

**Post-Socialist Deindustrialisation and Its Gendered Structure of Feeling:
The Devaluation of Women's Work in the Croatian Garment Industry**

Abstract: This article examines the devaluation of women's industrial work in the process of transition from market socialism to capitalism in Croatia. On the basis of oral history interviews with former workers from the Arena knitwear factory in Pula, the paper seeks to explore the gendered structure of feeling created by socialist industrialisation, and its transformations during post-socialist deindustrialisation. In socialist Yugoslavia, female industrial workers were partaking in the discourses and practices of workers' self-management. Despite their hard work and their low wages, most workers fondly remember the factory as a space of socialisation, solidarity and empowerment. The factory also functioned as a redistributive center through which they could access a number of welfare rights. After post-socialist transition, instead, workers experienced worsening social rights, precarity and exploitation as a result of deindustrialisation, privatisation and the neo-liberal withdrawal of the welfare state. Workers' nostalgic narratives about their work experiences during socialism, thus, are mobilised to reclaim the dignity and value of work in post-socialist times.

Keywords: deindustrialisation, gender, post-socialism, nostalgia, Croatia, garment industry

Introduction

In the year 2000, feminist artist Sanja Iveković carried out one of her pioneering urban interventions on the facade of the building of the former 'Nada Dimić' textile factory in her hometown, Zagreb. The textile factory, which was named after a young anti-fascist heroine killed in the Second World War, employed up to 1700 women during socialism. In 2000, when Iveković illuminated the factory name in red neon across the facade, the company was in the midst of a bankruptcy procedure. The building, an example of industrial architecture from 1910, had been abandoned for years. The art project pointed at the multiple layers of memories that had been lost in post-socialist transition, namely the memory of women's anti-fascist struggle, but also the memories of women's work during socialist times.

Croatia, as in other post-Yugoslav states, has witnessed an overall devaluation of industrial labour in the last twenty-five years. In the textile sector, in Croatia only, 100,000 jobs have been lost since 1989. The bankruptcy and devastation of formerly successful factories, and the insecure and exploitative character of current working conditions in the garment sector stand in contrast with the relative job security experienced by many female industrial workers during socialism. In this paper, through the case study of the Arena knitwear factory in the town of Pula, founded in 1947 and closed in 2014¹, I investigate the process of devaluation of industrial

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production, and, by extension, of women's industrial work in post-socialist Croatia. I argue, in particular, that the closure of textile factories challenged the gendered 'industrial structure of feeling' of female industrial workers, which was based upon workers' individual and collective contribution to the very existence and success of their factories.

The term "structure of feeling" has been coined by cultural theorist Raymond Williams to indicate 'a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which give the sense of a generation or of a period.' Williams used the term "feeling" to indicate 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt', as opposed to more formal definitions such as 'world-view' or 'ideology' (Williams, 1977, p.131). Scholars of labour and deindustrialisation have re-appropriated this term to address the manifold effects of the rise and fall of industrial production. They emphasised how industrial production created specific structures of feeling for workers and for inhabitants of industrial towns, and how emotions such as loss and dismay emerged when factories ceased to produce, and when industrial districts' importance within a neighborhood or a city declined (Byrne, 2002; High, MacKinnon and Perchard, 2017; Strangleman, 2016). This paper contributes to these discussions by highlighting the 'industrial structure of feeling' developed in Yugoslav times, its gendered character and the ways it lives on in the post-socialist, post-Yugoslav setting of Croatia. Due to the specific configuration of workers' symbolic and material participation in Yugoslav self-management, female workers employed in textile factories developed feelings of belonging, pride, recognition, security and sociability. Deindustrialisation and factory closures, in turn, generated feelings of loss, devaluation, injustice, precariousness and isolation.

The existing literature on deindustrialisation so far has mainly focused on the closure of heavy industry in the United States, Canada and Western Europe in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism (High, 2013a; High, 2013b; Strangleman, 2016; Strangleman, Rhodes and Linkon, 2013). Studies of deindustrialisation in post-socialist Europe are rare (Pozniak, 2014), and so are comparative studies that include post-socialist settings (Byrne, 2002; Mah, 2012). Because of a focus on heavy industry and on deindustrialised masculinities, moreover, the deindustrialisation literature rarely focused on women workers. New scholarly works, however, are starting to redress this gap and to consider female workers' experiences of deindustrialisation (Clarke, 2015; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012).

This paper contributes to this growing literature by tackling the position of garment workers and the shifting value of women's labour in the Arena knitwear factory in Pula. This factory case study illuminates workers' position during the transition from socialism to post-socialism, which also coincided with the end of the Yugoslav Federation, the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, and the creation of new post-Yugoslav nation-states. Garment factories built after 1945 functioned as socialist microcosms, in which everyday work coexisted with a variety of political, social, educational and cultural activities. As Rory Archer and Goran Musić (2017, p.44) have argued, the socialist factory 'is a fruitful entry point for the exploration of multifaceted aspects of socialist modernization, its contradictions and demise'. By addressing the history of a factory from its beginning during socialist industrialisation to its demise during deindustrialisation in post-socialist era, I wish to further contribute to the scholarship dealing with transformations of class and labour relations in Central and Eastern Europe (Crowley and Ost, 2001; Dunn, 2004; Kideckel, 2002) as well as globally (Kalb and Carrier, 2015).

The paper is structured as follows: the first section is used to describe the specific structure of feeling created within socialist factories in Yugoslavia, which was linked to the ambivalent valorisation of women's labour achieved through the 'working mother' gender contract. In the second section, I take the case study of the Arena knitwear factory in Pula to explore workers' recollections of factory life, which point at the economic and social value of the factory and at workers' contribution to factory life. In the third and last section, on the basis of the Arena case and of its bankruptcy in 2014, I analyse how deindustrialisation undermined the previous structure of feeling created during socialism, fundamentally reconfiguring the value of industrial workplaces, and, by extension, the value of women's industrial labour in the post-socialist era.

Socialist self-management and its gendered structure of feeling

The conception of industrial work as a source of individual and collective value was a crucial feature of socialist Yugoslavia, and one that was greatly internalised by its working class citizens (Grdešić, 2008). Textile workers' specific structure of feeling in Yugoslavia was shaped by the self-management doctrine of workers' ownership over their factories, coined after the break with the Soviet Union in 1948, as well as by state socialist authorities' emphasis on women's emancipation through productive labour since World War Two.

The inaugural self-management law of June 1950 defined the workers' collective of each enterprise as a sovereign, elected body, while each factory became social property, with each worker de facto becoming 'a property-owning producer receiving a share of the company's income' (Musić 2011, p.177). Workers also paid for most welfare services provisions, as well as for further economic investments,

through income taxation (Comisso, 1979, p.79), and thus came to experience their own material contributions as fundamental for their factory's growth. Workers' ability to invest and redistribute factory profits, however, remained limited. Managers and technical staff carried out the lion share of economic decision-making, also due to the Yugoslav economy's growing dependence from Western markets and loans (Unkovski-Korica, 2016). Scholars who had the opportunity to witness the self-management system on the ground widely debated the gaps between the 'official discourse' and the 'reality' of workers' participation (Adizes, 1971; Zukin, 1975; Comisso, 1979). Despite the official discourse of social equality and despite economic growth, higher standards of living and access to consumption remained unevenly distributed (Archer, Duda and Stubbs, 2016). Due to the decentralisation of the Yugoslav economy, blue-collar workers mainly developed a sense of loyalty towards their own enterprise, rather than overarching forms of class-consciousness (Musić, 2011).

A similar ambivalence between official discourse and reality affected gender relations. In line with Marxist theory, Yugoslav authorities saw women's full participation in the workforce as a fundamental way to achieve women's emancipation. Women's reproductive work in the private sphere – particularly motherhood – was also recognised as in need of being 'socialised', in order for women to be able to take part in production outside the home. A number of welfare arrangements such as extended paid maternity leave, workers' canteens and childcare facilities were supposed to encourage women to take up work. Scholars have defined this type of gender regime, which existed in various forms in Central and Eastern European state socialist regimes, as the 'working mother gender contract' (Hormel, 2011; Fidelis, 2010). Socialist welfare provisions did not resolve gender inequalities

inside the home and women continued to be the ones taking care of domestic work, leading to the widely discussed phenomenon of the 'double burden' (Einhorn, 1993; Jambrešić-Kirin and Blagajć, 2013). Women also tended to be less educated than men, and to be concentrated in less profitable, light industries, and in blue-collar positions, according to a persistent gendered division of labour in the public sphere (Mežnarić, 1985).

At the same time, it would be reductive to only consider women as alienated victims of socialist policies and of emancipation from above. After 1945, as a result of the industrialisation process, women participated in education and in the workforce in unprecedented ways, with women's employment rates scoring approximately 33% on average, but with significant differences between the various republics (Woodward, 1985). Working outside the home became an important part of women's everyday life in the most industrialised regions of Yugoslavia. Factories often became a second home, and industrial work allowed women to access wages, social insurances, healthcare, cheap housing and subsidised holidays. In Woodward's words (2003, p. 76), during socialism 'the employment status defined the identities, economic interests, social status and political loyalty of Yugoslav citizens. One's place of work was the center of one's social universe'. As industrial workers, women were partaking in the socialist discourses and practices that turned each factory into a centre of community life, and gained job security, social mobility and personal empowerment to various degrees. The interviews I collected seem to confirm what Frances Pine (2002, p. 104) argued for the case of Polish seamstresses during socialism: 'In their work relations and activities in the state sector women were able to realise a kind of individual value which transcended, without excluding, the prescriptions of kinship and gender located in the domestic domain'.

In a recent journal issue dedicated to the theme of ‘post-Fordist affect’, the editors underlined how Fordism (and industrialisation) generated wide-ranging attachments across the world, and particularly ‘commonly held attachments vis-à-vis the future – a future marked by a predictable, measured incrementalism mediated by the state’ (Muehlebach and Shoshan, 2012, p. 333). Similar, yet specific, affective attachments were generated in Yugoslav factories during the industrialisation process. All along the socialist era, Yugoslav authorities emphasised the importance of each individual’s contribution to the self-managing collective, as well as the need to sacrifice for the common good of future generations. The socialist ethics of sacrifice were deeply rooted in the material and human losses experienced during the Second World War, as well as in the strenuous reconstruction efforts of the post-war era. After such traumatic experiences of devastation and poverty, as Sharon Zukin has noted, for many generations in Yugoslavia, socialism came to be identified with industrialisation, economic growth and better standards of living: ‘Just as individual Yugoslavs tend to describe socialism in terms of a higher standard of living, so the official ideology imparts the lesson that “Progress is our most important product”’ (Zukin, 1975, p. 88).

Textile factories were conceived as modernizing sites for gender relations, especially when it came to women living in rural areas (Vodopivec, 2012). Progress narratives were a constant feature of workplace periodicals published within textile factories in the late socialist era. Portraits of pensioners-to-be and former shock-workers, who retold of their difficult post-war beginnings, were instrumental in motivating younger generations of workers, but also in marking the milestones reached by each factory in just a few decades, thanks to workers’ collective efforts. The official discourse of women’s emancipation incorporated women’s traditional

self-sacrificing position, sustaining socialist narratives of collective sacrifice, progress and consumption, as Jambresić-Kirin and Blagajć (2013) have noted. For blue-collar female workers, hard work outside and inside the home was a constant feature of daily life and a way to guarantee the wellbeing and living standards of their children and grandchildren. As I will show in the following sections, workers were aware of the economic value of their work and of its significance for the long-term success of the factory. In turn, the factory space provided them with social recognition, and strongly contributed to shape workers' structure of feeling during socialism and in its aftermath.

The value of a women's factory: the 'Arena' knitwear factory in Pula

In order to understand the specific structure of feeling created by industrial labour during socialism, as well as its demise during post-socialist deindustrialisation, I will take the case study of the Arena knitwear factory (*Arena trikotaža*) in Pula, Croatia. Pula, in Croatian, or Pola in Italian, once an important harbour within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is a former industrial town of over 50,000 inhabitants located in the southern tip of the Istrian peninsula, at the border with Italy, to which it belonged from 1918 until the contested post-Second World War settlement with Yugoslavia in 1947. Socialist industrialisation in Pula mainly focused on the expansion of the Uljanik shipyard (now privatised and restructured), and of the Yugoslav naval base (now dismantled), which employed a predominantly male workforce. While the shipyard is still a considerable industrial employer, the town is now rebranding itself as a tourist destination. Since Croatia's independence in 1991, Istrian politics has been dominated by the Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS), a regionalist party who opposes hard-line Croatian nationalism on the basis of multi-ethnic regional identity

(and, critics argue, locally embedded clientelistic practices). Istria is generally perceived as a liberal region within Croatia as a result of the legacy of grassroots anti-fascist Resistance during the Second World War, but also due to the multiethnic character of the city.

In the first years of the socialist regime, Pula was characterised by great poverty and by the exodus of thousands of Italian inhabitants, who were slowly replaced by internal migrants from the rest of Yugoslavia. The first knitwear factory was created in 1947 in a former tobacco factory overlooking the harbour, under the name of Olga Ban (1926–1943), a young village woman engaged in the partisan struggle together with her family, who had been executed by Nazi troops. In the 1950s, the factory employed around 400 workers, who were knitting by hand with old machinery. After the economic reforms of the mid-1960s, the Olga Ban factory was merged with two other textile factories from Pazin and Novi Grad, taking the name of Arena. New modern machines were bought and garment production started to flourish.

The establishment of an internal bank was instrumental in guaranteeing the success of the factory. Workers deposited their monthly salaries in the bank, funding the company's investments. In a recent interview for the local *Glas Istre* newspaper, Arena's former director from 1966 to 1989, Ivo Škrinjarić, explained the importance of the internal bank for the survival of Arena within the self-managed market economy:

We concluded that if we wanted to survive, we had to enrich ourselves and save ourselves in three ways: to be producers and to make money from our work, to be bankers – we were laughing at that! – and from that make some interest, become ourselves creditors and live off the interest;

and, finally, to be sellers, selling our own products in our own stores and save that part of the income (Palibrk, 2015).

Arena's internal bank and its 30 shops distributed all over Yugoslavia assured its competitive standing within the internal market. Only in Slovenia were there similar knitwear factories. The Arena factory employed over 1000 workers in the early 1960s, and around 700 on average in the 1970s and 1980s. Arena successfully exported high quality knitwear to the West, the Eastern bloc, and Non-Aligned countries allied to Yugoslavia, such as Libya, Iran and Iraq. The growing value of the factory's export – and the forward-looking imaginary of that time – is well exemplified by Arena's 1983 multilingual brochure, which stated:

Pula (...) is a modern town with all the characteristics of a Mediterranean region – intensive colours, temperamental people, a port with hundreds of anchored ships, yachts sailing under a variety of flags and a great shipbuilding yard. Three thousand years of history have been built into the town of Pula, including a great Roman amphitheater, Arena, after which our factory was named. (...) What is being presented here is only a fraction of what we produce, as our products are made and worn in countless fashionable shades over the whole of Yugoslavia, and with regard to our significant exports, we can say over the whole of the world.

The branding of Arena and of its products was another significant element to its success. The innovative designs of its fashion creator, Marija Vareško, led to several prizes being awarded to Arena at different fashion fairs. Across the city of Pula, the

legendary quality of the Arena knitwear is frequently evoked by the female public, as it is among former workers, who keep wearing the sweaters and knitted dresses which they could buy at discounted prices, also for their families.

Arena was known not only for its high-quality production, but also for its exemplary working facilities and social standards. The factory had its own canteen, and also its own health clinic (*ambulanta*). Once a week, moreover, the dentist, gynecologist, orthopedic and eye doctor came to see the workers in the factory. Some of the workers also received small flats, particularly working mothers who came from the nearby villages. Bruna, Arena's former secretary, now active in the pensioners' union, emphasised the factory's social role throughout her interview. She observed that young women would arrive from the villages to the city and get into relationships with men working in the naval base, which resulted in a number of children born out of wedlock. The factory management, she argued, helped these single mothers, so that their kids had the same opportunities to study as her own children.

To the pride of Bruna, while women from villages nearby Pula started to be employed in Arena as unskilled workers, most of them gradually gained further qualifications in the course of their working lives, thanks to stipends and adult courses arranged by the factory. During the summer, subsidised holidays in Slovenia were organised by the trade unions for workers. According to Bruna, female workers with less means had to be pushed to go on holiday. In Bruna's words: 'I told them that they have to go. [I told them:] "At home you have nothing decent to eat, take a rest, if you take a rest the production output will be different [better]"'. Note here the connection between workers' welfare and greater productivity. Pavlica, a former manager, also stressed the significance of the factory's social standards:

I believe we had all that no one had in Yugoslavia. Our factory ... we had everything, from the doctor who was there all day, to the nurse, to specialists who came once a week, so that women would not lose much time to see a specialist. We had the dentist, the orthopedic, everything. We had everything.

Similar to Bruna, Pavlica pointed at the benefits that these social arrangements would have for overall production – workers did not lose time to see a specialist outside the factory, and could fully focus on their work.

While agreeing on the high social standards present in Arena, blue-collar workers, differently than managers, perceived these welfare services as rightful compensation for their hard work and low wages. Dissimilar to the management's paternalist narratives, blue-collar narratives frequently point at work alienation, fatigue and personal sacrifice. In a way, workers' narratives indicate the chief mechanism of value production, which was behind successful branding and exports: female workers' intensive, exhausting and often even disabling piece-rate work at the machine. In the words of Ines:

We had a real restaurant, the cooking was good. We had a clinic. The worker was taken care for, and the work had to be done. All according to the [piece-rate] norm [*norma*], from hand-made to all other phases, everyone had to work to get something. Because we know that textile work has always been poorly paid, then and now. We did not know better, and you've got to do what you've got to do.

Workers frequently recalled the perceived mismatch between their low wages, and the trucks full of highly prized merchandise that were shipped from the Arena factory to the rest of the world. Challenging the official socialist discourse on workers' rights, Ines recalled how she would avoid taking sick leave in order not to lose the production prize, which represented a substantial integration to the basic salary. Three times, she had a cold and took a box of antibiotics to get on with work: 'You cannot go on sick leave, you take five, six pills and get going, you would not think of going home or taking sick leave'. Another problem for female workers was the absence of an internal childcare facility, so that workers generally used municipal crèches and kindergartens, or left children with female relatives, usually the grandmother or the mother-in-law. Otherwise they had to pay someone, usually a local woman, to take care of the child, as Pavlica did, or have alternate shifts with their husband, as in the case of Ines. The unequal division of reproductive labour was generally taken for granted, and welfare services only tempered women's 'double burden' to a limited extent.

Despite these difficulties in combining industrial work and domestic work, the factory represented a space of socialisation, solidarity and empowerment. Most women started working in the factory during their training in technical school, or immediately after finishing school, at 16 or 17, and spent all their lives within the factory until retirement. Pavlica, born in a poor family, the last of 9 children, started to work in the mid-1950s. Thanks to the factory's sponsoring of her studies, she later became a qualified manager in charge of all the foreign exports of the factory. For her, 'the factory was home. There you grew up, became a woman and a mother, and all that.' After childbirth, she refused to stop working, despite her husband's requests. And when she went into retirement, she cried, 'as if you were leaving your home'.

Ines, a blue-collar worker, has a similar narrative. Once she said to a relative and former colleague that she missed the factory, after retirement. Her relative asked her if she did not like to stay at home, to which she replied:

It's nice at home, but it was nicer when I would get ready in the morning, take the bus or get a lift from my husband and go to work. It was how it was, but we worked, we were young, we sang, we had fun, and so on. There was a party once in a while, we would bring something, treat ourselves, and so on. During the night shift, for the whole night shift you work, and work, but you also sing, not because you are happy, dear God, but like that, together with others [*u društvu*], you were also somehow happy, weren't you?

Similar to the Moulinex workers studied by Clarke (2015), and to the Polish seamstresses interviewed by Pine (2002), Arena workers describe the factory floor as a space that allowed class and gendered sociability and solidarity. Most interviews evoke the good working atmosphere that reigned in the factory. Words like family and home are frequently used to convey this sense of community. Alida, another worker, stated: 'In fact we were like one family, if something bad happened to someone, God forbid, everyone would collect money'. She then recounted a solidarity initiative taken by all the workers to help a woman who had a baby out of wedlock, and how all the colleagues collected items in a minivan and took it to her village.

Everyday sociability was intertwined with public celebrations, as made clear by other shop-floor tales related to 8th of March and New Year's Eve parties, when all the women would congregate in the House of the Army (now Veterans' house) for a

celebration, all dressed like ‘real Jovanke’, namely like Jovanka Broz, the wife of Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, known for her glamorous style. Workers were often called to greet and celebrate Tito and Jovanka with other international guests in the harbour adjacent to the factory, on their way to their presidential residence on the Brioni islands facing Pula. Beside celebrations for state holidays and special occasions, such as their retirement, workers received different kinds of symbolic awards after 20, 25 or 30 years of service (a ring, a broche, an extra wage), which increased their sense of recognition and the feeling of having contributed to the success of the factory.

‘As if we gave nothing to the firm’: coping with post-socialist deindustrialisation

While industrial workers were bestowed with symbolic recognition and social rights during socialist times, post-socialist transition led to an overall devaluation of industrial labour, notably women’s labour, across newly formed post-Yugoslav states. The pre-existing industrial structure of feeling based on the centrality of socialist factories and on workers’ contribution to factory progress came to be challenged both at the symbolic and at the material level. On the one hand, the nationalist and neo-liberal rhetoric prevailing in newly founded post-Yugoslav states associated industrial workers and socialist factories with an unwanted past, and stigmatized workers’ memories of socialism as Yugo-nostalgic and disloyal to national unity (Vodopivec, 2010; 2012; Petrović, 2016; 2010). On the other hand, the collapse of the internal Yugoslav market and the unscrupulous privatisation deals that accompanied the Yugoslav break-up led to an overall destruction of industrial jobs (Stambolieva and Dehnert, 2011). Beside lay-offs, textile workers often lost months of unpaid wages or years of social contributions, which increased feelings of loss and of abandonment on

the part of the state. In the garment sector, globalisation also played a role, with former Western clients often outsourcing orders to other locations with cheaper labour costs, thus contributing to bankruptcies and closures (Bonfiglioli, 2014; 2015; Vodopivec, 2010; 2012).

Mismanaged privatisation and globalised factors similarly affected the Arena knitwear factory. After its privatisation through shareholders' quotas in the 1990s, Arena continued to produce high quality knitwear for well-known Western brands, such as Benetton and Stefanel. Because of its small dimensions, it managed to survive throughout the 1990s and 2000s, mainly on outsourced orders for Western clients, but also by selling on the internal Croatian market (particularly to the Croatian army during the Yugoslav wars). Over time, however, Western companies moved their outsourced orders to Eastern Europe and Asia, while the factory administration was more focused on selling the various factory properties rather than on increasing production. With retirements and reduced orders, the number of employees gradually decreased to 62 workers.

From June 2013, employees no longer received a wage, but continued working in the hope that the factory management would save the situation. After eight months without wage, in February 2014 workers went on strike, to get bankruptcy declared officially and to be able to claim social assistance. Bankruptcy was declared in spring 2014, with workers receiving very little compensation. Beside the wages, the common aid fund to which workers contributed for decades through their wages also went missing. And so did the savings of many workers and former workers deposited in the internal bank for several decades. When I lived in Pula between 2014 and 2016, the Arena building, located on the main seafront or *riva*, was in the process of being sold floor by floor. The building now hosts an English pub as well as a privately owned

Museum of Olive Oil. The only remaining trace of Arena is a small plaque placed in socialist times, which recalls workers' former ownership of their workplace from 1950s onwards.

Due to the contested recent ending of the factory, the sadness and bitterness provoked by the bankruptcy was widespread among former workers at the times of interviewing. This was especially the case for those who lost their job in 2014, many of whom were unemployed and still unable to access retirement. For this category of workers, a sense of failure and injustice was more immediately present, especially if they also lost savings in the collapse of the internal bank, together with others who were already retired. The factory closure challenged the narrative of progress, sacrifice, and state protection in exchange for work to which they had been accustomed. Workers' experience of deindustrialisation, filtered through the structure of feeling acquired in the socialist era, led to narratives that can be characterised as reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001; Strangleman, 2007, 2016; Velikonja, 2009). The socialist period was remembered, not in an uncritical way, but as a way to underline some of the negative features of the post-socialist era by comparison, in order to express a critique towards present day injustice in the sphere of labour and welfare rights. The remembrance of positive times within the factory and of high-quality production, moreover, was used by workers as a way to reclaim the dignity, meaning and value of their past work. This was especially clear during one last protest event held on March 8th, 2014, when a so-called 'catwalk on strike' (*modna revija u štrajku*) was organized next to the factory building by workers and left-wing associations to gather support from the citizens of Pula and to denounce managers' criminal privatisation of factory assets.²

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKkYDd6YWNM> (last accessed 18 July 2018).

The feelings of loss and precariousness generated by factory closure are apparent in the following quote, a dialogue between two neighbors, Alida and Jasminka. Alida retired shortly before the collapse of her factory, while Jasminka lost her job in 2014. The two neighbors compare the factory's closure to the break-up of Yugoslavia. Both Yugoslavia and the factory were conceived as eternal entities, whose dissolution could never be envisaged. The former director of Arena, here, even appears as a local Tito, a benevolent ruler who took care of workers' security, and led several generations of workers who sacrificed for the factory's success. The dialogue goes as follows:

Jasminka: It's like the breakup of Yugoslavia! The same! We fell from the clouds. Will Yugoslavia break apart? Of course not, there is no chance it would happen... no chance. And then it happened. The same goes with the factory. You simply cannot grasp it is all gone ... that's it, you cannot...

Alida: Such an important firm, I will never forget, when I was working at the door, there came all the pensioners (...) they were the ones who put the factory on its feet, who took money out of their wages so that things could be good for us afterwards. They had no toilet or canteen or health clinic or anything, the workers made all that. Someone led those workers, well done to Škrinjarić [former factory director], I am not saying it wasn't good for him, but it was good for us as well. As when Tito was there, everyone says he was a dictator, this and that, but it was good for us while he ruled, we did not miss anything, we got flats, we had workers' self-management. Someone directed it, but you felt like you were worth something, different than now. And now there is democracy...

Jasminka: And there is more fear than before. Young people are afraid about work, of where they will be when everything closes, and of how they would manage to create a family. There is no security, no job, no flat, nothing. There is no security.

Job security featured among the valuable elements of working for a socialist factory, and factory closure is something that seemed inconceivable only a few years earlier – similar to the end of Yugoslavia, which could not be foreseen. Beside her job loss, Jasminka is among those workers who lost savings due to the disappearance of funds in the internal bank. She revealed how she felt compelled to keep her savings there rather than in a regular bank, as like many others, this way she felt she would contribute to keeping the factory going, while receiving a slightly higher interest rate. Her feeling of having been let down by the factory management was palpable during the interview. Another element contributing to feelings of “fear”, as mentioned by Jasminka, is the position of their children and grandchildren, who are frequently unemployed and envisaging work migration abroad.

The workers who lost their jobs were uncertain about what they would find in the labour market at their age, having never looked for any other job in their lives. Suzana, for instance, was one of the last to leave the factory, assisting sale proceedings in the winter of 2014. I interviewed her in the bankrupted factory, when potential buyers could come and look at the industrial equipment and factory furniture for sale. Again we can see how the workers read current events through the structure of feeling developed during socialist times. The devaluation of their labour appears as a sudden challenge to their perceptions and experiences:

– When you think how much of your life has been spent here, and all of a sudden... we never went to the unemployment bureau, only when we got employed. And now we have to go to the unemployment bureau. It is so unusual for me, to go there. After all these years. I feel like... how shall I say... as if we had no value here. As if we gave nothing to the firm. But we gave our maximum. Not just us, also the women who came before, we continued their work. That's why, when I look at the machines and at what's on sale... so little money is being asked for it, and we, how shall I put it, earned it with our blood, for the factory to get to this point.

Similar to Alida's account in the earlier passage, Suzana's narrative expresses feelings of anger and bitterness, while recalling her own sacrifice as well as the sacrifice of the previous generations of women. As mentioned earlier, this discourse of sacrifice was very much part of the structure of feeling created by self-managed socialism in Yugoslavia, and its legacy can still be perceived among workers, who frequently recall the difficult post-war beginnings of the factory. The closure of Arena, however, disrupted the linear vision of time that sustained the idea of sacrifice for a higher purpose. Workers had difficulties in coping with the idea that their hard work had no meaning, or value, since during socialist times their contribution had been valorised both symbolically and materially.

The end of the factory and of socialism is connected, in the workers' narrative, to an overall change in work ethos brought about by the post-socialist transition to capitalism. Workers generally feel less protected and less recognised. When describing the socialist system, workers did not deny the power differences that existed even then between management and workers, nor their sense of powerlessness

in political meetings and politics more generally (on this, see also Archer, Duda and Stubbs, 2016; Vodopivec, 2010). However, they still perceived socialist paternalism as more acceptable than the present situation. During the dialogue between Alida and Jasminka, mentioned above, Alida stated that even if the former director was profiting from the factory, workers also got something good, similar to what happened to Yugoslavia in Tito's time. In another dialogue, the two neighbors remember the workers' councils that characterised self-management as follows:

Jasminka: [During meetings] it was always like they decided, but still...

Alida: But still they would listen to you. You could speak out and you would not be reprimanded for it. That's how society was taught. And after [socialism], you did not dare to say anything, not to the boss nor to anybody.

In contrast, after transition, according to Alida and Jasminka, 'you were not supposed to think', but only to 'work and shut up'. In these quotes one can see both the paternalistic character of the factory during socialism, but also the sense of collective security and individual reward it offered to workers, in comparison to the current context in which former workers experience devaluation and a lack of social security. Another worker, Sanja, started working at Arena in 1987 and found a job in a cleaning company after her dismissal in 2014. She comments on post-socialist transition and its effects as follows:

For us it was much better, for us personally, for people it was much better during socialism than it is today, in any case. In every way. From

interpersonal relations, to the rights we had, to the protection we enjoyed as workers, it was a hundred thousand times better for us than today. Today you have no right to oppose anything. *'If you don't like it, you can go'*. That's the phrase that you will hear everywhere, that's it. Before, you had the right to fight for something, to ask for something, and to have that taken into account.

The symbolic and material recognition of workers' rights that existed during self-management seems to occupy a central position in Arena workers' memories. Today, in comparison, former workers' status is precarious, due to the particularly low pensions they receive (between 200 and 300 euros), but also due to the fact of having lost their savings or having become unemployed before retirement age. While many women received social flats in socialist times, through their firm or their husbands', some still have to pay rent. The tourism industry in Istria, and the proximity of the wealthy Italian regions of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto, provide an outlet for middle-aged retired and unemployed women in search of additional earnings. Former workers often take on extra jobs in tourism, either by renting out family apartments or by working as cleaners in the tourism sectors. Others are engaged in circular migration towards Italy, taking care of the elderly across the border. In this way they sustain the family household, or are able to help their children and grandchildren. Beside work outside the home, many former workers are accustomed to make ends meet by cultivating their own gardens and by using their knitting and sewing skills for the home economy. Zorica, a former supervisor who left the factory just before the bankruptcy, and Božica, a former blue-collar worker, now retired, integrated their earning by selling handmade crafts at the local market every Saturday. Even if they

have been working hard for their entire lives at home and in the factory, former Arena workers are now forced to reinvent themselves. Through informal work and through new income-generating activities, Arena workers reclaim their own personal dignity and value after factory closure.

Conclusion

In this paper, I discussed the contemporary devaluation of women's industrial labour that accompanies processes of deindustrialisation in contemporary Croatia. I argued throughout the paper that factory closure poses a challenge to the values, ways of life and worldviews in which garment workers were socialized during the socialist era. Workers' narratives bear the legacy of the gendered structure of feeling created within garment factories during socialism. Socialism is remembered as a period in which female workers' individual and collective contribution was valorised through job security and welfare rights, despite seamstresses' low wages, intensive working rhythms, and daily skepticism towards self-management decision-making processes. In contrast, the present post-socialist era is read as one characterized by precariousness, injustice and growing social inequalities.

As scholars have made clear, deindustrialisation is a political phenomenon, which leads to working class communities' invisibilities and marginalisation (Clarke 2015; High 2013a). Workers' economic and social disempowerment has also accompanied post-socialist transformations in the field of production and labour (Crowley and Ost, 2001; Dunn, 2004; Kideckel, 2002; Kofti, 2016). In the post-Yugoslav context, industrial workers' attachment to the welfare and labour rights experienced during socialism has been further made invisible as a result of dominant nationalist and neo-liberal narratives (Petrović, 2010; 2016; Vodopivec, 2010; 2012).

As I have showed through the case study of garment workers' narratives in the Istrian town of Pula, the marginalisation of working class experiences is countered through reflective memories of past work and life experiences, with the socialist factory becoming a powerful signifier of female empowerment, working class sociability, welfare redistribution and symbolic valorisation of workers in the self-managing system. Arena workers' narratives point towards a residual industrial structure of feeling (Strangleman 2016) that is shared among working class women of the generations who came of age during socialism and started employment between the 1950s and the 1980s in textile factories across the post-Yugoslav region (Bonfiglioli forthcoming 2019). Despite the symbolic and material devaluation of women's industrial labour which characterises post-socialist Croatia, for the former workers of the Arena knitwear factory in Pula, productive labour remains a central source of meaning and value in their everyday practical consciousness.

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