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### THE PROBLEM OF THE HISTORIZATION OF 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY SERBIAN FASHION 1920-1980

**ABSTRACT:** *The paper covers the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion from the 1920s through the 1980s, focusing on the problem of its historization. Based on established readings submitting 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion to politics thus distancing it from global fashion history, I aim to structure a possible historical narrative of fashion by identifying the elements of haute couture in 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion industry. Rather than contrasting Serbian fashion figures with their Western counterparts and deepening the West / East Europe fashion divide, the paper traces similarities between them, demonstrating that 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion responded to haute couture trends simultaneously with their emergence in the West.*

**KEYWORDS:** Historization, 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Fashion, Fashion History, Fashion Designer, Haute Couture, Serbia, Belgrade, Yugoslavia

In his 1987 book, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy (L'Empire de l'ephemere)*, French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky notes that fashion,<sup>1</sup> seen ontologically and socially as an inferior domain, is straightforward and undeserving of investigation; whereas seen as a superficial issue, it discourages conceptual approaches.<sup>2</sup> Lipovetsky continues by stating that fashion turns up everywhere on the street, in industry and in the media, but it has virtually no place

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<sup>1</sup> Rather than emphasizing the sociopolitical constrictions of culture of clothing as a unity of dressed bodies in different ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbia or the industrial production of clothes, by term 'fashion' I will refer to those phenomena to a certain extent aligning with the term 'haute couture' in the West, where aesthetic rather than utilitarian aspects of clothes are valued. By fashion I shall thus consider agents pivotal in structuring the fashion system of 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbia that corresponded with Western high fashion and translated it into domestic fashion production: the authenticity of fashion designers, fashion magazines, runway shows, and fashion trends as a reflection of broader fashion aesthetics.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

in the theoretical inquiries of our thinkers, adding that it is celebrated in museums but has marginal status among serious intellectual preoccupations.<sup>3</sup> Even though written more than three decades ago, Lipovetsky's claims still resonate with rather minor approaches to fashion and its history, be it national or global, within Serbian history academia. However, rather than focusing on reasons, mapped out in the paper *Breaking the Canon: Towards Fashion Museology in Serbia*,<sup>4</sup> leading to the lack of fashion as a subject in Serbian academic discourse, I intend to structure a possible layout of history of Serbian fashion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with regard to a global *zeitgeist* embedded in fashion as a complex sociocultural phenomenon. As such, fashion is not seen as inferior to canonical narratives of 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian history, but as a tool for reading history from the margins while enabling the structuring of its own history.

Since the staging of the first fashion-history-related exhibition in Serbia in 1966, *Women's Fashion from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century to the 1930s (from the collection of the Museum of Applied Art)* curated by Dobrila Stojanović at the Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade (MAA) until the present day, there indeed have been several attempts, predominantly in terms of museology, to address certain chapters of history of Serbian fashion. These explorations mostly framed fashion as a manifestation of either visual or material culture, thus submitting fashion to art historical, ethnological, and anthropological interpretations, without giving the agency to its own history. Without any courses related to fashion history offered through higher education programs in historical sciences at national universities (history, art history, archeology), the task of somewhat structuring history of Serbian fashion in terms of institutional study has been bestowed upon the MAA. However, the primary limitation of approaching fashion history from within a museum environment is that such history pertains exclusively to artifacts belonging to a certain museum. This can be seen from the example of fashion history exhibitions organized at the MAA after the 1966 exhibition: *Urban Dress in Serbia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Dobrila Stojanović, 1980); *Fashion in Belgrade 1918-1941* (Bojana Popović, 2000); *Fashion in Modern Serbia: Fashion in Serbia in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries in the Collection of the Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade* (Draginja Maskareli, 2019). As Maskareli notes, the main criteria in collecting clothes guiding both the MAA and other museums in Serbia were aesthetic and artistic values, national symbolism, and their potential for contextualization within the trends in the political, social and cultural history of the Principality and later Kingdom of Serbia.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Žarić, "Breaking the Canon: Towards Fashion Museology in Serbia", in: *Museoeurope Collected Volume: Textile, the Culture of Clothing and Fashion*, eds. Nives Cvikel and Maja Hren Brvar (Maribor: Regional Museum Maribor, 2019), 159–169.

<sup>5</sup> Draginja Maskareli, *Fashion in Modern Serbia: Fashion in Serbia in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries in the Collection of the Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade* (Belgrade: The Museum of Applied Art, 2019), 14–15.

While these exhibitions undoubtedly represent invaluable contributions to specific chapters of history of Serbian fashion, they also pose the question whether it is possible to structure, not as a bricolage of conglomeration, but as an interrupted narrative, a history of Serbian fashion, both in general and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the idea of haute couture rose to prominence in Serbia as well. While fashion exhibitions in Serbian museums focus solely on a certain period (predominantly the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) as well as fashion items (e.g. wedding dresses, shoes, bags) or designers (e.g. Aleksandar Joksimović), this paper aims to unify the different aspects of fashion production and systematize them into a possible not yet definite response to the problem of historization of 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion and its contextualization within broader 20<sup>th</sup> century haute couture tendencies. With 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion being largely researched in *Clothing in Belgrade in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* by anthropologist Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić in 2006, the structuring of fashion of a given timeframe in a complex fashion system – we have selected the 1920s – is the starting point of this study. The primary reason for such a chronological framing is that the 1920s saw the dissemination of haute couture as a global trend beyond the established fashion centers in the West and more importantly, its democratization in peripheral fashion cultures like Serbia in which the acceptance of modernity was signified by the transformation of the entire wardrobe. However, despite being a peripheral fashion culture, this did not mean, as Jovana Babović states in *Metropolitan Belgrade*, that the city was not in dialogue with larger urban centers.<sup>6</sup> In fact, fashion was one of the leading forms of communicating modernity between centers and peripheries. To paraphrase Simona Čupić, the disappearance of traditional folk costumes results in the process of modernization in which fashion is seen as a category of modernity due to its potential to destabilize imposed traditions, where clothes are not coded (or at least not only) by symbolic, but aesthetic values as well.<sup>7</sup>

Condensed in the second and third decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, numerous events – social, cultural, and political – initiated the aforementioned wardrobe transformation in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and Belgrade as its capital. First and foremost, it was the *International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts (Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes)* held in Paris in 1925, in which the Kingdom participated. As many traveled from Belgrade to see it, cultural exchange between Serbia and France / the West was inevitably increased, as the Parisian exhibition enhanced the desire to own unique pieces produced in a new style<sup>8</sup> and fashion was one of the most

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<sup>6</sup> Jovana Babović, *Metropolitan Belgrade: Culture and Class in Interwar Yugoslavia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Simona Čupić, *Građanski modernizam i popularna kultura: Epizode modnog, pomodnog i modernog (1918–1941)* (Novi Sad: Galerija Matice srpske, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Bojana Popović, „Pariski podsticaji: Međunarodna izložba iz 1925. godine i srpska primenjena umetnost“, *Zbornik seminara za studije moderne umetnosti*, 12 (2016), 93.

emblematic products of the Exhibition and the epoch. The emergence of jazz clubs, modern cinemas, ballet and opera, Radio Belgrade, the Miss Yugoslavia pageant, the English-Yugoslav Club, the French Institute, two royal weddings (King Alexander and Queen Maria in 1922 and Prince Paul and Princess Olga one year later) and Josephine Baker's visit,<sup>9</sup> to name a few, demonstrate that after the Great War, Belgrade was, as Babović points out, on a steady albeit not necessarily linear, trajectory of modernization, urbanization, and Europeanization.<sup>10</sup> In such a rapidly changing environment, fashion became both an aesthetic and a social event as well as a manifestation of contemporary urban life, introducing the first fashion designers, fashion illustrators, fashion magazines like *Vogue*, photographs (though not fashion still presenting fashion as an integral aspect of the identity of a photographed person) and seamstresses copying Western haute couture to the local cultural and artistic scene.<sup>11</sup> As such, the exposure to haute couture or its derivatives in Serbia was a matter of spatial belonging and class privilege: the Royal family of Karađorđević in Belgrade was the most exposed to it by wearing designs by fashion houses *Patou, Lanvin, Redfern, Lelong, Molyneux, Cartier, Hermès, Vuitton, Worth*;<sup>12</sup> while going down the social scale and further away from Belgrade people whether copied trends from fashion journals or did not partake in the fashion system at all. However, as Čupić stresses, despite modernity impulses mobilizing only the very surface of the Kingdom's urban centers according to their wealth, mass culture, including fashion, grew to become a constituent aspect of everyday life in Belgrade.<sup>13</sup>

In *Fashion in Belgrade 1918-1941*, Popović finds that in Belgrade, as elsewhere in the world, both the domestic and foreign press had a great role in transmitting fashion news and forming local taste, stating that all well-equipped Belgrade bookstores sold the following fashion journals: *Le Jardin des Modes, Femina, Vogue, L'Art de la Mode, Marie Claire, La Mode Chic, Chiffona*, and *Die Dame*, among many.<sup>14</sup> Local fashion-related or fashion press emerged as a response to this: *Žena i svet (Woman and the World)* being the first of its kind, founded in 1925. by Jelena Zrnić and running until 1941. Popović notices that this magazine not only offered various useful insights into domestic relations and family life, but also into cultural and social happenings in the country and from abroad mostly devoted to fashion, with illustrated fashion reports from Paris, Vienna, and Berlin.<sup>15</sup> As most local magazines were aimed at women

<sup>9</sup> For a full chronology of sociocultural events in interwar Belgrade and Yugoslavia in regard to Western popular culture, see: S. Čupić, *Građanski modernizam i popularna kultura: Epizode modnog, pomodnog i modernog (1918–1941)*.

<sup>10</sup> J. Babović, *op. cit.*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Stefan Žarić, „Srpska moda između mita i stvarnosti“, *ELLE Serbia*, XVI, issue 193, (2021), 78.

<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Bojana Popović's thorough insights into fashion services bills of the Royal family, we can know for certain which Western fashion houses and designers were present in Serbia's interwar fashion system.

<sup>13</sup> S. Čupić, *op. cit.*, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Bojana Popović, *Moda u Beogradu 1918–1941* (Beograd: Muzej primenjene umetnosti, 2000), 56.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

from all social strata, the circulation of fashion, in line with Roland Barthes' thesis, relied largely on activities in which fashion magazines brought about transformation.<sup>16</sup> To clarify, Barthes understood fashion through structures: technological (actual garment), iconic (e.g. illustration, photography), and verbal (e.g. magazine reports) meaning that those who could not afford originals were able to acquire their reproductions - and even make copies. One of many notable 'couture copyists' was Rebeka Jakovljević-Amodaj (1896-1980), who opened her salon in Belgrade in 1919. She was considered to be the most expensive fashion seamstress, making clothes after Parisian originals and showcasing them to her customers on models, having business contacts with Parisian fashion houses like *Patou*, making up to fifty gowns a week for the local clientele and employing 52 workers prior to World War II.<sup>17</sup> Seamstresses like Jakovljević-Amodaj and others<sup>18</sup> played a crucial role in translating French haute couture into Serbian settings of the 1920s and especially into the 1930s as the Great Depression brought more originality to their work due to a reduced capacity for hiring French models, contributing to the formation of local fashion systems and fashion expressions. Additionally, the increasing number of seamstresses and tailors led to the formation of a section of tailors of women's attire (*Sekcija krojača ženskog odela*) in 1935, which, through organizing spring and fall fashion shows, significantly contributed to promoting local fashion up to World War II, when the section was suspended.<sup>19</sup>

However, key figures in conceptualizing Serbian artistic fashion of the interwar period as a national response to haute couture were Dušan Janković (1894-1950) and Milena Pavlović Barilli (1909-1945). Between 1926 and 1927, Janković founded the *Atelier for artistic fashion Collete Janković* (*La Mode d'Art de l'Atelier Colette Janković*) in Paris, named after his wife, which ran until 1931 or 1932.<sup>20</sup> The chance to study and work in Paris and collaborate with local fashion houses allowed Janković to distinguish himself from fashion artisans back home and at the same time enrich Parisian haute couture with Serbian creative expressions. He had a talent for recognizing universal values in local and folk ornaments and transforming them into original and modern motifs, incorporating elements of Serbian and Balkan textiles and costumes in a contemporary art deco expression.<sup>21</sup> By not only being submerged, but also taking active part in Parisian fashion, Janković was able to pioneer some of its concepts on the Serbian fashion scene, such as giving his creations specific

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<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (London: Vintage, 2010), 6.

<sup>17</sup> B. Popović, *Moda u Beogradu 1918-1941*, 82-83.

<sup>18</sup> In the chapter of her *Fashion in Belgrade 1918-1941* book devoted to fashion salons in Belgrade, Bojana Popović provides a detailed account of activities of Belgrade seamstresses during the 1920s and the 1930s like Ruža Koen, Katarina Mladenović, Šarlota Alfandari, Lenka Lam Majer, Regina Benvenisti, Živka Dankučević, Lazarenka Babkova and others.

<sup>19</sup> B. Popović, *Moda u Beogradu 1918-1941*, 89-92.

<sup>20</sup> Bojana Popović, „Dušan Janković i moda“, *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja: Istorija umetnosti*, XX, issue 2, (2012), 458.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 463.

names as Paul Poiret did, or signing his creations with a handwritten signature, despite not creating fashion since returning to Belgrade in 1935 and until his death in 1950. Through modernizing folk traditions and combining them with contemporary approaches to fashion and artistic sewing, Dušan Janković became the first couturier in the history of Serbian fashion.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike Janković, who was bound to Paris, Milena Pavlović Barilli is the only prominent artistic figure of Serbian interwar culture who in addition to Belgrade and Paris also took part in the life of prominent Western fashion centers: Munich, London, and fundamentally, New York. While she did not design fashion per se, she was professionally engaged in the field of fashion illustration, fashion advertising and merchandising, fashion photography, Hollywood celebrity portraiture, and costume design, contributing to the heterogeneity of Serbian fashion. Barilli's Belgrade fashion illustrations are invaluable in reconstructing a more concise image of the so called *roaring twenties* in Belgrade and the reception of haute couture among the domestic population. Contemporary fashion trends like Madlene Vionnet's bias cut, Jean Patou's sport elegance and Jeanne Lanvin's *robes de style*, which were often worn by young Belgrade women for their dance outings, found their way into Barilli's fashion illustrations.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that both during her stay in Belgrade (1922–1927) and abroad (Munich, Paris, New York) until her death in 1945 the fashion illustrator was not concerned so much about creating a national style in Serbian fashion, but presenting local fashion as an integral part of a broader fashion narrative and a reflection of contemporary fashion trends of her time.

Conversely, Barilli has also, at least in terms of visual representation, introduced many haute couture trends that were not based in Serbian national history of art or history of fashion. She is the only Serbian artist who transposed fashion in her complete oeuvre (including painting and poetry) – not clothing as an essential aspect of human appearance, nor the latest trends that inevitably affect the representation of a dressed human figure, but fashion as a self-sufficient aesthetic phenomenon.<sup>24</sup> However, both in Paris and New York, where she landed the position of fashion illustrator for *Vogue*, she did remain a Serbian fashion artist actively engaged within the framework of not just French, but the emerging American fashion scene as well, comprised of a vast immigrant creative milieu seeking refuge from a war-engulfed Paris. By leaving for Paris in 1931, and then for New York in 1939, where she resided until her death in 1945, Barilli upgraded her fashion illustrator expression with Coco Chanel's elegance, Elsa Schiaparelli's surrealism, Madame Gres' popular draping techniques, and Cristobal Balenciaga's romanticization of historical costumes<sup>25</sup> as well as with poetics of famous fashion photographers like George Hoyningen-

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<sup>22</sup> S. Žarić, *Srpska moda između mita i stvarnosti*, 78.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>24</sup> Stefan Žarić, *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York – One Study of High Fashion and High Art* (Požarevac: The Gallery of Milena Pavlović Barilli, 2017), 67.

<sup>25</sup> S. Žarić, *Srpska moda između mita i stvarnosti*, 81.

Huene and Toni Frissell.<sup>26</sup> As such, Barilli's works can serve as a basis for studying the history of fashion in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and enable the establishing of fashion history as a separate discipline in Serbian academia.<sup>27</sup>

The historization of Serbian fashion of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century typically focuses on decades between 1960 and 1990. The fashion of the 1950s is, same as of those decades prior to Josip Broz Tito's death in 1980 and the breakup of Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1992, usually framed within a broader context of socialism and seen as a reflection of primarily Yugoslav politics and ideology and only then of consumer culture. Apart from studies focusing on individual designers like Aleksandar Joksimović, Dobrila Smiljanić, or Mirjana Marić, no research has been conducted yet on Serbian fashion in the 1950s,<sup>28</sup> or 1980s, 1990s, or in the 2000s and onward. The most coherent approach to Serbian fashion between 1960 and 1990, albeit not fashion historical but anthropological, is conveyed exactly through the study of life and work of one designer, Aleksandar Joksimović (1933-2021), as authored by anthropologist of fashion Danijela Velimirović and titled *Aleksandar Joksimović: Fashion and Identity*. Velimirović finds that different forms of socialist Yugoslav fashion productions are the most noticeable in Aleksandar Joksimović's work, which as such is the most representative model for studying Yugoslav fashion in the period between the 1960s and 1990s.<sup>29</sup> Hence, Joksimović, similarly to Barilli, can serve as one of the points for initiating the narrative of history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion, but in order to construct such a history, works of these fashion artists should be contextualized within the wider history of fashion, not vice versa.

The opposite approach definitely allows a systemic insight into the fashion habitus of an individual fashion figure, but at the same time its scope includes only those aspects of fashion history inherent to that figure. Further narrowing that scope to fashion – socialism, although significant, offers only a few established fashion historical narratives: sociopolitical fashioning of postwar Yugoslavia's 'new' woman, fashion as an extension of the regime, designer – regime correlation, Jovanka Broz as the epitome of the regime's fashion and shopping tourism in Yugoslavia. This is not to say that political or any other

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<sup>26</sup> For a detailed analysis of Barilli's fashion illustrations compared to fashion photography see: Stefan Žarić, "The Influence of Fashion Photography on Fashion Illustrations of Milena Pavlović Barilli (1932–1945)", in: *Interdisciplinary Companion to Photography: Photography as a Method of Visual Research*, eds. Dijana Metlić and Mia Ćuk (Novi Sad: Academy of Arts, 2019), 134–147.

<sup>27</sup> S. Žarić, *Maison Barilli: Belgrade / New York – One Study of High Fashion and High Art*, 67.

<sup>28</sup> The exhibition *Women's corner (Ženska strana)* organized by the Museum of Yugoslavia and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 2010 did reflect on fashion and fashion magazines in Yugoslavia and Serbia between 1940 and 1960, but again in order to demonstrate the role of women and fashion in the sociopolitical discourse of socialism and the country's postwar reconstruction. It is similar with Danijela Velimirović's essay "A New Look for a 'New Woman': The Shaping of 'Proletarian taste' (1945–1951)", published in: *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology*, volume 7, issue 4, (Belgrade, 2012), 935–955.

<sup>29</sup> Danijela Velimirović, *Aleksandar Joksimović: Moda i identitet* (Beograd: Utopija, 2008), 8.

premises of Yugoslav socialism should be discarded as they inevitably affected the fashion system. While works by designers like Aleksandar Joksimović and Mirjana Marić are inseparable from the political climate in which they were created, politically-tinted interpretations overshadow the possibility of their further contextualization and ignore other fashion figures significant in structuring the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion, like Anđelka Slijepčević, Bernat Klein, or Mira Brtko. As such, readings of, for example Marić's designs as a reflection of the cult television series *Dynasty*, or Lady Diana Spencer's fashion imagery, or Ralph Lauren and Yves Saint Laurent's catwalk experimentations during the 1980s, are hitherto non-existent. By actively perpetuating political readings of both Serbian and Yugoslav 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion, they are further isolated and distanced from broader European and global fashion histories, at the same strengthening the East/West European fashion history divisions. As Babović insists, history cannot be reduced to politics, just as European narratives cannot be reduced to West European narratives.<sup>30</sup>

In that sense, identifying those matrixes of haute couture in Serbian fashion of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could enable a more nuanced reading of its not only political but also aesthetic tendencies, not by contrast but by similitude to Western fashion. According to Djurdja Bartlett and her seminal 2010 study *Fashion East: the Spectre that Haunted Socialism*, for citizens of socialist regimes wearing Western fashion was an act of communication in which Western fashion as a sign was applied to the new social situation, naturalized and recoded with new cultural meanings and social functions.<sup>31</sup> In other words, despite being controlled by the regime, post-World War II Serbian fashion had aesthetic tendencies and cultural traits of a global fashion zeitgeist in addition to its domestic social function. As Bartlett finds, all the latest Western fashion trends arrived in Yugoslavia simultaneously with their appearance in the West<sup>32</sup> leaving little time and space for the regime to maneuver, unlike in the USSR and other East European countries. Just a year after the end of World War II and Yugoslavia's transition from kingdom to federal people's republic, fashion magazine *Ukus (Taste)* published by the Antifascist Women's Front, besides recipes and household instructions, also advises on how to freshen up old and cut out new models for women and children, avoiding army overcoats, simple skirts and shirts, and tall army boots and emphasizing a woman's attributes through slim-waist and low-cut dresses, shorter and narrower skirts, fringe shirts, and high heels.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> J. Babović, *op. cit.*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Djurdja Bartlett, *Fashion East: the spectre that haunted socialism* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010), 271–272.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Marija Đorgović, Ana Panić and Una Popović, *Women's corner* (Belgrade: The Museum of Yugoslav History, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010), 51–52. When *Ukus* was reporting on 'new and fresh models' Christian Dior, alongside Pierre Balmain, was working for Lucien Lelong, who, as already mentioned, designed for Queen Maria and Princess Olga Karadorđević. Only a few months later, at the beginning of 1947, Dior introduced his cult *New look*.

This suggests that in Serbia, just like in the West, as fashion historian Daniel Milford-Cottam notes, the 1950s laid the foundations for fashion in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the emergence of stylish options and several silhouettes.<sup>34</sup> More importantly, this demonstrates that Serbian fashion of the late 1940s and through the 1950s followed the inception of Christian Dior's *New look* in 1947, as, according to Milford-Cottam, Dior became the designer linked with the curvaceous silhouette that swept away the boxy shoulders and skimpy shirts of the war years worldwide.<sup>35</sup> Tailored skirt suits, coats, blouse and skirt ensembles, full skirts in lightweight cotton, straight-cut cardigan suits simultaneously introduced by Chanel, Dior and Balenciaga, leather handbags, neat gloves, modest hats and cocktail dresses as emblematic fashion iconography of the decade based on Milford-Cottam's observations<sup>36</sup> were present in Serbian fashion as well. The first International Clothing Fair *Fashions in the World* was organized in 1958 at the Belgrade Fair and in 1959 Dior, Lanvin, and Balenciaga were already participating in it.<sup>37</sup> Contrary to media mythologization of Joksimović as being 'Yugoslavia's Dior', it was in fact Anđelka Slijepčević (1931–2010) who pioneered the westernizing national style in postwar fashion with some aspects of Dior and Balenciaga's designs, which were well-known to the locals by the end of the 1950s. Prior to her return to Belgrade in 1959, Slijepčević spent three years in Paris being introduced to haute couture and having worked for some French fashion houses (possibly Lanvin) as well. In Belgrade, she founded the Center for Contemporary Clothing (Centar za savremeno odevanje) as well as the Department of Contemporary Clothing Design at the Academy of Applied Art in Belgrade (nowadays Faculty of Applied Arts), the first higher education program in fashion design in Serbia. In 1961, she organized a fashion show titled *Folklore and Fashion (Folklor i moda)* which marked a turning point in Serbian fashion as it was the first time that both collection and catwalk were based on national folk costumes on one side, and Dior's A-line silhouette on the other.<sup>38</sup> The September 13, 1961 issue of Belgrade's daily newspaper *Borba*, reported that the fashion show demonstrated

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel Milford-Cottam, *Fashion in the 1950s* (Oxford: Shire, 2017), 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Bojana Popović, *Aleksandar Joksimović. Iz zbirke Muzeja primenjene umetnosti* (Beograd: Muzej primenjene umetnosti, 2015), 16.

<sup>38</sup> S. Žarić, *Srpska moda između mita i stvarnosti*, 81. A thorough insight into Anđelka Slijepčević's sketches and Christian Dior's designs shows that Dior's evening ensemble in his Naturelle line comprised of a short-sleeved red silk blouse and a medium-waisted full length pleated black rayon skirt from the 1951 spring/summer collection that most definitely could have served as the basis for Slijepčević's collection and show. Dior's ensemble belonged to Mavis Powell in Australia and was gifted to the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, whereas Slijepčević's sketch of it, according to the designer's relative Tanja Slijepčević, was gifted to the Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade. I owe a debt of gratitude to professor and fashion designer Doda Komad for providing me with the contact of Tanja Slijepčević. Dior's ensemble is available for online viewing at: <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/67792/> (accessed September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021).

aspirations for adjusting contemporary forms of clothing to the development of the national style, praising Slijepčević's use of Dior's A-line alongside elements of Serbian folk costumes.<sup>39</sup>

As such, even though considered the first collection of high fashion in Serbia (or as Velimirović defines it, 'official gala fashion'), Joksimović's 1967 *Simonida*, named after and inspired by Serbian medieval Queen Simonida, was not the first to be based on national folklore. However, unlike Slijepčević's collection, where just the runway show was titled, Joksimović was, as Velimirović finds, the first in the Yugoslav postwar fashion system to name his collections and introduce the concept of themed collections and catwalks as choreographic spectacles.<sup>40</sup> He also deserves huge credit for promoting the space-age style in Serbian fashion, concurrently with its appearance in Western haute couture, as *Simonida* premiered in the same year as Pierre Cardin's *Cosmos* collection. With the exception of Paco Rabanne, few other high-profile couturiers at the time were quite as outré and experimental as Cardin and Andres Courreges were, meaning that their work received substantial publicity<sup>41</sup> including Serbia, as all three designers exhibited their creations at *Fashions in the World* fair in Belgrade throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Despite that, the primary challenge in reinterpreting couture for mass-production was finding effective and affordable substitutes for exceptionally high-quality textiles.<sup>42</sup> *Simonida* was largely imitated and plagiarized, not just by seamstresses but by boutiques and companies throughout Yugoslavia. As such, even though modified through being 'folklorized', a major haute couture trend like the space-age was allowed, in its hybrid form, to enter Serbian fashion.

Whereas Joksimović transposed dominant trends of haute couture as dictated by fashion designers whose importance had started to fade by the end of the 1960s and especially in the 1970s, Mira Brtko (1930–2014) is the key-figure in mapping out elements of emerging subcultural and countercultural fashions in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion. Namely, Mira Brtko joined the fashion scene at a time when there was still a strong influence of the hippie movement and the movement of women and marginalized groups for equality and freedom in the social, family, and fashion sense of the word.<sup>43</sup> Youth revolts and their skepticism of corporate and bureaucratic authority and their strong emotional identification with the underprivileged, gave shape to politics, arts, and fashion of the era, with Yugoslavia and Belgrade seeing the first mass protests since World War II – the 1968 student demonstrations. Additionally, the premiere of the musical *Hair* at Belgrade's *Atelier 212* theater in 1969 through costumes designed by Vladislav Lalicki exposed countercultural fashions of the

<sup>39</sup> Lj. S., „Narodna nošnja – neiscrpno vrelo inspiracije“, *Borba*, 13. 9. 1961. Cited after Dušanka Slijepčević-Lesov, *Anđelka Slijepčević: Život i delo* (Beograd: Cicero, 2013), 77.

<sup>40</sup> D. Velimirović, *op. cit.*, 28–29.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Milford-Cottam, *Fashion in the 1960s* (Oxford: Shire, 2020), 23.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>43</sup> Olivera Janković, "Fashion design", in: *Reflections: Mira Brtko* (Belgrade: Belgrade City Museum, Mira Brtko Foundation, 2021), 232.

hippie movement to the local youth. As in the West, according to fashion historian Katarina Nina Simončič, the hippie style in Yugoslavia broke with the strict space-age style and returned to the long dress in a new form (the maxi dress) and popularized psychedelic patterns, folkloric motifs, traditional decorating techniques, ethnic elements, the safari look, and second-hand clothing,<sup>44</sup> most of which was present in Brtka's fashion design. Brtka's dresses with a square or round neckline and a hem above the chest, with fabrics often combining patchwork or embroidery extending below the knees and ending in a pleated ruffled hemline, advocated a democratization of fashion, visually eliminating the difference between social classes, and also between women of different ages, body images, or professions.<sup>45</sup> While Joksimović's usage of folklore was futuristic and ideologically colored, Brtka's incorporation of her more Slovak than Serbian heritage in her designs was more pan-Slavic than Yugoslav and more nostalgic and romantic than ideological, similarly to Laura Ashley and her 19<sup>th</sup> century-inspired dresses in Britain. Without emitting enough national ethos, but only using folklore as a decorative aspect of subcultural eclecticism, Brtka as a fashion designer was of no interest to the regime and was therefore omitted from the canonization of 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion designers, despite contributing significantly to diversifying the local fashion system in the 1970s and early 1980s. However, seen from this point of view, Brtka did emancipate the institution of the independent fashion designer, further developing the concept of artistic fashion initiated by Dušan Janković in the 1920s and rising to prominence as a designer of author fashion (*autorska moda*) throughout the 1990s.

Unlike Brtka, whose dresses remained recognizable but were not allowed to be labeled, Mirjana Marić (1938–2021) succeeded in having a tiny metal plate with her name engraved on her designs in the 1980s, but without *Yugoexport*, the company she worked for, trademarking it. She entered the Yugoslav fashion scene at a moment when the international rise of Prêt-à-Porter (ready-to-wear) helped replace (in the socialist Yugoslavia) the ideologically problematic concept of haute couture with a form of prestigious fashion clothing available to a considerably wider social class.<sup>46</sup> Simultaneously with Yves Saint Laurent and the rise of ready-to-wear fashion in the mid-1970s at fashion weeks in Milan, New York, and London, Marić pioneered and mastered these concepts in Serbia, becoming the most prominent figure in domestic fashion, aware of fashion trends, demands of the fashion market, and possibilities of the fashion industry. Additionally, by engaging art photographer Mario Bralić, Marić produced some of the most creative and cutting-edge visual solutions in her advertising campaigns and catalogues<sup>47</sup> which could serve as sources for

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<sup>44</sup> Katarina Nina Simončič, "The Fashion Revolution", in: *The Sixties in Croatia – Myth and Reality* (Zagreb: Museum of Arts and Crafts, 2018), 351.

<sup>45</sup> O. Janković, *op. cit.*, 232–234.

<sup>46</sup> Mirjana Menković, *Mirjana Marić: De luxe-pret-a-porter in Yugoslav Fashion (1970–1992)* (Belgrade: Ethnographic Museum, 2014), 56.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

studying Serbian fashion in the 1980s. As simple head-to-toe portraits with a blank piece of wall as a stark backdrop were popular among independent fashion designers and photographers opposing dominant *Vogue* aesthetics,<sup>48</sup> Marić was no exception from yet another global fashion trend.

With the exception of Marić's contacts with Pierre Cardin, who personally promoted her designs and had her organize a fashion show in his Parisian *L'Espace* venue in 1975, the only Serbian designer who actively took part in the Western fashion system and directly shaped haute couture in the 1960s and 1970s was Bernat Klein (1922–2014).<sup>49</sup> Born into an Orthodox Jewish family of textile merchants in Senta, Serbia,<sup>50</sup> Klein left the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1940 for Israel and then in 1945 went to the UK, where he remained until his death in 2014. Similar to Dobrila Smiljanić's Sirogojno weaving center on Mt. Zlatibor in Serbia, Klein established his *Colourcraft* in 1952, comprising of a weaving center in Galashiels, a town in the Scottish Borders, and *Bernat Klein Ltd* a decade later. Combining slub yarns with twists of three or more colors and a velvet ribbon he created textiles that popped, and introduced something new by reinventing the traditional tweed.<sup>51</sup> With designers like Coco Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, Nina Ricci, Guy Laroche, and Pierre Cardin and fashion houses *Dior* and *Balenciaga* using his fabrics in their couture collections, Klein was directly involved in setting a fashion trend that ruled the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, also finding its way to Serbia: the tweed suit. Coco Chanel used his fabrics for her spring 1963 collection, whereas in 1964 *Dior* produced a coat out of one of them.<sup>52</sup> By 1968, both Nina Ricci and Pierre Cardin in his futuristic designs were using Klein's fabrics.<sup>53</sup>

Given his popularity in the 1960s and the fact that many of couture designers and houses Klein worked with also presented in Serbia, Cardin particularly, we can only assume why Klein was ignored from the national fashion discourse of his time. While there is no doubt that the Yugoslav regime knew about Klein at least through the fashion media and his designs presented by fashion figures showcasing at the Belgrade's Fair, Klein's artistic and individualistic persona, unlike Joksimović or Marić whose works were monitored by the regime, would not have fitted in with the collectivist fashion system of postwar

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Abraham, "Irony and Mythology: The Fashion Magazine Reconsidered", in: *80s Fashion / From Club to Catwalk*, ed. Sonnet Stanfill (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2013), 78.

<sup>49</sup> Unknown to the broader and academic public in Serbia, Klein's life and work were presented for the first time at a panel *Bernat Klein: The King of Yugoslav Fashion*, held at the Belgrade Youth Center (Dom omladine Beograda) in February of 2021, as presented by me on the invite of The Center for Yugoslav Studies (CEJUS).

<sup>50</sup> According to Klein's daughter, Shelley Klein, the family business ran under the name of *Klein Lipot Textile Merchant*, named after Klein's father. The shop, managed by Lipot and Klein's mother, Zori, was located on Stevan Sremac Street where their house was located. See: Shelley Klein, *The See-Through House: My Father in Full Colour* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> S. Klein, *op. cit.*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> In 1968, *Vogue Italia* presented creations by both designers made of Klein's fabrics.

Serbia. Had Klein stayed in Serbia, he would have met the destiny of his family being deported to Auschwitz, had he returned, he would have been denied the creative freedoms he enjoyed in the UK. As such, seen from this point of view, Klein would have exposed paradoxes of 'national' fashion, where designers were allowed creative and aesthetic liberties only to the extent to which it demonstrated the geopolitical progress of the regime. When Joksimović and Marić's fashion shows were used for diplomatic boasting, all of London's leading fashion editors were flown and driven to Klein's estate where his latest creations were being modeled.<sup>54</sup>

However, Bernat Klein remains a rather transgressive figure in the history of Serbian fashion: by abandoning the Serbian fashion system he returned to it through haute couture, with many locals certainly unaware that the tweed suits or coats they saw in Chanel or Cardin's designs and copied on their own, in some way had originated in Serbia. Additionally, he never utilized Serbian folklore, but rather translated the landscapes of his childhood into some of his brightest, boldest tweeds, turning the fields of Vojvodina into fabrics adorning haute couture designs.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, the transgression doubles: Western fashion systems and canons of fashion history, reluctant to incorporate the Eastern European 'other' would not have had an era-defining fabric and garment if it had not been for Klein, proving that Serbian and broader Yugoslav fashion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century aligned to a great extent with haute couture in the West. As demonstrated in this paper, the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion *can* be structured outside of dominant political interpretations. Since the emergence of artistic fashion in the 1920s, couture copying of the 1930s and 1940s, gala socialist fashion, attempts of independent or ready-to wear fashion of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion production actively followed haute couture tendencies and responded to them, from Dušan Janković to Bernat Klein. As such, not only does the history of Serbian fashion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century justify its place within the overall sociocultural history of Serbia and Yugoslavia, but it has an important place in the global history of fashion as well, *de facto* deserving further contextualization, both museum and academic.

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<sup>54</sup> S. Klein, *op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

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## THE PROBLEM OF HISTORIZATION OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY SERBIAN FASHION 1920-1980

### *Summary*

Based on relevant literature concerning both 20<sup>th</sup> century Western and Serbian fashion, the main purpose of this paper is to structure possible historization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion between the 1920s and the 1980s in regard to haute couture trends emerging in the West. Such structuring aims to, on one side, position fashion history as a valid aspect of overall 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian history, while on the other, to position the 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion within the framework of broader European and global fashion histories. By placing different concepts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion production – artistic fashion, couture copying, grandiose socialist fashion, ‘independent’ fashion, ready-to-wear – within tendencies of haute couture in the West, the paper demonstrates that historization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion does not necessarily have to be based on submitting fashion to Serbia and Yugoslavia’s political climate. Rather than contrasting prominent figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion system like Dušan Janković, Rebeka Jakovljević Amodaj, Milena Pavlović Barilli, Anđeljka Slijepčević, Aleksandar Joksimović, Mira Brtko, Mirjana Marić and Bernat Klein to their Western counterparts like Paul

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Poiret, Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Cristobal Balenciaga, Pierre Cardin and Yves Saint Laurent, the paper identifies similarities between them. Such analysis thus emerges as a conceivable solution to the problem of further historization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian fashion.

**KEYWORDS:** Historization, 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Fashion, Fashion History, Fashion Designer, Haute Couture, Serbia, Belgrade, Yugoslavia