

Nostalgia as a Critique of Europe: Reflections from Contemporary Greece

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The last 15 years have witnessed a wave of nostalgia for the recent past in Greece. This nostalgia is boosted by social media, especially Facebook, and revolves around the rising consumer standards that the country experiences in the first three decades after its entry in the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1981. Drawing on media material and surveys, this article discusses this phenomenon, focusing on whether this nostalgia represents a cultural response to Europe and Europeanization. Through a historically empathetic analysis, the article argues that this critique focuses on participation in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), a choice that Greek society largely sees as harmful. In this vein, the drachma, Greece's currency until 2002, is viewed nostalgically and identified with prosperity.

Introduction

This article focuses on Greece and discusses how nostalgia about the late twentieth century emerged as a critical cultural response to Europeanization, the politics of the European Union and the EMU. This period coincided with the popularization of social media, which multiplied nostalgic voices. The article adds to the examination of the relations between nostalgia and politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These relations have been examined in Eastern Europe, where this period coincides with the transition from communism to capitalism (see, for example, Todorova and Gille 2010; Pehe 2020), but have received less attention in European countries that experienced milder political conditions in the 1980s and 1990s. There is almost no research on whether and how democratically elected

socialist governments in late-twentieth century Europe are remembered and this article invites an international dialogue in this direction.

Greece joined the EEC in 1981 as the only European country that transitioned from a military regime to a parliamentary democracy functional enough to permit full membership in the EEC after only seven years. This entry consolidated contacts that had started in the 1950s (Tsakas 2022) and inaugurated the EEC's widening to the South, which continued with Spain and Portugal in 1986. Europeanization is a term ranging over history, culture, society, and politics, generating change affecting relations, institutions, ideas, and interests (Featherstone 2003: 3). It is a process through which policies, norms, and supranational institutions influence and shape domestic policies, economic behaviours, and lifestyles. In Greece, the term has marked politics, consumption, and lifestyle since the 1980s. In the early 1980s, participation in the ECC was criticized (Nafpliotis 2018), but public opinion embraced the EEC by the end of the decade (Dimitras 1992). Greece was still an emotionally unstable post-authoritarian society, where fears were succeeded by wellbeing-focused anxieties (Zestanakis 2024a); unexpectedly, Europeanization embarrassed sections of society that were anxious about the future, for example, from the perspectives of industry or changes in consumption.

The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in the 1970s and 1980s boosted critical positioning of the EEC (Nafpliotis 2018). PASOK's share of votes rose from 25.34% in 1977 to 48.06% in 1981. PASOK stated that entry into the EEC should be decided in a referendum, but never called one after it came into power in 1981. PASOK became more Europhile in the 1990s. Its governments (1993–2004) strongly supported the European Union (EU) project. Greece became a founding member of the Eurozone in 2002 and was a very Europhile country until the beginning of the debt crisis of the early 2010s.^a Trust in the EU fell below 20% between 2012 and 2017, when the crisis ruined living standards (Balampanidis 2019: 92). Simultaneously, Greece was internationally stigmatized as a spoiled and counter-productive society; this situation favoured anti-Europeanism (Kalantzis 2015; Mylonas 2014). The bibliography on the Greek debt crisis is extensive (e.g., Doxiadis and Placas 2018; Siani-Davies 2017) and cannot be analysed here. I define 'crisis' as the period between the 2008 revolt and the end of the bailout agreements in 2018. After 2018, Greece witnessed higher optimism (not even the COVID-19 pandemic overturned this trend; Zestanakis 2023) but still is ranked 64th on the world happiness index, lower than several developing countries such as Honduras or Uzbekistan. Unemployment is currently around 11% (one of the highest in the EU), while the cost of living has increased significantly in the last two years, rendering Greece an expensive country to live in (Bali 2023). Greece expects to return to pre-crisis economic standards only in the 2030s (Thomsen 2019). To briefly remind the reader of some data, unemployment rose from 7.8% in 2008 to 27.5% in 2013 before it fell to 16.3% in 2020; the average net salary, yearly income, fell from €21,232 in 2008 to €17,310 in 2013. The proportion living below the poverty level increased from 28.1% to 36% in the same period. Facing crises stresses subjects (Enander 2021): unsurprisingly, depression, and suicides rose (Economou *et al.* 2011; Siani-Davies 2017: 283).

What makes the Greek case riveting? In the first half of the 2010s, several EU countries experienced financial crises. Ireland witnessed a banking crisis when institutions faced collapse due to insolvency during the recession, and the Irish government provided a €64 billion bank bailout. Portugal underwent a crisis, including an international bailout and austerity. Spain faced a housing bubble. Dissatisfaction with EU politics has been widespread since then. The low turnout in the 2024 elections for the European parliament in Southern Europe (e.g., 49.42% in Spain, 36.52% in Portugal) or the Balkans (e.g., 33.78% in Bulgaria, 21.35% in Croatia) confirms that. In Greece, only 41.37% voted, whereas participation was above 70% in the 1980s and 1990s. Greece shows low levels of trust in the EU and optimism about its future, even compared with other crisis-stricken countries (45% in Greece, but 66% in Spain, 69% in Portugal, and 84% in Ireland; European Union 2023). This high distrust makes Greece a special case whose relationships with the EU deserve analysis; this article adds to this, mostly through a historical and cultural studies lens.

The analysis has limitations. It is not a *strictu sensu* digital ethnographic study; it draws on nostalgic Facebook communities but does not examine the organization of these communities in depth from a media studies perspective. This would be beyond the scope of an article-length study, as these communities are huge, and would require additional research such as interviews with moderators. Data were collected through invisible observation: the examination of internet sites by an ethnographer whose presence is physically invisible (Garton 1999; Richman 2007). Generalizability is important, ensuring that the findings can be meaningful beyond specific examples (Yin 2014: 4–12). Representative sampling does not fit all research situations (Bauer and Aarts 2000: 19–23) and does not apply to this study. Representability is practically impossible for researchers dealing with large body sources, such as those working with digital ethnography findings in the big data era. In nostalgic communities, some users contextualize experiences to make their arguments more convincing, but while nostalgic testimonies are still emotional discourses, their factual validity is not guaranteed. Such testimonies are not a sample from which quantitative data can be distilled, as may happen with other sources such as oral interviews or autobiographical texts (Papadogiannis 2022: 334–335). The posts represent a collection of materials from which the researcher makes inevitably arbitrary selections. When contextualized and combined with other findings (e.g., surveys), they provide nuanced understandings of nostalgia.

Historicized content analysis is also important in this article's methodology. Such analysis enables researchers to analyse phenomena in depth, challenging established conventions and utilizing habitual procedures to make valid inferences and create information from text. Such inferences can be about senders, audiences, and, of course, the messages themselves. Historicized content analysis discloses differences in communication content, compares levels of communication and media, audits communication content against objectives, identifies the intentions and features of the communicators, determines the psychological state of groups or

persons, detects propaganda, describes attitudinal responses to communication, reflects cultural patterns of individuals, groups, or societies, reveals the focus of individual, group, or societal attention, and describes trends in communication (Weber 1990: 9).

After this introduction, the article has three sections. The first of these sections presents discussions on nostalgia and explains why this emotion can be examined as a cultural response to political and economic challenges. The second section explains why nostalgia can be approached as a critical cultural response to Europeanization. The third section has a more specific focus and discusses nostalgia for the drachma as a critical component of this nostalgia.

Nostalgia as a Cultural Response

Nostalgia is a developing interdisciplinary research field (Hviid-Jacobsen 2022). The bibliography cannot be presented in detail here.^b The term was coined in the seventeenth century by Johannes Hofer, who described nostalgia as an ailment or illness identified among Swiss mercenaries stationed away from home (Hviid Jacobsen 2022: 7–8). Then, nostalgia was a state of anguish associated with the forced disconnection from the social environment and was considered a disease or a form of melancholy (Clarke 2007; Fuentenebro de Diego and Valiente Ots 2014). Since the late twentieth century, nostalgia has increasingly preoccupied researchers. Davies (1979) identified three types of nostalgia: simple nostalgia (sees the past as always better), reflexive nostalgia (investigates past ‘truths’), and interpretative nostalgia (seeks to elucidate different meanings of nostalgia). For Boym (2001: 42–57; see also Hviid-Jacobsen and Wilson 2022: 92–93), nostalgia is a yearning for a different and ‘slower’ time. Boym identifies two kinds of nostalgia. First, restorative nostalgia is a pursuit to return to a lost condition. Those experiencing restorative nostalgia do not see themselves as nostalgic, but as pursuing truth. Second, reflective nostalgia is the aching and longing associated with remembrance, and the idea that multiple pasts exist and compete. Rather than searching for truths about the past, reflective nostalgia involves considerations of the passage of time and how individual recollections are shaped. Restorative nostalgia characterizes national and nationalistic revivals and is often connected to state-level phenomena such as nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism, while the latter represents a more critical engagement with the past (Boym 2001: 41). Nostalgia obtained a positive and uplifting psychological status in the late twentieth century (Scanlan 2004; Weiss and Dube 2021) and now is a phenomenon able to explain trends in politics and pop culture and interactions among senses and memories (Becker 2018; Swenson 2022) and a lucrative concept in marketing and entertainment (Bowman and Wulf 2023; Hartmann and Brunk 2019; Makai 2018). Nostalgic memories may still connote joyful past times contrasting with a stressful present (Weiss and Dube 2021). This is crucial, as nostalgic feelings may arise because of dissatisfaction with current politics.

Hence, nostalgia for a less European past can be seen as a cultural response to (disappointment with) the EU.

Culture is a set of values, assumptions, beliefs, orientations to life, behaviours, and procedures shared by people (Matsumoto and Juang 2003: 5–9; Spencer-Oatley 2008: 3). Cultural responses indicate how individuals and groups react and interact with trends and phenomena, and are embedded in wider historical frameworks. This includes responses to cultural norms and practices, traditions, beliefs, and values. The social context and historical background influence how cultural responses are manifested. Emotions affect the politicization of concepts (Van Rythoven 2018), and the politicization of European issues intensifies during crises (Gellwitzki and Houde 2021; Hutter and Kriesi 2019). Perceptions of the EU or Europeanization are affected by politics, and nostalgia, as a politicized emotion, can influence how such concepts are perceived. The social media boom of the 2010s – especially Facebook, which forges communities around textual and (audio)visual stimuli – caused nostalgia, especially for the late twentieth century, to skyrocket. Such communities permit us to understand how societies (re)conceptualize the past or even imagine the future (Niemeyer and Siebert 2023; Niemeyer and Uhl 2024) and to delve into interplays among memory, emotions, and positioning towards contemporary history. The analysis of nostalgia permits the understanding of the interplays between the past and the present and emotions' roles in the process. In Greece, this nostalgia often focused on the 1980s (a prosperous and safe decade in collective memory; Zestanakis 2016b), but also includes the 1990s and 2000s. This nostalgia is not confined to the digital sphere but is evident in exhibitions, bars, museums, and other physical spaces (Zestanakis 2024b).

The crisis repoliticized life (Kallianos 2013): nostalgia for looser relationships with the EU should be examined within this (re)politicization. Europeanization is often identified with the EMU. The EMU is criticized, and the drachma (Greece's currency before 2002) is linked with a lost 'easygoingness'. Nostalgic interactions revolve(d) around the yearning for a more national and simpler past, usually identified with the years between entry in the EEC and entry in the EMU, namely from the early 1980s to the early 2000s.

What Nostalgia is This?

It is difficult to categorize this nostalgia politically. It is a wide phenomenon that crosses political boundaries, exceeding the utilitarian nostalgia used by the populist right in countries such as the United States (see, for example, Porter 2020). Greek left-wing politicians incorporated nostalgia for the 1980s into their vocabulary (Panagiotopoulos 2013: 277–286). Nostalgic groups in social media are huge. This analysis mostly draws on two Facebook groups: 'Nostalgic People of the 1980s and 1990s' (Νοσταλγοί ογδόντα ενενήντα; henceforth: nostalgic people, with about 230,000 members), and '80s Nostalgia' (80s νοσταλγία, with 161,700 members, both as of March 2024). Nostalgic posts criticize how the EU and the EMU affected life,

especially the increasing cost of living. This nostalgia revolves around the assumption that PASOK's politics in the 1980s improved life, while the cost of living was lower. Other large nostalgic communities, such as the 'old orthodox PASOK' (Παλιό ΠΑΣΟΚ–Το ορθόδοξο; about 165,000 members as of March 2024), are built around memories from the 1980s as a decade marked by PASOK's redistributive politics and democratization. Nostalgia works as a weapon to maintain memories from an optimistic era.^c Posts praising changes such as the establishment of a four-week holiday, enfranchisement at 18, equality between the sexes, or the recognition of children born out of wedlock are common. Better living standards were accompanied by cultural pluralism facilitated by systematic contact with the West through tourism and culture (e.g., international festivals). Cultural extroversion and optimism seem interrelated.^d The 1980s are seen as quite different from the 1990s, when prosperity was accompanied by anxieties due to rising neoliberalism, which increased work insecurity, rendering lives more risk-bearing.

This idealization of the 1980s is worth commenting on, as at that time Greece experienced relatively high unemployment (often >7%) and double-digit inflation; these issues seem expelled from memory. The nostalgia for the 1980s coincides with Greece's first years in the EEC, when relations with the EEC were loose and claims for fiscal discipline limited, while Greece benefited from funds that improved living standards (e.g., through the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes). These years combined optimism with a desire for social transformation, something evident in surveys.^e Loans became easier and consumers enjoyed improving living standards in a rather undisciplined financial climate. External debt rose from 26.8% of the Gross Domestic Product in 1980 to 80.7% in 1990.^f This 'easygoingness' marks collective memory and is transmitted to youngsters, as evident in the participation of young members in nostalgic communities. A glimpse into Facebook profiles makes clear that many members of nostalgic communities did not live through the period. Narratives abound from young people who feel nostalgic about the 1980s and frustrated for not having experienced these years. This nostalgia did not politically benefit PASOK, which obtained 43.92% of votes in the October 2009 elections but 4.68% in the January 2015 elections and 11.84% in the June 2023 elections. PASOK paid a price for Greece's participation in the EMU, a goal of its governments between 1996 and 2004. European integration was popular among PASOK voters: 76.4% of them felt that Greece benefited from the EU, more than the total population (55.7%; Moschonas 2001: 4). As Greek society condemned this choice during the crisis, PASOK paid a price for this choice as the party more closely associated with this attempt.

This nostalgia expresses the belief that life before the EMU was more affordable. Narrators divide Greece's itinerary into two stages: one starting in the 1980s and terminating with the EMU, and one from 2002 to today. This division springs from the fact that since the late 1980s, Greece has witnessed pressure from the free market (Featherstone 1998: 23). This pressure intensified in the 1990s as Greece had to fulfil certain financial criteria (e.g., regarding inflation and government budget deficit) to participate in the Eurozone. Narrators discuss the 1980s as the end of a period when

Europeanization expressed desires for a better life through higher consumer standards and a less financially disciplined life.

A question concerns whether this identification is associated with rising nationalism in the crisis. Immigrants experienced racism even before the crisis (see, for example, Pavlou 2007). In the 1980s and 1990s, parties that claimed the heritage of the dictatorship were marginal. In the 2000s, parties that combined nationalistic ideology with populist and anti-systemic appeals grew in popularity (Ellinas 2013). The Golden Dawn Party (now condemned as a criminal organization) won between 6% and 7% of the vote in all elections between 2012 and 2015, but only 2.92% in the 2019 elections. Fragments of the nationalistic rhetoric of the 2010s appear in nostalgic groups. In the '1980s nostalgia' group, a post by KL (17 November 2023) called on group members to characterize those who exchanged a 1000 drachma note for three one-euro coins.^g Responses included far-right clichés such as 'people of the New World Order', 'thieves', and 'loan sharks'. Nevertheless, such rhetoric does not appear often enough to permit close association of these nostalgic groups with far-right political subjects. Consequently, nostalgic groups attract wide audiences and cannot be characterized as nationalistic or far-right.

The essential relay among these narratives is nostalgia for a simpler era characterized by better living standards and fewer worries. As the crisis generated discomfort, anxiety, and stress, people idealized the past, and this distorted nostalgia touched young people from the first postwar generation destined to live worse off than their parents. The slogan 'OK, boomer' expressed a critique of the older generations who led the country to the crisis and frustration from a generation that did not enjoy the 'period of the fat cows'.^h Simplicity is an important term here. We associate simplicity with clarity, elegance, lack of complexity, a focus on the essentials, limited anxiety, authenticity, efficiency, peace, tranquillity, innocence, purity, authenticity, hope, positivity, lack of guile, emotional empathy, and compassion. Nostalgia for simplicity flourishes in the groups examined. It involves a longing for the past – a sort of restorative nostalgia to remember Boym's (2001: 41) term – and simplicity speckles this yearning desire. People regularly discuss the late twentieth century as a simpler era. The following quote, uploaded by ET to the group '80s nostalgia' on 14 July 2023, is characteristic:

We are children of the 1980s. We are the last generation that played in the streets. [...] We are the last who recorded cassettes from radio programmes and the last who recorded movies from television on the video cassette recorder. We travelled in cars without seatbelts, child car seats, or airbags. We lived without cell phones, we wrote letters, we grew up without Facebook profiles, likes, and selfies. But still, we had the best childhood ever.

This nostalgic spirit contradicts current research, which shows that the 1980s witnessed new anxieties about the transition to a more sophisticated and technology-driven world (Zestanakis 2024a). Demands for simplicity increase in crises when

people reconsider the past, often experiencing unpleasant emotions such as morosity and guilt (Lallas 2023) and can feel frustrated and vulnerable as they see living standards deteriorating and certainties collapsing. This longing for simplicity is evident in nostalgic groups and, as we will see, this simpler and better life relates to (memories of) the drachma. On the other hand, what is presented as a simpler era is a period when life was less technology-driven, but also riskier – for example, road safety standards were poor – leading to a higher number of traffic accidents than in Western Europe (Zestanakis 2016a: 10). People feel nostalgic for a past that was characterized by a sense of adventure and freedom, which is unsurprising as risky experiences evoke memories of excitement. They simultaneously feel nostalgic for a society with more flexible rules; this can be seen as a critique of the Europeanization of life, as participation in the EU resulted in stricter laws in many areas of life.

Nostalgia for the Drachma

The drachma originated in ancient Greece. It was used in city-states from the archaic to the Roman period. In 1832, after independence from the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Greece reintroduced the drachma, attempting to associate itself with the ancient past. Drachmas remained in circulation until Greece joined the Eurozone in 2002. Then, the media demonstrated embarrassment for the euro as people struggled to cope with exchange rates (YouTube 2022). Support for the EMU was viewed as important to the integration project as it signified that European citizens were willing to transfer power from the nation-state to the EU (Banducci *et al.* 2003: 685). Public attitudes towards the euro reflected calculations of costs and benefits (Gärtner 1997) and were a complicated issue. In the 1990s, Europeans were divided over whether they liked the idea of a single currency: on average, around 50–60% endorsed the idea, while 30–40% remained sceptical (Kaltenthaler and Anderson 2001: 140). Surveys at the time showed that Greeks were unwilling to abandon the drachma: 67% believed that life would be worse with the euro in 2002 (Kontarinis 2022), a finding that contradicted the generalized Europhilia in Greece at that time. This finding challenges the argument that the drachma was associated with memories of underdevelopment (Pagoulatos 2012: 2). Moreover, it disputes the assumption that citizens in countries that had looser monetary regimes were supportive of the EMU and a monetary policy directed by an independent central bank because they expected that such a regime would provide lower inflation rates relative to those supplied by the domestic monetary regime (Kaltenthaler and Anderson 2001: 159) and that public debt had a positive effect on the support of the Euro, as the larger the debt of a country was, the more support there was (Gabel 2001).

Surveys and comments in Facebook groups demonstrate satisfaction with life in the last years of the drachma era.ⁱ The inflation rate was at 26.2% in 1980, 24.8% in 1985, and 22.9% in 1990, before it fell in the mid to late 1990s (as a pre-requirement for entry into the Eurozone), but many people have sidelined such memories and associate the drachma with absolute prosperity. This is a mood effect. In positive

times, people experience mood-congruent memory and may recall memories that align with their current mood and idealize the past as reflecting on positive memories that can regulate negative emotions, providing a contrast to current distressing situations and evoking nostalgic feelings (Zestanakis 2016b). Expectations for calmness and self-realization in optimistic conditions were associated with the drachma, as in late twentieth-century Greece a large segment of the population was relatively satisfied by their position in life (Voulgaris 2002: 319–332).

As mentioned, 67% supported the drachma in 2002, compared with 41% in 2010 (Kapa Research, cited in Kontarinis 2022). As Greece was Europhile before the crisis, support for the drachma corroborates that habit is a powerful cultural parameter as people hesitate to abandon comfort zones (Duhigg 2012). The drachma had stamped everyday routines: people linked habits, memories, and relations with this currency. This is clear in the responses to Facebook posts with photos of drachma notes and coins, showing that people yearn for a bygone era when relations were supposedly simpler, more innocent, and authentic, and ultimately more human and better.

Nostalgia for vintage objects and old products is a common phenomenon and, for instance, marked life in former communist countries after the 1989 revolutions (see, for example, Berdahl 1999). Here, we observe nostalgia for a currency that could buy products remembered as good and affordable. This appears in the group ‘Nostalgic people’, where comments below photos with catalogues of ice creams (e.g., 28 June 2021) or souvlaki restaurants (e.g., 16 June 2022) abound. Users comment on how nice life was when ice creams cost 100 or 200 drachmas, much less than one euro.^j Another viral post shows a calendar page with notes on the prices of basic goods in 2001: cigarettes (τσιγάρα) cost 450 drachmas, coffee in a café (καφέξ έξω) 500, a loaf of bread (ψωμί) 140, a souvlaki (σουβλάκι) 150, one litre of gasoline (βενζίνη) 190, a cheese pie (τυρόπιτα) 100, one litre of petroleum (πετρέλαιο) 100, and also there was a note that the basic salary (βασικός μισθός) was 170,000 drachmas at that time (see Figure 1).^k

The euro signifies worse living standards and the alienation of social relations due to anxieties and other tensions springing from impoverishment. The EU and the euro are portrayed, respectively, as a pernicious political subject and a currency which demoted a society that featured healthier social relations. If commodities come into value through relations (Tsing 2013), nostalgic groups identify the drachma with a more viable and healthier commodity culture, or more eloquently, the years when kids could buy Gameboys by singing Christmas carols, as a popular post (7200 likes and 345 comments) in the group ‘Nostalgic people’, argued on 23 December 2019. More simply, the drachma is nostalgically identified with happiness and the euro with anguish.

Routines provide a sense of comfort and security to subjects. The modification of routines leads to discomfort, embarrassment, and resistance. A change of habits is identified with fears of loss of identity. Changing habits feels like giving up a part of yourself, and this leads to reluctance and resistance to the change, especially in Mediterranean societies where tradition is strong (Argyrou 2002). It is not easy to

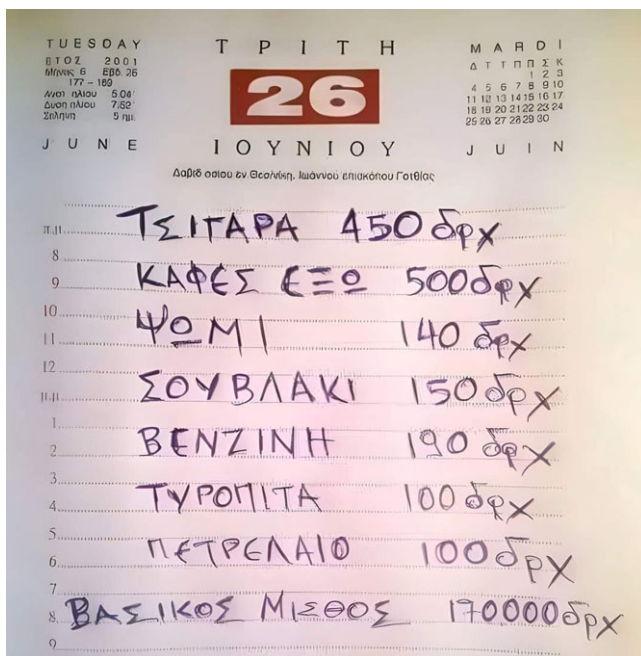


Figure 1. Viral photo showing a calendar page with notes on the prices of basic goods and the basic salary in June 2001. The photo was uploaded on the group ‘Nostalgic people’ on 26 June 2024 and received about 2800 likes and 332 shares by mid-December 2024.

define the relationship between this attachment to tradition and nostalgia for the drachma. Certainly, monetary policy is an area of policy that holds strong symbolic value, because a country’s currency is a symbol of its sovereignty (Kaltenthaler and Anderson 2001: 141). It seems that the drachma was a referent connecting contemporary Greece with the past and an essential part of the national identity. In a sense, the drachma’s popularity can be seen within the appeal of banal nationalism, the everyday representations of a nation that build a sense of shared national identity (Billig 1995: 5).

This connection becomes clearer if we consider that drachma notes and coins showed heroes of the Greek Revolution and other important personalities. The 5000 drachma note (pentochiliaro; πεντοχίλιαρο), which emblemizes prosperity in nostalgic discussions, showed Theodoros Kolokotronis, a general of the War of Independence, and the historical bridge of Karitena, a village in the Peloponnese that served as the base of operations for the general’s rebel army. In the slang of the 1980s and 1990s, the 5000 drachma notes were called ‘Kolokotronides’, a metaphor linking the purchasing power of the note with the general’s masculinity. Patriotic manhood is pivotal in nationalistic discourses and representations (Nagel 1998): here this manhood links the 5000 drachmae note with a period marked by economic sovereignty. Still, there is rather little evidence confirming that preference for the drachma was combined with Euroscepticism before entry into the Eurozone.

Table 1. Answers to the question: Which currency do you prefer for the country?

	Age category				
	17–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Prefer the euro	49	55	53	57	66
Prefer the drachma	42	34	37	33	25
I do not know /	9	11	10	10	9
I do not want to answer					

Source: Kapa Research as republished by Kontarinis (2022).

PASOK and New Democracy, two pro-euro parties, won 43.79% and 42.74% of the vote, respectively, in the 2000 elections. The political establishment was proud of Greece's participation in the EU and EMU, but largely had a self-interested perception of institutions, policies, and procedures, focusing on how Greece could gain benefits from the EU (Sotiropoulos *et al.*, 2008: 28–29); this influenced the people, who tended to see the EU as a source of benefits, and explains why public opinion changed radically when the crisis started.

In nostalgic groups, nostalgia for the drachma is nostalgia for a lost and carefree era – a restorative nostalgia – to return to Boym's (2001: 41) term. Members less frequently link the drachma with the easier satisfaction of basic needs, and more often with entertainment. The answers to the question 'With which currency was life better?' asked in the group 'Nostalgic people' (1 March 2024) are eloquent. The post attracted more than 600 answers by April 2024, almost all supportive of the drachma. Compared with surveys (see Table 1), supporters of the drachma are overrepresented in nostalgic groups as, overall, people do not support a return to the national currency. Still, supporters of the drachma represent a non-negligible minority. Nostalgic groups link the drachma with national pride, liberty, and sovereignty; exaggerated claims such as 'the drachma was the best currency in Europe' appear. The drachma is coupled with feelings of lost greatness, a nostalgic emotional response that subjects experience when reflecting on past glory, success, or magnificence that has faded or been diminished over time. This sentiment mixes nostalgia with regret and melancholy and can arise from personal experiences, such as reminiscing about the youthful achievements of a person, or from a wider historical perspective, such as contemplating the decline of an empire and highlighting the past splendour and the present more mundane state. Of course, Greece was not an empire in the 1980s and 1990s but was a relatively optimistic society that had experienced decades of continuous economic progress (since the early 1950s) and democratization (after the fall of the dictatorship and the 1974 referendum abolishing the monarchy). The drachma is identified with this environment, which differs from the crisis that is featured by the euro. This grandeur is suggested even by photos that do not necessarily depict luxurious environments, such as that uploaded by GP on 2 June 2024 in the group '1980s nostalgia' showing a 5000 drachma note next to cups of coffee and cigarettes and the

phrase ‘with that you could go out for coffee, and you were a lord! Ahhh, the good old times.’ The photo received more than 1800 likes and 140 shares and comments, demonstrating that nostalgic people believe that with the euro they not only lost access to luxurious goods, but also to life’s small pleasures, such as going out for coffee. Participation in the EMU is commented on as a betrayal responsible for this lost grandeur and an outcome of an alienating ‘thirst for Europe’, which leads Greeks to lose their homeland. The drachma emblemizes the years when many consumers could enjoy habits previously possible only for upper-class audiences. These years ended with the crisis, as since then consumers have often struggled to satisfy basic needs, reducing entertainment (Star.gr 2018). In ‘1980s nostalgia’, we spot posts (e.g., GF, 27 March 2022) mentioning that in the drachma era, bouzoukia^l opened six nights a week, while now they only operate two nights a week.

People fetishize old concepts because they evoke nostalgic feelings for a bygone era, reminding them of cherished memories of the past. Enthusiasm for the drachma derives from nostalgia for a life different from the hard and unsafe life of the crisis, and from the idea that this life is forever lost. Some people often approach this change as a political plan designed by the ‘New World Order’, targeting the impoverishment of society. These discourses likely echo nationalistic and conspiracy discourses that flourished in the crisis (Rakopoulos 2018). The EMU is seen as a pernicious political choice organized by the New World Order to impoverish people. This nostalgia expresses a critique of Europeanization and received little coverage from mainstream media. Nostalgia for the drachma is invisible in television or newspapers after the tense negotiations between the Greek government and the Eurogroup in 2015, when exit from the Eurozone seemed possible, so the question of whether and to what degree Greeks would support it received media coverage. Currently, the topic preoccupies nostalgic discussions in social media, but is absent from mainstream media. This contradiction demonstrates that social media represents a public sphere with noticeable differences from the main social media, where issues invisible in established media can be discussed, helping subjects to express political opinions and support alternative forms of self-understanding and networking.^m

Conclusion

This article has discussed how Greece witnessed a wave of nostalgia in the last 15 years and argued that this nostalgia can be seen as a cultural response towards Europeanization and the EU. Combining material from selected nostalgic groups on Facebook with other information, the article argued that this nostalgia should be seen as a cultural response directly related to the experience of the crisis of the 2010s. All crises have strong impacts on daily lives, ruining well-being and violently disrupting the routines of individuals, who are likely to blame those in power. The financial crisis that started in 2008 provoked anxiety, fear, and frustration and generated anti-establishment sentiments: in crises, the decisions of politicians and national or supranational bodies are under intense scrutiny, as people are attentive to

how political powers respond to situations. Unsurprisingly, the decade of the financial crisis overturned well-being and other certainties, rendering many people nostalgic about a recent and, in a way, less European past. The conditions were ideal for a nostalgic wave entailing critique of the EU and Greece's Europeanization since the 1980s. This critique largely focused on the experiment of the EMU and Greece's participation in the EMU, which was criticized as a detrimental political choice. This article has deconstructed this reaction and aims to inspire researchers to explore whether similar nostalgic reactions are observed in other crisis-stricken societies of the 2010s.

In this respect, the drachma is identified with the 1980s and 1990s, a period seen as prosperous and carefree. This nostalgia touches even young people who are affected by the mythologization of the purchasing power of this currency. Support for the drachma is stronger among these nostalgic groups (see Table 1); this corroborates the view that social media often limits exposure to diverse perspectives and favours the formation of groups of like-minded users framing and reinforcing shared narratives (Cinelli *et al.* 2021). Simultaneously, the problems of these years are sidelined from the public memory. Nostalgic narratives occasionally reproduce nationalistic and anti-European rhetoric, but it would be an exaggeration to see them as directly related to far-right political subjects. Such subjects appear weaker after the bailout agreements era, while nostalgic groups remain very popular. This is an interesting point that requires further investigation and could inspire a separate study. In sum, in the case examined, nostalgia is not only an emotion boosted by the social media boom of the last 15 years, but also an explanatory tool that helps us to understand how concepts are (re)seen in critical times and to comprehend relations between national societies and supranational political subjects from an emotional standpoint.

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Notes

- a. For quantitative data by year see Balampanidis (2019: 93).
- b. For a recent outline of this bibliography also see Salmose (2019).

- c. See the letter from the moderators of the page to the then new president of PASOK, Nikos Androulakis, posted 8 December 2021.
- d. For this climate see Vamvakas and Panagiotopoulos (2010).
- e. For data see Zestanakis (2024a).
- f. For additional data see Stergiou (2021).
- g. Those who made the posts use full names and surnames. To ensure their privacy I have replaced them with initials.
- h. For an autobiographic historical comment in this direction also see Triantafyllou (2017).
- i. For data from surveys see Zestanakis (2024a).
- j. The exchange rate was €1 = 340.75 drachmas when Greece joined the Eurozone (1 January 2002).
- k. See the republication of the post in the group 'nostalgic people' on 27 June 2024.
- l. Expensive nightclubs with live pop and folk music.
- m. For a classical analysis of this argument also see O'Donnell (2001).

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