

Panteion University

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The Social Structure in Greece (1983-2023)
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Abstract

The social structure in Greece is one of the most peculiar among developed capitalist countries, with a very high level of prosperity. The search for its structure in the recent past of modern social development reveals that the basic petty-bourgeois characteristics, namely self-employment, small property and small production, were initially located in primary sector of production. In the last forty years, much has changed. The agricultural economy was sidelined and lost most of its proportion in the composition of wealth and employment. The rural population shrank, mainly due to the mass departure of farmers who retired and were not replaced by younger workers. The prevalence of services and the fragments of industrial development significantly changed the basic economic and professional activities, while making decent sufficiency possible for a large part of the population, in cities and tourist areas. Despite the fact that both production and the place of residence of the main body of workers have been reorganized, the comparatively larger mass of self-employed, very small employers and contributing family members is observed to have been maintained in Greek society. The connections of all employment statuses, and therefore also of employees, with small property ownership, even in recent decades, reveal the resilient nature of the petty bourgeoisie phenomenon.

Keywords: Greek society, petty-bourgeoisie phenomenon, property, social structure, social classes.

1

Critical comments for the approaches on the Greek social structure

1.1

The Initial Formations

K. Vergopoulos (Vergopoulos 1975) expresses at a theoretical level the perception that Greece is a country of “regional (peripheral) capitalism”. This definition of the country is due, among other things, to the particular way in which agriculture has been integrated into the capitalist mode of production. The integration of agriculture does not mean its full and classical capitalist development, but its particular development through “small commodity production”, as well as support for the family organization of the agricultural holding. The particular organizational model does not encourage wage labor, without preventing it. The basic employment regime in these conditions is the self-employment of the owner of the holding (along with the auxiliary contribution of the assisting family members). According to this view, capitalist investment in agricultural production has been practically “rejected”. In this sense, agricultural exploitation represents a form of capitalism without capitalists. The main mechanism of this type of capitalism is determined by state interventions and the special role of bank capital. The state is responsible for shaping the dominant model of small property, through institutional arrangements (in the 19th century) and especially through agrarian reform (in the 20th century). The banking system reinforced this type of exploitation. This reinforcement over-indebted the peasants and in essence contributed to the subordination of small property to capital, in the long run. The rural

economy thus became a nationalized or socialized productive situation, in which the small owner and self-employed farmer was transformed into a quasi-proletarian. According to this approach, the farmers of Greek society can be considered to belong to the proletariat of regional capitalism.

The view that capital either avoided or was prevented from undertaking major investments in the agricultural economy is a very useful and substantial observation, which explains the lack of consistent processes of land concentration and the establishment of classic capitalist farms, with large areas, the systematic use of hired labor and high productivity. One of the analyses, to which I also had a personal contribution (2006), confirms the validity of the assessment of the prevalence of small agricultural exploitation, with the additional reason that the great technicalization of small properties further burdens the cost of land and makes its acquisition by the actors of capital unprofitable. Particularly useful is the position that small-scale farmers and small property in the Greek case do not have a pre-capitalist origin, but were formed, en masse and precisely in the phase of capitalist domination and even because of it.

The criticism made by N. Mouzelis (Mouzelis 1978) of K. Vergopoulos' approach is well known. The criticism concerned both the excessively general nature of the view and the fact that the analysis gave the impression of treating the Greek agricultural issue as if it were similar to the countries of developed capitalism. N. Mouzelis estimates that the problem in Greek society is summarized in two issues, which are related to the disharmony of the relations between the capitalist

mode of production and the simple (or small) commodity production, which prevails in agriculture and handicrafts. He notes, on the one hand, a one-sided transfer of resources from simple commodity production to the capitalist sector. He considers, on the other hand, that the capitalist sector has very strong economic communications with the developed capitalist countries and that is why its profits are transferred abroad (Mouzelis 1978: 104-105). In my opinion, these remarks are constant objects of investigation and reflection. I am of the opinion, however, that the previous positions are rigid, because they lead to the conclusion that the economy and in general the Greek social organization is problematic. The remark that the country is accompanied by political and state pathologies makes the thought of comparing Greek society with the most backward, worldwide, almost automatic. The first very harsh position of N. Mouzelis, of course, becomes more blunt in the following decade and, with almost the same historical material (and comparative data from Balkan and Latin American countries), includes Greece in the semi-periphery (Mouzelis 1987).

1.2

Petty-bourgeois' structures and uneven development

J. Petras (Petras 1985) rather represents the theories of neo-imperialism. His analysis of the countries of Southern Europe, although quite general, elaborates on several aspects of the structures and the social and economic realities that also concern Greece. It represents, in my opinion, a descriptive, but realistic, treatment of social realities.

He points out that the organization of the agricultural economy shows trends of modernization in relation to the market and, in some cases, interconnection with industry. He establishes the major distance of industry in the countries of the South from the realities in the developed countries. In a timely manner, he observes that the process of industrial destructuring of certain regions of the South (including our country) in the decade 1981-90. He thus perceives the destructuring of the working class, the parallel increase in unemployment and the tendency to create a distinct "sub-proletariat". He highlights, with his comments, the broad masses of small producers, who, however, have no relationship with pre-capitalist structures. Some of the former are found in competitive and flexible business activities in manufacturing. His analysis of the emergence of (new) middle classes with high education and demanding specialization is noteworthy. His assessment that the working groups that make up these classes are sometimes independent professionals (lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, dentists,

accountants, engineers, caregivers, etc.) and sometimes salaried (lawyers with a fixed salary, doctors in hospitals, teachers, etc.) is well-founded. The latter quite often work as salaried employees in the public sector and in many cases combine their main professional activity with parallel activities and investments in real estate, with the aim of obtaining additional income.

The author's general view is that capital in the South tends to make larger and more consistent investments in real estate and construction. However, large-scale ownership of real estate does not dominate. On the contrary, small-scale ownership of real estate is very widespread.

Society, in these conditions, responds to a peculiar model of undisciplined individual modernism. This model hinders or even denies disciplined institutional and productive modernization. The broad middle classes (primarily representing individual modernism) develop a contradictory radicalism. On the one hand, they demand general changes, but, on the other hand, they refuse substantial reforms of public organization, such as the property tax, because their own economic interests are also affected. The overall picture is attributed to the observation of social impasse and institutional involvement, as modernization seems almost impossible.

The most famous work of Y. Milios (Milios 1988) can be considered to be part of the analyses of imperialism. In my opinion, the studies of Y. Milios constitute special analyses. His earlier generalizations on imperialism and the correlation of the phenomenon with the development of Greek society have caused me to be in an

intense questioning. The analysis, on Greek society in the twentieth century (Milios 2010: 259-288), contains sound assessments regarding the management of the economic realities of the Greek state, especially after 1922.

In his most recent work, he expresses the view that capitalist relations have undoubtedly dominated Greek society since the interwar period and those institutions and state interventions of a bourgeois nature in the economy have developed accordingly. It is interesting that he does not consider small ownership and small production, as well as self-employment in the agricultural economy, as elements of pre-capitalist relations. Y. Milios' view of the post-war era highlights the continuous convergence of the Greek economy with the most developed countries. In his view, inclusion in the developed capitalist countries is indisputable, despite cyclical fluctuations or periods of stagnation. His analyses of the factors of the Greek crisis in the twenty-first century are useful. I agree or approach his findings and conclusions: namely, regarding the form and extent of industrial development, the role and power of shipping capital, the role and institutional interventions of the state, the dynamic economic development of Greek society during the post-war period, the inclusion of Greece in the dance of developed capitalist countries, the relationship between labor productivity and relatively low wages, but also the high level of prosperity, in relation to the past. I also note the existence of usable data for systematic discussion regarding the causes or phenomena that pushed the country towards the severe fiscal crisis of

the previous decade. Y. Milios' economic analysis, in these specific fields, tends to reasonable and debatable conclusions.

The analysis of A. Moschonas (Moschonas 1986) is a special study of production and work in cities and especially for craftsmen, merchants and independent professionals. It accurately conveys data on business organization and its distributions, but at the same time focuses on the peculiarities of small businesses or self-employment in cities.

It highlights the massive expansion of small ownership and small production in urban activities. It draws attention to the very large differences from European countries. It examines the possibility that social modernization and social change do not require the abolition of small ownership, self-employment and small production.

The work of A. Moschonas has, in my opinion, problematic aspects related to the theoretical concept of small commodity production. The renaming of the official categories of small and medium-sized enterprises (small and medium) into enterprises of "small commodity" and "medium-commodity" production, if not a choice resulting from some defining embarrassment (with no other meaning than avoiding the official terms), then it is an oblique recourse to derivatives of small or simple commodity production. In reflection of the two aforementioned terms, the concept of "macro-commodity production", which concerns larger enterprises, demoralizes the purely capitalist nature of these business organizations.

If the specific characterizations of the categories of specific enterprises are removed, the expanded objective role of the traditional petty bourgeoisie strata in the cities, during the post-war period, and in

Greek social organization in general, is indicated and documented. In this sense, A. Moschonas' analysis contributes positively to the relevant discussion on the Greek social structure.

1.3

The anxious search for the subject of radical change

P. Papadopoulos (Papadopoulos 1987) aims to demonstrate, in my reading, the very large and continuous social polarization (based on the data of the population census, by the National Statistical Service of Greece, of 1981). From this pursuit begins the peculiar description of the empirical data, which resembles a kind of narrative about social evolution, but also with great distances from the reality of the time.

The data of this particular census and especially of the labor force indicate that employees, despite their proportional increase compared to 1971, still constitute a minority, that is, they represent a percentage lower than 49%. An enlarged group of self-employed people is clearly visible, accompanied by a still numerous (in 1981) category of contributing family members. The structure of the workforce does not meet the author's expectations and he attempts a particularly strange treatment of these figures.

He makes empirical estimates of a marginal nature, which are supposed to correspond to the elaborations of Marxism-Leninism. Specifically, to the 48.6% of wage earners, he adds the young unemployed and, in his opinion, the sum of the working class reaches

51.3%. The analyst includes in the proportion of the working class, foreign immigrants, fashion designers and other working categories, to reach the proportion of the working class at 54.3%. In an even more arbitrary calculation with the working class, he includes the so-called semi-proletarians (self-employed small owners in the countryside), in the “poor population”. In this way, the (broadly understood) working class amounts to approximately 57% of the Economically Active Population. The analyst does not stop only at the pretentious expansion of the working class. He also expands the bourgeoisie, calculating the employment of three employees as the minimum limit for defining a “capitalist” entrepreneur.¹ He accordingly limits the petty bourgeoisie strata. The degradation of the traditional petty bourgeoisie phenomenon distorts the depiction of the class structure.²

¹ I remind to those who appreciate the “Marxist-Leninist” logic of the definition of V.I. Lenin [Lenin Collected Works, Vol. 3: 358 (also, see, Lenin, 1964⁴: 344-355, 356-360)], regarding the boundaries of the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie. In combination with the qualitative criteria (separation of management and executive work, release from the need for family auxiliary work, ability to reproduce small capital), the quantitative limit is placed (in a rather loose manner), at the employment of between 15 and 30 employees. In a modern approach, E.O. Wright (Wright 1985: 150-151) considers that capitalists, in the full sense, are those who employ 10 or more employees, members of the traditional petty bourgeoisie are exclusively the self-employed (due to an error in the design of his empirical research, those who declared one employee were considered petty bourgeois), while the (“contradictory”) class position (or placement) of the so-called “small employers” is unclear (with 1-9 employees in the initial theoretical elaboration or with 2-9 employees, due to the aforementioned error in his research, which also affects them). However, even in this case of the sequence of unclear definitions in the field of theory and errors in the handling of empirical research, employers who employ up to 9 salaried workers are not considered capitalists (Lytras 2020: 44-45).

² The following statement by V.I. Lenin (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3: 530) may provide some assistance in deriving useful estimates: “When you hide the large number of petty bourgeois strata that exist in the population of Russia, it is as if you are openly distorting the picture of our economic reality.” [Additionally, see, Lenin, 1964⁴: 344-355, 356-360].

I do not wonder about the result of the peculiar presentation of the Greek social structure. It is the indication of an arbitrary voluntarism, which constructs a non-existent reality, probably, to justify a “political strategy”, which has no margin for success (it has also been proven *ex post*). This is addressed, after all, to some “other society”, beyond the present and existing one. The specifically “formed society” exists only in the mind of the analyst,³ while the functioning society has no reason to follow his constructions.

³ Projects of empirical processing (with smaller or wider interventions by analysts) of employment categories and their mapping into class groups continue, in some way, in the 21st century. Despite the diligent efforts of more modern analysts (see, Katsoridas 2020: 109), to be more attuned to realities, similar problems (although not equivalent or identical) to those of P. Papadopoulos' work are observed in their work. Possibly, in a similar research lens, the (debatable) convergence of theoretical approaches, both of the so-called “Marxist-Leninist” logic and of the intellectual idioms of structural Marxism (particularly concerning N. Poulantzas' treatment of productive and unproductive labor), for the determinations of social classes (cf., regarding the discussion: Sakellaropoulos 2014, Sakellaropoulos 2019) may be detectable. In this field, I highlight the view of K. Marx (Marx 1981: 438-449, 452-461), according to my own understanding, after studying his texts. Productive labor is any labor that is exchanged for capital (there is no direct limitation for wage workers, in non-material production and for intellectual workers) and produces surplus value. In any case (this also applies to the view of N. Poulantzas), any different definition of productive and unproductive labor is permissible and respected, without meaning that it derives (clearly, fully and without interpretative filters) from the assessment of K. Marx.

1.4

Social fluidity:

The peculiar encounter of the petty bourgeoisie with wage labor

In the relatively recent past, Tsoukalas's thesis on “polysthenia” was better known than it is today. K. Tsoukalas is a sensitive and highly intelligent social critic, with a philosophical and historical education. His two studies, namely the one on public space (Tsoukalas 1981) and the one on educational mechanisms (Tsoukalas 2006) are noteworthy efforts. In my opinion, these two efforts could not support a generalization about the form, structure and characteristics of Greek society. His important and penetrating investigations add, of course, to the understanding of the historical developments of public institutions and education, and, possibly, of the ideological relations for a part of the social groups. They did not, however, confirm the prevalence of the bodies of intellectual labor and the “new petty bourgeoisie” as a major phenomenon of Greek society, to the extent that a similar purpose is discernible.

The intention, of course, for the emergence of expanded layers of the “new petty bourgeoisie” prevails over the existing data and the analyst seems to insist on his effort. In his work: *State, Society, Labor, in Postwar Greece*, (Tsoukalas 1987) he reinforces his undertaking with an additional intellectual daring. He synthesizes the findings of N. Poulantzas (Poulantzas 1984) on the “new petty bourgeoisie” (possibly,

the critical comments of A. Gorz on intellectual workers have played a role), with the theorem of E.O. Wright (Wright 1985), on the “contradictory class locations” (which corresponds to the latter’s view that the “new middle class” of the Fordism-Taylorism era has now disintegrated). K. Tsoukalas aims, with a new lever, to focus on a very large “new petty bourgeoisie”, through the agitation, perhaps even “violent”, of the characteristics of the groups of intellectual workers (mainly in the public sector), with the existing social groups of small property owners, the self-employed and small autonomous producers (even those operating within the framework of the “informal or/and illegal economy”). The lever is the concept of “polysthenia” and the scope of application of the composition of the characteristics is the family (either close or extended). Polysthenia is the opposite of the possession of one and only class position. It is, in other words, the result of class multi-determination. To the extent that this approach “decomposes” the existing and integral elements of the traditional petty-bourgeois phenomenon, in order to stir them into a mush of social and especially class characteristics, polysthenia ultimately constructs, by itself, the image of generalized social fluidity.

The counterargument to these views on the modified schematizations of class multi-determination is that all the individual dimensions (except wage labor), which the analyst stirs up, are characteristics of the traditional petty bourgeoisie phenomenon, such as property ownership, small commercial, tourist and craft enterprises. Without the existence of small property, small capital, small

autonomous production and self-employment, there is no possibility of achieving the proposed synthesis, even if strong desires “invite” it.

In addition, the feasibility of the project raises questions. In my opinion, the social organization and structure are not vague and unclear, but simply do not fit the analyst’s guiding intellect. In this sense, the “imaginary petty bourgeoisie” is possibly an intellectual refuge for him, but also the basis of a thorough explanation in the context of our investigation. The ambiguity of positions and the fluidity of the social structure are accompanied by the “imaginary petty bourgeoisie”, according to K. Tsoukalas, that is, by the Greek equivalent of the “petite-bourgeois ideological subset” that characterizes the “new petty bourgeoisie” of N. Poulantzas. When the “new petty bourgeoisie” is a minority (rather thinner, compared to the basic calculation), then the reproduction of the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie (or, otherwise, the “imaginary petty bourgeoisie”) is the magnifying lens, to make the “new petty bourgeoisie” seem more socially significant, because it seems to occupy the ideologies of broader social categories. When, however, the traditional petty bourgeoisie is broader, present and active, then the petty bourgeoisie ideology represents a tangible, formed and functional social subject. The social group is not a fluid ambiguity and its ideology is not “imaginary”, because it represents its interests, albeit with contradictions. Therefore, petty bourgeoisie exists, but it does not concern any ideological reflection in an alternative class category or its reproduction by an alternative social group. In this case, the term: “imaginary” is devoid of any meaning; it concerns, that is,

only, a constructed depiction of the fluidity of the social structure, but does not concern “petite bourgeoisie”.

2

The characteristics of Greek society and the petty bourgeois'
phenomenon

2.1

General Comments

Greek society is included, even after its recent hardships, in the group of highly developed capitalist societies and indeed with a very high level of prosperity (UNDP 2010: 143, UNDP 2016: 198, UNDP 2020: 343).⁴ The relative historical delay of capitalist domination and integration is overcome, from the end of the second decade of the twentieth century (Mallios 1979: 32; Mouzelis 1978: 48; Moschonas 1986: 47; Milios 1988: 284; Lytras 1993: 151). The process of domination and integration has since accelerated, to become indisputable in the post-war period. The modernization of Greek capitalism was initially slow or with setbacks, until the change of government in 1974. The return to the legitimacy of parliamentary democracy and later accession to the EEC⁵ marked its exceptional development and indicated the country's continued prosperity.⁶ In the field of individual prosperity, Greek society has shown for four decades

⁴ In 2010, Greece's position was the 22nd, in 2015 it was the 29th, and in the 2020 listing it was the 32nd.

⁵ EEC: European Economic Community.

⁶ The most influential conceptions of the types of capitalism in the modern era are well known (Amable 2000; Hall & Soskice 2001; Schmidt 2002; Amable 2003; Deeg 2005; Deeg & Jackson 2009; Deeg 2009). These assessments have, more or less, a lack of theory and of substantive analytical discussion, while they resemble dogmatic statements, when gleaning the most competitive and tested forms of contemporary capitalism. I consider that their positions and typologies seem floating and today have not any real significance, due to the general failure of their predictions, especially after the crisis of 2007-2008 (Lytras 2017; Lytras 2020: 77-83).

to be at a better level than even several pioneering (or higher ranked, in terms of GDP value) countries in the modern world.

The particular properties of Greek society start from the social subjects and first of all from characteristics concerning the capitalists. There is no capitalism without capitalists (stock holders), and the vast majority of these entrepreneurs are employers. The origin of the bourgeois strata in our country is mainly merchant-intermediary and to a significant extent broad business groups were active in shipbuilding (Moskof 1972, Philias 1974, Dertilis 1985). Their initial composition therefore deviates from the rule, which was formed by the English originality for the transition to capitalism, where productive capital was imposed on merchant capital (Marx 1867: 259-260, Marx 1959: 216, 219-220, Dobb 1949: 18, 150-152). They have some marginal affinities with the origins of the bourgeois classes in Germany and Japan (Takahashi 1963: 30-55). In Greece, the bourgeois strata, possibly due to the geographical location and the initially small size of the internal market, remained more stable as merchant-intermediaries, with anemic or circumstantial involvement in industrial production. The distinctive abilities of the Greek bourgeois strata concern ship-owning and commercial extroversion and in these they placed their hopes and economic expectations for international achievements and high profitability (Milios 2010: 259-288). Greek ship-ownership (as a whole) is a major economic power, but burdened by its traditions, it constantly explores for the flags opportunities, the low tax burden and the cheap labor costs, outside the borders. The personal achievements of ship-owners, recently, were also copied by the industrialists, when

the possibilities of subsidy and tariff support dried up and they were deprived of the conditions of high profitability, in the internal market. Greeks recognize the important capitalists (most of whom are now heirs), indirectly, by their contribution to charitable projects, financed by a dividend of their wealth. It is very rare or even unlikely that they recognize them, as employers and active factors of economic life. Their internationalized economic activity and their luxurious life are in many cases mythologized, while they are “nationalized”, with the successful model of “benevolence”. This is certainly a late payment for the purchase of the post-reputation.

The consistent employer force is replaced, elliptically and for decades, by small entrepreneurs, who either permanently or periodically employ a very small number of employees per business. They stand out with their active presence in crafts, trade and other services, which in recent decades have increasingly included tourist activities. Until “European integration” they rely on protective tariffs, tax and insurance facilities, but also direct state financing or (privileged) loans with state guarantees (Lytras 2010: 219-244). The internal market does not allow for large openings or expansion possibilities with high expectations. It is, however, a fertile ground for laborious, but decent, professional activity, while ensuring, in normal conditions, a stable income, which exceeds the level of wages.

The former, in the economic landscape, have been accompanied, for many decades, by a numerous group of self-employed in all the aforementioned activities. The self-employed share common characteristics with small employers, such as small ownership and

small production. Self-employment was previously complemented by auxiliary family work. The numerous self-employed, assistants and employers complete the picture of non-salaried workers, who represent the majority of those employed until 1987, in the country (Chart 3, Chart 4, and Chart 5).

In the post-war period, one of the achievements of Greek society is the admirable educational performance and the remarkable development of scientific professions (Tsoukalas 1987: 98).⁷ Even more interesting is that young scientists, until 1981 at least and to a limited extent, were included in employment as salaried workers. Many of the young scientists reproduce, despite the modernization of (cognitively) demanding professions, the status of self-employed. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants with private offices or sole proprietorships and educational qualification providers with private tutoring, superficially reshape the urban landscape of professions, but on a similar basis to the previous generation (Lytras 2020: 228, 230-231).

It is a spectacular fact that the numbers of self-employed people are practically comparable or even identical, during the last thirty years, despite the simultaneous and continuous numerical reduction of self-employed farmers. To the reasonable questions of readers, regarding the reason for the relative numerical stability, the answer is basically the following: Self-employment is certainly based on the type of profession, but its important element, in order to exist, is property. As

⁷ See, ILO, ILOSTAT (2017).

long as small property is stable and not abolished, self-employment is also reproduced (Lytras 1993: 209-214).

2.2

Private Property

A strong indication of the importance of property can be found in the historical trajectory of agricultural exploitations. In the rural area, in fact, the lack of succession in the agricultural profession and in self-employment has not been accompanied, until our days, by the abolition of small agricultural property. The society was rural until at least the 1950s (Lytras & Prontzas 2006), and the vast majority of farmers were smallholders and self-employed, while their spouses and children were declared as contributing family members. In this economic environment, wage labor, even today, is an episodic (or sporadic) situation.

Social modernization, in the post-war period, was accompanied by a massive and steady rural exodus, without overwhelming changes in ownership.⁸ The maintenance of small properties (even by those who migrated domestically or abroad), provided the opportunity to enjoy additional incomes, alongside basic incomes from any other source. Those incomes were not sufficient to cover family needs independently, but they constituted valuable supplements for their alternative service and the basis of origin of some financial reserves.

⁸ In 2020, according to ELSTAT data (2020), the total area of agricultural holdings was approximately 27.14 million acres (each acre=1000m²), the holdings were 463,320 and the average holding had an area of 58.58 acres.

Small ownership in real estate and especially in residences constitutes a generalized rule for Greek households. Nearly four-fifths was the proportion of owner-occupied homes in the total number of normally occupied homes in 2009.⁹ It is an extremely interesting issue that in the twenty-first century there is more than one home (1.5 homes)¹⁰ per household. In addition, Greek society has a lower percentage (as a proportion of GDP)¹¹ of household bank debt and, in particular, loans burdening homes, compared to European countries (2009).¹²

It is noteworthy that the importance and distribution of home ownership, despite the severe hardships of Greek households during the country's long and unbearable fiscal crisis, remains similar in the third decade of the twenty-first century. There is no doubt that the number of

⁹ In 2009, owner-occupancy, as a percentage (%), of the total number of houses, was 43% in Germany, 56.6% in the Netherlands, 57.2% in France, 58% in Austria, and 62.3% in the Eurozone average. In Greece, the ownership of houses is in a different “universe”, compared to the above mentioned countries and its proportion is 79.6%, of the total number of houses (European Central Bank 2009: 13).

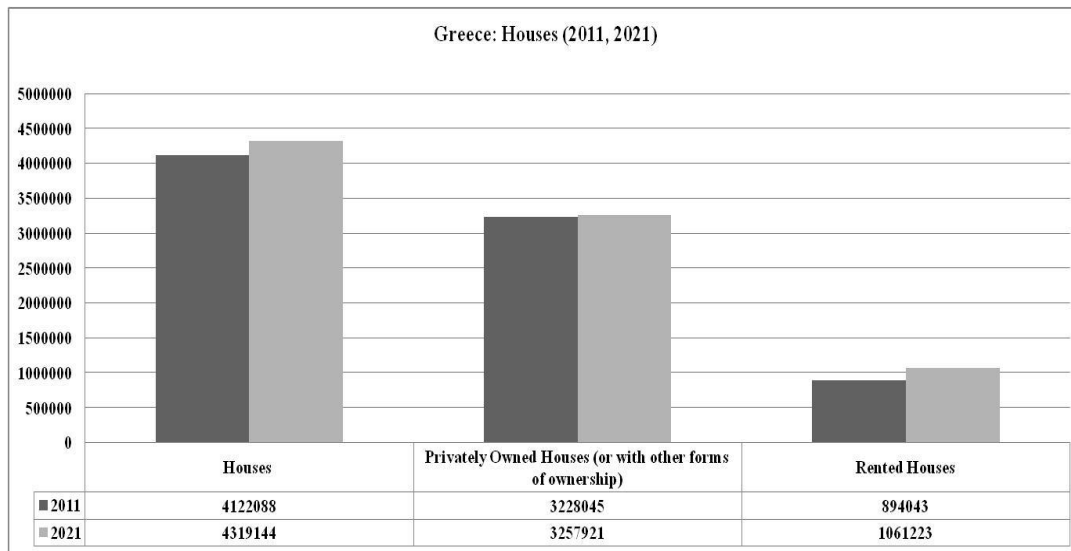
¹⁰ In Germany and the Netherlands, each household has the ownership of just one (1) house, in France, Austria and Italy of 1.2 houses and in the Eurozone in general there are 1.1 houses per household, on an average (European Central Bank 2009: 85).

¹¹ In Ireland, loans to households in 2015 were 58.5% of GDP, and to businesses (excluding banks) 265.1% (total: 323.6% of GDP); in Spain, loans to households in 2015 were 67.8% of GDP and to businesses in 2015 105.5% of GDP (total: 173.3% of GDP); in Cyprus, loans to households in 2015 were 129.2% of GDP, to businesses in 2015 226.1% of GDP (total: 355.3% of GDP); in the Netherlands, loans to households in 2015 112% of GDP, to businesses in 2015: 124.3% of GDP (total: 236.3%); in Portugal, loans to households are, in 2015: 77.5%, to businesses in 2015: 120.7% of GDP (total: 188.2% of GDP); in France, loans to households are, in 2015: 56.6% of GDP and to businesses, in 2015: 126.6% of GDP (total: 183.2% of GDP). Private household debt in Greece reaches 62.4% of GDP in 2015. In businesses in 2015 it amounts to 63.9% of GDP (total: 126.3% of GDP). See, European Central Bank 2017: S25, S27.

¹² Private debt for the houses was (in 2009) the 89.5% of GDP in the Netherlands, the 40% of GDP in Germany, the 35% of GDP in France and the 41.5% of GDP in the Eurozone. In Greece in the same year the loans for the houses represented the 30.3% of GDP (European Central Bank 2009).

households renting their permanent residence has increased. At the same time, data indicate that the number of houses has increased considerably in 2021 compared to 2011.

Graph 1



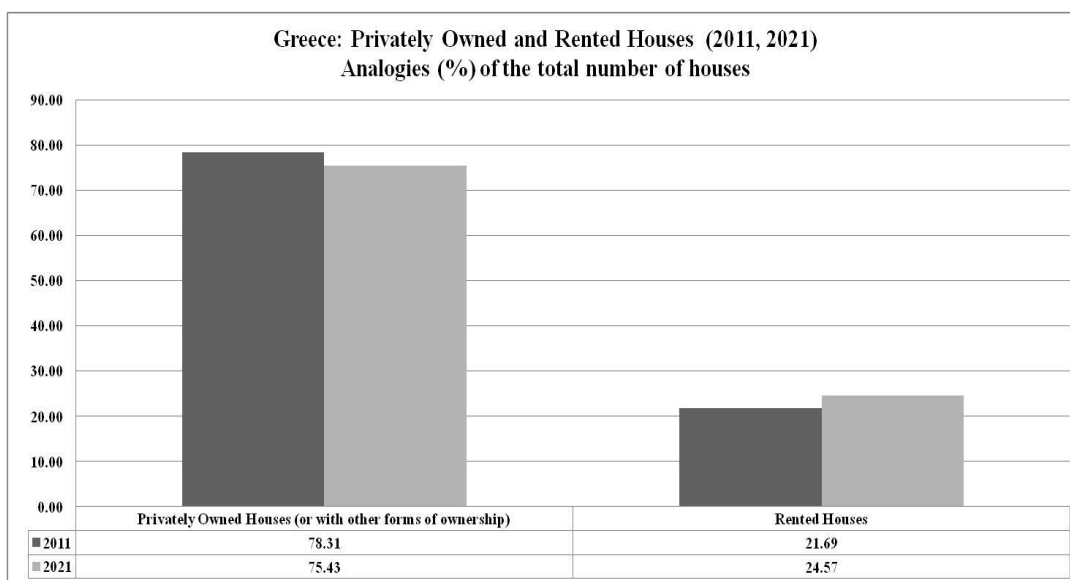
Source: ELSTAT [ΕΛΣΤΑΤ (2011, 2021)].¹³

The analysis of the proportions of the occupancy statuses, whether owner-occupied or rented, forces every observer to admit that the previous situation has not changed substantially. This increase in tenants is not an inexpensive phenomenon. This particular trend calls our attention and at the same time motivates us, as it is associated with the difficulties of income response to housing expenses, of a part of the households and more especially those consisting of younger members of our society. Possibly, the present records may also foreshadow more

¹³ ELSTAT (2011), *Census of Population-Housing 2011* [ΕΛΣΤΑΤ (2011), *Απογραφή Πληθυσμού-Κατοικιών 2011*], <https://www.statistics.gr/2011-census-pop-hous>; ELSTAT (2021), *Census of Population-Housing 2021* [ΕΛΣΤΑΤ (2021), *Απογραφή Πληθυσμού-Κατοικιών 2021*], <https://www.statistics.gr/2021-census-pop-hous>.

difficult economic or social situations. At the same time, the proportion of owner-occupied housing, which amounts to more than three-quarters of all dwellings, does not leave much room for not recognizing the resilient nature of small property, even in very difficult economic phases, as well as over a long period of time.

Graph 2



Source: ELSTAT [ΕΛΣΤΑΤ (2011, 2021)].¹⁴

It is obvious that the model of small property, which has been very widely spread in urban centers (Lytras 1993: 209-214; Lytras 2020: 151-155), also concerns the vast majority of wage earners (we can easily compare the proportion of wage earners with the proportion

¹⁴ ELSTAT (2011), *Census of Population-Housing 2011* [ΕΛΣΤΑΤ (2011), *Απογραφή Πληθυσμού-Κατοικιών 2011*], <https://www.statistics.gr/2011-census-pop-hous>; ELSTAT (2021), *Census of Population-Housing 2021* [ΕΛΣΤΑΤ (2021), *Απογραφή Πληθυσμού-Κατοικιών 2021*], <https://www.statistics.gr/2021-census-pop-hous>.

of homeownership). Symbolically, we could claim that, in Greek society, wage dependency does not mean automatic or generalized proletarianization. Even in the phase in which the majority of workers are included in the wage employment regime, the ultimate social threshold is formed by small property and not by the salary. Sometimes the value of real-estate represents the equivalent of several annual salaries. It is reasonable for property to shape more systematically the economic behaviors, social attitudes and ideological predispositions of the members of working class and all sorts of other strata of wage earners.

2.3

The Wage Workers

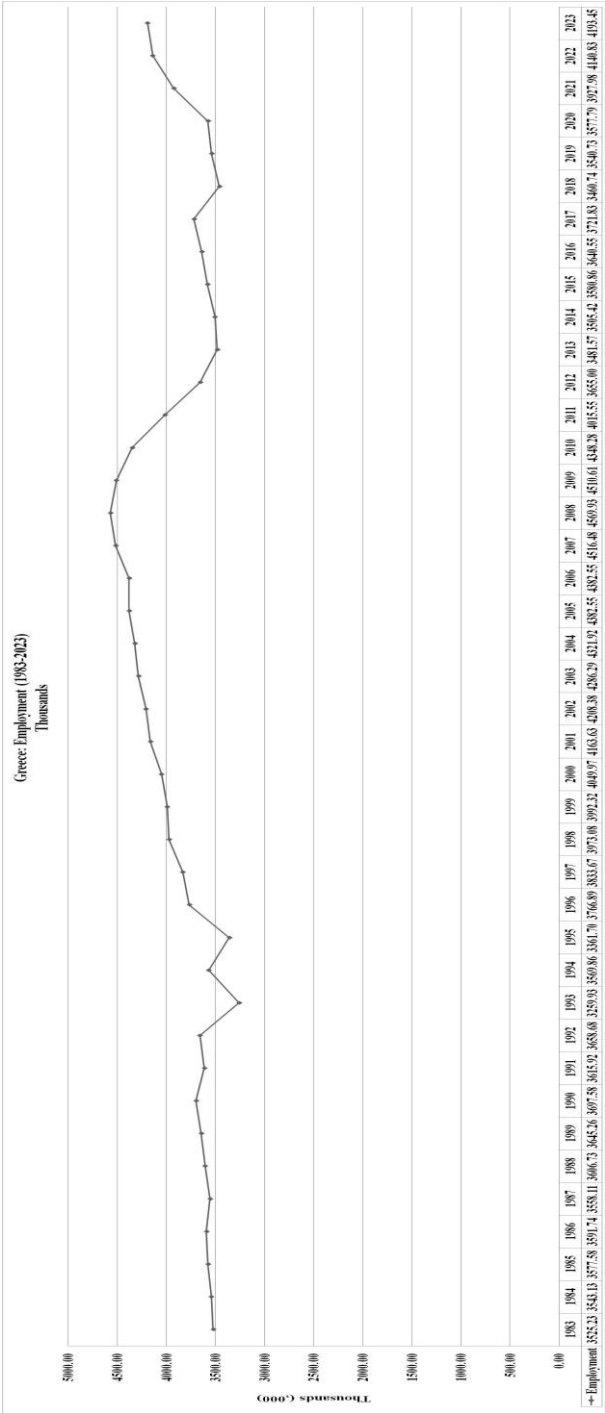
Reality and objective interests shape individual consciousness, and therefore the rough or detailed strategic goals and practices of the claim do not derive from some abstract ideas and perceptions. In this way we must also understand the actions of the working classes in Greek society, as well as the problems of their mass organization and collective practice. The explanation of the attitudes of the Greek working classes in the modern era can be carried out with the basic lens of the realities of integration into wage labor.

Salaried workers, before 1981, are a minority in employment. They will remain in a proportion below 50% of all employed people, until 1986 (See, Chart 3, Chart 4, and Chart 5). From 1987, a long period of slow expansion of their number and proportions (%), with two downward convulsions, will begin. This expansion will last until 2008 (the number of all employed people, then, will reach approximately 4.57 million). The percentage of salaried workers at that time will reach 65.55% of employment. One of the most interesting Greek paradoxes is the simultaneous increase in wage employment and unemployment, in the period 1991-1999, and the maintenance of the index above 8% of the labor force, until 2007 (Lytras 2020: 219). The Greek fiscal crisis highlights the collapse of the Greek wage employment model. At the same time, there was an explosive increase

in unemployment (27.7%, in 2013). The collapse in the number of employed people was accompanied by a proportional decrease in the number of wage earners, in a number that in 2013 is similar to that of 1998 (Chart 5). The percentage of wage employment reaches its lowest point, namely 63.56%, after the onset of the crisis, also in 2013. After this lower proportion, it very gradually increased and reached 69.05%, in 2023. It should be noted, of course, that the number of wage earners, in 2023, is comparable (but smaller than the corresponding one), with that of 2007 (as well as 2008 or 2009). These measurements are the clear indications of the adventure of Greek capitalism, which has not yet been overcome, despite the fact that fifteen years have passed since its beginning.

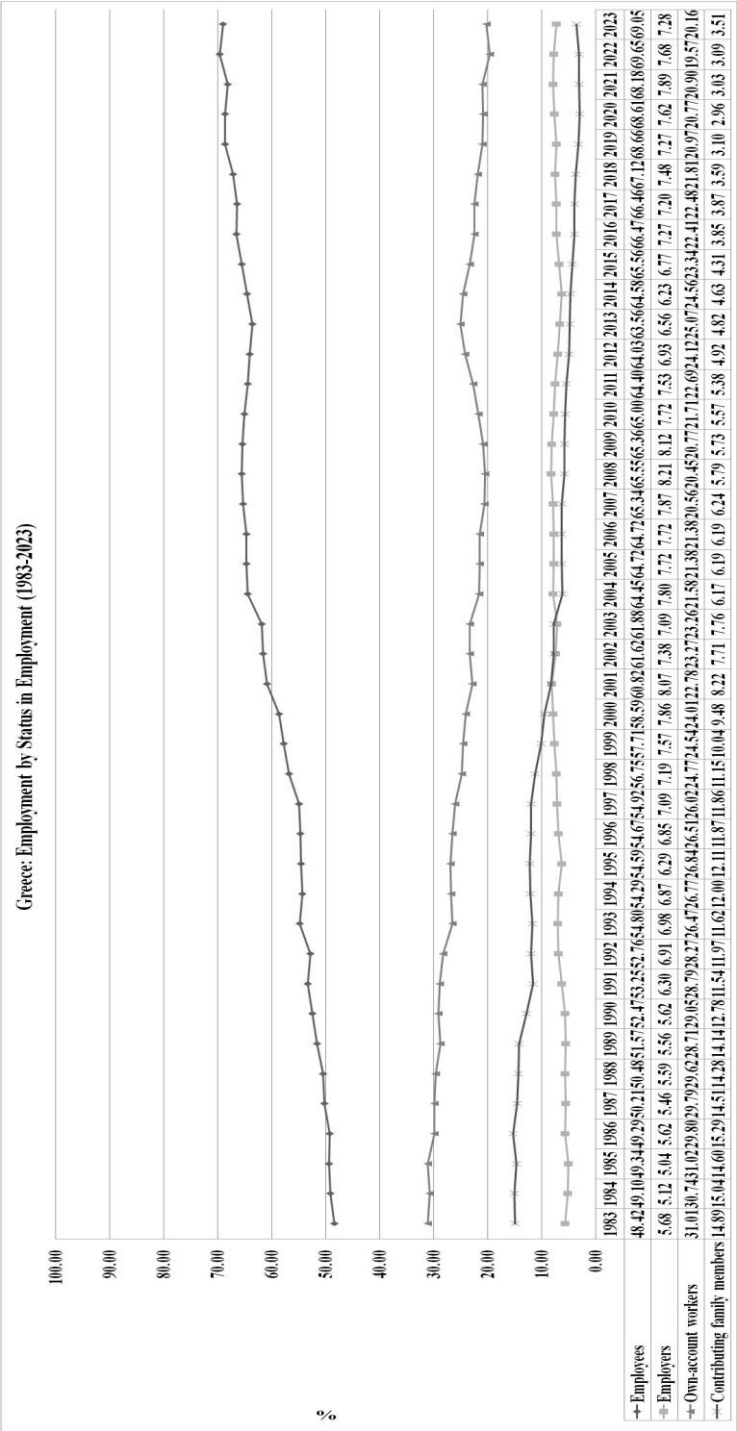
Beyond the general and slow development of wage labor, we must highlight important specificities of dependent workers, which determine the social profile of the majority of the working population and influence their attitudes and behaviors. This highlighting also contributes to the assessment of the cohesion of the working class.

Graph 3:



Source: ILO (2024).

Graph 4



Source: ILO (2024).

In the context of this analysis, we will refer to some useful examples of the specificities of the labor integration of employees in our country. Of the total (approximately 3 million employees), practically, the 967 thousand employees, out of approximately 4.57 million employees, in 2008, or the 794 thousand employees (in total approximately 2.35 million), out of approximately 3.58 million employees in 2015, who work in the State and public enterprises have an unclear or reduced sense of the importance of wage labor and its relationship with capital or, more specifically, with employers (ILO-ILOSTAT 2018; OECD 2015; OECD 2009; OECD 2011; Faitaki, Ioannou, Dimitriou, Kontogiorgis 2016).

The remaining approximately 2 million employees in 2008 and 1.5 million employees in 2015 work in enterprises that employ on average a very small number of employees (around 5 or 6 per employer) in 2008 and 2015 (based on the previous examples). The experiences of the majority of employees from large enterprises are therefore very rare or completely absent. The personalized relationships between small employers and the employees scattered in the sea of small shops (mainly trade and service enterprises) are more common than the impersonal and hierarchical relationships of large business structures (see, for example, Table 1).

Table 1:

Enterprises with personnel in manufacture, 2017 or most recent year (%)

Country/ Number of Employees per Enterprise	1 – 9	10 – 19	20 and over	[250 and over]
France	88.4	5.45	6.15	[0.70]
Germany	61.72	17.81	20.47	[2.36]
Greece	91.87	4.29	3.84	[0.23]
Japan (2016)	74.62	10.4	14.98	[0.93]
UK	78.4	9.41	12.19	[0.91]
USA (2015)	66.99	13.41	19.6	[1.66]

Source: OECD (2020).

Since 1987, the vast and perhaps overwhelming majority of employees working in the private sector are workers, in the most absolute and indisputable sense and regardless of the production sector (they are members of the working class, objectively). As long as the previous statement is true, the next one is also important. The working class is extremely fragmented, in a huge number (for the size of the country's economy) of enterprises. This fragmentation is responsible for its organizational disability and elliptical activation, in modern Greek social organization. While it is the vast majority, it functions as a minority of minor importance. The possibility for collective organization and action is objectively limited to the human resources,

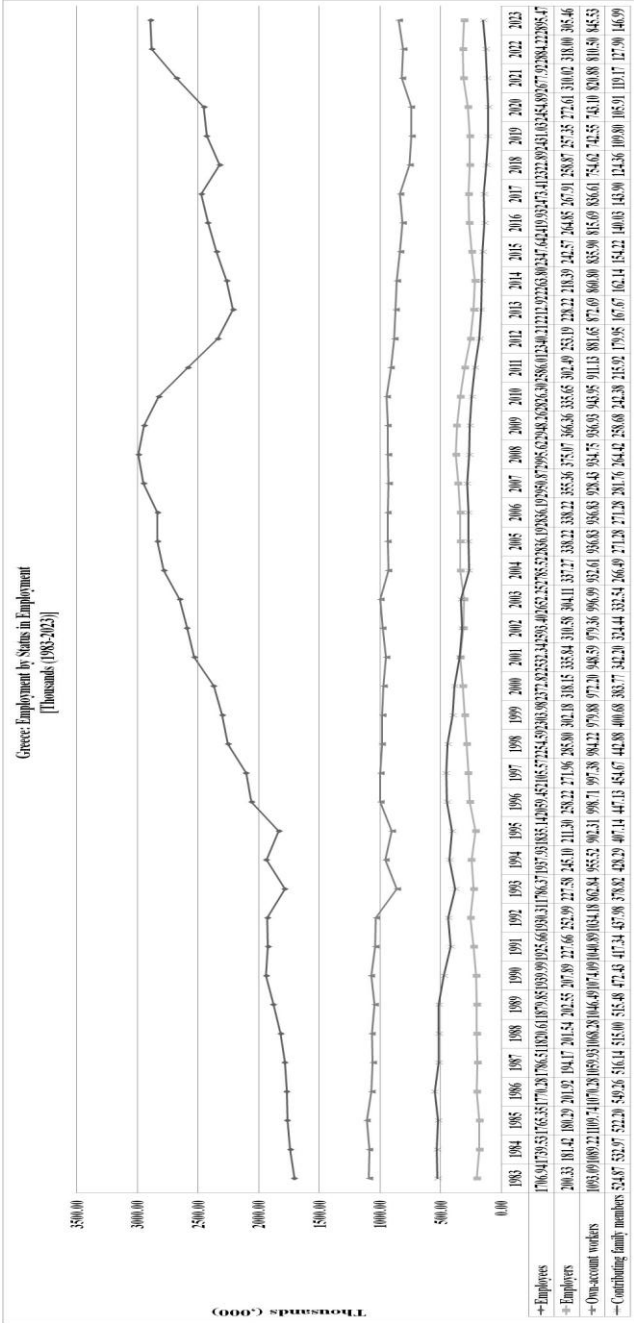
which are integrated into the largest enterprises. The latter are numerically limited and, for this reason, the phenomenon of trade union organization is sporadic. The presence of the organizational and practical aggregation of wage labor institutions in Greek society is developing to a significant extent in the State and the public enterprises.

In public enterprises (their employees, unions and federations are members of the GSEE¹⁵), in particular, there was the most fertile ground for collective organization and demands and for this reason the larger federations that participated in the GSEE came from this area (Lytras 1993: 218). The systematic process of privatization and denationalization, for twenty years, deconstructed the unified character of these enterprises and the dynamics of collective organizations, weakening the action of wage-earners.

In private enterprises, there is no substantial ground to speak, beyond the working class, for the development of a significant, in size, new middle class (Lytras 2016: 349). The Fordist-Taylorist model of organization of production and work, in essence, has had sporadic appearances in the country. The middle-level employees of enterprises, in this way, did not develop to a significant extent. Today, enterprises worldwide limit these forms of staffing (Lytras 2016: 369-387). A peculiar convergence is discernible between the data of the Greek social structure and those of the pioneer countries of capitalist organization.

¹⁵ GSEE: Greek General Confederation of Workers.

Graph 5



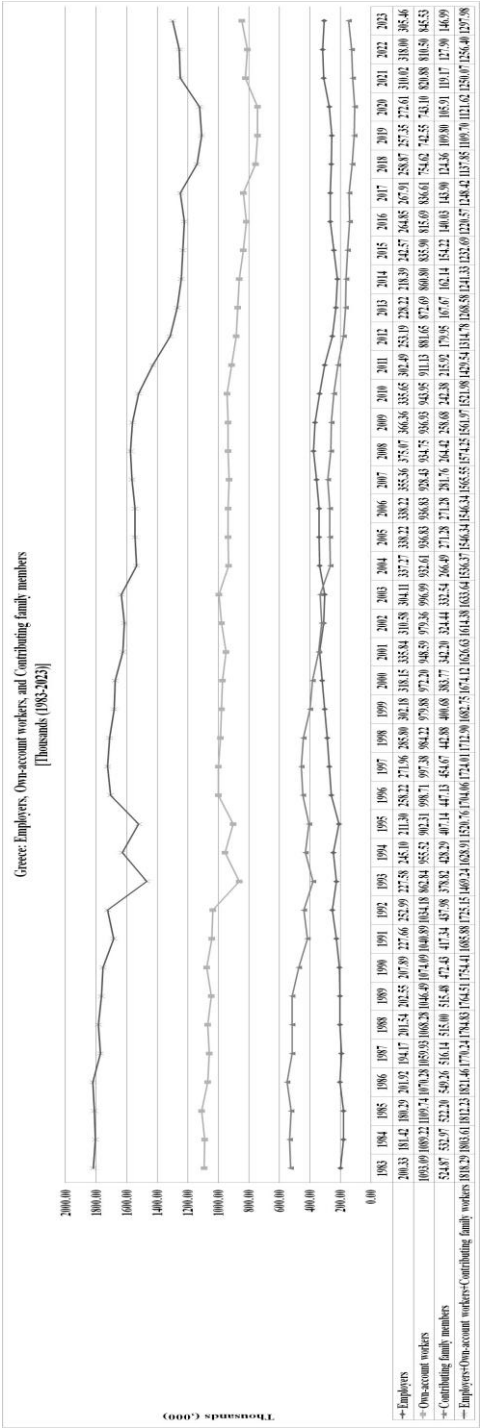
Source: ILO-ILOSTAT (2024).

2.4

Petty Bourgeoisie's Strata

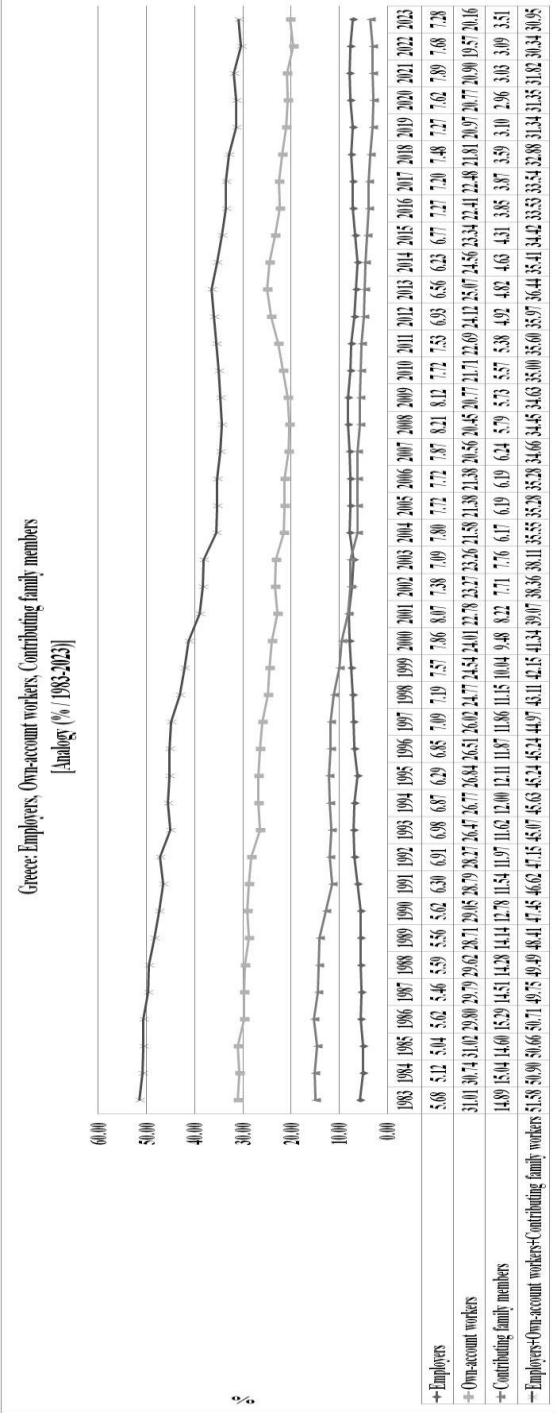
Greek society, in the light of the previous findings, is defined more than any other developed social organization by the presence of traditional (or old) middle or petty bourgeoisie strata (as indicated by the composition of very small employers, self-employed and contributing family members). Until the end of the 1981-1990s, they have the potential of a real social majority, to the extent that employment data are correspond to reality. The over-representation of these strata must be attributed, at least until the middle of the 1971-1980s, to smallholders and self-employed farmers. They are assisted by their family members (Lytras 2020: 198, 207).

Graph 6



Source: ILO-ILOSTAT (2024).

Graph 6.1



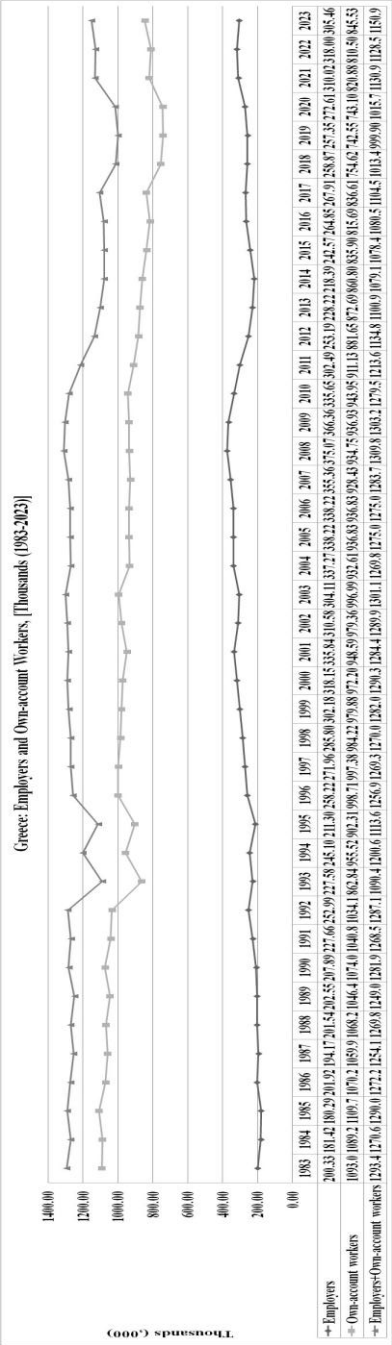
Source: ILO-ILOSTAT (2024).

The significant formation of similar, but disproportionate in size, petty bourgeoisie strata of the cities, in trade, services and crafts, indicates the declining, but historically resilient, development of the traditional petty bourgeoisie phenomenon in the country. The traditional petty bourgeoisie phenomenon still endures, despite the recent economic hardship and the pressures from the evolving diversification of employment. It is interesting that in the correlation of employment forces, the strata with a traditional petty bourgeoisie definition are proportionally declining, but the main reason for this percentage decline is the expansion of the size of employment, in the period: 1993-2008. On a numerical basis, the decrease is less noticeable. The numerical decrease becomes more pronounced only in the period: 2009-2015, after the impact of the fiscal crisis, but it is a contradiction that for a four-year period this is reflected in a percentage increase, due to the contraction of employment.

Greek society seems flatter, that is, less polarized than most leading capitalist countries in the world today. At the present juncture, the social categories that are predominantly of petty bourgeoisie in nature, based on employment developments, are approximately 31% (2023) of all workers. It must be understood that these class categories cannot be ignored by political forces, across the entire spectrum of the political system. Moreover, it is extremely problematic for them to be ignored by political organizations and strategic plans, which are based on intellectual preparations for their intervention in social structures, with exceptional class polarization. The same sensitivity must (avoiding ideological intolerance), characterize the management of the interests of

small property, as these concern both the predominantly petty bourgeoisie categories (universally and based on the status in the employment) and the broad masses of employees or pensioners. If the last political forces ignore or underestimate the aforementioned realities, they will hand over these social groups, as prey, to the most arbitrary layers of business profiteering and their political representations. These layers and those representations will first caress the petty bourgeoisie categories, then will marginalize them and finally will devour their assets, with sad results for the Greek social organization.

Graph 7



Source: ILO-ILOSTAT (2024).

Beyond generalizations, a specific focus of the analysis of the realities is, in my opinion, of particular interest. The measurements indicate that there is a possible connection between the self-employed and very small employers (i.e. the vast majority of employers in general). We can assume that a part of the self-employed (e.g. for the tourist season or for some years) operate as very small employers (Figure 7). To the previous one can be added the possibility that, during the crisis, some very small employers have retreated to the status of self-employed, in order to maintain the tangible and intangible assets of their business activity (ownership or use of premises, machinery or equipment, licenses, etc.).

The ideology of the interconnected petty-bourgeois strata reflects all the contradictions of their objective social position, namely the individualism, the passionate competition to stand out from their peers, the intense insecurity in the face of possible social decline, the bench conservatism mainly associated with the preservation of property and the radicalism in the practices of professional assertion. The wide diffusion of these social categories in the population and their objective intertwining with the masses of wage earners, through the coexistence of property rights (of the close or extended family and community networks), forms broad channels for the formation of general social attitudes or behaviors.

Conservatism is reasonable, to a certain extent, and is related to the great attachment to small property and the inexorable need to preserve it. It is accompanied by the obvious individualism. The individual character of labor integration, the general narrowness of

monetary liquidity and the usually narrow sufficiency do not allow for a very wide distribution and the emission of positive results to a larger circle, beyond the family (in some cases the community). The need for expansion is the only recourse, to feed social and economic optimism, and the prelude to the noticeable expansion of competition. The individual competitive mood takes the form of a cursory squeeze. It hardly succeeds, essentially, but it allows the avoidance of some of the most adverse effects of economic pressure on themselves and on the wage earners, those who are connected to their property and their petty bourgeoisie families. All of this results, of course, in few “results”, despite the temporary individual solutions, and in the sense of a generalized social impasse.

The succession of low (or even miserable) sufficiency (for a longer period of time), of conjunctural prosperity (for a very short time) and of decent sufficiency (more recently, but for shorter periods or even for fewer people) forms the sad trajectory towards the diminution of the number and proportions of the petty bourgeoisie categories. With them, if they become a social memory, their only valuable, perhaps priceless, “asset” will be lost. Their most valuable asset is not property. It is labor autonomy. After this dramatic diminution or eternal absence, only the drudgery of wage labor will remain here, no matter how high the superficial prestige of certain professions and the expected level of their remuneration (for a tiny minority of wage earners) may seem. The indications, of course, are not optimistic either for the well-being of the wage-earning categories of the population. The information known so far from the pioneering capitalist countries, which have long preceded

the broader spread of wage-earning labor (see, the comparisons and the possible future for the Greek distribution of employment regimes, in Graph 8), do not give the right to make any claim (Lytras 2024: 327-334, 342-352), regarding the imminent improvement of the standard of living and the avoidance of the misery of those subject to dependent (employer-based) labor, even if their qualifications are great and evident.

3

Summary and Beyond

3.1

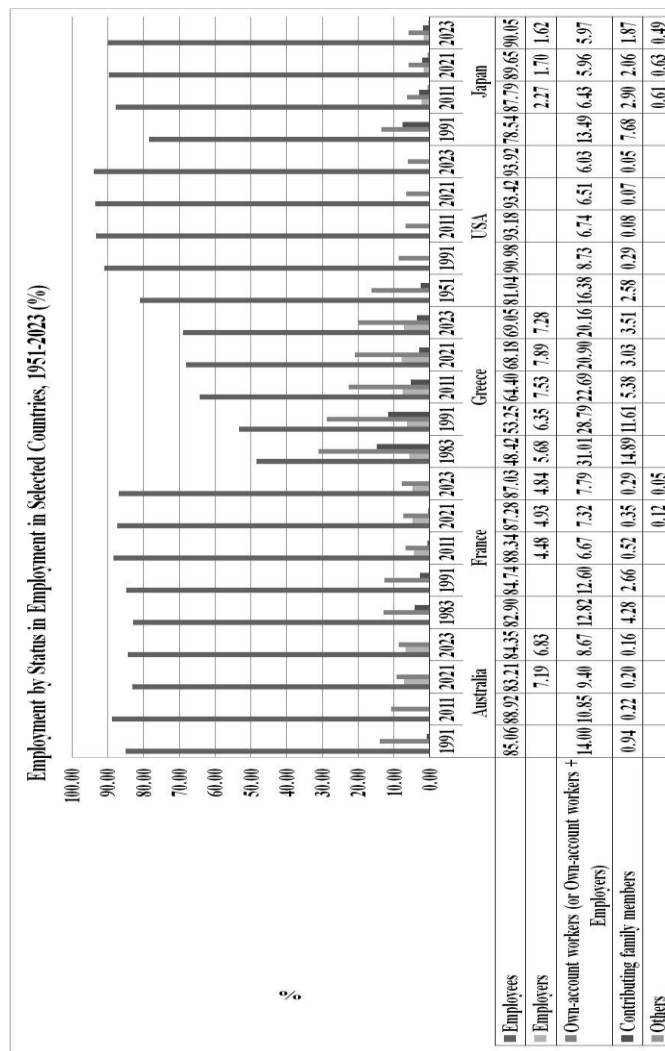
Summary

The brief analysis in the context of this analysis reviewed important theoretical views on contemporary Greek society and focused on the elaboration of measurements for employment (1983-2023) and ownership, mainly, in houses (2009, 2011, and 2021). The elaborations on employment statuses showed the great resilience, in the medium term, of the categories of working people, which do not regard to the employees.

The correlations of these specific findings with the slow expansion of employees, confirm the theoretical estimates, which have been formulated by the writer thirty-two (1993) or even thirty-six years [(1989) 2010], before the present conjuncture. Those assessments had occupied (in some cases, very extensively or with special attention) the relevant studies on Greek society, already, since the last decade of the twentieth century (Spiliotis 1993; Nassis 1994; Koniordos 1996: 222, 232-239, 245-246, 374-375). Interest in the same findings continued both in the first decade (Koniordos 2001; Katsouras 2004: 32, 62, 129, 133, 142, 157-158; Tsatsanis 2009: 199-223) and in the second decade of the twenty-first century, either in Greece (Daropoulos 2013: 93 ff.; Aranitou 2018) or abroad (Themelis 2013; Theodoropoulou 2014; Daskalakis 2015; Kotouza 2015: 53-54, 57-58, 64; Gaitanou 2016: 97-99, 103-108, 110-111, 130, 133), including broad, meaningful and

substantial comments or even highlighting individual differences. In the same vein, a broad discussion of my assessments has been incorporated into more recent scholarly works, either for my aforementioned studies (Kotouza 2019; Potamianos 2019; Dimanopoulos, Hadziiossif, Katsoudas and Potamianos 2020; Paloukis 2020) or for my most recent publications (Mardas 2025: 116-132).

Graph 8



Source: ILO-ILOSTAT (2024).

3.2

The aftermath of the analysis

The extent and importance of the traditional petty bourgeoisie phenomenon is indisputable in Modern Greek society. The differences, in relation to the distributions of social classes in the pioneering countries, are remarkable, even in the present conjuncture of the twenty-first century. According to the most modest estimates, very close to a third of the working population can be distinguished by direct (traditional) petty bourgeoisie definitions, based on current developments in the division of labor and employment, while a large part of the wage earners is also affected by petty bourgeois characteristics, due to their small ownership of houses. Social relationships are undoubtedly and decisively influenced by the interests and often by the annoying (or even contradictory) self-interests (at the expense of wage earners and informal workers) of the petty bourgeoisie categories of the population, but it would constitute an unjustified deception of readers to conceal, underestimate or deliberately distort these existing and, in certain situations, ruthless realities.

The formed beliefs, regarding the need for different depictions of the social relationships of our country, may stem from strong desires (perhaps of “noble” origin) or from inexplicable voluntarism for the prospects of our society. If they are not the products of “self-deception”, they also contain the seeds of some political choices or even plans, which may fuel major dead ends of social organization.

Since these plans are fueled by privileged minorities and their representations, then Greek society will experience a period of (“civilized”) political “barbarism”, framed by obvious social disasters, under the guise of “necessary” reforms and critical adjustments to international events. However, if the choices are based on the interests of the workers and radical political forces, then things will probably be worse. In that undesirable situation, the absence of suitable alternatives (including comprehensive measures for small ownership, small production, self-employment and cooperative organization) for the dominated social groups will leave the social majority uncovered and will make only “barbarism” or even “savageness” possible. We should not leave the future to fate.

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Appendix

Comparisons

[Employment by Status in Employment]

Employment by sex and status in employment (thousands) -- Annual

With the aim of promoting international comparability, statistics presented on ILOSTAT are based on standard international definitions wherever feasible and may differ from official national figures. This series is based on the 13th ICLS definitions. For time series comparability, it includes countries that have implemented the 19th ICLS standards, for which data are also available in the Work Statistics -- 19th ICLS (WORK) database. The employed comprise all persons of working age who, during a specified brief period, were in one of the following categories: a) paid employment (whether at work or with a job but not at work); or b) self-employment (whether at work or with an enterprise but not at work). Data disaggregated by status in employment are provided according to the latest version of the International Standard Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-93). Data may have been regrouped from the national classifications, which may not be strictly compatible with ICSE. For more information, refer to the Labour Force Statistics (LFS and STLFS) database description.

Subject: Employment

Database: Labour Force Statistics (LFS)

Id: EMP_TEMP_SEX_STE_NB_A

Time period: 1948 - 2023

Last updated: 22/12/2024 14:29:01

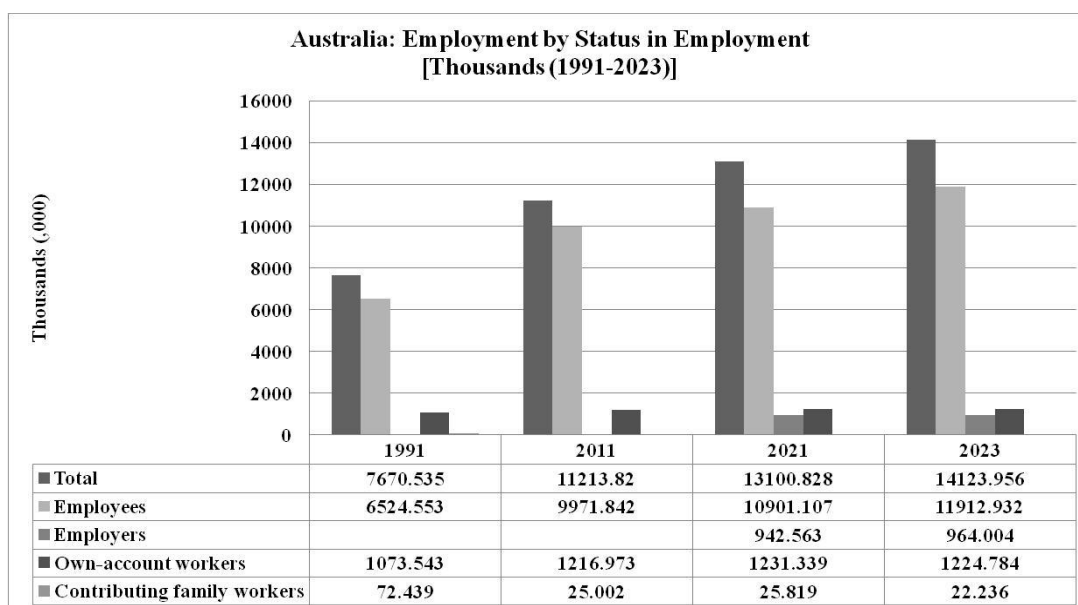
Number of records: 78935

https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer17/?lang=en&id=EMP_TEMP_SEX_STE_NB_A

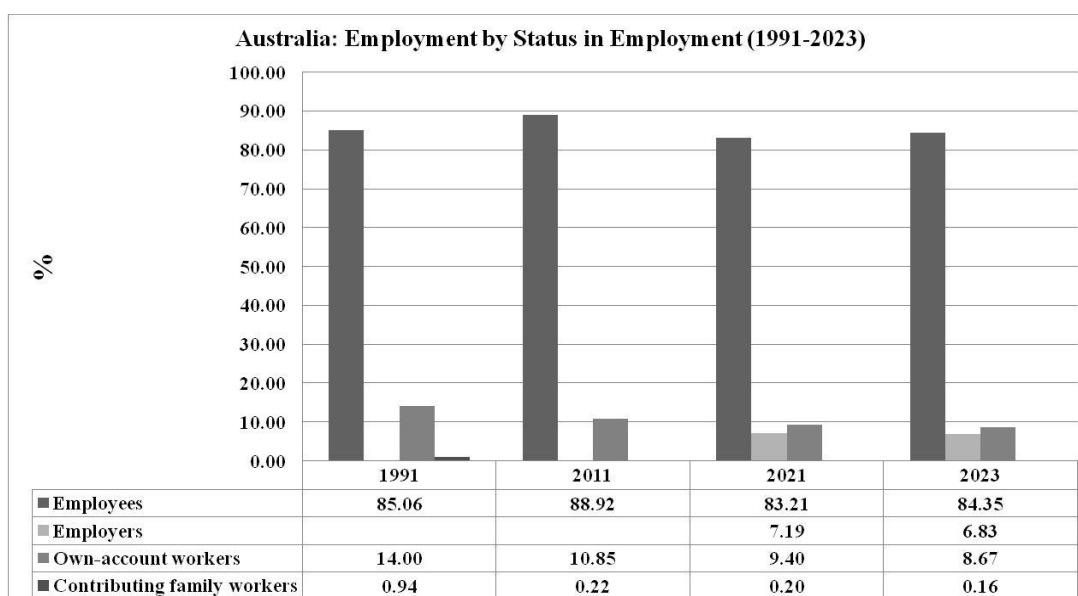
App.1

Australia

Graph App.1.1



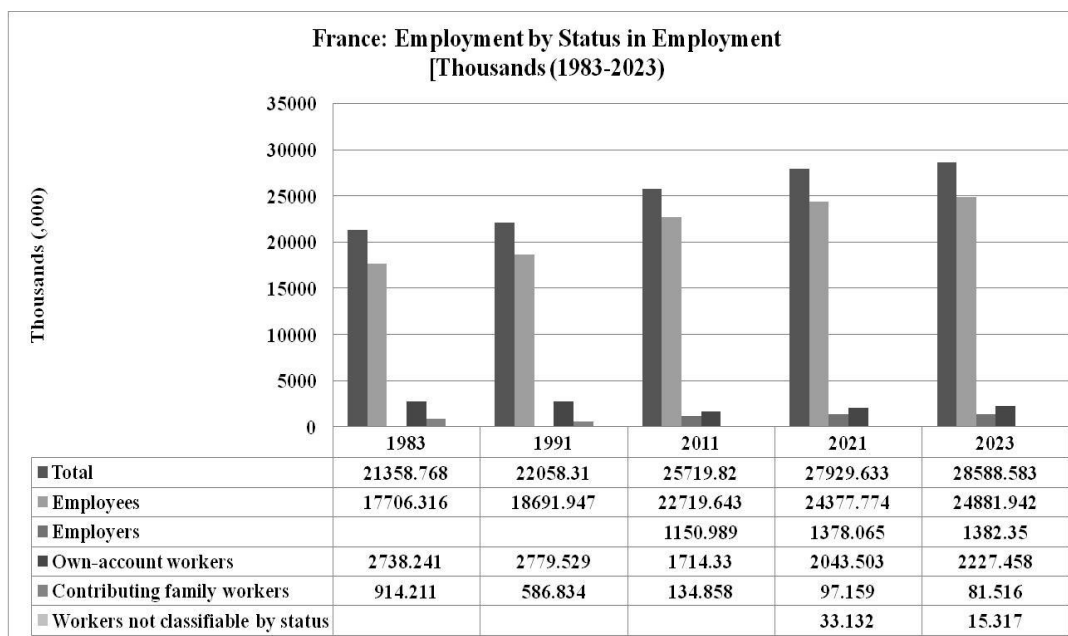
Graph App.1.2



App.2

France

Graph App.2.1



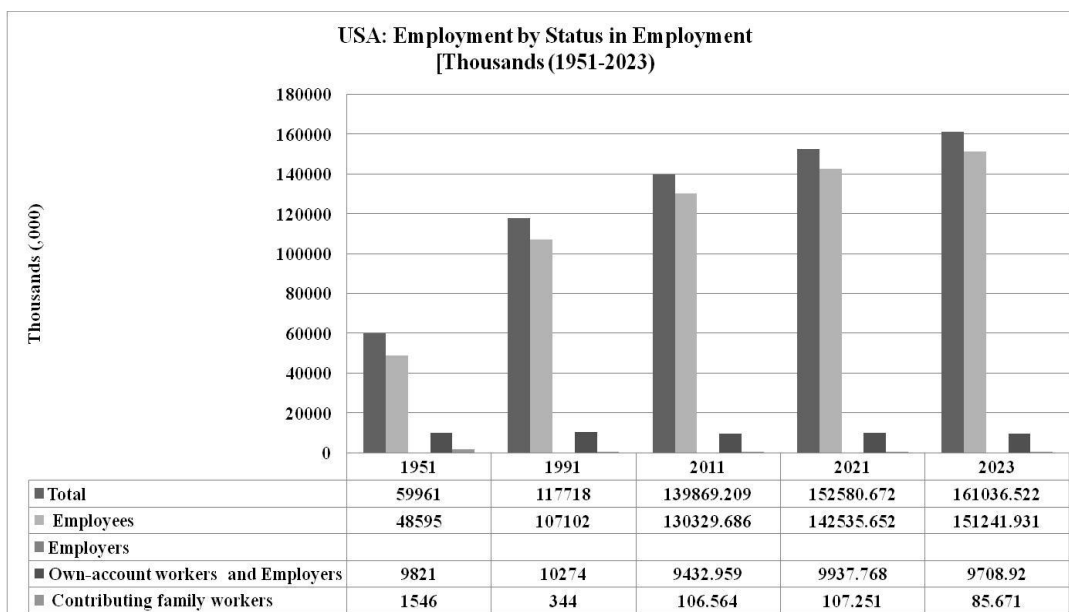
Graph App.2.2



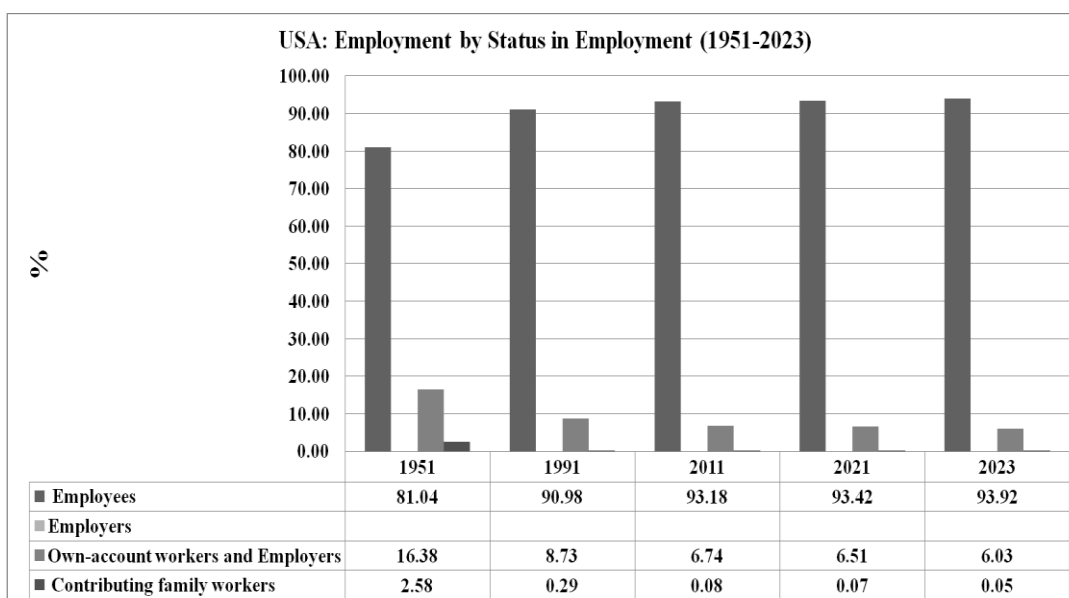
App.3

USA

Graph App.3.1



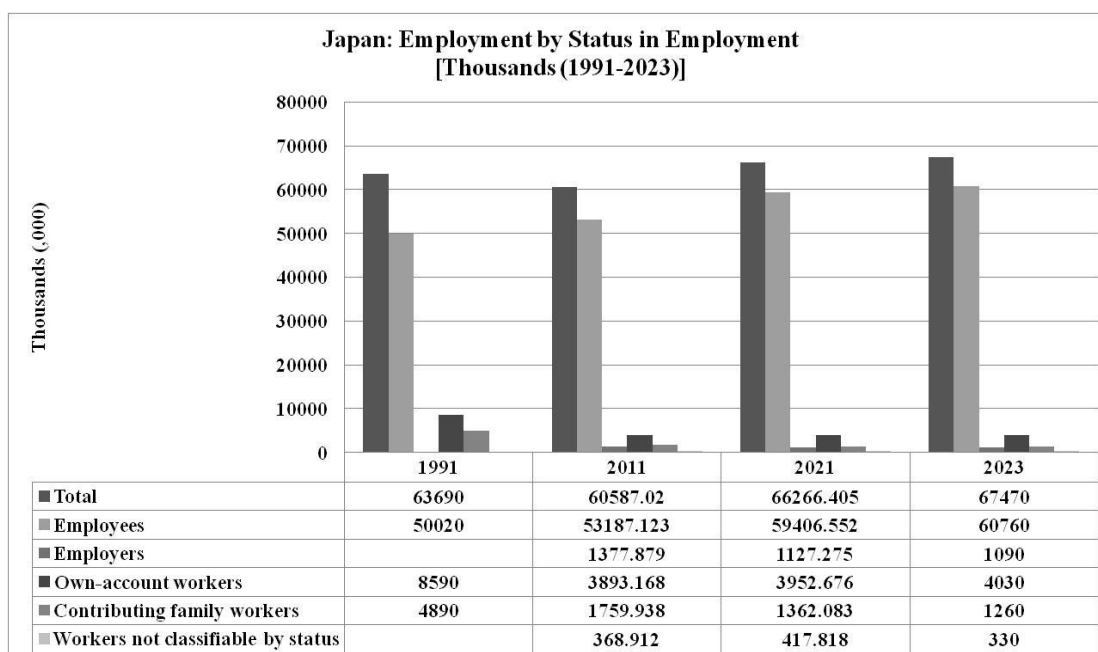
Graph App.3.2



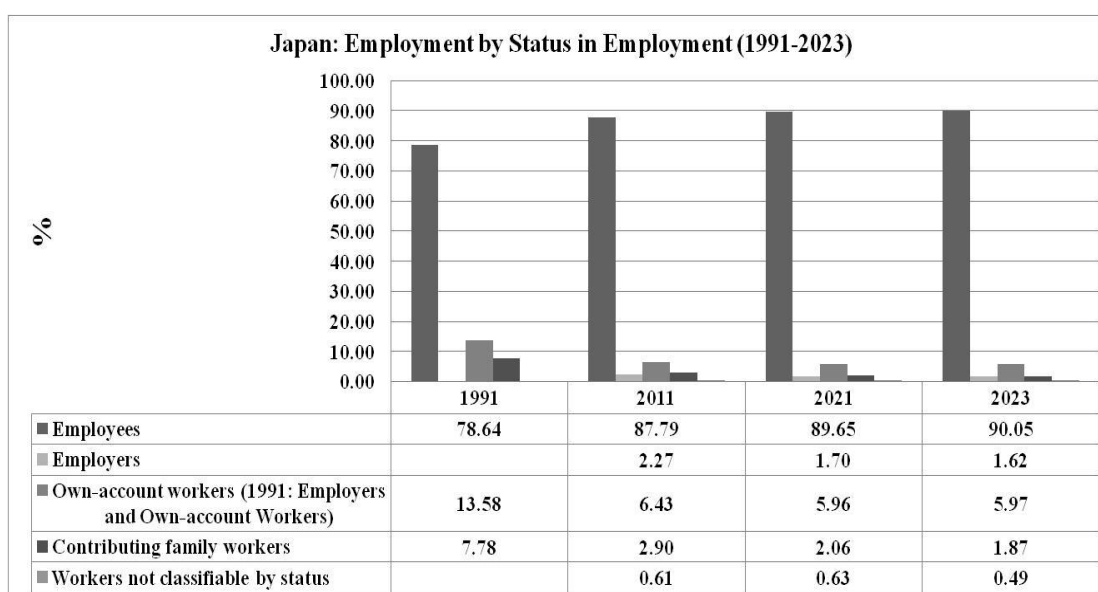
App.4

Japan

Graph App.4.1



Graph App.4.2



Greek Society

Social Analysis

Class Structure