



Stiletto Socialism

Social Class, Dressing Up, and Women's Self-Positioning in Socialist Slovenia

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how women interpreted everyday clothing practices and decoration of their body and how they positioned themselves in different social milieus during the period of socialist Slovenia (1945–1991). The new socialist middle class in Slovenia and Yugoslavia was defined by participation in a lifestyle, created and expressed through consumption and behaviors that turned everyday life into a symbolic display of taste and cultural distinction. This article shows the ways women engaged in self-expression and negotiated dressing up. It analyzes the self-emancipation of women as they challenged the boundaries of social hierarchies on the basis of self-transformations, pointing out the active role that women had in their self-positioning in social categories.

KEYWORDS: clothing habitus, gender, rural-urban, self-positioning, social distinction



Following the communist takeover in Yugoslavia in 1945, a new middle class emerged with sufficient economic and cultural capital to be spent on material goods. This new class was defined primarily in cultural terms and less by socioeconomic factors through participation in a lifestyle, created and expressed through shopping and other behaviors important for their power to symbolically communicate a sense of belonging in a modern and cosmopolitan society.¹ The citizenry in socialist Yugoslavia defined itself in terms of its modernity rather than along familiar class categories.² Consumption and leisure became the central foundations of social well-being, together with social welfare in the form of healthcare and social insurance, and women served as the domestic bearers of socialist modernization with the mission of transforming the rest of their family members into modern citizens.³

Clothing was one of the areas in which the identity and loyalty of citizens toward the state were negotiated. This article understands clothing as the holistic external



appearance of a person, together with body decoration, and therefore defines it as a system of body modifications and/or accessories, displayed by a person while communicating with others.⁴ On the basis of objects such as clothes, we learn about the nature of our relationships, because fabric is above all a form of everyday experience.⁵ This article explores how women interpreted body decoration and how they positioned themselves in different social milieus in socialist Slovenia, a republic within Yugoslavia. Drawing on oral interviews, the article argues that many Slovenian women found means of self-expression, negotiation, and resistance in everyday clothing practices and decoration of the body.

Socialist Yugoslavia was formed in the aftermath of World War II in 1945, and it consisted of six republics: Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, and Montenegro. This study focuses on Slovenia, Slovenian women, and their dress, situated within the wider context of state policy, the economy, and the ideology of socialist Yugoslavia. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Yugoslavia established administrative state socialism, but the period after 1960 introduced a more liberal and decentralized political system that enabled far greater liberties for Yugoslav citizens than experienced in the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact states. After 1960, Yugoslavia developed more open relationships with the capitalist world regarding civil liberties and economic and cultural exchanges. Open borders and the relative ease of travel to the West for ordinary citizens, along with regular cultural and economic exchanges with the Western world, including Western credit, were distinct characteristics of Yugoslav socialism.⁶ In this context, Slovenia occupied a privileged position in terms of access to products from Western capitalist countries due to its borders with Italy and Austria. As a result, Slovenian consumerism developed to a greater extent than in other Yugoslav republics. Furthermore, Slovenian policy favored more liberal economic-political discourses, especially regarding a larger role for the market and the decentralization of power. Nevertheless, certain taboos in society remained unchanged, as did the leadership of the League of Communists.

To show the complex interplay between various social divisions of gender, class, and rural-urban origins it is necessary to employ an intersectional approach. The concept of “intersectionality” represents the diversity through which women and men of different class, racial, ethnic, national, sexual, and religious positions negotiate power and equality.⁷ When examining seemingly fixed categories, such as class and femininity, we must pay attention to their cultural construction, especially how respondents understand, negotiate, and embody ideas and practices. In this way, we challenge narratives about the assumption of universal subordination of women and patriarchy. As historian Jill Massino notes, official socialist politics, based on the definition of gender, promoted mass industrialization and party loyalty, but gender was also a prism through which people interpreted, negotiated, resisted, and sometimes ignored state discourse.⁸

The narratives of female respondents in this study reveal the relationship between shame and self-respect, as postulated by Beverly Skeggs.⁹ According to her, respectability embodies moral authority and is one of the key mechanisms by which some groups were “Othered” and pathologized. Lack of respectability leads to a loss of social value, moral authority, and legitimacy.¹⁰ Feminist writers have also engaged

with the sociology of emotions to explore gender and class.¹¹ Such authors argue that shame results from an individual's failure to achieve social standards, such as how the body should behave in public.¹² Likewise, feelings associated with class, such as envy, resentment, compassion, contempt, and pride, are evaluative responses to particular properties of class inequalities and relations.¹³ Class inequalities mean that the "social bases of respect," in terms of access to valued ways of living, are unequally distributed, and that shame is likely to be endemic to the experience of class and concerns about respectability.¹⁴

This analysis takes into account dress and its symbolism in connection with concepts of gender, social background, consumption, the body, and emotion to enrich our understanding of the social conditions that facilitate or constrain women's agency. Starting from the argument that gender and class intersect, we explore the complex interdependence between the social position of an individual and the freedom of acquiring new identities. More precisely, we examine the ways women found means of self-expression and negotiation in everyday clothing practices and consumption of cosmetic products, and how these practices resulted in resistance to normative rules and values. Also, we assess how the self-emancipation of women challenged the boundaries of social class and social hierarchies on the basis of self-transformations.

This article does not aim to reconstruct the socialist past, but to provide a different perspective on it, filling a gap by focusing on the cultural and social experiences of people's lives rather than political systems. Methodologically, the article employs oral history research, incorporating subjective interpretations of women. Oral interviews provide a view of the transmission of values over generations, giving better insight into cultural patterns and emotion.¹⁵ The value of the qualitative approach used in this study of gender and class is that it raises the potential to identify economic, moral, symbolic, and cultural narratives of self and others, and to explore questions of belonging. Memory is always a reconstruction and representation of the past with an active production of meaning by interviewees, which is encapsulated here as accurately as possible.

Ethnographic fieldwork was performed using two approaches: participant observation of interviewees who lived their active life during socialism, now living in a retirement home; and in-depth unstructured interviews with thirty of those women. We will focus on a life biography of one interviewee, Sonja, a shopkeeper born in Zgornji Kašelj near Ljubljana in 1928, but we will also include discourses of others to provide a broader context.¹⁶ Interviewees were selected on the basis of their age and gender, place of origin (urban or rural), and occupation to provide a diverse sample. Interviewees shared a common *Slovene ethnic* identity. They came from villages and towns and different social backgrounds (although mainly working-class and middle-class professionals). Sonja is just one of the Slovenian women who belonged to the first Yugoslav generation, which was shaped by the socialist modernization process and significantly marked by free access to education and full-time employment for most women. Sonja's story and her experiences are representative of the opportunities available to the generation born before World War II, who share certain common understandings, meanings, and processes.

Historical Background: The Different Phases of the Yugoslav Socialist System

The period of socialism in Slovenia and Yugoslavia consisted of several phases that differed in economics, politics, and the stage of consumer development. In the first years after World War II economic policy favored the development of heavy industry to the detriment of the production of consumption goods. After dispute with the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslavia increasingly turned to the West—to American jazz culture, Hollywood production, American culture portrayed through rock music, and the idea of freedom of choice in modern supermarkets, which gave Yugoslavs a different perspective on how to spend their leisure time.¹⁷

After 1954, significant changes related to the new economic orientation occurred, as the state abandoned the policy of one-sided industrialization and put greater emphasis on standard of living. The Yugoslav regime embarked on a number of reforms, such as the retreat from central planning toward market socialism, greater consumer orientation, and openness to the “imagined West.” The images of the dream world of the West created high hopes and expectations for a better future and social well-being.

Households in socialist countries began to modernize in the early 1960s, when washing machines, refrigerators, televisions, and other electronic devices became more widely available in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. In 1965, further economic reforms reduced the role of the state in the economy and accelerated the development of market socialism. By the mid-1960s, a new five-year plan (1966–1970) focused on increasing personal consumption, modernization, and freedom in the marketplace.¹⁸ The basic tenets of socialism were modesty and sustainability in consumption, which had to be “cultural,” and part of the process of creating the new socialist man.¹⁹

In contrast to the shortcomings that characterized socialism in the Soviet Union and in other Eastern European countries, Yugoslav socialism tried to provide its citizens with comfort in their daily lives.²⁰ As stated by Malgorzata Fidelis, mass consumption in the 1960s was part of a pan-European trend fueled by the Cold War competition between East and West.²¹ Socialist Yugoslavia differed from other Eastern European socialist countries in terms of personal living standards, travel, and shopping abroad. There were also substantial differences among the state socialist regimes in how their political, economic, and other institutional mechanisms operated: much less uniform and harsh in Poland and Yugoslavia, compared to the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Romania.²²

The introduction of the free market system in Yugoslavia allowed the development of a lifestyle that was more similar to the West than to other Eastern European countries. With the rapid escalation of the Yugoslav standard of living between 1960 and 1970, the belief that quality of life was a right became more widespread.²³ Wearing fashionable clothes or perfume—once the preserve of the rich and privileged few—seemed like normal aspirations for many in Yugoslavia by the 1970s, as “common” or “democratic luxuries” became widely available in stores.²⁴

The general tendency to equate modernity with triumphant liberal capitalism is problematic. Such an approach is an extension of an older Western Cold War logic,

which characterized state socialism “as essentially a culture of surveillance, privation, economic management and colourless lifestyles.”²⁵ In addition, as David Crowley and Susan Reid note, mass consumerism was the defining aspect of modernity in the capitalist West; therefore, it was assumed that communist countries could not, by definition, be modern and consumer societies.²⁶ In this article, I use “modernity” not as a normative category, but as an analytical framework to describe the profound transformation of traditional agrarian societies into fully developed industrial ones. Specific to socialist modernity was a high degree of correspondence with general principles of Western modernity such as secularization and the belief in the transformability of society, combined with an emphasis on both the sciences and the communist worldview, linked with the notion of a centrally planned economy.²⁷

The golden age of Yugoslav socialism ended in 1979 due to an economic crisis, when a decline in living standards occurred and the supply of goods decreased.²⁸ Immediately after the death of Josip Broz Tito, the president of Yugoslavia (4 May 1980), the currency devalued by over 30 percent, inflation skyrocketed, and Yugoslavia was unable to manage its international debt. The disintegration of the state in 1991 followed these economic and political crises.

Tidiness, Fashion, and the Search for the “Right Measure”

Clothing is a medium through which women can express and create their own self. Thus, a particular garment can increase a woman’s sense of self-confidence or vice versa.²⁹ Tidiness expresses the individual, her/his knowledge, and competences, and depends on how the individual perceives herself/himself. Scholar Anthony Giddens argues that individuals in late modernity perceived the self as a self-reflective project in terms of their own biography, which means that the subject is what the subject makes out of herself/himself. All responsibility for her/his own transformation falls on her/him, so she/he is forced to find what will best serve her/him in the process of self-construction.³⁰

For newly middle-class Slovenians, the phrase “to tidy yourself up” directly linked the appearance and behavior of a person. Tidiness represented the “inner” state of a person, her/his morality, which manifested itself in external appearance. Being tidy meant that you behave appropriately and that you are socially respected, while not being tidy signaled negative individual characteristics such as carelessness.³¹ Sonja pointed out that she dressed for others who might gossip about her if she was untidy: “Either you were beautifully dressed or dressed like a gypsy.” To say that someone was “dressed like a gypsy” meant that he or she was dressed poorly, untidily, and insufficiently. Untidiness as a contrast to tidiness carried an extremely negative connotation and was linked with people on the lowest social scale.

Many normative rules existed in socialist Yugoslavia that reflected the morals associated with the body and clothing policy. Books on good manners in Yugoslavia, such as *Ilustrirani bonton & protokol* (Illustrated good manners & protocol), reflected existing social relationships and prescribed rules for women on how to dress tidily.³² Purity, appropriateness, and modesty were extremely important, and dress needed to

be functional but not extravagant, feminine but not vulgar. As Cas Wouters points out, “good manners” must come “naturally,” automatically, and become deeply rooted “second nature,” otherwise they have no effect.³³

According to Pierre Bourdieu, women contribute to the reproduction of symbolic capital in the family, which they display through the cultivation of their appearance, and are therefore responsible for being pleasing in their appearance.³⁴ Unlike her mother, Sonja wore makeup, but only later when she moved away from home: “Not because I would fool around [*afnāti se*], but because I wanted to look tidy. My parents did not allow me to wear make-up because they said that it would mean I was fooling around.” “To fool around” carried a negative connotation and denoted somebody’s desire to stand out from the ordinary crowd of people. The exaggeratedly decorated exterior of women was directly related to their behavior, which was allegedly artificial and unnatural.³⁵ Respondents often mentioned that while dressing up, in the process of “becoming tidy,” you had to find the “right measure,” which included tracking trends and following expected conventions, but excluded excessive deviations in appearance. When using makeup, for instance, women had to be extremely careful to catch the “right measure” and not exaggerate, as according to interviewees improper makeup use could result in being labeled as prostitutes.³⁶

Already after World War I, prescribed norms for women advised modesty, merit, tidiness, and decency. The use of cosmetics, especially lipstick and powder, became a symbol of vanity and the decay of moral and social norms.³⁷ Danica, a teacher who was born in 1927 in Most na Soči, a small town in West Slovenia, close to Italy, recalled how she resisted her future husband, a Communist Party member, who did not want her to wear makeup:

It was considered bourgeois if you wore makeup. In 1945, when Filip began to date me, he was in the partisans and other men said to him: “Your Danica is using lipstick. It would be better if she would not.” He walked past the bathroom while waiting for me. I quickly applied a little powder in secret and waited for him to pass by. He once mentioned something to me, therefore I gave up wearing it for a while. After 1952, when we moved to Rome, I wore makeup all the time.

According to Mary Neuburger, the socialist state tried to emancipate women of their bourgeois past and at the same time ascribed them an active role as participants in the economy and politics. Makeup, beautiful haircuts, and clothing were seen as desirable elements in the process of building socialism, but only if beauty was expressed within socialist terms.³⁸ Under socialism, decorating the body with makeup and clothing could be a way of compensating for the mistakes of Mother Nature; however, physical beauty could never replace internal beauty, represented by intelligence.³⁹ These expressions were also influenced by deeply rooted negative attitudes toward cosmetics, derived from the Catholic Church, according to which the use of cosmetics was considered a means of changing God’s work, a symbol of pride and temptation.⁴⁰ Catholicism influenced traditionally Catholic parts of Yugoslavia (i.e., Croatia, Slovenia, and parts of Bosnia) and values regarding feminine appearance.

As David Crowley and Susan Reid argue, during the post-Stalin period, from the mid-1950s onward, consumerism and a moderate fashion consciousness were tolerated and even promoted with the intention of signifying modern socialist life. During the late 1950s, regimes abandoned harsh repression in favor of more subtle ways of controlling their citizens, and elements of Western modernity gradually penetrated everyday life. Fashionable dresses provided the socialist woman with a brief experience of Western-type modernity, as they respected a woman's individuality and expressed her personal aesthetics, while reaching out toward international trends.⁴¹

Beginning in the mid-1950s, fashion and beauty, once labeled as bourgeois frivolities, began to serve as symbols of socialist modernity, with consumers becoming a tangible medium through which socialist leaders legitimized their rule. By cultivating their looks, Slovenian women created their own idea of physical attractiveness and also adopted Western concepts of women's beauty standards. Standards of fashion and beauty were represented by a highly urbanized and elegant Western dress, which served a precise ideological function in the domestic fashion press. It was Yugoslavia's shortcut from postwar poverty, technological backwardness, and the prevailing rural-ity into an aspiration for a highly developed and urbanized socialist society.⁴²

The late 1950s and early 1960s in Eastern Europe were a period not only of political and cultural liberalization but of economic and social modernization. Style, a notion that had been suspect under Stalin, became an urgent issue, together with questioning which forms of dress, furniture, and housing as well as fine art could give shape to modern socialist life.⁴³ According to Djurdja Bartlett, official discourse during the 1950s borrowed aesthetic categories from "petit bourgeois good taste" to dilute the asceticism of proletarian style. Socialist good taste combined prettiness and elegance, two categories appropriated from bourgeois good taste, with modesty and functionality. It was produced through the hybridization of their mutual characteristics, like modesty, appropriateness, and comfort.⁴⁴

The message of socialism increasingly asserted that women no longer had to sacrifice beauty and femininity for success. Perfumes, cosmetics, and fashionable clothing became increasingly available to consumers in the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and, of course, Yugoslavia. They were necessary for the successful socialist construction of the modern socialist citizen.⁴⁵ By the late 1960s in East Central Europe, everyday fashion was embedded in an unofficial, faster-moving modernity. Everyday fashion involved numerous individual acts of appropriation through which socialist women indigenized and adjusted Western fashion trends to their needs.

With the help of cosmetic products, Slovenian women tried to emphasize their femininity, most often spontaneously. However, they were split between needs and desires and their capabilities. Sonja pointed out that she had followed fashion trends while always watching to "catch the right measure": "We followed the fashion musts very well, because otherwise we stood out. If we did not stand out at least a bit, we were like the highlanders, but we also had to pay attention not to stand out too much." Meta, an accountant born in Domžale near Ljubljana in 1928, recalled a dress that annoyed her partner, who believed that she stood out while wearing it: "It tied with straps on the neck and Ante said: 'You will not wear this.' I said: 'Why not? I don't

mind, but if you do, then look away.” In spite of his disagreement she decided to wear the dress, resisting normative rules of dressing.

Slovenian women acquired cultural capital as they learned how to dress appropriately at the workplace. From the knowledge of what “goes together” and how to “catch the right measure,” the respondents obtained a sense of comfort, which is more than just the feel of a fabric. It is the need to feel comfortable, in the sense of appropriate, under the gaze of others, within a public situation.⁴⁶ Interviewees employed in a company’s secretarial office faced their director’s ban on wearing trousers at work, especially jeans, because they represented a garment that contrasted with the expected beauty and elegance of the workplace. Vesna, an administrator at a construction company, born in Trzin near Ljubljana in 1955, remembered that her coworker came to work in jeans and encountered the director’s disapproval: “He told her in front of everyone: ‘Miss, you have half an hour to go home and change your clothes. You can wear normal trousers or skirt, but nobody will work in jeans as long as I am director.’ She blushed from embarrassment, turned around and went to change her clothes.”

Resistance to normative rules and values is noticeable among the younger generation of women, who, unlike Sonja’s generation, opposed their director’s ban on wearing certain clothes to work. Darja, an employee of the Tourist Association of Slovenia, born in 1954 in Ljubljana, recalled that she and her colleagues tried to challenge their director’s authority to dictate what they wore: “I said: ‘When you will give us money, we will dress as you dictate, but until then, we will dress in our own way.’” Darja remembered the director’s response when she and her coworkers nevertheless wore trousers at work: “He was grumbling: ‘Why are you wearing trousers if we agreed they are not allowed?’” She explained the director’s ban by referring to his “old views.”

Women also learned how to dress from women’s magazines, which shaped morality and gender roles while spreading ideas about financial independence, the pursuit of nondomestic activities, and the cultivation of femininity through fashion and cosmetics. Between 1945 and 1953, the image of women as mothers, heroines, and workers prevailed in the socialist press. The *partizanka* was the “new woman” in which the revolutionary and the traditional were reconciled.⁴⁷ The superwoman portrayed in the socialist press was a worker who transcended working norms while maintaining traditional feminine qualities, such as sacrificing for others. Women’s magazines from that period (*Naša žena* [Our wife], *Glas* [Voice], *Žena u borbi* [Woman in combat]) represented women as combatants, nurses, workers, and people’s heroes.⁴⁸ In the modest media market of the 1950s, there were only ten major weekly periodicals with a combined circulation of approximately 472,500. Those numbers increased by 1965 to thirty-nine weekly publications with a combined circulation of almost 3.4 million copies. This expansion was all the more noteworthy for its tendency to shift the orientation of the Yugoslav media away from “hard news” with political coverage toward entertainment and “lifestyle” features, some of them directly connected with the emerging consumer culture.⁴⁹

During the 1950s, images of the woman constantly working to meet socialist goals was replaced by a consumer who looked after her appearance. Founded in 1953, the Yugoslav fashion magazine *Svijet* [World], one of the most popular Yugoslav women’s fashion magazines, strongly endorsed Western fashion trends and appropriated its

aesthetic from Western magazines such as *Vogue*, which depicted the luxurious lifestyles and latest trends of Western fashion. Since the socialist civilization process manifested itself through dress and good manners, women became the main recipients of the new taste.⁵⁰ Consumption had become, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, a near constant feature of Yugoslav mass circulation periodicals, such as *Svijet* and Slovenian magazines such as *Jana*. In those magazines, modernity was “in,” and fashion ranked as a prime index of modernity.⁵¹

The public discourse presented in the Slovenian newspaper *Sodobno gospodinjstvo* [Modern household] in the 1950s advised women to use newly gained time for participating in public life to achieve full social equality with men.⁵² However, the advertisements in the Slovenian women’s magazines changed in the 1970s, instructing women instead to achieve higher standards of cleanliness in their homes, to reallocate their saved time to provide better care for their children, be better housewives, and improve their appearance through the use of cosmetics, fashionable dresses, and hairstyles.⁵³

Interviewees likewise emphasized that the most important element of the tidiness of a woman was the coherent whole, which they described as “being tidy from head to toe.” It means that a woman had a harmonious overall appearance, which entailed fashionable hairstyle and makeup and also the clothes and accessories optimal for her lifestyle. Miranda, born in 1941 in Most na Soči, pointed out the need to understand the complementarity of objects for body decoration, which had to form a coherent whole: “If you have a fur coat, you must have everything, a proper hairstyle, matching shoes, everything, otherwise a fur coat looks bad on you. The Italian women wore high heels, and they also had gold jewelry. They put a lot of effort into their appearance. Also, they were convinced that they held more respect and importance in society than others.” We can associate this with Grant McCracken’s concept of the “Diderot effect.”⁵⁴ A “Diderot unity” takes into account the unity and complexity of consumer goods that supplement each other in cultural consistency. Objects have to mean something together, otherwise they are meaningless. It is precisely the Diderot effect that can be the cause of transformation, as individuals hope that by transforming the material world they also transform themselves.

Clothing is not only an object of material culture, reflecting aspects of the self, but a means which through a particular material quality is cocreated in the identity of a person. The feeling for what “goes together” is based on a specific sense of social order by the individual.⁵⁵ Because Miranda did not live in a rich villa or wear gold jewelry and high heels, in her opinion the fur coat did not match with her overall dressing style, which reflected her social status. The dynamics of various, even contradictory interpretations about the perception of dress by the interviewees provides insight into the understanding of complex identification processes and what it meant to be a woman from a certain social class.

Taste and Class: Social Positioning through Clothing

Women’s clothing exemplified the practice of social positioning. Taste, according to Pierre Bourdieu, derives from “habitus,” which is a set of preferences that define an

individual's choices. Individuals place themselves in selected social categories to gain social power and at the same time are placed by other people through judgments about their (dis)taste.⁵⁶ Social order is experienced, communicated, and reproduced through clothing, producing and reproducing cultural groups, together with their positions of relative power. Clothing practices not only constitute and communicate position in the social order, but also challenge the positions of relative power within it.⁵⁷

According to Pierre Bourdieu, taste, knowledge, and other forms of cultural competences are encoded as something innate—something, which someone “is,” not what he “has.” Through cultural competencies and knowledge, people are hierarchically organized into classes. It is worth recalling what Bourdieu pointed out, namely, that social stratification operates in subtle ways through taste, where the most important thing is “to know, without ever having to learn.”⁵⁸ Social order is inscribed in people's minds through different cultural products, such as language, methods of classification, values, and judgments that lead to formation of a personal habitus, marking a person as belonging to a certain social class with a sense of place in society.⁵⁹

Judgments of taste show that the politics of belonging in Slovenia represented an extremely dynamic process, with complex contradictions in the positioning of respondents who actively played with and negotiated their class positions. In the 1980s, the narrative of Yugoslavia as a working-class society marked by social equality remained the dominant framework for articulating the discourses of social positioning. Simultaneously, the “equality myth” in everyday social reality was in a state of constant redefinition, reimagination, and rearticulation.⁶⁰ Cultural and economic capital enabled women to self-govern in ways that allowed them to demonstrate the porousness of the notion of social class.

Sonja was born into a working-class family in rural Slovenia. In Ljubljana, she completed four grades by 1943 and trained to become a shopkeeper, which placed her in the new Slovene middle class. She married a Yugoslav army officer, which increased her social stature and positioned her within the upper middle class, since her husband earned a high salary and at the same time his profession was, according to her narrative, prestigious and reputable, as he had access to social power networks.

According to Simone Abram, class is not a position on the scale, but a symbolic reference and a sign of a diverse stratum.⁶¹ With their way of dressing, respondents actively played with their self-representation and class positions. According to Erving Goffman, social status is not a material thing that is possessed and displayed, but a pattern of proper performance, whether it occurs in an elegant or embarrassing way.⁶² To provide a more multifaceted reflection on social inequalities in socialist Slovenia, we understand class as part of the “social performance” in transformation⁶³ while stressing the flexibility of class positioning over time.

Beverly Skeggs emphasizes that diverse inequalities associated with a particular class position must be understood within the context of an individual's life in its material and cultural forms.⁶⁴ As Sayer and Fisher realized, it is almost impossible to stop and think at any point in time “What class do I belong to now?” because of class fluidity. There is also a lag between the class that a person was born into and the one he/she “achieved.”⁶⁵ Social class is not a static and fixed structure; rather, it is perceived through the perspective of active self-positioning. Considering that in the course of

her life, Sonja saw herself as someone who moved between the various classes, it is more insightful to talk about “social positioning,” as suggested by Polona Sitar and Ana Hofman.⁶⁶ This notion enables us to verbalize the active role that women had in their self-positioning. Social background and/or social stratification in socialist Slovenia must be understood as flexible and inclusive, representing diverse patterns of stratification and reproduction of social inequalities.

Some objects of consumption, such as menstrual hygiene products, were viewed as necessary to all women in socialist Slovenia, regardless of class, occupation, and location. The products strengthened a sense of social equality among women, an unintended by-product of their circulation.⁶⁷ With some other consumption products, such as fur coats, women could display a higher social position. According to my respondents, such luxury items were mainly worn by wives of Communist Party members and company directors, who had more money. However, many respondents indicated that being rich was not popular under socialism.

By not wearing fur coats, these women identified themselves with the working class and also distanced themselves from women of the upper social class. They preferred to express the ordinariness and values of the working class, showing the intertwining of consumerism and morality in the creation of class identity. The interviewees did not necessarily want to be connected to people from a higher social milieu, as this could sometimes be considered a reason for condemnation by people in lower social positions.⁶⁸ Thus, in order to obtain social values they preferred the style of self-representation associated with working-class people, a dynamic that Randall Collins calls anti-status or reverse snobbery.⁶⁹ For middle-class women it was important to have respect from the working class, as the existing mainstream socialist culture in Slovenia valorized the working class. The upper class was unpopular in society; therefore, many women sought public recognition by identifying themselves with the modesty and ordinariness of the working class.

Furthermore, consumer culture was restrained by socialist ideology and morality. Socialist ideology emphasized that displays of financial status were discouraged because they were incompatible with the moral ideal, according to which people should find satisfaction in hard work, rather in materialism, which was condemned as egoistic, individualist, and superficial.⁷⁰ Indeed, Jennifer Patico argues that the creation of a “new femininity” that was consumer-oriented and dependent on financial success and material privilege can be seen as morally ambiguous in socialist society.⁷¹ On the one hand, women wanted to make themselves attractive and feminine, but the conditions for that fulfillment were often contradictory.

Interviewees born after World War II, however, usually noted that they wore fur coats, because they warmed them up and also due to their quality, disregarding the social status usually associated with fur. Milena, an administrator born in 1941 in Hoče near Maribor, bought a fur coat, and her mother-in-law said to her: “‘Oh, madam has become a ladyship!’ I said: ‘I feel comfortable in it.’ She continued: ‘Of course you do if you are wearing fur.’ I did not like her comment. I wore it because of its function of being warm, but she understood that I wanted to stand out and pretend to be a lady.” Milena’s mother-in-law considered the purchase of a fur coat as a boastful and vain act, which according to Pierre Bourdieu challenged the “call to order.” Boastfulness is

a condemnation directed at people who have a gap between what they appear to be and what they are.⁷²

Clothing and other body decorations also presented women with tools to create a maneuvering space for positioning themselves higher in society. When Sonja went to dance with her husband, she dressed well. "I was always dressed up. I went to the hairdresser for special occasions—if we went to a dance event, but otherwise I did everything on my own." Sonja pointed out that she invested a lot of effort in her outer appearance, because "there were also women from wealthy families, who were very beautifully dressed."

Although women are socialized into certain dispositions and tastes through class and education, they can, on certain occasions, emphasize a specific aspect of their identity with their clothes. The choice depends on the particular occasion they are dressing for.⁷³ Vesna recalled that they had a New Year's party at work that had to be attended in an elegant evening gown. "It was nice to dress for special occasions. You felt beautiful and special, even if you had to borrow the dress for that evening." Through dress she was able to position herself higher on the social scale, even though the dress exceeded her financial capabilities.

Interviewees' self-transformations challenged social hierarchies through an interplay between working-class origins and accessing economic and cultural capital. This had the liberating potential for scaling hierarchies, since they enabled women to challenge and exceed the seemingly "fixed" boundaries of social groups while simultaneously strengthening and playing with social norms. During the process of self-positioning women were most often responding to social factors like socialist manners, normative rules, morality, and existing prejudices based on rural versus urban identification on how to dress appropriately. In this way, the new socialist woman, who was a worker and consumer, questioned the political definitions of the system. These women actively played with representations of their social position, with their workers' identities and their femininity, and sometimes also challenged and disputed social norms in their everyday life. These negotiations occurred at the level of spontaneous interactions, when they were interwoven between their demands and capabilities.

Rural-Urban Divide, Clothing Habitus, and Social Background

In the new consumerist Yugoslavia, the relationship between consumption and privileged status changed significantly after the 1957 publication of Milovan Đilas's book, *Nova klasa* [New class], in which he posited the existence of a "new class," marked by its special access to the material tokens of power.⁷⁴ According to Patrick Patterson, this new class consisted of a small group of bureaucrats, politicians, and administrators who were able to spend conspicuously, and for them power enabled consumption. Greater prosperity and a veneration of material things as repositories of status and identity reversed this trend after 1957 so that even for the majority of the population, consumption enabled power and a person's importance in Yugoslav society.⁷⁵ Class identities in Yugoslavia did not disappear, but consumer culture changed the very

nature of those identities, since it worked to erode social distinctions and diminish class divisions.⁷⁶

Many women acquired cultural capital, manifested in the knowledge of how to dress appropriately, when they immigrated from the village to the city for education and employment. After World War II, Yugoslavia experienced rapid urbanization. The urban population in Yugoslavia increased by more than five million after the war. In 1947, about 75 percent of the total population in Yugoslavia was rural, and in 1977 that had decreased to 31 percent.⁷⁷ In socialist Slovenia, rural residents made up 41.1 percent of the population in 1953, but only 20.4 percent by 1971.⁷⁸ In 1961 in Yugoslavia, every second inhabitant made his living from farming, but by 1971 that had declined to every third.⁷⁹ People in many parts of the country were, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, still deeply committed to traditional, sometimes patriarchal, ways of life. Nevertheless, while the older generations often remained engaged in agricultural work, their children joined a modernizing industrial working class that acquired modern, consumerist tastes.

Slovenian women acquired cultural capital through the process of socialization, mostly from their mothers. Milena pointed out that she had a great advantage because her mother was a dressmaker who was fashion conscious. When she moved to the city, her mother sewed her a red dress and gave her red-colored stilettos: "I felt so important when I was walking down the street in Maribor. Once I did not pay enough attention and stepped on a grate with stilettos and fell down. While practicing at home my mother taught me how to walk in high heels. I had to wear stilettos and a book on my head. She said: 'You will not walk like a peasant, but elegantly.'"

Women put a lot of effort into their "self-made" femininity, but there was always the possibility of failure. Ideas of embarrassment and stigma play a crucial role in social interaction and are also partly implemented through dress. Inappropriate dress in a particular situation leads to embarrassment and the shame of not meeting the standards associated with the moral order of the social space.⁸⁰

Vesna recalled that there was a significant difference between the tidiness of girls who came from the surrounding rural area and girls from the urban parts of the capital city of Ljubljana: "We were much more modestly dressed and we never wore makeup. The girls from Ljubljana were far ahead with fashion, hairstyles, and their behavior. The difference was very much felt." Sonja also pointed to the discrepancy that manifested by combining a beautiful dress and shabby, old shoes: "Women who moved from the countryside to the city to study or to work wanted to be the same as us, but they did not know how to dress appropriately. They stood out in a stupid, distasteful way. This kind of talk was quite common among us: 'She came from the highlands, but she does not know how to dress herself. She is fooling around.' Sometimes a woman had a proper dress, but she wore worn-out shoes." By labeling women as coming from the "highlands," she distanced herself from this stigma and positioned herself in the category of a modern and urban subject, using clothing as a sign of provinciality. Women of the peasant working class were, according to Valerie Walkerdine, defined as those who exhibited the wrong type of femininity.⁸¹ They constituted an exotic and repulsive "Other," their bodies perceived as too sexual, noticeable, and related to filth.⁸²

Although women in socialist Slovenia were able to enjoy consumption much more evenly, because they had access to the latest fashion trends without having to be elites, this was mainly true only for those who were employed and earned their own money while living in or near the city. Several respondents highlighted the great distinctions between the rural and urban lifestyles, which also manifested itself in the decoration of the body. Women and girls from poorer peasant households in the village were limited in knowing and imitating city fashions. For Yugoslav citizens at the poorest margins of society, it was difficult to participate in even this scaled-back version of consumption. Cash-strapped agriculturalists in remote regions and poorly paid factory workers had fewer opportunities to enjoy the Yugoslav dream.⁸³

Urban and rural divisions were a reflection of social reality. According to Karen Sayer and Gail Fisher, the city and the village differed in their perceptions of industrialization, which was seen in the countryside as a kind of fall from grace, and in the city as a form of superiority, progress, and culture.⁸⁴ The contrasts between urban and rural worlds accentuated patterns of social distance. Newcomers in the cities, whom Andrei Simić defined as “peasant urbanites,” continued to maintain close connections with their villages of origin, and could be publicly differentiated by taste from the urbanities.⁸⁵ Women from poorer farm households were limited in their knowledge and imitation of urban fashions. Moving to the city made it easier for them to emulate a new, urban standard of beauty and to buy perfume, makeup, and other luxury products. In addition, rural and working-class origins were often linked, with most of the Yugoslav working class coming from rural backgrounds due to the relatively late industrialization of the country.

Andrew Sayer points out that “class concern” is always connected with access to desirable practices and ways of life in society, while the class hierarchically arranges the access.⁸⁶ Drawing on the concept of “moral boundary drawing,” Sayer describes the ways in which social groups distinguish themselves in terms of moral differences, claiming certain virtues that others are deemed to lack: we are cosmopolitan, they are parochial; we are hard-working, they are lazy, and so forth.⁸⁷ “Moral boundary drawing” became visible when Sonja drew the boundary between herself and the women who came from the highlands to distance herself from them. This dynamic is particularly strong in groups that are anxious about their position in terms of both how they are regarded from above and the risk of falling into the groups they despise below them.⁸⁸

Emotions such as shame, pride, respect, envy, and rebellion are “moral class markers, full of significance.”⁸⁹ According to Sayer, a person who is despised in society because he/she cannot afford fashionable clothes did not do anything embarrassing, but he/she still feels shame.⁹⁰ The shaming of those who fail is a structurally produced effect, although it is experienced as an individual failure.⁹¹ Shame is often a response to real or imaginary condemnation, or avoidance of real or imaginary others, especially those whose values are respected.⁹²

When the interviewees from the village moved to the city, their rural background continued to influence their lives. They were “betrayed” by their family origin, behavior, accent, and self-confidence, which revealed their origins to the people in the city. Zdenka, a personnel clerk in a pharmaceutical company, born in Ljubljana in 1926,

stated that in remote villages life was completely different than in cities. "People had other habits. They were more under the control of the priests and women had to be housewives." When women immigrated to the cities, they became accustomed to another way of life, but according to Zdenka, "some manners remained unchanged." For respondents, moving to the city represented an escape from the countryside, but not from social class, because they still shared moral values and experiences based on rural identity.

Conclusion

Gender and class intersected and were actively (re)constructed through daily interactions and practices to negotiate power and (in)equality in socialist Slovenia. Women found means of self-expression and negotiation in everyday clothing practices and consumption of cosmetic products. They experienced socialism in diverse, contradictory, and sometimes even empowering ways while challenging patriarchal attitudes and practices, often as an unintended consequence. Individuals often rejected and altered forced social models, although often unintentionally.

Slovene women sought their own definitions of emancipation. Resistance to normative rules and values is noticeable among the younger generation of women, who, unlike Sonja's generation, opposed the rules of dress at work and their director's authority, while questioning, challenging, and negotiating their social position. Playing with the expected traditional roles attributed to women and their subordination or resistance to different authorities, such as husbands, partners, and directors, opened up a space for subversion of the social expectations of gender in Slovenian society and undermined its traditional understanding.

When women immigrated from the village to the city, they were exposed to different ways of spending leisure time. How they negotiated these new opportunities offers insight into the self-emancipation of women as they challenged the boundaries of social classes, actively moving between classes through the acquisition of economic and cultural capital. In this way, the "new woman," who was a worker and consumer, questioned state definitions and played with a bricolage of elements and values that she took from urban and rural culture, as well as from socialist and presocialist values. On the one hand, women wanted to become attractive, feminine, and respected subjects, but they were trapped in the desires and conditions of their fulfillment, which were often contradictory.⁹³

Interlocutors questioned the ideas of fixed social stratifications and at the same time demonstrated the restrengthening of social hierarchies. Their ambiguous social position offers contested space for the performance of heterogeneous possibilities of gender, social position, and female power. Self-transformations of women's appearance challenged social hierarchies through an interplay between working-class origins and accessing economic and cultural capital, which had the liberating potential for scaling social hierarchies. While they were playing with social norms and rules women could challenge the seemingly "fixed" boundaries of social class. Of course, it should not be forgotten that although at the center of contemporary feminist scholar-

ship lies the idea of women having a choice, these choices are, as Valerie Walkerdine argues, always limited by social class, and only those who have enough cultural and economic resources are entitled to them.⁹⁴

◆ About the Author

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◆ Notes

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16. The ethnographic fieldwork, which was performed from January 2012 until April 2015, was conducted by the author in an elderly home in Ljubljana. Because I wanted to include the experiences of women living in more rural area parts, fieldwork was also carried out by interviewing in the northeastern and southwestern parts of Slovenia. I did not strive to achieve a representative sociological sample across all Slovenian regions, but aimed to collect women's voices in local settings and to uncover different narratives. Interlocutors were selected by ethnographic snowball method. After I grew closer to my central interlocutor, Sonja, and conducted interviews with her, I asked her to introduce me to her social network of people who have lived most of their active lives under socialism and whom I later also interviewed. The interviews were conducted in Slovenian, recorded, transcribed, and translated by the author, and are stored in the personal archive of the author.
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