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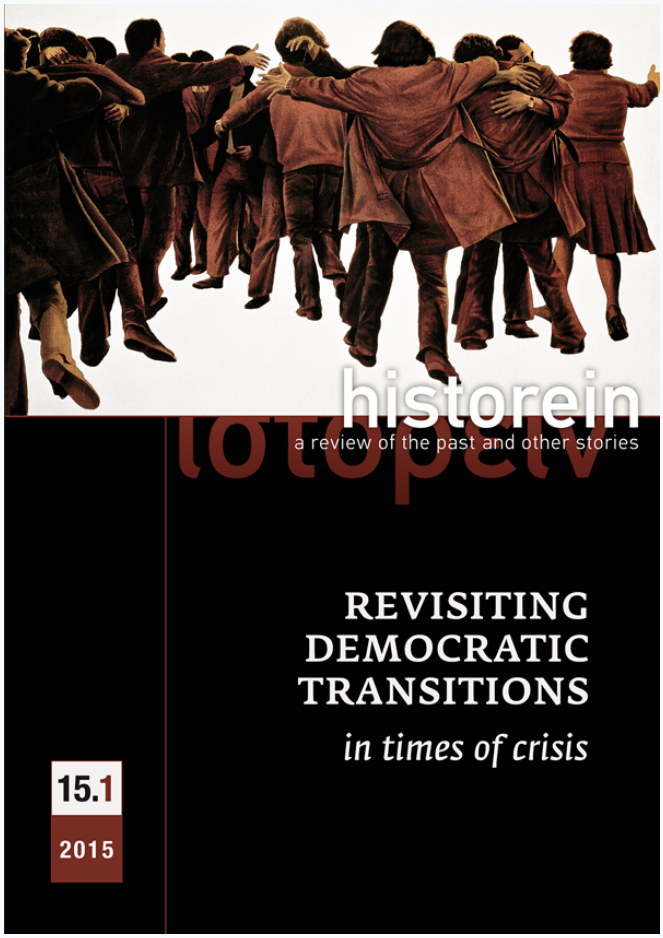


# Late this Summer-In Memoriam Vangelis Kechriotis

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# *On Vangelis Kechriotis, affectively*

Late this summer, our beloved friend and colleague Vangelis Kechriotis (1969–2015) died after a short, but brave, battle with cancer. His untimely loss has left us all in limbo. Vangelis was a founding member of *Historein*'s editorial group, and remained an active presence since the journal's inception until the thread of his life was so tragically cut short.

Born and raised in Greece, between Athens and the island of Skopelos, Vangelis studied history at the Department of History and Archaeology of Athens University. He ensued his engagement with comparative history at the University of Essex (MA, 1996) and then at the University of Leiden, where he defended his doctoral thesis on "The Greeks of Izmir at the End of the Empire: A Non-Muslim Ottoman Community between Autonomy and Patriotism" (Ph.D., 2005). Upon completion of his graduate studies, Vangelis received numerous fellowships and conducted research in prominent academic institutions in Europe and the United States. In 2003, he joined the Department of History of Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. Throughout his short but extraordinary academic career, he focused on the study of late Ottoman imperial ideology, political and cultural history, Christian and Jewish communities, and nationalism in the Balkans. He published many articles related to these topics. Together with Ahmet Ersoy and Maciej Górny, he was the co-editor of *Modernism: The Creation of Nation-States* and *Modernism: Representations of National Culture*, published as part of the "Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Texts and Commentaries" series (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010); together with Lorans Tanatar Baruh, he was the co-editor of the volume *Economy and Society on Both Shores of the Aegean* (Athens: Alpha Bank Historical Archives, 2010); and, together with Malte Fuhrmann, was co-editor of a special issue of the *Mediterranean Historical Review* [24/2 (2009)] on "The Late Ottoman Port-Cities and Their Inhabitants: Subjectivity, Urbanity, and Conflicting Orders".

Vangelis' trajectory, both in geographical as well as historiographical and intellectual space, was marked by distinctive and exceptional characteristics. His approaches were deeply transnational and comparative and, thus, his historical understanding often defied disciplinary restrictions and transgressed the boundaries and idiosyncrasies of national historiographical communities. He practiced historiography in a way that always undermined and nuanced the conceptual certainties that often developed and were comfortably shared within fields of academic expertise.

But what made this young historian's intellectual trajectory even more unique was that for Vangelis being a historian was not a mere academic or professional choice, but rather a whole way of life, a deeply subjective – and subjectively experienced – wholehearted commitment. He became an activist against nationalistic politics of all sorts, a public figure who made constant interventions in the international public sphere and social media, a devoted teacher with apprentices on both sides

of the Aegean and beyond. He chose to live and create a wonderful, loving, transnational family in Istanbul. Vangelis was restless: he travelled, wrote and, most importantly, spoke to transnational audiences.

At the time that these lines are being written, it is still too soon and too difficult for us, his friends and companions, to access Vangelis' impact on our own lives and intellectual practices. We are so unprepared for that. This is still a moment of mourning that will hopefully evolve into a more sober reflection on Vangelis Kechriotis's legacy. Even so, I think we already share a conviction that Vangelis' uniqueness lay in the fact that he experienced historical thinking as a deeply affective practice. As Vangelis Karamanolakis put it in a recently published farewell to our friend: "Vangelis loved history, because he loved people" (*Avgi*, 29 August 2015). His research, teaching, talking and writing was grounded on a crucial commitment to create, enhance, promote and safeguard affective relationships and networks of people across borders of all kinds, an intellectual capital invested in intersubjective relationships.

Having being personally honoured with his friendship since we were twelve years old, I can be certain of one thing: Vangelis Kechriotis did not follow any pregiven model of being a historian. He grew up struggling to discover his own path, he questioned himself endlessly, he strived to formulate his own means, form and content of it takes to think and act historically and meaningfully for himself and for others.

Strengthening our own commitment to "doing things in our own way" is, I believe, a truthful way to remember him and to honour his legacy.

**Ioanna Laliotou**
On behalf of the *Historein* parea

# *Farewell to Vangelis Kechriotis (1969–2015)*

No matter how hard you try to imagine it, you cannot see it happening. And, even if you are expecting it to happen, you cannot grasp its severity as it unfolds.

For those of us who were aware of the state of his health – colleagues, friends and former fellow students, among others – the news of Vangelis Kechriotis' death was not unexpected. This, however, did not make the news any less painful and, above all, less unjust.

Vangelis was 46, an associate professor of Balkan history and of the history of non-Muslim populations in the Ottoman empire at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul. More than simply an important scholar of the Ottoman empire, Vangelis formed a powerful channel of communication between the Turkish and the Greek scientific community. While his academic work, starting from the Greek Orthodox population of Smyrna in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, brought to the fore the wealth and complexity of the relationships between different religious and national communities in the context of the Ottoman empire, with his constant reporting in the media and initiatives he took a stand on all that was happening in contemporary Greek and Turkish society. Vangelis was a militant, who, through his strong political and social action, fought against the same enemies in his two home countries: stereotypes, nationalistic awe, simplifications and rhetoric. Through the online journal *Chronos* and in *Avgi* (some of his most recent articles in the Enthemata supplement can be found here: wp.me/sT5Wh-vk), but also through the Turkish media, blogs and Facebook, he discernibly and outspokenly commented on current affairs, demonstrating the kind of understanding of actuality that moved beyond the surface.

And thus, Vangelis served history in, I believe, exactly the way he wanted from the very start: not as a dry, sterile knowledge, but as a means to comprehend the world and to talk about today. And this is because Vangelis, like many others of his generation – of my generation – found himself studying history not as a result of a wrong choice in the Panhellenic high school exams or out of convenience. Rather, towards the "end of ideology" in the late 1980s and early 1990, he consciously chose his discipline in the context of a wider vision of changing the world but also of changing himself.

Vangelis was part of the left, though with much less certainty than his elders and with many more doubts about the objectives and realisation of his goals. What distinguished him was an unyielding desire, a bulimia even, for life and knowledge, which he gradually gained on his own, going through books and attending lectures one after the other, first as a student in the department of history of the University of Athens and later on in different academic contexts. While in the University of Athens, Vangelis, together with some other undergraduate and postgraduate students, actively participated in the formation of the research group that, years later, was to publish the journal *Historein*. But he did not stop there. Since his student years, Vangelis was a member of the Society for the Study of Modern Hellenism (Mnimon) and a regular columnist

for *Avgi*, ready to share any plan of collective action and each initiative that would bring together politics with history.

When the cycle of his studies in Athens, Essex and Leiden closed, he found himself in a new environment – Turkey. It was there that Vangelis built his career and became an active and particularly cherished member of the Turkish historical community. Nonetheless, Greece was always in his mind – and not just academically. Even in this last, difficult year, he did not cease to discuss and to express his hopes about what was happening in the country, while he intervened in the Turkish public sphere by writing about Greece and vice versa. He honoured both his home countries – the one where he was born and the other where he chose to live – through his actions and writings.

Even though his journey was violently disrupted, it was not a short one: from Athens to Istanbul, from his very first writings and academic articles, from adolescence to fatherhood, the journey was full of knowledge and changes, dreams and realisations. And, above all, full of love. Vangelis Kechriotis loved history because he loved people. And, in their turn, people loved him back: his wife Ceyda and his little daughter, Rana, his mother and his siblings, his friends, his colleagues, his students. Surrounded by the love and care of the people closest to him, he gave us the ultimate message: he did not withdraw nor did he conceal the state of his health from us. Rather, he shared his experience with us, in an impressive realism and with unimaginable strength. He kept on making plans and thinking about the future with the same thirst for life and caring for the people around him.

And this is precisely how I wish to remember Vangelis Kechriotis, as I bid farewell to him and to a part of our common youth: standing, a few months back, in the courtyard of Boğaziçi University, making jokes, talking about his daughter and making plans, aware of the future but without letting fear overrule him. Showing us the signs of the Byzantine presence in Istanbul, explaining things to us while he spread his arms towards the sea and the shore of the Bosporus. The sea that, on that day, was calm and glowing.

**Vangelis Karamanolakis**

*(This obituary, originally published in Greek in* Avgi *on 30 August 2015, was translated into English by Margarita Markoviti)*