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Yota Kravaritou (1944–2008) A ‘child’ of ‘68

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IN MEMORIAM

Yota Kravaritou
(1944–2008)
A ‘child’ of ’68

Yota Kravaritou studied law at the universities of Thessaloniki, Nancy, Strasbourg, Exeter and the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. She was condemned *in absentia* for her anti-dictatorship activities as member of the resistance organisation Democratic Defence, a fact that forced her to remain abroad for many years. She received her PhD from the Institute of European Studies in Brussels in 1976. After the *Metapolitefsi* she returned to Greece, where she was appointed to the chair of comparative law at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) in 1977. From 1991 to 1999 she was a professor in the department of law at the European University Institute, Florence. She finished her career at AUTH.

Kravaritou focused her teaching and research on comparative law and European social law, with a particular interest in gender as well as female labour. Working on projects supervised by the European Commission brought her into contact with the major feminist representatives in Greece with whom she co-launched the Interdisciplinary Program of Women Studies. The guarantee of social rights for labourers and new forms of employment were her other major concerns, and for that reason she became one of the main researchers of the European Trade Union Confederation, with whom she pub-

lished the *Manifesto for Social Europe* (1996). In terms of law and gender she collaborated with the well-known historian of gender Owen H. Hufton, with whom she co-edited a book on the same subject (*Gender and the Use of Time*, 1999). Deeply interested in the multifaceted relation between law and literature, she co-organised an international symposium entitled ‘Law and the Art of Discourse’ in November 2004, with the participation of writers, poets and jurists (see *Δίκαιο και Τέχνη του Λόγου*, 2008). Among her numerous publications are *L’emploi des femmes en Grèce, en Espagne, au Portugal* (1983), *New Forms of Work, Labour Law and Social Security Aspects in the European Community* (1987) and *Equal Opportunities and Collective Bargaining in the Member States* (1998).

Many of those research interests and sensitivities derived from her contact with the European social movements of the late 1960s. In particular, her direct contact with May ’68 was a factor that sealed both her political but also her academic predilections. She remembered arriving in a Paris that was already full of barricades and street fights; she was mesmerised by the events: “We thought we were living in a different era and we were sure that everything was going to change,” she once said, reflecting the utopian optimism of the time. Apart from the student strikes, she was also overwhelmed by the mobilisations of workers. In fact she later associated her predilection for labour law with the fact that she first saw industrial workers in action there. Her recollections of May included weird happenings, such as losing a wallet with all her money in a crowded Sorbonne amphitheatre and an adventurous trip to Strasbourg (at a time in which petrol was a rare commodity) in order to meet with law professor Dimitrios Evrygenis, who was connected to the 1969 motion against the Greek junta at the Council of Europe.

The tension between her anti-dictatorship commitment and the rousing experience of rebellion in May '68 did, in fact, characterise her memories of that period, as was the case with many Greeks who happened to be abroad at that time. If the situation in Greece under the Colonels politicised her more ("I took it personally," as she used to say) and prompted her to distribute anti-junta fliers while in Greece, her contact with the French student unrest radicalised her even more. But her most vivid recollection was during her sojourn at the city of Nancy. It was there where she first saw the Situationist brochure *De la misère en milieu étudiant* which dwelled on the terrible conditions of student life and which she deemed entirely incomprehensible. Apart from the political situation, the living conditions of students in Western Europe seemed to her to be vastly superior to those in Greece. Interestingly, Kravaritou changed her mind when male students broke the decorum concerning the all-desired but forbidden visits to the female halls of residence. The savage reaction of the French police authorities that stormed the building was something that she never forgot:

It was something that I never expected to happen in France. Something awful. Something like out of a Nazi camp. Because the boys wanted to go visit the girls and it was prohibited, they beat them black and blue. I saw boys with their eyes hanging out and I said 'What is this? In France, in democratic France?' And then when I went to Paris [in May 68] I thought, 'Revolution, that's it. The world is changing!'

Yota Kravaritou's Trotskyist militancy in Belgium in the following years, her academic views and her teaching at the universities of Thessaloniki and, later on, Florence were all to a great extent informed by these experi-

ences. Her interest in labour, feminism but also the relation between law and psychoanalysis derived from these powerful stimuli. All her attempts to approach the issue of citizen's rights as well as the intriguing relation between jurisprudence and other intellectual realms were to a large extent an offspring of the contestatory spirit of the 1960s and were in various ways connected to their intellectual and political heritage.

Historein shares the grief for her loss and pays tribute to her work on the occasion of the '68 volume.

NOTE

- 1 Interview to Nicolas Manidakis, 2 January 2008. Other quotes are from an interview to Kostis Kornetis, 6 January 2008.