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“Balkan Barbie: women and consumer culture in post-socialist Croatia”

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This paper looks at advertising, an important market force, as a point of tension in negotiating the place of women in the economic sphere in Croatia. It grounds theories of gender, transformation, and consumer culture in the experiences of women. At first glance, women’s magazine advertising presents a Balkan Barbie, a glamorous woman who does not fit the local economic situation. Research suggests that these ads are a symbolic text of society’s western cultural orientation and geo-political aspiration. Also, Croatian society historically tends to associate the nation with femininity. Advertisements are also symbolic of new class differences among women, and a continuation of economic and cultural patriarchy. The implications for feminism in the Balkans are discussed.
INTRODUCTION

It has now been fifteen years since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of state socialism in Europe. Especially in the Balkans, the transformation of state socialism and one party rule into democracy and private ownership has not been the move to a western style capitalist, market economy that some consumer behavior researchers implied in research conducted in the early 1990s (Ger, Belk, and Lascu 1993). The restructuring of new elites takes its base in cultural norms as well as in state socialist structures and ideologies. A backlash against socialist gender equality reaffirms politics and economics as the male sphere (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Einhorn 1993; Gal and Kligman 2000; Rueschemeyer 1994). In the transformation process, femininity is a point of tension.

Similar to policies of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia that put the revolution of society before women’s issues, most political parties in Croatia now put national needs before the needs of women. Like most revolutions (Chafetz and Dworkin 1986), both the socialist and post-socialist efforts for liberation were largely efforts for male equality (Molyneux 1995). In the Marxist viewpoint, gender equality would be an outcome of state socialism. Women’s issues were considered as less important than the revolution and something to take care of after. They were never fully addressed during state socialism in Yugoslavia (Sofos 1996). In the current political and cultural situation, they are also not addressed. Catholicism is central in Croatian culture. Throughout the post-socialist states, the Church is actively promoting restrictive reproductive rights
(Einhorn 1993). Now, the Croatian state and the Catholic Church call women to build the nation through leaving the workforce and returning to motherhood in the domestic sphere. The post-socialist effort to re-build Croatia is, like the socialist transformation was, a hyper-masculine effort of restructuring the economy and government following a war and independence movement.

To understand the role of advertising in the current transformation phenomenon in Croatia, feminist scholars might see the current transformation either as a chance to improve or destabilize the lives of women in the Balkans, or a combination of the two. The relationship between market forces and gender is generally tenuous. Women, especially women working in advertising agencies, have used advertising as a force for change, especially in periods of transformation in US history, for example the 1920s and 1960s (Scott 2000). Advertising, as a part of an economic arrangement that oppresses women, has also continued their subjugation through its imagery and language (Bordo 2000). During Croatia’s current transformation, women in agencies could take leading roles in business and economy. Advertising could also continue to promote the patriarchal arrangement of society in Croatia. The socialist experience, cultural patriarchy, independence, and the 1991-1995 war in Croatia are important historic and cultural forces in this process of change (Pavlović 1999; Sofos 1996; Stojsavljevic 1995). I believe that any change that is possible will be in the context of the local situation. This paper looks at advertising, an important market force, as a point of tension in negotiating the place of women in the economic sphere in Croatia. It grounds theories in the
experiences of women in Croatia with the hope that this will contribute to understanding the issues of feminism in the Balkans.

Croatia, a country with a population of 4 million, is presented because Yugoslavia had the most developed advertising and marketing, the most open political system, and the highest standard of living of the socialist states (Pecotich, Renko, and Schultz 1994). Croatia was a Republic of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) from 1946 to independence in 1991. The economic situation is reversed now. Most of the post-socialist states entered the European Union on May 1, 2004 while Croatia’s candidacy process is likely to be completed in 2009. The benefits of the market economy are highly disputed in Croatia. Unlike the new European Union member states, Croatia experienced four years of war on its territory (1991-1995). The meaning of femininity in this hyper-masculine context is under attack (Pavlović 1999). This provides an important example of the tensions between markets forces, societies, and femininity.

This paper first presents an overview of transformation studies. The paper discusses socialist advertising and consumer culture. It describes femininity in that context. It also discusses important historic influences. The paper continues with an ethnographic presentation of the current phenomenon. This connects the literature on gender, the transformation, and the Balkans with seventeen months of interpretive research in Croatia conducted by the author in 2002-03. The research explored the tensions as political, social, and economic forces assert hyper-masculinity in the public sphere, and advertising, specifically magazine advertising, calls women to participate in public life. Global advertising agency offices in Croatia are examined as a site of
women’s employment. Advertising is usually a gendered field. Agencies were a part of the socialist experience, and the globalization of advertising might offer a glimpse into how gender dynamics transform. These offices in Croatia Advertisements are explored as a social text of economic, class, and gender arrangement. Some main themes in the research are the tensions professional women feel with the traditional feminine role of mother, women’s subjective economic experience and expectations, class differences among women, independence, war, and privatization.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Consumers in Yugoslavia, like those in many other state socialist countries, were exposed to global consumer culture during state socialism. A female informant from Split, a Croatian coastal city, described 1970s consumer culture through a memory of watching her oldest sister apply red lipstick that she brought back from Germany. However, scholars of the transformation of state socialist societies often present consumer culture in state socialism as a political and ideological contradiction or unexpected aberration of state socialism. Consumption is rarely presented as normal, which makes state socialism seem not normal, and therefore capitalism becomes the norm (Gille 2004). This paper extends previous research on advertising in Yugoslavia (Hanson 1974; Patterson 2003) by treating it as supporting, not challenging the state socialist project. This view overlooks important cultural, regional, and geo-political
differences throughout state socialism. There is an effort in sociology and cultural studies to research consumption during state socialism as an important activity in daily life, especially in the lives of women (Berdahl 1999), and an important process of meaning making (Reid and Crowley 2000). As the consumer behavior literature asserts, consumer culture is not limited to the most affluent countries of the world, it is not exclusive to west, and to see it that way is ethnocentric (Belk 1988). Moreover, consumption and economic systems go together; consumption is also a fundamental part of non-monetary societies (Douglas and Isherwood 1979).

What, then, characterized socialist consumer culture? Rassuli and Hollander (1986, p. 5) describe four elements of a culture of consumption. They are: consumption substantially above subsistence, exchange of goods and services rather than self-production, an ethic that sees consumption as acceptable and appropriate, and judgment of others and the self by their consuming lifestyles. This paper will briefly review those in the socialist context. This paper understands consumer culture as a process of state socialism in the political and socio-cultural realms (Yurchak 2003). First, the basic communist party social contract promised to take care of the basic human needs of all people. For very political reasons, the state planned for consumption levels above mere sustenance and did not destroy the second economy as a way of securing consumption levels it could not meet (Verdery 1996). Second, goods and services were obtained through consumption, not self production. The state sought to eliminate self production as a means of maintaining power (Verdery 1996). Third, consumption was socially acceptable. State socialist governments promoted a specific consumer ethic: a level of
consumption just as high as the west (Ditchev 2004). Consumption was also part of the state modernization project. Fourth, people judged themselves and other by consumer lifestyles. Consumers showed their social and political status by displaying branded goods as a symbol of their access to resources (Berdahl 1999). Consumers viewed their access to goods in Austria and Italy as a part of their national status. Women’s dress was a sign of national westernness. To consider the transformation as a change from polar opposites of planned to market economies fails to acknowledge the dynamic in between. What happens in Croatia, and in other transformation societies, is a nuanced and qualitative change that has so far developed into a blend of socialism, capitalism, and local economic cultures (Verdery 1996).

A specific consumer culture developed in Yugoslavia, informed especially by its self-judgment as western according to access to western markets. This was important in the historical context of the Cold War. Yugoslavia broke with the Soviet Union in 1948 and after that took its own course of socialism with a human face. It positioned itself between capitalism and state socialism. At the same time that Yugoslavia accepted loans from the United States, it organized the non-aligned movement. This had an influence on local consumer culture. Advertising was a part of almost every state socialist economy (). Differences in culture, economy, and politics characterize the advertising in state socialist countries.

In Yugoslavia, advertisements for local and imported brands were common from the 1950s on. Yugoslav promotions agencies, for example OZEHA, started in the 1950s as state organs for promoting ideology. In the 1970s, advertising in Croatia experienced
an explosion of domestic and foreign investment. OZEHA’s Zagreb office provided
global and local clients, for example Pepsi, American Express, Podravka and
Fotokemika, with full services from national campaigns to sales force training (Hanson
1974; Pecotich et al. 1994).

State political, economic, and cultural controls in Yugoslavia were much less
strict than in the Warsaw Pact countries. The government granted citizens passports,
permitted them to hold foreign currency, and work abroad. This was important in
people’s construction of Yugoslavia as western. The western Balkans is historically and
culturally a bridge between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. For most
Croatians, viewing themselves as western is an important aspect of cultural and political
identity (Todorova 1997). Women’s fashion is interpreted by men and women as a sign
of Croatia’s western cultural orientation (Ugresic 1998). How women looked during
socialism was also a sign of Yugoslavia’s high political, economic, and cultural status
among the socialist states. Throughout socialism, global and local market forces were a
part of the social construction of femininity. This paper has so far introduced the idea of a
socialist and specifically Yugoslav consumer culture. Within that context, women’s
consumption of western fashion was a sign of national westernness. This continues in the
transformation, especially in women’s magazine advertisements.

The Yugoslav media market carried many women’s magazines, for example
Svijet (The World) was published before World War II and publication again in 1953
(Robinson 1977). State socialist advertising promoted the women as workers and mothers
(Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000; Tolstikova 2000) Women in the domestic sphere
were also expected to maintain their femininity through using cosmetics and wearing fashionable clothing in spite of scarce goods and an ideology that promoted erasing gender differences (Tolstikova and Scott 2001). The double burden of home and factory work was part of women’s experience in state socialism (Corin 1992). Because of the patriarchy of most state socialist countries, men did not assist women in the home, which made the double burden more stressful (Berdahal 1999). It also placed providing for family domestic needs, for example food and soap, in the feminine realm, which was a stress in an economy of shortages (Tolstikova 2000). Self-sacrifice in private and victimhood in public made a legitimate daily life role for women in socialism. Men usually assumed a passive private role and an active public role in political and economic leadership (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000). In the transformation, male leaders sought to reclaim their dominance in the public and private sphere. This paper explores advertising as a potential force for changing women’s roles in the economic sphere.

**RESEARCH ACTIVITY**

To learn more about the phenomenon of social change, market forces, and gender, I lived for 19 months in Croatia: the summers of 2000-1 and from June 2002 to August 2003. My understanding of the phenomenon as it occurred *in situ* developed through observation of and participation in daily activities in natural settings and multiple sites throughout Croatia, social interaction, and composing fieldnotes - observations, thick
descriptions, emerging analysis, and reflections – and visual anthropology. I sought triangulation across sources in Balkan history and sociology scholarship, both cross-cultural and inter-cultural works, and Croatian literature and art. Participation in consumption rituals throughout Croatia included co-shopping for women’s clothing and shoes, women’s cosmetics shopping, and food shopping in a grocery chain in towns, at hyper-markets in suburbs, and in neighborhood outdoor markets, as well as exchange in the second economy. Analysis and interpretation of data was compared constantly with topical literature. Emergent design, purposive sampling, depth interviews, (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Lincoln and Guba 1985; McCracken 1988; Wallendorf and Belk 1989) and focus groups explored and tested analysis. Member checks brought to light insights from observations and directed the research to important new areas of exploration (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989).

Unstructured depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with women undergraduate students and graduate students at the Economics Faculty of the Universities of Zagreb and Split, retired women, and young professional single women. They centered on the socialist and post-socialist subjective experience as women, war, independence, privatization, gender relations, advertisements, social values, and consumption. Interviews with Croatian women living in North America were also useful, especially for member checks. The use of projective techniques allowed active construction of subjective advertising experience by the informants, as well as a balance of power in the interview process. Specific advertisements served as prompts across the interviews (Branthwaite and Lunn 1985; Buhl 1991). With women in advertising, the
conversations also included discussion of the process of creating advertisements, and potentials for women to advance in their advertising careers.

I accessed informants through the snowball method, starting with my network of friends, relatives, and colleagues at the University of Zagreb, Dept. of Marketing. A key informant who is a prominent member of the advertising community in Zagreb granted me access to advertising informants. A total of 52 informants participated. The duration of each interview was between one and two hours, and I interviewed many informants more than once. Interviews were conducted in Croatian (I speak Croatian) and in English, tape-recorded, and transcribed. Informants also participated in member-checking. I accessed consumers from different ethnic groups and regions of Croatia. My intention was to access a variety of interpretations informed by ethnic identity. As a woman and a member of the Croatian Diaspora in the United States, understanding the transformation in Croatia, and the role of femininity in the transformation, is important to me for scientific and personal reasons. While I was researching in Croatia, my insider/outsider position informed my understanding of the desire to define one’s identity, especially as a woman, after the Cold War. During the Cold War, in the US, eastern European meant Soviet satellite, and Croatians were never sure how to present our blended identity.

FINDINGS
As the theoretical overview described, Yugoslav advertising and consumer culture not only emphasized the woman as a symbol of national westerness. The woman’s role in the public sphere was limited to the factory worker. At home, she was the brave victim of socialism. This section will explore the role of advertising, especially women’s magazine advertising, as a force of change for women after state socialism. It will look at economic, social class, and subjective economic position of women in Croatia. It will also explore the experiences of women in advertising agencies, a generally female worksite. This is grounded in contemporary culture and history. The independence movement, privatization, and the war that ended Yugoslavia (1991-1995) were largely masculine efforts for male citizens’ rights and wealth. The first two governments of Croatia, led by president Franjo Tudjman and the HDZ (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica), which by most accounts are considered nationalist and anti-communist, promoted an independent, moral, nationalist Croatia. Tudjman associated these values with the family and motherhood (Sofos 1996). Tudjman sought, through controlling the press, to publicly discredit women who rejected prescribed gender roles as mothers and sought careers were a threat to the future of Croatia.

The critical journalists and feminist social commentators Dubravka Ugresic (1998) and Slavenka Drakulic (1992) write about their experiences as the media attacked them with accusations that they were lesbian witches. Tudjman used the anti-abortion movement just before independence as an issue to affirm support among nationalist and men. The Catholic Church is a powerful social and political force in Croatia. Although the Catholic Church was divided between rural support of Tudjman’s HDZ and urban
opposition to its nationalism (Bellamy 2002), it supported Tudjman’s pro-natalist, ant-abortion policies (the abortion laws were not reversed) (Verdery 1996).

Tudjman and the HDZ may seem extremely right wing from a Croatian as well as an outside point of view (Udovicki and Ridgeway 1997). They were a both a reaction to state socialism and a continuation of its paternalistic system (Verdery 1996). State socialism asked women to participate in building socialism through labor in the home and in the factory. Tudjman’s pro-natalist policies, for example state funding for families with more than three children, were also a means of building the new Croatia. It was a call to reject state socialist policies that on the ideological level endangered a status of male hegemony. This reaction is an important part of the processes in which economic life became gendered masculine after independence. This gendered policy, like state socialist gender ideology was also convenient for economic reasons: with high unemployment, if women left their jobs, then more jobs would be available for men (Kligman, 1996).

Socialist paternalism and cultural patriarchy also influenced privatization. Following the nationalism and collectivism of socialism, it was important to leaders that Croats would control national assets. In socialism, the grey economy depended on the state. Privatization could not be a process of cutting this network off the state because they were mutually dependent. If they were separated, then both systems might fall. So, alliances across political and economic elites assured their survival. This was a gendered process initiated by mostly male leaders. Males continue to exclude women from powerful positions (Kligman 1996; Verdery 1996). A climate of national unity, especially among males, was fueled by the military conflict with the Yugoslav National Army and
Croatian Serbs. In many transformation countries, the importance of women’s appearance increased, especially as a reaction to socialist gender ideology (Coulter, Price, and Feick 2003). Because Croatia’s transformation happened during a war, this could be an especially sensitive topic.

As an observer and participant in Croatian society, advertising and women’s magazines were a place to explore women’s reactions to the transformation. The Croatian press had a strong tradition of women’s and specialty magazines directed at hobbyists. It also had a strong tradition of advertising agencies producing ads for these magazines. The Yugoslav political situation government condoned magazines and advertisements as long as they did not corrupt the people (Robinson 1977). During the privatization process, a media holding corporation, Europress Holding, emerged as the largest owner of media companies in Croatia, including daily newspapers and magazines (Malović and Selnow 2001). Sonoma Magazines, and Italian company, entered the market later with Elle. A diverse range of women’s magazines currently make up a substantial amount of the space at kiosks, where most magazines are sold. The most important women’s magazines, including monthlies and weeklies, are Elle, Gloria, Mila, Sijet, Tena, and Zaposlena (The Employed Woman). Sijet is a continuation of a title offered in state socialism. Other choices are Istinite sudbine (True Stories) and Moje tajne (My Secret) (Vilovic 2001). The focus of my interviews was Elle magazine.

It might at first seem contradictory to see the emergence of many specialty women’s magazines, including two aimed at professional, working women, in spite of the privatization processes of making the economic sphere masculine. The Croatian edition
of Elle includes locally produced advertising for brands with a long history in Croatia, for example Nivea, and new brands, for example Diesel. The layout, paper quality and glossy finish are the same as US editions of Elle. The editorial content is written by locals. Like women’s magazines all over the world, it addresses eternal questions such as relationships with men. Also, articles highlight women in Croatian arts and letters, culture, science, politics, and economy. The April 2003 issue, for example, includes an article on the local production of “The Vagina Monologues” with an interview of a starring Croatian actress Anita Matić. The audience, as an informant close to the magazine described, is women who fit a global demographic of university education, professional occupation, aged from their mid-twenties into their forties, with discretionary income.

The magazine price is about $8, and typical income in Croatia is about $400 per month. It is an expensive magazine. I noticed that very few women in Croatia fit the demographic description or can afford to buy the magazine as anything other than a luxury. Like much of advertising, I thought it represented the desires of consumers in Croatia rather than their lived experience. This is not specific to Croatian advertising, but the experience of desiring what is unattainable might be different in Croatia than in the United States, where I have lived most of my life. For example, many ads feature cosmetics and skincare products, for example from Lancôme that cost from $50 in the local cosmetics chain, Iris. Even the advertised bottle of Nivea anti-wrinkle cream, which I priced in Drogerie Markt, an Austrian chain store throughout the Balkans and Central Europe that is similar to the US CVS, is a luxury at $13. I was interested in local
women’s views of the aspirations to which it referred as well as the reality it might contradict. It was an especially gendered question since women are symbols of the nation in the western Balkans (Kligman 1996; Sofos 1996). Also, what place would these ads have in a society in which women are in an economically disadvantaged position? It is not only that women earn .55 of what men earn and that Croatia is ranked 46 of 162 countries in gender empowerment in the world. (UN 2001).

I looked to informants to explain the differences between the lack of economic opportunities for women in Croatia and the advertisements. I also thought this might be an opportunity to learn the subjective economic position of women in Croatia. I spoke with a business graduate school student in her early 30s who described her economic position as very difficult: she returned to school because she was unemployed and needed to increase her chances of employment. Her statement of frustration with the ads was typical of other informants who were unemployed and had even less of a chance to change their situation.

“This is like, like it should be a magazine for a girl but it’s really piece of trash. All that it talks about is some pages about how to stay young, healthy, good looking and ten pages of recipes and about the famous people thinking and we have, this is our TV star, do you prefer Prada and Gucci and fashions like that. That’s not in our league at all Prada or Gucci and it’s just to make women more stupid. It’s I hate this kind of magazines (Lada).”

I talked with more affluent female informants, for example a marketing manager in her early 30s, in the same business class, also there to advance her career, who described the same magazine ads less critically, for example:
“The only thing I’ve noticed is the clothes that should be in. For my opinion I wouldn’t wear one of this clothes at all, maybe one or two things for the beach, but usually I wouldn’t. Here the most models are skinny models and then people look at them, like ok, they can wear this kind of things, we don’t. And I think that daily girl or woman can’t afford those kinds of things because each part of these clothes requires special shoes, special accessories, and things like that, that people can not exchange from day to day (Jadranka).”

This points to increasing economic and probably social class, differences among women in Croatia. This is both between the two informants and between Jadranka and the “most women” to whom she refers (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000).

What was most interesting about the two informants was that they both were pursing their education for advancement, although one of them was already employed. Many informants described to me that for women in Croatia, there is very little hope for change or improvement in economics or gender relations. The economic situation is too difficult and restrictive for this. Moreover, because the economic sphere is male dominated, most women will have to rely economically on their husband. Thus, it is very important to marry a man who has a salary and who will bring home all of his pay.

This brings up the question of the gendering of the economic sphere. Money making remains a masculine domain in Croatia. Many women are in the professions, but men continue to exclude them from the political and financial networks of support necessary for their advancement (Heyat 2002). For most men, political or family connections (veza) are necessary for finding a job. Men usually trade business favors and contacts with their male kin or perhaps the godfather of their child (kum) to cement the ties and repayment of favors (Allcock 2000; Rubin 1975). It was my experience, listening to female and male friends describe how they found their first job or what others did, that
this proved a disadvantage for women. Men usually exclude their female kin from the favor exchange processes. Although a man might facilitate their girlfriend’s finding her first job, it is unlikely that he will use his connections for her advantage rather than the advantage of a man in his kind network. So, women have few chances to advance in a career. Or, as informants tell me, they can sleep with their male boss.

It was surprising, considering to the general status outlook for women, that these women were attending a master’s program to advance their career opportunities. Along these lines, I expected advertising might be a place for women to advance. I expected that advertising would be a gendered feminine industry in Croatia as it is in most places and therefore offer better job opportunities for women. Most advertising offices were directed by men, but several of the experts working there were women. A thirty year old, single woman who worked at a local office of a global agency as an account manager mentioned, “most of the people here in business are woman in Croatia. Maybe creatives are men, designers, but account business are 99% women.” Their experience at the top is conditioned by the gender of the economy. As one informant, a director of a global agency office in Zagreb, described:

“basically if you want to succeed in the man's world and this is what Croatian business world is, I'm the only woman who's a part of the [Croatian Competitiveness Committee], there are 15 top managers, but they are all men... I think [women’s absence from the top of business] is partly because of the attitude that women have toward business, number two is because they don't have as much time, they have to bring up their children. I'm really independent so so basically it brings, a lot of problems into your life if you are a business woman in Croatia … you're perceived as too aggressive and you know … everybody's just afraid of you, right? (Sanja age 40)”
Women working in the advertising context often spoke about images of women in adverts singing as in conflict with local values. They also saw many of the consumerist messages as contrary to local values. They were also aware of their lack of power to change it. They said did not “see themselves” in the ads or agree with the values of the ads. I noticed that the women in agencies were attractive and fashionably dressed. They did not seem to be wearing make up, in spite of the emphasis on make up in the magazines. I thought their position compared to the ads was different not because of the violent ethnic nationalism the west ascribes to the Balkans (Todorova 1997), but because of cultural differences between the local and the global. I wanted to confirm that with other respondents from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

I did interview women and men whose parents were Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Serbian, and Slovene. I expected that different ethnic experience might be important. However, I found that differences of generations were more important. The literature of post-socialism describes the leaders of the late 1980s independence movements in Croatia as members of the Croatian Spring, the early 1970s movement for increased national autonomy. This group experienced the transformation to socialism. The majority of my informants grew up with state socialism as the norm. For them, the war was a more formative experience. They told me that they are much less concerned with national questions than older generations. Their main concern is advancing in their careers and building a normal life. And for this new generation a “normal life” means to a large extent the western, consumer lifestyle combined with local values.
Many informants added a historical background to their explanation of the differences between the economic situation of most women in Croatia and the popularity of consumer lifestyles. During socialism, as this paper has already presented, consumer culture and women’s fashions were understood in Croatia as symbols of the nation’s westernness. Croatia, after the fall of Yugoslavia and increased integration into European institutions since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, is working on re-orienting culturally itself in the European Union. As one informant said describing ads and Croatia’s geopolitical position, “I think [the ads] just promote that fantasy of the west.” The aspiration to have the consumer products in the magazines is also the aspiration for a better life in the west. I believe that it is very important that the ads are locally produced. They are local renditions of the imagined lifestyle of the west brought home. The ads are signifiers of the western, consumerist lifestyle that Croatians want at home. This supports consumer behavior research on globalization as a process of local reinterpretation of global consumer cultures (Ger and Belk 1996; Sredl and Renko 2004).

CONCLUSION

This paper presented advertising as a potential force for change in negotiating the place of women in the economic sphere during a post-socialist transformation. Croatia was selected because gender is highly contested there compared to other post-socialist states due to the war. Women’s magazine advertisements were used as the central advertising text because of their large share of the media market. This presence presented a contrast to the masculinility of public, economic life. Informants explained these messages as texts of desire, especially Croatia’s desire to join the west and to bring its
normalcy home, as reminders of the inequity of the transformation. They thought that
most of the values were foreign. Advertising in Croatia is a text of its western political
aspiration and cultural orientation. It is a bricolage of local and foreign references,
images, meanings, and even brands.

Women in magazine advertisements show a local rendition of a global theme, a
Balkan Barbie. It might seem at the outsider’s first glance to be nothing local. In the local
perspective, it is much more complex. Global and local advertising and consumer culture
were part of the socialist experience in Croatia. The transformation is an opportunity to
express local identity in a global and local context (Wilk 1995).

Informants described this bricolage of local and imported as a characteristic of
Croatian culture. The paper presented a description of socialist consumer culture, and
specifically Yugoslav consumer culture as oriented around self-judgments of westernness.
From interviews, this was presented as a part of Croatian consumer culture as well.
Future research on consumers in the Balkans should be organized around these
characteristics of consumer culture. Also, researching the production of ads would be an
important area for future research.

Advertising in the transformation is a bridge between the local and the global with
a gender context. This is a mixed situation for women. The agency does bring work
opportunities for some women, who are successful to the extent that men control.
Although women are doing most of the work in advertising agencies, the top of the
industry is still gendered male. Not all women have the economic chances as these
women, so globalization is also creating class differences between women. Different
feminist issues might emerge from this. Since the feminist movement in the USA originated from a more affluent group of women, this might also happen in Croatia. I would expect so, because the economic situation is too stressful for other women to have the resources to organize. However, many informants saw the transformation as another instances in which the country and women are once again wronged. The women’s movement, because of local circumstances and culture, might have specific needs and issues that are out of the context of US feminism. The Yugoslav women’s movement organized in the early 1980s (Stojsavljevic 1995), actively involved in advocacy and support of women’s lives and concerns, for example rape, domestic violence, and employment rights. The nationalist movement deeply influenced the women’s movement’s power to oppose the war or the use of women for a nationalist agenda.

As a woman in Croatia, socialized in the American context, I noticed the masculine public and feminine private sphere. For example, I could feel men’s gaze in public monitoring my chastity and fashion. I was well aware of the sexism of the workplace through stories of friends. I recalled a visit to the museum in Zagreb of Ivan Mestrović, the Croatian sculptor. His sculpture, History of the Croats, depicts a woman holding in her lap a replica of the first Croatian text. I asked the museum guide why a woman was chosen, and she explained that it is well known that in Croatia, the women do all the work.

At the same time, my friendships with Croatian women and men introduced me to a differently gendered world. Networks of female kinship and friendship are very important. Women have satisfaction from careers and more than from relationships. This
does not endorse chauvinism or discrimination. However, it does mean that feminism in the Balkans is likely to have nuanced differences than in the United States. I recall telling a female American friend living in Zagreb that my dear friend and roommate, a woman from Zagreb, had moved to Seattle to marry her American boyfriend of four months, on extremely short notice. She replied that my roommate’s parents must be so happy, meaning happy that she got out of Croatia. I commented that they probably share their daughter’s joy over the marriage. Still, their daughter moved to the other end of the globe and is married to a person they just met. She left her law career, and many good family business connections, and them, behind as well. From what they told me, their emotions were more complicated than happiness that their daughter lives in the affluent west. Perhaps betterment for women’s lives in Croatia comes as people understand that it can be better to be a global woman in Croatia than a Croatian woman abroad.
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