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«MOTHER LANGUAGE OVER THE HISTORY»**

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«THE WOMEN OF TOBACCO »

EDITING - STUDY RESEARCH

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1. THE WOMEN OF TOBACCO

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The cross-border program Interreg III A, Greece – Italy 2000 – 2006, within the project entitled «Mother Language over the History», aims at exploring and highlighting the historical aspect of the female sex, its various representations as well as exploring the female's cultural identity within the areas of South Italy and the regions of Western Greece*, Epirus and in many cases it covers even sites of the Ionian Islands.

The present study attempts to explore the society and culture of Etoloakarnania from the perspective of female contribution and presence within those two levels. It is assumed that the reference to the female sex is done through relations – the changing relations between men and women.

Due to the fact that Etoloakarnanias's local identity and history has been defined in a great extent by tobacco production and processing, it is inevitable that the interest of this study is centred around the women of the tobacco, to approach them as historical subjects and to investigate the 'visible' and 'invisible' levels of their action in society and culture. The tobacco-city of Agrinion and the surrounding agriculture-driven region provides the research's place. The latter is shifted towards an anthropological approach of the local and 'invisible' means of social change.

From a methodological perspective, the research is based on field-research, the exploitation of memories and experiences as well as the utilization of written sources and bibliography.

* Patras Science Park is the project's leading implementation body of the Region of Western Greece.

1.1 Introduction: Agrinion, the city of tobacco

Following the release from the Turkish occupation and the integration of mainland Greece within the Greek state, Agrinion, formerly called as Vrahorí, has undergone a phase of development to a new city, with a new society and culture that is shaped under pressures of incorporation in a national society and economy and the innate dynamics that are developed by different types of residents: the refugees from Epirus, the villagers from the hinterland and other residents of mainland Greece, old, repatriated residents, the formerly rich families of armed men (*armatoloi*) and families of fighters and captains of the revolution, etc. that seek a suitable area for their base and further development. *The place is in need for more people. The land of Agrinion is capable to serve not only people from Epirus but the entire nation if that is necessary.*

The city is challenged to support its existence on the basis of a limited rural production, in a heterogeneous social and cultural population and in its intense dependence from the central state. However, since the last decades of the 19th century the city has already placed the bases for growth towards a development as a big commercial centre and since the first decades of the 20th century as important centre of tobacco processing and commercial centre¹ but also of other products, such as olives. Likewise in all the Greek territory, also Agrinion during this period - and in particular between 1860-1870- a shift of small agriculture businesses is observed towards commercialised agriculture and mainly that of tobacco, which flourishes in the region already since the 17th century. Following 1870, the cultivation of tobacco began to acquire a status of increased importance for the local economy, which up to some decades before, was quite insignificant. The production of tobacco is characterised by good quality and large quantities, which in periods of euphoria amounts for 1.000.000 oka (1 oka=1280 grams), the bigger part of which, was exported. The rural reform of 1871 contributed towards the growth of cultivation exclusively for exports. In the export plantations one could find mainly smallest family-run lots. In the year 1875, 9 million stremma (1 stremma = ¼ of an acre) out of a total of 7, 22 million, in other words a percentage of 43%, were cultivated in

¹ In EtoIoakarnania, tobacco cultivation is dated back to the 17th century. In the 1668, a Turkish traveller, Evlīga Gelebi, reports on tobacco cultivation and describes the broadleaved tobacco of Zapantion (Evlía Tselempi, Travel in Greece, research-log. Output by M. Heiladakis, Ekati Publications p. 212.)

plantations.² As reported in the Commercial Guide of 1875 "*Agrinion produce the following products: Tobacco of large quantities and good quality, where its annual production although insignificant some decades ago, now reaches already the production of 1.000.000 oka...*"³ It is quite important to note that in an exhibition of Greek products, which was held in Paris in 1878, Agrinion is represented by 'its flavoured tobacco' - as it was then imported - and that of the local production. Among the products that had been sent to the exhibition, were those of cut-tobacco, cigarettes and boxes of cigarettes, obviously originating from the local rudimentary manufacture.⁴

The economic and social growth within the area of Agrinion begins to emerge during the two last decades the 19th century. The chancellorship of Charilaos Trikoupis – which characterised almost all of the 1880-1890 decade, besides some small breaks and was also continued in second decade but with a slower pace- contributed to the reformation of the entire Greek state in a more general sense. The municipality of Agrinion was therefore interwoven with the works of rearrangement that took place within the Prefecture of Aitolokarnania. The last refer to a series of big technical projects that contributed towards the 'exit' of the city from the previous state of isolation and immobility and boosted its connection with the ports of exporting trade.

Beyond the organisation and the decency, what it is repeatedly underlined by the press of that era with a certain sense of exaggeration, is that: *As far as commercial matters are concerned, Agrinion at present possesses the initially founded place - within the prefecture – literally a small town having a population of 7.000 people, gradually progressing and advancing mainly due to tobacco cultivation and commerce". "As a city, Agrinion has a bright street-plan, wide squares, a spacious town-hall, with green-bloomed residences, trees, gardens, with so much good things which they present to the foreigner a city that is progressing. The abundant production of tobacco has brought much of life to the inhabitants as everybody is living a comfortable life "*⁵

² See, indicatively, K. Vergopoulos p. 112, where the reasons behind the state's encouragement for the tobacco and vineyards plantations' extensions are explained:

³ See, M. Mpouka, *Commercial Index, Geographic and Historic Index of major Greek towns, Year 1875. "Greek Independence"*, 1875.

⁴ E. Giannakopoulou, p. 45.

⁵ Neologos newspaper, number 1365 (23/05/1898)

The gradual urbanisation and progress is also certified by the unprecedented movement in the socio-cultural domain. In 1896, in view of the Olympic Games' resurgence, the Gymnastics' Association of "Hercules" is founded and the same year in the frame of wider feministic movement an annex of the "Athens-based Association of Ergani Athina" is founded in Agrinion, which organised the 1st Greek Exhibition of Domestic Products on 21 May 1898.⁶ In the exhibition, products of the craft-based and industrial production by a lot of cities of Mainland Greece, Peloponnese, Epirus and Macedonia were exhibited (buckrams, carpets, crafts, articles of clothing and foot-ware, products of distillery, jewellery). Exhibits also exist from the sectors of agricultural tools and other objects of domestic use and art. Immediately in deed after this report the Association organises, on 24th of May 1898, a congress on the subject: *"What should the role of the Greek female in the family and the society be?"*

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the city is being developed as an important centre of production, processing and trade for tobacco⁷. As far as generic positive factors that led to this development are concerned, the surge of workforce should be added. This workforce was emanating from the populations of refugees coming from Asia Minor. It is estimated that in the wider region of Agrinion the settling-down of almost 9.500 refugees existed on a progressive pace and lasted for a period of years, starting from 1922 to 1924. Most of them were workers in the tobacco fields as well as in the tobacco stores of the city. Workers, particularly those who were coming from the regions of Mpaфра and Smyrni, possessed enough experience and know-how and were therefore chosen for tobacco-related work, contributing in the swift growth of cultivation and production.

"The cultivation of tobacco, following the coming of refugees is undergoing a stage of tremendous promotion, as stated in the following official statistics: In the municipality of Agrinion during 1922 3.500 stremma were cultivated, in 1925 this number increased to a total of 7.000 stremma and the production of tobacco during

⁶ See indicatively K. Trjantafyllides, "Vrahoris" 1880-1940. Social and intellectual revival ", in "E" Historical Eleftherotypia Newspaper, 26th of September 2002. The report of 1898 was a landmark in the history of permanently developing Agrinion, as many people came from all over Greece. Representatives of the economic and business world from Greece and from the Balkans, but also from countries of Europe, politicians, diplomats, journalists, ministers and the royal family roll up to Agrinion these days. The press of this era described with excellent comments the success of the particular report (see indicatively Neologos, op cited)

⁷ For the economy of tobacco in the Agrinion during the interwar see Patronis Vassilis (2003), "The economy of tobacco and the matter of tobacco workers in Agrinion during the interwar", in Kon. Mpadas (ed.), (2003), *The memory of provincial urban place and landscape: Agrinion up to the 1960s decade*, Athens, Metaihmon – Municipality of Agrinion, p. 161 – 170. In general see M. Aggeli, where analytical bibliography also exists.

the first year amounted to 259.488 oka, while the second to 500.000! Out of this, the 1/8 are from the type called tsempeli, that is consumed in the interior of Greece, the rest, i.e. the 2/3, is called myrodato and is exported abroad to Germany, USA and other parts of Europe".⁸ In a general sense, this new social and cultural potential contributed considerably in the change of socio-cultural physiognomy of city and these changes - even though they are slow - they become obvious in the level of social behaviors and mentalities, in the everyday routine of city and in the local cultural settings.

The course of development for the city is altered due to the international economic crisis (1929). The assessment of tobacco matter of 1931 "is drearier" compared to the previous year: The strictest application of restrictions within tobacco cultivation, heavy taxation and indisposed quantities of tobacco contribute to the economic decline, which progressively leads to the degradation of tobacco producers and tobacco workers in the region, but also more widely in the entire Greece. The painful situation, to which the working world came into, during the 1930s decade, is expressed with protests, where females actively declare their presence, as we will see in the following. Moreover, the war and the occupation apart from the painful results in human resources literally shattered the "blooming and developing tobacco economy" of Greece. The life-based stories of women that experienced from their own side the occupation and the reduction of product that sustained their survival, imprint the traumatic experiences of selling-out their dowries, virtuous but also cultural finances, for a little flour, or for a bottle of olive oil. Shocking narrations prevail as they recount how young girls, then, together with their mothers and neighbours are loaded with clothes or the utensils and go sell them in the villages of Artas, Preveza, Lefkas island and elsewhere for a few foodstuffs, so that they could survive.⁹

⁸ See Big Greek Encyclopaedia, v. 1, p. 465, entry "Agrinio".

⁹ Indicatively we mention the extracts from the narration of K. I.: *"We passed very difficult years. Stone years. Hunger? I roamed all over Epirus, to sell our things, in order to bring the wheat, the maize, to live... All things, we have left nothing here in, all! In a bag in our shoulder, and in any car... were the Italian then, Italians they were little more flexible, they took up everybody with them. Up to Epirus we were selling them in order to bring fruit, foods with us. Here they waited for us as the swallows, with the mouth open... We made a group of 3-4 people and we took the street to the unknown, and to where it took us from there. In the villages the situation was better because they had farming, wheat, maize... The villages around Artas, I have been all around them. Through endless walking the mud went inside our legs... Think about that, young women, and you say where are we supposed to sleep during the night? We passed very difficult years my girl... «Interview of Mrs K. I., number 51, 25/5/2003, Research Program of the University of Ioannina.*

The post-war social and professional structure of the town until 1970 is determined by the tobacco-producing world (small owners, tenants or "semproi"). This world of course was consisted of older residents (local inhabitants, refugees and villagers from previous territorial phases), but also newcomers, human resources emanated from the mountainous space¹⁰. The last one equally possessed the means, the technical knowledge and the experience for the organisation of agricultural production that was supported in the self-funded family-run tobacco's exploitation. It is pointed out that at the same time the city was losing, for the same or different reasons, a comparatively better human element of high potential. It is indicatively reported that the leading economic and social teams of people that were related with the trade of tobacco, withdrew themselves progressively, carrying their activities and their investments to the capital, Athens. A relevant 'exit' was also made by a specialised part of the workforce following the changes that occurred in the labour process of tobacco in the 1960s decade. The last decreased the rate of employment and it mainly increased the rates of unemployment within the males' population with consecutive negative consequences in the commercial and craft-based activities of city. The final result was that Agrinion started as a developing, up until the interwar, an urban centre charmed by the efficient tobacco cultivation, commerce and trade, having a dominant social stratification, conscience and the dynamics of its residents, started to devalue in the aftermath of the war towards the primary sector of production, the tobacco cultivation, considerably limiting its commercial and manufacturing activity and urban characteristics of city. The aforementioned tendency of shrinkage¹¹ of manufacturing activities and the urban growth of city, a centre of an important rural region, is of course the expected result of the processes of integration of region and the rural world¹² characterising Greece's post-war capitalistic growth. The previous

¹⁰K Bada, "Revealing the historicity of migrant women. Moving from the mountain areas to the provincial urban centres of Greece. The case of Agrinion", *Ethnologia Balkanika* 10 (2006).

¹¹The social memory and history maintain the elements that testify the process of de-structuring of economy and society of tobacco in Agrinion, as those of the resistance of the workforce for its dissuasion (e.g. the reports in the protests of tobacco workers, in the rallies of producers etc.). See Papatrehas Ger. History of Agrinion, Agrinio 1991, Gkiolia Markou the working movement in Greece and Kostas Hatzopoulos, Agrinion 1996: publ. P. Moshonas, K. Mpada, "The female tobacco workers of Agrinion", In: Mpada Konstantina (ed), *The memory of provincial urban place and landscape: Agrinion up to the decade of the 1960s*, Proceedings of the meeting of 23 September 2001, Athens 2003, Metaihmon – Municipality of Agrinion, p. 117 – 130. Barhambas Aristides (2003), *Agrinion once upon a time*, Agrinion, Municipality of Agrinion.

Aristides Barhambas, Tobacco workers. Hunters of the Dream, Agrinion 2006.

¹² In general see Damianakos St., (ed), (1987), Processes of social transformation, Athens, E.K.K.E, Kassimis Ch., Louloudis, L.(eds), (1999), *Countryside, op cit.*, Anthopoulou Th. and Moisides A. eds. (2001), *From the rural space in the countryside. Transformations and modern data of rural world in Greece*, Athens KEKMOKOP – Gutenberg.

decentralised economic growth is also followed in Agrinion, where the more general tendencies of centralisation, shape - in the absence of the dynamics of local activities - two or more industrial and urban poles of growth¹³.

1.2 Theory and method: Exploiting the experienced history and memory

The highlighting of “inconspicuous history” of the tobacco world and particularly of women, meets certain difficulties mainly because the written sources are particularly limited and the "official history" has not faced the world of everyday routine as a factor of history and social change. It has not given the required attention in the study and the comprehension of the local societies and regions and if it has been done, very little has been accomplished to lighten the historicity of social teams, the action of inconspicuous majorities that constitutes the motivating force of history. Among others, it has failed to lighten the social and cultural action of woman's and the approach – in general – regarding the altered relations of two sexes. The local historiography, as it happens everywhere in a small or large extent, has been released by the sovereign historical perspective that gives attention in the important makes and persons of local society, in the leading layers of the city, in the objective history of battles and dates. The historical gap is consequently big, similar to the gap of anthropologic research since apart from the way of historical observation what is missing, as it was already pointed out, are the written sources that concern the inconspicuous majorities of women, children, workers etc.

The present study tries to fill the gap by registering and exploiting the memory and the experience of the women, as well as with field (on-site) research. It is also pointed out that the last decades the history of anthropology acquired a new dimension within the sources and the interpretation that was provided by the use of memory and people's experiences as primary sources¹⁴. The oral sources opened new prospects

¹³See G. Burgel (1976), Athens. *The Growth of Mediterranean capital*, op cit, p.185 – 227 and more generally all the text where presentation and interpretation is made on the process of economic concentration and explained why no provincial activity did not achieve its causes as a real and continuing extension and growth that would become perceptible in the level of demography, local and regional economy of the society..

¹⁴ For the importance of oral sources in the history and the exploitation of more generally memory from the side the historical and anthropologic research see indicatively Thompson Paul (2002), *Voices from the past. Oral History*, Assiduity - Import Kon. Mpada - R.Van Mpoushoten, Athens, Plethron Passerini L. (1998), *Sparagmata of the 20th century. The history as experienced experience*, transl. Ontet Varon – Vasar, Ion. Laliotou – Julie Pentazou, Athens, Nefeli. Also indicatively, Proceedings of the International Meeting on the subject: Testimonies

that exceed the level of facts, structures and behaviour and lightens up the way with which the facts are experienced, retained in imagination and hermeneutically re-define the past and the present of the individual and collective subjects.

The material of the present study consequently originates from the few written sources, on-site research and the analysis of thirty five recorded histories of life that have been provided by female tobacco workers and tobacco farmers of Agrinion. Even if the histories of life about women of tobacco externalise individual experiences, they accomplish – within common and repeated narrative forms - the shaping of common stereotypes and identities. Self representations are almost the same because individuals recall what they have done, as other researchers of oral history have shown, as members of a social team, a class, where they are included.

Halbwachs¹⁵ had firstly pointed out, regarding the last one, that the individual operation of memory is determined by the social team in which the individual belongs, consequently the individual always recalls and reconstructs the past as a member of team or as institution of cultural identity in which many are participating in different ways. The researcher of consequently oral narration and memory in the substance does not have to deal so much with individual memory, but moreover with the collective forms of subjectivity, the collective memory. It is therefore led via the individual memory, to the study of social team, to the limits of which the subjective dimension of memory is developed and functions. In this case, the latter refers to the study of tobacco women.

Through the rich cultural background of the last ones a unique picture of social reality and cultural life is emerging. It is noted that the deposited history from them (the women) is not the total history of their place but theirs, the one that elects attitudes and behaviours, experiences and mentalities. It is not also a single history of action and behaviours but a lot of parallel histories that constitute however a total, as the individual experienced experience is the one that elects the polymorph and provides the possibility are appraised the deviating individual attitudes and mentalities, that they

in sound and moved imprinting as source of history, Athens 1998: Katarti Mpoutsouvi Aleka –Thanopoulou Maria (2002), "the oral history in Greece. The experiences of difficult course ", Special copy, *Aspects of oral history in Greece*, Inspection of Social Researches 107, A.

¹⁵Maurice Halbwachs, *La memoire collective*, (Paris, 1950) · English translation *Collective Memory*, New York, 1980). From his side to Pier Nora marks that the collective memory is fixed as "what remains from the past in the frame of teams' experiences or what the teams create with their past" See P. Nora, "Memoire collective" In: J. Le Goff, P. Chartier, I. Revel (eds.), *L' histoire nouvelle*, Retz, Paris 1978, p. 73 – 106.

constitute, at the end, the local collectiveness. The pieces of life that they select to recount declare the retraction of a distant and recent past that they received from the previous generations, registered and also maintaining in their memory, enriching it with their own experience. Louisa Passerini¹⁶ notes in that point that more specifically the field of woman's reasoning is enriched with a cultural and symbolic autonomy that is provided to them by the use of tradition, the transmission of experience from a mother to a girl, from the neighbourhood, the relatives.

Although at first sight, it appears that the world of tobacco growing, trade and commerce did not constitute - due to the activity and the intensive rhythms - an important factor of cultural production of the place, especially the female sex that did not take part in public events and activities, it is realised in the present work that women were the silent factor of social and cultural actions and also important factor of social change.

By analysing the life histories of female tobacco-workers and growers and by simultaneously attempting a historic-anthropologic reading through them what came into the surface, were the most important stereotypes that lead to the appointment of cultural/collective identities of women of tobacco and to the revelation of many aspects of feminine culture. It is pointed out that the narrative means and the techniques of reasoning for women are common and repeated so that they shape common stereotypes that impress the various gradations of feminine cultural identity. Firstly, the identity of female tobacco-grower who had a dynamic presence in all levels of family, social and cultural life, will be presented in the following. That is the identity of tobacco-grower/weaver that experienced the hard reality of economy of self-sufficiency and domestic textile manufacture as additional activity to her daily life. The salaried field worker or the worker in a tobacco store house. Incorporated in these constant defining identities, other identities that are emanated from social roles are presented (e.g. the mother, capable landlady, the young and the adult), from social realities (refugee, worker, *semprissa* or master), from the distribution of work in tobacco cultivation and tobacco working, from the degrees of attendance in the field of public social life and culture.

A first ascertainment is that within their self-representations, Agrinion's female tobacco-growers and workers are firstly presented as casual women meaning that

¹⁶ L. Passerini, *Sparagmata of the 20th century. The history as experienced experience*, translation of Ondet Barron -Vasar, Ion. Laliotou - Julie Pentazou, Athens 1998: Nefeli Publications, p.13 -20,

very few of them had achieved even a minor level of public award. However, they actually feel that they have made appreciable achievements. As they unfold their life histories, it becomes obvious that they did not underestimate their contribution in the society: they show that they knew their role, they were sure in this and they felt satisfied from their activities. They played an important economic role within the gaining and managing of the family's income and a conscience about their role in the family and in the society.

As one female tobacco-worker narrates: *«Through my job, it made possible to grow-up my kids and two of them did actually study. I would not wait with my hand open, so as to get money from my husband so I could be able buy things from the grocer. When Saturday night came and I was getting my weekly salary, I could make sure to make my own budget, my husband's budget and we could be able to pay our rent, the groceries and every other obligation. I even put some money aside... I was working and that provided me a sense of security... We went for a walk every Sunday to the park, had a drink, roamed around and it was all nice. I would not be bothered by working...»*

Thus, the work in the tobacco-storing facilities and tobacco fields¹⁷ as newer elements reveal, constituted a basic element of their identity. This type of paid constant work, even if badly-paid attributed an income in the family and provided an important reason for the presence and action of women in the public affairs. The latter shaped a feeling of self-esteem and constituted a point of collision for the perception of the women's role at home. Many women indeed presented themselves as capable of breaking the rules and as protagonists of those social changes that were of concern to them. Narrative forms of women that desired a change of the society's attitude concerning them projected their opinions by narrating of practices of their feminine mischief, or recounting small actions of everyday routine (e.g. reports about smoking, or about walking in the square or about tailoring of clothes), recounting also their own decisions and energies that dynamically regulated, or sometimes violently¹⁸, their personal life.

¹⁷ Often, the same women were moving as workforce between the field (tobacco production) and the tobacco store houses (processing).

¹⁸ *I would not leave him like this. Who was I that he believed that he could leave me because my father did not give him a damn field? The truth is that he entertained himself with me and then he left me... I was waiting for him, I thrown some poison on his face and I made him blind.. Afterwards, I left and I moved to Agrinion, I rented a place...leave the rest.. I went through a trial, but him...he ended-up a person better not look at... (K. D., aged 65).*

In general, the female tobacco-workers but also tobacco-growers were very little distinguished by their disposal to be presented as women oppressed by men. In their histories of life, most of them underlined the conscience that they had for the limited prospects and opportunities they had in their lives and did not omit to connect men and men of their social class, with this lack of choices that they had in their lives. They did not believe that they, or their mothers, had been particularly oppressed by men, not at least from the men of the working class. On the contrary, they tended to accuse poverty that controlled the place where they lived, the duration and the nature of their education and very often the type of offered work. Those that considered the roots of poverty saw themselves and their husbands as being oppressed from the rich people, brokers and the tradesmen of tobacco and the bosses, that were men. In other words, the women who were self-conscious about the exploitation, they interpreted it in the frames of a social class's conflict. Through the regular characteristics of narration, what is firstly expressed is a multiple sense of collectiveness and working solidarity: "we", "we" and we, means the association, the other workers or the male and female companions.

The social evaluation of the important roles of the female tobacco-worker and grower is taking place silently in the internal world of feelings of her children and family. It takes place also in the level of representations. Poetry and prose, figurative art¹⁹ and the cinematographic art had richly reported the woman of tobacco and elected various aspects of her social substance. Indicatively, it is reported that Costas Hatzopoulos, *in the tower of Akropotamos* and in the "Love in the village" makes a psychographic on the women of tobacco impressing simultaneously the economic and social realities that surrounded his heroes. P. Hatzopoulos, a poet coming from Agrinion, put particular emphasis on his verses about the labour of women within the tobacco fields of Vraheri (Agrinion) and Zapantion²⁰:

*«Oh my mother from Vraheri, having a dirty dress,
The red that became dark by the glue of tobacco, deadly herb,
Your heart became ill-fated...
You got old in the field but are still fighting
Until your last breath so as the family prospers, the workers».*

¹⁹ Dagkli, Women in the tobacco

²⁰ The poem of Panos Hatzopoulos was published by Th. M. Politis in the magazine «Root of Agrinion's people 5 (1990), p. 14–15

1.3 Real and symbolic actions of the female tobacco-grower

1.3.1 The cycle of tobacco cultivation

The culture of tobacco requires workforce that covers primarily the family and the circle of close family members. When family working hands are not enough, the needs are covered through borrowed help, which means the labour help of another family, relatives or friends or from salaried workers. However, in every case the entire process of tobacco production up until its sale to the tradesman is based on a strict distribution of work based on sex. This can be explained only if it is connected with the popular mentalities and ideologies that want the women to be from the side of nature or acting as mediators of culture and men exclusively from the side of culture.

In tobacco's farming circle – which begins on February with the seeding stage and finishes in the autumn with the packing of tobacco – the female sex has a particularly important role. From all the stages of traditional cultivation and production of tobacco²¹, starting from the field up to the tradesman (the preparation of the seed, the tillage, the seeding, the hoeing, the harvest, the stringing, the desiccation, the packing and finally the sale) the woman has to prepare, as in her reproductive role, the birth of seed, to resurrect it carefully²², to sow it in the field²³, to grub and collect when its growth is completed, and to continue with the process of stringing²⁴ and desiccation.²⁵

²¹ For an analytic presentation of productive process and distribution of work in the base of sex see Aggeli Maria, *The World of work: Women and men in the production and treatment of tobacco (Agrinion 19th - 20th century)*, doctoral thesis, University of Ioannina, 2007, p.

²² "You know *klwsimo*? You made a woollen sacket, from a woollen cloth, a square one and you put it inside and you left it next to the fireplace. You made the seed wet, you warmed it and you wetted again in the morning.. After 8 days the seed became white and after another 8 days the first sprouts started to appear..." (Gr. Mp: Research Program of the University of Ioannina)

²³ The process of seeding is carried out mainly by women – tobacco workers, with a simple wooden tool in the traditional culture, punctures the earth and simultaneously ground the plant. The oral testimonies are reported in this difficult phase, then that machines did not exist work was undertaken all day long, bent in the ground with the primitive tools. They were working in the fields from sunrise until sunset, with little breaks and a lunch break.

²⁴ Afterwards the collection it follows the stringing or threading of the tobacco leaves. It is a process where all the members of family are participating, mainly women and the children. The stringing in the traditional way was conducted with a stainless steel needle (length of 50 cm and width of 1,5 cm) with tip in front in order to that the leaves pass through and a hole behind in order that the string passes, in which the leaves are retained, shaped in a bunch, as it is said. The process was time-consuming and laborious and lasted up until the evening, under the light of an oil lamp.

²⁵ Following the stringing comes the sun-soaking of tobacco *in liastra* (dry-out of leaves), and the cares of men and women are continued. Usually women in the morning with the dew returning from the leaves collection they are trying to stick out the leaves from each other, the leaves that are hanging in bunches in the *liastra*. It is a

The men have to take care of the soil, to seed, sun-soak the leaves, to irrigate, transport the tobacco for stringing, packing and mainly they bring the entire process to an end, meaning the distribution of product, negotiations of sale in good price, market, borrow money from the bank, etc.

Apart from her participation in the almost day-long farming circle, she has to make sure that the family has food, to take care of the food in the field for more people, she is responsible for the household, the care and the socialisation of the kids, the preoccupation of the elders of the wider family and very often the management of economic resources since she is responsible about the guarantee of self-sufficiency, the creation of saving capital for the accumulation of dowry for the girls, the study of children or reserve for the elders. She contributes almost always in the family's income by maintaining a green garden, working in other fields via the system of borrowed help or by her simultaneous work in the field as tobacco-collector and in tobacco-stores as worker. She also undertakes additional activities as weaver, mainly for covering a part of her family's needs for additional income.

The whole local cultural system is involved around the tobacco's production structure, as well as a working culture that is separately connected with the female sex.

In the socio-economic level, it is observed that those who possess big parts of land have the force and the power. Under these perspectives, the institutions and practices – shaped by time – led to limit the female sex towards an invisible social person even if this was allocated with force in the domestic sphere in the base of age, place and intra-family's roles. Being good mothers and spouses, honest daughters, good landladies, good and generous to the workers, they achieved the recognition of their own social value and guaranteed that of their men. They had more prospects for a good marriage with tobacco-merchants, higher civil servants, scientists, etc. via a rich endowment and consequently for a social mobility for them and their families. In the level of culture what it is realised is that they contributed considerably to the reproduction of certain of their aspects. Having for example more time available in the safety of their house, without implying that they were inactive, particularly during peak periods of tobacco growing, they were the more powerful factors of embroidery

process that was undertaken in order to achieve better sun-soaking form better coloration of tobacco, so that it acquires that sweet yellow colour.

tradition of their homelands. Besides, considering the embroidered dowry, the self-made textiles by other women and by the dowry expressed in cash their positions as brides, good housekeepers and spouses was evaluated.

The majority however, that ensured their survival by exploiting their own small piece of land or cultivated other's land by making use of the "sempria" system, organised their life based on the silent but fully stability of substance of women-mothers mainly. In this framework, women share their time and their life between the open space of rural activity and the social life in the closed space of houses. These women actually do not represent the solidified stereotype of the female sex that is identified with domesticity. On the contrary, through the self-memories, throughout study of the real field, women present dynamics of consciousness and adaptation in each of the new conditions and elect themselves as factors of action and change in all levels. Investigating the family's roles, for example, of the two social sexes, it appears that the real force of each household lay within the hands of women even if they declare that the power belongs to their men. Investigating her place as reproductive force, we find out that this is closely connected with the productive process. In the requirements of tobacco growing for workforce, the marital family corresponds with a status of many children. We can also report in the role that the female sex has within the maintenance of the family's cohesion and for the growth of family relations as well as relations of cooperation between relatives, all necessary for the process of production. More analytical, the value content of family and kinship – confidence, collaboration, support and good will – show that they are realised in the daily life of men and women too. The collaboration between relatives, family persons as well as neighbours is a social reality that extends beyond the tobacco growing activities. In this field that women are mainly the ones that develop, maintain and renew the relations and the networks of collaboration between the relatives and the circle of own people.

From the study the material, what is resulted is that the technical changes (that became obvious with the first mechanisation via the tractor and then via the machine of seeding, stringing and packing, etc.) and more specifically the changes in the type of nicotinic culture (by the Eastern tobacco to the American *Virginia*) were accompanied by other social changes that influenced the individual and family's life and more generally they had an effect in the local social and cultural structure. For example, a lot of working hands of the family were released, which were turned then

in other activities, in studying etc. In this point, it is important to stress out that the female sex gained from this development considerably, as it was strengthened by the prospects for education of newer generations and for attendance in the wider public life. Most mothers and tobacco workers externalise a sense of pride when they report that they encouraged the family to take decisions for children –and more specifically girls- education, as well as for the financially painful implementation of this education.

1.3.2 In the society and the reproductive culture of tobacco fields

The productive process took place simultaneously with a working culture of which, basic successor, creator and user is the female. The heavy-loaded, for example intensive phases of tobacco growing mainly in the phase of leaves' stringing are mainly faced in the limits of collectiveness with discussions, fairy tales, anecdotes, songs etc. Women and particularly the very old ones, recount a fairy tale, a fable, an old history, etc. in order that co-workers are staying awake to keep-up with their work. There, around the pile with tobacco-leaves the women-stringers, as they pass one-by-one the leaves in their needle, they string -at the same time- various faces of the folk tradition and they transfer them in the memory of their children, as authentic as they are at those laborious times... Those transmissions of experiences and memories, from generation to generation, render the female sex as a basic institution and factor of the folk tradition's continuation.

In the 1960s decade, the radio undertakes the task of providing information, to amuse, to "recount" fairy tales, "to play" figure theatre, to transmit sentimental programs, traditional and folkloric songs, but also the divine service and the requests to the Virgin Mary during the 15th of August's celebration when the tobacco-production was reaching its end. The women of tobacco are connected with the outside world, far and beyond the field world and renew the delivered - from generation to generation - experiences as they strengthen them with new data and ideas.

2. By the needle of tobacco and the arrow of the loom

With regard to the pre-mentioned complementarities of family's resources from the side of women, we will stand in that of textile as most women within the histories of their life referred to this activity with terms that in the conscience, they had already evaluated as a useful technique and art, also creation. Until the 1950s decade, an essential supplement of each household was the domestic loom, which is set up near the door or the window so as the weaver has ample light. That refers on a type of domestic space manufacturing activity that covered the self-consuming needs of the family, the needs of the girls' dowry²⁶. In specific, those appreciable products and – simultaneously- cultural goods were intended for fulfilling the family's needs in terms of individual and domestic clothing and mainly for the dowries of girls. Through these goods the capability and the value of woman – landlady was evaluated, while by the quantity of weavers and other goods the family and its purchasing power was also evaluated.

We should assume that in the specific region, a long and continuous tradition of the art of weaving and embroidery²⁷ was existed. The latter is strengthened by the fact that in this city the Association of Ladies "Ergani Athina" was founded, as already noted, at the end of the 19th century. Its aim was to elect and develop the female way of craft-work. It is also an indicative fact that in Agrinion, the 1st Pan-Hellenic Exhibition of Female's Works and Craftsmanship was organised (21 May 1898)²⁸, which marked an enormous success with many visitors from Greece and abroad. That

²⁶ Evangelos Papastratos, the work and the labour. From my life, Athens, 5th ed. 1995, p. 16: In our own house we did not have loom because mother did not have time to weave. Most families however had their looms, and the women wove the woollen and the cotton clothes of their house and the dowries of girls. A lot of families had as their profession the manufactured very beautiful woollen carpets (the said rugs), curtains as well as various cotton types. Also very thin buckrams of loom, for bed-sheets, table clothes, towels etc. and other various embroideries.

²⁷ For the continuing delivery of textile in the region see. D. Loukopoulos, How people from Etolia are weaving and get dressed, pub. of the association for the distribution of beneficial books, 1927, Ger. Papatrehas, textiles of Xiromeron, Agrinion, see also the recording of technicians, form and symbols, weavers of Western Mainland Greece, as experiences provided by weaver Areti Asimaki – Roka, in her study: the Textile Art. Kaimos kai nostalgia, Athens 2007: Aiolos

²⁸ see newspaper Neologos 24-5 1898: "On the sides of grounds unfolding reports of carpeting. Certain carpets existed of excellent colours and manufacturing....., [...]"

The Exhibition of Agrinion is work of worthy praise and presented the good study of the various feminine work in the provinces of Greece and the rhythms, as it is done each of these use in the weaving.

This report is able to be considered as auspicious beginning of concentration and appointment of females in Greece as starting lines to knowledge and studying in domestic production in order that it overcomes the foreigner competition. Via this I consider that work of "Erganis Athina" should be prompt in Greece to manufacture and systematic growth of weaving...."

(newspaper Neologos of Patras, Sunday of 24 May 1898). More generally see K. Triantafyllides, "Social and intellectual awakening", Historical Free press 2002

is strengthened also by the fact that female technicians, in the decades after the war included local textiles, creative, new drawings, model, techniques and colours. In this adapting traditions of the region, EOMEH has also contributed in a great extent, richly expressed in Etolikon and Xiromero, by founding four schools of textile, where women worked as apprentices.

The female tobacco-growers as they evolved within the structured framework of corresponding of resources that always were in effect for the Greek rural society, during the winter months, hang the needle of tobacco leaves' stringing to get the arrow of the loom. Usually, weavers do not study in textile schools, but become apprentices next to the grand mother, the mother, and the neighbours or in a teacher of the region. Most women "golden-handed, as they called", undertake the processing of wool: washing, rinsing, painting, and others.

In specific, for the painting of the wool, specific experience is needed. For that, the new weavers are getting the help and the contribution of elder women, most of whom know the secrets and use vegetable paintings in order to achieve beautiful and fadeless colours. Onions and acorns for example provide nice colours in the strings.

«We collected “kakatsides”, we pressed them and we put them in boiled water, until their colour was coming out. A lot of time was passing and afterwards we put the strings inside and we let them take the desired colour. It was the colour of the olives, water-proof and quite durable over time...»²⁹

(Information provided by Mrs. Ekaterini Politis)

Some women worked with the loom as their professional activity. In these terms, they could contribute to their families' limited income. Their salary was quite small, compared to the laborious work they had to undertake, however it was important as it covered some certain needs of the family.

«My mother sent me to school, but I was going to the loom instead. I liked the loom; I did not like the school. I was watching the neighbor using the loom and I liked it. Next year, I lost one class at school and I started going to the loom. I learned next to Mrs. Evanthia. Those were very famous weavers, having three looms, each having 15 students, together with me. I stayed with them for three winters, because during the

²⁹ See Areti Asimaki – Roka, The art of textiles, op. cit., p.52 - 69

summers we had to cultivate tobacco as we were quite poor. My family had 5 children, three girls and 2 boys, my dad was a tobacco-worker and my mum too. In 1954, this loom cost almost 850 drachmas. When I was 14 or 15 years old I finished with learning about how to use the loom and became a weaver, so I wanted to buy a loom. But we had to fix our house so we did not have enough money for that. Therefore, I had to go and work in a tobacco store house. During that winter, I bought the loom and I made my first carpet. After that I started weaving. In 1958 I got married, but I never left the loom. In the place where my kitchen was, I had my loom too. With my loom I was able to help with the house's finances. I did my first orders. As my children wanted to study afterwards, I had to make money so I could help them. I have four daughters and one son. Nowadays (2004) the loom is in no demand. There are no qualified people to work on them. Ready-made carpets are in the market, so when I will die the loom will stay there without any use...»³⁰

Concluding in that section, we attempt to provide a view on the aesthetics of domestic or craft-based products, to point out that those women-weavers are moved - with their work and their life - by the limits and in the engagements of traditional social structures and consequently they express elements of already commonly-respected culture. However, the same structures of this culture are such that either encourage renewals or innovations or discourage them from the need of conformity with the tradition. In this framework, the weavers-members of the same society and factors of this culture are elected as subjects of action in the cultural change and diffusion, exhausting indeed each margin of tolerance on behalf of collective, opposite to the creativity of the individual.

3. Folkloric religiosity

Rural societies have developed a folkloric religiosity that is found away from the influences of official institutions. They keep pace with the rhythms of work and rest that are shaped by the cycle of the circular and repeated calendar time of rural society³¹. The uncertainty and insecurity that farmers faced on a daily basis, led to the growth of folkloric religion, the main characteristic of which was the faith in practical

³⁰ Oral interview of Irene Contouris.

³¹L. K. Hart: 1992: 225 - 264

usefulness of the holy and superficial forces. This retributive usefulness was always expressed with the adoration of Saints in the days of their feasts. Epidemics, natural destructions, droughts, made people faithful and begging the corresponding Saint for help. They also sought the benediction of priests for their sick animals, the houses, the wells, the fields etc. In every case, the women were leading in all these informal ceremonies and practicalities of religious and folkloric feasts by extending – through them – the realistic and symbolic field of action towards the space outside their domestic area. Lets see certain aspects of this folkloric religiosity that emits the faith but also the distress of the people of tobacco.

The patron Saint of Agrinion, Saint Hristoforos is celebrated on the 9th of May. He is a very popular Saint, who protects from various natural disasters and accidents. For this reason he was established as the protector Saint of taxi-drivers, but the collective memory of the region has mainly established him as the protector of tobacco producers. The reason behind this is that during May - a month during which the tobacco-growing is in progress - danger of destruction from sudden downpours and sleet that fall this period is present. What is believed is that the Saint is intervening³² for the protection of their production, by altering the devastating meteorological phenomena. The women make a special type of holly bread in the feast of the Saint, they go to worship in his old church and they celebrate with the family and close family members in the grounds, bringing with them their food. They also refrain of any work. It is also common that oblations are given to the sake of the Saint, such as a little pack or parcel of tobacco. Corresponding worship rituals are also observed in the celebrations of Saints Constantine and Helen (21st of May), where the producers requested for rains that were essential for the growth of tobacco, during Saint Paraskevi's celebrations (26th July) that it was considered as one of the most important religious feasts and "was kept" as a holiday, because they were so afraid of sleet fallings that this period that would be fateful for the production!

During the celebrations of the death of Saint Mary Virgin (15th of August) the works in the tobacco fields were coming to an end and were concentrated on collecting the top leaves, which are the last tobacco leaves. Especially for this important celebration, people are prepared through a 15-day long fasting and go to churches of the region, where local feasts are organised.

³² Aik. Polymerou - Kamilaki, "Saint Hristoforos in the Greek folklore" announcement in the Agrinion meeting (6/5/2007).

During autumn, when the celebration of Saint Dimitrios takes place, the first rains occur and are accompanied by southern humid winds. At this time of the year, the works of tobacco packing are initiated. The producers and mainly the women dedicate a parcel of tobacco to the Saint of Parish for the needs of the temple, as a sample of thanks, because he safeguarded the crop and the producers themselves from each villain. It is a custom that is very widespread not only in the area of Agrinion, but also in the entire Etoloakarnania prefecture, that -as we know- tobacco is the main rural product.

4. Female tobacco-workers in the tobacco store

The trends for increasing the production and tobacco export, created the conditions for the growth of an important phase related to its commercial treatment. Thus, since the beginning of the 20th century, in Agrinion, as happened in Kavala, Xanthi, Volos etc., appropriate industrial buildings were developed, "tobacco-storing houses" or "*tobacco-stores*", as those were named, where the commercial treatment of tobacco has taken place, that is to say the storage, the screening of tobacco in qualities and the packing. Indicatively, we refer to the deposits of Papastratos Brothers (1924), Papapetros Brothers (1925), Panagopoulos Brothers (1925), Elias Iliou, K. Kamposioras, I. Kokkalis, and others... Historical and economic situations sometimes created an economic growth in the city also for the residents, which was totally connected with the marketability and the absorption of tobacco (as it was in effect up to 1930), and at other times, an economic crisis that had most unfavourable repercussions in the workforce of city, in the commercial - craft-based business community and in the tobacco producers. In every case, the tobacco-stores were spaces where the working conscience and identity were shaped and their working force constituted the basic factor of intensification and the organisation of the working class. The working conditions, the low wages - particularly of female workers - the redundancies and often the violation of collective conventions, led to dynamic fighting movements and intense conflicts that led even to deaths. It is important to note at this point that memory and history constitute the working identity over the death of a woman that happened in the 1926's protests. That was about a pregnant

woman, named Vassiliki Georgatzeli, a tobacco-worker, who was shot dead by the police forces as she participated in a tobacco-workers' protest. Often differentiated throughout various times, the histories about the death of Vassiliki Georgatzeli, as they were recorded in oral testimonies and written sources show precisely that this fact - as memory and history – constituted an important defining element of cultural identity of the male and female tobacco-workers for all the periods. Especially for women, Georgatzeli appears as a constitutive element of the female's identity. Within her image, the woman-mother is elected, hardly working, the life fighter and in the syndicalism, the one that is sacrificed for the sake of all.

*In her first steps in the labour market,
16 years old, followed her "mother", poverty,
She was present at the factory.
In her young years, the familiar herb
Was a bunch of flowers, colored gold
And a strange cough in her chest
In the tobacco-stores a deadly silent.
Packing wealth for the rich,
And in her chest the bad disease,
And when love was looking at her side,
Her body smelled of tobacco.
The life of a tobacco-worker was poor.
Her future was gloomy,
But the merchants and the broker
Were packing their wealth that resulted from bad disease...
(Aristides Barhampas)*

In the phase of commercial processing of tobacco, a significant part of the working force of the city was employed, which was emanated from the refugees' population, up until the year 1953. A key part of this population was constituted of women. Due to the fact that women had lower wages, made them a more favourable work-force for the tobacco merchants. Therefore, women were the largest percentage of all the tobacco stores' workforce. These worked within a strict distribution of work, based on sex and on a hierarchy according to a rudimentary specialisation. The women were "ksefyllistries", "karotsieres", "raftries", "sopani", "nerofores", "cleaners" and "togadorisses". The male workers were *stivadoroi*, *harmantzides*, in the humidifiers, leading technicians, also employees as supervisors, tobacco merchants and bosses.

These important or insignificant specialisations acquired a meaning for determining of the identity of each one and the recognition from the others. For example, the technical experience was a recognised value that lent prestige and respect.

Analysing the life histories of female tobacco workers, apart from highlighting the domestic identity of full force that springs from the family's and the more widely social's role of maternity and landlady, various gradations of cultural identity are revealed carrying a lot of aspects of the feminine culture. Firstly, the female refugee's identity, which reveals her other aspects as that of foreigner, the poverty and worker.

«Well, I understood that we were poor and foreigners, since I was seven years old. We were going to Saint Constantine when we were little kids so could take our daily food from the Social Service and the people of Agrinion were making fun of us, by saying: the refugees are coming, recognising us from the noise that our wooden shoes were making as we walked on the streets..

And later when we were leaving from the place we were living to go to the tobacco-stores, we could still hear our shoes making the same noise.

I worked for 20 years in the tobacco storing houses. At that time, someone had to work a lot to survive in life. My husband died within 8 years of our marriage and myself, I started to grow tobacco and worked in the stores too. My life was always full of work, work and more work. But, I am not complaining, my children are well and now I am resting.

Furthermore, that of the landlady, of fun, of culture and of the tendency for independence.

Can I tell you something? I was laughing as I started my day. That's how we are, we the refugees. The people from the coastline of Asia Minor and close to Smyrni. We are polite and we carry our culture with us. What were the locals before we came? We came almost nude and barefoot but we had our culture. We filled our huts with light-wash and that made them shining bright.

The female of social consciousness, often left-wing and rebellious, the female who had a tendency for independence, who broke – earlier than the locals - the valid rules of social exclusion.

The field (on the spot) research shows that the everyday routine in the domestic space and the social relations of women are based, here as in the world of field, on the

collaboration between family members and friends and relatives' circle. Their houses are located close to each other and even if they do not constitute of a family neighbourhood, however, the women help each other, they spend time together and do not hesitate to extend this collaboration and the friendship with local women. Some of them are good couturiers and embroiderers and next to them, other local females learn techniques. Since the commercial processing of tobacco was a seasonal employment³³ the periods of unemployment were covered with various other activities, such as textile, embroidery and tobacco-growing.

As a conclusion, we could note that although the customs within this refugee, ethnologically-layered micro-society (females from Smyrni, Pontos, etc.) are strict, what is mainly developed is enhanced space for these women to participate in a more out-of-the-house type of life. They are on a state of readiness for watching cinema or shade theatre in the city, or for a walk in the park. Space is also developed for intermarriages with local males, something that facilitates the communication with relatives and foreigners. The first generations were more based on the need rather than on the choice, in the hard, split but familiar traditional social and cultural structures of their places of origin from the Minor Asia in order to survive in the new place and new conditions. However, this identical culture and the wider change in the city of Agrinion, allowed for an independence of movements and cultural behavior. Their daughters begin to participate in various cultural activities (e.g. in the Gymnastics Association of Agrinion, in the Music's Association), in folkloric feasts (for example, Carnival or youth balls) and with the support of their parents, many of them were studying.

Up until the year 1952, in tobacco store houses there were only female refugee workers. The local females (from Agrinion) will follow on a slower pace³⁴ after the year 1953, where the former closed profession became open for all. There, in the

³³ The period of beginning of processing started each year during the spring and finished in autumn. Certain big enterprises worked until Christmas time.

³⁴ **I.R.** *A local newer tobacco worker recognizes the value of these women and their superiority: "These (the refugees) did not have scruple to go for work, were more evolved, here our own women considered it a shame. They were used in the rural life, to plant tobacco, to make, and they considered few shame. These were pioneers, went to work and after saw ours that while earned money the women, began slowly, in the beginning and ours afterwards. And they were women really that is to say compared to ours here they were much more also evolved in their clothing they were modern, because most were from Smyrni and Smyrni was a city developed and a harbour and as city it was developed! They were different in their clothing style and in their behavior and in everything they were different. » Interview of I.R., number 23, 12/4/2003, Research Program of the University of Ioannina.*

browsing and screening of tobacco leaves, opinions are also progressively "screened" and rejected as "faulty", useless tobacco leaves, the dividing perceptions for refugees and locals, respectively. The different identity of the two sides, regarding their origin and the common identity regarding their work: both were tobacco workers.

We could at this point express the opinion that the remunerated salaried work of the female tobacco worker contributed enough to the improvement of her position within the family and the society, as it also contributed towards some changes -in a certain degree – within the relations between the sexes.