

# 117 | Slovenia's socialist superwoman: feeding the family, nourishing the nation

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## abstract

This article explores how the Slovenian women's lifestyle magazine *Naša žena* (*Our Woman*) helped the Yugoslavian socialist project construct and shape the ideal socialist woman, and argues that she became the crucial ally in implementing socialist ideas in the everyday lives of Slovenians. The article shows how texts on food preparation and consumption, as well as those touching on household management and family care, published in *Naša žena* from 1960 to 1991 played an important part in the 'civilising' process that shaped behaviour, directed cultural and social practices, influenced social relations and constructed women's identities during socialism. We show how food-related texts (articles, recipes, columns, advertisements and advertorials) were never far removed from the larger political and economic socialist realities. In fact, they bore witness to changes in living standards and told stories about gender regimes, socialist ideologies and fantasies. These texts belong to a corpus of social transcripts that guide collective understandings of what it means to select, prepare, cook and eat food; what constitutes good cooking and eating; and who is responsible for preparing meals. Despite official socialist feminist rhetoric about freeing women from backward patriarchal arrangements, this article shows that texts offering food-related advice in socialist Yugoslavia contained explicit instructions for the 'correct' performance of the social roles of women, legitimising women's roles as worker, mother, wife and housekeeper. Above all, a woman was to be an 'engineer' of the private domain whose goals were to feed her family and keep the nation healthy and hence productive, and to modernise her kitchen in support of the technological and economic development of Yugoslavia.

## keywords

socialism; Yugoslavia; lifestyle magazine; food; consumption; state feminism

## introduction: *Naša žena*, the magazine that shaped socialist womanhood

Women's magazines have played a significant part in modernising societies around the globe (Sakamoto, 1999; Ghodsee, 2014) in terms of both consumer culture and private household management, but also in the sense of building political citizenship and the public sphere (Senjković, 2011; Ytre-Arne, 2011; Ghodsee, 2014; Saarenmaa and Ruoho, 2014). Their texts vary in their meanings for different audiences (Hermes, 1995), in their capacity to steer social change (Sakamoto, 1999; Ytre-Arne, 2011; Saarenmaa and Ruoho, 2014) and in their emancipatory potential (Senjković, 2011; Ghodsee, 2014). Thus, women's magazines can open a window into the micro history of popular culture and ordinary lives in a particular society since they encapsulate the various social, cultural, economic and political shifts that occurred in that society.

*Naša žena* (*Our Woman*)—the first and, up until the 1980s, the most significant women's magazine in the former Yugoslav republic of Slovenia—may be considered an example of a socialist women's magazine that took its emancipatory role very seriously, especially in the initial period after it started appearing. It aimed to advocate and support the socialist struggle for women's equality by addressing both rural and urban women and presenting the combination of women's work and family life as a private and public concern (Jogan, 1986, p. 36; Verginella, 2006).<sup>1</sup> It held great potential for popularising women's emancipation in socialist Slovenia, not least because of its impressively far-reaching audience; in 1969, 33.3 per cent of Slovenians who read print media claimed to read *Naša žena* (Toš, ed., 1969, p. 47). Many women perceived it as an ally 'helping' them to negotiate their social roles in constantly changing socioeconomic and political realities (Košir, 2011). Since it dealt with issues of daily life that were occasionally contextualised in line with a 'global strategy of socialist social development', the magazine's political power was also acknowledged (Jogan, 1986, p. 37). Tellingly, the magazine was named '*Our Woman*', portraying women as an imaginary community that is centred around 'womanhood'—as is typical of women's magazines (Vidmar, 2002)—but belongs to an even wider imaginary community: a socialist society. The title connotes society's need to both recognise the importance of women and to take care of women's well-being, but it also ascribes her with responsibilities towards the 'collective'.

In this paper, we are not interested in *Naša žena*'s narratives that explicitly convey the ideology of 'state feminism' as seeking to promote progress in gender equality (Kantola and Squirez, 2012). Instead, our interest lies in apparently apolitical texts about ordinary matters that are a mainstay of everybody's daily life, both materially and symbolically, but are typically ascribed to women as a 'gendered skill' (Luthar and Pušnik, 2010), such as cooking. We are concerned with food-related narratives that aim to guide everyday lives through forms of 'common sense', imprinted on routine activities and popular

<sup>1</sup>The history of *Naša žena* dates back to the pre-war period. It first came out in 1941 as a newsletter of the Slovenian Antifascist Women's Front. During the war, the issues were often published in smaller units devoted to particular topics and printed illegally. After the war, *Naša žena* became an official monthly women's magazine that was published until 2015. The magazine covered a range of private and public sphere-related topics, including domestic politics and various social issues related to housing, cooking, work and the family. By the late 1960s, the magazine, which was still dealing with matters related to healthcare, housing and other social policies, gradually began to devote more attention to private matters, including housekeeping, cooking, lifestyle, fashion, parenting methods, physical and mental health issues, and relationship problems. An even greater shift was apparent beginning in the 1970s, when *Naša žena* increasingly promoted consumer goods, giving a significant amount of space to full-colour advertisements for a range of goods. By the 1980s, *Naša žena* reflected a Westernised concept of a women's lifestyle magazine, with its main focus on consumption, fashion and cosmetics; at the same time, food, health, child care and household management also remained important.

consciousness (*ibid.*, p. 10) in relation to growing, buying, cooking, serving and consuming food, since food practices play a significant role in gender construction; they both constitute and reflect it (Counihan, 2004).

Food-related texts do more than simply stimulate the culinary imagination or direct everyday food choices. Rather, these texts belong to a corpus of social transcripts that guide collective understandings of: what it means to select, prepare, cook and eat food; what constitutes good cooking and eating; and who is responsible for preparing meals and for what function on both the broadest and most intimate levels of society (Counihan, 1999, p. 6; Tivadar, 2009). Hence, food texts form part of a 'civilising' process that shapes behaviour, directs cultural practices, influences social relations and impacts identities (Lupton, 1996, p. 2; Wilson, 2006, p. 12). As Bracewell (2012) notes in her study of cookbooks and food consumption in two former Yugoslav republics (Serbia and Croatia), cookbooks and recipe columns were never far removed from the larger political and economic realities. In fact, they bore witness to changes in living standards and told stories about gender regimes, national ideologies and fantasies related to cooking and eating (Bracewell, 2012, p. 378). In this sense, food matters are also political and have been often used as a measure of societal development. During the so-called 'kitchen debates' in 1959, marked by the bragging confrontation of American Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev with respect to capitalist and communist technological progress, the kitchen was exposed as a symbol of a good life (Masey and Morgan, 2008, p. 198; Castillo, 2010). Nixon discussed the abundant variety of food products and kitchen appliances available to women (housewives) to process and cook food as an ideal of a good life that is accessible to the average American citizen who cherishes free choice and leisure time.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, we have three purposes in this article. The first is to analyse how *Naša žena* aimed to shape women's everyday lives through food-related texts (e.g. recipes, advertisements and articles) and how this aim was in tune with the state's mission to build a modern 'women-friendly' socialist society. How was *Naša žena* discursively framing the material practices of everyday life at the level of providing, preparing and consuming food, and how did it contribute to the 'general heterogeneities and conflicts within a normative socialist culture' (Luthar and Pušnik, 2010)?<sup>3</sup>

Second, we aim to contribute to the scarce literature on the mediated representation of food and everyday life in socialist Yugoslavia (for some of the rare studies on Yugoslav socialist media and food consumption, see Tivadar and Vezovnik, 2010; Bracewell, 2012; Tominc, 2015; Vezovnik and Kamin, 2016). We discuss the role of this widely read women's magazine in educating women about the conduct of daily life and point to its ideological nature: we contend that by giving advice on food consumption and household management, the magazine was bridging powerful 'state feminism' on one hand, and 'ordinary people' who needed to negotiate the formal project of women's emancipation within the sphere of domestic life on the other. A discussion of this issue may be seen as a response to and criticism of a pervasive privileging in the writing and discussion of socialism's history of official political documents

<sup>2</sup>'Nixon vs. Khrushchev—the kitchen debate (1959)', video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Cv00uNecy4> [last accessed 25 June 2016].

<sup>3</sup>In support of our claims presented here, the analysis considers three decades of *Naša žena*. The analysed sample included seven volumes per year: issues published in February, April, June, July/August, October and December, from 1960 to 1991. This sample was further refined to 1960, 1962, 1965, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1979, 1980, 1985, 1989, 1990 and 1991. For our study, we selected texts on food, cooking and eating, as well as eating-related practices such as table arrangements, etiquette, party hosting and gardening, presented through different genres such as recipes, food columns, practical suggestions for housekeeping and cooking, advertisements and advertorials for food and kitchen technologies, and articles on food topics.

and texts concerning events in the public domain over material that reveals how state power was negotiated within the realm of everyday life (Luthar and Pušnik, 2010).

Despite the well-polarised post-Yugoslav debate on state feminism's contributions to gender equality between so-called liberal and socialist feminism, a rich body of literature shows that state feminism can be and has been effective in providing women with essential rights that address the systemic oppression of women (Burcar, 2009, 2015). Liberal feminism builds on ideas of identity politics, claiming that state-driven emancipation based on a broadly accessible network of public services (such as child and elderly day care, healthcare, fully paid maternity leave, and canteens) did not truly eradicate patriarchy, since women ended up becoming doubly burdened by adding their full-time employment on to their domestic work. Leninist-driven socialist feminism, on the other hand, asserts that socialism's crucial achievement was to do away with systemic patriarchy by building upon the systemic and content-driven emancipation of all women. Socialist feminism greatly acknowledges the attempts of state feminism, although it is still aware that the patriarchal system's systemic dissolution was unable to completely and promptly eradicate the persistent patterns of prejudice towards women and their traditional role in the private sphere (Jogan, 1986). Despite this, it is necessary to acknowledge that state socialism did offer critical public services that considerably improved women's position in households (Burcar, 2009, p. 304; Tomšič and Burcar, 2009, p. 305). Thus, the third purpose of this article is to explore how *Naša žena* negotiated the discrepancy between the systemic solutions driven by state feminism and the everyday reality of the private domain where patriarchy was still in force. What kind of advice did *Naša žena* give socialist women for steering between the systemic changes ensuring women's emancipation and equality, and the deeply-rooted gender-divided housework patterns in the private sphere?

The analysis extends from 1960, when Yugoslav socialism turned from administrative state socialism, introducing a more liberal, decentralised political system and witnessed its most stable and prosperous period (Woodward, 1995, p. 263; Luthar and Pušnik, 2010), to 1991, when socialist Yugoslavia came to an end due to a serious economic downturn and a political crisis that continued in the mid-1980s (Woodward, 1995, p. 260).

The article has five sections. First, we will outline the socialist ideal of independent women in the socialist Yugoslav republic of Slovenia and some of the factors inhibiting and stimulating the pursuit of this ideal. The next three sections will demonstrate how food-related texts in *Naša žena* shaped the micro policies of daily lives and women's responsibility for the modernisation of society from within, by attending to women's fantasies, constraints and high social expectations. In the conclusion, we summarise how food-related texts in *Naša žena* (re)produced and negotiated the conflicts between the political ideals and the material circumstances of socialist womanhood.

## building up the ideal of socialist womanhood

Similar to that of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Eastern Europe, the socialist regime that came to power in Yugoslavia<sup>4</sup> after the Second World War expressed a strong commitment to gender equality in all spheres—economic, social and political—of life (Clark and Clark, 1987, p. 414; Kay, 2007; Bracewell, 2012, p. 395; Funk, 2014; Ghodsee, 2014; Kralj and Rener, 2015). Women’s participation in paid labour outside the home was established as a main factor of their economic independence (as economic emancipation) and as the only true path to their social and political participation (as political emancipation) (Rener, 1986, p. 126); this accorded with the socialist ideal and Marxist ideology that the modern socialist woman needs to grow as a subject of her own development, that she is independent, and that her social security derives from her work (Jogan, 1986). Women were encouraged to pursue higher education and participate in the workforce, not least because in Yugoslavia, as in other socialist countries, women’s labour was needed to make rapid progress with the intensive industrialisation and to expand the post-war economy (Jogan, 1986; Funk, 2014, p. 353; Ghodsee, 2014, p. 552). In Yugoslavia, women made up 35.2 per cent of the labour force by the early 1980s, while in socialist Slovenia, this share was the highest in all former Yugoslav republics: 45 per cent of all employed were women (Jogan, 1986, p. 25). The number of women in high schools in Yugoslavia rose tenfold from 1946 to 1976, while the difference between men and women’s participation in higher education steadily narrowed; by the start of the 1980s, the share of women in higher education in Slovenia was 50 per cent, again the highest in Yugoslavia (*ibid.*, p. 29). Thus, in Slovenia most working-age women were either in full-time employment or education. This brought about significant shifts within the social landscape: for instance, the traditional, rural organisation of society, in which women held economically dependent and subordinate roles, was eroding (Clark and Clark, 1987, p. 414; Verginella, 2006, p. 57), and the need to rethink the social costs of biological reproduction came to the fore (Jogan, 1986, p. 27). The Yugoslav government provided women with significant freedoms in the area of reproductive rights, and several special rights defining and protecting women as working mothers (Jeraj, 2011; Kralj and Rener, 2015). The 1963 Yugoslav constitution was followed by legislation on maternity benefits, child care, healthcare and social insurance, alongside other working legislative actions protecting women from heavy labour, night shifts and other physically demanding work conditions that could interfere with women’s specific social role in biological reproduction (Končar, 1986, p. 93).

Although such legislation was ‘progressive’, it was primarily related to the public sphere; division of work in the private sphere continued to reproduce traditional arrangements (Jeraj, 2011, p. 73), with women playing the role of homemaker and child caregiver (Dobos, 1983, pp. 50–54). In the 1970s, Slovenian women continued to perform the large majority of household work, which included doing the laundry (in 80.9 per cent of households this was done exclusively by women), cleaning (67 per cent), preparing food and cooking (70.1 per cent) (Toš, ed., 1976, pp. 204–209). Thus, women had a very long list of daily obligations that consisted of eight hours of work, commuting and domestic work. This was also the case in other socialist countries, where women were expected to contribute both to the national economy and the physical reproduction of the nation (Kay, 2007, p. 2), thereby shouldering a double burden (Ghodsee,

<sup>4</sup>In 1946, socialist Yugoslavia was constituted as a confederation of six socialist republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia) under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito and his administration. In the early years, the state was mainly focussed on rebuilding industry and infrastructure, developing and modernising the agrarian sector, and nationalising private companies. Yugoslavia was expelled from the Eastern Bloc in 1948, and hence from Soviet control (Zakrajšek, 1979, p. 893).

2014); however, this dual burden did not go unnoticed in Slovenia and became a public issue (Jogan, 1986). Through self-organisation and local participation in different organisations, like the Red Cross and the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth, women helped to advance many services, particularly those that would help working women manage households and raise children (Jeraj, 2011, pp. 70–71). These bottom-up women's movements exerted a lot of pressure on politics to systemically unburden women and families by expanding access to good quality public social services, especially day care for children and the elderly, along with canteens in working places, schools and kindergartens.

The processes entailed in the 'women friendly' reorganisation of society needed time and resources. Meanwhile, women in socialist Slovenia continued to attend to their domestic obligations as mothers, wives and caregivers because it was essential for the survival of the state, akin to other socialist countries (Massey *et al.*, 1995, p. 364; Ghodsee, 2014). It should be noted that the double or even triple burden borne by women was not exclusive to the socialist system; capitalist countries in the West also witnessed a situation in which women were forced to negotiate between domestic and work responsibilities (Federici, 2012). Nevertheless, while in the US 'housewife' was considered a possible career for a woman, this was socially (i.e. morally) unacceptable in socialism. In socialist countries, the ability to combine the role of a worker, a wife and a mother was often perceived as the most important quality of a modern woman (Massino, 2012, pp. 484–485).

Juggling the different social roles was not equally easy and appreciated among all women in socialist Slovenia. The traditional social roles were more deterministic for women from lower socio-economic strata<sup>5</sup> and rural areas, those less educated (Istenič, 2007, p. 479), and from ethnic minorities like Roma. For some women, socialist policies were far more beneficial and progressive than for others, as noticed in other socialist countries (Funk, 2014, p. 353). The ingrained traditional attitudes to gender roles, particularly in rural areas, combined with a lack of financial resources, ultimately prevented some women from becoming fully involved in economic, social and political life (Repe in Verginella, 2006, p. 57). As in the West, the gender gap persisted. Despite a law stipulating equal payment for equal work (Jogan, 1986), Yugoslav women earned less money than men because they: occupied (less valued) gender-specific jobs; made up 80 per cent of the unskilled labour force; were less than half as likely as men to work as supervisors; and remained in subordinate positions in workers' councils and society as a whole (Dobos, 1983, pp. 47, 50; Renner, 1986; Clark and Clark, 1987, p. 414; Massey *et al.*, 1995, p. 364; Jeraj, 2011). Ideals of equality were often subordinated to goals of socialist production, thus the ideals of women's equality were easily abandoned when coming into conflict with other (male-driven) state interests (Jeraj, 2011, p. 71; Funk, 2014, p. 354). Perhaps this is the reason why women's emancipation was chiefly mandated within the public sphere, often on the level of political debates (Jeraj, 2011), leaving the no less important relationship between the public and private sphere almost entirely unregulated (Kralj and Renner, 2015). The private sphere needed to compensate the gap between the publicly declared women's equality ideals and the material reality in which women had to continue with their traditional social roles and adopt them for new assignments.

Thus, women seemed to inhabit parallel realities: the official political ideology promised a new way of life free of the oppressive structures of the past, while the private everyday reality kept women anchored in

<sup>5</sup>Despite the socialist ideal of a classless society (Luthar, 2014), more than 70 per cent of people in socialist Slovenia believed that inequalities in society on the grounds of different incomes and living standards existed (Toš, ed., 1976, p. 118).

their 'natural' domestic roles. From now on, we will try to argue that what were apparently apolitical texts in popular media, such as *Naša žena*, played a crucial role in helping women manage these two realities.

## **the kitchen, the realm of women ruled by the ideal of modernisation**

Topics relating to the kitchen best capture the paradox of the unregulated relationship between the public and private realms that affected how socialist womanhood was constructed. As far as the culinary texts in *Naša žena* are concerned, food topics were explicitly portrayed as a woman's domain. This included procuring foodstuffs, cooking, serving meals, cleaning, planning for future meals, and securing basic cooking ingredients. From the start of the socialist period, food-related texts were also intimately bound up with the socialist vision of progressive development based on technological modernisation (Woodward, 1995, p. 261). The food industry was an important part of the socialist promise of a good life for the citizens (Bracewell, 2012). Indeed, it was a major force in Yugoslav economic development during the 1960s (Woodward, 1995, p. 263), when Yugoslavia altered its central planning system and pursued consumer-driven economic modernisation (Le Normand, 2012, pp. 278, 722–723).<sup>6</sup> In comparison to other communist states, Yugoslavia was the most responsive to economic and cultural influences from America and Western Europe with a relatively well-developed retail infrastructure (Hyder Patterson, 2012, p. 261). Yugoslav investment in the production of consumer goods was a political decision based on the assumption that abundant consumer goods would lead to an increased standard of living (Hyder Patterson, 2011; Le Normand, 2012, p. 278), and this strategy apparently worked: in the 1970s, people reported an improved standard of living primarily due to improved consumption opportunities (Toš, ed., 1976, p. 187). This accords with the Western ideals of the satisfaction of consumer wants and needs as a key element of 'the Good Life' (Hyder Patterson, 2012, p. 251), as also presented during the 'kitchen debate' (Masey and Morgan, 2008), and led to characteristic capitalist retailing tools, like advertising and the adoption of other forms of marketing communications (Hyder Patterson, 2011, 2012, p. 247). Among food-related texts published in *Naša žena*, the share of advertisements and sponsored contents for food and kitchen appliances grew steadily, inviting women not only to take part but also to lead the process of utilising commodities in procuring the good life for their families and wider society. The magazine not only introduced new products to the market, but sought to build trust in the food industry more broadly, while encouraging women to use its products like canned food, instant soups, powders and bouillon cubes as a regular part of the family diet. Articles featuring pictures and interviews with female workers in the food industry served to bring awareness of its new and complicated technologies to the readers. Building a better understanding of industrial production was vital to removing suspicions about its new products and to increasing demand for the industry's ever-growing supply. The greater use of scientific discourse helped distance *Naša žena* (1971b, p. 54) from the rural past and offer more

<sup>6</sup>The late 1950s and early 1960s witnessed the most stable and prosperous period of Yugoslav socialism. Especially in Slovenia, socialist leaders' goal of a technologically advanced, highly productive administratively lean economy with full employment came to be realised. As a consequence, social welfare, health and education systems were improved, and more affordable housing was constructed. Most Slovenian families, particularly those living in towns, had two breadwinners, as close to 40 per cent of women were employed and the average size of private households was 3.5 members (Woodward, 1995, p. 263).

convincing recommendations, as the following extract from the food column demonstrates: 'In modern cooking [...] We need to get rid of the old and outdated cooking methods and become acquainted with the new, modern approaches and then try them out'. Along with kitchen appliances, new materials and products were introduced in the magazine from the late 1960s onwards. Teflon pans allowed cooking with little or no fat, and tinfoil helped preserve leftovers, while paper towels, metal sponges, baking bags and plastic wrap made cleaning more efficient. The growing number of full-page, colour advertisements for furniture, kitchen appliances and cookware in *Naša žena* gave the impression that modern kitchen accessories were common in every home, and thus set the social norm regarding how the proper modern kitchen should look. *Naša žena* was quite normative in its suggestions, telling its readers which behaviours were desirable, even if associated with increased expenses. Nevertheless, *Naša žena* was aware of the differences in the levels of kitchen technology its readers possessed. Therefore, the magazine was more of a trendsetter, stimulating the consumption of new products, but not taking this for granted.

By relieving women from having to cook from scratch or make everything by hand, the industry would presumably provide her with extra time to spend with the family or at work, yet without neglecting one of her main duties: i.e. feeding the family. In light of this, it was considered socially irresponsible not to support the food industry by purchasing its newly developed products. The planned, desired or actual consumption of food-related products was increasingly coming to the fore of culinary texts in the 1970s, when the aesthetics of eating practices were becoming more important. Modern everyday cooking still had to be simple and fast but also pleasing to the eye, as vividly described in one of *Naša žena's* (1970, p. 59) food columns: 'The colours should be beautiful, contrasting. ... The plates should be beautifully garnished. ... Chopped parsley, nicely cut red radish, tomato, raw or cooked carrots are necessary plate garnishes'. Recommendations for garnishing meals and sophisticated table arrangements emphasised the urban, modern, liberal ways of housekeeping and cooking, aspiring to French chicness for the housewife and her family and friends to enjoy. Alongside the rising importance of aesthetics, *Naša žena* also started to challenge the domestic food industry, comparing its products with Western imports described as more innovative and attractive. It expressed an explicit desire for Western products, constructing them as symbols of quality and prestige and the modern woman as a consumer yearning for them. Shopping trips to neighbouring Western countries to obtain 'luxury' goods such as coffee, rice, pasta, exotic fruits and chocolate, as well as kitchen appliances, became quite common, especially among Slovenians living close to the Italian and Austrian borders (Švab, 2002, pp. 63–79).

While *Naša žena* sought to free the modern woman from 'nature', encouraging her to trust the industry to provide her with a 'good life' into the late 1970s, by the 1980s it sought to bring her closer to her traditional roots. The same modernisation that had earlier been praised and implicitly linked to the country's industrial development was now downplayed in favour of environmental awareness and a generally traditionalist approach. This approach criticised the excessive reliance on pesticides and artificial fertilisers in managing crops, as well as the use of chemical additives in food products. Women were encouraged to acknowledge the importance of organic food, vegetarianism, home-prepared meals and home-grown produce that could be obtained from the housewife's garden or from her relatives who cultivated crops in the rural areas of the country.



Although modernisation was generally positively portrayed, as leading to a more productive and prosperous society, it was ultimately an abstract concept, an empty signifier that could easily be filled with meanings suiting the current socio-economic realities. It was important for a woman to follow the latest trends, from enthusiastically incorporating the food industry's innovations in order to disburden women of their cooking responsibilities (through the 1960s and 1970s) to critically questioning the industry's role in distancing women from their traditional food-related knowledge and cooking skills in the 1980s.

In the 1960s and 1970s, women were expected to rely increasingly on the system of industrialised food, while in the 1980s they were asked to regain their independence from the system, relearning the skills required to provide food for their families from scratch. This shift is consistent with the socio-economic and political developments in Yugoslavia at the time. In the mid-1980s, Slovenia still enjoyed full employment and a relatively high standard of living; yet, by the end of the decade, a political crisis was brewing. The country's stability was threatened by high inflation, debts and political disagreements. Real personal income dropped by more than one-fifth between 1981 and 1990, while prices of basic necessities rose by nearly 50 per cent between 1981 and 1985 and by almost 320 per cent between 1986 and 1990. In 1990, more than three-quarters of the population in Slovenia claimed they were worse off than five years earlier, saying they had greater difficulty obtaining employment and bearing the expense of raising children (Tivadar and Vezovnik, 2010, p. 400).

## **struggling with shortages: thrift household management as an extension of the socialist economy**

At least on a discursive level, food-related text in *Naša žena* assumed that a modern socialist woman was a working mother and a wife, thus chronically lacking time, occasionally short of cooking ingredients, and always thrifty and careful when spending money. Managing such shortages was considered a skill, and women were encouraged to take pride in their ability to procure scarce food, to make something from scraps of food, to save time for cooking, and to carefully invest money in modernising the household. In the early 1960s, most Slovenian households, especially in rural areas, still struggled with primitive kitchen equipment and a limited variety of available foods. It was a challenge for women to prepare filling, healthy meals using ingredients that were available or affordable (Somerville, 1965, pp. 353–354). While prioritising low-cost, accessible basic ingredients, women had to be skilful in creating a variety of flavours in otherwise dull and repetitive dishes. *Naša žena* suggested using parsley and common Mediterranean herbs, and ready-made time savers like canned soups. Saving leftovers for later consumption was a commonly recommended practice for economising on food. Anything potentially edible had to be put to use. Beef, chicken and pork bones might not be edible as-is but could be used to make a good soup. One recipe in *Naša žena* (1960a, p. 122) explains: 'Soup prepared in this way is very tasty. Moreover, we make use of bones that are often left over when we prepare meat cuts for roasts, steaks, etc., during feasts'. Among the most highly promoted economising practices in *Naša žena* was do-it-yourself food preservation. The large rural population and strong family networks enabled many

households to rely on the rural-urban exchange of goods, and thus allowed them to survive with tight budgets (Woodward, 1995, pp. 327, 330). Women were able to access inexpensive or even cost-free vegetables and fruits, which could be preserved and stored in jars for winter. Although time-consuming, food preservation could save a significant amount of money for the family budget.

As Yugoslav prosperity grew, *Naša žena* shifted its focus. According to the magazine, in the late 1960s and in the 1970s, the biggest food-related shortage with which women were confronted was not money or ingredients, but time. Time saved in the kitchen was time a woman could invest in social life for the family and herself. Ready-made dishes that simply had to be warmed up were presented as easy, practical and fast. By the late 1960s, a large selection of processed food products was available. These could either be purchased or used along with other ingredients at home. Despite normative socialist equality (Luthar, 2014, pp. 19–22), *Naša žena* made it clear that socio-economic differences in society did exist and that the food being promoted was not equally accessible and available to all. Thus, the magazine was consistently sensitive to lower-income households, publishing recipes for dishes that could also be bought ready-made in stores. Thus, it was quite common for *Naša žena*'s readers to see an advertisement for the industrially produced Thomy mayonnaise and an old recipe for its homemade equivalent on the same page. In this way, the magazine excluded no one from using this product.

In the 1970s, *Naša žena* openly exposed women's frustration with the 'double burden', occasionally questioned the traditionally gendered social roles, and challenged men to participate more in cooking. However, the bottom line was that *Naša žena* did not put much trust in a systemic solution to the unfair division of work between men and women in the private domain, so it looked for individualised solutions. In late 1972, the magazine introduced a new section entitled 'Breaking the manacles of housewife slavery' (*Naša žena*, 1972b, p. 68), and in 1974, it issued a special section with the catchy title 'A complete meal within half an hour' (*ibid.*, 1974, p. 59). These told readers how to save time while preparing meals through better organisation, cooking larger quantities, freezing portions for later use, and consuming processed foods. Saving time in the kitchen was inherently connected to spending money on processed food or modern kitchen appliances, as evident in the next two quotes: 'A freezer is certainly not cheap, but it allows us to prepare ready-made meals several months ahead' (*ibid.*, 1971a, p. 54); 'A smart housewife always doubles the portion of the stew she prepares. Half is put in the freezer, and the other half is consumed right away. This way she saves a lot of time' (*ibid.*, 1972a, p. 61). Such spending was socially justified since time was positioned as an important commodity, a currency needed for the self-fulfilment of socialist women.

The underlying emancipatory intention of the food-related texts was less apparent in the 1980s, with the end of a decade of economic prosperity and political stability. Women were again invited to sacrifice their time in order to deal with food shortages, this time related to high inflation, debt, price increases and unemployment (Woodward, 1995). Their duty was to save the family (and society) from despair in times of political uncertainty. A 1985 article in *Naša žena* (1985, p. 68), for example, reminds the reader of economic struggle and women's responsibility to lift morale and spirits through cooking: 'Even in bad times, like now, we cannot allow the holidays to just go by without making some effort to cook or bake something good or special for a festive lunch or dinner or for guests who come to greet us and wish us luck'. In the 1980s, *Naša žena* was again promoting recipes that did not require processed foods, while encouraging older methods of

cooking and growing food. This was not so much an instance of 'back to nature' values as it was a response to the economic crisis and the need to once again ration everyday cooking.

## **healthy and productive families building up the strong socialist nation**

The health of a population is one of the key developmental indicators of societies throughout modern times, and accessibility to enough good quality food one of its pillars (Kamin, 2006). By the same token, an expert nutritionist discourse was central to *Naša žena's* reminders to women about their responsibilities as providers of healthy food and food habits. Thus, women were assigned a quintessential role in implementing the socialist project of maintaining a healthy population in order to ensure worker productivity. Women were constantly reminded that the things they knew about food might be wrong given new scientific findings, and that *Naša žena* was there to remind them of that by providing accurate information.

During the 1960s, *Naša žena* was primarily preoccupied with two food-related women's health concerns: malnutrition and hygienic food preparation and preservation. Quantity was the most prominent concern despite the subsidised prices of staple food items such as bread, sugar, cooking oil, beef, milk and eggs (Čepič, 1979, pp. 904, 906, 908; Tivadar and Vezovnik, 2010, p. 383). The body was viewed as a machine that needed to be fuelled with a substantial amount of food, which itself was seen as an energy source. If bodies were machines, then women were their 'engineers', maintaining and boosting their functionality. Nutrients related to energy, such as fat, carbohydrates and proteins, were the most discussed. Red meat had the highest status, since it was seen as the best source of protein and other essential nutrients for survival, growth and productive work. However, red meat was expensive and not widely available, so women were advised to overcome these challenges by using less desirable cuts, like offal, alongside eggs and milk. Milk, in particular, was praised as an essential food and described as 'a cheap remedy' for strengthening bones and teeth, making skin healthier, while preventing anaemia and weariness (*Naša žena*, 1960b, p. 233).

From the mid-1960s onwards, questions of food quality were raised, along with quantity, which follows the typical discourse of nutritional science. It became clear that, for a healthy productive worker, calories were important but not sufficient to support complete health; *Naša žena* introduced a new concern: providing variety in meals to satisfy the whole family's daily needs for protein, vitamins and minerals. The reputation of processed convenience foods was not affected by the additives in these items. Still, *Naša žena* often advised the reader to make it more nutritious and tasty by adding fresh vegetables and herbs. Frequent advice about the risks of food poisoning and instructions for efficiently preserving food implied that the preparation of abundant meal sizes intended to produce leftovers. The most commonly recommended safety measures were proper storage of food, personal hygiene and attentive shopping. Following simple logic was still sufficient for meeting the health standards in the 1960s, but by the middle of the 1970s, the complicated discourse of risks related to food and health had become omnipresent. The following quote is indicative of the quickly changing food-related health recommendations, introducing ever new scientific discoveries about the effects that various foods might

have on the human body, both physical and psychological: 'vitamin supplements are of no use to a healthy person who eats normally, in fact, they can even be harmful' (*ibid.*, 1973, p. 60).

In each issue, *Naša žena* introduced a selected vegetable and gave a detailed explanation of its nutritional value, as well as methods for its preparation and consumption. Such descriptions were highly technical and educational in nature, suggesting that women lacked knowledge about the nutritional benefits of different vegetables but could imagine how to prepare and serve them attractively in line with the latest nutritionist recommendations. This encouragement of scientific thinking in daily meal preparation implied that women should give up on common sense in cooking and transform family kitchens into home laboratories in which health for the whole family could be 'produced'. Women thus became engineers with high expectations to modernise the kitchen and to produce sustainable health. While calories were discussed only in positive terms in the 1960s, the 1970s revealed their disadvantages and women were challenged to keep their families from consuming too many. Sugar and fat were the most problematised ingredients, linked to increased risks for various diseases and premature death. In the early 1970s, *Naša žena* devoted several issues to informing readers about a new phenomenon that required women's attention: overweight. This problem warranted a separate section in *Naša žena* with a title that clearly medicalised body weight: 'Overweight is not healthy'. Managing one's weight suddenly required precise medical attention: 'It would be good to have a medical check before you go on a diet and to stay under medical supervision the whole time you are on the diet' (*ibid.*, 1972d, p. 17). Besides calories, women were advised to pay attention to food additives. 'Nitrosamine can also enter a human or animal organism through consumed food. This substance ... can be found in different kinds of food. Especially large quantities can be found in meat, which is treated with nitrites during the process of conservation', claimed *Naša žena* (1972c, p. 41). Despite such information, the *magazine* continued wholeheartedly to support processed food, as the time it saved in meal preparation seemed so liberating as to cancel out associated health risks. This changed in the 1980s when additives, along with foods high in calories and low in nutrients, were exposed as the main causes of so-called 'civilisational diseases' such as cancer, allergies and diabetes. Since women were portrayed as family health 'engineers', they could simultaneously be seen as enablers of and saviours from such civilisational diseases.

The emancipated woman of the 1980s was encouraged to avoid the newly identified risks to herself and her family by returning to nature and to pre-industrial wisdom for the growing and cooking of food, which is a sign of re-traditionalisation. Herbalism became an extremely popular way to deal with illnesses and diseases and received its own section in the magazine, entitled 'Green mosaic'. Home-grown vegetables and fruit were considered healthy and valuable and discussed in special sections. While in earlier decades, meat was the most desired foodstuff and considered a necessity in a healthy diet, the 1980s introduced alternative diets, such as vegetarian and macrobiotic diets. Healthy was equated with natural, home-made, home-grown and traditional, giving rise to a green ideology and the portrayal of woman as potential green activist. The body was seen less as a machine and more as an organism possessing its own wisdom, as in one of the magazine's articles that states, 'After the winter, the body longs for freshness, as if it knew that it needed a new stock of vitamins and minerals' (*ibid.*, 1990, p. 76). It became important for women to learn how to listen to and interpret the inner voices of the thinking and communicating body. Listening only to constantly changing scientific knowledge based solely on available measurement tools and technological devices became questionable and insufficient.

*Naša žena*'s approach in the 1980s promoted the notion of the fully conscious, thinking, reflexive, consuming self: a self, as Lupton (1996, p. 87) describes, that buys, prepares and eats food with a heightened sense of the food's history.

## women as household 'engineers'

Our analysis has demonstrated that through topics related to food, *Naša žena* popularised women's normative responsibility for transforming the socialist society on a micro-societal level from within—according to the prevailing socio-economic reality of the times—and caught women in the midst of the paradox between the liberating ideals upon which the socialist state was founded and the reality of everyday practice that required the 'correct' performance of women according to the state's goals.

While *Naša žena* began as a political pamphlet, over the decades the magazine began to focus more on private issues, suggesting that women enact both emancipation and modernisation in the private sphere via consumption practices, through household management, as well as by cooking and taking care of family members. Along with other publications from that period, such as cookbooks (Bracewell, 2012), it demanded that women bear the responsibility of professionally managing the modern household. Nothing could be left to chance. *Naša žena*'s cooking advice addressed women by offering up normative prescriptions and patronising modalities, expecting women to employ high standards and use precise and developed methods. Like the factory worker, the socialist woman had to be an 'engineer' in her home, operating her household like a lathe, while remaining ever mindful of limited resources, such as time and money. The magazine went hand in hand with socialism's political aim of constructing the ideal of an inventive, innovative, thrifty and hard-working socialist woman. As such, she was a master of making do. She happily adopted new industrial food products and electronic kitchen appliances, while following the latest findings of nutritional science, but she was also an expert in preserving fruits and vegetables for the leaner winter months. These responsibilities were closely linked to caring for the physical development, functioning and general well-being of the family, and indirectly for the wider community, too. She was responsible for bearing and raising the 'socialist citizens of the future' (Einhorn, 1993, p. 40). After the 1970s, food-related texts in *Naša žena* seduced consumers with novelty, and even the fantasy of the unattainable. Those who could not afford the desired novelties due to the worker's tight family budget were encouraged to compensate fashionable lifestyles by inventing their 'home-made' substitutes. *Naša žena* highly regarded the 'do-it-yourself' mode and presented it as a special skill that is quite difficult to master.

Socialism had admirable goals and made some great achievements in liberating women in Yugoslavia from patriarchal chains, primarily by giving women a constitutional right to become economically independent from their men and by formally acknowledging that the system needs to help women in carrying the social costs of reproduction. Although the country had constructed a good network of widely accessible public services that would disburden women of their traditional social roles as carers, the gap between political emancipatory programmes on the one hand, and the material reality for enforcing emancipatory rights on the other, continued throughout the existence of socialist Yugoslavia. In the first decade after World War II, this reality related to poor living conditions, the mostly rural and uneducated

population, and the strongly patriarchal arrangement of society. In the last decade of Yugoslavia, it related to economic and political instability and the re-traditionalisation of society. *Naša žena* constantly addressed these gaps in its food-related texts. However, the advice given for possible solutions changed focus. In the 1950s and 1960s, *Naša žena* was an ally of the state, because it helped promote public services (e.g. day care for children and the elderly and good canteens in kindergartens, schools and work settings) and women's emancipation. *Naša žena* was also critical of the slow developments and unequal distribution of public social services throughout Slovenia, and it supported social movements that lobbied for these services to become the state's political and economic priority. Moreover, women were taught about household economy and ways to modernise their homes and kitchens so as to ease their unavoidable domestic work, only as long as the public services did not offer a better solution. *Naša žena* continued to address women's double burden in the 1970s and 1980s, although individualised solutions came to the foreground and were closely linked to the sphere and processes of consumption. *Naša žena* believed in the socialist project of women's emancipation, but it was also aware that the patriarchal system was still deeply rooted in the day-to-day private lives of women. *Naša žena* therefore played a dual role: on one hand, it followed and promoted top-down socialist emancipation while, on the other, it wanted to help women in handling the burdens related to cooking, care and housework; thus, perhaps it also contributed to the reproduction of patriarchy in the private domain.

## conclusion

In relation to the situation of women during socialism, as (re)produced in the women's magazine *Naša žena*, we demonstrated that institutionalised politics, striving towards total gender equality, were significantly negotiated within the realm of everyday life. Thus, our study highlights the need to move beyond analysis of official political documents and texts related to events in the public domain, and that more complex analysis at the crossroads of several discourses is required to make better sense of life under socialism.

The socialist woman presented in *Naša žena*'s food-related texts was a household engineer, the carrier of modernisation, a buffer between socialistic theory and practice, a compensator for the system's deficiencies. She was always on the move and aware that her sacrifices were paving the way to the envisioned good life in the young socialist state. In this sense, *Naša žena* reformulated women's domestic work from a private role to constituting highly valued work for society, work upon which the whole nation's prosperity depended. As such, the emancipated socialist woman was a worker under contract with society, even when hidden from the public eye in her little kitchen.

*Naša žena* created a superwoman figure and positioned her as holding a highly moralised social function: as carer for the family and the nation. By ascribing moral values to women's social roles such as wife, mother, carer and household manager, *Naša žena* firmly tied women to domestic life, and thus reproduced and naturalised the traditional social roles of women. What did this mean for women's emancipation, glorified in political documents and promoted by state feminism? Our analysis confirms that state-driven emancipation based on a broadly accessible network of public services (e.g. child and elderly day care, healthcare, fully paid maternity leave, canteens) did not truly eradicate patriarchy,

since women ended up becoming double-burdened by adding their full-time employment on top of their domestic work. Was women's emancipation during socialism actually women's emancipation for others: for industrialisation, for modernisation, for the state?

In modern industrial societies, a family is a social unit that enables its members to compensate for the burdens and sacrifices related to socio-economic and political pressures on the condition of the unpaid domestic labour of all family members. However, in industrial societies, the role of stewardship over the family budget and the general atmosphere in the family was ascribed to women. Socialist societies never changed this precept, as our analysis confirms. Being both engineers of their family unit and employed workers, women were overloaded with work. In socialist countries with a poor economic base, women spent half the day working for a wage in extensive industry and the other half of the day for the family—constantly burdened by the need to provide basic goods for living, starting with buying foodstuffs at underdeveloped markets. The majority of overburdened women were thus also unable to significantly participate in the political sphere and advocate their interests.

The figure of a woman in the socialist women's magazine was not a housewife, but someone working for a better-quality life for all family members. *Naša žena* was thus a print representative of attempts to constantly persuade about how everything is possible, and that women's social position is actually quite all right. Women's work within the family was not represented as a burden, and women's participation in the public sphere was presented as women's emancipation in socialism. Thus, women's emancipation was limited to the technical question of women's employment and economic liberation, regardless of their situation in the private sphere on one hand, and in the political sphere (the sphere of power) on the other.

The equality and emancipation of women were themselves part of the legitimacy of the socialist system; they held a constitutive function in the state ideology. Therefore, women's emancipation was given political recognition in socialist Slovenia, but its redistribution in everyday life was limited; it was not a consequence of a bottom-up struggle for equal rights and opportunities. This is also evident in feminist studies and reflections on women's position under socialism. Feminism, for example, was critically addressed as a bourgeois delusion imported from the West, defined as an unreasonable demand for the absolute equality of women, which in fact undermines true freedom (Jalušič, 1998). Signified as such, feminism was stigmatised and, from the 1970s onwards, feminism and the development of feminist theory in socialist Slovenia were constantly also accompanied with an undisguised, outright anti-feminist movement (Ule, 2013). Perhaps this also explains why the discourse of women's emancipation in *Naša žena*, which up until the 1970s brought to the fore women's interests and emancipation-related demands, gradually disappeared.

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