

Dissidents liked Pretty Girls: Nudity, Pornography and Quality Press in Socialism

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SUMMARY

Communist regimes considered pornography to be an exclusively 'Western' phenomenon and interpreted it as a sign of moral decay caused by the capitalist mode of production. Yet if we broaden the notion of pornography to include "soft" or "modest" erotica, then we have to acknowledge the existence of numerous pornographic images on the pages of various socialist magazines, daily newspapers and current affairs journals. This paper examines the phenomenon of socialist erotica in the context of socialist Yugoslavia. It starts by providing a general overview of various Yugoslav periodical publications containing pornographic and nude images, and outlines some of the key traits of official cultural policies and attitudes related to such publications. This is followed by a close examination of Start magazine, published from 1969 until 1991 in Zagreb, and widely acclaimed among the Yugoslav intellectual elite for its sharp criticism of political and social affairs. Start was the first Yugoslav magazine of a 'hybrid' nature, meaning that it combined the characteristics of a tabloid newspaper, with erotic and pornographic elements, with those of a high-brow magazine containing progressive, emancipatory and critical analysis of current affairs. The analysis is limited to the period between 1961 and 1981, and is driven by three questions: How did the conceptual blend of photographs of nude women and serious, critical articles of high quality come about? What was the reaction of its readership and social establishment? How is it related to the West and to post-socialist transition? Using frame analysis, the paper identifies the key frames evident in the textual commentaries surrounding nude images, and shows how these frames helped legitimize the pub-

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lication of nude images. Among other things, the analysis demonstrates how sexual liberation became semantically associated with liberalization and progress, and how naked female bodies functioned as symbols of Yugoslavia's progressiveness.

Key words: communist regimes, socialist erotica, Yugoslavia, periodical publications, *Start*

- "Naked?!"
- "Not naked, nude."
- "What is the difference?"
- "Art!"

(*Calendar girls*, 2003)

"I still remember the long interview with Fassbinder---OK some pictures of naked girls too---;)"

(*Leksikon Yu mitologije*, 2009)

Introduction

Our everyday life is teeming with sexually-explicit images of women, sexualized language, and sexual imagery. Many market analysts would say it is because sex sells, while gender analysts would highlight that popular construction of sexuality produces, reflects and maintains a patriarchal gender regime where "men act" and "women appear".¹

Using the expressions "*our* everyday life" and "*our* popular culture" I speak from the position of a consumer of globalized culture under the strong influence of Westernization and Americanization. Nevertheless, since "culture is the making and communication of meanings in contexts" (Storey, 2003:111) my position of speaking is influenced by its local characteristics which inevitably include experience of socialism on one side and eagerness for the amenities of the 'normal world out there' that should be the last stop in the journey of transition² of post-socialist Eastern Europe on the other. Therefore, the complex processes of "simultaneous interpenetration" and "meeting and mingling" of local and global in popular culture in our case comprise two more instances: collective remembrance of socialism and imaginings of the "welfare state".

Many analysts of post-socialism, anthropologists, economists, media and gender scholars have highlighted the blooming of sexist tabloid culture and deterioration

in women's status and representation after the fall of socialism (Gal & Kligman, 1995; Funk & Muller, 1993; Verdery, 1996; Papić, 2002; Slapšak, 2000; Žarkov, 2007; Štulhofer i Sandfort, 2005; Einhorn, 1993; Blagojević, 1995, 2005; Đurić-Kuzmanović, 2005; Kronja, 2007). Specific post-Yugoslav political, economic and social circumstances, such as strong nationalism, war, abrupt decline in the standard of living, increase in crime rate, have contributed to an outburst of pornographic media images. Given all that, it is not surprising that changes in the media, and everyday imagining of women, towards objectification and pornographification of female bodies have become a salient feature of the "transitional culture". In this respect, (new) technologies, such as mobile networks and cable operations, the tabloids and commercial TV broadcasters play a key role (Šribar, 2008). When, from the point of "transition" that is saturated with pornographification of mediated culture, we look back at popular culture under socialism, we could get the impression that pornography did not exist or that it was marginalized and ghettoized.³

Nevertheless, if we consider images of naked women as pornography rather than merely "soft" or "modest" erotica, then we have to acknowledge the existence of numerous pornographic images on the pages of not only specialized magazines with "erotic content", but of many daily newspapers and current affairs journals. The other problem is that specialized erotic or pornographic magazines were not marginalized but, on the contrary, had a large circulation and were rather popular (Kržišnik, 1989:2). Besides profitability, there could be several more reasons why the socialist establishment was relatively tolerant towards pornography in the media. One of them is probably the fact that a notion of pornography was not clearly defined and often labelled as "erotica", which was regarded as more acceptable.⁴ Also important was the fact that the cultural establishment did not hold a unique stance towards "erotica" in the media. While some blamed it for being "insulting of public morals" others thought that it helped "break the old taboos about human sexuality" and that photos of the naked female body and similar content contributed to the equality of the sexes (Petak, 1975 cited in Senjković, 2008: 69). Some analysts were keen to say that the authorities were not very restrictive towards pornography because of their politics of "bread and circuses."⁵

In the post-socialist proliferation of pornography and political right-wing extremism, tabloids have become the place of interconnectedness and interaction between the two phenomena. In her study of current tabloid journalism in Serbia, Ivana Kronja argues that Serbian tabloid dailies frequently use soft-porn photography paired with political right-wing articles and essays, nationalistic hate-speech and "warrior Serb manhood". Serbian tabloids represent a symbiosis of "misogynistic pornographic elements" and "authoritarian patriarchy" and favour "political ex-

tremism” and “undemocratic arrangement” (Kronja, 2007:189–190). While, in transition, photos of naked and half-naked female bodies are connected to authoritarian tendencies of right-wing radicalism, in the socialist context these photos were linked, as some editors and columnists claimed, to the process of liberalization and anti-authoritarian potential. In that way, the female body could be seen as a site where the battle over meaning is held and to which different ideologies ascribe different goals and uses.

Socialist cultural policy and nudity/pornography in media

The first magazine with a pornographic orientation in socialist Yugoslavia was *Adam i Eva*, but the first printed medium where the “naked female body is used as an illustration for an article with political content” was *Čik (Ilustrovana Politika*, 24 Avgust 2002). *Čik* changed its name to *Zum*, then to *Zum Reporter*, and finally *Reporter*, which was stopped from being published in the mid-1980s because of its uncensored political content (*Ibid.*). *Start* was the other popular high circulation magazine in Yugoslavia with a similar format: photographs of naked women and political (provocative) texts. *Erotika* had similar editorial policies: quality articles, outstanding journalists and columnists and pornographic images. *Vroči kaj* was one of the most popular pornographic magazines and provoked criticism and anger among the cultural establishment, but was popular and had a great circulation (Kržišnik, 1989).

Besides magazines with overtly-pornographic images, there were many “mainstream” dailies and even family magazines in socialist Yugoslavia that regularly published nude female images. Photos of a half-naked popular singer or actress and “page-three girl” were published in the Yugoslav press during the 1970s as entertainment features and a consequence of the liberalization of “mediated culture” (Mihelj, 2007). The quantity and dispersion of pornographic and nude female images started to arouse the attention of different members of the socialist establishment, which resulted in consultations and conferences and, finally, in the adoption of the “Law on the Tax on Books, Magazines and Other Publications” (1971). The cultural establishment tried to suppress “tendencies of commercialization and corruption of the socialistic value system” (Popović et al., 1975: 411) in the media and in entertainment. The results of the Law were not entirely satisfactory for the establishment. While there were changes –for example, photos of naked women became less wide-spread than before the law was introduced – but many changes were “cosmetic” – as, for example, changes in the name of the paper or some unimportant and trivial changes in editorial policies (Senjković, 2008). At a conference “Zabavna štampa i ostala zabavna literatura” that was held

in 1975 in Zagreb, members of the socialist cultural establishment gathered together with editors and journalists to evaluate the results of fiscal politics in culture and reach an agreement about how to “elevate” the country’s entertainment media. Nevertheless, the conference offered no new solutions in cultural policies.⁶ It was stressed that a “socialistic concept of popular culture was missing” and that “fiscal politics should be restrictive forerunner of more active and complex social politics” (Šuvar, 1975: 330). While some magazines were criticized for “pulp fiction”, others were approved because they made positive changes and progress in quality. For example, it was said that *Start* was “far ahead of all the other magazines with erotic content” (Sabljak, 1975: 348-349, cited in Senjković, 2008: 81), because it had quality and valuable articles about politics, science and art (Sabljak, 1975: 348-349). *Start* was not a unique case in the socialistic media environment. As already mentioned, photos of naked or scantily-dressed women were widespread in the media. On the other hand, to publish a photo of a naked man in some “quality” mainstream paper was not only undesirable but also forbidden. When the photo of a popular Yugoslav football player appeared on the pages of *Polet*, the weekly magazine of the League of Socialist Youth of Croatia, in 1980, it provoked scandal and condemnation, and the issue of the magazine was prohibited, as the court judged the photograph to be pornographic. Among the first who react to the “double public standard” was *Start* magazine, which published an article in which the author posed the question: “How come that photos of naked man jeopardize public moral while photos of naked woman don’t?” (*Start*, 1980, No. 293: 67). Just a few pages away from this lucid analysis of the patriarchal socialistic climate, photographs of naked women were published, demonstrating the core of hybridity of the magazine *Start*.

Case study: *Start* magazine – tabloid, pornographic or quality press

The research here is concentrated on the *Start* magazine, published from 1969 until 1991 in Zagreb, in socialist Yugoslavia. *Start* was chosen for analysis because it represented one of the first examples of media of hybrid genre⁷ in former Yugoslavia that gained wide popularity throughout the country and had great influence in the media environment.

If the key attribute of quality press is of ‘high public significance’ and ‘democratic spirit, political rationality, in-depth debate, as well as analyticity and high journalistic culture’ (Spasov, 2004:9), then *Start* magazine was certainly a quality paper. One of the most distinctive features that creators of *Start* were proud of was *The Interview* section. Many outstanding public persons were interviewed for *Start*, and many high-quality interviews were taken from foreign magazines. In

most cases the interviewees were outstanding artists, movie directors, opera singers, actors, leading politicians, scientist, writers etc.⁸ The quality of interviews moved the magazine far away from the tabloids. *Start* was founded, to bring money to the company and it succeeded in that as well as the other entertaining publications issued by *Vjesnik*. It was the most dominant publishing house in Yugoslavia that had “the most modern technical possibilities and staff who were better organized and had better skills than other Croatian press and publishing companies” (Senjković, 2008: 101–2). In case of *Start*, some of the most progressive journalists and other professionals worked for the magazine.⁹ From the mid-1970s, serious issues were presented more and more frequently, and were treated in a serious manner. Quality texts, analysis, comments and valid information appeared in the fields of science, ecology, fashion, health, underground culture (graffiti), literature, etc. *Start* promoted new emerging literature, “jeans-prose”, by issuing novels.¹⁰ The “jeans-prose” bloomed during the 1960s and became very popular in the field of urban, anti-conformist and anti-hierarchic progressive literature. Eminent university professor Aleksandar Flaker, theoretician of “jeans-prose”, praised *Start* as a very important magazine for “the revival of our literature and generally our cultural development” (*Start*, 1978, No. 236).

In the first editorial note of the first issue, the magazine was presented as “a magazine for every family, and for each of our citizens” (*Start*, 1969, No.1). Nothing was said about nude and pornographic images, but the first issue of the magazine already set the frame in which visual, as well as textual, features of the magazine would be developed. A cover-page female nude became ‘the trade mark’ of the magazine. From the very beginning up until the last issue of the magazine (1969–1991), photographs of naked or scantily-dressed women appeared on every single cover-page of the magazine. “Pin-up” (*duplerica*) that first appeared in the fifth issue remained one of the constant features. *Start* had to pay the tax imposed on books, magazines and other publications because of its cover-pages and pin-ups for only two issues. But as the editor stressed, “bad reputation followed it for much longer ... our journalists were turned down ... and respectable famous people ... did not allow their names to be mentioned on the pages of our magazine” (*Start*, 1969, No.1). That is why a new editor was appointed and what was aimed at was a balance between “circulation and seriousness, light reading and quality” (*Ibid.*). Another epoch of *Start* began (from 1973), when the editorial staff and concept of the magazine changed, enriching the magazine with more socially-significant topics and improving the quality of reports. They started dealing with social-political issues, but in a *different* way. The transformed *Start* was praised and said to be “far ahead of all other magazines with erotic content” (Sabljak 1975, pp. 348–9, cited in Senjković 2008: 81). The aim was to turn “the magazine, which

was until then intended mostly for men of lower education into a magazine that would address mostly urban, educated readers of both genders” (Ibid.). Even though later analysis will show that *Start* addressed “the other gender” in some of its sections, it still seems that the most problematic aspect from women’s point of view – nude female photographs – was not viewed as problematic by the creators of *Start*.

Judging by the front page, which symbolizes and announces the entire magazine, there is no doubt that this was a magazine for men. However, the magazine contained many women’s issues, starting from information that concerns mostly women, from, for example, gynecology, artificial insemination (*Start*, 1969, No.10), birth control (*Start*, 1971, No.61), abortion (*Start*, 1971, No.73), childbirth, epidural anesthesia (*Start*, 1976, No.185), infertility (*Start*, 1971, No. 55), to advertisements intended for women, as, for example, cosmetics, food, (“How to make a good *struklji* dish”) as well as household appliances, women’s cigarettes, women’s fashion, etc. Advertisements for products for men were fewer and mainly advertised cars, alcohol and tobacco as well as products for potency (“*libido* – sugar-coated tablets”). Some sections of the magazines, as for example *Eva’s Notebook*, *Intimate Consulting*, *Lonely Hearts* were dedicated to professional advice for the readers, typical of women’s magazines.

Trying to keep both genders of its readership, as well as to maintain balance between fun and good quality, *Start* became a hybrid cultural form and an example of a modern, critical, liberal magazine. However, nude female images remained one of the dominant features of the magazine. The question which inevitably arises is what are the consequences of such a genre blend in the realm of media and social representation of women?

Different definitions of pornography depend on different contexts and ideological formations. During the transition, pornography is considered as a part of consumerism and liberal capitalism (Šribar, 2006), or ultra right-wing politics (Kronja, 2007). Under socialism, pornography is often considered as a sub-culture which functions as a counteraction to moralism, conservatism, traditionalism, and public hypocrisy and in support of sexual and even women’s liberation (*Start*, 1979, No.269). The third way in understanding pornography is defined by anti-pornography feminists who dislocated problem of pornography from the field of morality and the field of sexual freedom to the realm of women’s civil rights (Šribar, 2006). With this change in perspective, pornography is seen as dominant discourse in which sexual inequality is constructed and maintained. It is defined from the point of “sexualizing gender inequality” and “female submission with a sexual connotation” (Šribar, 2006: 14). From this point of view, pornography degrades and objectifies women, contributes to misogynist discourses and (re)produces male

dominance. It could be argued that publishing nude female images side by side with serious and quality articles contributed to “mainstreaming” the depiction of women as sex object and consequently reducing women to a sexualized body. This manner of gender representation coincided with the increasingly-minor role of woman in the socialist reality (Todorović-Uzelac, 1987) and reached its peak in the post-socialist media porn expansion.

Methodological frameworks: research questions, sample and method

The analysis of *Start* magazine is driven by three questions: How did the conceptual blend of photographs of nude women and serious, critical articles of high quality come about? What was the reaction of its readership and social establishment? How is it related to West and post-socialist transition? Consequently, the analysis touches upon questions of women’s representation in socialism.

Start magazine is important because it was the first with the concept of combining together the characteristics of a tabloid, with erotic and pornographic elements, with a serious magazine in a hybrid that not only became very popular but also paved the way for future magazines of this type in the post-socialist period. The period under analysis is the time span from the beginning of *Start* magazine in 1969 until 1981 because it illustrates the breakthrough of the media using female nudes and sexually-explicit images as well as liberal discourses on sex in socialist Yugoslavia. By frame analysis I tried to emphasize different ways of organizing discourses on sex during more than 10 years of the magazine. The sample for analysis is selected on the basis of appearances of sexually-explicit elements in images and articles.

By “frame analysis”, I refer to Gitlin’s media frame theory and definition of frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (Gitlin, 1980:7). Furthermore, the basis of our research uses Eck’s (2003) identification of several frames elaborated in her research on gendered reception of nude images. While investigating how men and women react to opposite- and same-sex nudes, she came to the conclusion that there are four frames “that help one understand nude images” – art, pornographic frame, information frame (medical texts) and advertising (commodified frame) (Eck, 2003: 692). In the present article, attention is shifted from the viewer to the (media) producer with special consideration given to the context. While Eck is “concerned with how people apply a variety of frames to nude images”, I look to the ways producers frame sexually-explicit content (including nude images) in the

attempt to be in accordance with both the buyer of the magazine and the socialist cultural and political establishment. Consequently, we are interested in what the implications were of gender representations in socialist popular culture.

Distinction frame “We are different”: Pornography vs. “art”, West vs. East, East vs. Yugoslavia

There are several frames which facilitate the social acceptance of sexual images of women and pornographic imagery and provide an alibi for an otherwise unacceptable discourse of sex and pornography. In the first issue of *Start*, a photo of a half-naked woman appeared with the accompanying text in which the woman with exposed breasts explains:

“Striptease in the western fashion – no. But, striptease with aesthetic, ballet and choreographic elements – yes”. This is what the first lady of the Czech striptease, Sonia Stenova, said in an interview for the Bratislava-based magazine *World*, explaining that striptease could, under certain conditions, be a form of art, like any other. (*Start*, 1969, No.1)

The socialist striptease is conceived not as pornography, but as “art”. Artistic nudity has cultural value and significance, therefore it deserves to appear in Yugoslav magazines and not be condemned by public or socialist establishment.

At the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s there were often photographs spread on two or more pages in *Start* taken from western erotic movies. These photographs, which could be shocking at the time, were accompanied by the commentaries which were a sharp critique of such films. In one of the examples, a journalist expressed his dislike of a movie with sexually-explicit scenes:

Cheesy kitsch, an era of business, sex and violence, spiritual poverty and stupidity are reasons for watching erotic movies. (*Start* 1969, No. 2)

It has been noticed that “hard porn” featured in Western countries is something completely different from “soft porn” and particularly from the nude images in *Start*. In comparison with Western “hard porn”, “beautiful nude women on the pages of *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Playman*, *Lui* or our *Start* were nuns” (*Start*, 1976, No.183). Often, there was harsh criticism for East Germany’s (GDR Germany) liberal stance towards pornography (*Start*, 1970, No. 36; *Start*, 1969, No.13-16).

An ambivalent relationship towards western media is obvious throughout this analysis: the creators *Start* criticize western sexually-explicit representation, but at

the same time they identify with some leading Western men's magazines, overtly stating that they published their articles and images.

Appropriation frame “We are the same”

The editors and journalist of *Start* did not hide that they found a role-model in foreign Western men's magazines. They very often reprinted articles and photographs from the foreign press.¹¹ They obviously exploited the “ideology of ‘our girl’” (*Start*, 1979, No.269). This ideology assumed that “other” foreign girls would be more acceptable in the eyes of the public than having “our” nude women on the pages, confirmed when some nude photographs of “our” celebrities caused strong public disapproval.¹² Another reason for taking the pictures and articles from the foreign Western press was probably the lack of such production at home. Nevertheless, this practice, turned out to be very popular among readers.

Identification with leading world magazines – “beautiful nude women on the pages of *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Playman*, *Lui* or our *Start* ...” (*Start*, 1976, No. 183) – allowed *Start* to continue in such a manner: if nude females are presented on the pages of famous magazines, than “our magazine” should do the same. In this vein, identification with such magazines is confirmation of *Start*'s modernity and progress.

Art and esthetic frame: “Beautiful women”

As already mentioned, *Start* was famous for “beautiful girls”: the cover-page nude female was ‘the trade mark’ of the magazine and from the very first to the last issue (1969-1991), photographs of naked or scantily-dressed women appeared on every single copy. The “pin-up” (*duplerica*) that first appeared in the fifth issue remained one of the constant features until the last issue of the magazine.

To mark the tenth anniversary of the magazine, *Start* published all of the 263 cover-pages issued between 1969 and 1979, and the editor noted:

Is there any question with a clearer answer than this one: ‘Guess what is on the cover of *Start*?’ A beautiful woman. (*Start*, 1979, No. 263)

He also asserted that the beautiful woman needed to be “anonymous”, “she should be neither blonde, nor dark-haired, her whole body should be shown and she should look the buyer in the eye (provocatively, but not vulgarly)” (*Ibid.*). Emphasizing that nude photographs are not vulgar but provocative is essential for the way in which the creators of the magazine, as well as its fans, saw the magazine.

Sexy images were seen as erotic, artistic, sexually-liberating and not pornographic. The editor pointed out that, in the beginning, “the only purpose of *Start* magazine was to bring revenues to the company,” but later on, it was transformed into a magazine of good quality that “was read by all of Yugoslavia” (*Ibid.*). The editor further admitted that at first they did not know who “*Start* is actually intended for”, which is why they marked time in the beginning until they decided to make what was, at that time, a bold move: “In the fifth issue of *Start*, on the colour centrefold, for the first time in the history of Yugoslav journalism, the now famous *Start*’s pin-up appeared!” (*Ibid.*), using successful foreign magazines as their role-models. Ever since they started publishing nude pin-ups of models, the circulation doubled to 160,000 copies. *Start*’s creators, as many readers, believe that pin-ups have contributed to “slowly changing our traditional attitude to the human body in general”. The editor further concluded “...nowadays few people see anything provocative in them, not to mention anything lascivious: they naturally belong to *Start*, as grapes grow on the vine” (*Ibid.*).

Information frame: Sexual education and scientific discourse of sex

Searching for an opportunity to show sexually-explicit content and nude females, the creators of *Start* tried to wrap sex in a scientific and educational discourse. One series of photographs show every stage of the process of giving birth in detail (*Start*, 1970, No.1). Today is quite unthinkable that scenes from a delivery room can be in any way shocking or provocative. But, in the late 1960s, this series of photographs had its function and there was a reason for printing them. The feelings that these photographs may provoke are shock and curiosity, and this was probably the card the editors played, although it was wrapped in the discourse of medical education.

A series of articles (*feuilleton*) brought “confessions of a homosexual” which were between sensationalism and information about the discrimination of homosexuals (*Start*, 1971, No. 73). Several years later, the problem of social discrimination of homosexuality was represented with more in-depth analyses and it was covered in a more “serious” style (*Start*, 1979, No. 261). This category also includes quasi-scientific *feuilletons* about sex and sexual revolution (*Start*, 1969, No. 43; 1969, No.22; 1969, No.25) and quasi-scientific texts about nymphomania (*Start*, 1974, No. 130). The section with professional advice as *Eva’s Notes*, *Intimate Consultation* and similar were a very fruitful field for sexually-explicit narrations.

Emancipation frame: Sexual and gender liberation

The outstanding journalists of the magazine often tried to defend pornography and erotica from charges of hypocrisy and false morality (*Start*, 1971, No.72). Advices and comments on sexual behavior were a constant feature of the magazine (*Start*, 1971, No.72). Fostering the sexual liberation sometimes brought about such absurd statements as: “Virginity can sometimes lead to severe physical and mental illness, even cancer” (*Start*, 1969, No.6). Besides pseudo-scientific articles on sexual issues, sometimes relevant texts on sexual education, legislation and sexual minorities appeared. The article “Sex is shaking the paragraphs?” contains new suggestions about changes in the criminal law which imply that “no sexual behavior or relation which is based on a free decision of mature and responsible partners can be the object of criminal legislative repression“ (*Start*, 1974, No.152). In the vein of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and owing to the socialist discourses and practices based on the break from the church and traditional bourgeois norms and standards, it was not only allowed, but also welcomed, to criticize these instances. In other words, the critique of Church and tradition which were at the very core of the officially proclaimed ideology of socialism opened the niche for pro-pornographic discourses. In an interview with Frederico Fellini, the “positive effects” of pornography were highlighted:

Pornography is not an ideal form of the freedom of expression, because it is void of thought, spirit, art, but it is better to have pornography than nothing. If nothing else, it makes people think about sexual problems in a different way. That is not the right way of thinking about sex, but what we need to do is put sex in the right perspective, stop overdramatizing it and take away from the church the power to use sex to blackmail people. (*Start*, 1974, 153)

Much of the attention in *Start* was paid to the issues of sexual liberation:

The epoch of the rule of the youth is coming – sexual liberation cannot be separated from the other individual and social problems, but it can contribute to solving many of them. (*Start*, 1975, 162)

Some of the best *Start*'s journalists wrote in defense of pornography in the name of liberty and against the hypocrisy of traditional morality. Moreover, the proper understanding of pornography was related to “cultural capital”:

...Obscene pictures on the back of the mirror or coital anecdotes in famous magazines are nothing more, for a well-bred person, but the symptoms of a sub-culture, fed with prohibitions and hypocrisy of public morals. (*Start*, 1979, 269)

Pornography and nudity were often considered in *Start* not only as emancipatory in terms of sexuality, but also in terms of women's liberation:

In the second half of our century, woman came on the scene like a thunderbolt, activating mentally, and physically if you will, mostly those parts of her being that were most suppressed, hidden and kept locked. (*Ibid.*)

Moreover, "by showing her naked body, which was until then solely men's obsession, she announced her candidacy for the wholeness of her personality." Although it is, as the journalist admits, paradoxical, "only nudity, widely spread in democratic dimensions, destroyed the prejudices of the traditional culture against women." Nudity is "a slap in the face of a patriarchal wimp" and a mini-skirt is subversive because "the flash of female thighs, with the barely covered bottom was equal to a nuclear assault on patriarchy" (*Ibid.*). The article was related to a public scandal which was caused by some nude photographs of a popular Yugoslav female singer. The author noticed that "the public" had not been made anxious by the nudity of foreign models and beauties, but when 'our girl' had taken off her clothes "moral panic" ensued and it turned out that the "naked bottom" and "bare breasts" became "the national emblem" in which "we encode our values" (*Ibid.*). The article was written from the anti-chauvinistic and anti-patriarchal stance and, from that position, the author wrote in defence of female nudity in the media. Such a connection of libertarian ideas and sexism is highly characteristic of the discourse in *Start* magazine.

Conclusions

The analysis of *Start* magazine, 1969 until 1991 in socialist Yugoslavia, aims to shed light on three sets of issues: media genre, pornography/sex/gender discourses and socialist popular culture. As a pioneer in new cultural form, a hybrid mix of tabloid, men's magazine, life-style magazine and serious, quality press, *Start* was the first to show that a combination of pin-ups and porno chic photographs on one side and high quality articles on serious political, social and cultural issues on the other side can be very successful on the market. Socialism was a very fertile

ground for such a media hybrid. First, anti-traditionalism was an element of official ideology and it allowed a cultural form which was based on breaking with “old traditional moral and hypocrisy” to enter the public scene. Second, after 1948 and the break with Stalin, Yugoslavia had opened up to Western influences in popular culture and new ideas and phenomena: sexual liberation, feminism and alternative movements. Third, hybridity of media forms provided an opportunity for new, different and quality content to enter the magazine. On the one hand, visual features of the magazine signalled content specific to men’s magazines and tabloids (images of nude females, celebrities, tabloid-style of coverage), on the other hand there were also some “alibi” themes in accordance with socialistic ideology (photographs of Tito, articles about NOB, great warriors and national heroes) and in between there was space left for critical and serious coverage, high-quality comments and columns crucial for *Start*’s image.

Hybrid connection of photographs of naked female bodies and pornographic imagery with progressive, emancipatory and critical texts gave birth to a new type of printed media in socialism. The aim of this new hybrid media form is “to open our eyes, to direct us towards ourselves, to rouse us from television and review numbness, to direct us to the world of real problems, make us suspicious of phrases, even our own quotations ...” (*Start*, 1976, No.195). In that way, *Start* paved the way for liberal, progressive and emancipatory practices and discourses which became the core of political and social transformations at the end of 1980s. Magazines with a hybrid mix of sexist representation of women and progressive and critical texts continue to be successful in post-socialism. While they were raising social and political awareness and responsibility, were reliable in coverage, critical towards the regime, had quality texts and used outstanding authors, they also published pornographic photographs of naked women that promoted sexism and gender stereotypes.

Commercialization and western influences contributed to the appearance of tabloids while socialist ideas and devices called for seriousness and adjustment. In this environment of a “Yugoslav third way” in politics and in culture, popular magazines like *Start* had great influence not only on popular culture, but also on the process of emancipation and democratization which inevitably included re-arrangement of the “gender regime”. Although, in the light of sexual liberation movements at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, depiction of women as nudes could be read as a form of resistance to patriarchal constraints, it is also clear that these ‘revolutionary’ nude pictures soon narrowed potential meanings to the naked one – entertainment for men. It has become the most dominant construction of female sexuality.

The hybrid cultural form of “luxury dolls” (Peratoner, 1973) and “Page Three Girls” accompanied by quality articles and anti-regime criticism can offer considerable material for reflection on paradoxical interconnections of emancipation and sexism, as well as social progressive tendencies and gender backlash. On the other hand, analysis of *Start* can shed light on similarities between Western and socialist popular culture. *Playboy* was inevitably a role model for *Start* magazine. Although this cultural form went through considerable changes along with its transfer from western capitalist society to a socialist one, it is clear that sexually-explicit content, pornography and nude female images were very visible in mainstream media and popular culture of socialist Yugoslavia.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ In his famous book “Ways of Seeing” John Berger argues that in the history of European art “men look at women” and women are depicted as “being looked at”. Men occupied positions of both the spectators and the owners of the paintings. Female nudes are submissive to “the owner of both woman and painting”. (Berger, 1972:52).
- ² According to some interpretations, the term *transition* has negative connotations, since “it assumes evolutionary progress from one well known ‘stage’ of history to another. It thereby inadvertently continues the Cold War morality tale (...), one that pitted two ‘sides’ against each other in an implicit contest for who was ‘ahead’” (Gal and Kligman, 2000: 10). On the other side, it has been pointed out that “in Eastern Central Europe, in contrast to Latin America and other regions, the processes were not only ‘transitions’ to democracy but were simultaneously political, economic, and social ‘transformations’ (*Ibid.*: 121). Another problem is that it is not clear what is the starting point and what is the final point of ‘transition’ (Senjković, 2008: 10).
- ³ “Pornography was forbidden by law but appeared in the symbolic ghetto of a few yellow print weeklies, a few cinemas, and smuggled porno magazines” (Šribar, 2008).
- ⁴ “Pornography is defined towards legal and ethical norms and “good taste”, but what are valid ethical norms and good taste nobody knows...” (*Start*, 1980, No. 294)
- ⁵ “Authorities ... have supported the project (pornographic magazine *Vroči kaj*) because they didn’t subject it to taxation.” Pornography is welcomed by the authorities in the times of “crises, worker’s strikes, price rises, unemployment and general decaying” (Kržišnik, 1989:2).
- ⁶ The papers presented at the conference were published in the journal *Kulturni život*, No 6, 1975
- ⁷ Quality articles and emancipatory discourse side by side tabloid issues and female nudes.
- ⁸ For example: Galup George, Coco Chanel, Vesna Parun, Bekim Fehmiu, Hugh Hefner, Federico Fellini, Zora Korać, Lennon, Oriana Fallaci, Vesna Krmpotić, Meša Selimović, Henri Miller, Momo Kapor, Roman Polanski, Jane Fonda, Françoise Sagan, Woody Allen, Jimmy Carter, Danilo Kiš, Isaac Bashevic Singer, Eric Hobsbawm, etc.
- ⁹ For example: Zoran Živković, Vesna Kesić, Dražen Vrdoljak, Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, Slavenka Drakulić, etc.
- ¹⁰ *Foliranti*, Momo Kapor (from 1974, No.138); *Provincijalci*, Momo Kapor.; *Stari dečki*, Zvonimir Majdak, (1975, No.167).

- ¹¹ The reprinting and “importing” material from Western media were wide-spread practices in the Yugoslav media environment.
- ¹² Moni Kovačić was the first Yugoslav popular singer who posed naked for Start in 1979 and provoked many public polemics.
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Disidentima su se sviđale lijepe djevojke: golotinja, pornografija i kvalitetno novinarstvo u socijalizmu

Biljana Žikić

SAŽETAK

Komunistički režimi smatrali su pornografiju za isključivo "zapadnjački" fenomen i interpretirali su je kao znak moralnog propadanja izazvanog kapitalističkim oblikom produkcije. Ipak, ako proširimo pojam pornografije na "soft" ili "modest" erotiku, tada moramo priznati postojanje brojnih pornografskih slika na stranicama raznih socijalističkih časopisa, dnevnih novina i publicistike općenito. Ovaj rad ispituje fenomen erotike u socijalističkoj državi u kontekstu socijalističke Jugoslavije. Počinje navođenjem generalnog pregleda raznih jugoslavenskih periodičkih publikacija koje sadrže pornografske i gole slike te navodi neke od ključnih osobina službene kulturne politike i stavova vezanih uz takve publikacije. Nakon toga slijedi pažljiv pregled časopisa *Start*, izdavanog od 1969. do 1991. godine u Zagrebu te opće priznatog među jugoslavenskom intelektualnom elitom zbog svoje oštre kritike na politička i socijalna pitanja. *Start* je bio prvi jugoslavenski časopis "hibridne" prirode što znači da je spajao karakteristike tabloida s erotičnim i pornografskim elementima s onim karakteristikama kojima se odlikuju ozbiljni časopisi što sadrže progresivne, emancipatorske i kritičke analize aktualnih pitanja. Analiza je ograničena na period između 1961. i 1981. godine i vođena je trima pi-

tanjima: Kako je došlo do konceptualne mješavine fotografija golih žena i ozbiljne, kritičke analize visoke kvalitete? Koja je bila reakcija čitateljstva i društveno utemeljenje? Kako je taj koncept vezan uz zapad i post-socijalističku tranziciju? Koristeći okvir takve analize, rad pronalazi ključne zamisli u tekstualnim komentarima kojima su okružene slike golih žena i pokazuje kako su te zamisli pomogle ozakonjivanju objave golih slika. Između ostalog, analiza demonstrira kako je seksualno oslobođenje postalo semantički povezano s liberalizacijom i napretkom te kako su gola ženska tijela funkcionirala kao simbol progresivnosti Jugoslavije.

Ključne riječi: komunistički režim, socijalistička erotika, Jugoslavija, periodičke publikacije, Start