

British perfidy in Greece: a story worth remembering - Ed Vulliamy and Helena Smith



An account of the time in 1944 when the British Army, at war with Germany switched their allegiance, opening fire upon – and arming Greek collaborators with the Nazis to fire upon – a civilian crowd in Syntagma Square.

“I can still see it very clearly, I have not forgotten,” says Titos Patrikios; “the police firing on the crowd from the roof of the parliament at the top of Syntagma Square in Athens. The young men and women lying in pools of blood, everyone rushing down the stairs in total shock, total panic.”

And then came the defining moment: the recklessness of jeunesse, the passion of belief in a justice burning bright: “I jumped up on the fountain in the middle of the square, the one that is still there, and I began to shout: “Comrades, don’t disperse! Victory will be ours! Don’t leave. The time has come. We will win!”

“I was,” he says now, “absolutely sure, profoundly sure, that we were going to win”. But there was no winning that day; just as there was no pretending that what had happened would not change the history of a country that, liberated from Adolf Hitler’s Reich barely six weeks earlier, was now surging headlong towards bloody civil war.

Seventy years may have passed but time has not diminished how Titos Patrikios felt that day. Nor has it dented his recollection of events. Even now, at 86, when he “laughs at and with myself that I have reached such an age”, the poet can remember, scene-for-scene, shot for shot, what happened on the central square of Greek political life, on the morning of December 3, 1944.

This was the day, those seventy years ago this Tuesday, when the British Army, still at war with Germany, opened fire upon – and armed Greek collaborators with the Nazis to fire upon

– a civilian crowd demonstrating in support of the partisans with whom Britain had been allied for three years. The crowd carried Greek, American, British and Soviet flags, and chanted: 'Viva Churchill, Viva Roosevelt, Viva Stalin', in endorsement of the wartime alliance.

Twenty-eight civilians, mostly young boys and girls, were killed and hundreds injured. Their blood was drawn not by the Germans, but from British sniper nests and by security forces aligned with the British who had served the Third Reich until weeks beforehand. “We had all thought it would be a demonstration like any other,” Patrikios recalls. “Business as usual. Nobody expected a bloodbath.”

Britain's logic was brutal and perfidious: Prime Minister Winston Churchill considered the influence of the Communist Party within the broad resistance movement he had backed throughout the war – National Liberation Front, EAM - to have grown stronger than he had calculated, sufficient to jeopardise his plan to return the Greek king to power and keep Communism at bay. In pursuit of that restoration, he switched allegiances to back the supporters of Hitler against his own erstwhile allies.

There were others in the square that day who, like the 16-year-old Patrikios, would go on to become prominent members of the left; then fuelled by revolutionary fervour in the resistance movement against the brutal Axis armies that had occupied Greece. Mikis Theodorakis, the renowned composer and iconic figure in modern Greek history, daubed a white and blue Greek flag in the blood of those who fell that day. Like Patrikios, he was a member of EPON, the resistance youth movement. And like Patrikios, he knew his country had changed. Within days, RAF Spitfires and Beaufighters were strafing leftist strongholds in the neighbourhoods of central Athens as the December Battle of Athens had begun – known in Greece as the Dekemvriana - fought not between the British and the Nazis, but the British alongside supporters of the Nazis against the partisans. “I can still smell the destruction,” Patrikios laments. “The mortars were raining down and planes were targeting everything. Even now, after all these years, I flinch at the sound of planes in war movies”.

And thereafter Greece's descent into catastrophic civil war: a cruel and bloody episode in British as well as Greek history which every Greek knows to their core – differently, depending which side they were on – but which remains curiously untold in Britain, perhaps out of shame and denial, maybe the arrogance of disinterest. A narrative of which the British millions who go to savour the glories of Greek antiquity or disco-dance around the islands Mamma Mia-style, are ruefully unaware.

The legacy of this betrayal has haunted Greece and Greek politics ever since, its shadow hanging over the turbulence and violence that erupted in 2008 after the killing of a schoolboy by police – also called the Dekemvriana - and the abyss between the left and right ever since. “The 1944 December uprising and '46-'49 Civil War period infuses the present” says the leading historian of these events, Andre Gerolymatos, “because there has never been a reconciliation. In France or Italy, if you fought the Nazis, you were respected in society after the war, regardless of ideology; they were heroes. In Greece, you found yourself fighting – or imprisoned and tortured by - the people who had collaborated with the Nazis, on British orders. There has never been a reckoning with that crime, and much of what is happening in Greece now is the result of not coming to terms with the past. Myth and polemic have too long dominated historical discourse”.

One of the most famous images from further bloodletting in 1973, when tanks of the Greek junta occupied Athens polytechnic, was the face beaten to pulp of Makis Balaouras, now a magazine editor, who talks about a "passing of the relay baton from one generation to another" between 1944 and recent leftist insurgencies and the rise of fascist Golden Dawn. "The legacy of dissatisfaction is passed on in Greece by special circumstances", he says. "The crucial moment was after the war, when in other countries those who had fought the Nazis were hailed as heroes, while here the generation that liberated Greece was executed, exiled and imprisoned, and those who had collaborated with the Nazis were rewarded. This experience plays a central role in what we see happening now".

The setting for the events of December 3 cuts deep into Greek and British history. Greece, during the pre-war period, was ruled by a Royalist dictatorship whose emblem of a fascist axe and crown well expressed its dichotomy once war began: the dictator, General Ioannis Metaxas, had been trained as an army officer in Imperial Germany to which he felt aligned, while Greek King George II – an uncle of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh – was closely attached to Britain. The Greek left meanwhile had been re-inforced by a huge influx of politicised refugees and liberal intellectuals from Asia Minor, who populated the Aegean islands and crammed into the slums of Pireaus and working-class Athens.

Both dictator and King were fervently anti-communist, and Metaxas banned the Communist Party, KKE, interning and torturing its members, supporters and anyone who did not accept 'the national ideology' in camps and prisons, or sending them into internal exile. There was even a category of political prisoner which "might believe the national ideology but opposes the government". A system was imposed, echoed brutally after the war and British intervention, whereby prisoners could sign publicised declarations of repentance, so called *deloseis metanoias*, repudiating themselves, their past and comrades.

Once war started, Metaxas refused to accept Mussolini's ultimatum to surrender and pledged his loyalty to the Anglo-Greek alliance. The Greeks fought valiantly and defeated the Italians, but could not resist the onslaught of the Wehrmacht army. By the end of April 1941, the Axis forces imposed a harsh occupation of the country. The Greeks - at first spontaneously, later in organised groups – resisted. But, noted the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), whose agents had parachuted or snuck into Greece: "the right wing and monarchists were slower than their opponents in deciding to resist the occupation, and were therefore of little use". Britain's natural allies were therefore the National Liberation Front or EAM – an alliance of left wing and agrarian parties of which the KKE was dominant but by no means the entirety - and its partisan military arm, ELAS.

During the Italian, then German, occupations a Greek government-in-exile was established in Cairo and London, under British tutelage, while on the ground, the ELAS resistance worked closely with the SOE and vice-versa, despite bitterness over the British renegeing on a promise to lift its blockade of the Aegean, which deprived the occupied population as well as the occupiers of food, and led to mass starvation on the mainland, particularly Athens. The historian Gerylomatos examined documents that demonstrate the calculation by some in Britain, who presumed that famine would encourage Greeks to join the resistance, while supplies of food could jeopardise the favourable impact on the war effort of "pestilence and revolution in the occupied areas". (Outcry over Britain's blockade policy led to the foundation of OXFAM.)

ELAS was by far the largest and most effective resistance movement, while anti-monarchists joined another, smaller group, EDES. There existed also an ultra-royalist militia called X, which were neither collaborators nor resistance. While ELAS battled the Third Reich, a second Greek collaborationist government was formed under Ionnis Rallis, who handed over all Metaxas' leftist political prisoners to the Nazis and created the paramilitary Tagmata Asphaleias, or Security Battalions to help the German occupier fight the leftwing resistance. A 'Special Security Branch' worked directly alongside the Gestapo and SS. In the Peloponnese, the Battalions were a direct response to ELAS' use of terror against non-left villages and random executions.

There is no overstating the horror of occupation, unhelpfully diluted in the popular imagination by Captain Corelli's Mandolin. More cogent are scholarly accounts like Professor Mark Mazower's book *Inside Hitler's Greece*, with its descriptions of hideous bloccos or 'round-ups' - "constant nightmares of many Athenians until Liberation" - whereby crowds would be corralled into the streets so that masked informers could point out ELAS supporters to the Gestapo and Security Battalions for execution. Security Battalions "sealed off and searched the 'red quarters' of Athens, arresting hundreds of people and executing others on the spot", writes Mazower. "The horror and violence of these events imprinted themselves on the popular memory of the occupation". Stripping and violation of women was a common means to secure 'confessions'.

One SS officer, Walter Bluhme alarmed even the Reich's own envoy with his enthusiasm for bloccos, and deployment of ferocious Security Battalions to "save precious German blood", so that "the mere appearance of Special Security units provoked panic among the residents of Athens", says Mazower. He writes elsewhere in an essay that, "on several occasions [the Security Battalions] actually insisted that SS officers leave it to them to conduct such actions". The Greek battalions' torture chambers in Stournara Street became as feared as SS headquarters itself, bodies dumped on the streets each morning. Mass executions took place "on the German model": in public, for purposes of intimidation; bodies would be left hanging from trees, guarded by Battalionists to prevent their removal. Yet these were the people to whom Britain turned in the post-war order it imposed; "only against this background of widespread suffering . . . can we understand the tragic events of December 1944", writes Mazower.

In response, ELAS mounted daily counter-attacks on the Germans and their quislings. The partisan movement was born in Athens but based in the villages, so that Greece was progressively liberated from the countryside. The SOE played its part, famous in military annals for the role of Brigadier Eddie Myers, who was later removed for his proximity to ELAS, and 'Monty' Woodhouse in blowing up the Gorgopotamos viaduct in 1942 and other operations with the partisans, Andartes in Greek.

But there was another British force at work in occupied Greece, MI6, with a different agenda, as London became alarmed at ELAS's successes, and what it saw as communist influence within the alliance of Andartes. "There was a British war-within-a-war", explains Dr. Gerolymatos in conversation. "SOE met resistance within the Foreign Office for its closeness to ELAS, so that during the occupation, MI6 would sometimes assassinate SOE agents. They needed information, they would try to recruit men working for SOE, and if he refused, they'd kill him. MI6 was the establishment, working to the Foreign Office".

By Autumn 1944, Greece had been devastated by occupation and famine. Half a million people had died, seven per cent of the population. ELAS had, however, liberated dozens of villages and become almost a proto-government, administering parts of the country while the official state withered away. But after German withdrawal ELAS kept its 50,000 armed partisans outside the capital, and in May 1944 had agreed to the arrival of British troops, to placing their men under the Officer Commanding Lt. Gen. Ronald Scobie, and keeping its guerillas outside the capital once the Germans left.

On October 12, the Germans evacuated Athens. Some ELAS fighters, however, had been in the capital all along, and welcomed the fresh air of freedom during a six-day window between liberation and the arrival of the British. One partisan in particular is still alive, aged 92, a legend of modern Greece: the man who tore the Swastika from the Acropolis in 1941.

In and around the European Parliament in Brussels, everyone seems to wear the same haircut, suit and tie. So that the figure with a Greek fisherman's cap, mane of white hair and moustache stands out all the more: Manolis Glezos, senior MEP for the leftist Syriza party of Greece. We eat at a restaurant among Eurocrats. "I feel like I'm living in the new dictatorship here, of capital", says Glezos. "The adulation of profligacy", adds his wife, Georgia.

Glezos is a man of humbling greatness; an icon of the Greek Left who is also hailed as the greatest living authority on the resistance. He was born on Naxos in 1922, moving to Athens in 1925 to study and work as a pharmacist's assistant. On May 30 1941, Glezos, by then a red cross worker and partisan aged 19, and another man, climbed the Acropolis and tore down the Swastika flag hoisted there a month beforehand. For this, he was already the stuff of legend when liberation came. He had been arrested by the Gestapo in 1942, was tortured and as a result began to suffer from tuberculosis, escaped and was re-arrested twice again – the second time by collaborators. He was sentenced to death days before the Germans left Athens - "they told me my grave had already been dug", he recalls defiantly - but was saved from a Greek court-martial's firing squad after German withdrawal by an international outcry led by General de Gaulle, Jean-Paul Sartre and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rev. Cosmo Gordon Lang.

Seventy years later, white locks flowing, his gait still spry, his eyes a piercing blue, the World War Two hero, inveterate writer and indefatigable activist recounts the liberation and its aftermath with a reverence for detail. Even now it is far from easy. For Glezos, like Patrikios, the events evoke a deep sadness.

"The English, to this day, argue that they liberated Greece and saved it from communism," he says, his eyes darting this way and that as we walk through Brussels, Glezos wrapped up against the early winter cold. "But that is the basic problem. They never liberated Greece. Greece had been liberated by the resistance, groups across the spectrum, not just EAM, on October 12. I was there, on the streets – people were everywhere shouting: 'Freedom!', we cried, Laokratia! - 'Power to the People!'"

In fact, the Germans had withdrawn – no one liberated the entire country. The British duly arrived on October 18, installed a provisional government under George Papandreou and prepared to restore the King. "From the moment they came", recalls Glezos, "the people and the resistance greeted them as allies. There was nothing but respect and friendship towards

the British. We had no idea that we were already giving up our country and our rights. Only later did we ask: 'Why did the British army need to arrive, after liberation?'"

It was only a matter of time before EAM would drop the six cabinet posts it negotiated in the provisional government, walking out in frustration over demands that the partisans demobilise. The negotiations broke down on December 2.

"The demand was that we demobilise, when with 50,000 armed men and women we were by far the biggest resistance group" Glezos says. "It was a ruse, but still our quarrel was not with the English. It was with the security police, the collaborators, the Battalionists who had been so brutal during the occupation. When the time came, it was difficult to kill an Englishman. Greek people had embraced the English on October 18, they had sung songs of liberation with them. We did not consider them enemies."

Official British thinking is reflected in War Cabinet papers and other documents kept at the Public Record Office at Kew. As far back as August 17, Churchill had written a 'Personal and Top Secret' memo to US President Franklin Roosevelt to say that: "The War Cabinet and Foreign Secretary are much concerned about what will happen in Athens, and indeed Greece, when the Germans crack or when their divisions try to evacuate the country. If there is a long hiatus after German authorities have gone from the city before organised government can be set up, it seems very likely that EAM and the Communist extremists will attempt to seize the city".

But what the freedom fighters wanted, insists Glezos "was what we had achieved during the war: a state ruled by the people for the people. There was no plot to take over Athens as Churchill always maintained. If we had wanted to do that, we could have done so before the British arrived. With the exception of a very small area [around Athens' upmarket Kolonaki district], Free Greece belonged to us. It was under our control". Glezos adds: "our huge mistake was to recognise Scobie as head of all armed forces. That laid the ground for our betrayal. When Scobie said 'disband', it should have been obvious what was up. Only later did people wake up to the fact that the British wanted to disappear us off the map, to get rid of EAM altogether. This is important: the months of October and November were peaceful. The demonstration of December 3 was unarmed. EAM staged the protest hoping that it would change the mind of the British".

One Cabinet note contains a summary of the so-called Caserta Agreement of September 1944, which placed all wartime militias under British Officer Commanding Lt. Gen. Ronald Scobie. There is a clause about the collaborationist Security Battalions, which stipulates: "Security Battalions are considered instruments of the enemy. Unless they surrender according to orders issued by General-Officer-Commanding, they will be treated as enemy formations". Unless there is a diabolical play on what the "orders issued" were, the irony could not be more cruel. An 'annexe' filed from Athens on November 25 informs the cabinet: "Government is failing to impose its authority on extreme Left which is extracting piecemeal damaging and obstructive concessions". The annexe ends: "the formation of the new National Guard is proceeding reasonably satisfactorily" - an observation more sinister than it sounds.

During November, the British set about building the new National Guard, tasked to police Greece and disarm the wartime militias. In reality, however, disarmament applied to ELAS only, explains Dr. Gerolymatos, not to those who had collaborated with the Nazis - in flagrant breach of the Caserta Agreement. Gerolymatos writes in his forthcoming book *The*

International Civil War about how “in the middle of November, the British started releasing Security Battalion officers from Averoff prison, and soon some of them were freely walking the streets of Athens wearing new uniforms ... The British army continued to provide protection to assist the gradual rehabilitation of the former quisling units in the Greek army and police forces” An SOE memo urges that “HMG must not appear to be connected with this scheme”.

In conversation, Gerolymatos says: “Members of the resistance started to see well known collaborators walking the streets in police uniform. Many civilian collaborators had been put into Averoff, and Security Battalions into Goudi prison, but there was no attempt to arrest any after October 1944. So far as ELAS could see, the British had arrived, and now some senior officers of the Security Battalions and Special Security Branch were seen walking freely in the streets. Athens in 1944 was a small place, everyone knew everyone else, and you could not miss these people: senior British officers knew exactly what they were doing, despite the fact that the ordinary soldiers of the former Security Battalions were the scum of Greece.”

The government in London could not plead ignorance: a British legal mission to Greece, quoted by Professor Mazower in an essay, reported in November that, “The Gendarmarie is at present being exclusively recruited from persons professing anti-communist beliefs”. The Communist newspaper Rizopastis put the same point differently: “an impartial police”, said the paper, was the “first guarantee of the normal development of the situation”, and it accused the Minister of War of appointing “a majority of guards who were Security Battalionists, fascists, disguised fascists or supporters of the Metaxas regime”. The recruitment was “a pre-meditated plan for domination”, urged Rizopastis. Many Gendarmes who had joined ELAS “rather than serve under the hated Italians” at the very beginning of the war, says Mazower, appear absent from post-war recruitment, while estimates Dr. Gerylomatos, 12,000 Security Battalionists were released from Goudi prison during the uprising to join the National Guard, and 228 had been reinstated in the army”.

Anthropologist Neni Panourgia describes the non-partisan paramilitary landscape thus, on the eve of December 3: “a system of alliances that can only be explained by the communistophobia that oriented the British presence and intervention in Greece. These organisations collaborated simultaneously with the Germans and the British, so that when the Germans withdrew from Greece, they were ready to be utilised by the provisional government set up by the British Foreign Office”.

Any British notion that the Communists were poised for revolution fell within the context of the so-called Percentages Agreement, forged between Churchill and Soviet Commissar Josef Stalin at the code-named 'Tolstoy Conference' in Moscow on October 9 1944 (the Americans were excluded). Under the terms agreed in what Churchill called “a naughty document”, Southeast Europe was carved up into 'spheres of influence', whereby – broadly - Stalin took Romania and Bulgaria, while Britain took Greece. Churchill knew that whatever ensued, the Soviets would never back their own communist allies in a takeover of Greece, nor did they.

The obvious thing to have done, argues Gerylomatos, “would have been to incorporate ELAS into the Greek army. The officers in ELAS, many holding commissions in the pre-war Greek army, presumed this would happen. Like De Gaulle did with French communists fighting in the resistance: 'France is liberated, now let's go and fight Germany!' But the British and the Greek government in exile decided from the outset that ELAS officers and men would not be

admitted into the new army. Some of this was just professional jealousy: many experienced officers from the Albanian wars had ended up in ELAS, and were now battle-hardened, unlike those who had sat out the war in exile and felt their due was coming, and were threatened by the ELAS veterans. But there was also Churchill: who wanted a showdown with the KKE so as to be able to restore the King. Churchill believed that a restoration would result in the return of legitimacy and bring back the old order. EAM-ELAS, regardless of its relationship to the KKE, represented a revolutionary force, and change”.

The SOE was sent home, and replaced by MI6. “As soon as Scobie arrived”, explains Gerolymatos, “the SOE had to go because they had served with the partisans. They'd been blowing up bridges under the occupation, conducting sabotage – and that part of the war was over. The British Foreign Office did not trust the SOE, while the High Command thought they had become redundant. They were people like Monty Woodhouse, who spoke Greek and would have urged Scobie not to get involved with the collaborators, although he had royalist sympathies himself. When the liberation parade was being organised, Woodhouse asked the new British command: 'Where is ELAS?' To which the reply was: 'What have they got to do with it?' The truth was, as Woodhouse knew, ELAS had helped liberate Greece, that's what they had to do with it”.

Meanwhile, continues Gerolymatos: “The Greek Communist Party did not know about the Percentage Agreement and they only found out in 1952; their leader Zachariadis was in Dachau until 1945. The Greek communists had decided not to try and take over the country, as least not until late November/early December 1944. Many ELAS fighters wanted to go home. I interviewed a man who had joined the communist party aged 14 in the countryside, fought in the resistance and by October 1944 he just wanted to go back to his family. The KKE wanted to push for a left-centre government and be part of it, that's all”. The KKE could not get any guidance from the Soviets and were left essentially to their own devices. On the other hand, they could see that the government of National Unity was intended to reinstate the pre-war political status quo”. Echoing Glezos, he says: “If they had wanted a revolution, they would not have left 50,000 armed men outside the capital after liberation: they'd have brought them in.

“But then they saw the collaborators on the streets and feared a return of the monarchy and another quasi-dictatorship. So that by recruiting the collaborators, the British changed the paradigm, signalling that the old order was back. It's true, Churchill could not be sure the Greek communists would abide by an agreement they did not know about. But the British were aware of the limited power of the communists. Churchill knew he had the Percentages Agreement. He was aware of the reputation of the Security Battalions. But they were the only military force at hand. Churchill wanted the conflict”, says Gerolymatos.

“We must remember, there was no Battle for Greece. A large number of the British troops that arrived were administrative, not line units. When the fighting broke out in December, the British and the provisional government let the Security Battalions out of Goudi; they knew how to fight street-to-street because they'd done it with the Nazis. They'd been fighting ELAS already during the occupation and resumed the battle with gusto. Accordingly, when the December crisis erupted, all the Security Battalions had been released and rearmed as the National Guard, thus ensuring a brutal confrontation.

The morning of Sunday December 3 was a sunny one, as several processions of Greek republicans, anti-monarchists, socialists and communists wound their way towards Syntagma Square, which had always been and remains the kernel of Greek political life. Police cordons blocked their way, but several thousand people broke through shouting: “Try the Collaborators!” and at 10.45am, a column moved into the square. As they approached the police cordon, a man in military uniform shouted: ‘Shoot the bastards!’ The lethal fusillade – from Greek police positions atop the parliament building and British headquarters in the Grande Bretagne hotel - lasted half an hour. By noon, a second crowd of demonstrators entered the square, until it was jammed with 60,000 people. After several hours, a column of British paratroops cleared the square; but the Battle of Athens had begun, and Churchill had his war.

On the morning of December 3, Manolis Glezos was on his sick bed, suffering the effects of tuberculosis. He had been laid low for a month, but was by no means out of the loop; friends and relatives had often dropped by his mother’s home in Athens with news of EAM’s successes.

On December 3, they did not have to do this: from Syntagma Square accounts of the bloodbath that had befallen Glezos’ comrades travelled like wildfire to his bed. “And when I heard what had happened, I got off my sick bed”, he recalls. The partisans feared, rightly, that the British would unleash their might against them, across the capital, and the following day, Glezos was with them roaming the streets, armed and determined: “We disarmed all the police stations apart from Kolonnaki, the area we all now call ‘Scobia’ because it was still held by the British”, he remembers.

“There were three phases,” Glezos continues, matter of factly, next morning in Brussels, now seated in his neat, big-windowed, impersonal office. Syriza’s corner of the soulless Willy Brandt building is a like a stockade of human beings among the suits: among them a former cleaner from Bulgaria whose face was disfigured in an acid attack by neo-fascists in Athens. The endless plain walls of the building are suddenly decorated with posters of clenched fists wearing cleaning gloves – in support of a cleaner’s strike back home.

“The first phase was when we felt love and friendship for the English”, Glezos explains. “Then came an intermediate phase where we didn’t really know what was happening, and a third phase, after the murders of December 3, when the English became our enemy and we took up arms against them.”

By the time the British sent in an armoured division – requisitioning tanks and troops from the 4th Indian Infantry Division who until then had been in full fight against Hitler’s forces on the western front – Glezos and his comrades were waiting. “I note the fact”, he says, “that they would rather use those troops to fight our population than German Nazis!” He vividly recalls British tanks rolling in from the port of Pireaus, “Allied soldiers ready to turn their guns against the very men and women they had fought alongside during the Occupation – an unprecedented act that would be repeated at no other time during the war”. As the tanks clunked up the Iera Odos, or Sacred Way, within view of the Periclean masterpiece that is the Acropolis, Glezos was among those lying in wait: “I remember them coming up the Sacred Way from Pireus. We were dug in a trench. I took out three tanks,” he says. “There was much bloodshed, a lot of fighting, I lost many, very good friends. But it was difficult to strike at an Englishman, difficult to kill a British soldier – they had been our allies. But now they were trying to destroy the popular will, and had declared war on our people”.

At battle's peak, he says, the British even set up sniper nests on the Acropolis. "Not even the Germans did that. They were firing down on EAM targets, but we didn't fire back, so as not [to harm] the monument."

On December 5, Gen. Scobie imposed martial law, and the following day ordered the aerial bombing of the working class Metz quarter. "British and government forces", writes Neni Panourgia, "having at their disposal heavy armament, tanks, aircraft and a disciplined army, were able to make forays into the city, burning and bombing houses and streets and carving out segments of the city ... The German tanks had been replaced by British ones, the SS and Gestapo officers by British soldiers". The house belonging to actor Mimis Fotopoulos, she writes, was burned out with a portrait of Churchill hanging above the fireplace.

Titos Patrikios lived through it all; he would march 300 kilometers, when one year turned to another in the winter of 1945, up to the town of Trikala with other freedom fighters. He still remembers that because when talk turns to his boots he flinches again. "Oh don't ask me about the boots", he says with sudden intensity as we talk in his apartment, its walls lined with books, the illuminated Acropolis in the distance, "it was the longest march I have ever made."

But first came the street battles in Athens: "I still vividly recall shouting slogans in English, during one battle in Koumoundorou square because I had a strong voice and it was felt I could be heard. "We are brothers, there's nothing to divide us, come with us!" That's what I was shouting in the hope that they [British troops] would withdraw. And right at that moment, with my head poked above the wall, a bullet brushed over my helmet. Had I not been yanked down by Evangelos Goufas [another poet], who was there next to me, I would have been dead".

Patrikios, whose father headed the actors' guild and whose background was as cosmopolitan as it was privileged, believes like so many others that the war upon which Greece embarked after December 3 was "a war without hate, a war that in many ways should never have happened". Quietly spoken, patrician forehead, wavy hair, intense dark eyes and soft good looks, the writer whose strong moral views infuse his verse can now smile at the thought that only months after the killing in the square, he was back at school, studying his English. In summer 1949, he attended a summer camp organised by the British Council on the island of Spetses, where he would play Banquo in Macbeth.

"We were enemies with the British, but at the same time friends", says the poet, who graduated from Athens University's law school. "In one battle I came across an injured English soldier and I took him to a field hospital. I took him books to read because we shared the same interests. I gave him my copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* which I remember he kept. We were enemies but at the same time we were friends."

It is illuminating to read the dispatches by British soldiers themselves, as extracted by the head censor of letters, Capt. J. B. Gibson, and now stored at the Public Record Office. They give no indication that the enemy they fight was once a partisan ally, indeed many troops think they are combatting a German-backed force. A Warrant Officer writes: "Mr Churchill and his speech bucked us no end, we know now what we are fighting for and against, it is obviously a Hun element behind all this trouble". From 'An Officer': "there is only one answer to a band of armed terrorists and that is force ... It is all part of the rot sown by the Hun. You may ask, why should our boys give their lives to settle Greek political differences,

but they are only Greek political differences? I say no, it is all part of the war against the Hun, and we must go on and exterminate this rebellious element”.

Another officer seems to know his enemy only slightly better: “They are not Greeks, the red enemy hand is plain”. While another is a little more reflective: “ELAS and EAM are communists of the most virulent type, aggressive and murderous ... When the police fired at them [on December 3] they were justified in my opinion. I was sorry they were young boys and girls that were killed”. He then repeats a fictional version of that day he has apparently been told, that the dead were used that day as human shields: “They were placed in front as protection, a very low form of fighting”. In the aftermath: “We are knocking hell out of them with tanks, planes and guns, but what a terrible fate for lovely Athens”.

An NCO sees the destruction differently: “To me the talk about the beauties of Greece do not mean a thing, because if I had my way there wouldn't be any in a very short while”. 'From a Private: “That's what we get from these people after all we have done for them. I hope they shoot the whole lot of them”. “Such excitable folks, the Greeks”, concludes an Officer.

Cabinet papers at Kew show both ruthlessness and concern in London. On one hand, a minute of December 12 records Harold Macmillan, political advisor to Field Marshall Alexander, returning from Athens to recommend: “a proclamation of all civilians against us as rebels, and a declaration those found in civilian clothes opposing us with weapons were liable to be shot, and that 24 hours notice should be given that certain areas were to be wholly evacuated by the civilian population” - ergo, the British Army was to depopulate and occupy Athens.

On December 17, however, the Lord President of the Council, Labour's Clement Atlee, asks worriedly about the terms for the disarmament of wartime militias and: “Were the Greek police the same force as had existed during the German occupation or was it some new body?” To which Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden replies, with calculation: “there was no formulation for the suggestion that ELAS would be disarmed but not EDES”, and assures the future Labour premier, with a brazen lie, that Greek police during the occupation, “had not given help to the Germans”.

By December 12, ELAS had assumed control of most of the city, and, as per MacMillan's proposal, further British troops were moved this time from Italy – thereby jeopardising the war against Germany - to escalate the battle for Athens. By Christmas, they had the upper hand and on Christmas Eve, Churchill himself arrived in the Greek capital, in a failed bid to make peace on Christmas Day. “I will now tell you something I have never told anyone”, says Manoli Glezos, at this point.

“You will have read about the plot to blow up HQ the Hotel Grande Bretagne. I do not think it was for my benefit. Still, a ton of dynamite was put in sewers by extremely skilled hands.” Thus wrote Winston Churchill in a telegram to his wife of his close brush with death in Athens on Christmas Day 1944. Those “skilled hands” belonged to Manolis Glezos.

On the evening of December 25, Glezos took part in his most daring escapade, laying more than a ton of dynamite under the hotel Grande Bretagne, which Gen Ronald Scobie had headquartered himself. “There were about 30 of us involved. We worked through the tunnels of the sewage system; we had people to cover the grid-lines in the streets, so scared we were,

that we'd be heard. We crawled through all the shit and water, and laid the dynamite right under the hotel, enough to blow it sky high.

“I carried the fuse wire myself, wire wound all around me, and I had to unravel it. It took me at least two hours laying the explosive material and two hours coming back. And when we came out it was a matter of seconds, it was ready to go. We were absolutely filthy, covered [in excrement] and when we got out of the sewerage system I remember the boys washing us down.

“I went over to the boy with the detonator and we waited, waited for the signal, but it never came. Nothing. There was no explosion. Then I found out: at the last minute EAM found out that Churchill was in the building, and put out an order to call off the bomb. They'd wanted to blow up the British command, but didn't want to be responsible for assassinating one of the big three”.

At the end of the Dekemvriana, thousands had been killed; 12,000 leftists were rounded up and sent to camps in the Middle East. A truce was signed on February 12, the only clause of which that was even partially honoured was the demobilisation of ELAS. And so began a chapter known in Greek history as the 'White Terror', as anyone suspected of helping ELAS during the Dekemvriana or even the Nazi occupation was rounded up and sent to a gulag of camps established for their internment, torture, often murder – or else repentance, as under the Metaxas dictatorship.

Historian Polymeris Voglis writes how, “the state had to rely on the extreme right elements for the suppression of the Left”. Many of those rounded up during this second wave of blocos, which recalled those during Nazi occupation, were simply citizens who had helped ELAS during that occupation. Most of those charged with murder had killed a member of the Security Battalions, sometimes under Nazi occupation.

Titos Patrikios is not the kind of man who wants the past to impact on the present. But he does not deny the degree to which this history has done just that. Had it not been for the square, the killings, the civil war, the violence begot, the Red Terror and White Terror that came after that, and the clandestine accord agreed by Churchill and Stalin, Patrikios' life would have been different.

As it was, this most measured and mild-mannered of men – who had drunk from the same fountains as those he would go on to fight - would end up spending years in the concentration camps set up with the help of the British as civil war beckoned. With imprisonment came hard labour and torture, and with exile came censorship. “The first night on Makronissos we were all beaten very badly. I spent six months there, mostly spent breaking stones, picking brambles and carrying sand. Once I was made to stand for 24 hours after it had been discovered that a newspaper had published a letter describing the appalling conditions in the camp. But though I had written it, and had managed to pass it onto my mother, I never admitted to doing so and throughout my time there I never signed a statement of repentance.”

Wracked by TB, he would subsequently be placed in solitary confinement, consigned to a tent for a month before being moved to the island of Ai Strati, where he sealed a friendship

with the poet Yannis Ritsos – a pre-eminent voice of the left in Greece – and conditions were “more pleasant”.

Patrikios was among the relatively fortunate; thousands of others were executed, usually in public, their severed heads or hanging bodies routinely displayed in public squares. On November 10 1947, the Daily Mirror became one of the few voices back home to question Britain's role in the carnage, with a historic front page featuring two photographs of severed heads paraded by militiamen through the city of Trikala, under the headline: 'What Are We British Doing Here?' The edition caused a frantic exchange between Athens and the Foreign Office, with the head of the British Police Mission in Larisa trundling out the collaborators' line that the offenders were 'brigands'. “Prices were fixed on the heads of these bandits,” reported the British officer, “and following the usual custom, their heads were removed to be produced when the reward was claimed. There is no evidence at all of any atrocity having been committed. There is no disfigurement in any of the heads shown”. The British police report concluded: “the whole matter has been grossly exaggerated”. His Majesty's embassy in Athens concurred: the exhibition of severed heads “is a regular custom in this country which cannot be judged by western European standards”.

The name of the man in command of the author of this police report is little known: Sir Charles Wickham, assigned by Churchill to head the 'British Police Mission' to Greece, the man whose job it was to oversee the new Greek police and security forces – in effect to recruit the collaborators. Neni Panourgia describes Wickham as “one of the persons who traversed the empire establishing the infrastructure needed for its survival”, and credits him with the establishment of one of the most vicious camps in which prisoners were tortured and murdered.

But who is Sir Charles Wickham, and what was his collateral for this dubious post? He was a Yorkshireman and a military man, who served in the Boer War, during which concentration camps in the modern sense were invented by the British. Unusually, he then fought in Russia, as part of the allied 'Expeditionary Force' sent in 1918 to aid White Russian Czarist forces in their hapless opposition to the Bolshevik revolution, in which 40,000 British soldiers waylaid from the war against Germany - much as those in Greece were in 1944 – formed the largest national contingent.

After Greece, he moved on in 1948 to Palestine. But his career, his qualification for Greece was this: Sir Charles was the first Inspector General of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, from 1922 to 1945, and to trace and understand this slice of hitherto untold Greek history we need to return back in time, and home.

The setting is the foundation of six-county Northern Ireland during the process of Irish independence from Britain and establishment of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force in 1913 by Edward Carson and James Craig before partition in 1921.

From the beginning of the Ulster statelet, the Royal Irish Constabulary, which remained under British jurisdiction, was distrusted for the existence and possible influence of Catholics within it. The Special Constabulary was accordingly formed in 1920 – a sectarian reserve militia formally tasked to aid the police, but in reality responsible for what became known as the Belfast pogroms of 1920-22, when – using an IRA presence as excuse, as in more recent

times - Catholic streets were attacked and burned, an entire family called MacMahon was wiped out during one infamous raid by Special police officers, and hundreds killed.

The RUC was founded in 1922, writes the historian Tim Pat Coogan: “conceived not as a regular police body, but as a counter-insurgency one . . . The new force contained many recruits who joined up wishing to be ordinary policemen. But it also contained murder gangs headed by men like a head constable who used bayonets on his victims because it prolonged their agonies. Brown Street barracks at the foot of Shankill Road was renowned for housing a number of notorious murderers”

One famous case was that of Inspector John Nixon, vociferous Worshipful Master of an Orange Lodge open only to RUC officers whom witnesses claimed to have seen at the site of the MacMahon family massacre. He was suspended with full pension rights by Wickham, but a glance through the documentation shows Wickham attempting to limit the damage with a circular urging officers to keep their overt political affiliations more discreet.

Wickham decided that the RUC should change its insignia from the harp to Ulster's Red Hand, a decision so unpopular it was eventually reversed. As the writer Michael Farrell found out when researching his book *Arming the Protestants*, much material pertaining to Sir Charles' incorporation of these UVF and Special Constabulary militiamen into the RUC has been destroyed. But enough remains to give a clear indication of what was happening, markedly a memo written by Wickham and published in 1922 – before more recent re-writers of history could get their hands on it – in a curious book by Fr. John Hassan, curate of St. Mary's church in Belfast during the pogrom, published under a pseudonym, G. B. Kenna.

On November 1921, before the formation of the RUC, Wickham addresses “All County Commanders” as follows: “Owing to the number of reports which has been received as to the growth of unauthorised loyalist defence forces, the government have under consideration the desirability of obtaining the services of the best elements of these organisations”.

Sir Charles adds his opinion that: “The scheme most likely to meet the situation would be to enroll all who volunteer and are considered suitable into Class 'C' and to form them into regular military units . . . It is not intended that this force should interfere with or replace the Class 'B' Special Constabulary, who remain a local force for local protection”. These are the infamous 'B' and 'C' Specials, over which Wickham was given full operational control in August 1922, and who have played such a brutal and painful part in Irish history ever since.

Ireland's greatest, veteran historian Tim Pat Coogan lays no claim to neutrality over matters concerning the Republic and Union, but historical facts are objective and he has a command of those that none can match. We talk at eventide, at his home outside Dublin over a glass of whiskey appositely called 'Writer's Tears'. “It's the narrative of empire”, says Coogan, “and of course they applied it to Greece. That same combination of concentration camps and putting the murder gangs in uniform. That's colonialism, that's how it works. You use whatever means are necessary, one of which is terror and collusion with terrorists. It works”.

Wickham's memo laying the ground for organisation of the RUC pre-dated the Treaty of December 1921 which partitioned Ireland and created the six-county statelet of Ulster. “Wickham was making these plans while the treaty was being drawn up”, he says. “It was entirely in breach of the Treaty, and at moments almost sunk it; when the Irish side got wind of what was going on, they were outraged”.

Contacts between the planners of a paramilitary RUC and the treaty negotiators came through “a Tory Secretary for War, Sir Laming Worthington Evans”, says Coogan. “He was one of the treaty signatories, along with Lloyd-George and of course, Churchill. They were sitting at the table, drawing up the treaty, and discussing murder gangs at cabinet level. Worthington Evans was in touch with Wickham on this project: get the Cromwell Clubs, sectarian murder gangs, into two or three barracks along Shankhill Road, and put them in uniform. Wickham's memo predates the RUC”, Coogan reminds us, “it was all done and dusted by the signing of the 1921 Treaty, rolling the dice and dealing with these people. They are not stupid, these politicians of empire, they do these things for a reason”.

“Wickham organised the RUC as the armed wing of Unionism, which is something it remained thereafter”, he says. “How long was it in the history of this country before the Chris Patten report of 1999, and Wickham's hands were finally prized off the police? That's a hell of a long piece of history - and how much suffering, meanwhile?” Wickham's approach, and his contacts with the treaty negotiators, illustrates, says Coogan, “that there were people in the Tory establishment quite prepared to recruit and deploy killers and fascists in order to counter Home Rule”.

The head of MI5 reported in 1940 that “in the personality and experience of Sir Charles Wickham, the fighting services have at their elbow a most valuable friend and counsellor”. When the intelligence services needed to integrate the Greek Security Battalions – the Third Reich's 'Special Constabulary' - into a new police force, they had found their man.

A letter from Wickham to the Minister for Public Order in London dated April 24, 1946 shows that he knew who he was deploying in Greece, referring to, “cases in which the Gendarmerie has actively or passively assisted these Right bands and murderers”. Greek academic views vary on how directly responsible Wickham was in establishing the camps and staffing them with the torturers. Neni Panourgia finds the camp on Giaros – an island which even the Roman Emperor Tiberius decreed unfit for prisoners - to have been Wickham's own direct initiative. Dr. Gerolymatos, meanwhile, says: “the Greeks didn't need the British to help them set up camps. It had been done before, under Metaxas”. The Observer still awaits disclosure – if it ever happens - of a full report by Wickham under a Freedom of Information request made several months ago, with no acknowledgement yet received. Existing papers at Kew show British police serving under Wickham to be regularly present in the camps, and part of their administration.

Gerolymatos adds: “The British – and that means Wickham - knew who these people were. And that's what makes it so frightening. They were the people who had been in the torture chambers during occupation, pulling out the fingernails and applying thumbscrews”. Gerolymatos' research has come upon some “fascinating documents which raise the question: 'Who taught who? Were the British teaching the Greek collaborators how to torture or were the collaborators teaching the British? These papers show young Greek torturers chastising their elders, saying: 'Why are we using these ineffective British methods?' - such as fingernail-pulling, electrodes on the testicles, and so on. 'Why don't we try our old-fashioned and proven methods?' I had one case of a man who would not confess to a crime he did not commit, until they just plucked him one day, like a chicken. He repented within 24 hours. The British had all this electronic torture equipment, the Greeks preferred the old and tried methods”.

By September 1947, the year the Communist Party was outlawed, 19,620 leftists were held in Greek camps and prisons, 12,000 of them in Makronisos, with a further 39,948 exiled internally or in British camps across the Middle East. There exist many terrifying accounts of torture, degradation, murder and gratuitous sadism in the Greek concentration camps – one of the outrageous atrocities in post-war Europe. In one of them, Polymeris Voglis of New York University describes how the system of repentance was re-introduced as though by a “latter-day secular Inquisition”, with confessions extracted with “endless and violent degradation”. By January 1950, 16,768 prisoners in Makronisos had signed, with only 1,494 refusing. Dr. Voglis catalogues the cruelties and the vile ideology which justified them, with classes – in between torture sessions - on subjects such as 'Our Race and the Slav Attack'. Women detainees would have their children taken away until they confessed to being 'Bulgarians' and 'whores'. The repentance system led Makronisos to be seen as a 'school' and 'National University' for those now convinced that “Our life belongs to Mother Greece”, in which converts were visited by the King and Queen, ministers and foreign officials. “The idea”, says Patrikios, who was among those never to repent, “was to reform and create patriots who would serve the homeland”.

At Giaros, “sheer terror reigned on the island” writes Voglis, citing contemporary accounts, among them this: “As soon as [a group of prisoners] went ashore, 'Kill the Bulgarians' was the signal for the guards' attack. They beat them furiously and indiscriminately on the heads and all over the body with batons and whips”. Forced labour involved carrying sacks and lime for 20 kilometres while being “chased and beaten by the tormentors”.

Minors in the Kifissa prison were beaten with wires and socks filled with concrete; the children were forced to eat soap. “On the boys' chests, they sewed nametags”, writes Voglis, “with Slavic endings added to the names; many boys were raped”. A female prisoner was forced, after severe beating, to stand in the square of Kastoria holding the severed heads of her uncle and brother-in-law. One detainee at Patras prison in May 1945 writes simply this: They beat me furiously on the soles of my feet until I lost my sight. I lost the world”.

Voglis includes a searing chapter on the last notes written by those condemned to execution, including that of a dressmaker to her fiance, in which she writes: “the few books that once we bought together still exist ... A chess set as well, that I made for you. Say goodbye to all the guys. Be free soon. With love”. And in this regard, Manolis Glezos has a story of his own.

He produces a book about the occupation, and shows a reproduction of the last message left by his brother Nikos, scrawled on the inside of a beret. Nikos was executed by collaborators barely a month before the Germans evacuated Greece. As he was being driven to the firing squad, the 19-year-old managed to throw the cap he was wearing from the window of the car. Subsequently found by a friend and restored to the family, the cap is among Glezos' most treasured possessions. Scribbled inside Nikos had written: “Beloved mother. I kiss you. Greetings. Today I am going to be executed, falling for the Greek People. 10-9-44”. 'Notice that he says the Greek people, not Greece”, says Glezos. “And that the word people – LAOS - is in capitals. I take this to mean that he meant all the people of the world, for them to be free”.

Greeks who had collaborated with the Nazis during occupation were rewarded with plum government posts and company roles after the conflict, while the defeated communists continued to be portrayed as national enemies until the resistance was finally recognized by Athens' first socialist government in 1981.

Nowhere else in newly liberated Europe were Nazi sympathisers enabled to penetrate the state structure - the army, security forces, judiciary so effectively. The Greek Orthodox Church was similarly infiltrated by collaborationist hierarchs. The resurgence of neo-fascism in the form of Golden Dawn has direct links to the failure to purge the state of right-wing extremists. Many of Golden Dawn's supporters and cadres are descendants of Battalionists, as were the junior army officers (collectively known as 'The Colonels'), who seized power in 1967.

Talking about his brother's execution, Glezos says: "I know exactly who did it and I can guarantee they all got off scot-free. I know that the people who did it are in government, and no one was ever punished," says Glezos. Among his many feats, Glezos has dedicated years to creating a library in his brother's honour. In Brussels, the nonagenarian unabashedly asks interlocutors to contribute to the fund by popping a 'frango' (a euro) into a silk purse. It is, along with the issue of war reparations, his other great campaign, his last wish: to erect a building worthy of the library that will honour Nikos. "The story of my brother is the story of Greece", he says.

There is no claim that ELAS, or the Democratic Army of Greece which replaced it, were hapless victims. On occasions, they gave as good as they got. There was indeed a Red Terror in response to the onslaught, and on the retreat from Athens, ELAS took some 15,000 prisoners with them. "We did some killing" concedes Glezos, "and some people acted out of revenge. But the line was not to kill civilians".

Much is made of ELAS' appalling practice of taking hostages for trade and negotiation during the Red Terror, but documents at Kew show the British to be happy to play the game of human chess themselves. A confidential annexe of January 12 1945 sees the War Cabinet discussing proposed terms for a ceasefire, with ELAS reported to be "wholly uncompromising as regards the hostages", and consideration as to whether this should be a barrier to truce. Lt. Gen. Scobie declares himself "profoundly shocked" by ELAS' position, insisting that "any truce must deal with the whole question of prisoners". But then Foreign Secretary Eden adds: "It appeared we have some 7,000 prisoners in excess of the number of prisoners held by ELAS and that this would give a substantial bargaining counter".

By the time of the Second Civil War, ELAS had reformed itself as the KKE-controlled Democratic Army of Greece. The collaborators and other rightists had been incorporated into a new National Defence Corps, and the former EDES leader Napoleon Zervas appointed Minister for Public Order, saying: "We will answer terrorism with terrorism ten times stronger; disaster with disaster ten times as strong, and slaughter ten times greater". There ensued what history calls the second Greek Civil War, known to the Left as the Emphylios and the right as "the brigand war", in a reference to outlaw brigands between the world wars.

In December 1946, Greek Prime Minister Tsaldaris – faced with the probability of British withdrawal - visited Washington to seek American assistance. In response, the US State Department formulated a plan for military intervention which, in March 1947, formed the basis for an announcement by President Truman to Congress of what became known as the Truman Doctrine, to intervene with force wherever communism was considered a threat.

For President Truman, who was not party to Churchill's arrangement with Stalin, the Greek Civil War was a sign of Soviet aggression, and America's takeover from the British in Greece constituted the first US intervention to face and suppress the Left in an allied country. As such, all that had passed in Greece on Britain's initiative was the first salvo of Cold War. A bitter irony betrayed the KKE: for the Emphylios, it was armed by Yugoslavia's Marshall Tito but when Belgrade severed from Moscow in 1947, Tito demanded of the KKE that it choose sides. The Greek communists remained loyal to Moscow, unaware that they had chosen to side with their betrayer.

The US Military Advisory and Planning Group would tolerate no parley with the KKE-controlled Democratic Army of Greece, thus the Cold War's first pawn descended into a still deeper abyss, and tumult that would continue down the decades to the Colonel's Junta and beyond.

Although the physical scars of World War Two are now hard to find in Greece, in Glezos they linger: in his ferocity of spirit, regimented ways and implacable habit of taking afternoon naps – a legacy of being imprisoned for 16 years for his views, as well as Greek custom. Few men were given death sentences or held in solitary confinement as often as he; “when I was first elected an MP in 1951, I was in jail”, he says, proudly. Glezos still calls himself a communist. But like Patrikios, who rejected Stalinism during the stone years of Makronissos, he believes that communism as applied to Greece's neighbours to the north, would have been a catastrophe.

He recalls how he even gave Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader who would de-Stalinise the Soviet Union “an earful about it all.” The occasion arose when Khrushchev invited Glezos – who at the height of the Cold War was a hero in the Soviet Union, honoured with a postage stamp bearing his image – to the Kremlin. It was 1963 and Khrushchev was in talkative mood. Glezos wanted to know why the Red Army, having marched through Bulgaria and Romania, had stopped at the Greek border? Perhaps the Russian leader could explain?

“I don't want you to explain!” Glezos quipped as he recalled the extraordinary exchange. “He looked at me and said “why?” “And I said, ‘because Stalin didn't behave like a communist. He divided up the world with others and he gave Greece to the English, when he should have said ‘no.’ Then I told him what I really thought, that Stalin had been the cause of our downfall, the root of all evil. All we had wanted was a state where the people ruled, just like our [then] government in the mountains where you can still see the words ‘all powers spring from the people and are executed by the people’ inscribed into the hills. What they wanted, and created, was rule by the party.”

The incident barely makes for a footnote in historical accounts of the time - with the exception of Glezos' own voluminous works on the Resistance. But it is the closest any leader ever got to recognising the moment when Churchill and Stalin carved up Europe, concocting their infamous Percentages Agreement. Khrushchev, says Glezos, did not openly concur. “He sat and listened. But then after our meeting he invited me to dinner, which was also attended by Leonid Brezhnev [who succeeded Khrushchev in 1964] and he listened for another 4 and a half hours. I have always taken that for tacit agreement.”

For Patrikios, it was not until the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, that the penny began to drop. That a line had been drawn across the map; 'spheres of influence' had been agreed by Churchill and Stalin who, inexplicably for those caught up in the fervour of ideological

warfare, would go on being respected in their own countries. “The camps made me see the evil of Stalinism,” says Patrikios, “and when I saw the West was not going to intervene [during the Budapest uprising] I, like so many others, realised what had happened – the agreed 'spheres of influence'. And later, I understood that the Dekemvriana was not a local conflict but the beginning of the Cold War that had started as a warm war here in Greece.”

Patrikios returned to Athens as a detainee “on leave” and was eventually granted a passport in 1959 after the Athens Bar Association intervened on his behalf. Upon procuring it, he immediately got on a ship to Paris where he would spend the next five years studying sociology and philosophy at the Sorbonne. “In politics there are no ethics,” he says, “especially imperial politics”.

The afternoon is that of January 15, 2009; the tear gas that has drenched Athens – a new variety, imported from Israel - clears, and we choke away its searing residue, trying not to wipe, and thereby further burn, our faces. A march in support of a Bulgarian cleaner whose face has been disfigured in an acid attack by neo-fascists, has been broken up by riot police after hours of street-fighting.

Back in the rebel-held quarter of Exarchia, a young woman called Marina pulls off her balaclava and draws air. Over coffee a few minutes later, we ask her: why Greece? Why is it so different from the rest of Europe in this regard – the unresolved war between left and right? “Because”, she replies with remarkable assurance, “of what was done to us in 1944. The persecution of the partisans who fought the Nazis, for which they were honoured in France, Italy, Belgium or the Netherlands – but for which here, they were tortured and killed on orders from your government”.

She continued: “I come from a family that has been detained and tortured for two generations before me: my grandfather after World War Two, my father under the Junta of the Colonels - and now it could be me, any day now. We are the grandchildren of the Andartes, and our enemies are Churchill's Greek grandchildren”.

“The whole thing”, spits Dr Gerolymatos with an intensity that commends rather than detracts from his scholarship, “was for nothing. None of this need have happened, and the British crime was to legitimise people whose record under occupation by the Third Reich put them beyond legitimacy. It happened because Churchill believed he had to bring back the Greek King. And the last thing the Greek people wanted or needed was the return of a de-frocked monarchy backed by Nazi collaborators. But that is what the British imposed, and it has scarred Greece ever since”.

“All those collaborators went into the system”, says Manolis Glezos, “into the government mechanism – during the civil war, after the civil war and their sons went into the military Junta. The deposits remain, like cells in the system. Unlike France, or even Germany, there was no de-Nazification. In fact, just the opposite: While other countries purged their Nazis, Greece promoted them, because although we liberated Greece, the Nazi collaborators won the war, thanks to the British. And the deposits remain, like bacilli in the system”.

But there is one last thing Glezos would like to make clear, that we have failed to raise during our three conversations. “You haven't asked: why do I go on? Why I am doing this when I

am 92 years and two months old?” he says, fixing us with his gaze. “I could, after all, be sitting on a sofa in slippers with my feet up,” he jests. “So why do I do this?”

And he answers himself: “You think that the man sitting opposite you is Manolis but you are wrong. I am not him. And I am not him because I have not forgotten that every time someone was about to be executed, they would say: ‘Don’t forget me. When you say good morning, think of me. When you raise a glass, say my name.’ And that is what I am doing talking to you, or doing any of this. The man you see before you is all those people. And all this is about not forgetting them.”

An edited version of this story appeared first in The Observer of Nov 30, 2014.

A group of Greek historians have written a critique of this article. As a result, we are making two corrections.

The authors maintained that British troops opened fire on the Greek demonstrators from the Grande Bretagne hotel in Athens on December 3 1944. The hotel was British military headquarters, but the fire from it could also have come from Greek police.

The article also said that the Greek anti-Nazi resistance, ELAS/EAM, agreed not to oppose the landing of British troops in May 1944. The historians point out that the agreement was formalised at Caserta in September.

Taken from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/ed-vulliamy-helena-smith/british-perfidy-in-greece-story-worth-remembering>