

## The female Body between Consumer culture and Traditional Roles: Redefining Gender Patterns through the Interwar Croatian Women’s Press

In the interwar period, the women’s press served as a venue for displaying various aspects of the female body. The analyzed textual and visual material in *Ženski list*, *Svijet*, and *Naša žena* reveals a juxtaposition of a modern, consumer culture worldview with the patriarchal representation of the female body, which primarily emphasizes its maternal role. This paper aims to explore how media, tradition, modernity, economic progress, and public medicine impacted the shaping, redefinition, and control of the female body in consumer society.

### *Introduction*

Political change following World War I brought about the rise of the women’s press in the interwar period. Given the spread of democratization and liberalization, as well as the development of consumer culture, significant changes were observed in all pores of society in this period; specifically, gender identities and relationships were being redefined, and there was pressure among young women to abandon old traditions and approach a new definition of the “modern” woman. The feminist movement was becoming more popular and began encroaching into politics. Educational reform and compulsory schooling in the interwar period created a generation of young, literate, and educated citizens, which is why the women’s press had a larger market.<sup>1</sup> As a political, economic, and cultural entity, the press was pivotal to women’s engagement in the creation of the new consumer culture and vital to the literacy of the new consumer “citizenry.”<sup>2</sup>

However, the interwar period was, in reality, remarkably polarized. While taboos and restrictions broke down, traditional values were simultaneously revitalized and underscored. Even as the image of an emancipated, sexy, busy and active woman was created, the idea of a dedicated mother and housewife was

<sup>1</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014.

<sup>2</sup> VUJNOVIĆ 2008: 15.

correspondingly propagated. As the female body became the focus of attention, the traditional cult of motherhood was amplified as an institution with significant political importance given the reality of demographic decline. "Women-mothers" become a fundamental factor in the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation, and the interwar women's press reflected the *spiritus mundi* of the time in which it was operational.

This study analyzes three notable Croatian women's publications from that period: *Ženski list*, *Svijet* and *Niša žena*, considering their historical context, content and societal influence. While each of these magazines had a slightly different approach to the female body and its role, with some being more conservative and others more liberal, they all convey seemingly contradictory ideas about the role of the female body in general. On the one hand, they adhered to the modern processes of emancipation and commercialization of the female body dictated by consumer culture. On the other, they strove (to a lesser or greater degree) to preserve the traditional view of the female body and its role, respecting patriarchal concepts. Thus, despite promoting the new femininity, the interwar women's press was dedicated to preserving the qualities of "old femininity," trying to build bridges that introduced women to the modern age while preserving traditionally feminine "qualities."<sup>3</sup>

In the changing socio-political and economic context of the interwar period, women held diverse viewpoints regarding the connection between capitalism and modernity. Although some rejected the prevailing patriarchal frameworks and voiced their dissent through alternative channels, others sought to be integrated into these structures to promote gender parity through active involvement,<sup>4</sup> advocating for universal suffrage, legal and social equality, women's labour rights, and pacifism.<sup>5</sup> In the given context, the role of the women's press as a cultural commodity and a material place for publicizing and rebuking capitalist consumer culture came to the fore. Moreover, the press provided a forum for discourse on gender relations, feminism and national ideology.<sup>6</sup>

The paper will then briefly analyze the theoretical framework of corporal history, elaborate further on the pertinent women's publications, and examine the status of the female body in consumer society through the media. The last part of the paper will touch upon the patriarchal understanding of the female body and what it represents within the culture of the interwar period, with particular emphasis on motherhood.

The relevant literature, textual and pictorial material from magazines, archival documents from the National Archives in Zagreb and the Croatian State Archives will be used. The visual material will be subjected to qualitative analysis.

<sup>3</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014.

<sup>4</sup> VUJNOVIĆ 2008: 1.

<sup>5</sup> BLASIN 2019.

<sup>6</sup> BLASIN 2019; JOVANOVIĆ 2018: 71-72; VUJNOVIĆ 2008: 15-16.

### *Theoretical framework*

As a separate field of historical science, the history of the body was shaped in the 1980s and 1990s. The work of Michel Foucault and his anti-essentialist, politically invested view of the body through the concept of “biopolitics” served as a primary impetus for the study of the body as an entity not limited solely to the biological dimension.<sup>7</sup>

The history of the body was neglected<sup>8</sup> in historiography due to a prevailing belief that the mind had a privileged position over the body; moreover, such a point of view was an integral aspect of classical and Judeo-Christian traditions.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the female body was often seen as an anomaly throughout history, while the male body was portrayed as an adequate representation of “human characteristics.”<sup>10</sup> This subordination of women has both spiritual and physical roots. Namely, apparent inequality can be observed in the biblical book of Genesis, through the divine moulding of Eve from Adam’s rib, as opposed to the direct creation of Adam in the image of God. Also, in the concept of Original Sin, women could only be “saved” with the help and intervention of an outside mediator. In all respects, women were taught that bonding with an innately superior being, a man, would bring them purpose, validation, and approval.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Church supported this patriarchal teaching, viewing the body as a dual entity whose upper part (reason and spirit) was on the male side, and the lower part (body and flesh) was on the female side.<sup>12</sup> However, medieval thought lingered in traditionally Christian societies.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout history, there have often been attempts to restrict women’s civil, social, and political rights based on the inferiority of their frail bodies.<sup>14</sup> Without a significant voice in culture, society, and politics, women were traditionally confined to quiet corners of the house, the muffled margins of society and the impotent peripheries of politics.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, increased interest in the body began with the French *Annales* historians. The reason for this corporeal (somatic)

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<sup>7</sup> COOTER & STEIN 2013; COOTER 2010; CANNING 2006; FOUCAULT 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Before the somatic turn, the body was viewed as a purely biological base of existence, and its pathology was predominantly of interest to the history of medicine (COOTER & STEIN 2013: 94; FOUCAULT 1995: 25).

<sup>9</sup> PORTER 2001.

<sup>10</sup> SHILLING, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> SCHAEF, Kindle Edition.

<sup>12</sup> LE GOFF & TRUONG 2012.

<sup>13</sup> FRANK 1991.

<sup>14</sup> RUBERG 2020.

<sup>15</sup> PONTEROTTO 2016: 134.

turn lies in the accompanying cultural and linguistic turn. With this shift came the change in scientific focus in the humanities and social sciences from political history and socio-economic structures to everyday events, which was also reflected in the display of the body as historically mutable and shaped by culture, language and ideology.<sup>16</sup>

It should be noted that the change in research focus was only possible with the development of the consumer culture that led to a change in bodily perception. In the interwar period, the pressure from commercial interests and sexual experts led to a departure from the earlier dominant ethos of Christianity, which saw the naked body as shameful. The new perception, however, transformed the body into an object of scientific and commercial inquiry,<sup>17</sup> which brings us to this paper's topic.

### *The women's press: Ženski list, Svijet, Naša žena*

In the territory that would become the future Kingdom of Yugoslavia, women's magazines first appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but they were mainly printed in the German language. National variants of the women's press appeared at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the interwar period, about thirty women's magazines were published in Yugoslavia, although many publications were short-lived.<sup>18</sup>

As noted previously, the Croatian magazines *Ženski list* (1925-1939), *Svijet* (1926-1936), and *Naša žena* (1935-1938) are of particular interest to this topic. These magazines were published in Zagreb with the ambition of covering the entire Yugoslav market and were modelled on modern Western women's magazines of that era.<sup>19</sup>

*Ženski list*, subtitled "For Fashion, Entertainment, and the Household," was a magazine intended exclusively for women, and based on Vujnović,<sup>20</sup> it impacted the interwar Yugoslav female readership like no other magazine at the time. *Ženski list* was a popular publication that emerged in the process of transition from a primarily feudal to an industrial and capitalist society. It is essential to understand the gender, media, cultural, and political-economic context in which the magazine was created, because it points to the "connections between the historical and structural changes of interwar Yugoslavia and Croatia."<sup>21</sup> The publication centred

<sup>16</sup> CLEVER & RUBERG 2014; RUBERG 2020.

<sup>17</sup> FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991; SHILLING 2003; RUBERG 2020.

<sup>18</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014; VUJNOVIĆ 2008.

<sup>19</sup> JOVANOVIĆ 2018; VUJNOVIĆ 2008.

<sup>20</sup> VUJNOVIĆ 2008: 295.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid: 297.

on subjects conventionally associated with women, including fashion, marriage, parenthood, household management and morality. Nevertheless, it updated these themes with the aid of rich visual content. Its readership was extensive, and Marija Jurić Zagorka, the editor, was instrumental to its triumph. She fostered a bond with her readers and regularly replied to their correspondence.<sup>22</sup> Male readers also responded to some of the discussions on the pages of *Ženski list*, several expressing anger over the magazine's perceived promotion of "Americanization, industrialization and capitalist processes."<sup>23</sup> Men felt threatened by the potential subversion of patriarchal norms during this transitional period, according to Vujnović.<sup>24</sup> The publication catered to the needs of ordinary women and offered practical advice to navigate their daily lives, but it also endorsed women's and national movements.<sup>25</sup> Despite not identifying as a feminist publication, the magazine frequently highlighted the ongoing fight for women's equality.<sup>26</sup>

*Svijet* was an illustrated weekly, with the tagline "A Magazine for Social Life." It was a contemporary magazine for modern citizens, covering various subjects like entertainment, cinema, theatre, sports, the arts and politics. The magazine was intriguing because it promoted the then stylish Art Deco design and jazz music while boasting the richest visual content of any publication. The editors were Vjekoslav Zakšek and painter Otto Antonini. The weekly included articles on fashion, beauty pageants, illustrations of scantily clad or unclothed female bodies, articles about Zagreb's nightlife and exotic locales. It was often called *Vanity Fair* of the Yugoslav kingdom and had many similarities to the world-renowned American fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar*.<sup>27</sup> *Svijet* was published by Tipografija, the largest newspaper publisher in Croatia between the two World Wars. The magazine had no political slant and was the favourite leisure reading for the Yugoslav intelligentsia.<sup>28</sup>

*Naša žena*, captioned "The Weekly for the Women's World," was edited by Zdenka Smrekar, a Croatian writer mainly committed to children's literature who nonetheless expressed an interest in engagement with political, social, and women's issues.<sup>29</sup> The magazine aimed to educate, enlighten and provide practical advice. It covered a range of social issues, including rural economic hardship, women's rights, anarchism and communism. Yet it also offered tips on marriage,

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<sup>22</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014: 138.

<sup>23</sup> VUJNOVIĆ 2008: 300.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014; VUJNOVIĆ 2008.

<sup>26</sup> BLASIN 2019.

<sup>27</sup> ŠOJAT-BIKIĆ 2006.

<sup>28</sup> ŠOJAT-BIKIĆ 2006; NOVAK 2005.

<sup>29</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK: 134.

parenting and even fashion. *Naša žena* was intended for the bourgeois, contemporary woman who played (or should have played) an active role in society. It also paid attention to homemakers and women in the countryside and sought to encompass all readers. Politically, *the publication openly propagated the ideology of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS)*,<sup>30</sup> and accorded particular attention to the village as the “wellspring of the nation”<sup>31</sup> and peasant women as the guardians of fundamental national values that every citizen should accept and nurture.<sup>32</sup> Due to its strict adherence to traditional values and avoidance of contemporary topics and photographs, the magazine had limited success during its brief period of publication, proving that periodicals adopting consumerism were more successful in popular culture.<sup>33</sup>

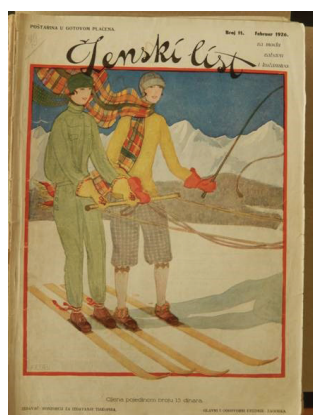


Fig. 1: *Ženski list*



Fig. 2: *Svijet*



Fig. 3: *Naša žena*

### *Beautiful is healthy: commercializing the female body*

Despite the differences between these magazines, they all served as media that facilitated the commercialization of the female body to lesser or greater degrees. By commercializing the female body, these magazines created a new generation of consumers who cared about a more attractive appearance, maintaining a modern household and participating in new forms of recreation.<sup>34</sup> In the interwar period, the media (radio, theatre, film) and especially the press formed a space in which

<sup>30</sup> “Hrvatski seljački pokret” [‘The Croatian peasant movement’],” *Naša žena*, Year 2, no. 2 (1936): p. 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> “Naše selo” [‘Our village’] *Naša žena*, Year 1, no. 1 (1935): p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> “Hrvatski seljak [‘The Croatian peasant’],” *Naša žena*, Year 1, no. 23 (1935): 1; also see: OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014: 136.

<sup>33</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014: 136-137.

<sup>34</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014.



corporations created women's needs and disseminated their messages, emphasizing the importance of physical appearance through advertising images and artistic illustrations representing the ideal of beauty.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, magazines became an instrument for simultaneously presenting new Western trends and developing trends in their environment. Thanks to film, radio and magazines, consumer culture thrived in the 1920s.<sup>36</sup> With the help of film, Hollywood set new standards for appearance and bodily presentation by projecting commercialized images of the glamorous style of celebrities around the world.<sup>37</sup> Movie stars, that is, their bodies, were presented to the audience as "disciplined" under the ideals of bodily perfection.<sup>38</sup> In order to maintain this perfect image, new types of mascara and new forms of body care were created.<sup>39</sup> The influence of the cosmetics, fashion and advertising industries, as well as Hollywood, was clearly reflected in the fashion expression of women.<sup>40</sup> For example, they began wearing lipstick, short skirts, nylon stockings and, in most cases, cut their hair in line with the latest Hollywood fashion (the bob, or *bubikopf*).<sup>41</sup> The new style was there to represent more than just trendy vanity. It represented liberation from gender-based oppression, and, in a feminist political-economic sense, a new woman in the public working sphere who needed the *bubikopf* as a powerful symbol to overcome the natural traditional inequality of women in society.<sup>42</sup>

Hollywood also helped create the perception that preserving beauty is equivalent to preserving health and prolonging life. Through movies and the press, images of youth, beauty and luxury opened up a space for self-improvement in every woman's life, exerting psychological and social pressure on women to be as close to the ideal image as possible.<sup>43</sup> On the pages of magazines, as well as theatre stages and film screens, different stars promoted a philosophy of pleasure and entertainment, reflected in the aforementioned magazines,<sup>44</sup> which helped to

<sup>35</sup> FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991.

<sup>36</sup> SYMONS 2018.

<sup>37</sup> FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991; SYMONS 2018.

<sup>38</sup> THOMPSON 2002; BRAIDOTTI 1996.

<sup>39</sup> ÖZDEMİR 2015; FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991.

<sup>40</sup> "Luksusna ženica od jutra do mraka" ['A luxurious woman from morning to night'], *Svijet*, Year 1, Book II, no. 23 (1926): p. 489.

<sup>41</sup> "Ekscentrične filmske zvijezde" ['Eccentric movie stars'], *Svijet*, Year 1, Book II, no 2 (1926): p. 33.

<sup>42</sup> VUJNOVIĆ 2008: 191; "Politička i građanska prava žena u svjetskom društvu" ['Women's political and civil rights in global society'], *Ženski list*, Year 2, no. 3 (1936): p. 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> AZZARITO 2010: 261.

<sup>44</sup> "Tko želi upoznati kazališnu umjetnost" [Who wants to learn about the theatrical arts?], *Ženski list*, Year 11, no. 12 (1935): p. 33-34. "Anny Ondra", *Naša žena*, Year 4, no. 6 (1938): p. 1; "Janina Smolinsk- najljepša žena poljske" [Janina Smolinsk – the most beautiful woman in Poland], *Svijet*, Year 4, Book VII, no. 1 (1929): p. 33.



Fig. 4: “Zagrebačka iz ptičje perspektive” [Bird’s eye view of Zagreb women] *Svijet*, Y. 1, B. I, no. 16 (1926): p. 304



Fig. 5: *Ženski list*, Y. 8, no. 1 (1932): p. 5

highlight the body’s appearance while popularizing it as a means of enjoyment, hedonism, relaxation and self-expression.<sup>45</sup> As the most widespread and accessible media, the press significantly influenced its readership, and the consumer industry used it to promote the cult of youth, health and beauty. Magazines also gave space to the advertising industry and promoted leisure-time bodily maintenance by making fitness a “social imperative,” skilfully exploited by the consumer industry.<sup>46</sup> *Ženski list*, *Svijet*, and *Naša žena* all dealt engaged in the discourse on nutrition, and they portrayed aging as a social problem to be addressed.<sup>47</sup> A handful of articles, photographs, and various illustrations in magazines dealing with diet, exercise and cosmetics were supposed to help readers slow the aging process.<sup>48</sup>

Through the mediation of the women’s press during the interwar years, body preservation became the foundation of a self-sustaining conception of the body. This fact can be tied to the development of public health and the socialization of medicine in that period. After the First World War, social medicine progressed

<sup>45</sup> FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991.

<sup>46</sup> PONTEROTTO 2016: 136-137; MACSWEEN 1993.

<sup>47</sup> It is noteworthy that nutrition management played a significant role in depicting docile and disciplined bodies (TURNER (1982) 1991; FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991).

<sup>48</sup> “Ženska se ljepota uvijek cijnila” [‘Female beauty has always been appreciated’], *Naša žena*, Year 4, no. 17-18 (1938): p. 7; “Žena i njega tijela” [‘The woman and bodily care’], *Naša žena*, Year 1, no. 27 (1935); “Kissingen – tablete za mršavljenje” [‘Kissingen – diet pills’], *Svijet*, Year 5, Book X, no. 13 (1930): p. 460; “Čuvajte svoje lice” [‘Take care of your face’], *Svijet*, Year 1, Book II, no. 1 (1926): p. 19; “Zašto gladovati? Boxbergerove Kissingen tablete za mršavljenje” [‘Why starve? Boxberger’s Kissingen diet pills’], *Ženski list*, Year 11, no.9 (1935): p. 28; “Tenis je zdravi ženski šport” [‘Tennis is a healthy women’s sport’], *Ženski list*, Year 11, no. 9 (1935): p. 35.



thanks to the efforts of Andrija Štampar, and numerous auxiliary institutions were established to improve public health. The socialization of medicine also meant that the state controlled the people's health (bodies).<sup>49</sup> National hygienic (medical) institutions implemented public health policies and social medicine programs. Particular emphasis was accorded to health education: enlightening the public against physical neglect, unhealthy habits, and addictions, reducing mortality and health costs, and increasing the overall quality of life.<sup>50</sup>

Consumer society melded the achievements of preventive medicine and public health with the idea that the body is a tool for pleasure, self-expression and a good life.

Women's magazines had the task of conveying preventive medicine ideas and programs to the public, helping state institutions regulate the human body. Stylized images, the cosmetic benefits of body maintenance and health-related discourse indicated that discipline and hedonism were no longer opposites. Moreover, to achieve the desired appearance and release the expressive potential of their bodies, women only needed to adhere to their maintenance routines.<sup>51</sup>

Namely, as early as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sunbathing began to be promoted as a healthy habit, especially as a way to treat tuberculosis. The same benefits were promoted in the interwar period by raising people's awareness of the health benefits of exposure to the sun.<sup>52</sup> However, the cosmetic benefits of sun exposure also began to be emphasized. The argument was that a dark body is an attractive



Fig. 6: "Ritmička gimnastika" [Rhythmic gymnastics] *Svijet*, Y. 1, B. II, no. 2 (1926): p. 27



Fig. 7: Cover *Ibid.*



Fig. 8: "Savsko kupalište" [Sava bathing zone] *Svijet*, Y. 4, B. VIII, no. 3 (1929): pp. 60-61

<sup>49</sup> BARONA 2019: 17.

<sup>50</sup> DUGAC 2005; 2010.

<sup>51</sup> For example, *Ženski list* from 1925 (Year 1, No. 8, p. 1-4) ran a series of features aimed at helping women maintain their health, slimness and beauty: "How to stay young and beautiful"; "Chamomile tea – an anti-wrinkle agent"; "Exercises to achieve slimness"; "Any weight gain can be suppressed with energy" "The ideal type of feminine beauty."

<sup>52</sup> DUGAC 2010.

body. So, in the interwar period, magazines promoted beach vacations, using abundant pictorial materials to motivate their readership. Hence, a woman's body slipped into a bathing suit for enjoyable physical activity.<sup>53</sup>

As a healthy means of shaping the body and maintaining health, exercise was also moving into the mountains, so magazines often showed alpine skiing accompanied by winter fashions.<sup>54</sup>



Fig. 9: *Naša žena*, Year 3, no.2 (1937)

Even though the commercialization of the female body in the women's press was often presented as a means of women's emancipation and modernization, the regime of maintaining the body through a healthy diet, cosmetics, and exercise, presented in said magazines, reduced the female body to the level of consumer goods. The body was compared to automobiles and household appliances that need to be serviced regularly to remain functional,<sup>55</sup> so public discourse was promoted that was meant to change the conception of the body and encourage individuals to become compliant participants in the mass creation of needs and sustain the progress of consumer society by adopting instrumental strategies to combat aging and decrepitude, and refuse to accept the body's natural condition.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991; see photo 8 (“Savsko kupalište” [‘Sava bathing zone’]) on the following page for details.

<sup>54</sup> “Zimski sport” [‘Winter sports’], *Svijet*, Year 9, Book XVII, no. 2 (1934): p. 30-31.

<sup>55</sup> FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991; PONTEROTTO 2016.

<sup>56</sup> ÖZDEMİR 2015; “Žena mora ostati mlada – Vesna krema” [‘A woman must stay young – Vesna Cream’], *Naša žena*, Year 1, no. 4 (1935): p. 12; “Majko, ostani mlada: Sinovi i kćeri vole mladolike majke - vole to i muževi. Takalon krema” [‘Mother, stay young: Sons and daughters love youthful mothers – and so do husbands. Takalon Cream’], *Svijet*, Year 9, Book XVII, no. 13 (1934): p. 253.; “Kako sam se sa 60 godina riješila nabora i kako mi je uspelo da izgledam 20 godina mada” [‘How I got rid of wrinkles at 60 and how I manage to look 20 years younger’], *Ženski list*, Year 11, no. 4 (1935): p. 32.

In this way, the commercialization of the female body within consumer culture facilitated the restructuring of social space. It helped depict the body by displaying it for public viewing.<sup>57</sup> The female body became particularly visible as a physical object to be observed, valued, judged, rejected, modified and essentially com-modified for socially constructed purposes.<sup>58</sup>

What was imposed on the masses by consumer culture became the social standard, like battling wrinkles (signs of aging that had to be hidden) and bodily hair, an entirely natural occurrence on the female body that suddenly became widely unacceptable and even “embarrassing.” As an example, what follows is an illustration of an advertisement for a hair removal cream that flooded *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Svijet* alike in the early 1920s.



Fig. 10: Harper’s Bazaar vs. Svijet

At the same time, women remain invisible in so many other aspects, creating the paradox of contemporary culture: the “simultaneous disappearance and excessive exposure of the body in culture, institutions and the persuasive discourse of social communication.”<sup>59</sup> Due to the commercialization of the female body in the context of consumer culture, female individuality was suppressed in women’s efforts to conform to the dictates of female physicality, posture and behaviour set by societal expectations.<sup>60</sup>

Ergo, appearance and posture became expressions of the self, and physical imperfections and shortcomings became a penalty in everyday interactions. Content

<sup>57</sup> PONTEROTTO 2016.

<sup>58</sup> FOUCAULT 1980:186.

<sup>59</sup> PONTEROTTO 2016: 134; FOUCAULT 1980:186.

<sup>60</sup> PONTEROTTO 2016: 147- 148; MACSWEEN 1993: 154.

promoting a particular lifestyle and appearance was present in every magazine mentioned above (e.g., face creams, shaving lotions and mandatory fitness).<sup>61</sup>

Also, using leisure time to maintain the body imposed control over this time on an individual.<sup>62</sup> Preventive medicine also encouraged this control over an individual's free time and body and required individuals to take responsibility for their health, emphasizing that most illnesses arise due to neglect or abuse of the body through addictions.<sup>63</sup> Consumer culture, in its commercialization of beauty, used the female body to emphasize two categories of the body: the internal body pertaining to health care and the external body pertaining to appearance, movement and bodily control in the social space. It also encompassed the aesthetic dimensions of the body.<sup>64</sup> One may conclude that within consumer culture in this period, the primary purpose of maintaining health (internal body) was to improve appearance (external body). Therefore, maintaining a firm body using the fitness industry's products and services was a social obligation. Moreover, a fit body was convenient to the consumer industry because it "could spend more time and money" enjoying the benefits of its fitness: longevity, vacations, sports and sex.<sup>65</sup> Sex experts joined this discourse, stating that dietary control and exercise improved sexual potency and pleasure.<sup>66</sup> Images of nude or scantily-clad bodies in magazines emphasized what could be achieved through self-control and physical discipline.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, by portraying female bodies as slender, mobile and aesthetically pleasing, magazines kept pace with health education and state regulation of bodies, encouraging readers to advocate for health, form and appearance, while on the other hand conveniently enabling the triumph of thin women.<sup>68</sup> Via excessive commercialization of the female body and constant emphasis on the "ideal," consumer culture led interwar society into glorifying physical appearance, creating the modern belief that appearance and bodily presentation define human beings. This paradigm in the interwar period was also imposed on men, so that overweight men were ridiculed in cartoons and caricatures.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>61</sup> "Koji ćete šport izabrati" ['Which sport will you choose'], *Ženski List*, Year 13, no. 4 (1937): p. 8; "Zdravlje i Higijena: Bezopasna kura za mršavljenje" ['Health and hygiene: A harmless therapy for weight loss'], *Naša žena*, Year 3, no. 4 (1937): p. 14-15

<sup>62</sup> LINDER, 1970.

<sup>63</sup> DUGAC, 2005; 2010; "Žena i njezino zdravlje" ['A woman and her health'], *Naša žena*, Year 3, no. 6, (1937): p. 17-19.

<sup>64</sup> FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991; PARK 1952; FOUCAULT 1995.

<sup>65</sup> PONTEROTTO 2016: 136-137.

<sup>66</sup> PONTEROTTO 2016, FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991.

<sup>67</sup> "Doglavnice princa Karnevala" ['Deputy princesses of the Carnival'], *Svijet*, Year 9, Book XVII, no. 7 (1934): p. 123.

<sup>68</sup> FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991.

<sup>69</sup> "Joško Baltek na nogometnoj utakmici" [Joško Baltek at a football match], *Svijet*, Year 2, Book II, no. 2 (1927): p. 39.

Beauty pageants, both for women and young children (most of whom were girls), featured in magazines also imposed a certain standard of beauty, providing readers with the possibility of comparison, and promoting an unhealthy attitude toward one's own body.<sup>70</sup> For young girls, these pageants meant associating idealized facial and physical features with popularity and social power, teaching them that an attractive appearance is a cultural gender requirement.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, it is vital to accentuate the fact that the women's press in the interwar period upset patriarchal understandings of the female body, and by portraying naked bodies, shattered prejudices about sexuality and the bonds of tradition in which a woman's body has a purely reproductive role. However, it also promoted unrealistic standards and taught women that their value rested in their appearance, creating emotionally vulnerable women worried about their physical imperfections (while concurrently offering solutions to remedy them). Photographs and illustrations in magazines emphasized the struggle against physical flaws and aging by raising reader awareness of the current state of one's appearance. Ultimately, these magazines also promoted the values of consumer culture by imposing it on parts of high culture, presenting it as a feature of modernism that highlighted a nurturing style and beauty aesthetics. The photographs and illustrations in the magazines implied that consumer culture represented a world of comfort that was no longer limited to the elite alone but to everyone.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, this culture mostly ignored the reality of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, which was also the reality of Croatian women in the interwar period.<sup>73</sup>

### *Between old and new: motherhood and patriarchal notions of the female body*

Taking into account the approach to this topic by the women's and medical press, this section of the paper will briefly describe patriarchal, traditional conceptions that, along with consumer culture, shaped the understanding of the female body in the interwar period.

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<sup>70</sup> "Natječaj Svijeta za lijepu djecu" ['Svijet's beautiful children contest'], *Svijet*, Year 5, Book X, no. 13 (1929): p. 458-459; "Natječaj za lijepu djecu" [Contest for the most beautiful children'], *Svijet*, Year 5, Book X, no. 13. (1930): p.330 -331.

<sup>71</sup> RICE 2007; CURRIE 1999; THORNE 1999.

<sup>72</sup> FEATHERSTONE (1982) 1991: 176; "Ford i Lincoln automobile" ['Ford and Lincoln automobiles'], *Svijet*, Year 2, Book IV, no. 21 (1927): p. 453; "Krznarija N. Petaković Zagreb" ['N. Petaković's fur shop in Zagreb'], *Ženski list*, Year 10, no. 11 (1934): p. 41; "Luksuzni šeširi M. Grilec" ['M. Grilec's luxury hats'], *Ženski list*, Year 8, no. 10 (1932): p. 38.

<sup>73</sup> HR- DAZG- 237 (Središnji ured sestara pomoćnica u Zagrebu: Socijalna kartoteka: Izvještaj o imućstvenim i obiteljskim prilikama porodice A-Ž signature 42-124). Social reports provide personal information about applicants and their families and the circumstances in which they lived. The reports are an indispensable source for more precise insight into the lives of Zagreb's female citizens.



As noted earlier, in the aftermath of World War I, there were differing opinions about the role of women in society. The immediate post-war years were marked by the country's democratization and raised the question of women's suffrage, although the war's violation of gender boundaries also resulted in more pronounced resistance to the women's movement and pressure to 'put women back in their place'. Likewise, in culture and the media (women's magazines), women were increasingly portrayed as the pillar of the nation in their traditional roles as mothers and wives. Even the women's movement was not based solely on the fight for women's rights. It was based on humanitarian campaigns, care for children, disabled veterans and the poor, promoting women's character as caregivers and mothers.<sup>74</sup>

The role of the family as a foundation of society was particularly emphasized in the interwar period. The family was promoted as the key to community prosperity in general, providing that home life and upbringing were healthy.<sup>75</sup> The body of the "woman-mother" was considered a fundamental factor in the biological reproduction of the nation, and it became the bearer of suitable (or undesirable) genes. Also, motherhood became the much needed link between the "old and new."<sup>76</sup>

Due to the socialization of medicine, and hence state control of the (female) body, during the interwar period, different branches of science began to deal with the female body and motherhood, including medicine, psychology and politics, leading to the *womb* becoming "public territory." This was apparent in the continued debates about 'Abortus criminalis'<sup>77</sup> in *Liječnički vjesnik* and *Staleški glasnik*<sup>78</sup> and many articles about motherhood and child upbringing in women's magazines.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, books with advice for young mothers were being published, and "Mother and child" courses were organized, as well as an exhibition of the

<sup>74</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014.

<sup>75</sup> "Emancipacija žene" ['Emancipation of a woman'], *Naša žena*, Year 1, no. 21 (1935): pp. 1-3.

<sup>76</sup> OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014.

<sup>77</sup> The term "abortion" means spontaneous or induced termination of pregnancy with the discharge of a fertilised egg prior to the twenty-fourth week of pregnancy. After that time, the term used is "premature birth" (*Partus pretemporarius*). More about the subject in: Dugac & Marton 2009: 211-213.

<sup>78</sup> *Liječnički vjesnik* [Medical Herald] – the newsletter of the Croatian Medical Association, a professional-scientific monthly, one of the oldest Croatian journals, was launched in 1877 and is still published today. *Staleški glasnik* [Vocational Gazette], a "supplement to *Liječnički vjesnik*", was the bulletin of the Croatian Medical Association. It was published from 1914 to 1915 and from 1921 to 1934.

<sup>79</sup> "Majka i djeca" ['Mother and children'], *Ženski list*, Year 1, no. 3 (1925); "Odgoj djece" ['Upbringing of children'], *Ženski list*, Year 14, no. 4 (1938): pp. 35-36; "Majka prijateljica svoje djece" [The mother, a friend to children], *Ženski list*, Year 14, no. 2 (1938): pp. 33-34; "Djeca životinje i biljke" [Children, animals and plants], *Naša žena*, Year 3, no. 11-12 (1937): p. 21-22; "Nešto o školskome djetetu" [A little something about the school-age child], *Naša žena*, Y 2, no. 27 (1936): p. 20-21; "Zagrebačko sanjkalište na Smroku" [Zagreb's toboggan run at Smrok], *Svijet*, Year 3, Book V, no. 2 (1928): p. 29.



same name (organized by the head of the children's clinic, Dr. Žiga Švarc). The exhibition presented the development of the human body from the fertilised egg, including children's organs, skeletons and nervous and circulatory systems.<sup>80</sup> Also, during the house calls, nurses devoted increased care to mothers and children, trying to give them medical, social and emotional support.<sup>81</sup>

The columns in magazines focused on topics such as running a household, child-care advice and promoting the idea that women can contribute the most to society by preserving classical women's roles.<sup>82</sup>

Societal attitudes during the interwar period enforced the traditional concept of the female body, confirming that it was defined primarily by its reproductive function as sanctioned and required by paternal law.<sup>83</sup> It follows that motherhood could be understood as the result of a sexual system that mandated the female body to internalize motherhood as the core of its identity and desire.<sup>84</sup> While masculinity carried a non-discursive, historically implicit value in a patriarchal culture, femininity was determined by its relation to masculinity and what is appropriate and expected.<sup>85</sup>

As patriarchal society demanded that women conform to the ideals and concepts that it perpetuated – resuming traditional roles, returning to their domestic lives and raising a family, the interwar women's press presented a daunting task for women as it urged them to flawlessly balance old values with the new modernity. A woman in the media embodied the “new” femininity with a *bubikopf* (bob) hairstyle, wearing a short skirt and holding a cigarette. Despite her stylish appearance, she was also a devoted mother and homemaker who managed her household efficiently in line with modern standards. According to the magazines, a woman was supposed to dress nicely, but not necessarily fashionably, be attractive without being brazen, and maintain a youthful appearance while exhibiting dignity and femininity appropriate to her age. She had to possess qualities such as hard work, tidiness, adaptability, tenderness and gratitude, all while knowing her place in society. Above all, as a bearer of desirable traditions, she was also

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<sup>80</sup> Hrvatski državni arhiv, Higijenski zavod sa školom narodnog zdravlja, fond 517, Kutija 1, Popis izložaka izložbe majka i dijete; Švarc Ž., Higijenska izložba “Mati i dijete,” *Liječnički vijesnik* 46 (1924) 647-650; Dugac 2010: 101-103; 2015. HR-DAZG-237, Središnji ured sestara pomoćnica, Opći spisi, 1935-1936., sign. 21/2; Ibid., 1938, sign 23.

<sup>81</sup> DUGAC 2015: 219.

<sup>82</sup> “Žena kao čuvarica tradicije i culture” [‘The woman as the guardian of tradition and culture’], *Naša žena*, Year 2, no. 30 (1936) ; “Emancipacija žene” [‘Emancipation of a woman’], *Naša žena*, Year 1, no. 21 (1935): p. 1-3 “Kućanstvo” [‘The household’], *Ženski list*, Year 6, no. 12 (1930): p. 73.

<sup>83</sup> KRISTEVA 1980.

<sup>84</sup> BUTLER 1999:125.

<sup>85</sup> ROSIĆ 2008.



Fig. 11: “Djevojke iz sjeverne Dalmacije” [Girls from northern Dalmatia] *Svijet*, Y. 1, B. II, no. 1 (1926): Back page



Fig. 12: *Ženski list*, Y. 6, no. 12 (1930): Cover

expected to safeguard all that was pious and chaste, including cultural practices and religious symbols (as seen in many portrayals of women in traditional attire).<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, the desired behaviour of the “woman-mother,” should she take her duty seriously, had to be rewarded. For example, the Red Cross Youth’s executive committee conferred an award to a “worthy” mother on Mother’s Day. The prize was 500 dinars (monthly rent for modest accommodations was 150 dinars), but only mothers with more than six children could apply for the prize.<sup>87</sup>

Endorsing the state’s pro-natal policy, a military physician from Požega, Andrija Deak, wrote an article in *Liječnički vjesnik* (1923) in which he suggested that a mother who has performed her maternal duties of giving birth to at least six children should be decorated like a combat veteran and be declared an “honourable lady.” On the other hand, he added, an atmosphere should be created in society so that women who did not want to give birth to children would feel uncomfortable. This physician also proposed the severest penalties for illegal abortions, stating that they threatened the nation’s development.<sup>88</sup>

It is evident from the archival records and medical press that women were primarily viewed through the prism of the maternal role. In that function, they had significance within the health and social service mechanism.

<sup>86</sup> “Žena koja se uvijek sviđa” [‘Always a likable woman’], *Nasha žena*, Year 3, no. 8 (1937): p. 18; “Smoking, senzacija današnje mode” [‘The tuxedo - the sensation of today’s fashion’], *Svijet*, Year 1, Book I, no. 8 (126): 149; OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2014.

<sup>87</sup> HR-DAZG-237, Središnji ured sestara pomoćnica, Opći spisi, 1933, sign. 20/1.

<sup>88</sup> DEAK, Andrija, “Bilješke o pometanju ploda” [Notes on Abortion], *Liječnički vjesnik : glasilo Hrvatskoga liječničkog zbora*, no. 5 (1923): p. 173-178.

Notwithstanding the public glorification of motherhood and pro-natal politics, archival nursing records reveal inadequate state support for mothers. The documents offer details concerning the motherhood challenges faced primarily by underprivileged women. Some of these challenges involved home births in poor sanitary conditions resulting in the death of both mother and child, lack of maternity leave which often threatened pregnancy or resulted in death, and illegitimate children who ended up with breadwinners or in orphanages.<sup>89</sup>

Based on the archival sources, it can be deduced that the matter of motherhood was not unambiguous, as it was imposed within the patriarchal system of the interwar period.



Fig. 13: *Svijet*, Y. 2, B. III, no. 16 (1927): p. 333 (Vladimir Bečić)

### Conclusion

World War I spawned a redefinition of gender patterns, and the media, especially the women's press, magnified the narrative of revived and redefined femininity while still promoting traditional values. By commodifying and commercializing the female body, the press raised questions about gender, sexuality and the body that cannot be understood outside of the framework of consumer society. The articles and illustrations in these publications were influential enough to alter patriarchal understandings of the female body and its representation within the culture of the interwar period. Likewise, with depictions of the nude body, magazines upset prejudices about sexuality and the bounds of tradition in which a woman's body had a purely reproductive role. However, they also encouraged unrealistic standards – imposing needs to promote consumer values and state

<sup>89</sup> HR-DAZG-237, Središnji ured sestara pomoćnica, Opći spisi; HR-DAZG-233 Gradski dječji ambulatorij u Zagrebu.

control over the body. As the best represented media with a significant following, the women's press proved to be an essential link in the complex interplay between economic processes, modernization, science, especially medicine, and the state apparatus in defining and controlling the female body. Nonetheless, in shaping a new, modern society, women were contradictorily expected to resume playing their traditional roles within patriarchal notions and preserve the nation through motherhood. Despite progress in women's emancipation, legally and medically, the male authorities still decided on the fate of their bodies.

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*Tijelo žene između potrošačke kulture i tradicionalnih uloga:  
redefiniranje rodni obrazaca kroz ženski tisak između dva svjetska  
rata u Hrvatskoj*

Prvi svjetski rat kao posljedicu je iznjedrio redefiniranje rodni uloga i obrazaca te porast popularnosti ženskog tiska. U međuratnom razdoblju upravo je ženski tisak služio kao mjesto prikazivanja različitih aspekata ženskog tijela, čime ga je neizbježno komodificirao i komercijalizirao. Analizirani tekstualni i vizualni materijal u *Ženskom listu*, *Svijetu* i *Našoj ženi* otkriva sučeljavanje moderne, potrošačke predodžbe ženskog tijela s njegovim patrijarhalnim prikazom, koji prvenstveno naglašava njegovu majčinsku ulogu. Iako je ženski tisak razbijao predrasude o ženskoj seksualnosti i ulozi ženskog tijela tako što je tijelo stavljao u središte pažnje i promicao novu ženstvenost, također je ženama nametao povratak tradicionalnim ulogama unutar patrijarhalni konceptija i populacijske politike, ističući biološku odgovornost žene-majke u očuvanju nacije i odgoju novih naraštaja. Cilj je rada istražiti kako su mediji, tradicija, modernost, ekonomski napredak i javna medicina utjecali na oblikovanje, redefiniranje i kontrolu ženskog tijela unutar potrošačkog društva. Kao najistaknutiji medij tog vremena, sa značajnim brojem sljedbenika, ženski je tisak predstavljao važnu stavku u međuodnosu ženskog tijela, njegove emancipacije i muških autoriteta koji određuju njegovu sudbinu.

*Ključne riječi:* žensko tijelo, ženski tisak, međuratno razdoblje, potrošačka kultura, modernost, redefiniranje rodni uloga, patrijarhalno društvo, javna medicina

*Key words:* women's body, women's press, interwar period, consumer culture, modernity, redefining gender roles, patriarchal society, public medicine.

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**BROJ 1**

ZAVOD ZA HRVATSKU POVIJEST  
FILOZOFSKOGA FAKULTETA SVEUČILIŠTA U ZAGREBU

**FF** press

ZAGREB 2023.

RADOVI ZAVODA ZA HRVATSKU POVIJEST  
FILOZOFSKOGA FAKULTETA SVEUČILIŠTA U ZAGREBU

Knjiga 55, broj 1

*Izdavač / Publisher*

Zavod za hrvatsku povijest  
Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu  
FF-press

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Ivana Lučića 3, HR-10 000, Zagreb  
Tel. ++385 (0)1 6120191

Časopis izlazi jedanput godišnje / The Journal is published once a year

Časopis je u digitalnom obliku dostupan na / The Journal in digital form is accessible at  
Portal znanstvenih časopisa Republike Hrvatske „Hrčak“  
<http://hrcak.srce.hr/radovi-zhp>

Financijska potpora za tisak časopisa / The Journal is published with the support by  
Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa Republike Hrvatske

Časopis je indeksiran u sljedećim bazama / The Journal is indexed in the following databases:  
Directory of Open Access Journals, EBSCO, SCOPUS, ERIH PLUS, Emerging Sources Citation  
Index - Web of Science

*Naslovna stranica / Title page by*

Marko Maraković

*Grafičko oblikovanje i računalni slog / Graphic design and layout*

Marko Maraković

*Lektura / Language editors*

Samanta Paronić (hrvatski / Croatian)

Edward Bosnar (engleski / English)

*Tisak / Printed by*

Tiskara Zelina d.d.

*Naklada / Issued*

200 primjeraka / 200 copies

*Ilustracija na naslovnici*

Muza Klio (Alexander S. Murray, *Manual of Mythology*, London 1898)

*Časopis je u digitalnom obliku dostupan na Portalu znanstvenih časopisa  
Republike Hrvatske „Hrčak“ <http://hrcak.srce.hr/radovi-zhp>*

*The Journal is accessible in digital form at the Hrčak - Portal of scientific  
journals of Croatia <http://hrcak.srce.hr/radovi-zhp>*