

agrotika

A comparative study of rural social structures in the Balkans

by
Nicos Mouzelis

*Senior Lecturer in Sociology
London School of Economics*

In the introduction to his book *Agrotika*,* Karavidas mentions an interesting and typical incident: the long report which was the basis for the final work, and which had been financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, was lost by the Minister before he had read it. This incident not only shows the Greek State's notorious indifference to serious studies of modern Greek society, it also presaged what was to happen when the author had re-written and published his report in bookform: most of the intelligentsia simply ignored it, to the extent that today *Agrotika* is quite unknown, even among those who are seriously concerned with the study of Greek agriculture. This is totally unjustified. Not only does Karavidas help us to understand the fundamental problems of Greek rural life, but he has based his study on a methodology which, 45 years after its publication, is still surprisingly fruitful and relevant today. Introducing Karavidas' major work, I shall first give a brief outline of the structure and the basic arguments of the book, and then attempt to show in what way it can, even today, give very useful methodological lessons to the student of modern Greek society.

I

A. *Agrotika* is a highly serious and systematic study of the Greek countryside, based on the comparative examination of various pre-capitalist modes of production in the Balkans, and on the problems which arose when these modes of production were disrupted by the penetration of western capitalism. Karavidas distinguishes six basic socio-economic forms which, combining human labour and natural resources in a variety of ways, contributed to the formation of various styles and standards of living in the Balkan peninsula:

- (a) The *zadruga*, the Slav extended kinship system, which at the time when Karavidas was writing still operated not only in the central Balkans, but also in certain parts of Macedonia and Thrace.
- (b) The *tseligato*, a type of socio-economic organisation which associates a number of cattle farmers and their families on a cooperative basis.
- (c) The *chiflik*.
- (d) The Balkan *kephalohori* (head village).
- (e) The nuclear peasant family of the free smallholder.
- (f) The mixed urban-peasant family of small landowners, who live in the town but still cultivate their land with the help of relatives or other villagers.

* The full title of K. D. Karavidas' book is *Agrotika: Research on the Economic and Social Morphology in Greece and in the Neighbouring Slav Countries. A Comparative Study* (in Greek), State Publishing House, Athens, 1931, pp. XX + 698.

Karavidas systematically examines the structure and functions of each of the above forms by using four criteria of analysis:

First, the «containment capacity» of each form—i.e. in how far, from a demographic point of view, a system can keep or absorb the natural increase of its members.

Second, dynamism—i.e. the extent to which a socio-economic system has the capacity to reproduce not only its labour force, but also all the other resources (e.g. capital) needed for survival and expansion.

Third, the manner in which credit and insurance are organised within each socio-economic form.

Fourth, the relation of each of the six forms with the money/market economy.

Let us take as an example the *zadruga* on the one hand, and the small nuclear family, as the latter was functioning in inter-war Greece, on the other. Karavidas sees these two socio-economic forms as diametrically opposed in terms of all four of the criteria mentioned above. The *zadruga*, a form of extended patriarchal family, has a distinctly collective type of labour organisation. The land and other means of production do not belong to individuals but to the kinship collectively. Basic decisions about work organisation, expenses, investments, consumption, etc. are taken by the head of the family, usually the oldest or most able male member. This type of kinship organisation tends towards economic autarky. By combining cattle-farming, cereal cultivation and artisanal work, and by accepting a very hardworking and frugal way of life, the *zadruga* members manage to produce within the confines of their extended family almost all that is necessary for survival.

Applying Karavidas' fourth criterion, the *zadruga* is seen to be so self-sufficient that it succeeds in having considerable autonomy vis-à-vis market fluctuations. When conditions are unfavourable, it can easily dispense with the market system; when they are good, it can associate with it from a position of strength, having more to offer to the outside world than it needs from it (see *Agrotika*, p. 250). The *zadruga* family's relative autonomy is not confined to its relation with the market for agricultural and industrial goods, but extends to the insurance and capital markets, since the credit and insurance mechanisms necessary for the survival of this particular socio-economic form are to be found within its own structure. The *zadruga* patriarch will only very rarely resort for capital to the usurer or banker. Capital is accumulated through familial savings, with any surplus always put to the purchase of more land, animals etc., never spent on luxuries. In this way the *zadruga* can sustain itself through periods of crisis (e.g. bad harvests) without losing its independence.

It is precisely for these reasons that, according to Karavidas, those agricultural producers who were still operating within patriarchal forms of social organisation suffered much less from the disruptive effects of inter-war capitalism than those who, producing cash crops on small privately-owned plots, were left totally to the mercy of market fluctuations and of big capital.

Concerning Karavidas' other two criteria (containment capacity and dynamism), it is obvious from the above that the *zadruga* is capable of not only reproducing but also increasing its members without having to resort to any extra-familial help. In cases where a *zadruga* becomes over-populated, instead of its redundant members deserting the countryside for the cities, part of the family splits off to establish itself as a new *zadruga*, operating along the same lines. According to Karavidas it was not, therefore, surprising that in the regions being fought over by Greeks and Slavs, the «Greek ethnic element» was dominant in the urban centres, whereas the *zadruga*-organised Slav element was stronger in parts of the countryside (*Agrotika*, p. 240).

If we now consider the Greek nuclear peasant family, especially as it developed with the growth of capitalism, it becomes apparent at once that its basic structural characteristics are the exact opposite of those of the *zadruga*. True, before its entrance into the market system, the small landowning peasant family had functions similar to those of the *zadruga*: a combination of cattle-farming and agriculture, relative autarky, endogenous mechanisms for insurance and credit, etc. Karavidas did not, however, find this type of peasant family at all in post-1821 Greece. Due to the early commercialisation of the Greek economy as well as the large-scale destruction of property and human life during the protracted War of Independence, the Greek peasant family did not succeed in becoming a dynamic and relatively autonomous economic unit. In contrast to the *zadruga*, or even the well-rooted nuclear peasant family of Bulgaria which resisted the capitalist assault much longer, the Greek peasant family had already lost its self-containment in the nineteenth century and, increasingly so after the agrarian reforms of the twentieth century, was absorbed into the money economy as a very dependent unit, with highly disorganising results for its individual family members. In fact, the premature adoption of urban patterns of life, the rejection of its previously hard and frugal existence, the destruction of any built-in insurance and credit mechanisms, and the failure to replace such mechanisms with the establishment of autonomous collective credit organisations at the peasant community level, all these factors left the Greek peasantry at the mercy of urban capitalists and State bureaucrats.

Karavidas concludes his analysis of the inter-war Greek peasant family by pointing out that it had ceased to operate as an economically viable unit. It could no longer support its members, who simply used it as a temporary base before moving on to urban centres in Greece and abroad. Thus, not only had its containment capacity become minimal, but its dynamism was also extremely low, seeing that its restricted reproduction was ensured only by financial remittances originating from outside the village community.

B. Karavidas uses the same analytical method for studying the other socio-economic forms listed above with respect to their dynamism, containment capacity, credit-insurance mechanisms, and their relationship to the market. He also investigates, though less systematically, the interrelationships between these forms—for instance the linkages between the *tseligato* and the *chiflik* economies, their historical development, etc.

Despite the fact that throughout his book Karavidas emphasizes the superiority of the *zadruga* and other more autarkic forms of work organisation over those of the Greek nuclear peasant family, he is under no illusions as to the eventual fate of the former. He does acknowledge that the capitalist mode of production, which was already becoming dominant in the inter-war Balkan economies, leaves no room in the long run for the survival of such traditional forms of social organisation as the *zadruga* kinship system. His basic argument is rather that the comparative study of traditional socio-economic forms is useful because it throws into relief the structural weaknesses of the Greek nuclear peasant family, as well as showing how they might be remedied. According to Karavidas, such remedy does not, of course, lie in a regression to archaic, patriarchal forms of social organisation, but in an imaginative reshaping of Greek communal and co-operative traditions, with the objective of achieving an autonomous and dynamic rural economy.

More specifically, Karavidas' basic thesis is that capitalism in the Balkans has functioned differently and more negatively than in Western Europe. In the West, capitalism, as a relatively endogenous process, managed to build a new dynamic civilisation on the ruins of feudalism, with strong roots and virtually unlimited possibilities for expansion and domination. In the Balkan periphery, however, the imported western capitalism merely destroyed without building anew. Traditional socio-economic forms began to dissolve at a rapid pace, but what took their place was the systematic pillage and wastage of resources, the utter exploitation of the peasant majority by a small urban minority, the establishment of a pseudo-parliamentary system which can only be described as

a travesty of western democratic institutions, and the blind, indiscriminate imitation of western culture—an imitation which has finally resulted in the replacement of live, indigenous cultural forms by an empty pseudo-culture (see *Agrotika*, p. 604). Karavidas argues that inter-war Greece, where the process of «westernisation» had advanced more than in other Balkan countries, provides a striking practical example of all the negative elements of capitalist penetration. As already mentioned, he sees the solution not in a regression to indigenous/traditional institutions, but in employing them in new, imaginative ways. Thus, the strong communal traditions¹—either in the form of the peasant cereal-growing community (based on a successful combination of cattle-farming and agriculture, cf. p.p. 613-636), or in the form of a community based on resources gained by the cultivation of cash crops and from artisanal and commercial activities—can provide the basic elements for a new organisation of the rural economy. Without trying to revive defunct modes of credit and insurance, such an organisation must have as its primary goal the maximum autonomy of the village community and its independence from urban merchant capital and the State; it must operate in such a way that the fruits of peasant labour go to the direct producers themselves, rather than to parasitic intermediaries in the towns. Karavidas thinks that an autonomous co-operative community could give back to the nuclear peasant family the dynamism which it has lost in becoming dependent on the overcentralised State and on the overconcentrated urban capital; it could rejuvenate the peasant community in such a way that the countryside ceases to be an arena of social decay and a mere launching platform for migration.

II

A. The significance of Karavidas' fundamental thesis on the negative impact which western capitalism had and continues to have on the Greek rural economy, and his critical attitude towards the type of «modernisation» experienced by Greek society is not restricted to the time he was writing. It still has relevance even today. In order to fully understand the originality of *Agrotika*, it might be useful to look at it in relation to the sociology of development, a field of study which concerns itself with the same problems as were raised by Karavidas even then.

1. For more information on Karavidas' theories on the Greek commune, cf. his *Socialism and Communism* (in Greek), Koraes, Athens, 1930; and *Local Government and Greek Economic Regionalism* (in Greek), Athens, 1936.

After World War II, the basic theories on the development of third-world countries became gradually more optimistic. Influenced by nineteenth-century evolutionary theories, it was argued that with the spectacular development of western capitalism and technology, all poor countries must eventually go through the same stages as Western European societies — and in the process acquire the wealth and the political institutions of the West. Such theories saw modernisation, westernisation, development and progress as more or less one and the same thing.² On the ideological level, such theories continue to play a very important role in the arguments of all those whose primary aim is to imitate and «catch up with» the West. In Greece, for instance, the press and most political debates contain incessant reminders of the imperative need for the rapid development not only of the country's economy, but of all its political and cultural institutions as well, so that Greece can reach the institutional patterns and the levels of welfare and democracy achieved by the West-European social democratic societies.

To this type of attitude Karavidas is totally opposed. For him, the solution for Greece can never be found in the slavish imitation of western development, which could only result in economic dislocation, utter exploitation and disorganisation, and the final destruction of the few still surviving elements of our culture. For Karavidas Greece must either find itself a different type of developmental trajectory (one which is geared to the country's own specific needs and its indigenous forces), or it will ultimately become a sad caricature of the West — on the economic, political, and cultural level.

Karavidas' anti-evolutionist orientation does not differ much from neo-Marxist theories on the developmental problems which third-world countries are facing today, theories which first appeared in the 1960s as a reaction to the neo-evolutionist school. The facile optimism of the latter had begun to evaporate when it became obvious that the gap between poor and rich countries was not closing after all, and that third-world countries, entering the developmental race relatively late and forced to occupy a dependent, peripheral place in the international capitalist division of labour, are in fact following a developmental trajectory not only very different from the western one, but also much less advantageous for the mass of their populations. The neo-Marxist school holds that even when some third-world countries, with the help of foreign capital, achieve a notable degree of industrialisation (like Greece, Brazil, southern Korea), this type of capital accumulation

presents dislocations and weaknesses which make their industrialising process quite different from the western one. The economies of such late-comers are bedevilled by the persistent basic characteristics of underdevelopment: very low productivity in all sectors except big industry, low labour absorption of the capital-intensive industrial sector, an overinflated-parasitic service sector, and increasing balance of payment deficits which lead to financial dependence on the capitalist centres etc. etc.³

B. Of course, Karavidas was not the only Greek writer who regarded the «westernisation» of modern Greece with distrust and hostility. Ever since the opportunistic, arch-conservative reaction of the Greek-orthodox Church and the landowning classes against the western libertarian ideas and institutions which the western-educated Greek intelligentsia wished to impose on the new-born Greek State, there has been long and continuous criticism of western civilisation in Greece from both the Left⁴ and the Right.⁵ Karavidas' originality lies in that he did not resort to facile metaphysical or simply cultural critiques of western values and *Weltanschauung*; his attitude was based on a serious and systematic analysis of how production, as the foundation for the life style of specific groups, is organised: «Theoretically speaking, the kind of life led by any given human group is a result of its kind of work, and the kind of work depends, of course, on what kind of economic activity and technology is used by the group...» (p. 20).

I think that such an approach is not so very different from the Marxist methodology which investigates relations and forces of production in their specific social setting. Furthermore, Karavidas' approach to the relation between the pre-capitalist and capitalist mode of production in the inter-war Balkans is quite similar to the latest trends in the Marxist sociology of development — trends which lead to a systematic examination of the differences between developed/ western and underdeveloped/ peripheral capitalism in terms of *modes of production*, in terms of the different ways in which capitalist and non-capitalist modes articulate in the two cases.⁶ According to this

3. Representative works of the neo-Marxist school are: C. Furtado, *Development and Underdevelopment*, Univ. California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1964; P. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*, New York, 1957; A. Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, New York, 1969; and S. Amin, *L'accumulation à l'échelle mondiale*, Anthropos, Paris, 1970.

4. Cf. for instance C. Moskof, *National and Social Consciousness in Greece: 1830-1909* (in Greek), Salonica, 1972.

5. Cf. for instance D. Tsakonias, *The Sociology of the Modern Greek Culture* (in Greek), Athens, 1967, and also his *Introduction to the New Hellenism* (in Greek), Athens, 1971.

6. Some representative works of this new theoretical tendency are: I. Oxaal, T. Barnett, D. Booth, *Beyond the Sociology of Development*, Routledge, London, 1975; M. Bloch (ed.), *Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology*, Malaby Press, London, 1975;

2. A typical example of such a theory is W.W. Rostow's, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, Cambridge University Press, 1960.

view, Western European industrial capitalism, as a very gradual and relatively indigenous process, managed to both spread more widely and link itself organically with the rest of the economy and society. Using a more precise Marxist terminology, we can say that the capitalist mode of production dominant in the industrial sector either destroyed pre-capitalist modes (feudal, small-commodity production), or incorporated them in a «positive» manner—positive in the sense that small units of production for instance, whether in agriculture or industry, managed to specialise, increase their productivity, and establish *organic complementarity* with big industry. This meant that the effects of technological progress originating in the dynamic sectors quickly spread to the rest of the economy, with beneficial consequences on income distribution, the expansion of internal markets, etc. In contrast to this type of capitalist development, the «underdeveloped» type of industrialisation typically takes an *enclave* form, where the growing technologically advanced industrial sector cannot transfer its dynamism and high productivity to the rest of the economy.⁷

If we consider the growth of the Greek economy, for instance, we note the persistence of large sectors both in industry and agriculture where small-commodity production⁸ prevails, and where the links with the «modern industrial» sector are clearly negative; in that these sectors, without being destroyed, are permanently kept in a depressed and vegetative state, while their resources are systematically transferred through a variety of mechanisms to the technologically advanced sectors and abroad.⁹

M. Godelier, *Horizons, trajets marxistes en anthropologie*, Maspero, Paris, 1975; E. Terray, *Le Marxisme devant les sociétés primitives*, Paris, 1969; P. P. Rey, *Colonialisme, neo-colonialisme et transition au capitalisme*, Maspero, Paris, 1971.

For recent attempts to analyse the Greek social formation by using the mode-of-production concept, cf. M. Serafetinidis, *The Breakdown of Parliamentary Institutions in Greece*, Ph. D. thesis, London School of Economics, 1977; cf. also C. Vergopoulos, *The Agrarian Problem in Greece* (in Greek), Exantas, Athens, 1975.

7. For a systematic development of this point, cf. G. Kay, *Development and Underdevelopment: a Marxist Analysis*, London, 1975.

8. The small family economic unit which prevails in Greek agriculture and artisanal industry is not capitalist—in the sense that, although it participates fully in the market economy, it does not employ wage labour to any large extent: «Capitalist production only then really begins when each individual capitalist employs simultaneously a comparatively large number of labourers; when consequently the labour process is carried on an extensive scale and yields relatively large quantities of products. A greater number of labourers working together, at the same time, in the same place, in order to produce the same sort of commodity under mastership of one capitalist, constitute both historically and logically the starting-point of capitalist production.» (*Capital*, International Publishers, New York, 1967, vol. I, p. 322).

9. For a systematic analysis of these mechanisms in the Greek economy cf. Vergopoulos, *op. cit.*

In this process, those who are involved in the agricultural and artisanal sectors are, of course, increasingly marginalised, and their *relative* share in the national income decreases.¹⁰ It is not, therefore, surprising that social inequalities in peripheral capitalist formations are much greater than in the West, since to the inequalities generated within the capitalist mode of production are added those created by the vast production differentials between the capitalist and non-capitalist sectors.

This basic conception of the radical differences between western and peripheral capitalism, which has only recently been systematised, is given perfectly clear expression in *Agrotika*. It is not merely implied—as when, for instance, the author shows how the State, in collaboration with big capital, absorbs any surplus generated in the agricultural sector—but fully spelled out when he compares the Balkan with the Western European social structures. For instance, referring to the 1929 world crisis, Karavidas argues that the form this dramatic recession took in Western Europe was completely different from that in the Balkans: «Whereas in the fully developed capitalist economies of Western Europe—Germany and England, for instance—this very serious crisis had an «organic», «natural» character, this was not the case in our eastern, backward countries. Here the introduction of capitalist and related parliamentary institutions was a matter of putting the cart before the horse, instead of letting the organic transition from patriarchal and feudal to capitalist forms, and the real formation of an indigenous capital take their natural course... There is no single, simple explanation for the crisis in our countries. On the one hand it can be seen as a non-organic repercussion of the general crisis being experienced by capitalism, and on the other as the consequence of the general anarchy which was the result of our parliament attempting to cope with the recession in a onesided manner, not taking into account the whole set of factors which accounted for it» (p. XVI).

The emphasis in *Agrotika* on modes of production and their differing articulation in the West and the Balkans helped Karavidas to stay clear of the idealism and pseudo-romanticism so often to be found in the anti-western tradition of the Greek intelligentsia—the idea that the clock of history can be turned back and ideas and life styles revived which were congruent only in pre-capitalist contexts: «I must right from the start protest against the superficial criticism that my thesis is informed by romantic and sterile nostalgia for the past» (p. 16). In fact,

10. For statistical evidence and a more detailed analysis of this point, cf. N. Mouzeliis, «Capitalism and Dictatorship in Post-war Greece», *New Left Review*, March-April 1976, pp. 68 ff.

Karavidas' analysis is anything but romanticising. He concludes *Agrotika* by demanding a new way and new solutions to reconcile the technological progress and specialisation of western capitalism with the autonomy of our own rural economy and culture.

C. Taking into account that a country's industrialisation, in whatever way it may be achieved, always implies a drastic reduction of the rural population and is always a very painful process for the peasantry,¹¹ there is no doubt that even with these limitations a number of solutions to the «agrarian problem» are possible, some more and some less favourable for the population which remains in the shrinking primary sector. There is also no doubt that the solution which prevailed in Greece was, as Karavidas rightly argues, indeed very unfavourable, and that there was, and probably still is, room for a more positive solution. In other words, the need for a radical change in the town-village relationship, the need to put an end to the gradual decay of rural life, the need for increasing the economic, political and cultural autonomy of the countryside, these are general objectives today which very few would contest. The issue becomes more involved, however, as soon as one tries to identify with greater precision what form this rural autonomy should take, how viable it could be within the context of peripheral capitalism, and by what means it might be achieved. It is with regard to these problems, especially the last, that Karavidas' study shows certain weaknesses.

In what way could Karavidas' principles be applied to result in a substantive strengthening of the rural economy? The author of *Agrotika* envisages such fundamental changes as coming «from above», chiefly from the good will of the State. To be quite fair, what he actually says is that the sudden interruption (after the decision of the US government in 1922) of the Greek migratory movement to the United States might force the Greek State and the ruling classes to create a new setting in the countryside which would stop the rural exodus and offer the rural producers a more profitable and autonomous way of life. It is from this perspective that Karavidas proceeds to argue that «the rural class in Greece cannot rely on its own forces, and there is no reason why it should form a separate organisation; circumstances are pushing it towards rapid specialisation which will make it more urban, so that the country as a whole can be ruled on the basis of principles and not on the basis of the class struggle» (p.164).

The developments which have taken place since Karavidas wrote these lines demonstrate that his out-

look in this instance was rather utopian. The author of *Agrotika* not merely proposes small *ad hoc* changes within the *status quo* (e.g. better prices for agricultural produce, cheaper credit, etc.)—he proposes radical changes, resulting in the actual restructuring of the State apparatus, of the balance of forces between town and village, between the peasant and the capitalist class. This is to say, Karavidas asks for a different articulation between industrial capitalism and the simple-commodity production prevailing in agriculture. If, however, one takes into account the basic structure and dynamics of peripheral capitalism—i.e. its tendency to concentrate all resources in the hands of a few capitalists both indigenous and foreign, to dramatically accentuate class and regional inequalities, to make the State and monopoly capital interdependent, etc.—it is politically very naive to believe that such powerful tendencies can be reversed without any autonomous political organisation of the exploited classes (in both the countryside and the towns). The depopulation of the Greek countryside and the decay of the peasant community and family are not unrelated to the failure of the Greek peasantry to organise itself in a politically autonomous manner in either the inter-war or the post-war periods. This precisely is the reason why it is utopian to expect that really radical changes—such as Karavidas proposes—can come from above. The strengthening of village life and the growth of rural autonomy (assuming it can be achieved at all) will never arrive as a gift from the ruling class to the peasants; it can only be won by the peasants themselves through class-organisation and class-struggle against their exploiters.

As soon as this is acknowledged to be true, a basic contradiction becomes apparent in Karavidas' work. On the one hand he is opposed to the interventionist and overcentralised State and criticises the peasants' propensity to expect everything from the State; on the other hand he pins all his hopes on intervention by the State, as the only agent capable of bringing about the necessary reforms. Therefore, it is not only the Greek peasants who, lacking any real «peasant consciousness», expect everything from the State, Karavidas is guilty of the same irrational hope.

D. The summary of my argument so far that Karavidas is too optimistic when he thinks that his radical proposals for the solution of Greece's agrarian problems can come from above and without any development of class consciousness and organisation among the peasants themselves. Consideration of the economic and political developments since the 1930s makes for an even more pessimistic thesis: that in the long run and within the context of peripheral capitalism, the autonomous political organisation of the urban and rural working classes is very difficult

11. On this point cf. B. Moore Jr., *The Social Origin of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Allen Lane, London, 1967.

indeed, if not outright impossible. A politically autonomous working class would demand, as a minimum requirement, the drastic reduction of social inequalities and the establishment of a welfare state. But if western capitalist societies with their relatively well-rooted, indigenous capitalist class can afford a welfare state without losing their economic dynamism, the same is not true of underdeveloped capitalist societies. In the latter, a radical reduction of inequalities would destroy the «favourable climate» for private investments, and provoke the flight of both indigenous and foreign capital, on the good will of which the dynamism of the economy depends.

In other words, in contrast to conditions in the West, the autonomous political organisation of the rural and urban working classes—a basic precondition for the revival of the countryside—is incongruent with the rapid growth of peripheral capitalism, the dynamism of which (as is becoming increasingly obvious in countries like Greece, Brazil, Chile, etc.) is founded on the political repression of the masses. This repression is either direct (dictatorship) or indirect (integration of the rural population into the political process through bourgeois clientelistic parties). The indirect manipulation of the rural population was very apparent in inter-war Greece, where the peasantry, having failed to create a strong peasant party, was drawn into an intra-bourgeois debate (the monarchy issue) which had very little to do with its real class interests and problems. The direct type of control became manifest in neighbouring Bulgaria, where the peasants had managed to build up a powerful peasant party which seriously tried to promote the interests of its members; however, such an autonomous political organisation presented so great a threat to the *status quo* that it was forcefully suppressed.¹²

This is why the inter-war Balkan societies have been ruled by pseudo-parliamentary regimes, a system of government liable to transform itself into a straightforward dictatorship whenever there is a serious possibility of the working classes autonomously participating in the political process to demand the kind of changes proposed in Karavidas' book.

I believe that in the final analysis Karavidas' inability to see the political dimensions of the Greek agrarian problem more realistically is due, apart from ideological reasons, also to his methodology, that is to say to his tendency to examine the various modes of production in agriculture in isolation from those of the total social formation and its dynamic trajectory

as a whole. Such a more comprehensive perspective would involve not only a more systematic study of the linkages between industrial capitalism, as it operates in the urban centres, with simple-commodity agricultural and artisanal production; it would also require class analysis—i.e. the study of how the social classes developed in Greece, how they organised or failed to organise themselves politically, their relations with the State, etc. (By class analysis, I mean the study of the ever-changing relationship between modes of production and the social groupings which emerge within them; the study of how the overall articulation of the various modes of production shapes such groupings, as well as the ways in which the latter, by means of the class struggle, try to either maintain or change it.)

Agrotika quite rightly points out that Greece has never had the type of class struggles known in developed capitalist countries. But this does not imply the conclusion which Karavidas arrives at: that Greek society has no classes and that, *ipso facto*, social reform cannot come about through class struggle.¹³ The great difference between western capitalism and Greek capitalism does not lie in Greece having no distinct classes; what it means is simply that in Greece the links between class locations and political practices take forms different from those of developed western capitalism—forms that should be regarded as central to any analysis or modern Greek society.¹⁴

E. It must be admitted that my criticism of Karavidas' methodology is rather unfair. I expect that, half a century ago, he should have used a methodology that is ignored even by present-day students of Greek agriculture, and I assess a work written in the 1930s by the standards of the 1970s. But if these standards reveal certain shortcomings in *Agrotika*, the same criteria demonstrate that Karavidas' work provides methodological tools which can be very useful in the context of present-day Greek sociology. Perhaps the most positive contribution of *Agrotika* is its systematic use of the *comparative method*. If one takes into account how little this method is employed in current studies of modern Greece, *Agrotika* more than any other Greek work demonstrates the fruitfulness of this methodology for the examination of Greek problems.

In fact, existing studies in the problem area with which Karavidas concerns himself can be grouped in two categories: (a) numerous anthropological works which examine the social structure of the Greek village in depth, but lack all historical or comparative

12. For a comparative study of Greek and Bulgarian peasants along such lines, cf. N. Mouzelis, «Greek and Bulgarian peasants: aspects of their sociopolitical organisation during the inter-war period», in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Jan., 1976.

13. This thesis is developed more fully by Karavidas in his *Socialism and Communism*, *op. cit.*

14. Cf. for instance J. Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage*, Clarendon Press, Oxford J. 1964.

perspective;¹⁵ and (b) statistical studies which, if they provide comparative data at all, do so rather superficially and arbitrarily, in that they measure certain variables without giving any serious consideration to their overall socio-economic context. It is precisely on this point that Karavidas shows up the uselessness of statistics which, for instance, measure the standard of living and the agricultural income in various Balkan countries without taking into account variations in the degree of the peasant families' autarky (cf. *Agrotika*, pp. 3-9).

To a large extent, *Agrotika* avoids the weaknesses of both of the above approaches. It presents us with an analysis of the Greek countryside that neither the myopic anthropological studies of the Greek village, nor the dry, a-theoretical measurements of statistics have managed to surpass. If there is any reason why all those interested in the study of Greek society should read and re-read Karavidas' work, it is because *Agrotika* is the best illustration yet of how fruitful it is to compare the Greek social structure with

15. I do not, of course, wish to deny that by the standards of present-day empirical sociological research, Karavidas' manner of collecting and using a variety of data to support his theory shows many methodological shortcomings. Despite his backing up his arguments with empirical evidence (e.g. statistics, detailed reports of government officials on peasant-family expenditures, income, etc.), the author never explains how exactly he collected his data, nor does he make systematic reference to other works which have influenced his thinking. However, such drawbacks do not detract from the fruitfulness of the comparative method which Karavidas employs so very successfully.

the social structures of societies which have a similar historical and cultural background. It is my considered opinion that serious and systematic comparisons along such lines are the only way for arriving at a true understanding of the social structure of modern Greece. They are the only way to find out which of the numerous problems besetting Greece today are experienced in common with other societies at a similar stage of development/underdevelopment, and which constitute specific characteristics of the Greek social formation.

To give a simple example, I think that the best approach to understanding why inter-war Greece, in contrast to other Balkan societies, never had a serious peasant movement, is to compare the Greek case with Bulgaria which had the most powerful peasant movement in the Balkans. Also, I readily admit that I learned more about the Greek village and the peasant family by reading Karavidas' comparative remarks on the *zadruga*, the Bulgarian and the Greek nuclear peasant family, than from all the statistical and anthropological studies of the Greek countryside taken together.

Unfortunately, serious comparative studies are as rare as they are useful. That is why I wish to conclude by emphasising once more that Karavidas' book is of great significance not only for its contribution to the rural sociology of modern Greece, but because, four decades after its publication, it still provides the best methodological directives for the study of modern Greek society.