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Obituary

Eleni Varikas (1949-2026)

- Features - In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations -

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Eleni Varikas, a revolutionary Marxist-Feminist French-Greek professor of political philosophy, best known for her pioneering use of the concept of gender in French research, died of heart failure in Paris in early January 2026. She was 76 years old and the life partner of Michael Löwy, the French-Brazilian Marxist sociologist and philosopher. Both were contributors to AGAINST THE CURRENT and good friends of its sponsoring organization, Solidarity.

For those of us who knew Eleni personally, our memories are like precious gemstones. Who can forget her magnetic presence? Eleni was a piñata of enthusiasm and creative ideas—feisty and iconoclastic, yet always with unmatched erudition. This reflects her unusual life. She was born in 1949 in Athens, Greece, the daughter of Váossos Varikas, a well-known Marxist journalist and literary critic, who had been, in the 1930s, one of the founders of the Left Opposition in Greece. He was most famous for announcing a “Generation of Resistance” in his 1971 essay “Poetic Anti-Conformism,” in relation to a new group of poets in opposition to the Greek military junta.

While a student of history at the University of Athens, her father urged her to travel to Paris during the student-worker upheaval of May 1968, which made a lasting impression on her. Upon returning to Greece, she campaigned against the military dictatorship, returning to Paris again in 1971 to work with Georges Haupt, the Romanian and French historian of socialism, on a Masters Thesis about the origins of the Communist movement in Greece. She went back to Athens in 1974 and became, until 1978, one of the main leaders of the Greek Section of the Fourth International and the chief editor of its Journal, *The Barricade*. After 1978, she decided to invest her efforts in the feminist cause and was instrumental in creating the feminist movement in Greece. She was put on trial in 1975 for translating and adapting a banned work, *The Little Red Book for Schoolchildren and High School Students*. She was sentenced to prison but later acquitted on appeal. The Judge that acquitted her was Christos Sartzetakis, who had been in jail during the military dictatorship (he later became President of Greece).

In 1981, she once again embarked to Paris on a scholarship to pursue a doctoral thesis on the origins of modern Greek feminism and a year later she married Michael Löwy. Her thesis, *La Révolte des Dames* (1986) was awarded the highest distinction and published in Greece by Archives Historiques in 1987. From 1988 to 1991, Eleni was a lecturer at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) and at the University of Paris 7. Then, in 1991, she was appointed, by competitive examination, as a lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the University of Paris VIII. There she served as Professor of Political Theory and Gender Studies from 2006 to 2012, after which she retired as Professor Emeritus of Political Philosophy.

Over the years, Eleni was invited as a researcher, visiting professor and lecturer by universities around the world, including University of Lausanne, Free University of Brussels, European University Institute of Florence, Harvard University, Columbia University, The New School, University of Athens, University of São Paulo, and the State University of Campinas. While in the United States, especially during semesters spent at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor with Löwy, she had many memorable interactions with Solidarity activists and other radicals.

Eleni was additionally a member of the editorial boards of several journals, including *Pouvoirs*, *Raisons politiques*, and *Les Cahiers du genre*. Her books include *Penser le sexe et le genre* (2006), *Les rebuts du monde. Figures du paria* (2007), and *Pour une théorie féministe du politique* (2017). As co-author, with Françoise Collin and Évelyne Pisier, *Les Femmes de Platon à Derrida: Anthologie Critique* (2000), as well as, with Leonore Davidoff and Keith Mc Clelland, *Gender and History. Retrospect and Prospect* (2000). She also published, with Michael Löwy, an essay on “Max Weber and Anarchism” that was published in English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Greek. She always had a lot of sympathy for the Anarchist movement.

Vivid to many of us are Eleni's stylish vivacity, her bold, free, and unconventional persona, one that was warm and generous with an authentic joie de vie. Eleni was one of those people who lived with a sense of moral purpose, aggrieved by injustice, and a bastion of reason against all forms of bigotry. Sometimes Eleni would occasionally go off script with candid observations, but she always remained decent, principled and humane. Her captivating and singular personality will live in our hearts and memory forever.

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