (General State Archives, GAK)/Arheio Vasilikon Anaktorou (Royal Palace Archives)/Folder 439/page 2 (Zalokostas pros ton Vasilea Georgio II [Zalokostas to King George II], August 1, 1945).

including youth associations, trade and labor unions, and farmer associations continued to exercise an important role in local societies.⁴⁷ The presence of these groups was seen by sections of the security apparatus and conservative political and business elites as a direct challenge to their status and the state's monopoly of force.⁴⁸ Such perceptions were further influenced by the growing tension between Greece and its northern neighbors and rising peasant and worker militancy fueled by the decrepit state of the economy.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, political elites lacked the manpower and resources to curtail the strength of the left. This led them to subcontract violence to right-wing gangs and militias that were tasked with attacking and demolishing the political structures of the left. In Epirus, the violence was coordinated by the army's intelligence bureau (A2), and subcontracted to veterans of the *Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Sindesmos*.⁵⁰ Militia leaders and their followers were seen as ideal for the job as they possessed fanatical anti-communist convictions, a know-how of political violence, and a vested interest in the re-establishment of the status-quo. The occupation and the rise of the resistance had allowed militia leaders and their networks to climb up the social ladder through a combination of patronage, illicit activities, and politicking. The defeat of the *Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Sindesmos* and the subsequent dominance of the left threatened their newly found social status and wealth. The "white terror" provided them with a chance to get revenge and re-assert their dominance in local societies. The alliance between the state and the militias was formalized in March 1945 when several nationalist bandleaders met with the head of this intelligence bureau, who promised them guns, money, and immunity from prosecution in exchange for their support against the left. By August 1945, at least 800 paramilitaries were active in the area.⁵¹

The mobilization initially took place from the ground up. Most militias operated locally and were structured along extended clans and veteran groups. Funding for weapons and operations was provided by far-right gendarmerie officers, anti-communist associations, and business groups. In this period, violence was brutal but seldom lethal. Most acts of violence took the form of public beatings, smashing of *Ethniko Apaleftherotiko Metopo* offices, and public shearing of women who supported the left, as well as strikebreaking, and terrorization of trade unions and labor militants.⁵² Trade unionists and militant workers were terrorized and murdered, while the militias helped business owners to form yellow unions. Some militia leaders also engaged in small scale banditry and murder for hire, even offering their

47. "Laikes Axioseis kai Diamartiries," *Agonistis*, April 4, 1945.

48. David H. Close, *The Origins of the Greek Civil War* (London, 1995), 153–63; Christopher Montague Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord, a Survey of Recent Greek Politics in their International Setting* (London, 1948), 258.

49. "Logos tou Stratigou Zerva pros ton Laon tou Mesologgiou," *Iho ton Sintakton*, July 11, 1945, 1.

50. "Enteinetai I Tromokratia stin Thesprotia," *Agonistis*, March 21, 1945.

51. Diefthinsi Istorias Stratou (Army History Directorate-DIS)/Arheio Emfuliou Polemou/Folder 1372/A/12 (Anotati Stratiotiki Dioikisi Ipeirou, Deltio Pliroforion [Supreme Military Command of Epirus, Information Bulletin], August 1, 1945).

52. Imerologio Giannouli (GAK, Giannoulis Diary), 16–18.

services to private citizens who sought to be rid of acquisitive neighbors and unfaithful spouses.⁵³

Such attitudes led the left to attribute to these militias a fascist, or proto-fascist character. Some studies drew direct parallels between these groups and the counter-revolutionary militias (Freikrops, Squadristi) that emerged in the aftermath of the Great War.⁵⁴ Post-war moments at the end of WWI and WWII bear more than a passing resemblance. They were marked by state failure, the collapse of imperial and post-imperial projects, and the rise of powerful left-wing contesters. Yet, there are also stark dissimilarities between the two periods. Post-WWI militias in central and western Europe were rooted in urban, transnational networks of veterans, students, intellectuals, and professionals who were mobilized on the basis of a culture of defeat.⁵⁵ Greek militias on the other hand were an almost exclusively rural phenomena that derived their practices from local networks and traditions of violence. While anti-communism played an important role in the formation of these militias, other factors, including profit, local solidarities, and a nationalizing imperative were no less important. Greek militias were particularly prominent in contested, border areas rather than in the center. This brought them closer to the experience of similar groups in the Balkans and eastern Europe, such as Chetniks and ataman armies, who were also mobilized on the basis of kin and locality and rose to defend and/or contest the nation state in marginal areas.⁵⁶

Collaboration between the state and the militias gradually intensified. In January 1946 the army's intelligence bureau founded the *Sindesmos Ethnikis Drasis* [National Action Association, SED], a paramilitary high council that was co-chaired by the governor general, militia representatives, and a representative of the Army's General Headquarters.⁵⁷ State backing, including funding, allowed the militias to re-assert their wartime dominance of rural areas and thus to emerge as a major political and social player in the countryside. Many conservative politicians began courting the militias in anticipa-

53. "Oi Kapetanaioi tou EDES, Sosto Yperkratos stin Thesprotia," *Agonistis*, October 31, 1945, 3.

54. Neokosmou Foivou Grigoriadi, *Istoria tou Emfuliou Polemou 1945–1949: To Deftero Antartiko*, 4 vols. (Athens, 1980), 2:156.

55. Gerwarth, "The Central European Counter-Revolution," 170–80; Matteo Millan, "The Institutionalisation of *Squadristo*: Disciplining Paramilitary Violence in the Italian Fascist Dictatorship," *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 4 (November 2013): 551–73; Matteo Millan, *The Blackshirts Dictatorship: Armed Squad, Political Violence and the Consolidation of Mussolini's Regime* (London, 2022); Alessandro Saluppo, "Paramilitary Violence and Fascism: Imaginaries and Practices of Squadristo, 1919–1925," *Contemporary European History* 29, no. 3 (August 2020): 289–308.

56. Dmitar Tasic, *Paramilitarism in the Balkans, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania, 1917–1924* (Oxford, 2020); Serhey Yekelchik, "Bands of Nation Builders? Insurgency and Ideology in the Ukrainian Civil War," in Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford, 2012), 107–25; Ugur Umit Ungor, "Paramilitary Violence in the Collapsing Ottoman Empire," in Robert Gerwarth and John Horne eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford, 2012), 164–83.

57. Arheio Sofokli Venizelou (AMB, Sofoklis Venizelos Archive)/Folder 264/11/page 1 (Simeioma sxetika me tis organoseis tis dexias [Note on the right-wing organisations], November 1, 1945).

tion of the forthcoming (March 1946) elections in the hope that their backing would allow them to mobilize the support of northern rural voters.

The first of these alliances was forged by Napoleon Zervas, the wartime leader of the EDES. In March 1945 Zervas announced the creation of his own political party, the EKE. Zervas's party was primarily based in Epirus and the bulk of the candidates and ordinary members were recruited from among veteran militiamen. To support his campaign, Zervas also created a paramilitary youth organization, the *Ethniki Neolaia Ellados* (ETHNEE, National Youth of Greece), numbering over 2000 armed members. The purpose of this group was to intimidate both local voters and candidates of other parties who ran for office in the region. Gangs affiliated with the ETHNEE assaulted both left-wing and liberal politicians who tried to campaign; they blackmailed and threatened voters and intimidated officials who tried to intervene.⁵⁸ The presence of the paramilitaries allowed Zervas to run almost unopposed, as few other politicians dared to venture into action.⁵⁹

The alliance between the paramilitaries and the political parties presented a watershed for local and national politics, and the change was particularly pronounced in Epirus. In the prewar elections, 60 per cent of MPs had come from outside the region. The few local candidates usually had arrived from the expatriate community in Athens and had been the scions of prominent mercantile and military families. This trend was completely reversed by 1946. The elections of that year were a triumph for the paramilitary-backed EKE. For the first time, the majority of the candidates were natives of the region, several of them came from peasant families, and almost all of them were veteran militia leaders.⁶⁰ The electoral triumph of the right was completed with the return of King George II. The restoration of the monarchy sealed the conservatives' domination of national politics and gave a huge boost to the militia organizations.

The advent of a conservative government hastened the outbreak of civil war. The persecution unleashed by the militias led to the formation of the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG), which reacted by taking the fight to the state. Most members of the insurgent army were veterans of the left-wing resistance who had been persecuted by the militias. The first few months of the conflict were marked by a series of setbacks. The Greek military lacked experience in waging counter-insurgency campaigns and was also desperately short of money and material. Clashes between army troops and guerillas led to several resounding successes for the latter.⁶¹ These developments

58. Elliniko Logotehniko kai Istoriko Arheio (Greek Literature and History Archive-ELIA)/Arheio Napoleonta Zervas (Napoleon Zervas, Archive)/Folder 3.1.3/ (Epistoli tou Zerva pros Kokkino [Letter of Zervas to Kokkinos], October 25, 1945).

59. Nikolaos Anastasopoulos, "Oi ethnikes ekloges tou 1946 stin eklogiki periferia Ioanninon-Thesprotias," *Ipeirotika Hronika* 33, no. 1 (December 1999): 251–75.

60. Grigorios Psallidas, ed., *Oi ekloges tou 1946: Stathmos sten politike istoria tes sýchrones Elladas* (Athens, 2008), 25–35.

61. On the military struggle during the Greek Civil War, see Andre Gerolymatos, *The International Civil War, Greece 1943–1949* (New Haven, 2016); Spyridon Plakoudas, *The Greek Civil War: Strategy, Counterinsurgency and the Monarchy* (London, 2017); Christopher Montague Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece, 1941–1949* (London, 2018).

led the militias and their backers to lobby the government for a more active role in the counterinsurgency. Senior officers and political leaders believed that it would be “impossible” to defeat the insurgency through “legal means.” According to lieutenant general Konstantinos Ventiris, the only way to stem the tide of the insurgency was to destroy its civilian bases through a concerted campaign of terrorism and intimidation. However, Ventiris was aware that such a tactic would lead to an uproar against the government. He therefore suggested to use the paramilitaries in these tasks as it would deflect attention and provide the government with plausible deniability.⁶²

The cooperation between the militias and the state escalated further in the autumn of 1946 when the government authorized the creation of a state-wide paramilitary apparatus. This organization was divided into two branches. The first branch was the *Monades Aftoaminas Ypaithrou* (MAY, Groups for Rural Self-Defense), an organization whose purpose was to (self-)defend local communities and military installations. The second was the *Monades Aminas Dioxis* (MAD, Group for Defense and Pursuit). The authorities believed that their knowledge of terrain, guerilla warfare know-how, and fierce attachment to the monarchist cause would allow them to bring the fight to the enemy.⁶³

Violence reached its highest web in the autumn of 1946 in a series of operations that were “tantamount to a pogrom.”⁶⁴ Militias saw any villager in a left-supporting area as a prospective combatant; “women as well as children are soldiers, equally savage and equally monstrous to adult males,” and made no distinction between combatants and civilians.⁶⁵ Accordingly, individual acts of support towards the left were retaliated against with the collective punishment of the villages. In mid-1947, Ventiris sent a short document to regional commanders where he advised them that “the safety of the army is above everything. . . . If civilians betray you should not hesitate from turning their communities into ash.”⁶⁶ The definition of treason was applied exceptionally loosely by the army. Civilians could be targeted for failing to report guerilla movements to the army, for providing them with food, and even for failing to give accurate directions to pursuing units.

This shift had severe repercussions on both the nature and extent of the violence. The breakdown of the civil/military divide broadened the circle of both victims and perpetrators as civilians became liable for victimization irrespective of their political affiliations or beliefs. This situation slowly but

62. The army fared particularly badly in northern Greece, where the insurgents had the support of a significant segment of the Slavic Macedonian minority. This led military leaders like Ventiris to see the civil war as a “zero sum” conflict and thus to press forward with subcontracting violence to militias that were seen as the only “potent” weapon against the minority. GAK/ Royal Palace Archive/Folder 144A/page 1 (Siskepsis [Meeting], March 4, 1947). For the role of Slavic Macedonians, see John Koliopoulos, *Plundered Loyalties: Axis Occupation and Civil Strife in Greek West Macedonia 1941–1949* (London, 1999); James Horncastle, *The Macedonian Slavs in the Greek Civil War 1944–1949* (Lanham, 2019).

63. Dimitris Ploumis, *I Elliniki Tragodia 1946–1949* (Athens, 1973), 43.

64. “Xirovrissi,” *Rizospastis*, November 26, 1946.

65. “Oi simmoritai,” *Estia*, July 9, 1946, 3.

66. GAK/Arheio Vasilikon Anaktoron (Royal Palace Archive) /Folder 442/page 1 (Simeiomia pros tis 7, 9, 10 Merarhies [Note to the 7th, 9th and 10th Divisions], January 18, 1947).

steadily broke down bonds of social trust by empowering local actors to act with impunity. Local conflicts thus became increasingly politicized as various actors felt confident in using extreme violence to settle scores, sate their appetite for revenge, and acquire resources and social capital.⁶⁷ A report on paramilitary violence in Epirus enumerated several episodes where militias “broke into homes, robbing families and extorting money, threatening rape and murder upon those who refused to comply.”⁶⁸ This privatization of politics led to the erosion of a middle ground, making neutrality and opportunism perilous for civilians who attempted to abstain from this conflict.⁶⁹

The escalation of violence had a profound impact on the country’s social structure, civilian security, and the war effort. Insecurity and violence led to a massive population flight from the countryside to the cities. This trend was further escalated after the army began displacing rural communities into state-controlled fortified settlements.⁷⁰ The rationale for this move was to deprive the guerillas of recruits and provisions and force them to abandon their mountain hideouts. The displacement of large numbers of civilians, the pervasive fear, and lack of security in rural areas led to a huge drop in agricultural production and the gradual erosion of the region’s agricultural and pastoral basis.⁷¹ As a result, tens of thousands of civilians became dependent on government distributed food supplies. The crisis also led to the creation of parallel or “black” economic networks that provided civilians with food, goods, and recreation in the forms of drugs, prostitution, and gambling. The state lacked the ability to control these networks as both the armed forces and the gendarmerie were deployed against the left-wing insurgents. This left the paramilitaries the sole group capable of wielding organized violence in the countryside. The absence of law enforcement structures allowed the militia leaders to step in and seize control of licit and illicit economic networks.⁷²

These activities were coordinated by the “National Alert” organization, a front for the ETHNEE that extorted businesses and professionals who were forced to contribute a monthly fee to the armed bands. Some businesses also approached the militias and paid them to threaten and even murder their competitors, often over trivial disputes.⁷³ Militias also engaged in large scale graft, smuggling, and black-market trading. Paramilitarism was thus transformed from a military/political venture to a “commercial enterprise” and

67. “Ta Lypira Gegonota ton Filiaton,” *Thesprotika Nea*, June 1, 1948, 1.

68. Arheia Sinhronis Koinonikis Istorias (Contemporary Social History Archives ASKI)/ Arheio Kommounistikou Kommatos Elladas, KKE (Greek Communist Party-KKE Archive) Folder/417/24/1/54/page 1 (Katastasi tromokratias apo Iouni 1947 mexri Iouli 1948 [The state of terrorism between June 1957 and July 1948]).

69. “Ton Peiramaton ta Apotelesmata,” *Thesprotika Nea*, May 1, 1948, 3.

70. Idrima Konstaninos G. Karamanlis (Konstantinos G Karamanlis Foundation-IKGG)/Arheio Tsaldari (Tsaldaris Archive)/Folder /31/8/12/1/ page 3 (Ergasia perithalipseos [Relief work], June 5, 1948).

71. “Oi Galanides,” *Thesprotika Nea* May 1, 1948, page 4.

72. DIS/Arheio Emfuliou Polemou (Civil War Archive), Folder 14/ page 4 (Anafora Papatthanasiasiadi [Papatthanasias Report] August 1, 1947).

73. ASKI/Arheio KKE, Folder/417/24/1/54/page 3 (Katastasi).

a “means of generating wealth.”⁷⁴ A high ranking military officer even suggested that the paramilitaries “developed a vested interest in the perpetuation of violence,” which led them to engage in gratuitous brutality in the hope that they will “prolong” the conflict as peace would “deprive them of income.”⁷⁵ The prospect of loot and monetary rewards attracted an ever-increasing number of young men in these networks. The allure of paramilitaries was particularly strong among displaced persons, itinerant youths, and unemployed farm workers, who flocked to the ranks of their paramilitaries in search of money, loot, and respect, turning these groups into a powerful political presence.⁷⁶

The paramilitaries’ control of the local economy led to a gradual reconfiguration of the militias’ internal dynamics and their relations to local and national political elites. The backing of the paramilitaries allowed Zervas to be appointed Minister for Order. Zervas’s ascent to power led to a rapid expansion of paramilitary groups within and beyond Epirus. Taking advantage of Zervas’s support, some of these groups were able to completely sideline the local authorities. Paramilitary leaders acted as a parallel government that was only accountable to Zervas himself. A left-wing cadre noted that in Epirus “the civilians feel that they [the paramilitaries] are the real state . . . it is they who give orders and directives to the local authorities, the police, the district attorney . . . of course there is a prefect and a governor general, but they simply do [their] bidding.”⁷⁷

In many areas the militias became the main provider of jobs and a mediator between the state and the local societies. This gave them very significant control of local politics. Militias determined civil service appointments and business loans, fixed the prices for purchasing and selling foodstuffs, and mediated the provisioning of aid on behalf of local communities and displaced persons.⁷⁸ The broadening of the militias’ economic basis also allowed them to offer their constituents some basic social services. The EKE provided its members with grants for visiting doctors, buying medication, and other supplies. Militia leaders also functioned as an unofficial police force dispensing rough justice against rustlers, and robbers and inflicting brutal punishments on people who were perceived as “moral deviants”; wife-beaters, child-molesters, prostitutes, and petty thieves.⁷⁹

The combination of economic violence, patronage, and state-sponsorship embedded the militias deeply into the structures of rural society and served to forge ties between the state and population groups (nomadic pastoralist,

74. “Ekthesis Stanota,” *Eleftheria*, August 20, 1952. The newspaper seized publication in the 1970s.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Sokratis Natsis, *Anamniseis mias zois* (Volos, 1998), 95.

77. ASKI/Arheio KKE/Folder/24/1/41/ page 1 (Anti-Valkanikes Drastiriotites [Anti-Balkan activities], January 28, 1947).

78. IKGK/Arheio Tsaldari (Tsaldaris Archive) /Folder 22/4/1941/Epistoli D. Theoxaridi ston Tsaldari [Letter from D. Theoxaridi to Tsaldaris], November 20, 1947).

79. In Epirus the services provided by the militias ranged from policing to healthcare and education. GAK/Arheio Nomarhias Prevezas/Folder 32/ (Asfaleia Ipaithrou [Rural Security], May 10, 1947).

upland farmers) that had been marginalized in the prewar period. These populations were thus transformed from dangerous, semi-barbaric marginals to the “avant-garde” of the anti-communist struggle.⁸⁰ Moreover they created patterns of state-militia, co-operation and a culture of impunity that shaped policing and administrative practices in the post-war period. These developments gradually transformed the militias from local auxiliaries into an integral part of the state’s apparatus.

Legacies of Violence

The end of the civil war did not diminish the militias’ political importance. They were now re-designated by the army under the moniker of *Tagmata Ethnofilakis Aminis* (TEA, Security Defense Battalions), which was the post-war incarnation of the *Monades Asfeleias Ypaithrou* (Groups for Rural Self-Defense). Despite the crushing defeat of the communist left in the civil war, there were entire segments in the security apparatus who believed that the danger of internal unrest remained strong. Veteran intelligence officer Giorgos Fessopoulos argued to his political superiors that the military defeat and the transmutation of the “hot” civil war to a “Cold War” meant that the “internal enemy,” trade unionists, radical students, and minorities were even more dangerous.⁸¹ Yet, unlike the civil war the state could not use direct, overt violence against its internal enemies as it had to retain a façade of liberalism and democracy in the eyes of its foreign allies. The militias according to Fessopoulos and his colleagues presented an ideal solution to this conundrum. Their semi-formal structure and relation to the state provided the authorities with plausible deniability in the face of internal and external criticism. At the same time the experience and knowledge of the militias made them a powerful tool for the suppression of the left.⁸²

While such groups existed across Greece, the geographical position of Epirus at the border of a socialist state (Albania) endowed the militias with even greater power. Epirus was seen as a crucial frontline region directly threatened by internal and external enemies. To deal with this perceived threat the Greek state adopted a dual approach that combined direct repression with social engineering and economic reform.⁸³ The civil war had led to the flight of thousands of peasants and the abandonment of significant tracts of land. The authorities seized this opportunity to transform the social and political make-up of the area. Epirus was placed under a special regime known as the “surveilled zone statute.” The area was governed by emergency laws that allowed the militias and the military to act with almost complete impunity. Civilians were not allowed to travel from one part of the district to

80. “Thesprotia,” *Agrotiki Ellas* July 15, 1946, 1.

81. AMB/Arheio Sofokli Venizelou (Sofoklis Venizelos Archive) /Folder 23/67 (Sidomos ekthesis epo tis anagis kai tou tropou diexagogis esoterikis diafotiseos [Brief report on the need for and the appropriate manner to disseminate education in the internal front], November 1, 1952).

82. *Ibid.*

83. AMB/ Arheio Sofokli Venizelou (Sofoklis Venizelos Archive) /Folder 27/45/ (Ekthesis drastiriotitos toy KKE [Report of the activities of the KKE], August 1, 1950.

another unless they possessed a “special” identity card that was issued by the army’s intelligence bureau, the A2, with the recommendation of the local paramilitaries.⁸⁴

Militias were given a dual role. In case of an invasion from the Socialist Block they would act as scouts and saboteurs. In the meantime, their task was to prevent the left from seizing political power with legal means and rebuilding its civilian basis of support. Most of these militiamen were veterans of the EKE and the EDES who fought against the left during the 1940s. Violence against political opponents was both brutal and casual to the area. In the 1950, 1958, and 1961 elections, bands of masked and armed militiamen broke into the homes of leftists and electoral centers, threatening voters and MPs alike.⁸⁵ In one case a militia leader threatened his fellow villagers that their community would “cease to exist” unless the conservatives won the local vote.⁸⁶ In another case militiamen boarded a bus and threatened passengers that they would face grim consequences unless they voted the “right way.”⁸⁷ Murders of political opponents were brazen and commonplace. In rural areas, the authority of the militiamen was almost absolute. Militiamen acted as a political mafia engaging in murder for hire, intimidation, and political blackmail. Left-wing and centrist politicians were often assaulted by the militias, who proclaimed their areas “communist-free zones.”⁸⁸

Repression was combined with social engineering. In 1952 the government passed law 2185 for the “forcible appropriation of landed estates.” This effort was coordinated by the foreign ministry, the governor general, and the army’s intelligence bureau.⁸⁹ The purpose of these policies was to complete the “Hellenization” of the area by forcing out politically “untrustworthy elements” and settling the border areas with populations of “sound,” or monarchist political beliefs. This process was coordinated on the ground by the militias, who were tasked with vetting prospective settlers and in many cases leading the colonization process by settling in border communities along with their families. The colonization process was marked by corruption and violence as prospective settlers who looked to acquire land often paid hefty bribes to militias.⁹⁰ Despite these mishaps the colonization process was highly successful. In the region of Thesprotia alone it led to the settlement of 15,000

84. Ziagos, *Ethniki antistase kai Agglikos Imperialismos* (Athens, 1979), 4:315.

85. ASKI/Arheio Eniaias Dimokratikes Aristeras,EDA (United Democratic Left-EDA Archive)/Folder 187/2/5(Kommatikes kai tromokratikes drastiriotites ton TEA [Political and terrorist activities of the TEA], November 1, 1961).

86. ASKI/EDA Archive/Folder 187/2/4/page 3 (Onomastiki katastasis opliton TEA katadikasthedon gia proeklogiki tromokratia kai kakopoiisi politon [Catalogue of TEA members convicted on pre-electoral acts of terrorism and assaults against citizens], May 8, 1963).

87. ASKI/EDA Archive/Folder 614.2/Thesprotia/page 4 (Memorandum, May 27, 1958).

88. Giannis Simentzis, *Sta Monopatia tis Zoes* (Athens, 1980), 130–37; Kostas Georgiadis, *Odoiporiko tis Antistasis* (Athens, 1980), 131.

89. Gennadius Library/Arheio Filippou Dragoumi (Filippos Dragoumis Archive)/Folder 94.4/ (Ipourgeio Exoterikon/Praktika [Interior Ministry Minutes], October 21, 1952).

90. Napoleon Dokanaris, *I Metapolemiki Ellada (1944–2004): I esoteriki plevra tou ellinikou politikou dramatos* (Athens, 2004), 155–59.

politically trustworthy settlers whose presence turned the area into a bulwark of the hard right.⁹¹

The paramilitary's control of the local means of violence and access to political networks enabled them to consolidate their local dominance by establishing themselves and their affiliates in local governance. Local administration thus became the exclusive provenance of the militias, in most cases the local leader of the militias and the mayor were the same person.⁹² From these positions they engaged in large scale graft appropriating massive government grants that were originally aimed at destitute peasants and appropriated land and properties that belonged to persons of "questionable" political affiliation. These activities altered property relations in the countryside and ushered the creation of several local oligopolies on agri-business.⁹³ Across the area, paramilitaries fixed the price of wheat and olive oil and controlled the prices for renting a threshing machine or an olive press. Competition was driven out by force. Foreigners or non-affiliated peasants who tried to set up a business were beaten or had their equipment destroyed.⁹⁴ Militia leaders also took advantage of their access to state-funding to purchase modern farming equipment and introduce new methods of cultivation and new crops in areas like the Laggadas and Serres plains in Macedonia and the valley of Fanari in Epirus.⁹⁵ These developments increased and consolidated large landholdings and eventually drove out small farmers who were already hard pressed because of lack of money and land. Those who remained in their villages became completely depended on the militia leaders for loans, labor, and access to equipment.⁹⁶

Similar transformations took place in urban areas such as Ioannina, Castoria, and Kozani where militia leaders slowly transitioned from "men of the gun" to "men of affairs." By the early 1960s many rural paramilitaries had

91. Stefanos Papatsatsis, interview, Grikoheri Thesprotia, July 20, 2012; Spyros G. Mouselimis, *Istorikoi peripatoi ana tin Thesprotian Mouselimis* (Thessaloniki, 1976), 90–94.

92. Dokanaris, *I Metapolemiki Ellada*, 90–95.

93. In the area of Thesprotia, for instance, the dairy trade was dominated by a paramilitary clique that forced producers to sell them milk at low cost. Local competitors were forced out under threat of denunciation or worse, see Georgios Kolios, *Ta Prota mou Hronia kai o Polemos: Polemos-Katohe-Ethnike Antistase, Antartopolemos-Paidomazoma* (Athens, 2019), 74–75.

94. The dominance and impunity enjoyed by local militias is exemplified in the activities of the Georgoulas clan from the pastoral village of Filippaioi. This clan controlled local pastures and land rights for over two decades. When another village family tried to contest their authority in 1961, they broke into their home and killed four of its members. The Georgoulas clan declared the village a "military zone" and prohibited the local inhabitants from moving outside the area for over a week. The "siege" came to an end after the gendarmerie and the army stormed the village and disarmed the militiamen who were tried and declared innocent on charges of sedition, robbery, and murder. The clan continued to dominate local politics for the next two decades. "Allilosfazodai dio Oikogeneiai dia logous politikous eis ena Horion," *Eleftheria*, August 1, 1960.

95. Anastasia Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870–1990* (Chicago, 1997), 209.

96. Hans Vermulen, "Segmental Factionalism, Class, and Conflict in a Greek Macedonian Village," in Jojada Verrips, ed., *Transactions: Essays in honor of Jeremy E. Boissevain* (Amsterdam, 1994), 157–75; Dokanaris, *I metapolemiki Ellada*, 135–40.

shifted their center of activities into the cities and provincial towns and refashioned themselves as newspapermen, merchants, journalists, and industrialists. In addition, many veteran paramilitaries occupied positions of utmost importance in the state's security apparatus. Between 1953 and 1963, the minister for security, the head of the state's intelligence agency, and the general inspector of the gendarmerie were all paramilitary veterans.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, the urbanization of these networks did not result in the "gentrification" of paramilitarism. Indeed, as Anastasia Karakasidou noted, this "violent bourgeoisie" continued to stand out for its "manifest willingness . . . to employ violence, terror, or extortion in pursuit of their goals and defense of their interests." Accordingly, the ability to control, regulate and deploy violence "was an important aspect of their dominance, both political and economic."⁹⁸

Nonetheless, these groups did not rely solely on violence. In isolated areas anticommunist networks provided access to jobs, prestige, and a chance for social advancement to otherwise marginalized individuals and constituencies. Communities took advantage of their ties to settle scores with neighbors, claim land, and gain access to resources. In Epirus, communities with paramilitary ties were able to claim the lion's share of the land in 1952, upon the installation of law 2185/1952.⁹⁹ The unofficial networks also offered ambitious young men a quick route to social advancement, conditioned only on bearing the militia's seal of approval.¹⁰⁰ Such tactics were what helped to bolster social consent among many communities and solidified ties between them and the central government.¹⁰¹

The role of the militias was not limited to the economic realm. The movement of these groups into cities transplanted the paramilitary's methods and networks into a new environment, where they were employed to control and regulate the activities of the working classes, the student movement, and the trade unions. Paramilitary bosses thus became an integral part of the security and political apparatuses of urban areas. The power of the "kapetanios" persisted well into the 1980s, when the TEA were finally disbanded.¹⁰² Yet, their presence had left an undeniable imprint on local political practices. Paramilitary mobilization facilitated the emergence of an entirely new strata

97. Stratos N. Dordanas, *I Germaniki Stoli sti naftalini: Epivioseis tou dosilogismou sti Makedonia, 1945–1974* (Athens, 2011), 135–40.

98. Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat*, 216.

99. The case of the village of Popovo/Agia Kiriki exemplifies the role and impact of paramilitary networks. In the pre-war period this community was characterized by high rates of crime and illiteracy, and an inveterate hostility to the state. This situation changed in the occupation and the subsequent civil war when local peasants allied themselves to the nationalist militias and the EKE. Local peasants took advantage of militia patronage to colonize the productive lowlands and find employment in the gendarmerie and the civil service. By the late 1950s, the old bandits had been transformed into affluent farmers, police officers, and shopkeepers who voted en masse for the right. Mouselimis, *Istorikoi peripatoi*, 185–86.

100. ELIA/Arheio Nikitiadi (Nikitiadis Archive) /Folder 1.1.1, November 20, 1958.

101. ASKI/Arheio EDA /614.2/Thesprotia/ page 3 (Ypomnima [Memorandum], May 27, 1958).

102. Stathis Damianakos, "Ta eklogika feouda stin Ipeiro," in P. Avdelidis et al., eds, *Diadikasies koinonikou metasximatismou stin Agrotiki Ellada: Koinoniologikes, anthropogeografikes, ethnologikes kai istorikes prosengiseis* (Athens, 1987), 11–196.

of local political leaders, the displacement of traditional elites, and the emergence of new instruments of governance that introduced new political practices, ways of understanding, thinking, and relating to the nation-state in the guise of grass roots anticommunism. Such narratives helped legitimize the role of paramilitaries and provided the basis for a new political identity that merged local, national, and supranational elements, serving as a glue that united this fractious, polyglot region and its people.

Postwar reconstruction and the remaking of the Greek state had been casually described as a top-down process marked by the monopolization of force and the centralization of the state's administration. Yet, as this study has demonstrated, the situation was more complex. WWII initiated a profound transformation of sociopolitical networks. The rise of the communist left and the concomitant fragmentation of authority led the state to delegate its prerogative of violence to local, anticommunist actors who were employed to combat the nascent partisan movement. The emergence of these groups had a particularly long and pernicious effect on local and national politics. Political mobilization and violence led to the displacement of traditional elites by a new breed of radical anticommunist militia leaders who used extreme tactics to "cleanse" national territory and re-impose the authority of the state in these hitherto multinational areas. Yet, such men were not mere proxies. Paramilitary leaders often challenged the primacy of the state by engaging in outright criminal behavior, such as extortion, blackmail, and looting, and took advantage of state patronage to pursue a host of personal and regional agendas. Nonetheless, while these activities temporarily challenged the state's monopoly of force it also allowed the authorities to consolidate their presence and hold over hitherto marginal and difficult to control areas.

State-militia collusion had an equally far-reaching impact on local and national politics. Militias took advantage of their control of licit and illicit economic networks to displace the local elites who initially acted as their sponsors and funders, thereby effectively inverting authority. Most militias drew their membership from subordinate ethnic and class groups, such as refugees from Asia Minor, highland peasants, and nomadic pastoralists. These groups were traditionally posed as the national "other" as their lifestyles and traditions came in direct opposition to the state's centralist agenda. Their role in paramilitary mobilization allowed these leaders and the communities they represented to recalibrate their relationship with the state and integrate themselves into national power networks. Paramilitaries became the first port of call of peasants when dealing with the state and the law. Their role as mediators rendered them invaluable to national parties and politicians who used such groups as mediators and brokers with the rural population.

How did these social changes that followed the war play out in the context of the postwar reconstruction of state institutions? Paramilitary mobilization and the civil war accelerated rural outmigration and facilitated the penetration of rural areas by state agencies—armies, militias, and paramilitaries—to an unprecedented extent. These processes of violence, displacement, and ethnic cleansing consolidated the state's control and further facilitated the modernization of the rural economy by undercutting the mass of small,

subsistence-level farmers, who became progressively replaced by paramilitary-backed agri-businesses. However, the paramilitaries did not rule solely through force. They provided rural and marginal communities with mediation and social services and offered ambitious peasants an avenue for social advancement. The activities of the paramilitaries therefore hint to a complex and tortuous path towards institutional modernization that is concurrent with Charles Tilly's observation of state-making and crime as a continuum and demonstrate the need for more detailed research on the grey zone where states, militias, and crime figures interacted during the postwar nation-building process in the shadow of the emerging Cold War.¹⁰³

SPYROS TSOUTSOUMPIS is Lecturer in Modern European History at the University of Manchester and a Visiting Lecturer at Lancaster University. His first monograph, *A History of the Greek Resistance in the Second World War: The People's Armies* was published by Manchester University Press in 2016. He is currently working on a new manuscript that examines the intersection between paramilitary violence and state building in the Greek "New Lands" between the Balkan Wars and the Cold War.

103. Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 170–71.