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Food Scarcity and Women's Collective Action during the First World War: The Case of Greece, 1915-1916

ABSTRACT

The period 1912-1922 was a turning point in the history of the Greek state. The three consecutive wars it participated in (Balkan Wars 1912-1913, First World War 1917-1918, Greek-Turkish War 1919-1922), the National Schism which divided Greek society, the disastrous end of the Asia Minor campaign (known as the Catastrophe) and the exodus of 1.5 million Christians from Anatolia, completely changed the character of Greek society compared to the 19th century. As the country entered the Interwar period, new motifs emerged: statism, the intensification of the conflict between labour and capital, and the entrance of women into the public sphere. In this article we will examine women's collective action during the period 1915-1916 on the issue of the cost of living and food shortages, and the way in which they contributed to the shaping of the Greek Interwar period.

KEYWORDS

Greece,
First World War
Food riots
Popular movements

The aim of this article is to examine a largely ignored aspect of Greece's involvement in the First World War, namely the forms of collective action undertaken by women over the issue of high prices and food scarcity. Greece's participation in the war is inextricably linked to the events of the "National Schism" [Ethnikos Dichasmos], which constitutes the background to the social tensions of the period. The schism stemmed from the conflict between Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and the Liberal Party, and King Constantine and a loose coalition of conservative parties. The dispute was over Greece's participation in the First World War, even though it brought to the surface underlying controversies over various political and social issues. Venizelos favoured participation in the war on the side of the Entente, while Constantine advocated for neutrality, a stance dictated by his sympathies for the Central Powers and especially Germany. At the peak of the schism, from September 1916 to May 1917, the Greek state was divided into two opposing entities: the Entente-backed Provisional Government of Thessaloniki under Venizelos, and the State of Athens, headed by various puppet governments of Constantine. This conflict, a low-intensity civil war, introduced unprecedented levels of political violence into Greek society and constituted a vertical rift that defined Greek politics for the entire interwar period.

The course of social unrest and protests, including food riots, was dictated by the events of the schism. The demonstrations organized by women, which evolved into food riots in some cases, and which are the subject of this article, occurred during the period of the mobilization of the Greek army from September 1915 to June 1916. The demobilisation and the subsequent intensification of the schism in the summer of 1916 led to a reduction in women's collective action, as men organized themselves into the royalist paramilitary reservists' associations [syndesmoi epistraton] and the country was sliding towards the brink of civil war; in the winter of 1916/17, women would again appear in collective action, this time in mixed crowds. In this article I will argue that these forms of collective action, despite seeming to have premodern characteristics, were attuned to the social landscape of their time, echoing the demands for state intervention and protection. I will also argue that those protests were part of a wider social development, and more specifically, the emergence of the organised labour movement.

WAR, NATIONALISM AND STATE

Since its independence, the Greek state and domestic elites had showed a clear preference for *laissez-faire* and sought a low level of state involvement in the economy. In the late 19th century, however, this policy changed. The ongoing crisis in the agricultural sector, the concentration and centralisation of capital, and the spread of wage labour created social frictions that could not be ignored. The paternalistic legislation of the first government of Eleftherios Venizelos and the Liberal Party (1910-1912) moved precisely towards the direction of preventing the social tensions that the prevalence of capitalism inevitably generated.[1] The need to expand the state's sphere of action became even more obvious as Greece got involved in three consecutive wars, the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the First World War (1917-1918) and the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922). Under those circumstances, a new special social group appeared, the veterans and their families.

Before the Balkan Wars, the care of conscripts and their families was the subject of private initiatives and charitable organisations, such as the Union of Greek Women which was active during the Greco-Turkish War of 1897.[2] That short conflict, which was confined to Thessaly, bore no resemblance to the Balkan Wars: the needs of mass mobilisation and modern warfare far exceeded the capabilities of civilians' charitable initiatives. Thus, when the government of Eleftherios Venizelos decided to mobilise the Greek army in September 1915, with the intention of participating in the war on the side of the Entente, the state set up a special fund to provide allowances for the families of the conscripts.[3] Very soon, however, it became evident that the state was unable to fulfil its promises: two months after the mobilization, the process of registering the beneficiaries had not yet been completed.[4] Even when the procedure was completed, the allowances were paid with a significant delay – so much so that months after demobilization, which occurred in June 1916, the families of the reservists were still complaining about the matter, demanding the payment of benefits from December 1915.[5]

Soon after the mobilisation, the women of the reservists appeared in the public sphere, protesting about their abandonment by the authorities. This pattern appears throughout Europe, with soldiers' wives dominating food riots and demonstrations, the case of the *soldatki* (soldiers' wives) in Tsarist Russia being the most prominent example.[6] In the Greek case, women's collective action remained usually spontaneous and unorganised and consisted mainly of rallies outside government buildings. Their main demand was for the payment of benefits and the intervention of the authorities to prevent the withholding of products and profiteering. The demonstrations began as early as October: in Athens, dozens of women gathered daily outside the Parliament and the Ministry of the Interior demanding the payment of their allowances.[7] Gradually, the women organised their action. On February 12, around 150 women "from all parts of Athens, by prior arrangement" gathered with their children and surrounded the house of the minister of finance, Stefanos Dragoumis, protesting against the delay in the payment of their allowances. They then headed to the parliament, where they were dispersed by the intervention of the police.[8] Protests of this kind began to grow, and the number of women involved increased: on March 2, three hundred women along with their children, surrounded the Ministry of the Interior, protesting once again about the issue of the benefits. One of them managed to escape from the policemen and tried to enter the office of Minister Dimitris Gounaris, only to be blocked by officials. The sight of the crying woman exiting the building accompanied by police officers caused an outburst from the demonstrators who shouted, among other things, "Kill us! Before we starve to death".[9]

1 Hadjiiossif, Christos. "Isagogi" [Introduction]. In: Istoria tis Elladas tou 20ou aiona. Oi aparches 1900-1922 [History of 20th century Greece. The origins 1900-1922]. Athens: Vivliorama, 1999, pp. 9-39.

2 Avdela, Efi and Psarra, Angelika. "Engendering "Greekness": Women's Emancipation and Irredentist Politics in Nineteenth-Century Greece". Mediterranean Historical Review. 20(1), pp. 67-79, 2005.

3 Makris, Alexis "Domestic dimensions of a transnational problem: social welfare for veterans in Greece (1912–1940)". War and Society 42(2), pp. 3-4, 2023.

4 Patris 14 November 1915.

5 The information comes from the internal correspondence between the reservists' associations in the region of Epirus. Zosimaia Public Central Historical Library (ZDKIB), archive of Konstantinos A. Metrzios, file 1/B, document 102: "Letter to K. Mertzios from the Reservists' Association of Metsovo", 8 February 1917.

6 Badcock, Sarah. "Women, Protest, and Revolution: Soldiers' Wives in Russia During 1917". International Review of Social History 49, pp. 47-70, 2004; Engel, Barbara Alpen. "Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia during World War I". The Journal of Modern History 69(4), pp. 696-721, 1997.

7 Nea Imera 15 October 1915.

8 Patris 13 February 1916.

9 Patris 3 March 1916.

The presence of women in the public arena did not go unnoticed by the commentators of the time, but it did not emerge in a vacuum. This development originated in the 19th century, with nationalism and irredentism as a vehicle. Greece's need to mobilise every available resource for the fulfilment of its irredentist program inevitably opened up the debate on the part that women could play. In this context, the role of the family and motherhood was elevated, moving from the private sphere to subordinate itself to the public sphere. The family was no longer just the "refuge" of the middle-class man, but also the vital cell of the nation, and wife-mothers were responsible for the upbringing of ardent patriots and, especially, Greek soldiers. Through nationalism, Greek women acquired a "socially recognised function", and the service of men on the army required the proper recognition and support by the state.[10]

The service of men in the army appears throughout Europe as the main grievance of women protesters, while dealing with the authorities. Berlin women blamed the state for sending their men to fight without being able to at least provide them with "decent food".[11] The Russian *soldatki* constantly reminded the authorities that every benefit they claimed from the state had been paid for with the blood of their husbands and relatives who were fighting at the front.[12] In Greece, women did not cease to remind the authorities that conscription had put them in a desperate financial situation, and that it was the duty of the state to take care of them. At a demonstration outside the palace, women complained that they had been brutally treated by the police, those same women who had send "their men on the border".[13] In Ioannina, the capital of the region of Epirus – an area which faced shortages throughout the war – in one of the many rallies that occurred outside the prefecture, women claimed that "the army took our husbands and sons and left us starving".[14]

This rhetoric ensured at least for the demonstrators the favourable treatment of the press and some journalists, regardless of their political affiliation. A columnist in Ioannina, commenting on the daily demonstrations, noted that the authorities failed to fulfil their only duty to these women, which was to give them "a little bread as a reward for their sons and protectors who fulfilled their duty to the motherland, obeying her voice and going to the borders in defense of her sacred soil".[15]

In Athens, a liberal newspaper criticized the police, ironically calling "brave" those who used violence against desperate women whose husbands held "their swords outstretched against the Bulgarians".[16] But even the pro-government press, which had a more cautious attitude towards any popular mobilisation, emphasised that the care of the soldiers' families was a matter of "social and national necessity".[17] Nationalism had contributed to the creation of a favorable climate for a subject which, until then, had been completely absent from the public sphere and Greek politics. The "mothers of the nation" were no longer an abstract concept but a tangible social subset with its own claims and demands. The Greek state, committed to the national cause, was obliged to take this particular group very seriously.

At the same time, the women's collective action and demands were part of a broader shift in Greek society in support of state intervention. The period between 1914 and 1925 marked a significant deterioration of the Greek economy, with shortages, inflation and a steep decline of incomes for the popular and working classes. The enormous cost of living was the focal point of the mobilisations at that period and the dominant demand was that of state intervention in the economy. Price ceilings were imposed for a series of basic goods, such as food and fuel, while rent controls were imposed in an attempt to address the housing crisis that had been raging in Athens since the beginning of the 20th century, a measure that was maintained until the mid-1920s.[18] The demands of the conscripts' wives were fully attuned to the climate of the period: the evictions of soldiers' families had provoked public outcry and certainly played a role in the imposition of the rent control,[19] while the conscripts' wives of Kozani, a city in western Macedonia, called in a resolution for confiscating stashed food stocks to then be sold at reasonable prices.[20] In this sense, women's mobilizations were fully integrated into the social context of the time. However, in some cases women went further, taking matters into their own hands in the marketplace.

THE POLITICAL SCOPE OF FOOD RIOTS

Women's protests in some cases directly referred to food riots, a form of collective action that dominated Europe from the 16th to the 19th century. The social transformation that followed the emergence of political economy and capitalism rendered food riots obsolete by the 19th century, but the First World War brought about their re-appearance. In a number of countries, including the United States, Britain, Germany and Russia, food riots involved mostly women, reflecting the changes that the gender division of labour had resulted in.[21]
In Greece, apart from the issue of allowances, women's demands also addressed the issue of food prices and shortages. The market place had become a place for women to socialise, as had the food distribution points for the poorest families, and this is where we have the most important riots of the period. In the popular districts of the capital, the target was merchants who refused to comply with the price ceilings imposed by the state. In one case, the women, furious at a peddler who refused to sell his goods at the fixed price, called the authorities and vindictively bought all his merchandise in public view.[22] On 27 January, in a village of mountainous Central Greece, the conscripts' wives attended the Sunday service [a Greek Orthodox service]; afterwards, they took their children and crossed the market, protesting about the prices of food and their abandonment by the authorities. They headed towards the courthouse, surrounding the building, asking for bread. When the mayor of the commune appeared on the scene,

10 Varika, Eleni, I exegersi ton kyrion. I genesi mias feministikis syneidisis stin Ellada, 1833-1907 [The Ladies' Revolt. The Birth of a Feminist Consciousness in Greece]. Athens: Katarti, 1997, pp. 126-133, 139.
11 Bonzon Thierry and Davis Belinda, "Feeding the Cities", in Capital cities at war: Paris, London, Berlin 1914 – 1919. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 338.
12 Badcock. op. cit. pp. 62, 66; Engel. op. cit. pp.712-713.
13 Astir 18 March1916.
14 Tahydromos ton Ioanninon 8 May 1916.
15 Ibid.
16 Patris, 18 March 1916.
17 Nea Imera, 15 October 1915.
18 Potamianos, Nikos. Oi nykokyraioi. Magazatores kai viotechnes stin Athina 1880-1925 [Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Athens 1880-1925]. Herakleion: Crete University Press, 2015, pp. 464-493.
19 Nea Imera 13 and 14 September 1915.
20 Patris 9 February 1916.
21 For the case of United States, see: Frieburger, William. "War prosperity and hunger: The New York Food Riots of 1917". Labour History 25(2), pp. 217-239, 1984; Frank, Dana. "Housewives, Socialists, and the Politics of Food: The 1917 New York Cost-of-Living Protests". Feminist Studies 11(2), pp. 255-285, 1985. For the case of Britain, see: Coles, Antony James. "The Moral Economy of the Crowd: Some Twentieth-Century Food Riots". The Journal of British Studies 18(1), pp. 157-176, 1978; Hunt, Karen. "The Politics of Food and Women's Neighborhood Activism in First World War Britain". International Labor and Working-Class History 77, pp. 8-26, 2010. For the case of Germany see: Davis, Belinda. Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
22 Patris 8 November 1915.

the women threatened to stone him. It took the intervention of the police to disperse them.[23] Much more serious riots broke out in Athens on March 17. On that day about two thousand women queued up for a free food distribution organized by the French Catholic School, in a central part of the city. But as it became apparent that there was not enough food for all of them, about two hundred women, together with their children, marched to the Parliament where they clashed with the police. They then headed for the palace where they were intercepted by the palace guard and dispersed.[24] In Ioannina, on May 31, women attacked the market, seizing sacks of flour, while at the same time a group of villagers attacked wagons on the outskirts of the city, forcing the merchants to sell their products on the spot at a *fair* price.[25] Actions like these intensified after November 1916 and the blockade of the Greek ports by the Entente, but in this case the crowds that participated were mixed and did not exclusively consisting of women.

Food riots have been characterized as a premodern form of collective action, apolitical in character and with a narrow horizon.[26] However, we believe that this view is rather simplistic, in the sense that political character is identified with a certain political grouping or programme. For his part, Charles Tilly considers a food riot to be a political event and indeed "an important one", even in the premodern context, where he sees the conflict between the builders of the nation-state and a skeptical and reluctant peasantry.[27] British historian E.P. Thompson, in his famous article on moral economy, sees the food riots as an action oriented towards the defense of society, and as an attempt to protect a paternalistic model that ensured a minimum level of subsistence for the popular strata.[28] The case for a new moral economy, shaped during the First World War, has been made by some historians, and we tend to agree with them;[29] regardless, and concerning the political implications of food riots, we believe that neither Tilly nor Thompson confined the political character of food riots into the realm of modern political groups and parties.

In recent historiography, women's collective action during the war has attracted the interest of researchers, who have highlighted the political impact of food riots, especially in the cases of Tsarist Russia and Germany, where these protests were the prelude to revolutionary processes. Barbara Alpen Engel turned her attention to the "subsistence riots" that took place beyond the two urban centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg, and demonstrated the role that women played in the delegitimisation of the Tsarist regime. When outraged *soldatki* ransacked a merchant's shop in the Don region, among other things they took down and trampled a portrait of the Tsar, an unprecedented but clearly political act.[30] Sarah Badcock, following Engel, delved deeper into the case of the *soldatki*, in the period between the revolutions of February and October. Badcock considers the *soldatki's* collective action political, highlighting the inability of moderate political forces to both satisfy popular demands and keep Russia in the war, thus indirectly enabling the Bolsheviks' rise to power.[31] In the case of Germany, Belinda Davis challenged the dichotomy between high politics and everyday life, and showed that the discontent of the civilian population, especially women, was a key factor in undermining the "Wilhelmine regime, even before the war was clearly lost".[32]

As far as the Greek case is concerned, we have already mentioned the demand for state intervention, which cannot be considered apolitical. However, even if the conscripts' wives did not have any affiliation with specific parties or organisations, the climate of the period was such that their mere presence in the public sphere created a debate about their motives. By September 1915, and after the resignation of Eleftherios Venizelos, power was in the hands of King Constantine and a coalition of royalist parties (usually referred to as Anti-Venizelists in Greek historiography). The legitimacy of the government was fragile, however, as the Liberal Party abstained from the December 1915 elections. Protests over high prices and food scarcity were thus seen as a direct attack on the government; a royalist member of the parliament complained that behind the crowds of women protesting against the government were agitators, apparently meaning supporters of the Liberal Party, and called for the imposition of martial law.[33] The demonstrations which occurred on 17 March irritated of the pro-government press, which refrained from commenting on the failures of the state that led thousands of families to this desperate situation. One newspaper defended the police and the arrests of female protesters outside the parliament, while another criticized the French School for the sloppiness with which it set up the food distribution.[34] In the long run, however, the royalists managed to capitalise on the whole situation, attributing the sufferings of the "common people" to Eleftherios Venizelos who proposed mobilising the army and the interventions of the Entente which prevented the effective provisioning of the country.[35]

Food riots had another political aspect, and that had to do with the transition of motherhood from the private to the public sphere. The presence of children in this kind of demonstration was a common sight: in the food riots that occurred in New York City in February 1917, women from the popular districts marched with their babies in their arms, shouting "We want food for our children".[36] In Greece, children were constantly present in women's protests. In the 17 March riots, women were shouting, among other things, "Bread for our children". At a rally held in Patras, the largest city of Peloponnese, the conscripts' wives were at the head, with many of them holding babies in their arms, followed by a silent crowd bearing black flags.[37] In Russia, on the contrary, the image of women with babies in their arms begging for bread was more

23 Patris 29 January 1916.

24 Patris 18 March 1916.

25 Tachydromos ton Ioanninon 1 June 1916.

26 Taylor, Lynn. "Food Riots Revisited". *Journal of Social History* 30(2), pp. 483-496, 1996.

27 Tilly, Charles. "Food Supply and Public Order in Modern Europe". In: *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 386, 392-398.

28 Thompson, E.P. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century". *Past and Present* 50, pp. 76-136, 1971.

29 Bianchi, Roberto. "Voies de la protestation en Italie: les transformations de la révolte entre XIXe et XXe siècle". *European Review of History - Revue européenne d'histoire* 20(6), pp. 1047-1071, 2013; Potamianos, Nikos. "Isagogi. Ekdoches tis Ithikis Oikonomias" [Introduction. Versions of Moral Economy]. In: *Ekdoches tis Ithikis Oikonomias. Istorikes kai theoritikes meletes* [Versions of Moral Economy. Historical and Theoretical Approaches]. Rethymno: Institute for Mediterranean Studies of the Foundation of Research and Technology – Hellas, 2021, pp. 9-64.

30 Engel. op. cit. pp.716-717.

31 Badcock. op. cit. pp. 69-70.

32 Bonzon and Davis. op. cit. p. 334.

33 *Patris* 18 March 1916.

34 *Nea Imera* 18 March 1916; *Akropolis* 18 March 1916.

35 The issue is quite complex and requires a deeper analysis of the National Schism, which is beyond the scope of this article. What should be noted is that, gradually, the pro-war policy of Eleftherios Venizelos grew increasingly unpopular, compared to the neutrality favoured by the Germanophile Constantine, and this signalled a general alienation of the popular and working classes from the Liberal Party.

36 Frieburger. op. cit. pp. 221-223.

37 Kalpodimou, Kalliopi and Kondis, Georgios. "O antiktipos tou Ethnikou Dichasmou (1915-1917) stin perifereia. I periptosi tis Argolidas" [The impact of National Schism (1915-1917) in the countryside. The case of Argolida]. In: *1915-2015. Ekato chronia apo ton Ethniko Dichasmo. I politikes, politeiakes, koinonikes diastaseis ton gegonoton kai i metagenesteres epidraseis* [A hundred years since the National Schism. The political, political and social dimensions of the events and their subsequent impact]. Argos: Municipality of Argos, 2018, p. 180.

reminiscent of the 1905 revolution than of 1917, which is perhaps why some scholars tend to treat the invocation of motherhood as part of the premodern, and rather rural, repertoire of collective action.[38] In the Greek case, the invocation of motherhood is not necessarily identified with the rural space and the paternalism of the *Ancien Régime*. The special status that motherhood had occupied in Greek society, thanks to nationalism, legitimised the presence of women in the public sphere. The increasing presence of women in political activities is recorded from the end of the 19th century, but the period of war was a crucial one.[39] The National Schism was a real turning point in this respect, and the women's mobilisations of 1915 to 1916 were an important link in the chain of events that helped women to broaden their political horizon.[40]

The demands of women, however, coincided with the demands of the emerging labour movement, which at that time was initiating the creation of its most important institutions: the Socialist Workers' Party of Greece, which later evolved into the Communist Party of Greece and the General Confederation of Workers of Greece.

FEMALE AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

One question that arises about the women's collective action during the First World War is how they relate to the intensification of the class struggle, that reached its peak in Russia, and the dying empires of Central Europe. We have already mentioned the role of women's collective action in Germany and Russia, which delegitimised their respective authorities, making the continuation of the war impossible and led both countries into turmoil. In the Greek case, the events of 1915 to 1917 didn't escalate to the point of challenging the state's authority, though they played a crucial role in the formation of the labour movement.

This subject goes far beyond the purposes of this article. What can be said is that the experiences of the successive wars during the decade 1912 to 1922 were catalytic for the establishment of the most important institutions of the working class. The first steps had been taken at the beginning of the 20th century with the establishment of the labour centres in Athens and Piraeus, as well as in Volos and Larissa, the most important cities of Thessaly. The shortages and high prices and the consequent surge in the cost of living forced the various local labour centres to intensify their contact and develop coordinated action with the Athens Labour Centre assuming a central role. With the outbreak of the war, the labour centres submitted various petitions to the government and the King, describing the dire living conditions of the working strata and calling for the imposition of price ceilings on various goods by the state.[41] The army mobilisation raised the issue of providing for the families of conscripted colleagues. In addition to the petitions, actions were taken for the direct financial support of these families, with the trade union of commercial employees of Athens collecting contributions from its members for this purpose.[42]

With the aggravation of the subsistence crisis after November 1916, workers escalated their mobilisations, engaging in ongoing strikes; the working-class repertoire was clearly modern, although there were some instances of food riots. This does not mean that women's collective action was not coordinated with the working-class movement. The most important contribution on the issue comes from Temma Kaplan, who developed the concept of "female consciousness". Studying mobilisations that took place in Barcelona in the 1910s, both before and during the war, Kaplan argues that there were forms of women's collective action that reproduced the gendered division of labour without, however, necessarily indicating that they were less revolutionary than forms of action adopted by the labour movement.[43] Kaplan interprets female collective action as an expression of female consciousness, a certain type of perception of social reality according to which women are responsible for the well-being of the family, the basic component of society, and therefore become responsible for the preservation of life.[44] Women motivated by this perception were even willing to clash with the authorities if they felt that the authorities were making it harder for them to carry out their duties towards their families and society.

But Kaplan also points out something else: communication at the neighborhood and community level, which were the main space for the development of women's consciousness, did not mean that these women were not also bearers of a class, and a working-class consciousness, in particular. Clearly, the market and the queues in the soup kitchens were a place where women "come into contact and communicate with other people who have similar interests" as Greek historian Leda Papastefanaki puts it.[45] The events of 17 March 1916 are a case in point, when the hours of waiting in queues for rations turned into a militant demonstration. Thus, we can clarify the conditions under which conscripts' wives were able to move from simple protest to collective action. However, this aspect of women's mobilisation cannot provide us with the full picture of the transformations that were taking place within Greek society at the time, and Kaplan herself does not confine women's presence to collective actions that reproduced the gendered division of labour in the public sphere. Women also participated in protests that took place after the demobilisation of the Greek army, this time in their capacity as workers or working-class women in general.

It is a fact that women's wage labour was limited at the beginning of the 20th century in Greece and the war period (1912-1922) did not change that, at least to the same extent as in Europe, where the First World War marked the massive entry of women into the secondary and tertiary sectors of economy.[46] There was, however, a demand for women's labour in certain sectors, such as seasonal agricultural work

38 Engel. op. cit. p. 712.

39 Potamianos, Nikos. "Morfes symmetochis ton gynaikon stin politiki zoi tou ellinikou kratous, teli 19ou – arches 20ou aiona" [Forms of female participation in Greek state's political life, late 19th – early 20th century]. *Ta Istorika 77*, 2023 (To be published).

40 Samiou, Dimitra. *Ta politika dikeomata ton Ellinidon, 1864-1952. Idiotita tou politi ke katholiki psifoforia* [The civil rights of Greek women, 1864-1952. Citizenship and catholic vote]. Athens: P. N. Sakkoulas, 2013, p. 105.

41 Livieratos, Dimitris. *Megales ores tis ergatikis taxis* [Significant Moments of the Working-Class]. Athens: Koukkida, 2006, pp. 92-95.

42 *Patris* 14 December 1915 and 17 March 1916.

43 Kaplan, Temma. "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918". *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 7(3), pp. 545-566, 1982

44 Ibid. pp. 545-551.

45 Papastefanaki, Leda. *Ergasia, technologia kai fylo stin elliniki viomichania. I klostoyfantoyrgia tou Peiraia, 1870-1940* [*Labor, technology and gender in Greek industry. The textile industry of Piraeus, 1870-1940*]. Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2009, pp. 375-376.

46 Avdela, Efi. "Stoichia gia tin ergasia ton gynaikon ston Mesopolemo: Opseis kai theseis" [Evidence on women's work in the interwar period: Aspects and Views]. In: *Venizelismos kai Astikos Eksychronismos* [Venizelism and Social Modernization]. Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1988, p. 197.

(especially in Thessaly), textiles and tobacco processing, and even printing.[47] During the naval blockade there was massive recruitment of women in other types of labour: in Piraeus, the municipality was carrying out road construction projects where 1250 women were employed along with 450 men who, of course, were doing the specialized concrete paving work.[48] The workforce employed in these projects was obtained from lists provided by the Panhellenic Association of Guilds.[49] The opportunity given to these women to work reflects the situation in Piraeus, where women seem to have had a presence in the city's labour movement and generally in the public sphere.[50] Such public works were undertaken all over the country, with the aim of offering work for the poorer classes, but we have no information on the composition of the workforce beyond the case of Piraeus.

The naval blockade imposed by the Entente in retaliation for the November Events caused the spread of food riots.[51] The crowds involved this time were mixed, and the initiative of the action was taken by men and mainly by workers; this does not mean that there was no women's action. On 25 January 1917, violent riots broke out in the centre of Athens and spread throughout the city. The riots began outside a bakery in the area of Omonia, in the heart of Athens, but then spread to the popular districts of Neapoli and Vathi, where a crowd of women looted a bakery and seized more than two and a half tons of bread.[52] A few days later, on 8 February, new riots occurred, this time in Piraeus. The riots broke out when ten thousand people, men and women, queued for a food distribution at the city's municipal theatre. When the authorities decided to cancel the distribution, worried about possible riots, two hundred workers moved in a violent manner towards the railway station, looting shops along the way. At the same time five hundred women seized hundreds of sacks of flour from a nearby government warehouse.[53] Working-class women appeared in orderly fashion in the public space, with rallies, as was the case in Volos in April 1917, when hundreds of women from the working-class districts demonstrated in a central point of the city, protesting against shortages, and were dispersed after clashes with the police, which made four arrests.[54]

The two types of collective action – the demonstrations of the conscripts' wives and the food riots in which working-class women participated together with men – can be viewed separately. However, we believe that the common element of women's class origins is present in both cases, and that the demands of the soldiers' wives, even if they were articulated in a way that reproduced the gendered division of labour in the public sphere, were at least as radical as the demands of the labour movement at that particular moment, since they were fully attuned. Therefore, we can only place the women's food mobilisations in a continuum of political mobilisation and radicalisation of the working strata, since the core of their demands was the protection of society from the grip of the free market, through state intervention.

CONCLUSION

In June 1917, Eleftherios Venizelos, backed by Entente troops, once again assumed the government of Greece, and the country soon entered the First World War. Over the next three years the Liberals would rule almost dictatorially, creating a stifling atmosphere for social discontent to manifest itself. This discontent was finally expressed in the elections of November 1920, when Venizelos suffered a shocking defeat, and ousted King Constantine returned after a controversial referendum. However, the inability of either the Liberals or the Anti-Venizelists to bring the conflict in Asia Minor to a successful conclusion, and to deal with the ongoing economic crisis the country was experiencing, paved the way for the consolidation of a purely class-based pole, with the founding of the Socialist Workers' Party of Greece in 1918. The crushing defeat of the Greek army in 1922 and the exodus of 1.5 million Christians from Anatolia marked the beginning of the Greek Interwar. The liberalism of laissez-faire and uninterrupted parliamentarianism, conditions that characterized 19th century Greece, gave way to constant aberrations and military interventions, and the rise of statism.

At the same time, however, a new social dynamic appeared in Greek political affairs: the rapidly emerging labor movement, as well as the feminist movement which, through its various constituents, had a militant stance. In our opinion, the women's collective action of the period 1915 to 1916 can be included in a continuum of social ferment that had both of the above developments at its end. The presence of women in the public sphere was an indication in itself of a social transformation observed since the beginning of the 20th century, when women, especially of the popular classes, became more comfortable participating in public life. The dense political time of the Schism intensified this process; in 1920 women were participating en masse in Liberal and anti-Venizelist political rallies. Even the very nature of women's collective action during the period under consideration served as a promotional factor. The politicisation of motherhood had its roots in nineteenth-century irredentism, but it intensified during a decade of continuous warfare. The result was the further undermining of the dichotomy between the public and private spheres, and the confinement of women to the latter. Women's collective action also had a class aspect. The women's demonstrations themselves were indicative of the crystallisation of a class polarized society, with the working class emerging as a separate subject. Simultaneously, women's demands for protection of the lower strata by the state and for intervention in the marketplace were coordinated with the demands of the labour movement.

In conclusion, if the National Schism gave birth to the Greek Interwar, we ought to recognize that the women's collective action of the short period 1915to 1916 was also a link in this chain of social transformation experienced by Greek society. Therefore, the discussion of premodern or apolitical action is probably taking us in the wrong direction and we should acknowledge the fact that a given repertoire of mobilization does not prejudge the direction that a social struggle will follow ■

47 Kliafa, Maroula. "To episitistiko problima sti Thessalia kata ton A' Pagkosmio Polemo" [Subsistence crisis in Thessaly during the First World War]. In: *I Thesssalia toy 1917* [Thessaly in 1917]. Koropi: Niki Publications, 2019, p. 129.

48 *Nea Imera* 18 February 1917.

49 *Nea Imera*, 14 February 1917; Concerning the Panhellenic Association of Guilds, see, Potamianos. *Oi nykokyraioi. Magazatores kai viotechnes stin Athina 1880-1925*. p. 408-413.

50 Papastefanaki. op. cit. p. 382.

51 On 18 November 1916 (according to the Gregorian calendar, 1 December), with Greece divided between the Provisional Government of Thessaloniki and the State of Athens, the Entente, following a prior agreement, landed troops at Piraeus to receive quantities of arms and ammunition, effectively disarming the Greek army. The Entente force was ambushed by Greek regular and paramilitary forces and the operation resulted in fierce fighting between French and Greek troops, which led to the retreat of the former and the naval bombardment of Athens. The royalists then launched a pogrom against the Liberals with hundreds of arrests.

52 *Nea Imera* 26 January 1917.

53 *Nea Imera* 9 February 1917.

54 *Tachydromos tou Volou* 10 April 1917.