

# **The Class Structure of Cypriot Society**

## **[Η Ταξική Δομή της Κυπριακής Κοινωνίας]**

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### **Introduction**

The book *The Class Structure of Cypriot Society*, edited by Professor Thanasis Alexiou, constitutes a unique edition for developing a Cypriot literature on political economy, since it is the first systematic, analytical and dynamic look at how Cypriot society is structured. The book is both ‘academically sound’, as is the case with rigorous and analytic methodology, and also a political tool for policy making and developing political demands by mass movements. This special edition is an endeavour, on behalf of the Promitheas Institute, that started as a concept, back in 2017, and had become a concrete proposal by 2019, which might explain the dual purpose of this work. The book entails eight chapters; a theoretical and methodological chapter, economic class data of the Cypriot social formation, structure and action in the Cypriot social formation, class structure of the Cypriot society in real-time, main findings, a detailed account of statistical data used, findings from the analysis of secondary data, and presentation of findings using primary data.

Thanasis Alexiou, being the editor, was the one who analysed the primary and secondary data through a theoretical lens (an approach of the Marxist tradition), which concerns the bigger part of the book; Christina Paraskevopoulou has worked closely with Alexiou’s theoretical approach, to shape and interpret tables and figures (chapters 6, 7 and 8, where primary data of the study is presented). The team is also assisted by Michalis Poulimas, who worked on the presentation and evolution of variables of the class map based on the work of E.O Wright (1997), which is used throughout this work. An important point that has to be made regarding this book, is that the data and the subsequent analysis concern only the Republic of Cyprus and the Greek Cypriot community. As such, areas that are not government-controlled are not included and, by extent, the Turkish Cypriot community (even those who are employed in the government-controlled areas) is not included either.

## Methodology and Theoretical Framework

One of the major problems when distinguishing classes in both academic and activist literature, has been the issue of differentiated experiences of individuals of the same class location. There has been a variety of class analyses, that focus on different aspects of class, and thus, draw quite different conclusions. From more simple ones to more complicated, the underlying common denominator is that class exists, however different perspectives have active or passive understandings of class (class as a description of a position in the labour process or as an active category and basis for organising in class struggle). The basic umbrella categories of interest can be summarised based on the work of Marx and/or Weber. However, it would be helpful in setting the debate that, still, the major theoretical critique aimed at frameworks of class analysis, can be summarized in the form of a question. Alexiou has had to make a decision on which one to follow for his study, a narrow framework based on classical Marxism or one of the broader ones, that Erik Olin Wright identified in his scrutiny of neo-Weberian approaches, presenting not only a different perspective but also an increasing number of factors shaping class <sup>1</sup>. Namely, to what extent do the extra details and descriptions of the different locations within the labour process, or life chances according to such positions, help rather than obscure the concept of class itself?

Alexiou keeps the theoretical framework clean from the distractions and the noise that sometimes surround schemata of class analysis. He recognises two main oppositional understandings of class analysis, one based on the sphere of production (Marx) and the other on the sphere of consumption, political power and recognition, and status (Weber). Despite the two approaches, he also acknowledges and engages in the debate which already exists. There have been several neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian approaches, which converge at points, attempting to show the supplementarity (giving more detail of description or highlighting different aspects of class) of some of the insights of each approach, rather than them being mutually exclusive.

Emphasis is given to Wright's extensive work<sup>2</sup> on how comparative class analysis is done from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the start of the 21<sup>st</sup>. He suggested that the varieties of class conceptualisations have been analysed in terms of relations or gradations, however, the relations conceptualisation entails a number of different varieties

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Olin Wright (ed), *Approaches to Class Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.43.

<sup>2</sup> Erik Olin Wright, *Understanding Class* (London: Verso Books, 2015).

itself; some class relations are analysed in terms of market differentiations, in terms of production, technical division of labour, authority in the labour process or a system of exploitation. Thus, although the gradation concepts refer directly to Weberian analyses, the concepts of class as social relations have been integrated to assume a number of Weberian features as well. In this respect, Alexiou claims that anything that diverges from the class analysis as analysis of relations, endangers the subversion of the theoretical rigour of a Marxist approach, which is a system of exploitation. Putting an emphasis on levels of authority, for example, or positions in the division of labour, means that there is a chance of confusing the base of analysis, suggesting that the labour process itself might be the basis of the formation of social classes. This entails the possibility to argue that, not only the bourgeois class, but also the petty bourgeois class, can be an exploitative one, as individuals can take advantage of their position in the division of labour due to their skill, knowledge, networks etc. and acquire higher wages or access authority.

From the standpoint of connecting the scientific/social relations approach with some subjective features (for example how subjects view themselves in class structures and locations), Alexiou and his collaborators attempt to show some of the contradictions which emerge from some class locations in the labour process, as they are mediated through the class consciousness of the subjects. Although not accepting Wright's revisionist approach, Alexiou suggests that the team has utilised the class map provided by him as a reliable tool that has been tried and tested in comparative class analysis in a variety of countries. Most importantly, the class map provides the opportunity for a dynamic analysis, looking into the relational aspect between class structure, class relations, class consciousness and class struggle. The book aims to show that, although class consciousness is relational between individuals in different positions within the labour process, or even mediated through extra-class divisions (e.g. gender, race experiences etc.), nonetheless the views ultimately cannot transcend class structure, as it represents the material potential and imposes limits on actors. The originality of this work is that it attempts to show how individuals have opinions related to their class locations and structure, which can serve to understand why and how individuals transform themselves into political subjectivities through setting organisations to engage in class struggle; this analysis can also serve to show how individuals in similar class locations can associate and show solidarity between each other, looking at the broader picture of the 'world of work'.

This is an innovative approach that takes into account the type of data available,

and looks to expand on the effectiveness of data gathered via primary sources in relation to secondary data acquired from CYSTAT (the official statistical service of the Republic of Cyprus). However, this could also prove to weaken the arguments made by the author, given that the qualitative data were mostly interviews with questionable reliability of answers on the part of the participants (given the structure of the fieldwork), or that the participants have formed opinions in their answers (it is accepted by the authors that, at a micro-level, it is rather impossible to measure class consciousness accurately). Despite some reservations, Alexiou is well aware that such a micro-level approach to class consciousness does not sum up to macro-level approaches, as the latter entail the mediation of class consciousness through class struggle conducted through mass organised politics (political parties, trade unions etc.). The relational definition of this class analysis is ultimately in contrast to phenomenological Marxism, which emphasises individual experience<sup>3</sup>, or structural Marxism, which emphasises class positions departing from consciousness, or that class practices play a critical role in the emergence of class consciousness<sup>4</sup>. While this is not a middle ground analysis, it nevertheless seems as looking to find patterns in a micro-level of analysis, a description of the situation in situ and its dynamics, that can potentially lead to a macro-level in the future.

### **Main Findings**

The main findings that stem from the analysis of the secondary data are on the one hand very clear. These form the basis of class structure based on the type of work and occupational situation. During the two first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, companies with employees have been in steady decline (from 6,1% in 2000 to 4,5% in 2011, and 2,1% in 2018), the same with the category of self-employed without employing anyone (14,9% in 2000 to 11,6% in 2011, and 10,2% in 2018). This is in direct contrast with the category of employees, which has seen a direct increase (from 75,8% in 2000 to 81,9% in 2011, and 87,1% in 2018). At the same time, intermediary situations, such as family businesses without pay, have experienced a decline as well. The primary data gathered by the study have suggested a slight deviation in relation to CYSTAT, which can be assumed to provide a largely correct and evaluated data set. Another important finding is the decline in the primary sector of the economy, whereas the data suggests an increase in the service sector; concerning manufacturing, there is a

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Palmer Thompson, *Poverty of Theory* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Nicos Poulantzas, *Social Classes in Contemporary Capitalism (Οι Κοινωνικές Τάξεις στον Σύγχρονο Καπιταλισμό)*. (Athens: Themelio, 1984) (in Greek).

clear decline in the occupations which are characterised by craft. At the same time, the supervisory type of work has increased, as businesses have adapted their formal processes in the production sphere. The wage system has been extended and as such mediates a large portion of the population in various locations within the labour process. This shows the maturity and extent of the capitalist mode of production in the economy of Cyprus, and the decline of different modes that have historically existed in parallel (hybrid mode, simple/petty commodity production etc.).

Based on the findings concerning structure, the study continues with semi-structured interviews to capture the Cypriot class formation, how individuals experience and give meaning to their class locations. Ultimately, the authors suggest, the micro-level can give an understanding on how and why individuals choose to develop collective organisations, who abide with more accuracy to class structures in their behaviour. Thus, this is a vice versa approach to the one followed in the class structure analysis (from theory towards the subjective level) from the subjective to the theoretical level. The class structure, whether individuals are in a class location that is dependent on the wage system or not, and the ability to control or be controlled within the labour process can give a dynamic understanding of individuals' ability to create affinities within the workplace or form their ideas, perhaps also resulting in subcultures of meaning.

In the qualitative phase, authority is a category based upon the study that has suggested it played an active role in class formation. This was an important finding, as the authors have used some labour process characteristics to distinguish classes according to the class map that was utilised<sup>5</sup>. The authors claim that not all wage earners are part of the working class (as not all work is understood to be productive work), and as such some of wage earners can be classified under the bourgeois class, because of the authority they exert in the labour process. Others, such as self-employed, owners of family businesses or divisions that have to do with the labour process itself (supervision, autonomy, and skills), can be found in contradictory locations, either in the middle strata or in the new and older petty bourgeoisie strata. The book authors argue that the class structure, as well as the mediation of class through ideological superstructures (mainstream media, state education, etc.) shape, to a large degree, the consciousness of individuals who are not part of collective struggles through organisational vehicles (e.g., political parties). The study has integrated ideologi-

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<sup>5</sup> Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

cal positions (left wing, communist, nationalist, liberal, conservative, independent) alongside class locations, to understand the extent to which the class location shapes individual intent to political ideas. The intersubjective experience of individuals has produced some contradictory results in relation to the quantitative data. For example, only 75,33% of the participants are understood to be in the working class, in relation to the 87,1% which the CYSTAT suggests are the employed individuals and thus mostly belong to the working class. The study goes on to suggest a number of reasons for this deviation, from characteristics in the sphere of reproduction (consumption practices, availability of resources and social climbing opportunities) to a subjective understanding of the class location within the labour process. Finally, a histogram of pro and anti-capitalist sentiments was compiled according to class segments (working, middle and capitalist). The study found that, in general, the Cypriot society -according to participant answers- is more pro-work than pro-capital, with most of the working class segment (despite ideological position) to offer pro-work statements, same as most of the middle segment (except the part of the segment which is closer to capitalist class location).

### **Conclusion**

The book opens a path where there was none, perhaps because no one deals with such a small economy as Cyprus', or because politically there might have been low interest in the production of such works. Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is overcoming such matters and conceptualising a way to offer to readers a genuine analytical approach to the study of class and class relations for the case of Cyprus, albeit containing just parts of the population strata. The marriage of quantitative data with the theoretical approach and then the trying to draw qualitative conclusions is done with intent and adds to the validity and richness of the study. This edition reminds the reader of a bygone era of academia, where consistency of rigorous analysis and theory were not sins in quantitative research, and quantitative data were not irrelevant to theoretical analysis or considered superfluous or, even worse, an obstruction to further clearing theoretical matters.

Contrary to a general defeatist feeling in the intellectual landscape of the island's (growing via capital investments in the last few years) academic life, or more precisely the direction of class analysis leaving room to other analytical lenses, such as that of economic development or nationalism, this book stands out by going another way. The fundamental idea of this work is that class analysis is still very much needed because society is still very much tied in class relations. Furthermore, class analysis

makes it indeed possible to understand economic relations, as well as developments in other areas of social, economic and political life, as class relations that derive from a fully integrated (and even expanded during the last decade) capitalist economy on the island, form the basis that permeates all aspects of life.

This work can be enriched with a series of other studies, perhaps of the characteristics of classes and strata, or delving into the tools it develops (e.g., the dimension of foreign-Cypriot workers, small and large businesses, more in-depth analysis of cases, etc.). There is certainly quite a gap in the literature for many of the things that this research brings to the fore. The book will appeal mostly to those interested in social/political science and humanities, political economy or economics. A weak point in the study would be the attempt to convert some of the statistical data collected by CYSTAT, aligning them to class analysis, which might have an effect on the accuracy of the results. At the same time, whilst the sample size was substantial for the type of study conducted (323 people), drawing generalisations should be taken with a slight reservation, at least until evaluative and comparative studies become available.

**Leandros Savvides**