
HISTORICAL CENTER AND THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY. WOMEN MAKE CLOTHES AND HISTORY

Eleni Sideri, Elina Kapetanaki

Abstract

Since the 1980s/1990s, Thessaloniki's city center underwent many changes connected to the rediscovery of the 'cosmopolitan' character of the city's past, its multilayered and interconnected histories. The shift was part of the gradual integration of the city within the EU regionalism, but also the reception of a considerable number of immigrants arriving from the neighboring Balkan countries and the former Soviet Union. These different layers of histories have been inscribed in the city center and in the stories of people working and living there. Our paper focuses on stories of female workers involved in cloth making and circulation of clothes within the historical city center. The paper reflects on how clothing from a sign of protection, personal style, and distinction turns into a vehicle leading to the narrative worlds of these women: their connection to the city center, crises, and hopes of the every-day life inscribed in the "historical laws of motion" (Narotsky 1997).

Keywords: city, globalization, gender, clothing, life-stories

Introduction¹

Since the 1980s/1990s, Thessaloniki's city center underwent many changes. Many of these changes were connected to the rediscovery of the so-called cosmopolitan character of the city's past, its multilayered and interconnected histories. Our research tried to examine stories of female workers involved in the manufacturing and circulation of clothing material within the city center (between the western

¹ Earlier drafts and sections of this paper were presented at "Distribute 2020", Biennial Conference of the SCA AND SVA (7-9/5/2020), Online at: <https://distribute.utoronto.ca/> and at "The Intangible Cultural Heritage: the Traps of the City" Conference, Paisii Hilendarski" University of Plovdiv, 12/10/2021 (Online Presentation).

part of Romaiki Agora and Upper Ladadika²) and to find out how the idea of a geographic and symbolic center is inscribed in them. Women narrate their modes for survival and describe their own attempts to overcome crisis while sewing, selling, or exchanging clothes. The article goes into showing how the center of the city is inscribed in these female narratives of the everyday work life.

Moreover, this specific part of Thessaloniki turned in 2015 (during the outburst of the so-called refugee crisis) to a space where materials from the refugee arrival in Greece (blankets, boats or life jackets) were sent to various NGOs located there. These ‘charity’ clothes were, in some cases, transformed into commodities, with the contribution of refugee labor itself. These commodities (T-shirts, wallets, bags, etc.) reached Greek and global consumers as the NGOs created a network of (real or virtual) selling spots. But also, our paper will postulate that the city center of Thessaloniki had a tradition of being a space of care through the development of female labor in the postwar Thessaloniki and the feminization of migration in the 1990s. In this perspective, the heritage of emotional and real labor and the economic center of Thessaloniki have become transfigured under the historical changes and the gradual formation of a neoliberal market. The paper will discuss first the contact points between gender and intangible heritage, then, we will examine the historical changes at Thessaloniki’s center and finally, we will explore how our female narrators connect in their memories with the historical center of Thessaloniki, its official history and their own labor experiences.

Our ethnographic analysis derives from our own experience of being part of groups of women who exchanged their own old clothes at the historical center of Thessaloniki from 2011 up until 2021. But it also draws from participant observation, informal discussions and semi-structured interviews with women who worked for clothing manufacturing at the historical center of the city. Our interlocutors were women of different ages, from 35 to 85 years old. Some of them shared a flat with flat mates, while others were married and lived with their own families. Some of them had a background in rural-urban migration. Some others arrived in Thessaloniki after the fall of socialism. Some of the women were descendants of the Asia Minor refugees (1922). We talked to women involved in various professions such as architects, waiters, social workers, lawyers who were involved in clothing swap. Moreover, we talked to dressmakers, textile traders, women who repaired old clothes and sold them to secondhand shops or others who manufactured new clothes while working from home. Their narratives postulate aspects of the everyday that often are thought to be humble (Vaiou 2021: 11), or non-typical and thus, they are ignored by the official history or by the state statistics. However, they seem to reflect “important” stories of economic crises and movement in space. At the same time, they

² Google maps. Thessaloniki’s historical center , <https://www.google.com/maps/place/%CE%9B%CE%B9%CE%BC%CE%AC%CE%BD%CE%B9+%CE%98%CE%B5%CF%83%CF%83%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%BD%CE%AF%CE%BA%CE%B7%CF%82/@40.6348697,22.9127445,3393m/data=!3m2!1e3!4b1!4m6!3m5!1s0x14a8390b30348339:0xcc9bc9976b0cada1!8m2!3d40.6348544!4d22.9230442!16s%2Fm%2F05c1zdc!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

reflect stories of hope, family care and everyday struggle for survival. Smith argued (2006: 54) that “the heritage gaze is directed to the affect of heritage rather than to the cultural ‘object’ or ‘event’ itself”. In this sense, their narratives are a testimony of an invisible and often neglected labor history of Thessaloniki.

Heritage and Gender

The definitions of heritage often try to produce a definition in relation to specific sites or meanings and values, overlooking the fact that heritage is not static, but it is connected to change and transformation (or even struggle). In fact, heritage is multilayered and plural as it is connected to different memories or understandings and experiences of the official discourse about memory. The interrelation of the idea of heritage is connected, especially in Europe, with the formation of nation-states and the rise of nationalism which exerted an influence on what is recognized as national heritage, its objectification and materialization to specific territory and culture.

In this context, culture was considered as a constitutive element of the national project and was identified with high/national culture. The launching of state apparatuses such as education, cultural institutions like museums, academies, and cultural associations supported the recognition of the official heritage as a distinguishing feature of the authenticity and uniqueness of each nation and its culture. This recognition functioned in a double way. First, it delineated clear external borders with neighboring states which often shared histories, languages and populations (the Balkans is a case in point). Secondly, it managed to obliterate or marginalize colonial or minority histories pushing for cultural and racial purity. This understanding of heritage was integrated in the interests of the industrial and merchant bourgeoisie when the latter was shaped as a class. This process integrated ideas of Modernity such as a linear understanding of history, economic progress, the development of a technological civilization, and socio-political transformations such as the dissolution of rural communities, secularism, and urbanization.

Most scholars agree that the 19th century was a turning point for the comprehension of heritage as produced and producing a community of memory. Intensive industrialization and the gradual rural-urban migrations led to the erosion of the rural kinship-based communities of the Durkheimian mechanical solidarity whereas at the same time, new forms of belonging were produced in the urban centers. Spaces of labor emerged as spaces of formation of new ties and memories. As Moulaert and Ailenei (2005) argued, since the late 19th century until the postwar period, many informal practices and mechanisms of solidarity (guilds, associations, in other words, labor related spaces), especially in Europe, were produced as part of the state social protection and welfare.³ These spaces generated new ties and forms of inclusion.

³ It should be stressed here that the Soviet ideology did not contradict the premises of Modernity (progress through industrialization), but it offered an alternative take (ownership of the means of production by the People) where the consideration of heritage as part of the Soviet Nationality Pol-

However, their argument drew mainly from the industrial and formally recognized labor, which is not related to the experience of women addressed here.

The recognition of other interpretations regarding heritage has emerged since the 1960s when social movements and a shift to memory studies tried to give voice and make visible overlooked historical experiences of groups such as women, Black communities, LGBT. Moreover, it was a period when the multiculturalism generated by the postwar migrations forced European societies to develop more inclusive social policies. In this context, the pluralization of histories and memories created the conditions for a new approach towards the idea of heritage. In addition, this shift was combined with the emergence of a global culture where heritage and culture were not only nationally consumed and appraised, but they presented testimonies of an overall human culture. For example, in one of the foundational texts of UNESCO in 1945 (Constitution n.d.), culture was acknowledged as a property of humanity that needed to be safeguarded and diffused.

But which culture did UNESCO's texts refer to? The answer to this question was interwoven with the idea of world heritage which at first embraced the dominant back then ideas about high culture and civilization (see Batische and Bolla 2005⁴). In this sense, culture was understood by the legacies of the Enlightenment and colonialism. Economic transformations drawing from the neoliberal agenda in the 1970s and the gradual inclusion of culture in this agenda generated a new understanding of heritage. Especially in Europe, as Criss Shore (2006: 8) underlined, it was in the 1970s that the EU policy makers started to consider "the idea of "culture" as a key ingredient, indeed, a catalyst, in the integration process". The European economies and especially urban economies, after their de-industrialization, shifted to culture as a way to make a fresh economic restart that included gentrification, development of infrastructure, and creation of new public spaces. These processes incorporated heritage as a tool and opportunity for the development of tourist industry. The funding for this development stemmed, in 1980s, from the EU funding and national investments and in the 1990s-2000s from private investments (see Dalakoglou 2020).

At the same time, the shift to intangible heritage was not unrelated to the growing critique towards the logocentric and privileged visuality of the western thinking during the emergence of the post-colonial critique in the same period. Colonial policies which privileged bounded and strictly delineated ethnic taxonomies and categories were not impermeable to gender. Masculinity dominated the public space, official/national discourses and mythologies which were prolific with references to founding fathers, male heroes, soldiers and statesmen, etc. In this framework, the production of heritage was interwoven with a specific class (bourgeois) and gender (male) agendas. As a result, we should shift from thinking about heritage as a thing or a site to consider it more as a process of identity and/or community (re)building

icy and the strengthening of national cultures did not offer a less bounded or essentialist definition of heritage (Bekus and Cowcher 2020: 1123 – 1231).

⁴ <https://whc.unesco.org/document/138563>

within specific class and gender conditions. Today, the critical heritage studies try, on the one hand, to postulate and unpack the discursive and often hegemonic nature of heritage and, on the other hand, to examine heritage as a process. As cultural process⁵, heritage is remembered, practiced and performed through multiple subject positions like age, class and gender. As our discussion will show, women involved in the production and circulation of clothes remembered the city center as part of their youth and work experience, as providers contributing to the families' household, but also as part of their sociality. In their narratives, the center is associated with pride, affection, and care for paternal or conjugal families, children, but also for human beings in need like the refugees. The women's narratives here invest in the memories, emotions and affects which invoke instances of social belonging and identity construction. Female bodies, in these narratives, move in the city center, to go to work, walk back home or go shopping. In this way, they produce new, embodied geographies (Longhurst 1995), precarious and fragile, caring, tenacious and ingenious to face challenges and crises. In these memories of care and endurance, Thessaloniki's center becomes a heritage site. Let us turn here to Thessaloniki and the rooting of these policies in the biggest city of Northern Greece.

Thessaloniki and its city center

Like in other city ports (Hoyle 1988, 1989), Thessaloniki's port underwent a process of gradual modernization in the 18 – 19th centuries which followed the imperial economic interests of the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean Sea (development of sea trade routes) and then, the aspirations of the Greek nation-state for economic and military consolidation. In the late 20th century, Thessaloniki benefited by the opening of the Balkan corridors after the end of the Cold War envisioning its role as a maritime hub within the south-eastern Mediterranean. In parallel, Thessaloniki's port and the wider area of docks (Ladadika) underwent gentrification, as part of the shift of the European urban economies to culture, with the entry of Greece into the EU (Gospodini 2001). Ladadika, strategically situated at a proximity to the port and the Old Train Station (see Roupa and Hekimoglou 2004, Dagas 2010), fell into decay in the 1960s and 1970s. The reasons were diverse. On the one hand, the development of the banking and financial district in the area ousted the traditional merchants and their customers who had an increasingly difficult access to the area during rush hours due to traffic and lack of parking. At the same time, Thessaloniki expanded in its eastern and western borders.

But in the 1980s and 1990s, a process of changing the decaying image of the particular district was launched. A new urban planning envisioned the area as part of the cultural heritage of the city. The plan was supported by the Municipality of Thessaloniki, the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace and especially, by the local Ur-

⁵ The introduction of the category of intangible heritage contributed a lot to this deterritorialised and less essentialist understanding of heritage.

ban Planning Division of the Ministry of Environment, Planning and Public Works. In addition, the EU and the Greek state funded the Urban Pilot Project which tried first to make visible the cultural heritage of the area (more than 100 buildings, streets and squares were legally protected and recognized as being in need of conservation) (Gospodini 2007: 774). Then, in the 1990s and in connection with “Thessaloniki – European Cultural Capital” in 1997, the waterfront of Thessaloniki was reconstructed. The regeneration continued up to the 2010s (with an environmentally friendly twist) with the wider Stock market square (Upper Ladadika)⁶ up to Romaiki Agora⁷ (the Roman Market). To summarize the results of these changes, two zones were produced: the first one was the old port where the financial district and a space of High Culture was constructed including three museums, galleries and the venues of the Thessaloniki Film Festival. The other zone started from the main Ladadika square, the upper streets, the Stock market square which comprise a leisure and tourist economy: bars, restaurants boutique hotels, small shops for handmade clothes, jewelries, shoes or bio food (see Gospodini 2017).

Moreover, many startup businesses such as schools for vocational training of adults, collectivities which offered free or low-priced seminars especially to youth or provided venues for concerts or theatrical performances opened their doors in the area. However, many of these entrepreneurial initiatives were hit hard by the so-called Greek debt crisis in 2008. Soon the stock of empty apartments, offices or industrial lofts existing in this historical center was increased. During the refugee crisis of 2015 these empty spaces were rented to NGOs funded by the EU either to host local or global organizations or to house refugee families through international subsidies (UNHCR, EU).

The reorganization of the space of the historical center was not the only transformation that the city of Thessaloniki faced in the 1990s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of the northern borders to the former socialist Balkan neighbors, immigrants from these countries and from the former Soviet Union often found residence or work in the center (see Hatziprokopiou 2006). In this context, the female immigrants who arrived from the Balkans and the former Soviet Union pluralized and transnationalized the body of the city and its histories by adding new experiences to the long history of women’s labor in Thessaloniki and the connection of these experiences to clothes. In the same period, the city tried to open up its economy through different processes, like the new urban planning and its gentrified neighbours we described above, the formation of a new financial center, the modernization and internationalization of the port or institutions like the Thessaloniki Film Festival, the opening of malls, new museums. In this new extrovert economy, tourism played an important role. In this framework, the city center turned into the ‘historical center’. As a result, heritage was mapped in the city space and in tour-

⁶ <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/856248/to-teleytaio-prasino-astiko-peirama/>

⁷ <https://www.thessalonikitourism.gr/index.php/el/component/k2/item/427-ano-ladadika-and-emporiou-square>

ist guides, and it turned into an important resource for the city's branding within the fierce global competition for capital through tourism. In this competition, the stress on 'uniqueness' and 'authenticity' was accentuated because of the ever-lasting process of inventing 'new' and 'different' places to be consumed by the flows of tourists.

For our narrators, the city and its center are fluid and reconstructed in their memories. They remembered the places in the city where they lived, while talking about their own routes, practices and life experiences in their homes, doing two or three jobs at the same time, encounters with friends, relaxation, solidarity, and care (Vaiou 2021: 22 – 23, Lefebvre 1991, Simonsen and Koefoed 2020). The experiences of these women reveal a multidimensional experience which portrays a complex world, the world of labour in the postwar center of Thessaloniki, which is not represented in the tourist maps. We suggest that world and space (Ingold 2011: 142)⁸ derive in a sense through the stories, practices and experiences of our interlocutors not just as "routine" and "consent" (Vaiou 2021: 24), but also as a basis for the creation of life itself. This takes place through successive processes that often were/are "marginalized by the Western form of rationality" (de Certau 1984: 45) and which according to those women's narrations are related to survival, to the anxiety to meet the everyday needs, to care, as well as to their potential to change their lives. This is the reason why we focused on "her stories" of clothing, space and solidarity, since our interlocutors' practices of exchange and their narrations of labor seem to turn heritage from a thing or a site to a process of identity and/or community (re)building. Their stories of living/intangible heritage narrate public space, power, and crises and conceptualize all over again the ideas of community, self, and belonging. Their stories of intangible heritage are ways of understanding and engaging with the present.

Remembering work, clothes and the city

Since the 1950's and until the 1980's, an emerging world of fashion studios-ateliers and houses of haute couture became situated in the historic center of Thessaloniki to satisfy the demand for garment products of the middle-upper class of the city. Simultaneously, young women from areas peripheral to the center of Thessaloniki worked and were trained as apprentices in these fashion studios and haute couture houses. Very soon, some of them created their own craft businesses and fashion studios. After World War II, the purchase of new clothes seems to have become an obsession that reveals the transformations of the everyday life with regards to the local society of Thessaloniki.

⁸ Ingold uses the word "world" instead of space in order to describe the field where living creatures reside, create and obtain experiences. In this essay we chose to use Ingold's concept of "world" as almost identical, or at least deeply connected to the one of space. Our target is to use the creative dimensions that Ingold attributes to "world" in order to describe the connection among the notions of everyday life, gender and space.

Frosso was a second-generation Asian Minor refugee. Her maternal line was connected to the Asia Minor (Aival) coast and her paternal side to Anatolia (Kon-ya). She was the first of three children in a family of factory workers. Her mother worked in a tobacco factory in the center of Thessaloniki and her father was involved in shoe making. However, the marriage of her parents was not very successful, and she became the breadwinner of her family in the difficult postwar period with her father's income supplementing the family budget. Frosso told her story:

"I was sent to become a dressmaker like other girls from my neighborhood after the war. We were sent to an established dressmaker *na mathoume tin tekhni* (to learn the art/become trained). I used to leave our house in Triandria and walk through the *Evraika mnimata* (the Jewish cemetery) to the center near Karavan Sarai. There used to be many clothing factories, Greek ones. Nowadays, all factories have left for Skopje. Greeks are useless; they cannot keep their businesses in the country".

Refugee labor had an impact on the Greek mid-war economy (see Franghiadis 2018). Tobacco was important for Thessaloniki and for other ports and cities in Northern Greece (for example, Kavala, Drama, Xanthi). Frosso's family decided that the eldest daughter should become a dressmaker which was a "female" profession that could allow her to become independent. Although Frosso, due to the plight of her family, did not continue her training and became a factory worker, something that gave her and her family an immediate income, in the 1960s, her youngest sister became trained and worked in a small factory for wedding dresses in the center (Akheiropoiitos Church).

More specifically, after the end of World War II, a "diffused industrialization" (Vaiou, Labrianidis, Hatzimihalis, Hronaki 1991) took place in Northern Greece and Thessaloniki. It was linked to the mass movement of people from rural to urban areas. During that period of mass population movement to urban centers in Greece, dressmaking constituted an important livelihood for many young girls who had just arrived in the big cities coming from rural areas all over country. In fact, for several decades working in the manufacture of clothing was portrayed in the everyday discourse as a "female art" ("ginekia tehni", Bada 2015). In regard to the sector of dressmaking in Northern Greece, it was the numerous enterprises, the large number of women working in the manufacture of clothes, along with the intensification of work that created a situation of postwar capitalism where gender and class seem to play a substantial role. Moreover, the development of the Greek economy in the postwar period turned women into independent earners and consumers by transforming clothing manufacture into a small-scale industry and important commerce in Greece. In Frosso's narrative the center is delineated through certain toponyms such as 'the Jewish cemetery' which in fact had been demolished in 1942. The important toponym was Karavan Sarai, a place where her refugee family was housed when they arrived from Asia Minor. Later it became the residence of Thessaloniki's municipality. Her mother's workplace at the tobacco factory was located there. In other words, Frosso's memory regarding the center was defined by her refugee background and her family work history rather than by the official discourse on heritage.

It was from the 1960's up to the 1980's that small industries related to the manufacture of clothes rapidly multiplied within the historic center of the city (Vaiou, Hatzimihalis 1997). At the same time, almost everywhere in the city enclaves of informal work spread out. For example, women as freelancer textile factory employees worked at home to manufacture clothes and send them to small clothing industries for distribution and sale. As a result, in the 1980's and 1990's, women's narratives praised productivity and professional success.

According to Rea, who worked in her husband's shop for fabrics,

"It was the boom in the manufacture of clothes during the '80s up until 1996 that prompted us to introduce the retail sale of fabrics to the small clothing industries and craft stores. I remember the time when small clothing industries opened *en masse*. During this period there must have been from ten to fifteen couples per day, coming into the store and telling us "Hello, we want to open up a small clothing industry and we are here to take a look at the fabrics". They were poorly educated people who didn't have any experience in manufacturing clothes and who at that time did not have a job. In this way, by opening their own small clothing industry they found one".

Their hard work was paid with success, not individual but for the family. For example, Rea, assessing her family improvement in the 2000s stated, "We didn't have enough money. I was a girl from a small village. But then, my children had the opportunity to study in very good private schools. It was the glory of productivity". Work was often believed to have had a positive impact on health. For example, other women said, "We worked a lot, and "productivity saved me from cancer", stressing the fact that when work has produced the expected result, the psychological and social fulfillment can have a holistic impact on people's lives. However, the stories do not capture only the bright side. Since the mid-1990's, the sector of clothing manufacture in Thessaloniki and Northern Greece has been hard-hit. After the fall of socialism, traders all around Europe had the chance to produce goods with specific technical specifications in countries where production costs were very low, such as China. Women narratives started to address issues of unredeemed checks connected to narrations of vulnerability and anxiety about the self, the family and the conditions of work. But also new vulnerable bodies arrived in the city.

On that day in 2006, Era, a friend from Georgia who had a Greek and Armenian origin, came to Thessaloniki to study, but she was also looking for a job to support herself and if possible, to send some money back to Tbilisi. She rented a flat in the center near the church. Era was trying to find a job, if possible, in a clothing factory or a dressmaker's shop. In the 1990s, her mother was a schoolteacher while her father had already lost his job at the National Library. To survive, they all got into selling cheap clothes at Tbilisi's markets. They bought these clothes *en masse* from Turkey's bazaars. They were made in China. Later, they rented a small shop in Tbilisi for selling clothes, some of them designed and made by Era's mom and her older sister.

At about the same time, the Greek state ceased the subsidies to small or bigger industries that exported clothes. In this way, an important financial benefit provided

by the Greek state to the Greek industries for almost three decades came to an end. In Thessaloniki most of the clothing industries closed down. Similar was the impact on the shops selling clothes in retail, the businesses and ateliers manufacturing clothes. It was during that period that many old businesswomen/men working in the historic center of the city decided to retire the soonest possible. Gradually, in the 2020's the area of clothing crafts, located in the heart of the historic center of the city, was transformed into Airbnb apartments for rent, restaurants and nightclubs. Rea stated that "from 1996 onwards until the very beginning of 2000 we lost 85% of our clients. Almost all of them were running small clothing industries. That happened when we joined the EU".

Both Era's and Rea's narratives postulated that postsocialism and globalization had generated economic peripheries and new zones of cheap labor emerged. In Thessaloniki, the passage to post-Fordism eradicated production and manufacture, putting the stress on consumption and services whereas the post-socialist economies emerged to provide cheap labour. In the mid-2000s, the first signs of the emerging debt crisis started to become visible in Greece and in the economy of Thessaloniki's center. That is why Era could not find the job she was looking for. Production and manufacture had almost ceased. Instead, she found a job in a tavern as a waitress. And Rea looked for safety by a pension. After the onset of the financial crisis of 2010, our narrators pointed to a rising trend of exchanging their old clothes among friends instead of buying new ones. This change during the humanitarian crisis of 2015 was combined with more professionalized practices within the space of NGOs. Charity clothing banks started to appear in the center.

As Maria, an owner of a clothing workshop at the historical center of the city, stated,

"Since the late 2000 up to mid-2010 the demand of my customers for brand new clothes was reduced. I used to sew expensive formal wear for three decades, but from 2009 onwards I agreed to repair my customers' old clothes, as well as curtains and slipcovers".

After the outbreak of the financial crisis since 2008 onwards, measures such as the reduction of salaries of civil servants, the reduction of pensions, simultaneously with the imposition of a Uniform Real Estate Property Tax (ENFIA) on energy bills, and an increase in indirect taxes (Potamianos 2019: 465) generated a domino effect in all aspects of social life in Greece. In that period of time, numerous small businesses for clothes repair opened up throughout the city center of Thessaloniki. Simultaneously, the clothing trade sector was in a big decline leading to a massive closure of clothing enterprises, as well as to a large increase of unemployment (almost 28% in July 2013, see Potamianos 2019: 466). This was a time when more often than before our narrators as well as we ourselves met with female friends in order to socialize and exchange our old clothes. Clothes not needed or not exchanged were donated to Clothing Bank in the neighborhood. Then, a frequently asked question was "which clothing-bank do you prefer to give clothing material to?"

Chloe, 38 years old, used to work for a couple of years as a social care advisor in a new NGO based in a neighborhood of the center. “When I see all these homeless people sleeping by my door, more than before, I don’t feel proud of myself because I donate clothing material to NGOs. It is something normal that has to be done”. Chloe’s donations of clothes to NGOs seemed to be part of what she defined as “solidarity”. As Norris (2012) argued the secondhand clothing economy “brings into one frame the links between the market, materiality and morals”, where the cultural value of the secondhand clothing material created the kind of heritage that Chloe believed should be part of everyday life, something that we should inherit as a practice from other people. In this way, the practices of everyday care turned into qualities of a heritage that should be preserved and inherited. It is the intangible sphere of feelings, such as caring which are transferred to the material world via secondhand clothing goods.

Similarly, Sofia who lives in an apartment in the historical center of Thessaloniki and gave one of us a silk expensive dress of hers stated, “I saved this for you, it doesn’t suit me anymore”. Then she added, “It is important for the people to feel pleasure from what they receive from you. I don’t give to others just in order to give something to somebody”. Sofia seemed to believe in this moral economy where emotions are valued fragments of what she desired to be her attitude in life. As she argued,

“I use all my clothing material to the very end. Nothing is wasted. I buy clothes rarely and I prefer to purchase quality products. I want durability and thus I invest in the quality of my clothes, even if I must spend more money. Actually, I believe that a wardrobe should contain little and good clothing objects”.

According to Woodward (2015: 131 – 38), it is interesting to challenge the assumptions of consumers such as the expression that “fashion is always fast”, in order to get some insight into their consumption practices. Sofia adds, “I never receive from others their waste [...] How can I give something worn out to the people I love? It would be as if I don’t appreciate them enough”. In this context, the practices of giving and exchanging clothes may reveal Sofia’s own perceptions regarding what is useful, important or/and waste. Her practices of cloth swapping touch upon the economy of sustainable solidarity and appear to shape an option about a heritage that matters according to her. After all, Daniel Miller (2005: 2) stated, our material world seems to create the context and the norms of our everyday life. Then care and solidarity can be the qualities of an intangible heritage of the everyday.

The double destabilization of the Greek economy in the 2010s, that of the market (economic crisis) and that of society (impoverishment of Greek citizens, emigration and refugees) generated “sociality practices premised on ideas of egalitarianism”, as Rakopoulos stated (2015: 2). Workers’ cooperatives, collectivities, volunteering have increased in order to produce an alternative space of reciprocal support aimed at providing a safety net in the void produced by the collapsing Greek state sector.

NAOMI started in 2015 as a project in the Idomeni Refugee Camp (next to the Greek borders to North Macedonia). “I was about to go into pension, and I went

for a journey to Germany”, Theodora, the head of Naomi and a retired Protestant minister, related. She came to Greece and to Thessaloniki as a bride from Germany. She was highly involved with the Evangelical Church in Rhineland (Germany) and that is why the trip to the homeland was connected to a visit to the Church. There, she realized the interest of Germans in the refugee crisis in Greece: “A group from my church gave me some money to support the refugees”, Theodora who originated from there, stated. Back from Germany, she founded NAOMI by renting a space in an old industrial building which had hosted a factory before and had been left empty due to the crisis. First, NAOMI provided the refugees with food, language classes, etc. When Idomeni⁹ border was evacuated, Theodora and the others in NAOMI realized that nobody recycled all UN blankets that had been given to the refugees. They decided to do it themselves. Through a funding received from Germany and from Theodora’s personal relations, they bought sewing machines. A retired professor from a German Design College helped them as a trainer. This was the basis for launching their program for training refugees in sewing. Many refugees, especially women who took language classes at NAOMI, got involved in the training program. The first production included bags, and later, they produced a collection of clothes (T-shirts, hoodies, etc.) by using eco-friendly materials. The success of the undertaking first affected the people from the neighborhood and the center. Many of them were, to an extent, people working in NGOs, students who lived in the center and people who wanted to help. In that period, a solidarity movement involving different practices emerged in Greece.

As Tina, a volunteer at NAOMI, said, “Solidarity economy is not about profit, it is about human connection”. Her statement is supported by Miller (2010: 146) who argued that, “While all economic relationships are social in one form or another, solidarity names a specific mode of relationship: it begins with a recognition of interdependency”. Labor at NAOMI transformed the lives of refugees. As Theodora believed (being consistent with her Protestant background), training and work re-connected refugees to their self-respect, empowered them and provided a path for integration into the Greek labor market. In classical economics, the worker’s labor generates a surplus value. In the space of NAOMI, it seems that the refugee labor generated its own surplus. The products capitalized on the refugee odyssey, for example there was a whole series of products called “Remember Idomeni”. The names of the products became reminders of the images and the refugee story, but also they suggested that their consumption made a difference by supporting the improvement of refugees’ lives.

The knowledge about the ethics and the goals of production (eco-friendly cotton, refugee empowerment through labor and their gradual integration through skill development) further supported the ethos of solidarity and attracted the attention of distributors and consumers, especially through an online e-shop, which NAOMI created to sell its products mostly to buyers belonging in the similar alternative-soli-

⁹ This was a self-organized informal camp in the midst of the Greek-North Macedonian border that became iconic of the refugee crisis of 2015.

solidarity-networks. The ideological and economic interconnection was the cornerstone for their existence. In that way, NAOMI belonged to the deterritorialized symbolic space of global solidarity. The people, involved in this network, participated in different capacities (consumers, producers, and firms) and constituted alternative publics trying to make the consumption an act of care. The success of the undertaking inspired Theodora and Lia, a fashion designer who volunteered at NAOMI, to think about opening NAOMI's shop. But they both had reservations regarding the next step and how "the rules of the market would not erode the solidarity ideals". In other words, both women were concerned how the commercialization of their products, the strict hierarchical relations between employers/employees which dominate the market, would affect the relationships within the NGO, among the volunteers and the refugees themselves.

In the late post-Fordism, the state does not seem willing to address the needs of solidarity economy the same way nation-states did in the postwar Europe through generating more inclusive forms of social citizenship through the development of the welfare state. Instead, a market citizenship where economic productivity is the only way for social inclusion and exclusion which emerged in the last decade showed very good reflexes at adapting its own interests to political, social and humanistic ideas (solidarity economy, social economy, market citizenship). The skepticism that the people of NAOMI expressed concerned the way solidarity economy could respond to the challenges of the market (the potential rise of demand, the rent of a shop, the wages of the staff, in NAOMI's case, the refugees). People in NAOMI felt that there was an incompatibility between the market and solidarity economy. In addition, they were discouraged by the lack of any state provision for ventures like NAOMI which tried to explore the boundaries between the market and solidarity economy.

Women working or volunteering in the clothing industry at the city center turned with their narratives to the forefront were global, national and local challenges and changes were inscribed. The conditions of transition and precarity seemed to be engraved in the body of the city, Thessaloniki's center and the women in multiple ways connecting the past and the present, local, global and digital. Economic transformations and a new urban planning were introduced in Thessaloniki's center, both from above, but also from everyday experience. Women in these precarious periods, captured in their narratives, seemed to be those who tested the boundaries of these transformations, as women are often considered more susceptible to precarity (being the surrogate proletariat) and more adaptive to the conditions of crisis. Their narratives challenged the heritage of the center as expressed in the official tourist guides and histories and turned our attention to the heritage of care, solidarity and precarity.

Conclusion

We briefly described fragments of the voices of female narrators concerning their modes of survival, care and solidarity that revealed aspects of the heritage emerging through successive financial, commercial, and humanitarian crises, such as those experienced by the residents of the historical center of Thessaloniki in the last decades. Their practices of manufacturing and donating clothes or buying with a moral incentive became their practices of survival and care which gave off aspects of their social lives and dynamics of the local and global economy which in times of crisis could formulate a gender-based solidarity. It is the kind of solidarity which does not “operate at the level of feminist political action” but is “registered as an affective and active passage and interaction” (Kyriazidou 2022: 107). For those women, in their “humble” practices of the everyday (Vaiou 2021: 11), sewing clothes was the ticket for social mobility, informal work and residence in a new flat or house.

Since the postwar Thessaloniki to the period of the so-called Greek crisis, the modalities of feminization of survival, captured in the above narratives, postulated women’s own involvement with an economy of solidarity. In this way, we examined how their narratives also produce a new history of the center of Thessaloniki and this history’s qualities could be considered the heritage of the everyday, including how this heritage became re-created in the present through the practices of our informants. How was the circulation of these clothes embodied in the experiences and emotions of these women who identify with the city center of Thessaloniki? Our paper explored how intangible heritage is conceptualized all over again through lived female stories, producing Thessaloniki’s herstory. Could this be achieved through the connection of the materialistic dimension of products that women produce and donate or even buy, and the narration of their lives connected to victories of productivity (but also creativity) and/or stories of crisis and anxiety? The materiality, expressed through the clothes and the urban landscape of Thessaloniki’s center, appeared to relate to the intangible sphere of emotions and memories experienced by our narrators. In this way, the objects become vectors of meanings which are “good for thought” «bonnes à penser», (Claude Levi-Strauss 1963, Yalouri 2012: 22) and seem to shape the living heritage of the everyday life.

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Dr Eleni Sideri, Assistant Professor,
Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies,
University of Macedonia, Greece
E-mail: elasideri@uom.edu.gr

Dr Elina Kapetanaki, School teacher,
Hellenic Ministry of Education
E-mail: elekapeta@gmail.com

Postal Address for both authors:
University of Macedonia, Egnatias 156,
Thessaloniki 546 36,
Greece