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Chiara Bonfiglioli, Women and Industry in the Balkans: The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Textile Sector

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nist Romania (Eliade), or to stay there (most of them, including Noica, Capsali, and Sadova). It is difficult to speak of these paths as legacies of *Criterion*, for many other radical changes in their personal and the larger sociopolitical context predated the evolution of these people's careers after the war. Because of that, the links suggested by the author left me largely unpersuaded. There are also exaggerations or erroneous claims. For instance, the statement that Noica's Păltiniș school provided access to philosophers that were not being taught at the university is false (266). Kant and Plato were required readings at the University of Bucharest throughout the 1970s.

Intellectuals and Fascism in Interwar Romania provides a rich foundation for further research into the complex and often self-contradictory work of a generation of men who sought to construct themselves into the authentic elite of their country through a performative engagement with masculinity. I eagerly await a follow-up to this book with a thorough gender analysis of the core elements of *Criterion*, as the subject deserves it.

◆ Note

1. Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).



Chiara Bonfiglioli, *Women and Industry in the Balkans: The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Textile Sector*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2020, 232 pp., £85 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-78533-598-3.

Book review by **Alexandra Ghit**
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Chiara Bonfiglioli's book deals with gendered experiences and memories of industrialization and, especially, deindustrialization in Yugoslavia and its successor states. Bonfiglioli traces specific "industrial structures of feeling" (5) emerging from women's employment in several textile and garment factories now located in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia. The book relies on sixty oral history interviews, archival and published sources, and several films. Bonfiglioli argues that because during state socialism factories functioned as "microcosms of socialist values" (19), instilling certain structures of feeling, during postsocialism women textile workers narrate deindustrialization as a loss of employment and welfare rights and as an undoing of spaces of working-class sociability and solidarity. Bonfiglioli argues that their reflective nostalgic attachments (154) can fuel contemporary demands for social justice.

In the introduction, the author broadens Raymond Williams's original "structures of feeling" concept by arguing that structures of feeling consist of ideologies,

economic developments, and daily experiences that together generate what Williams stated were “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities” (quoted on 5). Chapters 1 and 2 detail the elements making up the socialist structures of feeling specific to Yugoslavia. Thus, in Bonfiglioli’s account, socialist industrial structures of feeling were made up of, among others: the ambivalences of the workers’ self-management doctrine and system (29); “the socialist politics of women’s emancipation promoted by the Antifascist Women’s Front” (32); “socialist gendered pedagogies enacted within garment factories” (37); representations of women as endlessly resilient workers in factory newspapers (39); improvements in welfare standards and a sense of material progress, but also open borders, making the domestic dearth of consumption goods visible (46); or disillusionment about self-management and the benefits of joining the Communist Party (69).

The first two chapters discuss Yugoslav women’s wage work and the complications intensive industrial labor brought for these workers’ performance of unpaid housework and care work. These tensions are placed in the context of the evolution of the textile and garment industries in Yugoslavia in the twentieth century, beginning with the 1920s. Bonfiglioli reviews the history of labor struggles in the interwar textile industry and discusses the mostly beneficial impact state socialist reorganization of the textile industry had on working and living conditions for women workers employed in various large textile and garment factories. She argues that the Yugoslav modernization project (and its attendant structures of feeling) challenged patriarchal arrangements, especially in rural areas where young women embraced postwar factory work the most. Also, Bonfiglioli points out that by the mid-1960s the “working mother gender contract” (57) of Yugoslav socialist self-management enabled relatively easy balancing of productive and reproductive labor (40), with various firms displaying a degree of flexibility and human understanding (49) of women workers’ significant care and domestic work obligations (60). In fact, the humane (“humanist”) orientation of state socialist paternalist factory managers was brought up repeatedly by the author’s interlocutors (49, 155), especially as contrast for the perceived inhumanity of postsocialist employers. At the same time, Bonfiglioli shows how Yugoslav cultural production both “valorized and naturalized” (55) women’s double-burden work (portrayed in newspapers and films as unending and deriving from gendered self-sacrificial dispositions) (55–74). This key ambivalence of the self-management system (30) strongly shaped how women interviewed by the author in the 2010s remembered the period. For instance, piece-rate labor (which proliferated in Yugoslav textile firms) was remembered by former workers as strenuous but somewhat offset by available welfare facilities (41, 134), while experiences of struggling to care for dependents during the period were naturalized and privatized (60) as individual hardships.

Chapter 3 tackles the deterioration of working conditions in postsocialist textile factories, developments shown to occur against the background of ex-Yugoslavia’s geopolitical re-peripheralization (89) and the global race to the (social standard) bottom characterizing the textile and garments sectors. The chapter details the privatization and layoffs that occurred in three major textile factories located in Macedonia and Croatia. It spotlights former workers’ and trade unionists’ narrative invocation of state socialist factories’ less exploitative labor conditions and better welfare provisions as

benchmarks for a bygone normality. According to Bonfiglioli, the heritage of socialist paternalism and postsocialist economic and military violence have left the women she interviewed (mostly former workers in now defunct or privatized factories) both ill-equipped to combat criminal privatizations (115) and distrustful of trade unionists (30, 122). By contrast, socialist structures of feeling that interviewed women still harbor, and their corresponding memories, function as “a cultural and political repertoire to demand social justice and social rights in the present context” (115).

Chapter 4 places women workers’ durable attachments to Yugoslav industrial work in the context of gentrification and the tourist industry’s rebranding of three deindustrialized towns (located in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia). It also sets them against the broader backdrop of the global demise of Fordism and its promise of a “job for life” (133). Here the author shows that besides welfare provision and labor standards, former textile workers are nostalgically attached to forms of socialist sociability (contrasted with a postsocialist “crisis of sociability”), collective solidarity (including multiethnic coexistence), and an overall sense of existential stability. Although the interviewed women were not uncritical of the organization of production and social reproduction during socialist Yugoslavia (with blue-collar textile workers less nostalgic than former white-collar workers in textile factories), Bonfiglioli argues that former textile sector employees still display an understanding of Yugoslav socialist modernity as enabling not only a more “normal life” for industrial workers but also a more “ethical form of life” (132). Because of this, what the author terms “critical Yugo-nostalgia” can function as a “form of counter-discourse to present injustices and a way to articulate utopian feelings of resistance and hope” (153).

The fifth and final chapter deals with labor resistance and everyday resilience among former textile factory workers through tactics that, although rooted in socialist structures of feeling, go beyond (narrative) nostalgia. Notably, it highlights instances of postsocialist labor protest by women discouraged from organizing by trade unionists but supported by resurgent new Left movements (the case of the 2010 hunger strike organized by factory workers from the Kamensko factory in Zagreb, demanding wage arrears) or backed-up by still active (116-121), and sometimes efficient, trade unions (solidarity strikes in support of Arena factory workers in 2014) (171, 178). Labor’s inconsistent support of women textile workers’ organizing could have benefited here from further analysis. For instance, were the solidarity strikes organized four years after Kamensko, in support of Arena factory workers, a sign of changes in views among veteran trade unionists in Croatia, or of a different approach chosen by a handful of modernizing unions, or were women better represented in some of these organizations?

Bonfiglioli’s conceptual rooting of her volume in the work of sociologist of urban (de)industrialization David Byrne and especially, of Williams, a Marxist theorist who emphasized the material underpinnings of changes in cultural forms, makes an original break with the constructivism embraced by most feminist literature relying on oral histories to deal with the broad theme of gender and (post)socialism in Eastern Europe. These other authors emphasize the narrative construction of gendered identities, and consider these changes especially in relation to national state policy, rather than in relation to local material circumstances created by evolutions in global economic

orders. Bonfiglioli's standpoint and her detailing of experiences of both empowerment and disempowerment for women workers during both state socialism and post-socialism also enables the author to largely avoid the by now repetitive discussion on whether women living under socialism in Eastern Europe had or did not have agency.

From here, exciting scholarly debate can proceed. Bonfiglioli mentions that the Yugoslav state was implementing an industrial modernization plan, complete with a gender contract aligned to the period's globally dominant Fordist imaginaries (138) and increasingly dependent on exports to a West whose markets were almost as fickle in the 1980s as they are now (59–60). Considering this, can attachment to once-dominant cultural forms grounded in state socialist versions of Fordism be conceptualized as a fully emancipatory resource for resistance in the current historical context? Bonfiglioli argues it can, but the interpretations and evidence she presents throughout the book can similarly be read as highlighting that these experiences and memories disable as much as they enable organizing to challenge current exploitation and dispossession. Historical sociologist Philip Abrams pointed out that "the past is the only raw material out of which the present can be constructed" and the "present [is] a struggle to create a future *out of* the past."¹ What to do with a past that does not offer ready-made futures? Chiara Bonfiglioli's book provides a valuable discussion of gendered work during socialist and especially, postsocialist deindustrialization and exploitative reindustrialization in Yugoslavia and its successor states. It raises the right and timely questions for feminist research in labor history and memory politics in Eastern Europe and should serve as a starting point for ventures seeking to offer original answers to this uneasy question.

◆ Notes

1. Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 8.



Aslı Davaz, *Eşitsiz kız kardeşlik, uluslararası ve Ortadoğu kadın hareketleri, 1935 Kongresi ve Türk Kadın Birliği* (Unequal sisterhood, international and Middle Eastern women's movements, 1935 Congress and the Turkish Women's Union), İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2014, 892 pp., with an introduction by Yıldız Ecevit, pp. xxi–xxviii; preface by the author, pp. xxix–xlix, TL 42 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-605-332-296-2.

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Aslı Davaz's book—*Eşitsiz kız kardeşlik, uluslararası ve Ortadoğu kadın hareketleri, 1935 Kongresi ve Türk Kadın Birliği* (Unequal sisterhood, international and Middle Eastern