

MODERN GREEK STUDIES IN AUSTRALIA

Dr EFROSINI DELIGIANNI, THE NEW GREEK STUDIES PROGRAM CONVENOR @ UNSW TALKS E

GREEK IS THE WORD

Dr Efosini Deligianni is the recently appointed Greek Studies Program Convenor at UNSW. In the interview that follows, she talks exclusively to "O KOSMOS" newspaper, about her experience with the Greeks of Australia, her relationship with her students, her thoughts and concerns about the teaching of the language of our forefather down under and the ways with which we can turn the tide around. "I remain optimistic" she claims, «but to get out of this impasse we need to radically change our mentality"

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY SAVVAS LIMNATITIS

Late afternoon on a hot Friday, in mid March at the "Greek" suburb of Bighton Le Sands. While outside the sudden downpour does its best to dilapidate Sydney's Indian summer, inside one of the numerous cafes currently in vogue with the area's Greek population, conversation is heating up at one of the tables. Listen closely though and you will be amazed to discover there are no great debates here. Prick up your ears a bit more and suddenly everything begins to make sense: just a bunch of Greeks getting animated and excited, as they engage themselves in friendly conversation. In other words, Greeks being Greeks again!

So who exactly are these four, rather over-excited Greeks and what exactly are they talking about? Leading proceedings is the indefatigable ex-president of SAE Oceania Costas Vertzayias, associate professor and Greek advisor to the Dean and History Program Convenor at UNSW Nicholas Doumanis, the new Greek Studies Program Convenor at the same university Dr Efosini Deligianni, as well as "O Kosmos" equally loudmouthed reporter. We have gathered here to discuss – and eventually introduce to the readers of the paper – the international symposium about Greek poet C.P. Cavafy the university is putting together and which will be held between the 18th and the 20th of June 2013 at UNSW's Kensington campus. Alas, very little is being proffered both in regards to the symposium and the poet himself. Instead, conversation has the tendency to do an about face, veering itself towards the past, the present and the future of the teaching of the Greek language in Australia.

With the interview heading nowhere and getting there fast, it's mutually decided to press the pause button and re-emerge ourselves in the celebration of the 150 years since the birth of one of the most human poets Greece has ever produced at a later

date. There is however, a happy ending to the day's meeting: from the ashes of an abandoned interview, another one arises.

A few days later, I'm on the phone to Dr Efosini Deligianni. Greek born and raised, Efosini (Froso to her friends and relatives) is a linguist specializing in Greek historical linguistics, receiving her PhD from UK's Lancaster University as well as acquiring a MA European Master's degree in Linguistics at the University of Manchester and Germany's Freie Universität. Although perhaps not yet properly acquainted to the wheeling and dealing of the many facets of Greek life in the land down under, Deligianni – who was only recently appointed as UNSW's Greek Studies Program Convenor – has an important ace up her sleeve, most of her contemporaries lack: clarity of mind thanks to her unobstructed view of the situation. Let's just hope her zest for the proper promotion of the Greek language and the zeal with which she applies herself to her role, forever dominate her approach to the subject. If nothing else, for the sake of the future of the Greek language in Australia...

How did the collaboration with the University of NSW come about;

I was in Nicosia last year where I worked in a research center. I realized that the object of my research there was not a very satisfying one, and I began sending applications abroad. The second application I sent was at UNSW. I found through an English website that there is a place in the Modern Greek section. I thought I fulfilled all conditions so I filled out the application, they got in contact with me, I went through a 20 minute interview with a 4-member committee and got the position. So here I am in Sydney.

Having studied in England, I imagine you had no trouble adapting here, at least in



« I'd like to believe that Greek is not a dead language. It does however operate in an environment that is somewhat undermined by English, but... The key to the solution of this problem is our culture. There are many people who when exposed even to a single aspect of Greek culture, they automatically begin to care more about the language and try to learn a lot more of it »

terms of language and culture.

The truth is that I underestimated a little the fact that it takes some time to get familiar with the environment and culture of a place. I also had the impression that being an Anglo-Saxon country settling in Australia would have been easier for me. There were difficulties with which I had not predicted: to put it different words, my daily routine has changed drastically. Also I had to understand what the requirements of my position were.

What were your first impressions of the university?

From the beginning, the impressions were very positive. First, there was full support, many arrangements had been made to facilitate my transition here, there was always someone whom I could contact if a problem arose. The only problem was that there were some issues that relate to the actual department of Modern Greek, which I realized along the way.

Once the lessons begun, what were your impressions of both the students and the way the Greek department is run?

The truth is that I needed a long time to understand what the needs were. I am alone in my department with no contact with