



Caesar Mavratsas (1963-2017)

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GUEST- EDITED SECTION

**The Sociologist Caesar Mavratsas:
Cypriot Society, Postcoloniality,
Nationalism, Modernity, and
Identity**

Dear Readers,

This special section is in honour of the Cypriot sociologist Caesar Mavratsas, who passed away in 2017 at the age of 54, following a battle with cancer. He had served as editor of the *Review* for a couple of years in the 1990s, before becoming one of the first Professors of Sociology at the Department of Social and Political Sciences in the newly established University of Cyprus. He also served as a member of the editorial board. He had 23 creative years.

Witty, provocative, and generous, with a keen intellect and questioning mind, he combined a good sense of humour in his sociological imagination. This made him hugely popular with students and colleagues at the University of Cyprus – and also controversial. His sociology focused on Greek Cypriot political culture, identity, diaspora, and nationalism. Born in Famagusta, Mavratsas went to Boston University to study philosophy and sociology, and graduated in 1993. Mavratsas wrote several well-regarded books on Cypriot society and published many articles in Cypriot, Greek, British, American, Canadian, and French academic journals, while substantial parts of his work were translated into Turkish and German. He was keen to open debates in society well beyond the confines of the ‘ivory tower’ of academia and to develop social questioning through critical thinking. Deeply influenced by his professor, Peter Berger, Mavratsas wanted a science that encouraged a better understanding of human society in order to improve it. In recent years, despite his unequal battle with cancer, he continued to publish his regular column for the daily newspaper *Politis*.

Mavratsas significantly contributed to the development of Cypriot sociology. He was a follower of Max Weber’s sociological school of thought; an important influence, apart from Berger’s social constructionism, was Ernest Gellner’s work on national and civil society. Near the end of his life, Mavratsas was interested in re-visiting the debate between sociology and biology.

He witnessed the transformation of Cypriot society during the first decades after the devastation of the coup, the invasion and the violent partition of 1974. This was conditioned by rapid economic growth after the division. During the 1980s and 1990s, global sociological concerns were dominated with issues of identity. Mavratsas, amongst other sociologists, anthropologists, and intellectuals, sought to locate Cyprus in these global debates. His PhD dissertation was on the economic ethos

of Greek Cypriot immigrants in the US. Approximately 20 years ago, Mavratsas' first monograph in Greek examined the potential for modernising Cypriot society. Based on his observation of Greek Cypriot modernisation, civil society, nationalism and identity, he coined the term 'clientelistic corporatism' as a key feature of Cypriot society. He hoped that what he regarded as 'deficient modernisation' would eventually overcome the distortions from irrationalism induced by traditionalism and nationalism, investing in Max Weber's charismatic forms of power. Five years later, when these hopes did not materialise, he wrote in his second monograph about the 'atrophy of the Cypriot society'. Nonetheless, he was still optimistic that the accession to the EU, the resolution of the Cyprus problem, as well as broader modernisation processes inherent in the Weberian model, would eventually prevail. He was one of the most articulate advocates of the 'deficient modernisation thesis', as regards Greek Cypriot society. Over the next decade, matters proved much more complicated than what he had anticipated – Cyprus acceded to the EU but there was no solution to the Cyprus problem.

His next book proved to be a best-seller: he spoke about 'the cultural and political underdevelopment of Greek Cypriots at the beginning of the 21st century'. He used the term 'horkatos' (χώρκατος) in the book title. This was a derogatory term derived from a popular humorous Greek Cypriot television series *Vourate Geitonoι* (Βουράτε Γειτόνοι). The term derives from the word 'horiatis' (χωριάτης), which means villager, but Mavratsas insisted that this is a caricature to mock ill-mannered racists and sexists, and attitudes which negate everything that is modern and civilised. The archetype of the 'horkatos' is the leading male character, Rikkos Mappouros, a caricature of a macho, married middle-aged man, who is uncouth, selfish, brutish, and constantly courting and harassing young Anastasia, who is rather snobbish and looks down on villagers, despite her own village background. The book remains controversial.

The aim of this special section is to critically take up the issues Mavratsas was working on, such as Cypriot sociology, modernisation(s), Europeanism, nationalism, identity, postcoloniality, diaspora, social prejudice and stereotypes, to further the debates in Cyprus. An interesting aspect of the debate over the work of Mavratsas pertains to Cypriot modernity, identity, social distinctions and media: In this issue of the *Cyprus Review* there is critical engagement with the notion and term the 'horkatos', which reflect upon media, modernity, Europeanisation, social prejudice and stereotypes in the context of the 'deficient modernisation thesis' of Cyprus. It

aims to debate issues of identity, ethnocentrism, globality, gender, social class and distinction and the role of the media in the context of Cyprus.

In this context, the section focuses on a promising sociological journey honouring Caesar Mavratsas. Over 20 years ago, in 1998, Mavratsas published his first monograph, hoping to modernise the Cypriot society, which would overcome the rigidities and narrowmindedness of Greek Cypriot nationalism in charismatic forms of power. It did not happen as the sociologist had hoped. But things have certainly moved on.

One must locate Mavratsas' work within a broader sociological framing in Cyprus and beyond. Today we can read his work, critically and collaterally in a manner that illustrates that the Cypriot modernisation project can be sociologically read more critically and perhaps more optimistically, manifested in the subsequent evolution of theorising, research, and art. In fact, what this special section illustrates is that currently we are witnessing an unfolding of a flourishing creative perspectives in different fields, areas and domains. This is a very promising and inspiring future, despite the bleakness of current politics, in our region and the globe at large, as the world appears shaky, surreal and terrifying.

Mavratsas's own *Invitation to sociology*, borrowed from the celebrated title of the book by Peter Berger, who had been the Cypriot sociologist's PhD supervisor and a mentor was a constant and endless call for reflection, which remained the guiding spirit for his work. In fact, he acknowledges his mentor, suggesting the book was written in Berger's spirit, as Berger is quoted at the beginning of the book: 'Unrespectability, whatever its ramifications in the emotions and the will, must remain a constant possibility in the sociologist mind'.

Mavratsas' work provided us with an important starting frame for us to continue engaging with 'the social', 'the political' and 'the modern', both globally and locally. His thoughtful analyses of the economic and cultural ethos in the Greek diaspora, the contradictions of Greek Cypriot society, his analyses on the questions of modernity, civil society and nationalism are reference points for anyone looking at Cypriot society. Moreover, these are crucial insights; from these fascinating debates, social scientists, scholars and the broader public at large can chart pathways for critiques, ruptures and transcendence.

Mavratsas helped us think and imagine beyond. His spirit and ironic smile are still with us. For this we must be grateful.

Costas M. Constantinou attempts to “transgress the Nation” by providing a “defence of Cypriot Peasantry and Rustic Politics” to examine Cypriot peasant culture, sociopolitical underdevelopment and nationalism. Then, Theodor Rakopoulos provides a short commentary of the film ‘Vourate Geitonoï’, which is read as “the return of the horkatoi” via a sociology of class. Followed by Marilena Zackheos, who examines the issues of labour migration and diasporic intimacy and belonging in Maren Wickwire’s documentary *Together Apart*. Then, Nicos Trimikliniotis reviews 100 years of sociology in colonial and post-colonial Cyprus in an effort to map public sociology and critical thought of a small divided island-country. Ellada Evangelou explores theatre beyond nationalism by examining participatory art in the Cyprus Buffer Zone a reflection and response to the turbulent 20th century which has left Cyprus with contested spaces scattered around its terrain. Contested spaces of inner cities are issues taken up in different ways by the next two papers: Gregoris Ioannou examines social activism and the city from the perspective of a cultural sociology and radical politics in 21st century Cyprus, whilst Evanthia (Evi) Tselika looks at state housing and social labeling in the construction of refugee identities in Cyprus. Finally, Stavros Stavrou Karayiannis discusses Nicos Philippou’s *Sharqi*, a collection of 27 polaroid photographs that depict Cyprus landscapes, and attempts to locate the work’s artistic contribution in the larger cultural context of a landscape that emerges behind a mesh of ideologies.

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