

Zachary Austin Doleshal, *In the Kingdom of Shoes: Bata, Zlín, Globalization, 1894–1945*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2021. xvi + 272pp., figures, table, notes, bibliography, index. Paper; ISBN:9781487524449.

The story of how a small shoe manufacturing workshop established in 1894 in the nondescript Moravian town of Zlín (today in Czechia) evolved into a still-existing gigantic multinational concern is, simply fascinating. First, because the Bata Shoe Company managed to survive against all odds in the first half of the twentieth century: the dissolution of an empire, a global financial crisis, tariffs, boycotts, the premature death of its founder, and two World Wars. Second, and most remarkably, because in parallel to its economic growth, the company put in place a highly rationalized management system and ideology that extended beyond the realm of the factory grounds and was inextricably entangled to the design, function and use of urban space.

In his book, Zachary Doleshal, a clinical assistant professor in the Department of History at Sam Houston State University (Texas), does a fine job in contextualizing and explaining the motivations, inspirations and mechanisms that led to Bata becoming the total regulator of daily life in Zlín. Relying on a good yet concise selection of primary and secondary sources, Doleshal de-centres the history of the company away from Tomáš Baťa, its founder, and shows the influence of other actors in its development. With that, he avoids falling into the hagiographic and revisionist narratives that tend to dominate mainstream literature on Bata. Additionally, his original use of Tara Zahra's notion of 'national indifference' to describe Bata's approach to globalization in a context of growing nationalism is particularly compelling. Using this concept, Doleshal offers a new perspective on how Bata's people and practices moved "into and out of national identities" (13) yet kept a distance from them in order to become global while finding legitimacy locally — something he illustrates in the book's fifth chapter. Such corporate ethos I have identified in my own research on the urban planning and design of Bata company towns (Muñoz Sanz, 2021). By investigating Bata through the lens of national indifference, Doleshal offers a relevant framework to look at how industrial capitalism and managerial innovations relate with societies across national borders.

In the Kingdom of Shoes, the author does not shy away from discussing thorny questions around the company. The last two chapters of the book are dedicated to the situation of the company on the eve of and during World War Two. Most notably, he portrays the toying of Jan A. Baťa (the company's senior executive after 1932) with Italian fascism, and the ambivalent positions among company management during the Nazi occupation in World War Two. As Hugh Agnew argued, the conflict for preserving the national assets during the occupation made the line between "necessary [or forced] accommodation" and "treasonous collaboration" very thin (Agnew, 2014, 210). However, as Doleshal shows by contrasting Jan A. Baťa's attitude with that of Thomas J. Bata (the son of the company founder), taking an unambiguous indifferent position in the face of political events of momentous implications at the end of the day pays off. While the former was blacklisted and ostracised, the latter eventually regained control over most of the company assets thanks to his support for the allied cause from Canada. In a way, this rarely told story offers a cautionary tale for the business community which is very relevant in today's geopolitical situation.

Particularly interesting are chapters four and six, depicting the scope of the social engineering project that was an intrinsic element of Bata's system. By connecting the drive to rationalization, with education, gender, policing and control, Doleshal shows how certain gender roles were emphasized, if not enforced, as a way of strengthening the grip on the workers. For example, company housing relieved married workers of the struggles caused by housing shortages. Yet, at the same time, it firmly bonded employees and their family's future to obligations involving their performance and adherence to the company's ideals of social behaviour in and out of the factory. Though these depictions occurred in a peaceful republic, the author rightly contextualizes Zlín and Bata's link to larger totalitarian German and Soviet schemes of the time. What is especially successful in the book is the use of vignettes with real, personal stories of former workers and residents of Zlín that make tangible and situate on the ground the abstraction of these grand rationalizing schemes. In doing that, Doleshal offers a way to study the decoupling between the ideal workings of a corporation, and everyday forms of resistance to and evasion of imposed duties.

Notwithstanding the above, the work is not yet the definitive English language revision of the company's history and its globalization as presented in Bohumil Lehár's article "The Economic Expansion of the Bata Concern in Czechoslovakia and Abroad (1929-1938)" (1963), that the author would have desired (12). Certainly, this book very well details how Bata and the town of Zlín globalized. It delineates the paths that led different global trends of the time (namely: the rise of the middle-class society, Americanization, and scientific management) to form a unique synthesis in Zlín. What is still missing is a global history of Bata, offering a deeper understanding of the technical, political, and organizational dimensions that supported and conditioned its international expansion — the true scope of which is just hinted at *In the Kingdom of Shoes* and overshadowed by the history of the remarkable transformation of Zlín. That task necessitates further analysis on Bata's multinational structure, internal and external networks, and corporate governance. It also needs an exploration on the ways Bata altered economic, social and urban practices in local contexts, and vice versa, how those, in turn, had an impact on Zlín and the other nodes in the multinational network. Operating globally as a nationally indifferent undertaking implies a constant push and pull between centripetal and centrifugal forces claiming for hegemony on how to manage a business. In spite of the consistency of its ideology and societal ideas, Bata was a highly decentralized and networked corporation. Understanding the finer points of such a structure is fundamental: it was the one that allowed Jan A. Baťa and other top managers to imagine the possibility of transferring the headquarters abroad in 1938. Most importantly, it was key for the survival of the company after 1945 and its nationalization in Communist nations, after which Canada and then Switzerland became Bata's central node.

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