

Acknowledgements

or...



Acknowledgements or “Er gaat niets boven Groningen”

People usually say that writing a PhD thesis is a lonely job. My experience was to the contrary. Yes, you do the job yourself but, at least in my case, several people have been steadily involved from the very beginning of the project (some even before that) and remained involved till its very end. People also say that writing a PhD thesis is a difficult job. My experience was again to the contrary. Everything seems easy when you are interested in what you are doing, when you enjoy it, when you love it, when you are proud of it, when you know you are finally doing what you were always meant to be doing. Not that it's not demanding; not that there are no moments that you lose focus and start wondering: what exactly is the purpose of all this – and how did I get myself involved in it? But to me these moments have been few and easy to overcome (Andrea might say differently...). Writing a PhD thesis in a foreign country presents some additional difficulties or challenges (depending on your optimism): unknown language, culture, habits, environment. Writing a PhD thesis in the Netherlands presents yet another additional difficulty or challenge (depending on your country of origin): the weather. This book is proof that I managed to deal with both.

Several people have played their smaller or bigger role from far (i.e. from Athens or Budapest) or close (i.e. Groningen or Brussels) in physical distance but always from close in psychological distance:

Stelios has been for many years my true and faithful friend of a very rare kind. We have followed a similar path; it's fair to say we both got lost in a similar path. Stelio, we don't spend as much time as I would like together but you are an inspiration and the best friend anyone could wish for. You are always wherever I am and, in my mind, I talk to you much more often than in reality. Thank you!

The small town of Stirling in Scotland has played a major role in my life. It was there I met Andrea. It was also there I met several other friends who have accompanied me these last years.

Pepi has given me so many times of so much fun. And she visited Groningen so many times... She was a witness in our Geregistreerd Partnerschap, she has been a witness from close or far in all important things in my life these ten years that we know each other. Pepi, I want you to witness everything that is coming my way in the future also. You, Chrisostomos and Aliki make a great family. I wish you all the best and I promise I'll be there to see what's coming.

The girls of House 16 i.e. Eleni, Maria and Tereza, together with Niovi and Vaggelis and the rest of the guys (Dimitris, Elias, Sergios), give me the great luxury of having people I look forward to seeing when distances allow and I am really glad I can follow most events in their lives and they can follow mine... I am also very glad you are all aunts and uncles of Nikolas...

Of all the uncles, however, my special thanks to Misa. Misa is a constant source of excitement and the best company I could ask for. So many great moments in Stirling, Amsterdam, Athens, Pireas, Budapest, Groningen, Niohori, again Amsterdam, again Groningen, again Budapest... Misa, have a gin-tonic for me... and never change!

Emese is another loyal visitor (Scotland, Greece, Hungary, Germany, Holland). Emese, how lucky I feel to have met you! Small Dani and Csabi complete the picture so nicely. Good people deserve the best.

Zsuzsi and Laci are good friends and make great company. Zsuzsi, it is funny how people communicate without speaking a common language... it is souls that communicate after all. Laci, you are my favourite tennis partner. Thank you both.

I think that Zoltan and Szonja are the two non-Dutch who have visited Groningen the most, with us and even without us there; they should get a medal... Panna came and gave us all joy. All the best to all three of you!

Agi, my mother in law, is certainly the youngest person I know. She treats life with joy and playfulness and she deserves this joy back. Who knows, the house on a Greek island might be closer than we think. Agi, life on the island will change with you on it... Thank you for the encouragement and support.

Nagyi has done so much for Andrea. I had the luck to meet her and hear her stories and she had the luck to meet Nikolas (and Panna before that). And then she thought it's time to leave...

Groningen would have been a nice but largely indifferent city for me if it weren't for certain people I met here. I had the luck to share nice moments with several people I found when I came, others who came later, others who came and left. I thank them all for our meetings and discussions.

My wife (Andrea) has a cousin (Gabi) who has a step-brother (Peter) who has a wife (Kata) who has a brother (Tamas). Tamas was the first person we met when we arrived in Groningen. Later we discovered that he was the Hungarian connection here and through him we met many people who would be very important for our sanity (and, sometimes, insanity) in Groningen. Thank you Tamas!

Special thanks to Sierdjan, Hendrik (both great guys) and Martine (it was nice in Budapest). Sjoerd and Evelien, what an unforgettable tour of Mexico with you guys! None of us will ever recover from the Mezcal-night in Oaxaca. Special thanks to Stefan who kept reminding me what a more 'metropolitan' life would be like. Hope to stay in touch.

I (a Greek) had my first sailing experience in a small lake in the Netherlands! It was thanks to my friend Rob, with whom I spent a lot of great times including that lovely weekend in Irnewaude. Then, Vanessa came and Groningen brightened a little for us but soon you left for the charms of Delft and the Randstadt. Thank you both for the time we spent together. Yuri is a lucky guy and I hope to get to know him better.

With Christian we spent time together in several places (including Mexico City and Budapest) but it was Kraneweg 15 in Groningen that I will mention here: we witnessed each others' "real victories", as he termed standing on our head during our common Yoga practice (thanks Berber – great teacher). Thank you, Chris, for many nice moments and a lot of explaining of what it means to be Dutch.

Karen, as well as being a loyal customer of the Greek islands, you have been a great support in everyday life in the faculty and Groningen in general. My lunches would have been much worse without you and the little time sitting in the Sportcafe after Bommen has been for me a very precious tradition I was always looking forward to. Thank you for your kindness, generosity, sharing and English speaking!

Tomas is a great guy and a fellow 'traveller' in life. Tomas, I wish you had stayed in Groningen longer. I have enjoyed our meetings in Vienna and Budapest and hope to repeat it.

The only indication I have that cultural globalization is possible are my friends Mirko (from Slovenia but also Groningen and from all across Europe) and Emma (from Lebanon but also Switzerland, the US, France and just enough Alexandrian-Greek blood in her). Emma and Mirko, you are a great example and a lot of fun to be around. Thank you for all the dinners and all the coffees in the Feithuis!

Hein and Elke, life itself chose for us to meet again and again in different parts of Europe. Warfum is forever on my map and your fabulous wedding day there forever in my memory. Life was funny in bringing us together – it was funny in bringing you permanently to Groningen just as we were permanently leaving... All the best!

Gabor, you have given me a lot of laughter, inspiration and love during these years. I am grateful I met you and thanks for all the drinking, barbequing, cleaning, talking and rapping. Most of all, thank you for all the dreaming...

The Netherlands will always be for me the country where I exercised my cultural understanding; in fact I came to understand what cultural understanding means. I do not mean the small (albeit important) differences between Greece and the Netherlands. It is here that I learned a great deal about India and Indonesia, enough to put both high in my list of places to travel to. Nadja,

Ajay, Biswamitra, I enjoyed beyond words our inter-cultural dinners and all the great food I had the luck to taste (...well, the not too spicy at least – Man!). Thank you all for the great times! Ajay, you are a great anthropologist, observer, cook, host, friend and guy to be around. We'll stay in touch! Nadja, my half Indonesian – half German friend and ex-roommate, you are unique and you make people around you feel unique too... It's been such a great luck our paths crossed in this hidden corner of the world. Still have to come to the famous village outside Berlin, still have to come to Indonesia and you still have to come to Greece...

Janneke and Reinoud, you have been and continue to be our closest and most affectionate link to Groningen and the Netherlands. Berend (probably the funniest person I have ever met) is so cute I have actually made thoughts of kidnapping him! I feel lucky to have met such good people and such excellent friends. I feel lucky to have had such pleasant moments, hours, days, nights, beers, dinners, phone-calls with you. All the best to all of you in your new life in Deventer. I hope (and will make sure) we stay in touch...

Professor Ashworth has been so much more than the supervisor of my PhD. A true mentor, he has taught me so much; more than I can realize now. He has been called the wizard of heritage; for me he is the wizard of academic research, the wizard of publishing, the wizard of PowerPoint, the wizard of living life with true, meaningful joy. A few things I learned from him:

- What it means to be a leading-edge ideas-generator
- How to write and publish
- How to find back my focus when I've lost it
- Better English
- How to let others think you will follow their way and go on to do things your way
- A lot about beer.

Professor Ashworth, how can I thank you for everything? I have enjoyed every single hour of working with you and hope to have the pleasure of working with you in the future (...remember, we have projects running). I have enjoyed every single dinner at the Klapper (and there were many). I have enjoyed every single beer (and there were many – but never enough) in Vilnius, in Dublin, in Amsterdam, in London and, of course, in the Paard van Troje. I am looking forward to the time I will be able to say “dinner's on me” like you did so many times. I am looking forward to the day I will have a PhD student to tell him/her (sic) what you told me at the very beginning: “set a date for the party of your defence and then work your way back to see what you have to do tomorrow”... Professor Ashworth or, for the first time, Dear Greg, thank you!

My gratefulness extends to Angela Ashworth for opening her house to us with great kindness and generosity and for sharing with us many memorable evenings.

My sister Sofi and brother-in-law Jose, you gave a lot to this thesis and me personally all these years. As you did before and as you will do after... You gave us a home in Brussels in the beginning, you gave us precious getaways to Brussels later, you gave us great weekends in Groningen, you gave us all those clothes and stuff for Nikolas. But, most of all, together with your house, you opened your lives and hearts to us. And Oh! the joy and happiness you gave me with Pavlo-Manuel and then Melina. What a joy that is and will be for the years to come! For all those, a simple ‘thank you’ does not capture the gratefulness. Sofi, you are the greatest sister I could have asked for. Love you!

My beloved parents, Aliki and Pavlos Kavaratzis have given me more than I can mention here; more than I can even realise. All their attention, all their comfort, all their support, all their guidance, all their good examples, all their finances. Their whole being. The day we were leaving Greece to come and settle in the Netherlands, saying goodbye right outside their house in Kifissia they were both sad. Particularly my father thought that they are sending me away. I told them then and I'm telling them now: you didn't send me away. You only gave me wings and taught me how to

fly. That is the best and most valuable thing you gave me. It's also a heavy weight: I have seen that being a truly good parent is possible – I have no excuse to become anything less. I only wish that I might be able to do the same for Nikolas. Mother and father, I show it and say it far less often than I should: I love you both very much...

Andrea, what can I say? And what more could I ask for? You deserve your name on the cover of this book; ...I would also add it in my passport. I wouldn't have started, I wouldn't have continued and I wouldn't have finished without you; and I am not talking about this thesis. Like the Polar Star you guide my boat in this trip we're taking. Life is exciting and you are the only one I want to share it with. Love, passion, excitement, breathing, all acquired new meanings since that all-night-long walk in the rain in Bridge of Alan. You sow seeds of life around and all I have to do is go out and water them... At the risk of sounding really old, The Beatles said it better:

Sounds of laughter, waves of joy
Are ringing through my open ears
Inciting and inviting me...
Limitless undying love which
Shines above me like a million suns
It calls me on and on across the universe...

What's more, little Nikolas calls us both across the universe. Nikola, you came and the world is a better place. Be as true as you are now and let people know what happiness is... Will I ever be able to tell you how much I appreciate you choosing me for your father?

Andrea, Nikola, words are not enough... How lucky can a man be? How do I deserve all this luck? What on earth will I be in my next life if I get this treatment in this one?

A thank-you note (and some tears that drop while writing it) is not enough to capture and transmit the emotions... The memories will stay, the affection will stay and the love will only grow...