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## Women's Press in Socialist Yugoslavia – Mediaportrayal of Dobrila Smiljanić in the Women's Magazine "Bazar"\*

This paper examines the way in which the character of Dobrila Smiljanić was presented in the media discourse of socialist Yugoslavia. She was a fashion designer who, using motifs from the traditional thesaurus, created the fashion brand *Sirogojno style*, recognizable on the national and international markets during the second half of the 20th century. The work aims to: 1) recognize and distinguish fabricated media images of Dobrila Smiljanić; 2) point to the degree of harmonization of those (and such) media representations of the fashion designer with the official socialist idea of women and "female nature", and 3) discuss, in the context of socialist ideology, the manifest and latent role of the messages that were thus sent to the Yugoslav readers' audience. In a methodological sense, the paper relies on the data obtained from the analysis of textual and visual messages in the highly circulated Yugoslav women's magazine "Bazar" during the 1970s (issues no. 129–389), as well as the data obtained from a semi-structured interview conducted in 2014 with fashion designer Dobrila Smiljanić.

**Key words:** women, Dobrila Smiljanić, socialist Yugoslavia, media discourse, women's magazine "Bazar"

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## Женска штампа у социјалистичкој Југославији – медијски приказ Добриле Смиљанић у часопису за жене „Базар“

У овом се раду разматра начин на који је у медијском дискурсу социјалистичке Југославије приказан лик Добриле Смиљанић – модне креаторке која је, користећи мотиве из традиционалног тезауруса, створила модни бренд *Сиројојно сѝил* препознатљив на националном и међународном тржишту током друге половине 20. века. Циљ рада је да 1) препозна и издвоји фабриковане медијске слике Добриле Смиљанић; 2) укаже на степен усаглашености тих (и таквих) медијских приказа модне креаторке са званичном социјалистичком представом о жени и „женској природи“, те 3) размотри у контексту социјалистичке идеологије, манифестну и латентну улогу порука које су на тај начин слате југословенској читалачкој публици. У методолошком смислу, рад се ослања на податке добијене анализом текстуалних и визуелних порука у високотиражном југословенском часопису за жене „Базар“ током седамдесетих година прошлог века (бројеви 129–389), као и на податке добијене полуструктурираним интервјуом који је 2014. године вођен са модном креаторком Добрилом Смиљанић.

*Кључне речи:* жене, Добрила Смиљанић, социјалистичка Југославија, медијски дискурс, часопис за жене „Базар“

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The importance, role and characteristics of (electronic/printed) media in the context of (mass) communication is widely discussed, even at an interdisciplinary level. When it comes specifically to the so-called *women's press* – as a theoretical term and a social phenomenon – there is a whole range of different theoretical thinking, which consequently arises due to the complexity and multi-layered nature of this social phenomenon. Whether women's magazines were treated as 1) “a kind of speech of the culture of a society” (Vujović 2016, 5); 2) as “a specific system of signs within which certain messages are produced and articulated” (McRobbie 2000, 68) and/or 3) “as cultural texts, as works of increasingly concentrated media empires and as a means of sale to very specific groups of consumers by advertising” (Gill 2000, 181), the conclusion is that the ruling ideas about women depend a lot on their media representation. In other words, by (anthropological / sociological / psychological) analysis of the discourse

that dominates the women's press, it is not only possible to mark "what image of the world and the women they construct, but also the relation towards women, that is, how a woman is perceived within a certain culture" (Vujović & Prokopović 2018, 157). Therefore, according to Neda Todorović, the women's press "passed a thorny path from moralizing manuals in which women were preached – initially exclusively by men – about their obligations and strict, patriarchal rules of conduct, through combative, feminist and neo-feminist women's magazines that emancipated and made them aware and then back, towards a classic, women's magazine" (Todorović 2012).

Considering that in this paper the case study is one of the first Yugoslav women's magazines "Bazar", and socialism is the reference time frame, it is necessary, in the introductory part, to briefly point to the characteristics of the women's press in socialist Yugoslavia, i.e. in the period from the end of the Second World War until the collapse of the federation in the 1990s. Namely, a number of (domestic) authors dealt with the analysis of the women's press in socialism, primarily within the theoretical frameworks of feminism, culture studies and communication studies, as well as other academic disciplines that consider various gender, political and/or communication aspects of society as a whole (see Todorović 1987; Isanović 2007; Jarić 2013; Stojaković 2013; Vujović & Prokopović 2018; Bogdanović 2022 and others). So far, the contents of women's magazines have been discussed from different theoretical and methodological angles; we have been offered classifications of Yugoslav women's magazines; the characteristics of the readers' audience have been viewed; media characteristics of femininity have been discussed, the importance of women's press has been pointed out in the context of consumer society; it has been viewed as a product of popular culture; the categories of style / language / graphic equipment of women's press etc. have been analysed. Subliming the opinions of different authors, it is possible to draw the conclusion that women's journals (or sentimental ones, as Edit Petrović called them; see Petrović 1985, 53) in socialist Yugoslavia, as an important part of popular culture "had a great role in the construction of gender roles, in socialization, in the consolidation of stereotypes, following the ideological political discourse of a society at a certain historical moment" (Vujović & Prokopović 2018, 167). In other words, in the media discourse of socialist Yugoslavia, *the fabricated archetype of the Yugoslav socialist woman* modelled "female reality" and contributed to the formation of social consciousness, creating collective representations (see Petrović 1985, 55). In the theoretical part of the

paper, it is necessary to emphasize that the Yugoslav “press of the heart”, as Neda Todorović called the magazines addressing the presumed female audience, in terms of content, was conceived in such a way as to “cover” three basic areas – marriage (marital infidelity, divorce, sexual life in marriage), family (children and school, sterility, childcare, fashion for the youngest, family trips) and home (living space decorating, growing flowers, recipes) – meaning that the (main / minor) female characters were primarily assigned the roles of wives / mothers / housewives (see Petrović 1985, 53). Also, as some authors noted, in the media discourse of socialist sentimental magazines, there was a gradation of the *woman-role model*, which ranged from an employed and politically engaged woman in the first post-war years (see Stojaković 2013, 172), to a beautiful, likeable housewife taking care of the house, cooking, dreaming of love and bringing up children (see Todorović 2012) to a “super-woman” who was successful in all fields – at work and at home, as a wife, mother and housewife (see Jarić 2013).<sup>1</sup>

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In light of Stuart Hall’s theory of representation – which suggested that media texts contain a variety of messages that are encoded (made/ inserted) by producers and then decoded (understood) by audiences (Hall 1973; Hall 1980)<sup>2</sup> – this paper examines the way in which the image of Dobrila Smiljanić, a fashion designer from Zlatibor, was portrayed in the media discourse of socialist Yugoslavia during the second half of the 20th century. In other words, the focus is on the *encoding process* – the attention is directed towards the way in which the official socialist idea of women and “female nature” is represented in structured media texts with the aim

<sup>1</sup> Many theoreticians dealing with the media, women’s issues and/or socialism as an ideological construct, draw attention to the questionable way in which women, femininity and sexuality are constructed and presented in the public media discourse of socialist Yugoslavia. The general conclusion is that the media discourse of socialist Yugoslavia was undoubtedly very stereotyped, shaped and rooted in traditional patriarchal patterns. In other words, female characters in the Yugoslav media space were constructed on the basis of cultural, social and gender remnants of traditionalism that socialism – as a doctrine of equality – could not (or did not want to) eradicate in practice (Bogdanović 2022, 90).

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall’s theory of representation argues that within a media text, there will oftentimes not be a true representation of events, people, places, or history. That’s why this approach focuses on the scope for negotiation and opposition on the part of the audience. This means that the audience does not simply passively accept a text. A message “must be perceived as meaningful discourse and meaningfully de-coded” before it has an “effect”, a “use”, or satisfies a “need” (Hall 1973, 3).

to make interests of dominant classes/groups naturalize, common sense and acceptable to society as a whole.<sup>3</sup> The research included the so-called *women's press* which “plays an important role in the formation of gender identity, i.e. in the production of a woman's (in)active socio-economic role, and also in the production of femininity, which can be reflected in various segments of her life” (Moren 1967, 160). The corpus of the research included issues of the high-circulation magazine “Bazar” – the oldest women's magazine in Serbia – in the seventh decade of the last century, i.e., newspaper articles about Dobrila Smiljanić published in issues no. 129–389. The seventies of the last century were taken as reference for two reasons: it was the time when the fashion production *Sirogojno style* was clearly positioned both on the domestic and foreign fashion markets, and it was also the period when the figure of the beautiful, young, modern and groomed woman became dominant in the domestic media discourse (Bogdanović 2022, 91). In terms of methodology, the research was completed with the data obtained in a semi-structured interview that I conducted with Dobrila Smiljanić in 2014 in Ravni. The analysis of textual and visual messages in selected newspaper editions aims to 1) recognize and distinguish fabricated media images of Dobrila Smiljanić; 2) point to the degree of harmonisation of those (and such) media representations of the fashion designer with the official socialist idea of women and “female nature”, and 3) discuss, in the context of socialist ideology, the manifest and latent role of the messages that were thus sent to the Yugoslav readers' audience.

## DOBRILA SMILJANIĆ

Dobrila Smiljanić was born in Radobuđa (municipality of Arilje, Republic of Serbia) in 1935 in a wealthy rural family. After graduating from the Secondary School of Economics in Užice, she enrolled (as the first generation) the Higher School of Tourism in Belgrade, which she completed timely and successfully. At the beginning of the 1960s - as a scholarship student from Čajetina- she came to Zlatibor and started working as a secretary at the Tourist Association in Čajetina. After visiting the exhibition of handicrafts of Dragačevo weavers, organized in Belgrade by Rajka Borojević, she came up with the idea of applying the principle of cooperation to Zlatibor, the same one that was organized in Donji Dupac:

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<sup>3</sup> According to Stuart Hall, media became a vehicle for powerful groups in society to assert their cultural dominance and pursue their own interests. Power – through ideology or by stereotyping – tries to fix the meaning of a representation in a “preferred meaning” (see Simeunović 2009).

“Since winters in Zlatibor are long, I came up with the idea that woollen items could be made in an organized production system [...] Therefore, it should be knitting so that it would not compete with the Dragačevo weavers in production.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1962, in the Zlatibor village of Sirogojno, within the Agricultural Cooperative “Milan Smiljanić”, the factory of domestic handicrafts “Zlatiborka” was founded, with the aim of developing a production system without large financial investments, in which village women in their households would make useful items out of wool. At the invitation of Milosav Stamatović, the director of the Agricultural Cooperative, and the village priest, Mišo Smiljanić, twenty-eight-year-old Dobrila Smiljanić came to Sirogojno on July 1, 1963, and assumed the role of creator of unique handmade woollen items. The first works of Zlatibor knitters – which were highly rated by fashion experts – soon appeared on the domestic and international markets.<sup>5</sup> Collections of hand-knitted sweaters, jackets, dresses, scarves, caps and other clothing items were exhibited in all the republics of the former Yugoslavia, then in Paris, Brussels, Copenhagen, Dusseldorf, Moscow, Rome, Lyon and Munich (Bogdanović 2016, 18). The handicrafts of Zlatibor knitters, created upon the designs of Dobrila Smiljanić, were worn by Jovanka Broz, Nancy Regan, Barbara Bush, Raisa Gorbachev...

The creator of the *Sirogojno style* fashion production marked the Yugoslav fashion scene with numerous works of high artistic value. After only three years of work, in 1967, she was accepted into ULUPUS (The Association of fine artists of applied arts and designers of Serbia), which was a great success at that time. She was called an “artist with a wide imagination” and a “master of drawing and form”. The originality of her

<sup>4</sup> From a conversation with Dobrila Smiljanić, conducted on July 31, 2014 in Ravni.

<sup>5</sup> Distribution in the former republics of the SFRY went through a representative office in Slovenia, in Croatia through “Rukotvorine” from Zagreb, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina through “Folklor”, while the export of domestically crafted items to the foreign (European and Japanese) market began in the late seventies and early eighties of the 20th century through Jugoexport, Genex and Globe Hermes networks (Bogdanović 2016, 17). Due to the nature, structure and scope of work, in 1969, the local manufacturing plant separated into an independent work organization and became part of the large foreign trade company “Interexport” from Belgrade (Bogdanović 2016, 16). In 1979, “Inex Zlatiborka” grew into work organization Inex with two organisational units (“Sirogojno” – domestic industry with 125 workers and 2,000 producer-cooperators and „Zlatiborka” – light women’s fashion clothing with 200 workers). Pursuant to the Law on Companies, in 1986 the company became “Social Enterprise Sirogojno”.

idea was reflected in the unique models of sound colour and abstract form. As she stated, she had always found inspiration for her “fashion stories” in folk art, folklore and the nature that surrounded her:

“I started with a tree that had leafed out on a pullover. Then I put flowers on the sweaters, then sheep, the sun. I revived the world that surrounded me. I made collections with mushrooms as decorative motifs with the greatest passion. I could spend hours in the forest, observing them and styling them later. I took the details from socks, hats, scarves and transported them according to my feeling. My works depict folk art and folklore, but they are also a superstructure of the previous period.”<sup>6</sup>

The harmonious sublimation of all requirements resulted in it being included in many world editions, even those having a very narrow selection. Together with the knitters – at one point, there were over 2,500 of them in the production system of handmade woollen garments – she was awarded numerous national and international awards: the Golden Peacock (1972), the great international recognition of the AMA for her contribution to the haute couture of Europe (1977), the Order of Labour with a golden wreath (1979), Vuk’s award for the development of culture in rural areas (1980), the Golden Goat of the Belgrade Fashion Fair on two occasions (1983 / 1984), the Seventh of July Award (1987), the ULUPUS Lifetime Achievement Award (1997), UNESCO Lifetime Achievement Award (1999), Belgrade Fashion Week Honorary Award for Contribution to the Development of Fashion as an Art (2012), etc.

In 1998, Dobrila Smiljanić retired, while – respecting the already set high standards of material quality, production and design – the production and distribution of *hand-made* knitwear continued within the private company “Sirogojno Company” under the (new) name *Sirogojno Style*.<sup>7</sup>

## MEDIA REPRESENTATION(S) OF DOBRILA SMILJANIĆ

In the Yugoslav women’s magazine “Bazar” in the period from January 1970 to December 1979, i.e. in issues no. 129–389, a total of 6 articles featured the creator of the *Sirogojno Style* fashion production, namely: announcement by M. Savić on the “Golden Peacock” award, which was awarded to creator Dobrila Smiljanić for the “Ice and Fire” collection at

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<sup>6</sup> From a conversation with Dobrila Smiljanić, conducted on July 31, 2014 in Ravni.

<sup>7</sup> See more about Dobrila Smiljanić in: Bogdanović 2016, 21–41 and Jeremić 2019.



the Belgrade fair "Fashion in the World" in 1972;<sup>8</sup> an extensive article (as many as four pages) written by Z. Mutavdžić for "Bazar" readers about the development of the production system of handmade woollen garments, Zlatibor knitters and the creator of unique models;<sup>9</sup> an interview with Dobrila Smiljanić conducted by M. Savić on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of the production system of handmade woollen garments;<sup>10</sup> a report on the appearance of Zlatibor knitters at the XV Belgrade Assembly signed by M. Savić;<sup>11</sup> in the section *Embroidery and knitting*, in which, under the title "Autumn hit", the model of Dobrila Smiljanić from the autumn collection (vest and skirt) was shown<sup>12</sup> and a short announcement by V. K. which contained the information that a fashion show of woollen clothing was held in the Cooperative house in Sirogojno, as part of the celebration on the occasion of the opening of the textile factory "Sirogojno".<sup>13</sup>

Having insight into the content of the mentioned articles, i.e. by analysing the textual and visual messages, the following media representation(s) of the creator of the *Sirogojno Style* fashion production, Dobrila Smiljanić, can be singled out:

#### 1. Dobrila Smiljanić – A Successful Business Woman

In the media discourse of the Yugoslav women's magazine "Bazar", Dobrila Smiljanić was primarily portrayed as a successful business woman. The narrative of her journey to the top of fashion was shown almost cinematically: a beautiful, young and college-educated tourist worker, "after only six days of work experience in Zlatibor" by a combination of (to be revealed fateful) circumstances, arrived in the remote and underdeveloped Zlatibor village of Sirogojno, where she met local, mostly illiterate, women who had been making woollen clothing with great skill for generations. She came up with the idea of marketing their handiwork and decided to accept the role of creator of *handmade* clothing. In an

<sup>8</sup> "Dobrila and her knitters at the fashion fair", number 203, year IX, November 4, 1972, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> "I knit... You knit... They knit", number 283, year XII, November 27, 1975, p. 4-7.

<sup>10</sup> "Applause to beauty and imagination", number 324, year XIV, June 23, 1977, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> "Autumn collection of Zlatibor knitters", number 330, year XIV, September 15, 1977, p. 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> "In autumn when evenings get longer", number 331, year XIV, September 29, 1977, p. 78-79.

<sup>13</sup> "Imagination and wool", number 377, year XVI, July 5, 1979, p. 70.



interview from 1977, the fashion designer stated that “at that time it was not a flattering job for a girl with a university degree”, and that her mother “hid from their neighbours the facts about her daughter’s work for a long time”. As in every film story, the road to success was not easy – “in Sirogojno, she lived in a small room on the ground floor, where a washbowl and a jug of ice water were real comfort and luxury”. She longed, as newspaper articles reported, “for cooked food and the company of peers”. However, despite the circumstances, “nothing could separate the young woman from the work she plunged into with enlightened passion.” The effort soon paid off – Belgrade discovered her talent “in a spectacular way”. It became “chic to wear soft, nonchalant, grey or milk-white sweaters, light and soft as clouds.” Very quickly, Dobrila Smiljanić got into the “focus of interest of the entire fashion world” thanks to handmade woollen models that “have not only a fashionable, unique rate, but also an artistic value, for in addition to folk motifs and colours, the folk spirit has also been woven into them.” She began to receive (domestic and international) fashion awards for her work; “the whole world applauded” her creations and the word about the talent of the “self-taught” fashion designer from Zlatibor reached the famous Pierre Cardin, who offered her cooperation. The newspaper narrative also brings stories about her business trips to distant and little-known countries, such as Iceland, where she went to contract the continuation of cooperation regarding the procurement of materials (wool) for her models. The narrative about the business success of Dobrila Smiljanić reached its climax in the article by M. Savić “Applause to Beauty and Imagination” published in 1977 on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of “Inex Zlatiborka”. It explained the difficulties that accompanied the initiation of the handmade woollen garments production system, the energy the fashion designer put into motivating rural women to get involved in the organized production of woollen handicrafts, and the moment when “this capable and talented woman” reached the very top of fashion, won awards and plaques, organized fashion shows all over the country and abroad...

## *2. Dobrila Smiljanić – A Transformative Leader*

“If she appeared suddenly out of there, I don’t know if we could work” – this is a sentence of Zlatibor knitter Milunka Čaldović recorded on the pages of “Bazar”, indicating the role of a transformative leader assigned to the *Sirogojno Style* fashion designer in the media narrative of the exemplary socialist magazine. In other words, Dobrila Smiljanić was presented as a determined, brave and self-aware woman who transformed the local community within its economic, family and social relations. She did that

by motivating, inspiring, initiating and organizing a large number of rural women to “use a tradition, an extraordinary female skill of knitting, so characteristic of all our mountainous and pastoral regions” and become “the fashion force of Yugoslavia”, i.e. successful, appreciated and far and wide famous artists of their craft who “have neither a holiday nor a dream” due to the multitude of orders arriving from all over the world, who use their “golden hands” to make real artistic masterpieces from fine Icelandic wool and set fashion standards. “Although there was mistrust from all sides, condemnation at every step, but also support that encouraged and obliged, the women of Zlatibor woke up over time, moved and started a new life”, the creator of the fashion production *Sirogojno Style* stated in an interview with a journalist from the Yugoslav women’s magazine “Bazar” done on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the production system of handmade woollen garments. Talking about their skills in the media, taking them with her to fashion shows all over the country, taking them out on the catwalks to “get applause that has not been remembered on such occasions”, Dobrila Smiljanić brought out (conventionally speaking) Zlatibor knitters – mostly illiterate village women and until that moment exclusively related to the space of their own house/household – from the private sphere. In other words, the previous strict division into the private/public, i.e. female/male spheres began to fade, and Zlatibor knitters were slowly “entering” the public space – the one that was, until then, within the traditional value system, intended exclusively for men. Also, thanks to the fashion designer of *Sirogojno Style*, rural women started to earn “women’s dinar”, which consequently affected the relationships within the patriarchal rural family. In this context, through magazine articles, one could get a notion that there were certain changes in the established family relations, as mentioned, for example, the statement of Zlatiborka Kića Čaldović, who boasted that “she no longer has to ask her husband for money for detergent, but now she can buy it herself”. Dobrila Smiljanić was aware of her role of a leader – “and now, when I meet one of my elderly neighbours, I sometimes wonder if I would have the nerve to step back, to let them down”, wondered this capable and talented woman, visibly tired of hard day and work, as the journalist observed.

Thanks to the production system of handmade woollen garments, the entire region of Zlatibor transformed as well – *Sirogojno*, previously an undeveloped village without asphalt and electricity, became a fashion and tourist hot spot – for example, in June 1977, “several hundred guests arrived here, among them a team of famous Italian fashion designers headed by

Angelo Litrik, ambassadors of Finland, Italy and Austria, politicians and businessmen of Serbia, domestic and foreign journalists and artists” to see the latest *Sirogojno Style* models “at the source”. In the magazine articles, it is underlined that Dobrila Smiljanić was the only fashion designer who received an award for the improvement of the economy from the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, which was illustrated by dizzying figures – at the time of reporting (1977), “Inex Zlatiborka” gathered over 1,500 valuable and skilled knitters, who annually made tens of thousands of handmade clothing items from wool, that their manager Dobrila Smiljanić contracted jobs worth 18 million German marks for the current year, and that there was the projection that only models prepared for the international market would bring an annual earning of a million German marks.

### 3. Dobrila Smiljanić – A Wife and Mother

The third narrative is placed within the framework of traditional partnership and family relationships, within which Dobrila Smiljanić was assigned typical female gender roles – the creator of the fashion production *Sirogojno Style* was shown as *a wife* and *a mother*. Love, it is written in one of the magazine articles, “came unexpectedly” – Dobrila Smiljanić “met here (in *Sirogojno*, ed.) Dragoš Smiljanić, a director, born and raised in this region”. Her marriage and the birth of twins were presented as “fortunate circumstances”. It can be assumed from the magazine narrative that the fashion designer successfully reconciled professional and family obligations, although this was not explicitly emphasized in any of the articles.

## DISCUSSION

In order to provide an answer to the question of whether (and to what extent) the media portrayal of the creator of the fashion production *Sirogojno Style* is consistent with the official image of the Yugoslav woman at the time, it is necessary, to begin with, to briefly discuss the characteristics of the female characters in the narratives of the women’s magazine “Bazar”. Therefore, in the media discourse of the mentioned Yugoslav women’s magazine in the observed time frame, there were *main* and *minor female characters*.<sup>14</sup> Having insight into issues no. 129–

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<sup>14</sup> It is necessary to emphasize that the narratives of the women’s magazine “Bazar” also included *male characters* who are not the subject of the research on this occasion. In this women’s magazine, a special fashion section was dedicated to men – Men’s Bazar, as well as a series of articles in which some of the problems of modern men were reviewed (Bogdanović 2022, 94).

389 of the mentioned magazine for women, it can be safely concluded that in the media discourse of this socialist magazine during the 1970s, the image of a *beautiful, young, modern and well-groomed woman* was dominant. "Beautiful from morning to evening", "My war against age", "For your 40<sup>th</sup> birthday" – these are just some of the titles that point to the imperative of being *beautiful and young*. Therefore, it is not surprising that magazine columns are flooded by stories about beauty contests, cosmetic products, fashion tips, etc. The main characters are assigned several roles, three of which seem to be indispensable – they are wives, mothers and successful business women in different industries. It is noticeable that the mentioned roles in most cases exist in parallel – typical female gender roles (wives/mothers), represented through traditional partnership and family relationships that Yugoslav society inherited from the period that preceded socialism, were added to professionally recognizable and successful, young and beautiful Yugoslav women. In other words, at the level of ideology, the state consistently promoted the concept of a "socialist woman who can do anything, as opposed to the bourgeois concept of a woman whose social and personal life is limited by the social construction of her biology" (Jarić 2013, 411). Opposite the characters of city women, who find their place in the new consumer society, consume mass culture products, are sexually educated, etc., there are minor female characters – these are women who, like Zlatibor knitters, do not immerse themselves into the socialist standards of femininity, for whom the process of emancipation is slow and difficult, who project their future within the framework of the inherited value system, etc. (see Bogdanović 2022, 92–97). In light of the above, the character of Dobrila Smiljanić fully corresponds to the stereotypical depiction of the socialist "super woman" – she is a tall and beautiful young woman, a successful fashion designer, a transformative leader, but at the same time she is the wife of a director Dragoš Smiljanić and the mother of two children. Keeping in mind that the women's magazine "Bazar", like other socialist journals intended (primarily) for a female readership, was designed to "cover" three basic areas – marriage, family and home, it is interesting, in such context, to comment on the fact that the magazine narrative omitted the information that the fashion designer became a daughter-in-law of the widely known and extremely influential priest family Smiljanić by marrying Dragoš Smiljanić. Namely, her husband was the son of the priest Milan Smiljanić, an archpriest of the Serbian Orthodox Church, a participant in the Balkan Wars and the People's Liberation War, and a socio-political worker (the first minister of agriculture in the Government of the National Republic

of Serbia). Also, it was not explicitly emphasized how the fashion designer managed to balance the roles of successful business woman and mother/wife, and whether one of them (and which one) had priority. If we take a moment to look at the more recent newspaper articles written about the life and work of Dobrila Smiljanić, we can conclude that it was not so easy to balance all obligations, and that the fashion designer nevertheless gave priority to her profession:

“My children, the twins, have never forgiven me that sin of mine, my involvement in Sirogojno [...]”<sup>15</sup>

“Monday was the hardest for me when Marija and Milan saw me off to the gate. Their crying rang in my ears all the way to Sirogojno. Torn between my loves, it seems to me that I owe them all”<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, it seems that in the media discourse of the exemplary socialist magazine, the character of Dobrila Smiljanić was purposely integrated into the fabricated image of a Yugoslav woman who could do anything, who did not rely (and did not count) on other people's help and who successfully balanced all the roles assigned to her by socialist society.

Through the analysis of the discourse that dominated the Yugoslav women's press, it is not only possible to reconstruct the media image of a “new” socialist woman, but also the political aspects, socialist cultural values and new social relations that were propagated through the media by the ruling structure of socialist Yugoslavia. Specifically, if one looks at the entire narrative about the *Sirogojno Style* fashion production published in the women's magazine “Bazar” during the 1970s, it can be noticed that Zlatibor knitters were actually put first in the media plan, rather than Dobrila Smiljanić, who conceived and launched the entire production system of handmade woollen garments.<sup>17</sup> In some articles – such as the reportage by D. Protić about 750 rural women employed in

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<sup>15</sup> Popović Ivana, 2020. “Life and work of Dobrila Smiljanić, a fashion designer from Sirogojno: She pulled the most”, *Ona* October 4, <http://www.onamagazin.com/zivot-i-delo-dobrole-smiljanic-modne-kreatorke-iz-sirogojna-glavna-vuca-je-bila-njena/> (accessed March 2, 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous, 2021. “Sirogojno fashion designer: Handicrafts worn by Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, Raisa Gorbachev”, B92 October 1, [https://superzena.b92.net/zivotne-price.php?yyyy=2021&mm=10&nav\\_id=1930695](https://superzena.b92.net/zivotne-price.php?yyyy=2021&mm=10&nav_id=1930695) (accessed March 2, 2023).

<sup>17</sup> For more about media portrayals of Zlatibor knitters see Bogdanović 2022.

the production plant “Inex – Zlatiborka”<sup>18</sup>; the report by S. Erić about the visit of Jeanette Augier, the owner of the hotel “Negresco” in Nice, the village of Sirogojno and Zlatibor knitters<sup>19</sup>, and a short text about the oldest Zlatibor knitter, Persa Živadinović, signed by D. V. K.<sup>20</sup> – the designer of the unique models was not even mentioned, which is very surprising, given that it was primarily her merit that *handmade* clothing was placed on the domestic and international markets.<sup>21</sup> In order to understand the media levelling of the aforementioned female characters, it is important to point to the social and political context in which the exemplary female press was published. Therefore, it is necessary to keep in mind that one of the basic principles that socialism (even the Yugoslav one) propagated as an ideology was *equality* – “no one has or takes an advantage over others” (Cohen according to Maraš 2013, 387). In other words, *Sirogojno Style* fashion production is shown to correspond to the socialist principle: “everyone does their part of work / everyone contributes and everyone bears their share of obligations” (Cohen according to Maraš 2013, 386). Therefore, according to the media narrative, the character of Dobrila Smiljanić was very skilfully integrated into the socialist model of a society based on fairness and equality. For example, in the article from 1972 entitled “Dobrila and her knitters at the fashion fair”, the first sentence states that the creator Dobrila Smiljanić was awarded the Golden Peacock award for the “Ice and Fire” collection; then, she is quoted already in the second sentence saying that her closest collaborators Caka Delić, Bosa Rosić, Brana Planić, Milojka Stamatović, Milunka Čaldović, Jagoda Stamatović, Kosa Bojović, Jela Teodosijević, Mica Stamatović and a thousand other “Zlatiborka” knitters from Sirogojno won the prize along with her. A particularly illustrative is the example of reporting on the great business success of the fashion designer, which is actually described in an indirect way – the focus of the narrative is on Zlatibor knitters who “heard

<sup>18</sup> “Poor but skilled”, number 173, year VIII, September 11, 1971, p.

<sup>19</sup> “Madame Jeanette in the village of Zlatibor”, number 247, year XII, July 26, 1975, p.

<sup>20</sup> “The oldest knitter”, number 349, year XV, June 8, 1978, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> The production system of handmade woolen garments is mentioned twice under the name “Sirogojno” (without explicitly mentioning the name of the fashion designer Dobrila Smiljanić and/or Zlatibor knitters): in the article by M. Savić “She shows models, but does not wear them” (number 357, year XV, June 8, 1978, p. 8–9) in which the front page model Ljiljana Tica speaks, among other things, about the imagination and attractiveness of knitted models from Sirogojno, and the report of M. K. on the cooperation of “Inex Zlatiborka” with the Italian fashion association AMA (“From a button to a set”, number 343, year XV, March 16, 1978, p. 8–9).

that their Dobrila was in Paris, at Cardin's, and that he had ordered loads of coats and jackets for his boutique".<sup>22</sup> It is noticed, therefore, that almost all magazine reports, reportages and/or announcements emphasized the joint contribution of Zlatibor knitters to the development of the production system of handmade woollen garments, while the *individual* merits of Dobrila Smiljanić are not contested, but are placed in a minor media plan. On that note, some of the most frequently used constructions are "their models", "our fashion", "joint work" and the like. In other words, there is no media space given exclusively to Dobrila Smiljanić, on the contrary – they simultaneously write about the artistic inspiration of the *Sirogojno Style* designer, but also about the skill of Zlatibor knitters; they are "her knitters" and she is "their Dobrila"; they report the statements of the production system of handmade woollen garments director, but also of the peasants Mara Čaldović, Živka Čaldović, Kića Mitrović and other Zlatibor women... In the media discourse of the women's magazine "Bazar" during the 1970s, not only textual, but also visual messages prove that the character of Dobrila Smiljanić was fabricated in accordance with the socialist principle of equality (collectively at the expense of the individual) – the photo of the designer without knitters was published only in two magazine articles, as well as (indirectly) the statement of the designer herself:

"We have received numerous awards for our work. In Rome, we received an international award from the Association of Applied Artists of Italy AMA for our contribution to European haute couture. You've probably seen that big cup in the salon. At first, there was my name on it. However, the general manager of Inex called me on the phone and said: 'No way, you know what that would mean.'[...] Judita Stambolić also called me and said: 'Oh, Dobrila, don't ruin everything you've done so far, your name shouldn't be here!' Any personalization was inadequate. Then we asked the AMA institution to change it."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> An exception is the interview with Dobrila Smiljanić, which was published in the jubilee year of 1977 on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the production system of handmade woollen garments; in this interview, the focus in both visual and textual messages is placed on the fashion designer: in the photo accompanying the text, Dobrila Smiljanić is surrounded by models wearing garments from her current collection, while the textual narrative emphasizes the life and work of the self-taught fashion designer from Zlatibor, who (this time too) does not miss the opportunity to point out the contribution of Zlatibor knitters to the development of Sirogojno Style fashion production.

<sup>23</sup> From a conversation with Dobrila Smiljanić, conducted on July 31, 2014 in Ravni.



## CONCLUSION

Summarizing what has been so far said, it is noticeable that the media portrayal(s) of Dobrila Smiljanić in the Yugoslav women's magazine "Bazar" during the 1970s can be observed (and analysed) on two levels – *manifest* and *latent*. In the perception of the first level, the image of the self-taught fashion designer from Zlatibor is completely consistent with the official / desired / expected media portrayals of women / femininity in the media discourse of socialist Yugoslavia – the creator of the fashion production *Sirogojno Style* has been shown as 1) a successful business woman, 2) a transformative leader thanks to whom working village women (Zlatibor knitters) began their process of emancipation, and the region of Zlatibor to experience economic prosperity, and 3) a wife of a director Dragoš Smiljanić and mother of two children. In other words, Dobrila Smiljanić has been presented as a "super woman" – capable of successfully managing a production system of over 1,500 knitters, creating fashion that received "applause of the whole world", traveling, contracting jobs worth millions, raising her own children and being a wife. Despite all that, she was a tall, beautiful and well-groomed young woman, and in that sense she fitted into the socialist criteria of femininity, that is, the beauty ideals that the reading audience of that time aspired to. On the second (latent) level, it seems that the character of Dobrila Smiljanić has existed in order to level social differences (which, in an ideological sense, Yugoslav socialism aimed for) in accordance with the basic principles of socialism (primarily equality and solidarity), and in the magazine narrative of the exemplary women's magazine, the university-educated Dobrila Smiljanić has been shown "side by side" with illiterate rural women creating widely famous fashion, presenting herself to the audience from the catwalks together with burly, scarfed peasant women, with whom she was "working together until middle of the night, believing to have made the best collection so far"... Nothing surprising, bearing in mind that in all socialist countries (even in SFR Yugoslavia) the media/media spaces were used by the ruling structures as extremely effective instruments of regime propaganda to promote their ideological programs (see Bogdanović 2022, 89). Thus, the character of Dobrila Smiljanić – a talented and hard-working fashion designer – was fabricated with the aim of propagating the political views of the ruling Party, promoting socialist cultural values and regulating new social relations in Tito's Yugoslavia.

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