

# Review of: "Alas (Hellas), there is no hope: It's not a crisis, it's a culture"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

**Review of paper by Peter J. Stavroulakis called "Alas (Hellas), there is no hope: It's not a crisis, it's a culture" posted on Qeios on 26 August 2023**

This is quite an unusual paper, for many reasons. The author raises an issue of quantitative (financial) evaluations vs. qualitative (cultural) assessments of behavior and valuation, regarding the limits of financial measures of social and individual well-being. The paper offers a critical view of Greek culture reflected in family upbringing and the socialization of males and females. Although I am not qualified or well-enough informed to offer any opinion as to the accuracy of his portrait of Greek family and cultural dynamics, the author's portrayal of this subject does come across as credible and offers an unusual perspective on the Greek financial crises.

I like the way the author starts his paper with a discussion of love, and about how important it is to any properly-functioning society. It's not exactly clear where he is going with this surprising introduction, as the paper then turns to a discussion of the current financial situation in Greece along with its social and political origins. But then the author addresses these problems, especially those of achieving sustainable growth, from a different vantage:

*"...These structural inefficiencies ... entail a qualitative inquiry within the fabric of Greek society; not within the economy, but within culture herself. Then, systemic hypocrisy would pose as the true hurdle for sustainable growth. The hypocrisy of systems is entrenched ... through nearly all aspects of societal structures. Hypocrisy within systems, will give way to denial. ... If society herself is hypocritical, and its people in denial, a lot of work is required to steer towards health. If one adds some sense of collective entitlement to the mix, disaster looms."*

The author then outlines his argument, that is presented in three sequential stages, in this way:

*"This research consists of subtext and footnotes within the Hellenic society; aspects that are veiled and lay mostly dormant within the progression of daily life. The results seemed to fall within three classes: What manifests itself within families, the absence of qualitative focus within global systems, and the absconding nature of value creation within culture. These results, are compiled to render three narratives... Therefore, the first section mainly consists of the findings from participant observation and in-depth interviews with social scientists. The second section pertains mainly to extracts from interviews with economists and officers from the private and public sector. The third section includes a major aspect of culture, that pertains to cultural indifference with respect to the process of value creation [as] a general extract of the research."*

So the overall argument is evidently based on observation and interviews with scientific experts in each of these three areas of inquiry, as they illuminate problems identified in Greek society and culture. In the first section of this argument, the author starts with family cultures.

### Section One: The Mother Hellene and Societal Dysfunction

Here the author presents a compelling image of the contradictory upbringing and acculturation of Greek women as an important aspect of the Greek financial crisis in which no equilibrium can be established or found, due to the contradictory nature of Greek female culture. The results of this pattern of upbringing are described in this way:

*“Thus, we arrive at ... a main culprit of this society in (perpetual) crisis, the mother. This type of mother makes sure that her daughter grows up to her immaculate image and likeness; to ensure the survival of her dysfunction. What will happen to her son, though, is a completely different story. The Greek mother will make sure that she is a slave to her son. She will provide intangible and tangible care, in excess, to promote the veneer of care, and construct her alibi. This alibi is very much required, since latently to the veneer of care, she will abuse the son ... in a completely different manner than her daughter. The father, on the other hand, will make sure that his son becomes a man's man. The world wherein the male will be brought up in might be exceedingly cruel and stereotypical. The image of toughness is enforced, and all feelings of empathy, understanding, and humanity must give way to competition and the constant need to project (perceived) masculinity, superiority, and uniqueness of the self. So, as the daughter grows up unable to love, and share those most basic human necessities, intimacy and companionship, so does the son, but in a different respect.”*

*“The male is catered to dismiss any emotional aspect as effeminate, creating a constant struggle of the need to prove himself. The smothering of the soul will blossom in such an excess, that it will dominate the boy's life. In addition, the mother goes into overdrive to prove to her son that the care that she provides, will always be required. ... It's a kind of female competition at work, only this is exhibited through the destruction of her child. It's as though the mother is ensuring that the only substantial female presence in her boy's (whole) life, will be herself, and none other. ... The father will enforce this stereotype, as well as incentivize insensitive behaviour... so ... that the male will remain ... male. As if masculinity is a trait that can only be exhibited in excess, brutality, and cruelty, when in fact, masculinity only means care.”*

*“In a system where emotion is penalized, and insensitivity is the norm, humanity has no room to manoeuvre. The Greek male is brought up with a patronizing feeling of superiority and entitlement, but in the dysfunctional and delusional respect that everything in life is taken care of by someone else. Everything is the fault of someone other; there is no responsibility lying anywhere in the mind of a typical Greek man, since everything that might be wrong is the fault of someone else. The Greek male is instilled with the notion that he was put on this earth to have servants, and live off the fat of the land. Women are there to be considered as quasi-slaves... At the same time, the male cannot feel functional love for them, since his emotions have been crippled. But ... the male is just afraid. The masculine dominating explosion of testosterone is just a veneer, and the result of abuse. Behind this façade lays a soul that has been tormented, and never left to develop freely. The male is afraid of his true feelings, afraid of living, and afraid of women altogether. The stereotype of the loving mother ... gives way to an inherent fear towards feeling (or admitting feeling) towards women. ... Greek society is a veiled matriarchy...”*

*“The Greek mother ... holds a clear responsibility for the state of the culture, that may disguise itself as only in financial crisis. ... The effects of this dysfunction ... follow Greeks in the progression of their life. In school, a psychotic system makes them detest knowledge. ... This hypocrisy continues in higher education, where the systemic failures have well hooked the students into chasing the face value of a diploma, and not the knowledge it should represent. If family fails, and education follows, then, the window of hope might be closing at an alarming rate for a society. It is within these systemic societal discrepancies that the threads of financial crises may reside. ...”*

I've quoted extensively from this section, because the author's analysis here is meant to establish a frame for the rest of the paper, regarding patterns of pathological culture behind the financial crises suffered by the Greeks. Section Two develops this argument of financial crises stemming from “the degradation of values within family, education, humanity and culture, to the point that this deterioration is evident in metrics, financial ratios, and growth rates.”

## **Section Two: Absence of the Qualitative within an Ambiguous Quantitative Context**

*“... Any civilization that has contributed even a tiny iota towards the evolution of humanity has done so through a culture of humanity and investment within all that is good in the human psyche. Simultaneously, a civilization within any type of crisis is nothing but the mere manifestation of culture discrepancies and the absence of humanity. ... That is why one may want to ponder ... the parameters that accentuate, facilitate, and perpetuate the degradation of values within family, education, humanity and culture, to the point that this deterioration is evident in metrics, financial ratios, and growth rates.”*

The author continues by discussing the important difference between mitigation of an existing crisis and the prevention of a potential crisis, where political benefits accrue from mitigation while rewards from prevention remain invisible. “...Culture will ... dictate the difference between prevention and mitigation.” The paper goes on to discuss the impact of children's insecure sense of identity on their cultural behavior. “Thus, the paradigm diverges from individuals maturing and seeking their own identity in life, to [an] individualism ... taken up by insecurity and fear of the self. People don't mature, and don't claim their happiness. Instead, they'd rather hide behind their own veneer of a personality construct...” This sort of isolated individualism corrupts its healthier versions.

“For all these reasons, it is not extraordinary to expect crises to prevail within modern economies.” These crises succeed when societies ignore the hidden causes of crisis dynamics. The author then contrasts a productive and happy culture in which people look out for each other to an authoritarian culture that emphasizes obedience, where people surrender their own value systems to such authority and so do not take any responsibility for resulting outcomes. That type of society loses itself in hypocrisy, and the only solution is for a culture to become more humane truly instead of falsely and hypocritically through pretense. “Hypocrisy is the element that allows a society to function with the veneer of humanity, when its operations and dynamics may be very far from anything even resembling humanity.” It is this hypocrisy that underlies a cultural crisis in Greece. “If the one modern prevalent mechanism within humanity is the constant rejection of one's inner truth ... then we are all just a legion of hypocrites... Social pain is the new pandemic, and it is only exacerbated by mitigating rather than preventing, and by supporting dysfunctional individualism.” These sociopathic cultural problems support an “excessive devotion to numbers” at the expense of “quality.” Financial accounting was

originally created “to promote transparency and efficiency,” but is too often misdirected to serve hypocritical ends, so illustrating “a much more general, and extensive crisis ... at the nexus of ... culture and economy.”

The paper then proceeds to its third section on value creation and its “elusive nature” within the Greek psyche. A dishonest culture will deteriorate through role model and other effects.

### Section Three: The Elusive Nature of Value Creation

“Management studies will tell us that ... culture is the most stubborn of aspects, when it comes to evolution and introspectiveness.” Greeks often see lawbreaking as endearing “if you don’t get caught. ... This cultural aspect can be observed in ... Hellenic society ... from ... minor societal traits, such as respect towards pedestrians, or picking up after dogs, to the major decisions affecting the fate of the nation.” Indeed, in the Greek case, “bureaucracy assists and fuels all sorts of systemic discrepancies. ... The result, is a state and a system that utilizes any means possible to just hold to its power, to accentuate its reach and mandate, perpetuating inequality and the crisis, to whole new levels. This Greek system more closely resembles feudalism than democracy.”

The paper then contrasts management science, in its creation of value, with public administration which “seeks to create issues, so that itself must be called in to solve them.” But downsizing the public sector will likely not work as a remedy, “since the major governing aspect of its dysfunction is not size, but the absence of a culture of value creation.” The paper continues with this: “The dynamics ... of this outcome ... result [from] a clash... Feelings of superiority are predominant, but ... no responsibility follows. ... This irrationality is masked by immaturity and denial ... rooted within the very fabric of the Hellenic society, and [they] result in the modern Hellenic culture.” Consequently, in such a hypocritical culture, “the result will always provide dysfunction. Thus, the Greek results ... simply portray the clash of a society striving for identity, trying to be something she is not, and manifesting herself in a financial crisis, in perpetuity.”

So on the basis of these three series of observations based on interviews with relevant scientists, the paper reaches its conclusions.

### Conclusions

The paper suggests that the Hellenic crisis is not really financial or quantitative at all, but rather resides in Hellenic culture and thus in qualitative values. Quoting Lionel Trilling (1979) on the importance of a coherence between cultures and values, the paper asserts that: “This harmony and accordance is absent, and will remain, so long as mitigatory action goes against culture, and a society is not ready to look at its culture in the mirror, without hypocrisy.”

*“The Greek culture ... has been forced to wear a cloak that doesn’t fit. Instead of being left to evolve systemically, to understand its weaknesses and overcome any threats, it must constantly prove it wants to become something it cannot. The world, and Greece herself, must be left ... to reflect introvertly with respect to mistakes, learn from them, and draft a way forward; Greece should ponder her true aspirations and build upon her numerous and invaluable assets, instead of relinquishing them ... in the pretence of crisis mitigation.”*

The paper calls upon family and education as the basis for renewal and a refocus “from financial crises to crises of the soul of society.” What is needed is to “facilitate and support all that is good within human beings.” This frame of reference, here applied to Greece, “may be applicable in other societies as well. These aspects point to a crisis that is deeply rooted within the fabric of societal dynamics, and included in both micro- and macroeconomy aspects.” So the paper ends.

What I most liked about this paper is its focus on the underlying cultural aspects of financial crises that are almost always framed on their economic characteristics with no attention to their sociological origins. As an economist strongly interested in the underpinning cultural aspects of economics, I commend this author for looking beneath these superficial financial and monetary (quantitative) issues into the behavioral and sociological aspects of this financial crisis. This is, of course, where the real causes of such problems originate. To ignore them is futile and takes us nowhere. Economic cultures are important to give us a deeper understanding of social behaviors and why they can be problematic in their financial, social and ecological outcomes.

Thank you so much, Dr. Stavroulakis, for a most interesting read!

One final and relatively minor suggestion is that you might seek out the use of a good editor. For example, your use of commas is excessive and overdone. It damages the pacing of an otherwise well-argued and interesting paper. In some of the excerpted quotations, I removed some of the many overused commas from your text...

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