ABSTRACT

Transcending the Home: Greek Middle-Class Women, Swedish Cosmetic Products, Entrepreneurship, and the idea of New Europe.

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The economic and political integrationist scope of the European Union currently taking place at the level of the nation-state is also accompanied by ongoing ruptures and re-figuring of cultural understandings and schemes at the local level. This paper will examine the processes by which women living in urban Greece are incorporated simultaneously as consumers and flexible workers in the economic activities of the European Union and globalization via a Swedish based, multinational cosmetic products company, Oriflame S.A.. In its effort to recruit consumers and unskilled, part-time workers, Oriflame puts forth a variety of empowering narratives regarding beauty, entrepreneurship, and personal freedom. When engaging with these narratives, politically and culturally marginalized persons, such as Greek middle-class, middle-aged housewives, engage actively and continuously in the re-figuring of cultural boundaries of womanhood, class, and national identity. While selling Oriflame products, and recruiting others to do the same, these actors also engage in the shaping of a moralizing discourse regarding women’s relationship to the global labor market and citizenship. These discourses enable Greek urban women to imagine transcending Greek social reality, and connect themselves to the larger transnational order of the European Union as productive workers and consumers. At the same time, Greek women participate in the re-figuring of the moral geographies of Europe, according to which the “South” stands in an inferior position to the “North.”