

WOMEN'S CRAFT CRAFTSWOMEN IN ALBANIA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Archaeology

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Abstract

The history and development of crafts in Albania and the many values inherited from the past speaks of high craftsmanship, their "individuality", their talent and their creative imagination. Natural heritage is completely inseparable from cultural heritage. This feature is also evident in the handicrafts made by women and girls whose creativity has been done at home. Making costumes for herself, clothing for husband, kids, home furnishings, etc. From the impressive wealth of today's handicraft products, it is not easy to choose. However, from this take, we will highlight the most prominent ones, which are often exhibited in museums. Is female crafts part of this sphere of work where women are forgotten? The statement that women entered the labor force from the war of 1914-18 is one of the rarely-dying myths. It is still regularly used in television documentaries. However, recent historiography has shown the whole void of this bias. It affirms the claim that women have always worked (Schweitzer, 2002). The question is not to show that women work, and it has been a long time they do so, but to clarify a well-meaning activity. This finding sometimes extends to all small independent businesses, including handicrafts. Closely related to these issues is cultural identity, which also by definition assumes different connotations, usually accompanied by other geographical, spatial and mental notions, such as region, locality, or ethnicity.¹

Introduction

The object of our study covers a very long period of time, starting from the 20th century, to the present-day global and local cultural phenomena. From the 50's to nowadays, but always referring to the tradition of female crafts and its heritage. New modes and forms of time adapted to the arts and crafts. They will mention these socio-cultural factors over the years. Thus we begin, after liberation, in 1945, the year in which the craft takes on new forms of organization, cooperates in craft cooperatives and then in artistic enterprises, where the best craftsmen of the town and village who, with their products, are assembled, also managed to compete in the foreign market. This period is also an increase in the cultural and economic development of women who are freed from domestic work and assumes a role in society. The suppression of individuality and the subjugation of everyone, as well as its amalgamation into the amorphous mass of the group and the collective, are well-known characteristics of totalitarian regimes. All of these numerous types of craftsmen, inherited mainly as family craft and handmade crafts (mostly called hand-made in today's design language), are characterized by a typical original Albanian stylistics, with highly distinctive local features especially in villages and highlands, and with a more generalized Balkan regional character or with a lot of Oriental borrowing or later occidental adjustments in the lowlands and cities. Closely related to these issues is cultural identity, which assumes different connotations, usually accompanied by other geographical, spatial and mental notions, such as region, locality, or ethnicity².

¹ Lajçi Bashkim, Albanological Folklore and Ethnology Traces 41 / 42,2011,2012 p.32

² Lajçi Bashkim, Albanological Folklore and Ethnology Traces 41 / 42,2011,2012 p.34

Social - Cultural Factors

In the early 90s of the last century (during the transition period), when our country entered the market economy, the production of handicrafts declined, found it difficult to survive, adapted to a reality where everything had changed, when state-owned enterprises were disbanded. But the creative artisan spirit could not be dismantled nor quenched. Therefore it was the most resistant, surviving and so leading his products to normality.

This was especially the case with women who, with their craft, struggled to maintain families, with men largely emigrating. And Craft was seen as a nonprofit, and only way women resisted it was in the form of survival. Thanks to their great work, performed with high professionalism especially during the 1950s-1990s, much of this ethnographic wealth was preserved (today renamed folk creativity, traditional craftsmanship, vernacular construction, etc.) where the talent of folk craftsmen over the centuries and the research, documenting and restoration work of our ethnologists and field specialists has made it possible for us today to have "cultural monuments" and our material heritage.

Entering the market economy helped further the spread of craft production and trade. The growth of the civic population along with the demands for consumption, the opening up and strengthening of relations with the outside world, gave a boost to craft production. The change of mindset led to the release of many creative energies and the satisfactory development of a wide network of workshops of various profiles. In addition to handmade work, the new era also brought about an evolution in its content, form, work technology and mechanism.

Women after 1945 embark on a new socio-cultural life, which makes a huge difference in this aspect of social and cultural development as well. At the beginning of the 20th century there was still a small production of domestic women (kayak in Korça and Berat, silk in Tirana and Shkodra), but even here this production was in complete decline. Until the liberation of the country (1944), textile work in the countryside was a household art, practiced mainly for the needs of the family, a skill well known to every peasant and urban woman. During these decades there was a great development from 1980-85.

If in the early years of opening up in a market economy it was difficult to do business being a woman, today that reality has changed. Although it is always difficult to realize your initiative, and not because of gender, but because of the rules of the market that remain chaotic. But how has the woman's approach to business changed? Is it difficult to be a woman in entrepreneurship today?

Women in a Men's Environment

One number would be almost enough to close the debate: 80% of artisan masters are men; only 20% of artisans are women. The term artisan/craftsman remains little used.

In 1938, we can estimate, thanks to the trade register, that France³ has about 139,000 craftsmen⁴. These represent only 2.1% of the female workforce. On the same date, all artisans (men and women) represented 3.8% of the total workforce.

We have no data on female handicrafts, what their numbers were because they were not allowed to be in the workplace, or shops, they were generally working at home.

Craftsmen co-operation in the city, begun in 1946, ended almost entirely in 1961. The IV Congress of Craft Co-operatives, convened in June 1962, announced that of the 4,400 private craftsmen of various services, enumerated in locally, over 2,000 had joined the respective cooperatives, another 1,000 had worked in state-owned enterprises and only 1,000, mostly elderly, remained private craftsmen for simple repairs and services.

Craft is thus relatively less important in the female workforce than in the entire working population. During this period, artisan women are a minority of the craft and even more so in the female workforce. This rarity is found in most craft activities. Some professions appear almost exclusively male. No trace of a woman in male crafts. Although construction is the most important branch of the development of socialist reforms, and as a counterweight to all that fanatical reality the woman is found in another major activity, she has the same profile as mechanics and metallurgy. Women are more frequent in construction (such as mounters, welders, etc.). In other sectors, without being completely absent, women remain very few. Some craftswomen also work in furniture, especially upholstery, woodworking, copper, watermarking, etc. In these light and food industry sectors, women in artistic enterprises manage to represent between 40 and 65% of trade registrations by country and year. Some, after all, occupy unclassified and marginal occupations such as this umbrella repairing craft, socks, watches, etc. At precisely the same time as in space, women move to various industrial areas and deep mountain villages where this has not usually happened before. In the social structure the social and cultural physiognomy changes, Albanian women did not come out of the house exemplary, some women become ceramists, wherein the fascist conditions there were women who made ceramics for the family in 1930-45, as artisans women they are educated today and are exceptional artists competing the male gender with their creations. This influx is not found elsewhere, not even in another period of our history. Where artistic productions began to appear at international fairs that were liked by the public for their Albanian originality and popular motifs. Education made the majority of girls and women form a different mindset and gain security by taking on different professions.

³ According to surveys conducted in the Tours and Bordeaux business registers of the 1930s and 1950s.

⁴ The trade register is the register where all artisans have to be registered since 1936. It is the equivalent of the trade register artwork and associations (created in 1920).

Women's Professions

Women are concentrated in three sectors of the craft industry during the 1960s and 1990s: in the light and food industry (designations of the time), in artistic enterprises and initially in craft cooperatives, (where old craftswomen taught young women their craft for free), in factories such as glass and ceramics, carpet making which was a precious tradition, preserving loom work, craftsmanship in both traditional workmanship and motifs, and artistic creativity.

We can mention the tapestries that a large part went for export and was preferred for their quality, colors, motifs, and originality. Other sectors that women worked in were clothing maintenance, tailoring, hairdressing, and especially clothing. Maintenance is not a major activity of the craft industry in the late 1950s. It barely represents only 2% of institutions. In the space of a decade, female handicrafts have become almost twice as numerous. This growth is slightly faster than that of the female workforce in general. As a result, the number of craftswomen is increasing. Artisan women now represent 2.9% of the active population. This proportion, however, remains quite low. In addition, it remains lower than the percentage of craftsmen/artisans in the general active population. Excellent area for women in handicrafts is clothing/embroidery. This is an important sector where the skills of female craftsmanship have perhaps excelled more than any other field, with an endless variety of colors and motifs of objects made to look astonishing. For cotton products, we have Shkodra, Prizren, Zadrime, Tirana, Dumren, Museums, etc., and for silk fabrics, we have Tirana, Elbasan, Shkodra, Prizren, etc., the exact opposite of that of handicrafts as a whole. Cosmic objects, the sun, the moon or the stars, as well as various birds, have constantly attracted the popular master, and she has reflected them on creativity at times as old cult reflexes and at times by attributing magical properties. This process is well known worldwide. Being prone to this process, craftswomen have been constantly observing the sky, seeking to find and enrich images⁵.

Female handicrafts represent, by area, between 60% registered in the trade register. Aside from stylists/tailors, general and mostly frequent appointments are a bunch of specialties. These many professions correspond to specializations in a material, clothing type or part of the production. Unlike other buildings and sectors, some terms are purely feminine. This urbanization of the registered markets/occupations represents two facts at once contradictory and complementary. First, it reveals the under-registration of rural tailors not appearing in the trade register. (at home) But second, it comes from a transformation of activity into the clothing itself. In rural areas, sewing is often just a supplement. It is practiced only in part of the year or on request. On the contrary, for some women, sewing becomes a full-time activity, a freelance activity. They become artisanal. So, we can observe a professionalization of the activity. Professionalism mostly carried out in the city.

⁵Agim Bido, *Popular Art in Clothing and Textiles* " 1991, pg.142

Those who take the step of professional independence to establish themselves as artisans usually come from two social categories. They come on the one hand, and in most cases, from the working class and, on the other, from the craft environment itself. In terms of women, they have an extra reason to try their luck at the craft, to afford household expenses. So they need to find income. It is the need of the moment more than a long-thought-out professional project that motivates them. From this common ground, the paths differ. Some transform into other activities take on an activity they had done in the past but abandoned, often at the time of marriage. These initiatives are fragile. The knowledge in which they are realized leaves no time to save or build up start-up capital and equip itself properly. Also, we see that many of these crafts start of almost nothing. Moreover, they often do not fill the part of the application form for authorization relating to capital, assets, materials, and labor. These artisans only have their own home to work on.

These tool-free "ateliers/workshops" will be the first. The craft fits best into her conservative family concepts. So, nothing emancipated has a very archaic vision of the craft and more so women in the craft industry.

Mutation of the Craft Industry: A Crisis for the Female Craft

Along with the recovery efforts of the war-torn country, the state embarked on reforms aimed at stripping the bourgeoisie and the crooks of their main means of production and creating a centralized economy. One of the first measures taken in this context was the establishment of "state worker control" over production and distribution.

On December 15, 1944, the government issued the law "On State Control over Albanian Industries and Societies". By law, all industries and societies existing in the country were under state control and this control was carried out through the Commissars during 1945 and a series of measures aimed at striking foreign capital, where all foreign nationals' assets were confiscated, the confiscation involved not only publicly recognized state-owned enterprises, but also small enterprises and societies. The economic policy developed by the state aimed at achieving, in addition to the development of industry, the conversion and centralization of property in the city and then in the countryside, to establish a single economic system, the socialist economy. Part of this policy was the measures taken in the field of handicrafts aimed at liquidating the sector and transforming it into state-owned enterprises.

The 1950s are a time of crisis and changes in the craft. However, the sector where women are most present is also one of the most fragile. Falling confectionery is harmful to craftswomen. Gradually, the garment becomes a medium branch of the craft industry. The confectionery crisis is not specific to the craft industry. It's the whole sector that suffers. But it has particular consequences for the craft industry. The latter transform this market. The custom sewing part is in steady decline in favor of ready-made garments or what we call the 1950s, half-mass industry. The paradox is that this revolution comes in particular from the leading role women play in this market. The situation then changes. However, women employ fewer craftsmen than men (Dumas,

1961). In short, the feminization of consumption plays against that of the craft industry. Gradually sewing is no longer enough to provide a good income for these artisans. True craftswomen remain.

They take place where batch production is applicable and where production should be manual. This is the case, for example, in woolen work, carpets, socks, etc. Crafts fit in by occupying what economists call pillars. Thus, some specialize in the textile industry. Only a few can be set to work forever. To cope with the difficulties of their mainstream markets, some women invest in sectors that so far are only male sectors. In 2017, the percentage of women among business owners or administrators increased to 29.7% from 26.8% in 2016. The percentage of women business owners/administrators is higher in small enterprises (with 1-4 employees) 30.2 % but has increased in all categories compared to the previous year. The highest growth in 2017 was registered in enterprises with over 10 employees, with 5.0% more women owners or managers than a year ago.

And the use of the term "industry" will undoubtedly be much more convenient and gradually substituted by the " of industry⁶". The evolution of the term used reflects the process which due to the greater ability of the term "craft" to suggest a magnitude compared to the term "industry", which has negative connotation progress concerning the industrial revolution. But industrialization and the symbols associated with it conflicts with the notion of heritage that, in turn, expresses cohesion and excludes decay and conflict.

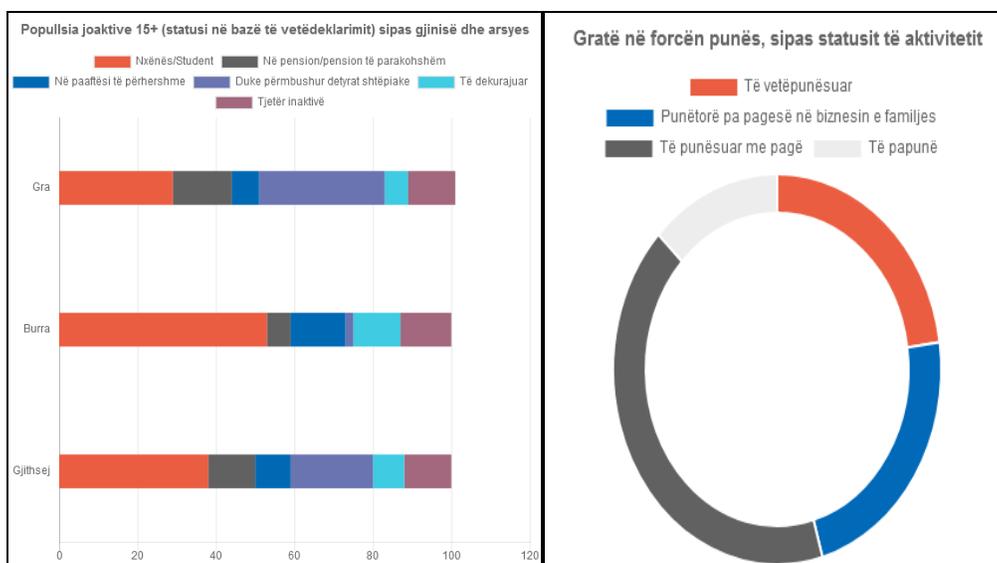
We can cite several reasons for this under feminization of the craft industry: difficulty in certain tasks, a technical education that is reproduced by societal stereotypes by directing girls into threads and needles. By the end of the century, the married woman is under the tutelage of her husband. She is a legal minor. She needs the consent of his spouse to start a business. Starting a personal business is certainly harder for a woman than for a man. In reality, it's more of an individual business. Most women artisans work alone; without employees or family help. This situation is largely due to the desire for independence that will lead to the refusal to hire. But there are also obvious economic reasons. The surface of these micro-enterprises is not enough to hire other people. Profits are not enough to support the craftsman and his wife. We are there at the heart of the invisibility of women's work. After the advent of the 1990s, with the advent of democracy, the situation of the artisan woman changed as many of the enterprises that had worked was shut down and forced to go out on their own. If in the early years of opening up in a market economy it was difficult to do business being a woman, today that reality has changed. Although it is always difficult to realize your initiative, and not because of gender, because of the rules of the market that remain chaotic. The Association of Professional Business Women and Craftsmen represents a group of women and girls who regard their business as humanity, the emancipation of culture and the economy. APABW is one of the oldest associations in Albania, established in 1992 and recognized nationally and internationally. The mission of this group is to emancipate Albanian women by increasing their authority in all professions, crafts, and entrepreneurship. Its main focus

⁶Abdelmajid Arrif, "The Paradox of the Construction of Patrimonial Event in a Colonial Situation. The Case of Morocco, Review of the Muslim West and the Mediterranean, 73-74, 3-4, 1994: 153.

remains support, encouragement in their economic, professional and craft activities. The strategy of this group is the real support for the development of micro, small and medium enterprises run by women in the Republic of Albania.

Workforce by Activity

The structure of employees by activity status shows that 42.0% of women are employed with wages, while 23.0% of them are unpaid workers in the family business. For employed men, these figures are 37.0% and 12.0%, respectively. However, a significant proportion of working men are self-employed, 36.0%, while self-employed women are 23.0%. According to the reasons for inactivity, women are left out of the workforce mainly after completing their homework (31.6%) or because they are attending school (29.0%). Whereas only 2.1% of men have homework as a reason for their inactivity and 53.1% of them are students.



Two Words on the Method

Our method of study will generally be a constant pursuit of the tensions created by these different cultures and civilizations over time, but also a pursuit of the coexistence of female and male artisans in compromising mutual relationships. We will try to identify those more typical phenomena and events that constitute influences or "traces" clearly left by the "seals" of relevant cultural ideologies or philosophies over time, or that continue to be left to this day in the legacy Albanian cultural materials. Also, those who take the step of professional independence to establish themselves as artisans in unequal conditions in a conservative society.

Even this temporal extension of the object of study, deliberately defined by us, we think is justified and necessary to observe or isolate cultural phenomena.

Also, a stay away from nationalist, megalomaniacal and subjective euphoria, we think will be right, the term 13 comes from Guy Debord, *La Societe du Spectacle*, Gaid Margot, Paris, 1967.

Conclusion

In conclusion, craftsmanship fits badly with femininity. Craftswomen are a few and they are less and less in the second half of the twentieth century. Still, craftswomen remain. Those that take place where batch production is not applicable and where production should be manual. Tailors mid-century, they suffer the collapse of the textile industries. Minorities in the handicraft industry, they are still more in the active population. It can hardly be said that women have found economic independence, at least in the craft industry, the jobs they would have been locked into earning a living. Lastly, if we focus on built heritage, the fact of heritage is built on the fear of disappearing elements of the past along with a concern of collection, preservation, and restoration (and therefore a heritage policy based on the idea of the monument, as we understand it in the European tradition) is important to protect.

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