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The Golden Dawn on Trial

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THE GOLDEN DAWN ON TRIAL

This report documents the on-going court case against the Greek neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn. It is based on a five-day trip to Athens in September 2019 to observe the trial, which coincided with the sixth anniversary of the murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas. Written in the final stages of the trial of 68 members of Golden Dawn, it looks at anti-fascist and anti-racist resistance, both today and historically. It draws upon the writings of Dimitris Psarras and Dimitris Christopoulos,¹ and examines the role that activists, lawyers, and the victims of racist violence have played in bringing members of Golden Dawn to justice, considering also the ways in which they continue that fight today, following the election of a reconfigured hard-right conservative New Democracy (*Nea Dimokratia*) government.²

IN THE COURT ROOM

The trial of 68 members of Golden Dawn, including all its 18 MPs, started back in April 2015. In the beginning, it was held inside the women's wing of Korydallos prison. Later on, and still at the time of our visit, it moved to the Athens Court of Appeals. Having gone through all the security checks at the Court of Appeals, we entered an exceptionally large space, less of a courtroom and more similar to a lecture theatre, split down the middle: half of it reserved for the supporters of Golden Dawn, half for the families and supporters of the victims. With the help of organizations like Golden Dawn Watch and Jail Golden Dawn, anti-fascists have been able to consistently follow the trial proceedings from the very start. It is deemed "one of the most important trials in contemporary Greek history" and "we consider it our obligation to monitor it closely and our duty to overcome fear".

When we visited the trial, the space reserved for Golden Dawn and family members was virtually empty. It was the same every day, we are told. The fact that even their mothers stay away, something unheard of in Greece's highly patriarchal society, is remarked upon by the presiding judge Maria Lepeniotou who mocks Giorgios Roupakias, the murderer of Pavlos Fyssas, for the fact that his mother failed to attend court at a critical point in the proceedings against her son.

The court layout is very different from a UK courtroom or the special Munich anti-terrorist court in Germany, where I attended sessions of the National Socialist Underground trial.³ There is no dock for the defendants to sit in. Instead, the five judges (including two substitutes, in case the presiding judge falls sick or dies during the drawn-out process) sit at a long table, while the defendants sit below, behind desks, like naughty schoolboys. Only five of the defendants are women, including Golden Dawn leader's wife, an MP and central committee member. The judge is a matriarchal figure who shouts, nags, and ridicules the Golden Dawn defendants—some of whom, unbelievably, fail to show up in court, sending various flimsy excuses. I cannot but feel that judge Maria Lepeniotou is infantilizing the defendants. But the strictness she displays in court is at odds with the fact that she does not subpoena suspects who fail to attend court—another major difference from the German and UK criminal justice systems. The lack of Greek TV interest in the trial angers Magda Fyssa, the mother of the murdered anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas who, in a painful interview with journalist Kostas Arvanitis of Radio 24/7,⁴ expressed incredulity that the court decided against video- or audio-taping "the trial of the century".⁵

Dimitris Psarris, a Greek anti-fascist researcher, explains that the "first priority" for the leadership is "to ensure its own immunity". Golden Dawn leaders try to depoliticize their crimes, disassociate themselves from the ideology of the party, accuse former members (now testifying for the prosecution) of suffering from mental

1 See D. Psarras, *Golden Dawn On Trial* (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Athens, September 2015); Dimitris Psarras, *The Rise of the Neo-Nazi Party 'Golden Dawn' in Greece*, (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Brussels September 2013); Dimitris Christopoulos (ed.), *Mapping Ultra-Right Extremism, Xenophobia and Racism within the Greek State Apparatus* (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Brussels, April 2014).

2 The other members of the delegation organised by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Athens and Golden Dawn Watch were: British and German journalists Daniel Trilling and Martin Steinhagen, and the lawyer Alexander Hoffman, who represented victims of the Cologne nail bomb attack at the trial of the National Socialist Underground in Germany. It was hoped that, as international media interest in the trial was fading, our visit would generate some local media interest and we would meet with Greek journalists as well as with anti-racist and anti-fascist projects on the ground.

3 On two occasions, I attended the Munich trial of four members of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground at the invitation of NSU-Watch. See Liz Fekete, "A Londoner's perspective on the NSU trial and the proceedings at the Munich Higher Regional Court". Available at: <https://nsuprozessentgrenzen.wordpress.com/2015/03/10/a-londoners-perspective-on-the-nsu-trial/>

4 The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in Athens has dubbed the interview in both German and English. See: <https://rosalux.gr/en/event/4-years-murder-pavlos-fyssas#top>

5 Greek law stipulates that all parties represented in court must consent to the proceedings being video- or audio-taped. The Golden Dawn legal defence opposed any recording being made.

illness, and attribute any proven acts of violence to the misconduct a few out-of-control local branches and their supporters. (The official position now is that Golden Dawn did not have members, only supporters.) Whether this tactic is succeeding, we do not yet know (the verdicts are expected in April 2020). It is bizarre though that all the MPs of a political party can be charged with forming a violent criminal conspiracy yet still be allowed to contest elections with their founder/leader Nikos Michaloliakos even being permitted to broadcast to huge public rallies from his prison cell.⁶ The 1975 Greek Constitution forbids the banning of political parties. It is ironic that Golden Dawn should benefit from a Constitution designed to protect democracy, especially since Michaloliakos was handpicked by the late dictator Georgios Papadopoulos, whom he met in prison in 1976, to lead a reconfigured far right. As Dimitris Psarras explains, in prison Michaloliakos became “acquainted with the structures of the ‘deep state’, the ties between state institutions (police, secret service, the military, and the civil service), the church, and right-wing extremists”. Various commentators, such as sociologist Nicos Mouzelis,⁷ describe this as a “para-state” that operates outside the scope of democratic institutions, acting, often unlawfully, against society or parts of it. In the Greek context, the para-state is understood to include informal groups of far-right supporters who seek to expand their influence and position, and organise clandestinely within the military, judiciary, the police, and the Church.

ALTERNATIVE ATHENS

During my stay, the head of our delegation, Ioanna Meitani, was constantly rushing us across Athens, from meeting to meeting, and also to and from the courtroom. As much of this movement was conducted on foot, it served also as a lightning tour of Athens alternative left-wing and anarchist neighbourhood culture, particularly in the district of Exarchia, where the Conservative government, elected by a landslide in July 2019, had ordered a police crackdown on anarchist and migrant squats. Another one of our guides was Olga Lafazani, housing activist and instructor at Harokopio University.⁸

In a city where rental housing and the protection of renters are already in short supply, Exarchia’s alternative political and artistic culture is very much under threat. Since 2018, as real estate has been snapped up by foreign and local investors, there has been a sharp rise in short-term rentals through AirBnB, which are now transforming this beautiful district of old buildings, courtyards, and restaurants into a “showcase quarter of Athens”, in line with the conservative government’s clean-up ambitions.⁹ Rents are soaring and local inhabitants are being driven out. One of New Democracy government’s promises in the last election was to “take back control” of Exarchia, which it describes as a “no go area” for police. Commenting on recent evictions, a representative of the police union reportedly described migrants as “dust”, adding: “We are the new silent vacuum cleaner that will suck up all the garbage”.¹⁰ Since then, masked riot police armed with tear-gas carried out the first evictions and armed police maintained a constant presence in Exarchia. Everywhere we go, we see them standing nervously outside buildings recently emptied. One has to wonder, given austerity, whether a 24-hour police presence to stop squatters from returning to the buildings, the doorways of which have been bricked over, is a good use of resources! Also conspicuous on our travels is the armed police presence outside the offices of all political parties, conveying a sense that despite the dictatorship formally ending nearly 50 years ago, democracy is fragile and political violence never far away. But then, this is not surprising given the deep imprint two spells of dictatorship and the German occupation have left on Greek political culture, and the constraints this has placed on any democratization process.

To understand the mark of the left on Athenian culture, you need to go back even further, to the precursor of the military dictatorship, the authoritarian 4th of August Regime under General Ioannas Metaxas (1936-41). When this collapsed, the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria) took over and the Nazi occupation of Greece

6 Michaloliakos career on the far Right started before the military dictatorship, as a member of the 4th of August Party (Komma Tetartis Avgoustou), which was founded by the National Socialist Kostas Plevris to build on the ideology of the dictatorial regime of General Ioannis Metaxas (1936-40), also known as the “4th of August Regime”, the date on which Metaxas dissolved parliament and suspended the Constitution. Michaloliakos has been arrested several times for violent acts, and in 1978 he was sent to prison for one year in connection with supplying explosives to right-wing extremist groups found responsible for a series of bombing attacks in 1977 and 1978, where several people were seriously injured.

7 Nicos Mouzelis, “Capitalism and Dictatorship in Post-War Greece”, *New Left Review* 96 (1996).

8 One of the best-known recent struggles around housing was that undertaken by the Economic and Political Refugee Solidarity Initiative, which occupied the vacated City Plaza Hotel in Exarchia for 36 months beginning in April 2016, when the EU-Turkey deal trapped 60,000 refugees in Greece. City Plaza, dubbed the “Best Hotel in Europe”, became legendary for giving hundreds of refugees the hospitality denied by the European Union, even raising funds to provide a clinic, a cafeteria and language classes.

9 See John Malamatinas, “First They Take Exarchia”, *ROAR magazine*, 3 September 2019. Available at: <https://roarmag.org/essays/first-they-take-exarcheia/>; see also Theodoros Karyotis, “Repression, eviction and dispossession in New Democracy’s Greece”, *ROAR magazine*, 7 January 2020. Available at: <https://roarmag.org/essays/squat-eviction-house-dispossession-greece/>.

10 “Police order probe into controversial comments of union official”, *Ekathimerini*, 26 August 2019, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/243913/article/ekathimerini/news/police-open-probe-into-controversial-comments-of-union-official>.

Figure 1: Sculpture by Memos Makris of the head of a youngster that is located at the entrance of the NTUA commemorating the 1973 Athens Polytechnic Uprising (Photo © Zimina/WikiCommons)



began, bringing with it the near eradication of the Jewish minority. With the King and the bulk of the army fleeing the country, and a government in exile established in Egypt, the national resistance to the occupation was led by the left, primarily the Communist Party. Nicos Mouzelis has drawn attention to the collaboration of the few Royalist army officers remaining in Greece with the German suppression of left-wing resisters, the two forming security battalions for dealing with the “enemy inside the walls”.¹¹ In 1943, when the Greek government in exile returned, these paramilitary battalions were incorporated into the state’s new security forces. Later, during the Cold War, the “White Terror” unleashed against Communist forces would be backed by the US and the UK. The Civil War (1944-45 and 1946-49) left the Communists decimated. In 1949, with the imprisonment, exile (to deserted or uninhabited islands) or extermination of thousands of left-wing members of the resistance and their leaders, the military established firm control over the whole of Greek territory and consolidated a system of “repressive parliamentarianism” or “guided democracy” —an apolitical system of repressive controls engineered to prevent the population from taking genuine part in the political process.

Greece’s current ruling party, New Democracy, currently targeting the squats in Exarchia and bussing migrants out of the capital to far-off destinations, has its roots, according to journalist Achilles M. Peklaris, in the National Radical Union Party (ERE). Peklaris writes that after the Rule of the Colonels ended in 1974, once political parties no longer were outlawed, “the National Radical Union morphed into New Democracy, under the same leadership, and playing the exact same role as before — but this time for the ‘orphans’ of the military junta: it provided them with a safe and comfortable shelter.”¹²

I got a momentary glimpse of the authoritarian violence inherent in recent Greek history on another of our many hurried walks across Athens. Alone with Ioanna this time, we were on our way to a public meeting at the Feminist Autonomous Centre when she took me past the National Technical University of Athens, which lies on the border with Exarchia, just before it morphs into the busy district of Omonia. We did not have time to enter but, behind the university gates, my eye was caught by a large sculpture of the melancholically tilted head of a young man. We stopped and peered at it through the gates. It was, Ioanna explained, a commemorative monument to the 24 students fallen during the November 1973 Athens Polytechnic uprising for “Bread-

11 Mouzelis, “Capitalism and Dictatorship in Post-War Greece.”

12 See Achilles M. Peklaris, “Greece’s neo-Nazis lost, but the far-right party that won has a dark anti-Semitic past”, Haaretz, 9 July 2019, access at: <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-how-ultranationalists-infiltrated-greece-s-new-ruling-party-1.7485494>.

Education-Freedom” against the military dictatorship (see Figure 1). The sculpture by anti-fascist artist Memos Makris¹³ stands as a powerful reminder of the hatred against left-leaning students shared by far-right regimes and military dictatorships across the world, along with their security battalions, such as Golden Dawn, which have and still continue to target left-wing and anarchist students. In 2004, as support for Golden Dawn was on the rise, the police were accused of supporting Golden Dawn members disguised as “indignant citizens”¹⁴ who attacked students commemorating the Polytechnic uprising. To this day, police continue to attack students commemorating the uprising.¹⁵

WHO IS ABSENT FROM THE COURTROOM?

Golden Dawn is a reflection of a political culture that remains permeable by fascism as long as these currents align with Greek nationalism and do not overstep the mark and threaten state authority. Golden Dawn emerged from the ranks of those who supported the rule of the Colonels. It becoming a *political party* was not a sign of Golden Dawn breaking with the past. On the contrary, as Dimitris Psarras explains, the article of the Greek Constitution protecting political parties from criminal prosecution was “precisely the reasoning behind Michaloliakos decision in 1994 to have Golden Dawn run for election every so often”.

Now, it is not the case that the electorate is turning away from Golden Dawn because the prosecution exposed its violence. The visible street presence of its security battalions on the streets in the 2000s had already exposed that. It is rather that Golden Dawn, which used to look like winners, now look like losers. A visit to the courtroom demonstrates this, as defendants and witnesses stumble and stall as they try to give evidence. And outside the courtroom, it is blocked too. In the 2019 general election, Golden Dawn failed to meet the 5 percent threshold to secure any parliamentary representation, with many of its supporters now casting their vote for the traditional party of the conservative Right, New Democracy. With state funding being suspended,¹⁶ one by one, Golden Dawn offices around the country have been shut down. Even its central Athens HQ on Mesogion Avenue has closed—an event witnessed by two journalists in our party who rushed off to photograph the removal of the logo from the building.

When one enters the courtroom, the most striking observation is who is absent. Where are the police officers who aided and abetted Golden Dawn, the military officers who provided unofficial training at abandoned military camps and ammunition depots? Where are the media outlets, such as Greece’s leading Sunday newspaper, *Proto Thema*, which acted as its cheerleaders? Where are the Greek Orthodox bishops whose hate speech inspired nationalist ferment, along with the religious zealots who demonstrated in October 2012 alongside Golden Dawn, waving their crucifixes, and who rioted outside a production of Terence McNally’s play *Corpus Christi* at the Chytirio Theatre, threatening to kill the actors before finally beating them up and causing substantial damage to the theatre?¹⁷

Writer Dimitris Psarras is in court at the time of our visit—a modest, shy figure and one of the very few Greek journalists nearly always present.¹⁸ Author of several books on Golden Dawn, and member of the journalist researchers’ collective “ios” (virus), Psarras work is vital to the archive that the anti-fascist movement is patiently building. In his various publications he has documented the process through which a “murderous organization” rose up from the margins into the very “centre of political life”, no less because, for Golden Dawn, “violence is not only the means: it is also the organization’s end goal”.¹⁹

13 Memos Makris fought with the National Resistance during the German occupation. After the liberation, he sought political asylum in Hungary. In 1967, the Greek state deprived him of his citizenship, which he regained after democracy was restored.

14 The same tactics are currently being mobilized by Casa Pound in Italy against the Roma. In May 2019, Casa Pound, posing as indignant citizens in the Roman suburb of Casal Bruciato, were instrumental in the protests against the council’s re-housing of a Roma family previously evacuated from a demolished camp. “We don’t want you here” and “you all have to burn” were some of the slogans chanted. In one incident, the mother was told: “Whore, I’ll rape you”. Rome’s mayor had to visit the family under police protection. See: Stefana Fasano, “Ahead of the EU elections, neo-fascists are inciting anti-Roma violence in Rome’s disillusioned suburbs”, Equal Times, 22 May 2019, Access at: <https://www.equaltimes.org/ahead-of-the-eu-elections-neo?lang=en#.XguoLm52vSF>.

15 Helena Smith, “Greek Activists warn of surge in police brutality and human rights violations”, *Guardian*, 31 December 2019. Access at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/31/greek-activists-warn-of-surge-in-police-brutality-and-rights-violations>.

16 In December 2013, the Greek parliament voted to cut Golden Dawn’s share of an € 11m state funding package allocated for parliamentary parties as part of the 2014 budget. However, if the trial finds Golden Dawn not guilty of forming a criminal organization, the party will regain access to the € 873,000 allocated to it.

17 The bishop of Piraeus joined with Golden Dawn to file a case of blasphemy against the production. Later, many Greek Orthodox priests opposed the introduction of anti-hate speech legislation on the grounds that “nobody can contain God’s speech”. See Christopoulos (ed.), introduction to *Mapping Ultra-Right Extremism*, pp. 5–6.

18 Another is the exceptional Giota Tessi, who spent a long time talking and briefing our delegation and also reported about our visit for the *Efimerida ton Syntakton*.

19 An entire chapter at the beginning of Golden Dawn’s party statute is devoted to the *Führerprinzip* (leader principle). Mussolini’s Black Shirts and Röhm’s “Storm Division” are cited as influences for its assault battalions. The party’s main slogan “Blood – Honour- Golden Dawn” mimics the motto of the Hitler Youth.

Unparalleled in post-war Europe, a violent neo-Nazi party used the electoral process to penetrate the state apparatus and subvert democracy from within. And this fascist party was broadly tolerated, if not applauded, though no applause is being heard in the courtroom on the days of our visits. Despite never having renounced its National Socialist sympathies, Golden Dawn massively expanded its electoral support in the 2000s, emerging in 2012 as the third largest electoral force in the country, with 440,000 votes and 18 seats in parliament. During the entire time that Golden Dawn's Nazi-saluting MPs were sitting in parliament and local municipality chambers, they openly expressed contempt for representative democracy. The appeal of Golden Dawn's demonic leader Nikos Michaloliakos is hard to comprehend. A veteran of far-right movements, Michaloliakos openly boasted that parliament filled him with "disgust and revulsion", while MP Ilias Kasidiaris who, with his supposed film star looks and attractive girlfriend, was the darling of the Greek tabloid press, boasted that Golden Dawn hates "MPs and their parliamentary crap". Greek MPs are allowed to carry guns under licence, something the neo-Nazis relished.²⁰

Golden Dawn did not follow the usual path adopted by Europe's electoral far right, not even those with fascist roots like Italy's Alleanza Nazionale, Austria's Freedom Party or France's Front National (now National Rally). All these parties distanced themselves, on paper at least, from violence. They jumped through the necessary hoops to enter parliament, most importantly by declaring their support of Israel and distancing themselves from street fighting formations (all the while indulging in an incendiary language that encourages them). Golden Dawn—a Holocaust-denying party that is virulently anti-Semitic—did not even bother with this pretence. On the contrary, it strengthened its security battalions and went as far as to provide an employer-friendly violent trade union presence at the Athens Perema Shipyards when wages were declining as the shipyards were being privatised under Greece's economic adjustment program.²¹ Assault battalions were not only there to discipline the Communists, but to "cleanse" the streets of migrants, the "sub-humans", the "scum", and the "dirty garbage of the earth", as MP Ilias Panagiotaros, put it.²² In organised purges, immigrant shops and market traders were attacked, and houses and apartments marked as "Greek" or "Christian".

And what did the prosecutors and judges do to curb this? From 1992-2013, there were just four successful prosecutions against Golden Dawn. During this time, the neo-Nazis were engaging in dozens of attacks targeting left-wing opponents, autonomous centres and students, such as Dimitris Kousouris, the central committee member of the National Students' Union of Greece who was beaten with truncheons and left brain damaged.²³ And there were the daily attacks on migrants, like the one which killed Pakistani national Shehzad Luqman, who was attacked on his bike and stabbed to death on his way to work in the Petralona neighbourhood of Athens in 2013.²⁴ All this and more were recorded by film-maker Angélique Korounis in her outstanding documentary, *Golden Dawn: A Personal Affair*, based on six years of grassroots work following the organization and its supporters.²⁵ All this time, the judiciary proved totally ineffective, in fact reproducing, in the words of Christopoulos, "the judgements and views that consolidate as the normative horizon... The common view of what is just [in a] culture that may be convincingly shown to share most features of the ultra-right".²⁶

THE SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE

It was the murder, on 17 September 2013, of the well-known anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas (also known as Killah P), that finally marked the end of state tolerance towards Golden Dawn. Pavlos was stabbed through the heart, dying at the scene of the attack in the working-class neighbourhood of Keratsini, near the dockyards of Piraeus. The impact the grief and anger of Pavlos mother, Magda Fyssa, has had on Greek society (see Figure 2) through her unwavering campaign to obtain justice for her son reminds me of Doreen Lawrence, the mother of Stephen Lawrence, a young black teenager murdered by racists in London in April 1993, whose staunch determination led to a government inquiry into the police's failures in the investigation of her son's death.

20 See Helena Smith, "Greek MP calls for firearms crackdown, fearing of parliamentary shootout", *Guardian*, 14 December 2012, access at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/14/greek-mp-firearms-crackdown-parliament>.

21 The terms of Greece's third bailout, laid out in the Third Memorandum, amounted to the most draconian austerity programme ever imposed on a European country, including the largest privatization scheme since the reunification of East and West Germany. One of the largest privatization projects stipulated by the programme was the sale of two-thirds of the shares of the Piraeus Port Authority to the Chinese state-run China Ocean Shipping Company.

22 As documented by Golden Dawn Watch, see https://goldendawnwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/gdw_23.9_en_final_web_0.pdf.

23 Antonis Androutsopoulos, the head of the ten-member Golden Dawn hit-squad who carried out the assault, evaded arrest for seven years.

24 Two Golden Dawn members were convicted for this racially motivated murder but on 6 May 2019 their sentences were reduced due to "mitigating circumstances", namely good behaviour in prison. See Patrick Strickland, "What the fight against far-right violence in Greece tells us", *OpenCanada.org*, 12 June 2019, access at: <https://www.opencanada.org/features/what-fight-against-far-right-violence-greece-tells-us/>.

25 Available at: <https://goldendawnpersonalaffair.com/>

26 Christopoulos (ed.), *Mapping Ultra-Right Extremism*, p. 96.

Figure 2: Graffiti on the wall of the Academy of Athens, September 2014.
(Photo © Nick Paleologos/SOCC)



Figure 3: A mural of Pavlos Fyssass on a former factory in Keratsini, the suburb in which he was killed.
(Photo © Maria Oshana)



On the final day of our visit, we travel by taxi to the working-class neighbourhood of Keratsini to attend the memorial march of the sixth anniversary of Pavlos death, which, as ever, is being led by his mother. The same spirit prevails here in Keratsini that I witnessed on Falls Road, West Belfast, in 2017 at the 35th annual remembrance procession for the 1981 Republican hunger strikers, who died in the H-blocks on a hunger strike campaign to persuade Margaret Thatcher's government to give them political ("special category") status. Pavlos, like the first hunger-striker to die, Bobby Sands, was a poet, and like Sands he was an extraordinarily popular figure, locally. A huge mural in his memory painted on the side of an abandoned factory (see Figure 3), a memorial erected at the site of his murder, and the renaming after him of the street where he died are all testimonies of the great affection he enjoyed.

Back in 2013, there was an immediate uproar at the murder of what was, after all, a white working-class Greek man—the very constituency that Golden Dawn, with its soup kitchens and blood banks for "Greeks only", boasted to represent. As angry working-class youth clashed with the riot police in Keratsini and as evidence emerged that a section of

the military (Special Forces Reserve Officers Community) were planning a coup, the state miraculously woke up to the danger that Golden Dawn represents. They arrested and charged 69 people, including all its MPs, central committee members, and leaders of local branches and cells, heads of the “hit squads”, and ordinary members, such as Giorgos Roupakias who stabbed Pavlos while other members of Golden Dawn’s Nikea branch were pinning him down. The mass arrests were made possible by the belated acknowledgement that Golden Dawn was not a political party (and therefore protected by the Constitution) but a criminal organization that could be prosecuted under Article 187 of the Penal Code.

WHO GUARDS US FROM OUR GUARDIANS?

When the trial began, on 20 April 2015, it was held in the women’s wing of Korydallos prison, where the defendants were initially held. (Nearly all the defendants were subsequently released on bail.) There are four major cases addressed by the court: membership and direction of a criminal organization; the June 2012 attack on the home of Egyptian fishermen in Perema; the September 2013 assault with nail-studded wooden beams and shafts, expandable batons, and crowbars on 20 members of the Communist party-affiliated All-Workers Militant Front (PAME) trades union; and the September 2013 murder of Pavlos Fyssas. Further cases have been tried separately. Some are still on-going. These include: attacks on Albanian women in Athens; a pogrom and arson attack targeting Roma in Etoliko, western Greece; the murder of Shehzad Luqman in Petralona, Athens; and the attempted murder of a school pupil in Paleo Faliro, Athens.²⁷

Although the verdict is by no means guaranteed, the civil action lawsuit launched by the family of Pavlos Fyssas, the lawyers for PAME, and the independent monitoring work carried out by Golden Dawn Watch and Jail Golden Dawn, mean that this exceptional trial has posed a challenge to the Greek criminal justice system. Lawyer Thanassis Kambayiannis, who in the past had represented the victims of racist violence, took time off to talk to us at the offices of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. The Greek legal system does allow a civil action lawsuit to be brought on behalf of the victims of crime, he explains, but as the Greek state does not provide legal aid, this is not an option for poor migrants. Kambayiannis, who was determined that an anti-fascist perspective be represented in the courtroom, reached out to the Egyptian fisherman who could not afford legal representation and agreed to represent them free of charge. Every day Golden Dawn Watch, an initiative run by lawyers and volunteers, are present in the courtroom. Lawyers tweet on main developments and publish a daily synopsis on the Golden Dawn Watch website. The significance of this cannot be over-stated. As there is no video or audio recording of the trial, this reporting represents an essential part of the historical record.²⁸ As Ioanna later observed: “Our sole role is to monitor the trial and report factually on what goes on in the courtroom. We do not allow ourselves to comment. Let’s say we are an amplifier of the trial.” But there is another important initiative called Jail Golden Dawn, which is more overtly political. “Golden Dawn Watch observes and reports, [while] Jail Golden Dawn Watch comments, analyzes, and makes demands”, Ioanna concludes.²⁹

“IN THE END COURAGE WINS”

During my stay, I was invited by the Feminist Autonomous Centre to speak at a meeting being held at a recently refurbished social centre, very close to Aghios Panteleimonas Square, in the centre of Athens. The Feminist Autonomous Centre is just one of a number of alternative centres run by LGBTQI+ groups that sprang up in Aghios Panteleimonas as part of a conscious effort to ensure a long-term left activist presence in areas where Golden Dawn used to be in control. It is as though the movement had absorbed Magda Fyssas sentiment who, in talking to Radio 24/7 about the enormous courage her son Pavlos had shown on the night of his murder, had commented: “In the end, courage wins”.

One member of our delegation, writer Daniel Trilling, had first come to Athens when he began researching *Lights in the Distance: Exile and Refuge at the Borders of Europe*, his epic story of the refugee crisis. He talked to me about the ways in which Aghios Panteleimonas had changed since he first visited Athens in 2012, emphasizing the role of the anarchist movements in confronting Golden Dawn on the streets and helping immigrant communities defend themselves. “Back in 2012”, he explains, “Aghios Panteleimonas was the

27 Golden Dawn Watch have produced an excellent pyramid graph providing information on each of the 68 defendants and their role in the organization. Available in Greek and English at https://goldendawnwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/gdw_23.9_en_final_web_0.pdf.

28 Though there is a court stenographer, court transcripts are not public documents.

29 Email correspondence, 4 October 2019.

epicentre of Golden Dawn’s effort to take over Athens neighbourhoods by terrorizing immigrants and turning their Greek neighbours against them. When I first visited, the square was deserted and there was Greek nationalist graffiti marking out the territory.”

When fascists want to take control over a neighbourhood, they start on a single street, extending their reach slowly by marking it as a “foreigners free” zone and setting up sites of vigilante violence and extra-judicial justice. The transformation of Aghios Panteleimonas from a bastion of Golden Dawn’s racist power into a multicultural neighbourhood was not achieved overnight or merely by imposing an anti-racist model over a xenophobic one. It is thanks to the activities of anti-fascists and immigrants, who have won back the space, that the area has been transformed. “When I visited again around 2014–2015”, Daniel continues, “the nationalist graffiti had all been crossed out and replaced with anti-fascist messages”. Now, returning again as part of our official delegation, he finds the area “unrecognizable—residents from Greek, Middle Eastern, and Asian backgrounds sharing space in the square”. This would have been an “unremarkable scene of everyday multiculturalism elsewhere”, but for Trilling this sight was bitter-sweet given all that had happened.³⁰

The prevailing mood among the Greek establishment is to forget the crimes of Golden Dawn as quickly as possible. That is why in 2019 the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung and Human Rights360 launched the campaign “X them out! The Black Map of Racist Violence” to provide a permanent visual record of the racist violence that defaced Athens during the ascent of Golden Dawn.³¹ At first, the campaign was directly connected to the trial. “The idea was to detail the history of racist violence in public places and also show ordinary people how Golden Dawn was behind most of the attacks”, explains Ioanna.³² This would be achieved visually through the “Black Map of Racist Violence” of Athens, which exists both on the internet and on a street level. On the street, stickers with different QR-codes are placed on lampposts along with other objects by the site of the different crimes. Passers-by can scan the codes with their mobile phones to be directed towards the project’s website where they would find a full account of the violence which had occurred there as well as in other neighbourhoods (see Figure 4). 25 graphic artists—including some celebrities, others less known—provided illustrations for the project, which later grew into an exhibition that toured all over Greece. By the end of 2019, the book *The Black Map of Racist Violence* was published.³³ It includes information about more than 100 attacks, including more sketches done by graphic artists who came from abroad to attend the trial and support the project.

POLICING AND THE CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

Back in the calm atmosphere of the Feminist Autonomous Centre, I was learning about the far-right violence directed against LGBTQI+ communities and the collusion of the police in this violence. And I was also meeting with friends of Zak Kostopoulos, who was beaten to death in broad daylight in Athens in September 2018.

Zak Kostopoulos (also known as Zackie Oh!) was a queer performer and committed anti-fascist. On the day he died, something had distressed him, and he ran in a panic into a jeweller’s shop close to Omonia square for reasons that are not clear. The two shop workers locked him in and beat him up. When he tried to escape by crawling through a smashed window, not only did the crowd in this busy pedestrian area join in on the attack, the nine police officers called to the scene also beat him and kicked him while he lay unconscious on the ground. The whole attack, which was captured on video, has been described as a lynching.

Zak was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital. With the support of Amnesty International, his family and friends are now campaigning for two civilians and four police officers to be charged with homicide and, in the case of the police officers, also torture instead of the existing charge of grievous bodily harm. Police made little effort to investigate Zak’s death and did not collect sufficient testimony or footage from the numerous mobile phones and CCTV cameras that captured the incident. The assailants were not arrested immediately and the crime scene was not sealed, allowing the jewellery shop owner to clean up potentially crucial evidence.

The police’s failure to secure the crime scene means that vital forensic evidence was lost and the mistakes committed in Pavlos Fyssas case were repeated.³⁴ The fact that the chair of the Athens Police Union, Dimosthenis Pakos, referred to the police violence used against Zak as “standard practice, whether you like

30 Email correspondence, 11 December 2019.

31 The Racist Violence Recording Network was founded in 2011. The lack of official responses to racist violence made its monitoring work essential.

32 Email correspondence, 4 October 2019.

33 View *The Black Map of Athens* online here: <https://valtousx.gr/>.

34 The multidisciplinary research group Forensic Architecture, which uses architectural techniques and technologies to investigate cases of state violence and human rights violations, was commissioned to investigate both deaths. In the case of Pavlos Fyssas, Forensic Architecture reconstructed the events on the night of his murder using audio and video material made available to the court to show how members of Greece’s elite special police forces were present at the scene, before, during and after the murder, but failed to intervene. (See <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-murder-of-pavlos-fyssas>). In the case of Zak Kostopoulos, the investigations of Forensic Architecture have forced the state to reopen the case after establishing the presence of a key witness, who had been there from the start to the end of the attack but had not been interviewed by the police.

Figure 4: Alexia Othonaiou’s graphic of the murder of Shehzad Luqman in Petralona, January 2013, published in *The Black Map of Racist Violence*. (Photo © Alexia Othonaiou, reproduced with the permission of Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung)



it or not” has raised further questions about the lack of democratic accountability and the dangerous culture of impunity within police ranks.³⁵ According to Christopoulos, the Hellenic Police is “the sector of the State that is by far the most exposed to ultra-right intrusion” to the point of being outright “contaminated with Nazi enclaves”. But of course, the whole issue of police impunity and police collusion with racist crimes is a vital part of the case against Golden Dawn although, as previously mentioned, the police are notably absent from the courtroom dock.

The creation in 1981 of a new Hellenic police force under the government of PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) was meant to fully purge the police of its undemocratic tendencies and remove the influence of the military. But while the new police service was instructed in its mandate to uphold the Constitution, very soon it would revert back to old practices, precisely because nothing had been done really to change its

35 Mariniki Alevizopoulou and Augustine Zenakos, “The killing of Zak: the astonishing violence and impunity of Greek police”, *Open Democracy*, 31 October 2019, access at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/killing-of-zak-astonishing-violence-and/>.

institutional culture. It is clear that Golden Dawn, at the height of its power, was acting as an adjunct to the police, cleansing neighbourhoods of immigrants at the same time that the Hellenic police was involved in mass immigrant swoops using racial profiling. Between August 2012 and February 2013, under a New Democracy government, the Hellenic Police launched Operation Xenios Zeus (named after the mythical Greek god of guests and travellers), which led to almost 85,000 suspected foreigners being forcibly taken to police stations for verification of their immigration status.

Policing tactics in Athens grew out of the model established under the military dictatorship. Then, the police acted as an anti-Communist task force and were known to use torture, beatings, *falanga* (beating or whipping the soles of the feet), rape with a truncheon, and the use of electric shock. In one scandalous case at the height of Golden Dawn's power, the police were accused of torturing 15 anarchists arrested during a protest against Golden Dawn's racist violence against migrants and refugees.³⁶ They were arrested, beaten with batons, and then taken to the Attica General Police Directorate (GADA), where they claim they were spat upon, slapped, beaten, strip-searched in the corridors in full view, burnt with cigarette butts, and had flashlights and lasers shone in their eyes. Meanwhile, Golden Dawn members were mingling in the police station corridors with police.³⁷

The allegations of police collusion with the far right reach beyond Athens. Golden Dawn's influence was especially pronounced within the border police, riot police, and the DELTA squad. Ever since the migratory movements from the Balkans region of the 1990s, the Greek Border Guard and the Special Guard, which have less training than the regular police, have been associated with violent, paramilitary-style tactics. But what happened in terms of border policing in Greece, though extreme, is not necessarily an aberration within the European context. Border policing is the least accountable form of policing in Europe today and, over the last decade, arbitrary police behaviour on the borders have joined forces with the growth of far-right vigilantism. The job of these vigilantes—at best non-interfered with, at worst encouraged by the police—is to enforce national borders by doing the dirty work of harassing and punishing immigrants. In a pattern that repeats itself across Europe, the police turn a blind eye to this violence or actively collude and participate in it.

"The police and Golden Dawn are one", concludes a heart-broken Magda Fyssa in her Radio 24/7 interview. "They were there [at the scene of the murder] and they did nothing." In the courtroom, where her trauma continued, she had the same feeling. The police officers who were at the scene of her son's murder uniformly responded to questions in court with "don't know; can't remember" though some fainted under pressure from questioning.

THE NEW "ENEMIES INSIDE THE WALLS"

As the Golden Dawn trial is coming to an end, are we witnessing the end of Golden Dawn or are we merely returning to the old status quo when far-right nationalism was absorbed by New Democracy and nurtured within the para-state? Will the racist nationalist forces that gave rise to Golden Dawn be purged or will the same forces be allowed to regroup and hatch their eggs in old political nests?

In a different context, but one that resonates with the situation in Greece, the Irish Republican activist Bernadette McAliskey coined the term "breakfast-table collusion" to help explain the collaboration between the Royal Ulster Constabulary and loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. "Breakfast-table collusion" refers to the normative environment that takes hold when the police, the army, the judiciary, and the para-militias are drawn from the same social milieu, essentially forming a segregated community.³⁸

Collusion is a relevant concept for understanding developments in Greece, a country that since 1936 has suffered a Nazi occupation, two spells of dictatorship, and the deformations of Cold War politics, all leading to extermination policies against the left. Native-born anti-Communist dictatorships, just like Western European colonial powers, have cast a long shadow over Greek (and Iberian) societies. Today we see the ideology of dictatorship regenerating and directing its venom against immigrants, refugees, and LGBTQI+ communities—the new "enemies inside the walls". Dictatorship, like empire, is a structure of domination that does not just belong to the past but leaves its mark on the structures, policies, processes, and political culture that govern us at present. Greece's "deep state" is like a many-headed hydra. It just keeps coming back. Cutting off one head is not effective, it needs to be completely extirpated.

36 Amnesty International has reported about further accusations regarding the torture of many prisoners at Grevena, and of refugees and migrants during push-back operations conducted by Greek coastguards and border guards. See "A law unto themselves: a culture of abuse and impunity in the Greek police", Amnesty International, March 2014.

37 Maria Margaronis, "Greek anti-fascist protesters 'tortured by police' after Golden Dawn clash", *Guardian*, 9 October 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/09/greek-antifascist-protesters-torture-police>.

38 For the definitive account of collusion, see Mark McGovern, *Counter-insurgency and collusion in Northern Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 2018).

POSTSCRIPT

On 18 December 2019, in her summary, the state prosecutor, suggested that the Golden Dawn parliamentary group should not be found guilty of membership in a criminal organization, and that only a total of six people on trial should be condemned of any felonies at all. Her suggestion is not binding on the judges. A final verdict is expected by April 2020.

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