Urbanities, Vol. 12 · Supplement 5 · January 2022
© 2022 Urbanities

Women Street Vendors: An Ethnography of Informal Trade in Athens[1]

Georgios Kouzas
(National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece)
g.kouzas@yahoo.gr

This article focuses on women street vendors in the centre of Athens, selling their products either as wandering peddlers or at stationary stalls. They usually sell their own hand-made goods, including aprons, socks and sweaters. For most of these women, their legal status is marginal, in the sense that they do not usually operate under a trading license. They prefer to sell their products on isolated street corners or at the outskirts of open street markets, so as not to interfere and collide with certified traders. Here, I am focusing on the daily issues of women street vendors, on their effort to sell their unlicensed goods, the strategies they employ and the significance of their female gender.
Keywords: Women, street vendors, urban anthropology, informal trade, survival strategies, multi-sited ethnography.

Introduction

In this article, I examine an issue which remains unnoticed by social sciences in Greece: the presence and professional activity of women who work as street vendors around central Athens. This research is the sequel to a broader research program dealing with the ethnography of elderly workers on the streets of central Athens (Kouzas 2017: 131-155). Here, I will be analysing the case of nine women street vendors selling their hand-made goods, such as knitted clothes, socks, wooden constructions (especially toys), even food prepared at home, or products bought from wholesalers, such as books, plastic trinkets and decorative items. These women held stalls on Athinas Street and Stadiou Street or they occasionally wandered around the centre of Athens. Furthermore, three of my nine informants were immigrants from Georgia, Albania, and Bulgaria, while six were Greek.

I will be emphasizing on three focal points: the adversities faced by these women, many of whom do not possess an official trade licence, the strategies they employ in order to survive and the importance of their gender — in other words, whether or not they might suffer further discrimination from other traders or passers-by because of it and how it might expose them to additional challenges in the streets of Athens, especially late at night or in the early morning.

Women Street Vendors, Informal Trade and Precariousness

Sociologists and anthropologists dealing with informal trade employ many terms, such as 'non-normal', 'flexible' or 'marginal work' to define it (Williams and Windebank 1998). The classification of any human activity, such as work, between 'informal' or 'flexible' is certainly not an easy task. In recent years, both terms have been used indiscriminately, almost interchangeably. Nevertheless, as Spyridakis has noted (2018b: 43), the two terms are not identical and are historically defined by several contributing factors, such as the background of the area in question, the history of particular types of employment in a country, the degree of industrialisation and technological development and the political system in place. 'Flexible' work expresses the 'degree of adaptability' to the demands of the capitalist system of

[1] I do thank Dr James Rosbrook-Thompson, Dr Italo Pardo and Dr Giuliana B. Prato, both for the editing and their comments on previous draft of this article as well as the Board of *Urbanities*.

© 2022 Urbanities

production, while 'informal labour' is conceived as 'non-formal', to be distinguished from the official one (Kesteloot 1999: 56-57). Our times are typified by the insecurity of work and constant change. Braverman (1974: 18-21) stresses that informal labour is not a negative consequence of our times alone. He notes that the spread of formal, waged labour has never ceased to be linked with and give rise to flexible, informal or unstable forms of employment.

The concentration of populations has led developed societies to an overabundance of workforce, the 'industrial reserve army'. Consequently, informal labour co-existed with formal forms of work even before the 1980s. This tendency is even more powerful in the post-Fordist era. It maintains three main features: the constant spread of informal work, the variability of informal work depending on age, gender, professional group and certainly on the locale and the co-existence — even to the degree that they complement each other — of formal and informal work. Several types of work are usually classified as informal labour, such as work performed at home or unpaid overtime, undeclared labour that complements basic income, marginal work or work at family-owned businesses, unwaged or voluntary work (Narotzky 1997: 58-60). Therefore, the concept of informal labour is frequently associated with unregistered economic activity. Hart (1973: 63-64) made the term more specific when he described the phenomenon of small-scale production, frequently also linked with marginal and/or illegal economic operations. Unfortunately, many studies are marked by a bi-polar approach between formal and informal labour (Williams and Windebank 1998: 21-24). Usually, informal labour and the activities associated with it are presented as something negative compared to the existence and development of the formal economy. As opposed to working in a developed form in the capitalist economy, the vocabulary and concepts of social and financial backwardness have been used to study informal work. However, such an approach distorts and inferentially marginalizes the work of thousands of individuals. Moreover, it fails to focus on the interdependence of formal and informal work within a single economy (Pardo 1996). Given the current fluidity in systems of production, the formal and informal sectors increasingly sustain each other. For example, the informal sector employs migrants lacking the necessary paperwork for a legal residence in a particular country (Spyridakis 2013). This tendency towards informal labour appears to have grown particularly strong in Europe over the last ten years, due to unfavourable financial developments (Pardo 1996; Leonard 1998: 17-18). It has also spread in developed economies, such as Greece, where there is also a large concentration of migrant labour.

Female labour out in the street has only been examined by a minority of social scientists. This issue informs the majority of studies on informal trade performed by street vendors. One, of course, needs to clarify the concept of informal trade, which has been discussed both by Geertz (1963) and Nisbet (1967: 73-90). Nisbet (1967: 74-76) notes that social anthropologists started using the terms 'formal' and 'informal' in the late 1960s, whereas other disciplines, such as economics, had already been employing them (see also Bromley 1979). He states that, in the case of street trade, the most frequent term used is 'informal trade'. In Nisbet's view (1967: 74-75), this tendency is explained by the characteristics of street trade itself, which place it firmly within the notion of informal trade, since the whole process of transaction involves the

© 2022 Urbanities

exchange of minimal monetary sums, while vendors rarely pay tax or issue receipts. Besides, one requires no special skills to be a street vendor and the trade is, therefore, open to anyone. Finally, street trading is characterised by fluidity. Many people practice it for short periods before moving on to other types of work. It is, therefore, an opportunistic occupation for most, intended to supplement income (Hart 1973: 61-65; Narotzky 1997: 220-223). Of course, as Spyridakis stresses (2018a: 113-133; 2018b), work under such fluid and uncertain circumstances, lacking any sense of schedule or predetermined income, renders those who practice it highly vulnerable. As early as the 1960s, fieldwork-based anthropological studies were already dealing with city street vendors. The study by Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes* (1963), examining street vendors in Indonesia, the work of Gutkind (1968: 135-166) on street vendors and professionals who constantly change employment in the villages and cities of Africa, and the study by Nisbet (1967: 73-90) on street vendors in Chile are typical examples.[2] Such studies are representative of the main features of anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s. They employ a holistic approach toward people who live and work as street vendors; mainly, they focus on specific geographical areas, such as small rural communities or city neighbourhoods and deal with male street vendors. However, since the 1990s and 2000s, research on street vendors has undergone significant change: instead of focusing exclusively on rural areas, research now deals just as much with street vendors in large urban centres (Pardo 1996; Pardo and Prato 2017: 1-19) implementing multi-sited ethnography, as formulated by Marcus (1995: 95-117).

Also, an emphasis has been placed lately on researching the importance of women street vendors, whose role is as vital as that of their male counterparts. However, what might be the reason behind them not attracting enough attention by anthropologists and sociologists? Sandra Wallman (1979: 18-24) offered an answer to this issue when she pointed out that both in the case of dependent workers (employees) and in the case of jobs involving a more comprehensive social interaction, such as street vendors, historical and anthropological studies used to emphasize on a male dominated perception of reality. This perspective arose because men’s work was associated with the concept of public space and productive work, while women’s work was inherently linked to private space and was, therefore, more associated with notions of caring and the upbringing of children. Similarly, in the case of street vendors, until the 1960s, anthropological research had been focusing on male street vendors, while women remained absent. However, besides failing to capture reality, such a perspective also confined women in a conceptual framework concerned solely with their role as wives and mothers. Thankfully, research from the 1990s on women street vendors (Dimas 2008: 1-20; Saha 2011: 301-326; Chakraborty and Koley 2018a: 400-403, Chakraborty and Koley 2018b: 14-20) introduces the concept of gender and its significance in the creation of work identities. This research work sheds some light on the manner in which female street vendors create their own identities in contradistinction to those of male street vendors and other traders in general and how the representations about women, femininity and work act either as integration or exclusion

[2] See also Pardo 1996.

mechanisms from labour. It also demonstrates how the notion of gender influences relationships between men and women in the same field of work.

Today, most anthropological research on women street vendors focuses on a variety of issues. These include an analysis of the construct of femininity (Chakraborty and Koley 2018a: 400-403), work conditions and the adversities faced by women street vendors, work strategies, the codes of value in such environments, and, of course, the emotions generated in this line of work, and, in particular, the pride felt by these people who can make a living from it for both themselves and their families.

Working on the street is primarily characterized by precariousness and social vulnerability. Spyridakis (2018b: 22) correctly notes that precariousness, rather than being a static condition, is a process of constant motion, involving employment precariousness and mobility from one place to another in search of work. Although there is no unanimity about the actual meaning of the term (Spyridakis 2018b: 17), it is related to unstable work conditions characterized by insecurity, low income and risks arising from social and economic conditions of uncertainty. In this aspect, I will present examples drawn from the working lives of women street vendors and their survival strategies, to illustrate the precariousness and social vulnerability they face.

Almost all informants in this study experience precarious conditions and social vulnerability on a daily basis. This happens for various reasons. First, their work is informal, as defined by Pahl (1984: 114-115). Second, they are immigrants and refugees, people who, as Bauman (2004) put it, belong to those who experience marginalization and live in the fragile conditions of a fluid world. Third, as Kalleberg (2011) argued, they are women involved in a male-dominated area of work.

Research Methodology

My research draws on ethnographic data collected during the years 2015-2016, through my ethnographic fieldwork in the centre of Athens, as part of my post-doctoral research at the University of Athens (Kouzas: 2017: 131-155). I particularly examined the daily routine of male and female street vendors at Kotzia Square, Athinas Street and the central meat and fish market of Athens. The research process has been quite adverse, since these informants were understandably reluctant to be interviewed or provide information regarding their lives and work and, additionally, they were constantly on the move with their merchandise, making it difficult for the interviewer to approach and interact with them. To overcome such obstacles, I implemented some well-established methodological principles of ethnography combined with modern methodological techniques (Pardo and Prato 2013; Krase 2018: 72-73). I used semi-structured questions so that the informants could reply freely and potentially add any information they considered relevant. In addition, I took a multi-sited ethnographic approach (Marcus 1995: 110-117) and followed them along their usual itinerary, in the hope that I would be able to obtain a first-hand experience of their work activities and the difficulties they face and to document their strategies (Burawoy 1998: 12-13). Eventually, I managed to interview a total of nine women, Greeks and immigrants, who talked about their lives and, therefore, their

work experiences. As I noted above, my research emphasized on specific focal points rather than on their lives as a whole.

Problems Faced by Women Street Vendors

Anyone uninformed on the lives of women street vendors might think that their main problem is of financial nature. However, as Gutkind (1968: 135-166) has shown in his famous work on women working in African markets, female vendors usually encounter different adversities, which are often overlooked. For example, in the aforementioned case, women in the markets of Africa had to resolve the practical issue of childcare, but they also had to face the disapproval of their husbands for having a job of their own, especially in a field of work that is traditionally considered more appropriate for men, such as trade. However, in the process of my ethnographic research, I came to the conclusion that women street vendors in Athens had different problems to deal with.

First of all, there are those issues directly associated with their line of work. Only two out of the nine informants possessed trade licenses. They presented this as, probably, their main problem, since they could be arrested by the police at any time. Besides, their relationship with the other traders in the same area, be it street vendors or store owners, is usually quite problematic. In the view of my informants, licensed traders with an established turf treat them either with contempt or hostility. It is not rare for street vendors to be arrested due to complaints made by their peers. Of course, this kind of competition between licensed and unlicensed traders is commonplace. As Bestor (2004: 42-56) has demonstrated in his study of relationships between traders in the central fish market of Tokyo, licensed traders were hostile towards street vendors for two main reasons. First, because they felt it was unfair to pay taxes and social security contributions, while unlicensed street vendors did not have to bear such burdens. Second, there was a clear issue of social and professional prestige involved. A trader, who enjoyed a *de facto* higher status than a street vendor, often aimed to punish the latter by denouncing them and to be able to frame this as a success in the eyes of their peers, thereby acquiring a reputation as a protector of group interests. This is another aspect of the informal economy, pointed out by Bromley (1979), who studied the relationship between economy and culture – that is how individuals construct their living conditions.

A typical example comes in the words of Sonia, a 58-year-old woman from Albania:

> ‘I never got a license; I was not interested in doing so; it is my fault, but this is how we did it in my country. Here, to sell socks and pyjamas, I have to produce so many documents for the Ministry and the Municipality of Athens, that it seems crazy. I can always work without a license.’

Would it be possible to examine such a view in the context of discipline/non-compliance with the laws in a Foucauldian sense? I believe not. The discussions I had with the informants convinced me that they really could not comply with formal state mechanisms. They merely continued to adhere to the mentalities and perceptions acquired in their countries of origin, viewing as usual and rational what the western world might consider obsolete or impractical. However, different people have different perceptions on norms and standards.

Their second main problem is the discrimination they have to endure because of their gender. Female workers are a part of the population that is particularly vulnerable to informal work. In Hoyman's (1987: 67) view, the matter concerns the whole world rather than merely non-western countries. This is attributed to the bisected model that held sway in the post-war world, according to which the man was supposed to work outside the household and the woman performed her domestic 'duties'. Frequently, however, women were compelled to perform secondary, informal work, to contribute to the family's finances or to ensure a personal income. This situation worsened for many women who, either because of political developments (for example, the collapse of socialism) or armed conflict in Asia or Africa, were compelled to migrate to Europe, where once more they had to undertake informal work. This placed them in a position considerably more vulnerable than their situation before migration. They found themselves in a foreign country, with no permanent accommodation or a stable income, while their husbands, who were also migrants, did not have steady employment. Such is the case of the women that I examine in the present article.

Their position is vulnerable, due to the increased financial needs as women and wives, together with their daily struggle for survival. 47-year-old Matina commented on these issues:

> 'Often enough, people at the market underestimate us for being women. They tell us to go home and cook and do some dish-washing and leave trade to the men. Nevertheless, is this behaviour acceptable in 2016, when women and men are supposed to be all equal? I think that many male traders are trying to intimidate us, so that we do not steal their clientele. For example, I have been here for four years and people have got to know me and they buy socks from me. This is something that many traders' envy.'

Indeed, women street vendors have to operate in a man's world, such as the male-dominated world of street trade in Greece. The fact that most women in Greece until the 1970s were homemakers also contributed to this male domination. Working outdoors and, in particular, on the street was also a confirmation of male identity. Even later, from the 1980s onwards, as an increasing number of women entered the labour market, most of them worked as employees, while the number of women who run their own business remains low, even today.

Besides gender-based discrimination, women street vendors encounter other difficulties (Kim and Lee 2016: 77-81), arising from working at night or in shady parts of Athens. In connection with this, Matina stated:

> 'I often have to work under challenging conditions: among drug addicts and drug dealers. All this scares me, but after all these years I have learnt to deal with it. A tough life has made me equally tough…'

My research revealed that those female traders can adequately deal with their demanding and competitive working environment and male traders. In the third part of this article, I will be dealing with the significance of the female gender and the difficulty of working as a woman in the male world of street trade.

© 2022 Urbanities

My interlocutors did not refer as much to their financial problems. Even though most of them stated that they earned between 400 and 600 Euros per month, they did not regard this as a problem, considering it a natural result of the crisis that has plagued the Greek economy for ten years now (Christodoulou and Spyridakis 2019). Tatiana, a 68-year-old woman from Georgia said:

> 'I make about 480 Euros per month. You might say, 'This is not much.' Yes, it is true that this is not much, but it is enough to live on, not just me, but also my daughter who is sick. The amount of money that you have to live with also depends on how you are used to get by. To some, this would seem little, but, for me, it is enough.'

There are another two factors, which might explain why women traders do not consider their financial situation to be their biggest concern. Pertinent to this is the fact that, after a decade of the economic crisis in Greece, salaries and profits have plummeted and views on work have changed. Now any job that ensures one's survival is to be valued, in contrast to a past habit which involved a contempt to any labour, with the exception of really well-paid or office jobs (Spyridakis 2013). This means that people do not evaluate work and income based on the same criteria as ten years ago, which now seem out of date. This lowering of expectations, irrespective of being a problem in itself or not, remains fundamental in the world of work in contemporary Greece.

Survival Strategies

My fieldwork over the years of 2015-2016 led me to the view that female street vendors in the centre of Athens, far from acting randomly, apply a range of general survival strategies. These strategies entail the continuous reproduction of patterns of behaviour, which are constantly readjusted in response to the changing circumstances of daily life. In the case of women street vendors, I chose Bourdieu's approach (Bourdieu 1977), which combines 'objective conditions' with individual, 'subjective' considerations. Given the latter, acting subjects are individual persons possessing independent skills for selective action, aims, and pursuits, in other words operating under complete freedom in a society which is the synthesis of the individual actions of its subjects. Bourdieu introduced the concept of *habitus*, which originates in 'objective reality' and, in turn, creates practices that are the response of the individual to daily challenges (Ciubrinskas 2018).

In contrast to entirely predetermined actions, *habitus* is the product of the internal dispositions of the individual. Bourdieu did not formulate this as a system of 'rules'. Instead, he employed it as a system of predispositions located within the individual to act in specific ways. Such ways were directed both by his or her daily habits and by his or her social circumstances.

Such strategies can be regarded from another perspective. As Pardo (1996) stresses in his anthropological work on Naples, individuals adopt strategies that frequently seem irrational to the outsider but result from the precariousness inherent in informal work. Surrounded by risk and instability, those who work on the streets, such as the women examined in the present

Urbanities, Vol. 12 · Supplement 5 · January 2022
© 2022 Urbanities

article, adopt, as Pardo maintains, a system of strategies that are founded on networks of contacts — consisting of familial or social relations — and attempt to exploit various possibilities, various chinks in the armour of the capitalist system. This adoption of various survival strategies, apart from aiming to ensure financial survival, which is of vital importance, reveals their own 'moral way of life', the winning of a personal bet, as it were, to surmount negative circumstances at work and society.

In my research, I attempted to decipher the women's responses to their daily circumstances. It was not an easy task, since each none of them acted on strictly personal criteria, which means that one cannot speak in general terms about the entirety of their strategies. Nevertheless, the data allows for a classification of some of those strategies, as follows.

Occupation of Space

I call the occupation of a specific spot on the street a 'post'. A proper post is always of crucial importance for these women for two reasons: First, because it directly affects their income and second, because it helps them overcome some of the problems they have to face at work.

The following account is of importance here:

> 'I am always careful where I place my cart with the clothes, so I do not obstruct others or have any problems with the other traders. And I wouldn't want to have any problems with the police either, because I do not have the necessary papers for the street vendor license. And it is not just that, but it is also important for my protection against the various threats in the streets, such as, for example…' (56-year-old Eleni).

Securing a good location is an issue that concerns all street vendors. For example, Chakraborty and Koley (2018a: 400-403), in their research on street vendors in Jamshedpur, India, mention the importance of issues involving the use of space in the flea market, and, of course, the competition among street traders. From my research, I concluded that the occupation of a particular space involves many factors. Women try to occupy posts where there is heavy commercial traffic to sell products more easily (for example, at the entrance or exit of the central meat market of Athens or the central points on boulevards). At the same time, selling products at busy central points ensures another type of protection from potential threats (Gutkind 1968: 155-156), such as thieves, drug addicts, or other minor criminals. My interviews made it plain that not only do these women know the importance of positioning in order to survive, but, at the same time, through their daily movements, they develop strategies for the use and exploitation of space which extends beyond commercial activity. For example, they prefer to choose spots which offer quick hideouts from the police, when they show up. As I have already pointed out, since they lack the necessary licence, their activities take place in an illegal context.

© 2022 Urbanities

Choice of Time

The time of the day these women choose to spend in the streets is also the conscious result of a strategic choice. Being outside in itself does not yield results, unless a general time management strategy is employed. Elona, a 72-year-old seller of wooden accessories, told me:

> 'People have this saying, that time is money. Nevertheless, for me it is not just money, it is much more, because depending on how I allot my time in the market, I can earn money or stay clear of various troubles. Therefore, timing is something fundamental for me in terms of my daily life on the street.'

As Alfred Gell (1992) has pointed out, time is different for each individual, a separate matter from one's objective experience of time; that is, how our time passes, depending on whether our current experience is pleasant or unpleasant. However, time is also socially and culturally constructed. We determine it and we exploit it for our own benefit, in order to satisfy our various needs. For women street vendors, this is standard practice, given that they do not have the eight-hour work routine of office workers. Time also has various 'densities', as Gell notes (1992: 30-32), in the sense that female street vendors are exposed to many daily experiences, both positive and negative. My fieldwork made it clear that female street vendors are selling the most during rush hours, either in the morning or in the evening, when commuting workers feel more relaxed. The end of the month, when salaried workers and pensioners are paid, is also a crucial period in the cycle of time, similarly to the Christmas and Easter holiday. Likewise, there are several lesser celebrations, such as St. Valentine's Day, which always trigger more significant trade activity. On such days, women street vendors work longer hours, aware that they will be increasing their profit. By contrast, the worst days for sales extend from the middle to the end of the month. Finally, there are women street vendors who sell food, such as hot-dogs and sandwiches, for whom the most profitable hours are either late at night, for example 2.00 am, when nightclub-goers are getting back home, or very early in the morning, from 5.00 am to 7.00 am, when early-starters, such as manual workers or street cleaners, go to work. For the untrained observer, who has no experience of working on the street, all these aspects of time management are certainly not self-evident and perhaps not even expected, but for women street vendors, they are an integral part of their daily practices.

Contact Networks

The establishment of communication networks and contacts is another strategy of crucial importance for street vendors. However, these contacts are much more than that. As Christakis and Fowler (2009) point out, these structural interconnections serve various goals and involve specific operational methods within each social or professional group. Sixty-year-old Eleni had a similar impression, when she told me:

> 'Here, I have genuine relationships with people, both traders and residents. I have known them for twenty years, and whenever I need help, they will offer it. However, I will help them too, whenever necessary. It would not be an overstatement to say that with some of them, we are like relatives.'

© 2022 Urbanities

My fieldwork made it clear that women street vendors create similar networks of contacts and relationships and are constantly concerned to expand them. Such networks consist of relationships between them and other traders in the area, residents, passers-by and other workers in the centre of Athens. These networks function in several manners which serve both as encouragement and protection. They promote trade, in the sense that they share information on the available products, serving as living advertisement for lesser-known merchandise, increasing both clientele and profits. However, at the same time, the networks also provide warnings of potential hazards for women street vendors. These women have developed information transmission networks involving shopkeepers in the area, notifying them of thieves or other offenders. Furthermore, when they face such problems, they can call on the help and protection of the shopkeepers in their vicinity. Such networks, therefore, ensure both the promotion of their products and the security of their daily lives.

Promotion of Merchandise

As pointed out by Geertz (1963), the concepts of promotion and advertisement are inherent in the culture of daily life. However, other social anthropologists, who have examined societal or professional groups in non-western settings, such as Africa or Asia, have also pointed out the significance of advertising by street vendors as a means of survival in daily life (Narotzky 1997: 182-184). In general, most of us tend to link advertisements with companies, but street vendors also employ strategies of promotion to attract passers-by.

Maria, who lives in Aspropyrgos, Attica, but sells dolls in Omonia Square daily, discussed these strategies. She said:

> 'There are some things that you have to do in order to attract the customer; having new merchandise, promoting it and attracting attention. If you just sit there doing nothing, you are not going to advertise your products and sell them. I even pay compliments to my customers in order to sell.'

Maria told me something that was repeated by other women street vendors, who had adopted basic promotional practices. In general terms, these are as follows: a) The vendors orally stress the quality of their products, b) They comment on their merchandise in order to attract passers-by to their carts, c) They try to make themselves likable by praising their potential customers, d) They indirectly accuse other traders of promoting poorer quality products and demanding higher prices.

I also noticed that women street vendors sometimes extemporised in promoting their products, depending on conditions and circumstances. Thus, they varied their advertising methods, depending on whether they were addressing children or older persons and they varied their compliments depending on whether they were addressing men or women.

None of these manoeuvres are fortuitous. Here we have 'inventive adaptation' as Spyridakis (2018: 198) puts it. Those who employ it, do so consistently, considering it a rational attitude towards life in general. It is also an attitude that is morally right for the people engaging in it, since it helps them overcome their difficulties. In his anthropological study of Naples, Pardo (1996: 34-42) talks of a dynamically 'continuous interaction' on the part of these

© 2022 Urbanities

individuals who survive in the world of informal work and are aware of their societal vulnerability. They nevertheless continue to struggle and contend as far as they can through their work and in symbolic terms. As Pardo also notes, such actions are not new phenomena during the recent crisis. Instead, they respond to a set of historical circumstances that reveal the adaptation of these individuals to a new and particularly harsh environment, which they certainly did not choose, but which they are now compelled to experience for the long term.

Conclusions

This article aimed to unveil some aspects of the daily lives of female street vendors in the centre of Athens and stress the importance of this occupation in terms of work culture overall. Above all, their labour belongs undoubtedly to the world of informal work. Their trade is unregistered and they have no official permission to practice it. It is precarious, frequently a supplement to the primary family income, and involves tiny amounts of cash. Apart from financial matters, the vulnerability experienced by women in this informal line of work extends to another set of relevant issues unprotected by any worker's rights. Women street vendors have no insurance coverage for healthcare and will certainly not be awarded pension at any time, although they have worked hard for decades. As for society's view on them, their work is certainly not highly regarded, as it is considered an opportunistic job that belongs to the world of undocumented economic activity. In the eyes of an outsider, such an occupation wavers between legal and illegal work and belongs to the margins of society.

Simultaneously, leaving aside a narrow economically-oriented view of the subject, one arrives at various conclusions in anthropological terms regarding the very nature of street vendors' work and how they strive to survive. As for the problems that female street vendors face, their income, which is anyway low, is not their main preoccupation. The racism that migrant female street vendors encounter and the sexism that all women traders face seem to pose more significant issues. Another major problem lies in the aggressive attitude of many shop-owners, who disapprove of them precisely because of their capacity as street peddlers. Contrary to an uninformed conviction, the vendors, far from acting randomly, employ particular strategies. As Bourdieu (1977: 28-31) stressed, such strategies are not to be viewed as a set of strictly repetitive actions designed to lead to a result. They should be approached to answer problems that arise every day that need to be resolved in order for these women and their families to survive. Four main strategies for dealing with daily life emerged from my research. These are: the appropriate use of space, choice of time, the exploitation of networks of contacts — also fundamental for the promotion of commercial activities — and strategies involving oral advertising, also for the promotion of merchandise.

Thus, the hierarchy of problems faced by women street vendors is very different from what is generally believed, while they also organise their methodology of work in ways much different than an external observer might have imagined. In its manifestation as street trade, informal trade has its own rules of organization and operation which can only be unveiled by anthropological fieldwork.

© 2022 Urbanities

References

Bauman, Z. 2004. *Wasted Lives. Modernity and its Outcasts*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bestor, T. 2004. *Tsukiji. The Fish Market at the Center of the World*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Braverman, H. 1974. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Bromley, R. 1979. Introduction–The Urban Informal Sector: Why Is It Worth Discussing? In R. Bromley (ed.), *The Urban Informal Sector: Critical Perspectives on Employment and Housing Policies*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Burawoy, M. 1998. The Extended Case Method. *Sociological Theory*, 16 (1): 4-33.

Chakraborty, P. and Koley, S. 2018a. Socio-Economic Condition among the Women Street Vendors: Anthropological Study on a Street at Jamshedpur International Journal of Reviews and Research. *Social Sciences*, 6 (4): 400-403.

Chakraborty, P. and Koley, S. 2018b. Socio-Economic View on Street Vendors: A Study of a Daily Market at Jamshedpur. *Journal of Advanced Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 5 (1): 14-20.

Christakis, N. and Fowler, J. 2009. *Connected. The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Christodoulou, M. and Spyridakis, M. eds. 2019. *Emotions, Temporalities and Working-Class Identities in the 21st Century*. New York: Nova Publishers.

Ciubrinskas, V. 2018. Transnational Fragmentation of Globality: Eastern-European Post-Socialist Strategies in Chicago. In I. Pardo and G. B. Prato (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Urban Ethnography*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dimas, H. 2008. Street Vendors: Urban Problem and Economic Potential. *Working Papers in Economics and Development Studies 200803*: 1-20. Available at http://ceds.feb.unpad.ac.id/wopeds/200803.pdf

Geertz, C. 1963. *Peddlers and Princes. Bazaar Economy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gell, A. 1992. *The Anthropology of Time. Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images*. London: Berg.

Gutkind, P. 1968. African Responses to Urban Wage Employment. *International Labour Review*, 97: 135-166.

Hart, K. 1973. Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 11 (1): 61-89.

Hoyman, M. 1987. *Female Participation in the Informal Economy*. In L. A. Ferman, S. Henry and M. Hoyman (eds), *The Informal Economy*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Kalleberg, A. L. 2011. *Global Jobs. Bad Jobs. The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000s*. New York: The Russell Sage Foundation.

Kesteloot, C. 1999. Informal Spaces: The Geography of Informal Economic Activities in Brussels. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* 23 (2): 56-70.

Kim, C. and Lee, E. 2016. Growth and Migration to a Third Country: The Case of Korean Migrants in Latin America. *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 23 (2): 77-87.

Kouzas, G. 2017. 'Working until the End of their Lives': Older People Who Are Working as Itinerant Peddlers in the Center of Athens. *Ethnologia Balcanica*, 20: 131-155.

Krase, J. 2018. The Multitude of Approaches to Urban Ethnography: Blessing or Curse? In I. Pardo and G. B. Prato (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook on Urban Ethnography*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Leonard, M. 1998. *Invisible Work, Invisible Workers: The Informal Economy in Europe and the US*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Marcus, G. 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 24: 95-117.

Narotzky, S. 1997. *New Directions in Economic Anthropology*. London: Pluto Press.

Nisbet, C. 1967. Interest Rates and Imperfect Competition in the Informal Credit Market of Rural Chile. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 16 (1): 73-90.

Pahl, R. E. 1984. *Divisions of Labour*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Pardo, I. 1996. *Managing Existence in Naples. Morality, Action and Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pardo, I. and Prato, G. B. 2017. Introduction: Urban Ethnography Matters—Analytical Strength, Theoretical Value and Significance to Society. In I. Pardo and G. B. Prato (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Urban Ethnography*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Prato, G. B. and Pardo, I. 2013. 'Urban Anthropology'. *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 3 (2): 80-110.

Saha, D. 2011. Working Life of Street Vendors in Mumbai. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 54 (2): 301-326.

Spyridakis, M. 2013. *The Liminal Worker. An Ethnography of Work, Unemployment and Precariousness in Contemporary Greece*. London: Routledge.

Spyridakis, M. 2018a. 'We are all Socialists': Greek Crisis and Precarization. In M. Spyridakis (ed.), *Market vs Society. Anthropological Insights*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Spyridakis, M. 2018b. *Homo Precarius. Experiences of Vulnerability in the Time of Crisis*. Athens: Pedio.

Wallman, S. 1979. Introduction. In S. Wallman (ed.), *Social Anthropology of Work*. London: Academic Press.

Williams, C. and Windebank J. 1998. *Informal Employment in Advanced Economies, Implications for Work and Welfare*. London: Routledge.