

## ECONOMIC CRISIS: HOPING FOR HOPE IN HOPELESSNESS

by

*Dimitra Gkotosopoulou*

Crises are and have always been part of our lives in this world. They come and go, leaving to the next generations evidence of their existence. One such challenging situation that has been affecting the whole world is the economic crisis that broke out in 2008. The period that we are going through right now is one of great changes in all aspects of life. After a number of great crises that our ancestors have been through, some of which seem so close to us, like the mass expulsion of Greeks from Turkey in 1923 and WWII, we are again on the verge of becoming the third “lost” generation. Greece was one of the first countries to feel the consequences of this crisis and gradually more and more people can see their lives changing. Unfortunately, the economic crisis has changed our way of living, but it has not changed our way of thinking; a way of thinking that, as the Dream Theater band song “On the Backs of Angels” reminds me of, has actually brought or has let us bring on this situation.

Before the economic crisis, life may have not always been better, but it definitely was quite different from what it is now. People could afford a descent state of life. Comfort had become an everyday fact often taken for granted, as was the case with consumerism and materialism that could only offer constructed and fake happiness. Wealth and material goods, as well as the persons who had promised and brought the change in a country that had suffered much, were more than welcomed. Unfortunately, not only unnecessary things were thought to be needed, but all the little things, the moments that matter and can offer real happiness in one’s life, were forgotten. The economic crisis has completely changed this familiar, until recently, way of life to the worst. As I look around, I see thousands of people who even lack the absolutely necessary goods for survival as many are suddenly left without a source of income or savings. Young people are left with no hope or dreams for their lives and their future. The middle-aged are left in a desperate position where they cannot even provide for their families, they cannot offer their children what they have dreamt of, and they see the efforts of a lifetime gone to waste. The elders that had spent their whole lives working in order to provide their children with a future and themselves with a descent retirement are now left with nothing. A new reality has come upon us with its main constituents being poverty, starvation, and suicide. This is how drastically life has changed. As these thoughts cross my mind while writing this piece, the Dream Theater sings in the background the following lines:

We spiral towards disaster  
survival fading faster<sup>1</sup>

Governments, the media, banking systems, corporations have been controlling, persuading, and misleading us since the beginning of their existence. In a world where manipulation has become an essential value, people are led to believe that each one of

---

<sup>1</sup> All citations, unless stated otherwise, come from Dream Theater band’s song “On the Backs of Angels” included in their CD entitled *A Dramatic Turn Of Events* released in 2011.

us is “destined to create” as the song goes. That life has no meaning until something worthy is done with it. The manipulation lies in the kind of “creation” each person should attempt, while its success should be defined, interestingly enough, by means of economic, social, and educational standards. The fact is that no one really knows what they are supposed to create in their life unless they are guided. And one is usually guided by a society that brainwashes people to live and think according to its interests. The “Troika” and the “International Monetary Fund” are just supplementary means that continue in their turn the weakening and the exploitation of people. And they have achieved their goal; they have made people their pawns in the game of power and they continue gaining power and wealth at the expense of those who believed in and relied on them for a better life. The loud voices of the Dream Theater band keep on echoing in my ears:

Standing on the backs of angels  
destined to create  
Mounting the attack  
while heroes carry your weight

In the heart of the economic crisis, the world has seen the real faces of fake messiahs and has felt the consequences of their actions in everyday life. The world is a sinking ship and we all are in search of someone to “guide [us] to the edge of the water,” the song lyrics claim. However, in a period during which the dominant feelings are those of fear and confusion, it is very hard to make a distinction between “what is right and what is wrong,” as the band sings, and in an effort to survive one could hold on from anything and anyone. People turn to the ones who made them reach the bottom, hoping that they can help them rise again. The need to believe in something or someone is so strong that they fall in the trap and they let “victims on the radar string [them] along,” in accordance to the song, hoping that what they see is help coming for their rescue and not their doom. It may be pure optimism or it may be pure foolishness, but then promises uttered by the politicians end up being a joke. There is a fine line between hope and hopelessness, sanity and insanity. A constant struggle is needed in order to stay on the right side of the line. While thinking these, I kept on playing the Dream Theater song again and again. How precise the following lines are:

Blurring lines drawn in between  
what is right and what is wrong  
victims on the radar string us along

In spite of the current, desperate situation, a great percentage of people do not want or do not dare to move forward, to leave the past behind and let those responsible sink into oblivion. They remain enslaved to the beliefs and life that someone else has chosen for them – although many think that their ideas about life are genuinely theirs – and they are being led, as the band claims, “like a lamb to the slaughter.” Some of them do this out of fear, others out of greediness, but the most dangerous of all are those who maintain this irrational situation because of obsolete ideas and, of course, out of ignorance. But all of them have a common point of reference; they are all totally absorbed in their own microcosms, in their own personal lives, unable to perceive the world as a unified entity, one in which each person’s actions affect all others. They consume their whole energy and thought in their everyday problems – something that is completely understandable – but they do not grasp the idea that

solving individual problems will not help the general situation, since all should act in favor of change in the political and social field. “Riding out the wave,” as the Dream Theater lyrics go, does not mean that problems will end, but just that another tiny obstacle will be overcome in an ocean of problems; all should realize that this crisis, whether it has direct or indirect effects on them, is comprised of inextricably intertwined problems and complications.

In fact, there is a sense and a hope – or else corruption would exceed by far – that most of those who end up supporting the dominant forces that carry a large part of the responsibility for this crisis are people whose decisions are led by fear. Governments and media direct their scaremongering exactly at this group of people whose continuous sense of fear makes them an easy target. Their concern about their families and their future makes them feel sufficient even with the mere promise of a descent life, although their lives may not be descent at all. They prefer to follow the safe and certain – at least for them – path, thinking that if they stick to their known beliefs, they will benefit them. Supporting change is not an option for them, since the unknown feeds on their fear even more forcefully than before. This crisis has made their life conditions insufferable; but it is preferable for them to live in this situation rather than find themselves in a different situation that could be worse or better. While I am writing these lines the music still beats...“content to feed off the machine/bleeding [them] to death.” The line attracts my attention as it makes me think of the willingness of people to bear anything, from those who sank them into darkness, for a glimpse of light.

Greediness and selfishness are some of the reasons why people choose to remain attached to false ideas and beliefs, supporting corrupt governments, banks and multinational corporations for the materialization of their goals. They range from those who want to make sure they find a working position with more income than responsibilities to those who take every opportunity for quick money that will come before them. The living conditions may not be as they used to, but certainly people who have learned to live and think in a certain way that has as its main purpose the promotion of their welfare are not ready to renounce their interests and a familiar, set ground of economic exchange. It is a fact that even if the social and political scenery changes, certain misappropriations, political patronage, and clientelism would still persist. But like in every change, what until now has been taken for granted would become quite uncertain and this would be very inconvenient for both sides. I keep on thinking, as the song goes, that people are “blinded by [their] hunger” literally and metaphorically and they are ready to do anything for financial and personal gain. But in a world where moral values basically seem to exist only in theory, they are more likely to survive this countdown than anyone else.

The elderly part of our society can be largely categorized in the group of people who see change as something completely unnecessary because of their obsolete ideas on life and politics, but of course they are not the only ones. There are many who support these beliefs by arguing that they grew up, worked, made families and raised their children successfully during a particular government’s term. As a result, they strongly believe that a particular government that had once brought welfare to the country will be the appropriate one to take them out of this difficult situation and give them their lives back once again. There is no clear perception of the changes that the whole world goes through every day, and a lack of understanding that in a changing world

there is also a great need for change in people's mentality and way of thinking; it is time for something new. However, what is even more frustrating to hear is that some of these people who do actually have many false ideas about what is happening in the world put the blame on the young generations for everything negative in our society, including the economic crisis, arguing that the spoiled young generations are unable to act and fight for their lives.

Last but not least, ignorance is a scourge that creates much uneasiness especially in crucial periods like the one that the world experiences today. At a time when people should be fully aware of every little detail that may seem unimportant, when each one of us is trying to have as much information as possible and criticize events in acknowledgement of the great responsibility this particular situation brings forth – even if opinions and arguments differ largely – there are still the ones who do not care or do not find it important to deal with the current events. Lack of education or lack of critical thinking turns people into the perfect pawns, ready to be totally manipulated according to the interests of the manipulator. And, if ignorance is combined with indifference, the situation gets even worse. Many say that indifference is an advantage of the new generations, as they have learned to be provided with anything they wish for effortlessly. There are certainly young people who are indifferent to the situation, but this “advantage” is not only theirs. Indifference exists regardless of age and social background and it has much to do with the environment in which one was raised and the personal beliefs and values they were raised with. There are many that, even in this demanding situation, adopt the usual thought of people that this will not happen to them, that the economic crisis will not affect them. They have their heads buried in the sand and they try so hard that they actually end up believing in an illusion.

Seeing and realizing the differences that exist between people, the differences in their mentality as well as view of the world and life in addition to their opinion about crucial affairs, one finds it very hard to understand how it could be possible to overcome our current difficulties without relying on governments and corporations. Solidarity is a value that has brought people together, but somehow we tend to overlook it. It is surprising how we manage to forget all the historical events that warn us about the outcome of certain actions, as if we are meant to inherit a kind of historical amnesia and repeat the same mistakes again and again. As they say, “every cloud has a silver lining,” but a glimpse of light, a glimpse of hope may not be enough when people have forgotten the values that have been keeping them in life, when they willingly place their lives in the hands of others. With the song “On the Backs of Angels” coming to end while writing down these lines, I keep on wondering whether any optimism still exists. Walking hand in hand with hopelessness can make life seem either as a prison with no escape or as the perfect means of escape. After all, everything is a matter of perception.

People have always lived under governing systems that controlled their lives either called democracy, oligarchy or dictatorship. The economic crisis has changed our lives and it offers us the opportunity to realize our way of life and change it to the better. However, there are still too many who do not realize its effects on the world. And even if there is hope, it is not as forceful as action. So, the question remains: Will we ever act for change as a unified body? Or will we just continue living, playing the game of our puppeteers? Will we ever be able to really free ourselves and live a life as

we have always wanted it? Or we will stay forever in our bondage? It is up to us to decide which course of action to take.

### **Works Cited**

Dream Theater. "On The Backs Of Angels." *A Dramatic Turn Of Events*. Roadrunner, 2011. CD.