

“WHAT IS THERE TO TALK ABOUT WITH THESE WOMEN?”: THE HETEROGENEITY OF FEMALE WORKERS AND THEIR INTERACTIONS AT FISH CANNING FACTORIES ON THE EAST ADRIATIC COAST

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This article explores the highly heterogeneous social structure of female workers at two fish canneries: Kvarner on the island of Lošinj and Plavica on the island of Cres. The heterogenous workforce reflected certain characteristics of Yugoslav society. First, there was regional and ethnic diversity. Second, there were differences created by rapid modernization, especially between educated and uneducated women who possessed different types of knowledge and embodied different behavioral norms. The third set of differences between workers was based on a traditional patriarchal idea of female propriety which existed simultaneously alongside the socialist idea of a “working woman”. Lastly, the position of workers was also shaped through the tension between appreciation of industrial and physical labor in socialism and tourist imagination of the Adriatic coast. Workers’ narratives and the visual material testify to social hierarchies and differences, but also to negotiations of these positions and different affiliations, all of which depended on their various situations and interests. The stories from different factories also point to different possibilities of social relations, interactions and community building. While workers from Kvarner in Lošinj on occasions remained disintegrated, workers from Plavica on Cres traversed boundaries more easily and formed a close-knit network and community. This was due to the different working and living conditions in the two factories, including a policy of organized leisure and social events, which were a consequence of different periods in which the factories operated, different roles that they had in the local community and different factory management.

Keywords: female workers, social heterogeneity, socialist sociability, industrial legacy, fish canneries

The usual story of women's industrial labor in socialism is a story of hard, physical labor and gradual attainment of both economic emancipation and workers' benefits and rights. The same is true of fish canning factories that operated on the east Adriatic coast. However, the story of fish canneries is also a story of a complex and diverse group of female workers. The heroines of this article were from a variety of regional, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds. They were single mothers, single women, married or separated. They acted and thought in different ways, influenced by varying social and moral ideas. They imposed hierarchies among themselves and also crossed them. This article seeks to demonstrate the complexities that are often hidden behind the general term "workforce" and to examine modes of interaction between workers who were shaped by the context of the socialist factory, which provided them with employment, but which also influenced their social life.

The article is based on collected visual material and interviews with former workers in two fish canneries in Croatia: Kvarner, which operated in Mali Lošinj on the island of Lošinj, and Plavica, which operated in Cres on the neighboring island of the same name. Kvarner closed in 1974, and Plavica in 1996. The workers' narratives cover the period from the late fifties to the early nineties. The interviews were conducted in 2018 and 2019 as part of a bigger project on the deindustrialization of the Adriatic Coast.¹ Most interviews were conducted by the research team composed of three members, my colleagues Tanja Petrović and Martin Pogačar, and myself. I conducted three interviews by myself. In total we talked with five workers from Lošinj (four women, one man; two white-collar and three blue-collar positions) and six workers from Cres (four women, two men; two white-collar and four blue-collar positions). In each of these cases, members of my family and/or members of the workers' families were present. My family lives on one of the islands and acted as a mediator in the interactions with the workers. The interviews were mostly conducted in workers' homes and they were unstructured and non-directive. We would initially ask interviewees about their age and occupation, as well as invite them to describe the work process. After these initial questions interviewees would continue spontaneously, as most showed great enthusiasm about sharing different memories and aspects of their experience. The conversations lasted approximately one hour or more. After the first interviews, I continued to meet workers on my regular visits to the islands, so I have informally talked to some of them on multiple occasions.

In the first part of the article I briefly describe the social context of the fish canning industry on the east Adriatic coast, and the effects of industrial work on its female workforce. Following this, I describe the differences between female workers – both differences that

¹ The bilateral project "Consequences of Deindustrialization of the Eastern Adriatic Coast: (Dis)Entangling People, Landscape and the Sea", financed by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) and German DAAD, involved ethnographies on several sites, including Cres, Lošinj and Lastovo. The author also acknowledges financial support by AARS for the research programme "Historical interpretations of the 20th century" (P6-0347) and for the postdoctoral project "Cultural memory in post-Yugoslav theatre" (Z7-8281).

were self-perceived and those described by the workers in the interviews. I have organized these differences into three levels: the first level relates to ethnic or regional identities, the second to educational standards and behavioral norms, and the third to traditional patriarchal moral norms. Lastly, I turn to the social position of workers in the context of beautified tourist imagination of the Adriatic coast. In the second part of the article I explore the interactions between women in the two factories. I examine the reasons why the workers from Kvarner remained somewhat disintegrated, while the workers from Plavica formed closer relationships and engaged in community building.

The fish canneries on the east Adriatic coast were mostly established by Italian, French and Austrian companies, which built such enterprises using local know-how and a cheap workforce at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Plavica on Cres was founded by the Parisian company, *Société générale française de conserves alimentaires*, with a branch office in Trieste. Kvarner on Lošinj was operated by the food industry company, *S.A. Prodotti Alimentari G. Arrigoni*, from Trieste. After the Second World War, the production was nationalized by the socialist Yugoslavia. In both these periods, women made up the main workforce, while the management and technical staff were comprised of men and the administration employed both genders, at least during socialism. In this article, I look at working women during socialism, as the specific conditions of the socialist system influenced the structure of the workforce and relations between workers. First, there was an organized possibility of workers' migration inside Yugoslavia, which was one of the reasons for the high level of diversity in the workforce. Second, the socialist context, work conditions and the organization of industrial work significantly affected relations between workers in the fish canneries.

At first, the fish canning industry employed large numbers of local women, and some places, such as the Sirena factory (1931–1969) (Jurica 2001: 469; Karač et al. 2009: 98; 100) on the remote island of Lastovo relied exclusively on a female workforce from the island.² However, with the development of other industries on some islands, such as Cres and Lošinj, local women went for other jobs. Work in the fish cannery was physically demanding and not socially appreciated, so many locals from Lošinj switched to tourism, which was regarded as more refined. On Cres, as described by our interviewees, local women opted for the textile industry, which was regarded as easier than cannery work. As a result, migrant workers from other parts of Yugoslavia filled their place, mostly from rural and underdeveloped parts, such as the Dalmatian hinterland, Bosnia, and Slavonia – i.e. the Pannonian part of Croatia. The working communities I present in this article are comprised of both local and immigrant workers, which means that they are more diverse than the working communities that relied primarily on the local workforce.

² Data has been collected in interviews with workers that worked during the socialist government; see footnote 1.

Female industrial workers were used to hard, physical work, but working in the fish canning industry might have been especially challenging. Women had their hands immersed in cold water for hours; they often worked outside on the open shop floor, also during the winter, carried heavy loads, moved between an open space and rooms with different ambient temperatures, cut and cleaned the fish without protecting their hands, operated dangerous tin-can closing machines and carried the specific odor of fish with them, which became increasingly stigmatized in the tourist-oriented and beautified communities on the sea coast. However, apart from these specific details, stories of female workers in the canneries are similar to the experiences of female workers in other Yugoslav industries (Bonfiglioli 2020; Borovičić and Vene 2018; Jambrešić Kirin and Blagaić 2013; Vodopivec 2015, 2010). Factory work changed women's everyday lives, their position in the family and society, their living standards and self-perceptions. It offered them the possibility of economic and social independence – of making decisions on their own or at least of participating in family decisions. Work in the canneries was organized as seasonal work at first, with permanent employment offered later, which included the possibility of taking out loans and advancing economically. The position of women in their families would change dramatically as they would be the ones to secure an apartment through their work at the factory. Additionally, employment in socialism provided welfare services like nutrition (canteens), transportation and, most importantly, organized childcare. Factories also organized leisure, cultural, educational and sport activities. Jambrešić Kirin and Blagaić thus argue that work conditions in socialism did more for the actual improvement of the position of women than the official discourse of emancipation in socialism (Jambrešić Kirin and Blagaić 2013: 49–50; Katić Jovanović 2011/2012; for more on socialist policies and emancipation, also see Burcar 2015). On the other hand, the socialist discourse provided workers with symbolic recognition of their work and a sense of value and pride (Bonfiglioli 2020; Vodopivec 2015). However, considering the workers' conditions and positions, it must be added that welfare services were not evenly distributed. The decentralization of the economy led to the decentralization of welfare policies that were implemented and decided upon by each factory. Not all workers had the same services and benefits, as factories offered different working conditions and even different wages for the same position (Archer and Musić 2017: 48). Bonfiglioli (2020) defined class and geography as the main points of differentiation between women workers in the textile industry. This means that white-collar workers had different experiences and received more benefits (they were allocated more social housing and more frequently used holiday apartments and other facilities provided by the factories) than blue-collar workers. On the other hand, social benefits were not equally distributed across all parts of Yugoslavia. Apart from geography, the era was also a key factor in the implementation of workers' social rights, as there were more services provided in late socialism than in the post-WWII years. Female industrial work is thus a complex phenomenon with different trajectories that depend on different eras and regions. While recognizing these differences, I wish to underline further

complexities of the blue-collar workforce that I will show through the examples of the fish canneries of Kvarner in Lošinj and Plavica in Cres.

REGIONAL, EDUCATIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DIFFERENCES, OR WHY DO ONLY BOSNIANS SMOKE?

The first level of differentiation between workers that was immediately established in the interviews was the local, ethnic or regional identity. Simply put, women from the same place would stick together. An additional element was language. Work was performed in Croatian, and all workers spoke some variant of Serbo-Croatian, depending on where they came from. However, the locals from Cres and Lošinj would use Italian dialects from the islands,³ intentionally separating themselves from the others.

There was a slight tension between the locals and the newcomers. Almost every immigrant worker remembers some injustice she experienced from the locals. This was true in both directions, although we should bear in mind that the workers experienced this tension from different positions, as the immigrants were a minority when they arrived on the islands. D.M. from Sarajevo, who arrived on Cres in 1978, recounted how the immigrants felt like second-rate citizens, as women who were looked down upon, and who were never totally accepted by the locals. She especially resented the locals' use of Italian, as she was unable to understand what they were talking about and felt excluded. D.M. remembered how the locals would clean the factory and (as if by accident) spray water on Bosnian women. D.M. decided to defend "her Bosnians," with whom she felt a regional affiliation and so she would curse at the locals.

L.K., a local from the island of Cres, had a different perspective. She remembered how the Bosnians wanted to take "their" seats, as their working positions were more favorable and farther from the doors, where it was cold and windy. The Bosnians were good workers, L.K. said, but very different from the locals. In her memory, the Bosnians were combative and aggressive, while the locals were sweet and weepy. When asked about a photograph of workers on a smoking-break, which we acquired from another worker, L.K. said that she did not remember the photograph, but that those must be Bosnian workers, as only they smoked. However, the actual photograph captures an ethnically mixed group of women. In addition, L.K. worked in the factory until its closure, when women of all backgrounds were smoking. Hence, this memory can be viewed as reinforcing a certain image of immigrant female workers: as neither as acceptable nor appropriate as the local women. The relationship between immigrants and locals was thus shaped by negotiating both symbolic social positions, as well as very real working positions, such as the seats.

³ Cres and Lošinj were under Italian rule from 1918 to 1943 (Goldstein 2008).



Photo 1. Women from the Plavica factory, Cres on a smoking break. Personal archive of Anka and Nikola Koljevina

In spite of the mentioned local and regional affiliations, we should not overestimate the importance of ethnic and national difference in this context. From the locals' point of view, the main difference was between them and all immigrants coming to the islands. Language, dialects, close local relations or the fact that the local people "knew each other" were especially important here. In this context I found especially telling the example of immigrant workers coming from the village of Stara Vas on Lošinj's neighboring island of Pag where they did not speak Italian. K.K. from Stara Vas arrived on Lošinj in 1958 and remembered that she had a "great time" with women from her village, with whom they formed a tightly-knit sisterhood. However, they never spoke with women from Lošinj, as they did not understand them. Women from two neighboring islands thus remained disintegrated. A.K. from Virovitica, inland Croatia, had similar recollections. She worked in both factories, starting in the seventies, and had learned Italian before her arrival, so she bitterly remembered that the local women from Lošinj and Cres gossiped about all the newcomers, thinking that they did not understand them. Disregarding their origin, the immigrant women were simply "others". In addition to language as one of the main identity markers, there was also the fact that immigrant workers led distinctly different lives: they came alone, unaccompanied and lived independently on their own. O.M., an immigrant worker that arrived on Lošinj in 1964 decided not to send her paycheck to her drunkard father, and explained it by saying: "I was my own boss". All of this was seen as unusual or even suspicious from the traditional moral perspective (more on this later).

However, women would not only unite (or separate) according to their local, regional or ethnic affiliation. Another level of differentiation (or correlation) was a perceived level of modernity. One of the main motifs that came up in conversations with some workers was the difference between them and the so-called “primitive” women. The women who established this distinction were white-collar workers and younger blue-collar workers, who started working in the sixties and seventies. Two blue-collar workers who started working in the fifties never mentioned this distinction.

The women who mentioned the difference between themselves and the “primitive” women dedicated some time to elaborating the distinction. The main differentiating factor was education, but also overall behavior, bodily appearance, manners, and lifestyle. Older women – both locals and immigrants – were mostly illiterate, while younger women mostly received some basic education. The workers who were formally educated made sure to emphasize the distinction between them and the illiterate others. Education was a source of immense pride, and workers wanted to display it and underline their different status. They were also certain that their education was a source of other workers’ jealousy. It is possible to connect this with the Yugoslav ideals that underlined education, industrialization, urbanization and modern manners as positive features of “the new socialist man” (Duda 2017).

Modernity was also expressed by having or not having, certain types of knowledge that were defined and required by the modern state. Not knowing your birth date was regarded as especially shameful. O.M., one of the blue-collar workers who explained which women were “primitive,” told us a story about a coworker nicknamed “Gospa”. This coworker was asked about her birth year and date, which she did not know. In response, she simply replied that she was born “around the Assumption of Mary” or “around *Gospa*”, as the holiday is called in Croatian. This episode was striking for the other workers and so they invented the nickname and remembered the story. When O.M. told this story, she also impersonated “Gospa”: she lowered her voice, started mumbling and slightly changed her body posture. This shows that the differences between women were also embodied and expressed through body posture, as well as gesticulation and pronunciation of words, with some bodies expressing modernity more than others.

M.S., a white-collar who worked in the seventies narrated the same differences, and also recounted different “unacceptable” behaviors, such as some “primitive” women using cat urine and blood to cast off evil spells. She underlined that she was disgusted by the poor working conditions in the factory and could hardly bear crossing the shop floor, because it looked and smelled unbearable. She also remembered that she tried to join the blue-collar workers on a daily boat trip to the factory, but she could not take the smell and their presence. “I could barely stand traveling with these women, I just could not stand it”, she repeated. I am using these stories to show that the differences between the workers were not only connected with their ethnic or regional identities. Women from different places were united in their feeling that they were not the “primitive” ones. On the other hand, older and illiterate women from all regions were perceived as “primitive” by their younger peers.

While several interviewees mentioned that the women who came from Bosnia were illiterate, this was not always the case. Two Bosnian interviewees, who came to the factory in the seventies, had received formal education and were proud to stress it. They simultaneously identified with other Bosnians, because of their common regional identity, but also saw themselves as separate from them, because of the differences in their education and behavior. D.M. came from the Bosnian capital to Plavica on Cres, having concluded a typing and stenography course. The reason for her arrival at the factory was, as she said, an attempt to escape from the control of her traditional family and also to experience adventure. She simultaneously recognized her regional alliance with other Bosnians, but also the differences in their formal and informal education and experiences. She said that she defended "her Bosnians" from the locals, but also drew a line of separation between them and her. She described Bosnian women as the "wretched poor" (*sirotinja*): while she had nice clothes, they came to Cres with plastic bags that contained all of their belongings. To explain the difference between her and them she said: "I am not from Bosnia, but from Sarajevo", distinguishing herself as a woman from the capital and as different from the rest of the country.

It is possible to see the factory's shop floor as a space in which social values and hierarchies were inscribed, and in which simultaneous processes of distancing and integration occurred. Immigrants were looked at suspiciously by the locals, but this was not the ultimate factor that determined their status on the shop floor and in the wider community. The second level of identification was their education and behavior, which offered an opportunity for social mobility. O.M. came from an underprivileged background in the Dalmatian hinterland, gained a reputation as a quick and good worker, became a foreperson and married a member of the factory's management. A white-collar worker talked of her as a role-model worker. In line with this example, it can be claimed that different women had different opportunities. As one group of women adjusted to the new standards of modernity and gained social recognition, other women – for various reasons – did not adapt to the new social standards and were thus regarded as "primitive". However, the reasons for the definite separation between the workers were neither due to regional nor to educational differences. Different affiliations and identities were negotiated according to different situations, in a dynamic process of simultaneous separating and connecting.

The heterogeneity of the shop floor reveals the heterogeneity of Yugoslav society, which was undergoing rapid change due to modernization processes, including urbanization, industrialization, liberalization of gender norms, mass education, etc. As these processes changed the general society, they did not reach all spheres and levels of society to the same extent. Rapid modernization created different social spaces, with some experiencing rapid change, while others continuing to foster old habits, behaviors, norms and types of knowledge that did not fit in with modern standards. These spaces and "worlds" would meet and be reflected on the shop floor, which would sometimes result in mutual distancing, while at other times they linked them in a variety of ways.

SOCIAL HIERARCHIES AND FEMALE WORKERS THROUGH THE EYES OF TRADITIONAL PATRIARCHAL MORALITY AND TOURIST IMAGINATION

As already noted, the fish canning industry was regarded as harder and less socially appreciated work than other forms of industrial labor. For example, in Istria before WWII, there was a social and symbolic difference between female workers in tobacco factories (*tabakine*) and fish canneries (*sardeline*). While *tabakine* were considered ladies and were of Italian origin, *sardeline* were mostly Slavic and had a lower social reputation (Đorđević 2012). As there was a lack of workers, it seems that fish canneries employed everyone who wanted to work. Apart from women regarded as “primitive” by modern standards, they employed women who were regarded as inappropriate or disrespectable by the standards of traditional patriarchal morality. Several workers called them “women with problems”. O.M. referred to them when she said that local men found spouses among workers, “but not all women were appropriate for marriage”. O.M. explained that these were separated and “abandoned” women, i.e. women whose husbands left them, as well as single and unmarried mothers.



Photo 2. Workers from the Kvarner factory, Lošinj. Personal archive of Martina Skitarelić

“Women with problems” were often referred to in hushed voices or between the lines. Đ.F., a white-collar worker from Cres, explained that many workers ran away from family problems, leaving their spouses and children behind. The factory would often receive phone calls from husbands and families, searching for their wives and mothers. It seems that

women who escaped the frame of traditional feminine morality also had the lowest position on the shop floor. When asked if she talked with the "primitive" or abandoned women, O.M. replied dismissively: "We did not talk a lot. What is there to talk about with [these women]?". This again points to the complexity of Yugoslav socialist society, which formally introduced new working and moral principles, while old moralities did not disappear, but continued to coexist with the new working ethos. However, this does not mean that the position of the woman remained solely connected to patriarchal morality. Following the example of "women with problems" in the canneries, we can again speak of a simultaneous processes of social distancing and stigmatization, but also of inclusion. On the one hand, "women with problems" were at the bottom of the society's and factory's moral hierarchy, symbolically devalued by their peers and the wider community. On the other hand, the factory offered them employment, social benefits, protection and stability. It offered them the possibility of economic survival and the chance to gain a certain amount of economic independence and social status, despite their socially unaccepted position.

Social and moral hierarchies were not present in the factory alone, but also between blue-collar workers and the wider community. When I talked to a middle-aged citizen of Cres and inquired into his memory of female workers, he told me that they called them *papaline* and unintentionally a mischievous smile appeared on his face. Both his reaction and the name used for the workers contain a slight tone of ridicule and a level of distancing from such workers. A *papalina* is a small fish – similar to a sardine – called the European pilchard (*Sardina pilchardis*). In Istria, the cannery workers were called *sardeline* which is another local name for the same fish. The expression *tvorničarke* (lit. factory women), as the workers were called in the Lošinj factory, escapes the same connotation, although the workers shared stories of public ridicule. There are at least two reasons for the low(er) social reputation of workers in the canneries: traditional moral prejudices regarding female labor and biases regarding hard, smelly and "unwanted" physical labor.

The fact that the women who worked and spent time outside of their families' control were traditionally regarded as suspicious goes beyond the socialist context, and relates to patriarchal values, views and social norms. In many other patriarchal contexts, female industrial workers were seen as promiscuous, disrespectable and immoral. Latin American historians of female industrial labor in the twentieth century observed that "factory labor was regarded as 'jeopardizing women's morals' because it placed them 'with the male sex in public where the protection of the family was absent'" (Lavrin in French and James 1997: 12). The factory was thus seen "as a sexually 'promiscuous' space in which fathers and husbands lost control of their daughters and wives" (French and James 1997). If we look for examples closer to the east Adriatic coast, it should be noted that pre-socialist tobacco factories in Istria organized a form of "morality control", as the women who worked there were automatically regarded as promiscuous (Đorđević 2012: 82). The same connection can be found in one of the rare literary novels whose heroine is a worker in a fish cannery. It is unsurprising that the main protagonist of *The Girl from Petrovia* (1963), by Istrian writer Fulvio Tomizza, has several lovers and faces an unwanted pregnancy (Tomizza 2010).

Socialist Yugoslavia supported and publicly celebrated working women and mothers (Bonfiglioli 2020) and portrayed prewar female workers as revolutionaries (Vodopivec 2015). However, in spite of the efforts of the official discourse, the traits of the patriarchal logic remained present. For example, Bonfiglioli and Modrić write about general contempt for women who broke with traditional norms and who accepted work in the Dalmatinka factory in the Dalmatian hinterland, which opened in 1951. Their work, especially in combination with other untraditional behaviors, such as biking or walking to work, was seen as deeply immoral (Bonfiglioli 2020: 37–38; Modrić 2018: 134–35). A colleague whose grandmother worked at Dalmatinka remembered how members of her own family reproached her for “whoring” at the factory. Bonfiglioli writes that at least ten years had to pass before a change in mentality occurred over Dalmatinka. The situation on Cres and Lošinj was far from the situation at Dalmatinka, but it is possible that traces of a similar imaginary remained present. Although the majority of workers never mentioned their having been regarded as “morally suspicious”, D.M., a very vocal and plainspoken immigrant worker at Plavica on Cres explained that the local fisherman approached and ridiculed *papaline* as sexually available women: “*Papaline* were those from whom fishermen hoped to get pussy. They would come in front of the building [where we lived] and yelled: ‘Is there any pussy available?’ We were humiliated. But I would answer on purpose: ‘There is, gentlemen, but we charge 50 marks just to enter our rooms!’”

As is noticeable from D.M.’s story, immigrant workers did not always humbly accept the status of “approachable” women that the fishermen attributed to them, and they verbally fought back. At the same time, they drew a line of separation between themselves based on the same traditional moral principles. D.M. narrated this anecdote on two occasions; the second time we spoke she added that some women would take advantage of this opportunity and “put 50 marks in their pocket”. With that she implied that she was not one of them and simultaneously distanced herself from those workers who acted against the traditional principles of female morality. White-collar worker in the same factory also alluded to the workers’ sexual freedom, noticing that “all kinds of things” were happening in the workers’ rooms. Again, she excluded herself from such activities. All of this testifies to the complex moral dynamics between female workers, which simultaneously includes resistance to patriarchal morality, but also, to a degree, a reproduction of the same principles between female workers themselves. Once again, this process of moral dynamics can be read as a reflection of a society that is undergoing rapid modernization and in which new, modern norms have to be negotiated with traditional patriarchal morality.

Another recurrent motif in several stories remembered by female workers is connected to the prejudices connected to hard labor. One of the most frequent worker memories elicited is that fellow citizens, acquaintances, strangers and even members of their own family would tell them publicly that they “smelled”. Fish odor is very difficult to get rid of, but the fact that they were publicly ridiculed says something about their social value and value of their work. In spite of the publicly proclaimed appreciation of workers and manual labor during socialism, this smelly industry, with its bloody appearance, was un-

wanted on the coastal area that aspired to tourist development (Brunnbauer 2019; for the relationship between tourism and fish canning also see Chiang 2011). This speaks about the tension between two industries equally developed in socialism, industrial work and tourism, as well as their social and cultural implications. Tourism in the Yugoslav context was a complex process, initially based on the utopian idea of leisure and holidays for all. As a practice it also reflected wider desires of Yugoslav society towards modernization, Westernization, leisure, material goods and materially comfortable life (Duda 2004, 2009; Grandits and Taylor 2010). Although tourism never abandoned its basic social premise, it slowly turned to consumerist values and commercialization, especially while catering for tastes of foreign tourists.⁴ It seems that both the Yugoslav idea of tourism as a symbol of “good life” and the commercialized trends created an imagery of the Adriatic coast that had difficulties in accepting the “parallel reality” of industrial work, its visuals, sounds and smells. Many workers repeated that canneries as well as local shipyards “bothered” tourism, as they were too smelly, too noisy and too ugly. Or, as Yugoslav thinkers proposed as early as the 1960s, commercialized tourism stood in collision with socialist values and re-introduced “bourgeois values” (Elaković in Taylor 2010: 244; Taylor and Grandits 2010: 12; Yeomans 2010: 91–97), which, we could add, do not hold physical labor in high regard. However, these new trends did not simply replace the socialist working ethos and positive validation of workers, but rather coexisted alongside each other. This is obvious from how workers reacted to the attempts of their devaluation and accusation of smell. When telling these stories, they expressed anger or disapproval of the people who dared to shame them. “It is totally normal that you smell when you work. You smell like your work”, said K. K. Some of them also directly responded to ridicule. “I might stink, but my money does not”, said A.K. when her son reproached her with the common accusation. Moreover, workers would express pride in their work, underline the excellence of the products they made, and emphasize their decent social status meaning that they had financial independency or means to enjoy their leisure time. These stories again point to the complexities of Yugoslav society and the constantly changing position of female workers and workers in general. On the one hand, this is a society that publicly celebrated workers, industrial and physical labor, including women who performed it. On the other hand, there was also a continuity of old moral prejudices and traditional expectations of women, while tourism encouraged pre-socialist prejudices against “smelly” and hard labor. However, this does not erase the contribution of the previously mentioned state measures and discourses for the promotion of women’s and worker’s rights. On the contrary, the acquired worker’s empowerment and even the sense of entitlement to public recognition is obvious from the pride that the workers took in their work and their ability to reject attempts of ridicule or devaluation.

⁴ This shift in some cases included even market-oriented images and ideas of palm trees, luxury, exoticism and high class society (Yeomans 2010: 91).

SOCIABILITY AND COMMUNITY BUILDING IN THE FACTORY

Both Kvarner on Lošinj and Plavica on Cres functioned as simultaneous spaces of distancing and differentiation, but also of connection and communication between workers. However, the interactions between workers on Cres and Lošinj were not identical. Plavica on Cres functioned as a space of community building where differences between workers were more easily overcome, while the workers from Kvarner on Lošinj remained somewhat disparate.

When the workers from Lošinj narrated their life-stories, they talked more of hard work and of unfavorable and unfair working and living conditions, such as inappropriate accommodation, low wages, the pressure of the piece-rate production system, the incredibly long hours that they worked in the time of the fish season with no childcare provided. Some workers from Lošinj enjoyed a sense of sociability and community, but they mostly socialized with workers with the same regional background. In general, workers from Lošinj talked less about socializing and interacting with people outside of their group. Some of them did not even identify as part of a community or group. They would mention other workers, but did not regard them as comrades or friends, and did not mention any leisure, non-work activities or time spent with coworkers.

On the other hand, the workers from Cres mostly recounted stories of socializing, enjoying their life and having a good time. Their stories revolved as much around working time, as around their leisure time. The events they retold almost always involved a group of people and were experienced collectively. Apart from this, they regarded other workers with a spirit of comradeship or friendship. This does not mean that the workers from Cres did not draw lines of separation between them. They did, but they also communicated, spent time together, experienced moments of collective union and their different identities overlapped. They mentioned trade union trips and excursions, celebrations of official Yugoslav holidays, sport competitions, other workers' retirement parties, and weekly dances that were organized by all three factories on Cres. A whole range of various social activities that they mentioned were organized by the union and the factory, and so it is impossible to separate their private and working space. This type of organization of work and life is typical of the so-called "socialist sociability" (Bonfiglioli 2020; Cepić 2015) – a system in which "one's place of work becomes the centre of one's social universe" (Woodward 2003: 76). The place of employment in socialism, in this case the factory, did not only provide the income and social services, but also organized workers' lives and leisure time outside of the factory (Archer and Musić 2017: 47; Bonfiglioli 2020; Cepić 2015; Petrović 2019; Vodopivec 2015; Woodward 2003). However, not all workers had the same services and benefits offered to them, as not all factories offered the same working conditions. This may explain the difference between Kvarner on Lošinj and Plavica on Cres. The latter offered more services, more opportunities for socializing and better working and living conditions. How did that influence the working community?

The workers from Cres brought photographs to our interviews – something we did not experience on Lošinj, which can be partly explained by the fact that Kvarner operated in an earlier period. The photographs of the Plavica workers were presented as objects with special meaning and a role – they were placed in family photograph albums, which underlines the cannery's special place in the workers' biographies. We can treat these photographs as specific visual sources relating to the workers' interactions. Sociability, collectivity and closeness between workers is deeply present in them. They are different from traditional photographic depictions of fish cannery workers, usually all women who are standing or sitting still in a formal pose. These photographs, taken mostly in the seventies and the eighties, capture informal moments and include mixed groups of females and males, which is unsurprising considering the more liberal social setting of the period. Photographs taken in the factory often depict workers posing in a joking and joyful manner without even trying to present themselves formally. Scenes captured outside of the factory display different gatherings, festivities and celebrations, often with people singing, hugging, laughing, raising glasses, playing the guitar – in short, having a good time. What the photographs depict is a space in which the workers feel comfortable and relaxed with one another, a space of closeness and familiarity.



Photo 3. The workers of Plavica celebrating the Women's Day. Personal archive of Anka and Nikola Koljevina



Photo 4. Informal posing of the workers of Plavica. Personal archive of Anka and Nikola Koljevinina

There are also other examples that underline the differences between the workers on Lošinj and Cres. One such example is the difference in the reactions to the piece-rate system of production. The piece-rate system was always controversial, as it evoked different reactions, often resulted in “conflicts, tension, and competition” and provoked nervousness and fear (Vodopivec 2019: 120). However, the workers on Cres managed to tackle this issue by creating networks of solidarity and helping one another. Several female workers stated that they helped their sick colleagues who could not reach the norm, and a male worker said that men would also jump in to help women when needed. This was not necessarily the case in Lošinj. There, the piece-rate system provoked competition, with workers trying to prove themselves individually as being the best worker, which was a source of pride among the interviewed workers. This also created a case of rivalry and mistrust, as workers tried to outdo each other in the competitive game. Two workers separately remembered a mutual resentment directed at each other, while one of them remembered how the other toppled the cans she was arranging in order to prevent her from proving herself to be the fastest worker.

Separations between workers existed in both canneries, but these examples indicate that it was easier to traverse these lines and interact in the working and social contexts

of Plavica on Cres. This interaction was made possible through different socialist rituals and the organization of events that actively included workers in both organization and participation. In 1978, a Yugoslav-wide sport games event for workers in the fishing industry was held on Cres. A.K. recounted how a group of four workers got up at four in the morning to prepare food for the guests from different Yugoslav canneries. The team was composed of Đanina, Anka, Rozaria and Džamila. Đanina was a local and a white-collar worker in the administration. The others were blue-collar workers. Anka was from continental Croatia. I did not meet the other workers, but Rozaria is a local name, while the name Džamila most likely comes from Bosnia and is of Islamic background. This working team reflects the different regional, educational, class and ethnic background of the workers who worked together at an event that united them as representatives of the same factory. When recounting this story, A.K. did not even notice the differences in their background and was solely focused on describing the food they prepared: dried figs, *kroštule*, *rakija*. On certain other occasions, this working community's multiethnic background and the interconnectedness between different workers were noticed, with several workers attributing it to the Yugoslav idea of brotherhood and unity, for as D.M. said: "There was comradeship because there was Yugoslavia." It should be noted that this was observed by the workers who also talked about the differences and hierarchies between the locals and immigrant workers. At the same time, both social processes were present; on the one hand there were disparities and a slight tension, while on the other hand there was also comradeship, community, and solidarity. This also testifies to the complex nature of Yugoslav society that was characterized by regional, linguistic, ethnic, educational, and ideological differences and hierarchies; however it was also a society in which the discourse of national unity, workers' rights, organized events, and rituals had tangible effects in integrating the diverse population.

Several authors have claimed that the living and working conditions of the socialist factories provided a specific sense of community and of belonging to the factory (Bonfiglioli 2020; Cepić 2015; Vodopivec 2019). Vodopivec concludes that socialist factories would systematically establish factory communities and a sense of belonging as a consequence of the system, which was based on social security, a network of rights and responsibilities and reciprocal relations between the workers and the management (Vodopivec 2019: 214). Cepić writes that socialist trade unions and factories provided a means for socializing, which created friendships and strong social bonds (Cepić 2015). This created a specific "structure of feeling", writes Bonfiglioli, which connected factory work with "dignity, interpersonal connections, interethnic coexistence, solidarity" (Bonfiglioli 2020: 2). These studies show that working and living conditions affect people and the relationships between them, as well as build a community. This can be of crucial importance in mixed communities with a large influx of immigrants who need to be integrated, and where a sense of close community has still not been fully established. Although both the workers on Cres and Lošinj felt the sense of belonging to the factory, they did not interact in the same way. The workers from Lošinj expressed a sense of belonging to the factory based

on a sense of pride in their work, alongside their appreciation of the financial security and social rights provided by the factory. However, the workers from Lošinj did not form a close-knit interconnected social community, nor did they spend leisure time together. In contrast, the workers on Cres managed to form a community and interact with each other. It is reasonable to say that this was also because they had many more opportunities to do so, and that the reasons for the differing relationships between the workers are to be found in the differences in their working and living conditions, as well as in the different welfare and social policies in the two factories. These differences relate to the different time periods in which the factories operated, but also to the different management and roles that both factories had in their respective communities. In the next section I will present these differences in the factories' social roles and further elaborate on how the favorable working and living conditions impacted community building on Cres.

The working and living conditions depended greatly on the time period in which the factory operated. Kvarner on Lošinj was closed in 1974, while Plavica on Cres operated until 1996. This means that the interviews elicited testimonies spanning across two different time periods. The living standards in the sixties and the eighties were very different. Workers on Lošinj in the fifties settled into private accommodation without running water, or stayed at the house provided by the factory where they slept on the floor and shared one water faucet. Workers who came to the island in the seventies and eighties had different experiences, as all the necessary infrastructure was there and the housing standards were much higher. However, Lošinj's Kvarner had already closed by then. Similar observations were true of technical equipment and working conditions. It was to be expected that Kvarner was less advanced and harder to work at than Plavica, as Kvarner closed earlier and thus had older machinery. However, the working and living conditions did not depend exclusively on the time period, but also on the management and the social role that the factories played in the wider community. A.K., who worked in Kvarner and who switched to Plavica immediately after Kvarner's closure, reported that the working conditions were much better in Plavica that same year. This means that the level of technological advancement and investment in the factory also depended on other factors. Namely, there were big differences between the social function and role that both factories had in their respective towns. The Kvarner cannery on Lošinj was semi-automated and the management did not invest in technological development. As the former member of management, T.T., stated this was the case as they expected the factory to be closed sooner or later, because it was regarded as unsuitable for the planned development of tourism. Lošinj was investing heavily in tourist facilities, had built several hotels and was proclaimed a "champion of tourism" in 1987. In contrast, Cres only had one hotel and relied on its industrial infrastructure to feed its population. The fish cannery, textile factory and shipyard employed most of the people of Cres. The Plavica management thus invested in the factory: production was automatized and regularly modernized. The social position of the factories is also reflected in their location. Plavica on Cres was originally located slightly out of the town center, but it grew together with the urban infrastructure

and finally became a part of the town, in close contact with the town inhabitants and other industrial infrastructures. Kvarner was located outside of the town of Mali Lošinj, and workers traveled to the factory by boat. Contact with the town was thus limited, and also unwanted. While the smell and noise were criticized in both towns, these aspects seemed easier to tolerate on Cres.



Photo 5. The workers of Plavica posing together with the manager of the factory on the day of his retirement. Personal archive of Anka and Nikola Koljevina

While wages at Kvarner were stable but small, workers at Plavica evaluated their wages as very good. This was not only their subjective description, because the white-collar worker in charge of the workers' salaries confirmed that there was a period when wages at Plavica were higher than in the other factories on Cres. The workers stressed good living conditions, some took loans, while some acquired housing. A.K. and N.K. invited us into their apartment, which had been provided by the factory. It was a spacious flat in a building with a direct sea view, at a location that would today be almost certainly used for tourist apartments. They also recalled the relaxed atmosphere between workers and the management and took pride in remembering how they openly joked and talked with a manager. The women often stressed how they dressed nicely and insisted that I note their dresses in the photographs. They underscored their financial freedom in indulging in some modest luxuries, like eating out without thinking about the financial consequences. As A.K. said: "If you'd like to eat gnocchi, you could just sit, and order gnocchi." Their memories were a constant flow of "how good it used to be" stories, and, of course, this can be explained in

terms of a reaction to their present condition, their meager pensions, and the unfavorable working conditions they experienced after the nineties. On the other hand, we should not disregard these “feel-good” memories when thinking about sociability. Cepić studied why worker sociability heavily declined after the nineties. He noticed that the main, but not the only reason, was the heavily reduced role of trade unions. However, even when trade unions tried to organize an event, workers were no longer eager to participate. They stayed at home because most activities required some level of expenditure, and they felt uncomfortable and insecure, as regards their meager financial situation and their employment status. Security and stability concerning payment and employment proved to be important factors in developing social relations. The same can be said of the case of workers from Cres. Their stories about dressing nicely and eating gnocchi are stories of workers who felt good about themselves, who felt secure concerning their finances and who had a positive self-image. It is reasonable to suspect that the atmosphere of stability and reassurance ensured easier communication and an openness to socializing with “others” in a friendly spirit.

Finally, in order to test the mentioned connections and socialist sociability between working community in Cres, I would now like to present the case of a worker who did not share these “feel-good” narratives. L.K. started working at Plavica in 1957, earlier than the majority of the other interviewed blue-collar workers, and she worked there until her retirement. She is originally from Pernat, a remote village on the island of Cres, and was one of the local women who worked for Plavica before the arrival of immigrant workers. While telling her story, L.K. centered exclusively on her first working years, which were also the most difficult, and spoke of many daily sufferings and injustices. When she started to work, there was no permanent employment or work schedule. Women from Pernat would walk for more than three hours to Cres just to be dismissed by Plavica’s management, who said they did not need them for the following days. She recounted the hard physical labor, the freezing temperatures at the factory, the pain she felt in her hands after their having been soaked in cold water for hours, the fear of operating the old and dangerous machines, and her resentment toward the management who raised her piece-rate every time she met it. She also never received social housing she had hoped for. When asked about the period of the seventies and eighties, she responded that it was better, but then switched back to her most difficult years. “I would not wish this [life], even to a dog,” as L.K. summarized her working years. In spite of the bitter undertone of her memories, even she found her situation better than that of today’s workers: “Still, I think we had more rights than [the workers have] today. Back then, we would at least get something for the 1 May and 29 November, while today they do not get anything”. L.K.’s story resonates with the memories of workers at Korčula’s cannery in the late forties and fifties (Borovičič and Vene 2018), so we might suppose that this type of narrative, emphasizing the hardships and the brutality of physical work, while recognizing workers’ rights, is more typical of the earlier socialist period. Later periods brought permanent employment, newer technology and social services, which resulted in memories that speak more of socializing, having a

community and enjoying everyday life. However, L.K. did not mention any of this. So, was she also a part of the community on Cres? L.K. was obviously different, older than the other blue-collar workers interviewed, and she never mentioned alliances apart from her local friends. However, I spotted her on a couple of photographs with the other workers. She posed together with A.K., an immigrant worker, and with another local worker, as they were celebrating the retirement of the third local woman. On the same day that I interviewed L.K., a colleague came to visit – a local, who had been a technician at Plavica and A.K.'s husband. The connections between these three workers – two locals and an immigrant wife to a local – are based both on the local identity and their factory experience. This tells us that in spite of L.K.'s differences and the fact that she did not express the same sense of belonging to the factory community, she was not excluded from the factory's social network. She did not participate in the community to the same extent as the others, and maybe did not even feel that she belonged there. Yet she was not disconnected, had relations with others, interacted with them and had her place on the factory's social map.

CONCLUSION

This article explores the heterogeneity of the working community at the fish canneries of Kvarner on Lošinj and Plavica on Cres. The highly diverse workforce reflected particular characteristics of Yugoslav society. The first of these is regional and ethnic diversity. Secondly, there were differences created by modernization processes in society, especially the differences between the educated and uneducated women who possessed different types of knowledge and embodied different behavioral norms. The third set of self-perceived differences between the workers was based on a traditional patriarchal idea of female propriety, which existed simultaneously with the socialist idea of a working woman. Workers' narratives and visual material testify to the different and simultaneous processes, hierarchies, but also negotiations of these positions. There was distancing, but also affiliations, all of which depended on the various situations and interests. The article points to the diversity of the working-class women, but also to the possibility of close interaction and community building between workers. Stories from the two factories were compared in order to point identify different social relations. While workers from Kvarner in Lošinj remained somewhat disintegrated, workers from Plavica on Cres traversed boundaries more easily and formed a close-knit network and community. The analysis showed that this was due to the different working and living conditions in the two factories, which were a consequence of the different periods in which the factories operated, different roles that they had in the local community and different factory management. While workers at Kvarner endured harder working conditions and fewer social benefits, Plavica came close to the ideal of the socialist factory as the "centre of one's social universe" (Woodward 2003: 76), offering good working conditions and a whole range of activities

that organized workers' social life. These favorable conditions positively affected workers' interactions and the formation of close connections. The story of the two factories points to the complexities of Yugoslav industrialization and to the fact that there is no single story of Yugoslav industry and its main protagonist – workers.

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"A ŠTA SMO MI UOPĆE IMALE PRIČAT?": HETEROGENOST RADNICA I NJIHOVA INTERAKCIJA U TVORNICAMA RIBLJIH KONZERVU NA ISTOČNOM JADRANU

Članak ističe heterogenu društvenu strukturu radnica u tvornicama ribljih konzervi Kvarner na Lošinj i Plavica na Cresu. Heterogena radna snaga odražavala je neke karakteristike tadašnjeg jugoslavenskog društva. Najprije regionalnu i etničku raznovrsnost. Zatim razlike nastale užurbanom modernizacijom između pismenih i nepismenih žena koje su posjedovale različite vrste znanja te utjelovljivale drugačije norme ponašanja. Treći set razlika temelji se na tradicionalnoj patrijarhalnoj ideji o ženskoj primjerenosti koja je postojala istodobno sa socijalističkom idejom "žene radnice". Konačno, status rada i radnica ogledao se i kroz napetost između industrijskog rada i turističke imaginacije jadranske obale koja se kosila s visokim vrednovanjem fizičkog rada u socijalizmu.

Priče radnica i vizualni materijal svjedoče o društvenih hijerarhijama i razlikama, ali također o pregovaranju ustaljenih pozicija i različitim udruživanjima koja su ovisila o različitim situacijama i interesima. Svjedočenja iz dviju tvornica govore i o različitim mogućnostima društvenih odnosa, interakcije i gradnje zajednice. Dok radnice iz lošinjskog Kvarnera nisu uvijek tvorile čvrstu zajednicu, radnice iz creske Plavice lakše su prelazile međusobne granice i formirale gusto prepletenu društvenu mrežu. To proučavam kao rezultat različitih radnih i životnih uvjeta, tvorničke politike organiziranog slobodnog vremena i društvenog života, što su opet posljedice različitih perioda u kojima su tvornice radile, različitih uloga koje su imale u lokalnoj zajednici i vođenja tvornice.

Ključne riječi: radnice, društvena heterogenost, socijalistička društvenost, industrijska baština, tvornice ribljih konzervi