

Essay

A WORKING DAY THAT HAS NO END: THE DOUBLE BURDEN IN SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA¹

By Chiara Bonfiglioli

The film *Od 3 do 22* [From 3 am to 10 pm] was made by Croatian director Krešimir Golik in 1966, and is considered a classic of documentary film in the former Yugoslav region.² The 1960s were a time of intellectual opening in Yugoslavia, and a new movement of film authors, known as the Yugoslav Black Wave, started to explore everyday societal problems and marginal subjects. The film portrays a day in the life of Smilja Glavaš, a 22 years old female factory worker, married with a small child, who lives in a suburb of Zagreb and is employed in the *Pobjeda* [Victory] textile factory in the city. The movie is an excellent historical source for understanding women's difficulties in combining productive and reproductive labour in socialist Yugoslavia, as well as serving as a general example of a working woman's double burden inside and outside the home.

The black and white movie, which lasts 13:42 minutes, follows the protagonist in her daily activities. The young worker wakes up at 3 am, lightens up the wooden stove, and prepares a breakfast of hot milk and bread for her husband and baby boy, who she feeds while she eats. She and her husband then leave the home to work, while the toddler remains in his bed, locked inside the little wooden house. After crossing the muddy road that leads to the house, Smilja proceeds to her work by bus, while her husband goes to work on his bike. At around 5 am, she then switches to another tram to reach her destination, and rapidly does some grocery shopping at the local market before entering the factory. At 6 am, she starts her shift within the factory, where she works deftly at the spinning machines. The film director follows her while she works, and while, sitting alone and looking pensive, she has a break, during which she eats again some bread and milk. At 2 pm, when her shift ends, she briskly walks back towards the tram stop, buying a loaf of fresh bread on the way. She barely manages to get into the overcrowded tram on the way home. She finally returns to her house a bit later than 3pm, where she immediately takes care of her child and starts cooking lunch (in socialist Yugoslavia, the main meal was con-

¹ Essay relates to source: Krešimir Golik: *Od 3 do 22* [From 3 am to 10 pm] (1966).

² Golik, Krešimir, *Od 3 do 22* [From 3 am to 10 pm] (1966). The film is available online, URL: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avaas3e37T4>> (17.05.2017).

sumed in the early afternoon upon return from work). Her husband then comes back from work and they have their meal. The woman first feeds her child and then eats her soup afterwards. Her husband briefly plays with the child and then has a nap, while the wife fetches water at a water pump, does the dishes, scrubs the floor and washes clothing by hand, trying to keep her toddler away from the water. The husband then wakes up and goes out, probably to see some friends, while the protagonist continues her household chores and childcare. Smilja even finds the time to mend some clothes and to iron them, as well as for writing down the daily expenses, until she goes to sleep at 10 pm. Presumably in order to emphasize feelings of alienation, throughout the movie there is no dialogue or human interaction between the protagonist and her husband or colleagues. What we hear are ambient sounds (the noise of the city and of spinning machines), as well as few words and sounds pronounced by the little toddler.

When viewing this documentary during a class on women's lives in socialist Yugoslavia at the University of Pula, Croatia, students were most struck by the living conditions of the time, namely the absence of running water and of domestic appliances in the house. They were also impressed by the fact that the protagonist left her child unattended at home while at work. This practice, in fact, was not uncommon at the time among women working in garment factories, who were often migrants from the countryside to the city, or from the less developed Yugoslav republic to the more industrialised ones, and thus had no opportunity to rely on other female family members for domestic help (the protagonist's surname, indeed, seems to suggest that she was originally from Hercegovina, hence a migrant to the city of Zagreb). This problem was present also within the factory where she worked. According to its internal magazine, the *Pobjeda* factory employed at the time around 1,700 workers, of which 1,100 were women. The problem of female workers leaving children unattended was recognised and openly discussed. A report of women's political association within the factory, the *aktiv žena*, discussed the results of an inquiry which showed that "only a small number of children of employed women is cared for in a nursery or kindergarten, and that the majority of children are left at home alone or are left to the neighbours".³ The organisation recommended to the factory management to open a nursery and a kindergarten, in collaboration with local authorities. That would have also allowed women, they

3 An incomplete collection of the *Pobjeda* factory magazines from the 1960s can be found at the National and University Library in Zagreb. *Pobjeda*: List radnog kolektiva tekstilne industrije "Pobjeda" Zagreb, signatura 211.325. The quote is from the *Pobjeda* factory magazine from April 1965, p. 5, article "Uključiti neaktivne" [Including women who are not politically active].

argued, to avoid taking sick leave from work, as 80 per cent of sick leave was due to childcare reasons.⁴

The example of the *Pobjeda* factory workers, and of Smilja Glavaš' working day, is not an isolated case in socialist Yugoslavia, but rather stands as a paradigm of women's double burden during the process of industrialisation and urbanisation that the country underwent since the post-war era. Socialist authorities, in fact, saw women's inclusion in the labour force as the main path towards women's emancipation, in accordance with Marxist theory. For the first time, the 1946 Yugoslav Constitution had recognized women's equal role as citizens and workers, and their right to equal pay. At the same time, after the model of the Soviet Constitution of 1936, it also recognized women's difference as mothers, and their entitlement to increased social rights when combining paid work and domestic work. Article 24 stated in fact: "Women have the right to the same pay as that received by men for the same work, and as workers or employees they enjoy special protection. The state especially protects the interests of mothers and children by the establishment of maternity hospitals, children's homes and day nurseries and by the right of mothers to a leave with pay before and after childbirth". The socialisation of domestic work and social reproduction was another tenet of Marxist theory, and the idea of "social motherhood" was engrained in the Soviet model adopted by socialist countries in the post-war era. Even after its break with the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslav authorities did not substantially change their gender politics, based on the so-called "working mother" gender contract.⁵ Employed women, however, never reached more than 30–36 per cent of the active female population during the socialist era, so that employment rates in Yugoslavia were more similar to Southern Europe than to other Eastern European socialist regimes. Women were mainly employed as unskilled workers or in "feminized", low-paid professions, such as agriculture, education, social services, and in labour intensive branches such as the textile industry.⁶

4 Ibidem.

5 For a similar set-up of women's equality and difference in socialist Eastern Europe, see Malgorzata Fidelis, *Malgorzata, Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, Cambridge, New York 2010.

6 Woodward, Susan L, *The Rights of Women: Ideology, Policy and Social Change in Yugoslavia*, in Wolchik, Sharon L; Mayer, Alfred G. (eds.), *Women, State and Party in Eastern Europe*, Durham 1985; Mežnarić, Silva, *Theory and Reality: The Status of Employed Women in Yugoslavia*, in Wolchik, Sharon L; Mayer, Alfred G. (eds.), *Women, State and Party in Eastern Europe*, Durham 1985.

Similarly to socialist elites in other countries, Yugoslav authorities did put in place a number of welfare services within factories, such as workers' canteens, health clinics, factory housing and holiday facilities on the coast. Female workers could benefit from longer maternity leaves and shorter working hours, and could sometimes access childcare facilities in the factory. Due to the underdeveloped state of the economy, however, welfare services such as health clinics and kindergartens could not keep up with the fast pace of industrialisation, especially in smaller towns and villages. One of the main reasons was that such services depended on the resources and decisions put in place by the factory management and by local authorities, as the Yugoslav system became highly decentralised after the break with the Soviet Union. Decentralisation and the subsequent openness of the economy to the world market reinforced the economic differences that existed between the different regions that composed the multi-ethnic Yugoslav federation, as well as between rural and urban areas. There was no centralised, federal regulation about the extent to which such social services should be provided at different levels, which meant that women's access to welfare services was highly uneven, and that women's paid and unpaid labour was providing a buffer to socialist industrialisation and economic growth.

As the film demonstrates, women had to take care of domestic chores and of childrearing, and this largely went unquestioned. The traditional gendered division of care work within the family was never challenged in a systematic way by socialist politics. This has often led feminist scholars to observe that socialism did not liberate women, despite its promise to do so. Various academic and feminist debates have engaged with the concept of "state patriarchy" during socialism, in Yugoslavia and elsewhere.⁷ In fact, such debates often treat the Yugoslav state as a single, homogenous entity, and end up representing women as victims of the patriarchal socialist state, thus denying their agency.⁸ These narratives, in my view, do not do justice to the complexity of women's experiences in socialist Yugoslavia, nor to the continuities

7 See notably the two Forums published on the journal *Aspasia*, *The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History: Is 'Communist Feminism' a Contradictio in Terminis?* 1 (2007); *Ten Years After: Communism and Feminism Revisited* 10 (2016). See also the Forum *Gendering the Cold War in the Region: An Email Conversation between Malgorzata (Gosia) Fidelis, Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Jill Massino, and Libora Oates Indruchova*, in: *Aspasia* 8 (2014), pp. 162–190.

8 Specifically on women's activism and women's agency during state socialism, see Funk, Nanette, *A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organisations, women's agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism*, in: *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21(2014), No. 4, pp. 344–360; Ghodsee, Kristen, *Untangling the knot: a response to Nanette Funk*, in: *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22 (2015), No. 2, pp. 248–252; Bonfiglioli, Chiara, *On Vida Tomšič, Marxist Feminism, and Agency*, in: *Aspasia* 10 (2016), pp. 145–151.

and discontinuities that emerged when it comes to gender relations. Post-war transformations of gender relations, in fact, were not only an ideological matter, but were greatly connected to pre-existing social, cultural and economic relations, as well as to class divisions. The Yugoslav socialist regime was established in what was largely a rural society, with only the main cities presenting a bourgeois upper and middle class. The immense destruction and human losses caused by World War Two and the new class politics introduced by the Yugoslav Communist Party created mass movements of the population and forged new social relations. Many working class and peasant women could access education and labour for the very first time and exercise social mobility, escaping absolute poverty in the countryside through internal migration and employment. New elites also emerged, largely from the political cadres formed during the antifascist Resistance, mostly educated urban pre-war activists, including women. Political repression also played a role in post-war society, affecting different types of so-called “enemies of the state” (from landowners to former collaborationists, to former partisans who allegedly sided with Stalin after the break with the Soviet Union).

Women’s position in socialist Yugoslavia, therefore, was not only determined by their subordinated gender status, but also, greatly, by their urban or rural origin, their education, their ethnicity (which often played a role in wartime experiences of persecution), their political orientation and their social class. These intersecting factors influenced women’s consumption practices and their standard of living, for instance when it came to washing laundry by hand or possessing a washing machine, as in the case of the protagonist of Golik’s movie.⁹ Women’s different social positionings in socialist Yugoslavia were very visible when it came to the politics of the official women’s organisations connected to the Communist Party, namely: the Antifascist Women’s Front (AFŽ), which existed from 1942 to 1953, the Union of Women’s Societies (SDŽ), existing from 1953 to 1961, and the Conference for the Social Activity of Women (KDAŽ), which lasted from 1961 until the end of the socialist system. The federal and republican leaders of such organisations, in fact, were a minority of urban, highly educated politicians who had been engaged as communist activists in the interwar period as well as partisans in the Resistance. They radically differed from the majority of middle-age peasant women who had joined in the Antifascist Women’s Front, or from the peasant youth who

9 On gender and consumption during socialism, see Sitar, Polona, *The Right Step towards a Woman’s Satisfaction?: Washing Machine as a New Piece of Technology and the Construction of the Role of Women as Housewives in Socialist Slovenia*, in: *Narodna Umjetnost* 52 (2015), No. 1, pp. 143–171.

had embraced the partisan struggle as couriers, fighters and nurses for the army (official statistics stated that at least 100,000 women had joined the partisan ranks during the war, and that two million women were part of the AFŽ by the end of the conflict).¹⁰

In the immediate post-war period, the AFŽ mainly dealt with the inclusion of women within newly created economic and state institutions, and organized a wide range of literacy courses, health trainings and welfare services for women and children in order to curb illiteracy and infant mortality, particularly in the countryside.¹¹ The reconstruction of the country and the raise in living standards was the priority for female political leaders such as Slovenian lawyer Vida Tomšič, who saw the improvement of women's condition as inextricably linked to the improvement of the general social standards across the country.¹² Women were thus encouraged to take part in production, partly out of economic need, and partly due to ideological reasons, since women's inclusion within the labour force was seen as the first factor of emancipation. In 1953, with the process of decentralisation, the centralized pyramidal organisation of the AFŽ was abolished and replaced with the Union of Women's Societies (SDŽ) and women were encouraged to take an active part in different societies, or *aktivni*, and to engage in the resolution of various everyday issues within their factory or municipality. This corresponded to the new orientation of socialist elites, who saw workers' self-management as the "national way to socialism" chosen by Yugoslavia, as opposed to Soviet hegemony over the rest of the socialist bloc. In this new ideological orientation, the League of Communists was supposed to "inspire and educate the masses so that they will know how to lead their own government, their own factories, and their own social organs and organisations."¹³

The end of the AFŽ in 1953 has often been read by feminist scholars as the end of women's autonomous organizing in Yugoslavia, and as the confirmation of state

10 Jancar-Webster, Barbara. *Women & Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945*, Denver 1990.

11 To get a sense of the degree of poverty and backward living standards that was affecting peasant women in 1950s Yugoslavia, I recommend the diary of Ratka Borojević, a former partisan who founded a weaving cooperative among peasant women in the underdeveloped village of Dragačevo, Serbia. Borojević, Rajka, *Iz Dubca u svet*, Belgrade 2006 (first edition 1964). See also Herbst, Natalja, *Women in Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1950s. The Example of Rajka Borojević and the Dragačevo Women's Cooperative*, in: Kersten-Pejanić, Roswita; Rajilić, Simone; Voß, Christian (eds.), *Doing Gender-Doing the Balkans*, Berlin 2012.

12 Bonfiglioli, Chiara, *Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia*, in: *Aspasia* 8 (2014), pp. 1–25.

13 Communist leader Edvard Kardelj, quoted in Lilly, Carol, *Power and Persuasion: Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia, 1944–1953*, Boulder 2001, p. 211.

patriarchy.¹⁴ This “instrumentalist” view of socialist gender politics and of Yugoslav self-management is fundamentally ahistorical, as it reads the post-war socialist context with the theoretical and epistemological presuppositions of second wave feminist theory. What is clear, instead, from archival sources of different kind (from AFŽ local records to factory magazines), is that women’s position as mothers and caretakers in the family was at the time normalized at all levels of society in socialist Yugoslavia, and was very rarely questioned (the same can be told for Western European countries at the time, whose families were based on the breadwinner-housewife model). Yet, there were different degrees of naturalisation and different ideas over what constituted the “modern family”. Namely, socialist authorities and female politicians saw women’s independence and double earning households – or, in other words, the ideal of the urban, “modern” mononuclear family – as preferable to women’s dependent status in the peasant extended family, and modelled their social and economic politics accordingly. Socialist legislation promoted women’s access to schooling, work, as well as to divorce, abortion and contraception. Working mothers who were not married or widows were recognized as full members of society, and children born out of the wedlock had the same rights as children of married parents. This represented a step forward, particularly for working class and peasant women who could study and work outside the home for the first time. As in the case of Smilja Glavaš, however, women’s domestic tasks were fundamentally individualized and privatized, and each woman had to find her own solution to everyday needs, also accordingly to the welfare services offered in her firm and in her municipality.

This does not mean that the issue of working women’s double burden was not openly discussed and examined in socialist Yugoslavia. From official women’s organisations to factory magazines, it was widely acknowledged that women’s entry into the labour market had put enormous pressure on female workers when it came to combining work outside the home and domestic work. When interviewed within textile factory magazines, female garment workers expressed their pride for their affiliation to the working collective, and their sense of belonging to the factory (this community aspect is completely missing in the film – perhaps out of stylistic concerns). Female workers, however, also complained about their double burden openly and matter-of-factly (one interviewee even stated, “today a woman is con-

14 For an overview of the debates, see Tesija, Jelena, *The End of the AFŽ – The End of Meaningful Women's Activism? Rethinking the History of Women's Organizations in Croatia, 1953–1961*, MA dissertation in Gender Studies, CEU Budapest 2014.

sidered complete if she can be at the same time mother, housewife and worker”).¹⁵ Husbands were rarely mentioned when performing unspecified “male tasks” or could be even defined as the “third child” in the house by their wife. Most female workers expressed the wish of not having to work during the night shift, since they were not able to rest the next day due to domestic chores, or had nowhere to place the children at night. Often, local women’s associations recommended that the factory take further measures to help working mothers, for instance by reducing night shifts or by opening a nursery, as in the case of the *Pobjeda* factory in Zagreb. Overall, therefore, the double burden was the object of public recognition, but at the same time it was also normalised in popular culture, with women being hailed as resilient and hard-working outside and inside the home.

It is only with the emergence of second wave feminist groups that socialist politics of emancipation, and the Marxist approach to the “women’s question” started to be contested. A new generation of young, highly educated women made evident the gap between advanced legal provisions and everyday reality, emphasizing that socialist politics had failed to transform the private sphere. In the document introducing the first international feminist conference held in Yugoslavia, and significantly titled *Comrade Woman, The Women’s Question: A New Approach?* (1978), the organisers stated in fact that “in the socialist societies, even though many things have been achieved, there is a whole series of open questions concerning the position of women, the family, marriage, social relations between the sexes and their still present inequality. The family, women and everything concerning the relation between sexes is still under the pressure of bourgeois morality, patriarchal tradition, religion and various social taboos and (new and old) habits. Such a traditional consciousness represents an anachronism and is not in accord with the [progressive] tendencies of self-managing society.” Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, feminist scholars in Yugoslavia started to discuss issues such as women’s alienation within the family, domestic violence and marital rape, in dialogue with Western European radical feminism and Marxist feminism¹⁶ Since then, feminist epistemology completely transformed the way of discussing productive and reproductive labour, and of rethinking social reproduction across Europe. Women’s unpaid work gained visibility among feminist scholars, and was recognised as a pillar of the gendered

15 Vuteks factory magazine, complete collection available at the National and University Library in Zagreb. The quote is from number 154, 1974.

16 Bonfiglioli, Chiara (forthcoming), *Feminist translations in a socialist context: The case of Yugoslavia*, in: *Gender & History*. See also Bonfiglioli Chiara, *Belgrade, 1978. Remembering the conference “Drugarica Žena. Žensko Pitanje – Novi Pristup?” / “Comrade Woman. The Women’s Question: A New Approach?”* thirty years after, MA dissertation, Utrecht University 2008.

division of labour on a global scale. As Adrienne Rich wrote: “Across the curve of the earth, there are women getting up before dawn, in the blackness before the point of light, in the twilight before sunrise; there are women rising earlier than men and children to break the ice, to start the stove, to put up the pap, the coffee, the rice, to iron the pants, to braid the hair, to pull the day’s water from the well, to boil water for tea, to wash children for school, to pull the vegetables and start the walk to the market, to run to catch the bus for the work that is paid. I don’t know when most women sleep.”¹⁷

Many historical and geopolitical changes have occurred in Europe since Adrienne Rich wrote this passage thirty years ago. Care work and affective labour, however, largely remains privatised and devalued (be it waged or unwaged). Women are mainly the ones in charge of domestic labour, even if new generations of men have started taking responsibility in social reproduction in a minority of cases. Gender relations, moreover, are intersecting with factors such as class and ethnicity in determining the redistribution of care work. In the post-Yugoslav region, most working class women lost their jobs as a result of the factory closures and post-socialist privatisations that followed the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.¹⁸ Many of them joined the ranks of paid care workers in Western Europe, together with migrant women from the global South and from the other post-socialist states of Eastern Europe. Women’s work of social reproduction continues to be essential, and yet it is largely invisible. That is why, fifty years from its making, a movie like *Od 3 do 22* still resonates with women’s experiences in the post-Yugoslav space and in other contexts, and serves as a productive tool for discussions in the field of feminist and gender history.

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17 Rich, Adrienne, Notes toward a Politics of Location, in: idem (ed.), *Blood, Bread and Poetry*, London 1986, p. 229.

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