

doi:10.5559/di.25.1.07

Nila Ginger Hofman
WOMEN AND
CAPITALISM
IN THE CROATIAN
HINTERLAND
The Practice of Labor
and Consumption

Lexington Books, Lanham, Boulder, New York,
London, 2015, 141 pgs.

In *Women and Capitalism in the Croatian Hinterland: The Practice of Labor and Consumption*, anthropologist, Nila Ginger Hofman focuses on the socio-cultural forces that mediate women's participation in the labour (both paid and unpaid) and capitalist consumer markets. She does this by examining their everyday lives i.e., their experiences at work and with shopping. Hofman also explores the particular meanings and memories embedded in women's experience of the past. She examines how women remembered the socialist era and how they now participate and negotiate the capitalist present focusing on the spheres of earning and spending. She concludes that participants' narratives demonstrate that 'their day-to-day experiences exist somewhere between the cultivation of capitalist values and the legacies of self-managing socialism' (p. 117).

Fieldwork for this study was conducted in Zagreb in 2011 and 2012 during two field trips. Hofman dedicates this work to her research participants who provided her with their lived experiences and memories. Through the prism of gender, class

and power she examines how the borders between production and consumption are blurred in the everyday lives of Croatian women. Namely, the author includes women that belong to different socio-economic categories exploring what types of strategies they used and how differences in their educational backgrounds and ages revealed different experiences. Although she employs the intersectional approach (i.e., oppression is not experienced in the same way but is dependent on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, and social class, etc.) she did not include women from very vulnerable populations (that she defines as 'desperately poor women with little or no education' p. 21) in this study.

To begin with, Hofman outlines pertinent socio-political and legal conditions in Chapter 1 'The Capitalist Hinterland', to understand the labour and consumer practices of Croatian women that in turn helps frame the ethnographic narratives explored in her book. In this chapter, she also introduces the book's theoretical objective and argues that a practice-oriented framework is critical for understanding how working women negotiate the particular transformations of their social environment including their experiences in the labour and consumer markets. Further, she maintains that this is useful for demonstrating the complex ways in which labour and consumer practices are embedded in hegemonic institutions and discourses of power through the practice of everyday life (p. 17). In her discussion of fieldwork methodologies also covered in this chapter, she emphasises 'the importance of contact with ordinary Croatian citizens to capture what ordinary Croatian women felt about the social and political in their immediate environments' (p. 18). As already mentioned, Hofman recognises that Croatian women are not a homogenous entity and how differences in age, education and income have produced different registers in which post-war Croatia is experienced. She aptly acknowledges her own positionality in her deci-

sions about themes and choices about what to include or exclude in this book as well as the translation of women's stories.

In the following chapter, entitled 'Earning Benefits and Spending: the Socialist Era and Post-1991 Croatia', Hofman discusses the social, economic and legal conditions that have marked the lives of Croatian women. By providing a historic overview of socialist consumer culture, in this chapter she shows that consumer culture is not *only* located in capitalist societies. Besides providing a brief history of earning and spending in the past, she also discusses different benefits for worker's participation in the labour market during socialism (e.g., state-sponsored education and retirement provisions) and in the more recent past since Croatia's independence. She concludes that virtually overnight Croatia was transformed 'from a society of producers to a society of importers' (p. 41) which meant a radical change in production and unequal access to the labor market (p. 118).

In her third chapter called 'Consumption Then and Now', Hofman discusses the consumer practices of different generations of Croatian women (i.e., women who experienced socialism and who became adults in the post-socialist era). She explains the importance and prevalence of specialised crafts such as shoemakers and dressmakers, weekend homes, state owned vacation resorts and cross border shopping sprees during socialism. Contrastingly, she discusses particular strategies and negotiations women employ since the collapse of socialism 'where production is geared towards the masses and in a multinational context' (p. 72). She describes the new shopping malls, the an-

ti-mall phenomenon and other consumption strategies used by Croatian women in this chapter. Importantly, she shows how consumer choices reflect a women's position in society, experience of the past and ability to navigate work and spending in the current political economy.

In the fourth chapter, 'Work Cultures', Hofman focuses on women's experiences in Croatian and past labour markets during socialism as well as their experiences with unpaid household labour. She addresses the ways in which women are and were simultaneously advantaged and disadvantaged by these two different systems. Specifically, to provide ethnographic detail, she draws in depth on the working-life stories of two women as well as stories told by academics, women working in the profit sector and care-giving professions. Apart from competitiveness, lack of interpersonal relationships, more on-the-job-related stress as well as less family-leisure time she concludes that 'their working lives were impacting their leisure activities which in turn led to different consumer experiences' (p. 118).

In her final chapter entitled 'Labor, Consumption and the Lives of Croatian Women', Hofman returns to the importance of an integrated view of labour and consumption and places the cultural meanings of labour and post-socialist consumer culture in a broader context. She concludes that the totality of her participants' experiences are marked by nostalgia for the past; wants and desires for a better, more secure and prosperous future; and a general sense of dissatisfaction with the present (p. 117). Relying both on local knowledge and the interpretation of the historic circumstances and power dynamics embedded in a particular place as well as broader and international contexts, she summarises the consequences and key patterns that continue to inform women's practices in Croatia.

This book is a welcome addition to the literature in that it presents 'a unifying approach' to discuss production and con-

sumption that generally seems to be missing from the available literature (p. 8). I would highly recommend this book to those interested in the interrelationships between consumers and labour processes as this study offers a deeper understanding of how labour and consumption are interconnected in the practice of everyday life. By succeeding to document and make sense of the experiences and world views of those who lived in both socialism and in more contemporary times, Hofman effectively shows how women negotiate labour and consumer practices in the new millennium.

Lynette Šikić-Mićanović

doi:10.5559/di.25.1.08

T. V. Reed
DIGITIZED LIVES
Culture, Power and
Social Change in the
Internet Era

Taylor & Francis; Routledge, New York and London, 2014, 258 pgs.

In June 2014, Taylor & Francis, Routledge published the book *Digitized Lives: Culture, Power and Social Change in the Internet Era*. The book explores in-depth the impact of digital communication technologies on everyday life. It is divided into nine chapters, with the addition of *Preface*, *Conclusion*, *Bibliography* and *Index*. Each chapter dissects a different domain of digital technologies and its repercussions on economic, political and social spheres. In the *Preface*

the author explains the main differences between existing literature in digital technology and this book. Unlike other books with similar topics, the target audience for this book is not limited to scholars and academics. Instead, a target reader is anyone who wants to make sense of complex interrelationships between the digital and the real world.

In the first chapter, *How Do We Make Sense of Digitizing Cultures*, the author immediately emphasizes that the abundance of literature concerning digital technology is either dystopian or utopian. However, he asserts that in certain parts of the book he will also give his own position, and he often provokes the reader's mind with a myriad of questions instead of offering unequivocal answers. Much of the first chapter is dedicated to introducing some important definitions as a foundation for the rest of the book. First, for the purpose of the book he simplifies the definition of culture as: the values, beliefs and behaviors that are typical and defining of a group. Next, technological determinism is explained as a theory that stresses the technological side of the technology-society relation. In its extreme form, the author states, the theory argues that technologies are the single most important force driving human history and that there is an almost automatic cause-and-effect relationship between the kind of technology a culture has and the essential qualities of that culture. Technocultural analysis is the opposite of technological determinism; it argues that technologies like the Internet always have cultural assumptions built into them by culturally shaped producers.

In the second chapter, *How is the Digital World Made?*, after describing the historical development of the Internet, the author examines the non-technical decisions which are always inherently also social, political, economic and cultural and their impact on the production of the material objects in everyday use. He points out the immensely arduous conditions in which most digital devices are assembled.