

Women academics' attire between personal identity and ideological mark

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Abstract: Gender, beyond being a social and cultural construct, is also a political construct, so womanhood is therefore influenced by the way official discourse prefers a certain image of women. In communist Romania the principle of labor effectiveness extracted the aesthetic from clothing and promoted manly women dressed in unisex overalls. This paper investigates the ideological traces left by the communist regime on the way women dressed. The communist duplicity was also visible in fashion as well as in any other field of activity. Despite promoting an egalitarian society through discourse, the regime preferred the most traditional concept of gender by encouraging women to wear only modest, conventional clothes. The new aesthetics were ideologically imposed and led to a standardization of clothing to create a uniform that could be industrially mass-produced. Moreover, the austerity of garments also affected the way Timișoara's university women dressed. However, this phenomenon took place to a lesser extent for them because apart from being a discriminated elite, they were at the same time a privileged elite consuming inaccessible goods, considered luxurious for their time: fur coats, silk shirts, elegant dresses, Guban leather shoes, etc.

Keywords: communist Romania, women academics, utilitarian clothing, discriminated/privileged elite.



Introduction

Any object, even garments, contain a narrative in itself, a constructed discourse, a story. A story identifiable with naked eyes at a glance and a story of the object's construction, of the context in which it was created. Clothes can say a great deal about the era in which they were created, about the people who created them and about those who wore them. The material and immaterial part of a piece of clothing are two inseparable facets of an item. As an analysis done only to the technological structure is insufficient to explain an everyday commodity, I will insist on the immaterial part (its context), to show that clothes are the true socio-political image of an era.

Consumerism paradigms study the symbolic aspects of consumption, focusing on the consumer's identity and the reasons underlying the consumer's choice. Studying Timișoara's academic women way of dressing in the Communist era may seem a trivial matter at first glance. Therefore I will try to prove the contrary by showing that even everyday objects such as clothes may be the subject of serious research. The goal of this investigation is to show that academic women's clothes mirrored both the political ideology and the identity of urban women of that time (1965-1989).

Considering that habits and clothing (as part of daily life) can be a form of history or a way of understanding a certain period, I will attempt a reconstruction of the communist dressing behaviours, in my attempt to see if and how they were influenced by trends imposed by the political propaganda. Considering appearance (clothes and haircut) as a cultural capital, acquired by predispositions given by family, school, or by ideological and cultural environment, I will analyse garments from concept to production, sale and even to the informal exchange, to provide a complete picture of academic women's daily life and fashion behaviour.

The following analysis is based on the data gathered from the fieldwork consisting in 18 semi-oriented interviews done with academic women (former employees in three universities in Timișoara, now retired) and on their photos from that period, comparing them with covers of *Femeia* magazine. The main methodological tool is Critical Discourse Analysis, Ruth Wodak method, because it is not concerned with language itself, but rather with the discourse as social behaviour, with cultural structures of power, and it aims to investigate the relationships between discourse and power (political or social), dominance and social inequities. CDA exponents are using a three-dimensional analysis: of the context, of the text production process and of text interpretation. This triangulation seems very useful in supporting my arguments, therefore I will

include the analysis of the political, historical and institutional context that generated a certain type of clothing. I consider a discourse: 1.) the oral stories that resulted from the interviews (what they said they wore); 2.) old personal photos showing their style of dressing; 3.) images from *Femeia* magazine, to the extent that all three have a narrative core, therefore they are all telling a story. I use the concept of discourse as:

„The use of language in speech and writing - as a form of 'social practice'. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned - it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it”¹.

Aesthetic relativism from beauty to usefulness

Feminine beauty was always recognized and appreciated, even if it has fluctuated depending on aesthetic criteria that varied over time. The Judeo-Christian tradition is hostile to feminine beauty: Eve`s charms attract Adam into sin, Salome`s alluring dance causes the death of John the Baptist, Sarah`s beauty causes disasters to the Pharaoh`s house. In the Romanian rural traditional world there are many sayings considering feminine beauty to be evil: "You can't be both beautiful and good!"; "Beauty won't compensate for hunger and thirst"²; "A beautiful girl is half devil"³.

In the Renaissance the *fair sex* is invented and the superiority of feminine beauty receives recognition: "A pretty woman is the most beautiful object that can be seen and the greatest gift that God made to human creatures"⁴. Although a few centuries later feminists condemn this image of an objectified woman, considered until then to be the "devil`s weapon", it is transformed into an angelic creature, surpassing man, even if only through beauty. Looking back at the history of humanity, we can identify three avatars of feminine aesthetic. The first one is woman as the

¹ Ruth Wodak (ed.), *Gender and Discourse*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p. 6.

² Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Les Amours paysannes (XVI^e - XIX^e siècle)*, Paris, Gallimard, 1993, p.166-169, *apud*. Gilles Lipovetsky, *A treia femeie*, București, Editura Univers, 2000, p. 79.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Gilles Lipovetsky, *A treia femeie*, București, Editura Univers, 2000, p. 87.

embodiment of evil, which by its charms attracts misery, the second one is the beloved frail and gentle woman, the exact opposite to the villain. This slideshow of the first two avatars of the feminine aesthetic, just like the whole historical destiny of the fairer sex, is constructed by men, because they are the ones who value all these images as positive or negative. In both cases "the woman was subordinate to man, designed by him, defined in relation to him, she was nothing more than what the man wanted her to be"⁵. If the first two are constructs of man, the third image, the woman of the twentieth century, is self-confident and her own creation. In the Western society of the first half of the twentieth century, the history of women's empowerment is paved with victories and "during the 1960s and the 1970s the feminist movement was struggling to emancipate sexuality from the retrograde moral norms and to reduce social footprint on the private life"⁶.

Communist Romania's situation is unfortunately different from this, for two reasons: on the one hand the acquisition of rights was delayed in comparison to other Western countries, and on the other hand the direction of the so-called progress was reversed because the political power was increasingly intervening in all spheres. Romania's third avatar was not the result of her own making but the result of the socialist realism. She could not be what she wanted to be, but what the one-party allowed her to be. The third woman in socialist Romania was the mother, the housewife, the worker, the peasant and often all of them at once. In the aftermath of the Second World War, while in Western countries woman was being emancipated, in Romania she was reinvented by the socialists. Housewives were employed, obviously implying the doubling of their tasks. Feminine identities are therefore subsumed to a long series of conditioning. The ideological framework uses the new feminine images as springboard for a new social order:

"The anxiety towards feminine beauty generated a struggle to exorcise it through a devaluation or occultation, process maintained by the socialist realism. The communist model of femininity is an artificial construct composed of disparate elements that passed the test of ideological alienation, but without any real connection with the cultural paradigm of the era. On the one hand, the anti-aesthetics rural mentality abolished at the end of the First World War was revived, and on the other hand, the pressure of a manichaeistic style, merged into one two antagonistic types of women: the heroine,

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

*positive, with moral virtues associated to the proletariat, and a negative portrayal of women, the cruel torturer, the embodiment of the enemy*⁷.

Therefore, in order to remove the bourgeois elegant women, the aesthetic principle is replaced by the principle of labour effectiveness.

Clothing consumption in communism

Clothes can be considered history because they generate a narrative by telling a story and they are a form of cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital. In communism, an outfit becomes a fetish empowered by the politic regime. By standardizing garments, the regime ensured both the compliance of individuals and political advertising. Wearing certain clothes, besides being a social daily ritual, depends on the possibilities of the consumer: "Political organizations are ruled by rituals; rituals give political legitimacy and contribute to political solidarity in the absence of a political consensus"⁸. Traditionally, society attributes gender roles in a segregationist way: housework for women and professional activities for men. Communism, even though it declared these stereotypes abolished (through discourse, posters, slogans and pictures from magazines), still maintained defamatory misconceptions: "Consumption, woman thy name is!"⁹

Therefore I will analyse the way fashion practices encountered in Timisoara`s academic women between 1965 and 1989, express signs of identity that are based on both professional status and ideological standards. I aim to investigate consumerism beyond its one-dimension perspective, that of the endless queues, empty shops or poor clothes, in order to discover its role in influencing a wide range of phenomena, including power relations and identity constructions (group or individual). Official doctrine denounces consumerism because it is associated with capitalism and false needs.

Garments, beyond their material essence become an "ideological state apparatus"¹⁰, a way for the regime to advertise for free. Political communication (publicity) was performed through clothes designed by fashion state agencies and produced by state enterprises¹¹. Tracking its

⁷ Alice Popescu, *O socio-psihanaliză a realismului socialist*, Editura Trei, București, 2009, p. 132.

⁸ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, politică și putere*, Editura Univers, București, 2002, p. 27.

⁹ Slogan inspired by the Shakespearean phrase from Hamlet: "Frailty, thy name is woman!"

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Design as an Ideological State-Apparatus*, 2005, *apud.* David Crowley, Susan E. Reid (ed.), *Pleasures in Socialism. Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, Northwestern University Press, USA, 2010, p. 9.

¹¹ Sofia Bratu, *Imaginea în construcția simbolică a realității sociale. Imaginea politică*, Editura Ars Academica, București, 2009, p. 63.

egalitarian agenda, the state took over not only the entire production and distribution of goods to the population, but also all aspects of everyday life. Dictatorship's duplicity was visible in fashion as in any other field of activity. Thereby private matters such as making and wearing clothes become a public policy matter where the state intervenes and controls. Fashion was considered useless and under "the rule of the pleasure principle with the cost of being ineffective in reality"¹². At the other end of pleasure lies the yield principle. Following this principle, socialism rejected any glamorous bourgeois aesthetics and switched to a more austere, simple and functional style, in order to match the ideological imperatives. The discursive abolition of gender inequities was done by imposing the male standard as the only standard, namely by masculinizing the woman, undressing her from her dresses and adorning her with unisex overalls in order to cover her curves¹³: "Equality does not involve affirming and respecting women and men's equal rights, but rather imposing male standards and treating women as men"¹⁴.

During the liberalization period fashion was not considered bourgeois frivolity but signs of a socialist modernity meant to legitimize the regime: "In 1963, or whenever Ceaușescu came to power, until 1970-72, it was a time of blossoming. One began to find everything"¹⁵. Unfortunately this relative welfare period did not last very long: „Romania became increasingly nationalistic, repressive and isolated, and daily life more difficult and desperate”¹⁶. Socialist propaganda displayed in *Femeia* magazine advised women to consume wisely and rationally in order to avoid sliding into squander and exaggeration: "But in Ceaușescu's Romania, the marketing of modern fashions accompanied policies, in particular reproductive and family policies, that were highly repressive and conflicted with seemingly progressive lifestyles being promoted in the magazines"¹⁷. The sign of a woman's emancipation was not her elegance but the ability to successfully combine her roles as worker, wife and mother¹⁸.

¹² Herbert Marcuse, *Eros și civilizație*, Editura Trei, București, 1996, p. 164.

¹³ Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, Cambridge University Press, NY, 2010, p. 21.

¹⁴ Liviu Marius Bejenaru în Alina Hurubean (coord.), *Statutul femeii în România comunistă. politici publice și viață privată*, Iași, Institutul European, 2015, p. 12.

¹⁵ Jill Massino, „From Black Caviar to Blackouts. Gender, Consumption, and Lifestyle in Ceaușescu's Romania”, în Paulina Bren, Mary Neuburger (ed.), *Communism Unwrapped. Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012, p. 226.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 226.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 227.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 233.

In 1980s Romania, after a short political thaw, followed a tightening of the policies and deprivation of basic necessities¹⁹. Communism is the living proof of how an enticing dream can end up as a depressing failure:

"Thus, even when they were fashionable in design, the quality of the products offered by the centre was often derailed during the production process. Coarse textiles, for example, could not produce a dress that was „elastic, soft, well designed, fitting like a glove to the body. (...) so factories used rough materials, which often had low-quality dyes that faded quickly"²⁰.

Informal exchange of goods

After Ceaușescu's visit to North Korea in 1971, Romania entered a downward path concerning the living standards, and political and economic changes affected consumers behaviours and habits: "because of the repressiveness of socialist rule and Romania's isolation during the 1980s, people were especially dependent on the black market, informal networks, and the barter system for acquiring basic as well as luxury goods"²¹. Acquaintances maintain mutual support relationships. One of the most interesting facets of consumerism in post-war Eastern Europe is the phenomenon of informal exchange of goods. The informal barter of goods transformed Romanian citizens into occasional smugglers, networks maintained with the complicity of the communist nomenclature. Thus a quasi-legal secondary economy was born. Because of the fact that goods were scarce and of poor quality, a parallel, informal network of purchasing goods had been developed.

Communist clothing between luxury and austerity

State interference in the private life of citizens was sometimes visible through laws, decrees or abuses and sometimes almost imperceptible in the form of fashion propaganda. Luxury goods such as fur coats or silk dresses could be rarely purchased through the black market, acquaintances, mutual benefit relationships or at exorbitant prices. Although luxury goods contradict the idea of an egalitarian communist society, they were available for export or for privileged small groups such as the nomenclature or the academic elite. Interviewed ladies admit that even if in the post-

¹⁹ Paulina Bren, Mary Neuberger (ed.), *Communism Unwrapped. Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012, p. 10.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 238.

war period they had to wear old clothes and shoes passed on from their parents, the 1980s situation changed and they could procure luxury goods directly from factories. In addition to those, they received packages from abroad. Considering luxury a "monstrous and bizarre"²² type of consumerism, the Communist regime tackled it by consumption planned policies and discouraged it through official discourse or by depriving access to it to most of the citizens.

Custom, unique items vs. series items

Industrial uniformization tendencies imposed a dull, monotonous style among masses: "industrial mass-production annihilated any personal choice, leaving only an illusory differentiation"²³. Custom objects encounter obsolescence while series models cease to be functional, only if they suffer physical wear down: "in the case of an object the opposition is custom made vs. series model"²⁴. According to Baudrillard "any object has a degree of exclusivity depending on its level of social use (personal, familial, public)"²⁵. For clothing, this categorization can be applied either to the person producing the item, or to the one who is wearing it. The new means of production introduced by the industrial revolution led to a veritable odyssey of the garment produced by technical methods, a process implying human and non-human creators. Clothes were not supposed to be adornments or arouse admiration, but to provide a useful cover for the body.

Once the communist regimes takeover in Eastern Europe, the political influence of Moscow felt even stronger, pervading all areas of public and private sphere, including in the creation of an ideal clothing prototype, which was imposed on women from all states East of the Iron Curtain: "The East European states were forced to adopt the same centralized mode of dress production following the communist takeovers in 1948"²⁶. The female clothing prototype promoted by all communist regimes of Eastern Europe included, on one hand, uniforms/overalls, dull but comfortable and on the other, day dresses, also practical and simple. The uniform had an extremely trivial fit, was made from a thick material in dark colours, versatile (could have the

²² David Crowley, Susan E. Reid (ed.), *Pleasures in Socialism. Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, Northwestern University Press, USA, 2010, p. 56.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Sistemul obiectelor*, Editura Echinoc, Cluj, 1996, p. 90.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

shape of a skirt or trousers), had no ornaments whatsoever and could be worn regardless of the domain in which the woman carried out her activity: "its basic shape, consisting of a perfectly cut suit with a square-shouldered jacket and a straight skirt, conformed to the style of a uniform"²⁷.

In 1951, the *Textile, Leather and Rubber Research Institute* was established in Bucharest, and the activity of the institute focused on "the training of specialists in research, approaching themes of research with immediate applicability, and at the request of the factories it provided technical assistance for industry"²⁸. Beyond the policies and regulations coming from the top, there were also some pressures coming from below, from the citizens who had needs unsatisfied by the products existing on the market:

*"Caught between the Soviet model they wanted to implement and the challenge posed by a new kind of prosperity in West Germany, SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) leaders faced demands for a more generous and high-quality provisioning not only from the population but from within their own apparatus"*²⁹.

The stretch fabric used to be worn a lot, not just because it was a cheap and accessible material, but also due to the fact that in those days the synthetic fibres represented the latest fashion not only in socialist countries but also in the Western countries: „For a vast number of people around the world in those decades (1950-1960), plastics represented the modern. For some in Eastern Europe, it represented the ultimate socialist fabric"³⁰. The synthetic textile fibres industry represented a very advantageous substitute whereby factories (the state producers) could somewhat satisfy the clothing market demand.

Gowns, uniforms or even day dresses were designed so that would satisfy the need for convenience in carrying out various works after the Soviet Stakhanovite model. "The socialist rudeness" as Bourdieu called it is none other than the supreme affirmation of utilitarianism as unique and ultimate principle. The individual recognition in the case of creating a "bourgeois" piece of clothing is replaced with the collective non-recognition, when on the label of a product that came out from the Communist factories is registered the name of Romania. If until then the coat was a unique object, created by a tailor artist or by a craftsman who left his personal imprint

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and demand. The politics of consumerism in East Germany*, Harvard University Press, London, 2005, p. 11.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

on that object, in the communism era the coat becomes a multiplied object and is the result of collective technological processes and the result of centralized policies. The individual turns into the collective and the aesthetics are transformed into the useful. Politics overtakes the individual, stealing his or her freedom over his own appearance. In communism, the predilection of the regime for control led to a high degree of conventionalism in the clothing production. Rationalization was implemented in the first post-war decade even in the case of clothes. This was a bizarre phenomenon whereby persons regarded as friends of the regime received points and cards for purchasing clothing, and the persons who were considered undesirable were not able to procure clothing: "The fashion of ready-made clothing, confections produced in large series, of clothing for poor girls and women, appears. It is fashion on points, on a card. With points you could buy meters, confections, shoes or a suit once a year"³¹. Clothes on points were received by peasants, workers, officials, but the small bourgeoisie, the Kulaks, etc., did not benefit from such clothes:

"In the year 1953 probably the cards were introduced for clothing and shoes. Not everyone received such cards but only some categories. In the first category were the peasants and workers, who out of conviction or from resignation yielded to the regime, in the second category were the officials. These first two categories received cards for clothing and shoes. A type of overcoat was received on the card, it was the only one that could be found on the market, and white crepe sole shoes. Next came the categories of small bourgeoisie, the Kulaks, and others who did not receive the card. We belonged to the third category, because we did not have much land, not much but anyway we got cards with points so we didn't have to buy clothes from shops. And then we wore the clothes our parents cleaned and modified at the tailor's"³².

Between 1965-1975, the national version of homo-sovieticus, the new woman, has been named by some researchers as the socialist humanism period³³. The term of socialist humanism appears in contrast to the capitalist materialism that was considered to be dehumanizing. The socialist humanism represented the transitional period from "construction of socialism" towards

³¹ Florin Constantiniu în Dorin-Liviu Bîțfoi, *Așa s-a născut omul nou. În România anilor '50*, Editura Compania, București, 2012, p. 284.

³² Cf. interview with a former UPT employee.

³³ The term of socialist humanism is used by Cristofer Scarboro in *The late socialist good life in Bulgaria. Meaning and living in a permanent present tense*, Lexington Books, Plymouth, 2012. Vladimir Tismăneanu uses the term to denote the period that is shaped in the first decade of Ceaușescu ruling as substitute for the socialist realism, a period which coincides with the so-called liberalization, relaxation (a.n.).

the period of living in a developed, strengthened socialism. The communist regime promoted its own politics by any means available to it at that time, from written press to audiovisual. One of the main methods of propaganda exclusively addressed to women was *Femeia/The Woman* magazine, a periodical that appeared each month and was edited in an impressive number, and that was the main press tool of UFDR (Democratic Women's Union of Romania) and was published for the first time in March 1948.

Thus, both women from towns and from villages were taught how to take care of themselves, how to dress, how to run their careers, what to cook or even how many children to have. The covers of the magazine and the pages dedicated to fashion presented clothes approved by the regime, clothes that represented an effective method of propaganda. Whether it was about wearing male clothes for feeling casual at work, red clothes or communist caps, all these contributed to the consolidation of the female desired by the communist imagery. The liberated woman was advised on what to do in order to be emancipated, this consisting sometimes even in not using makeup:

*"Emancipated but not very coquette. Young girls must avoid make-up. A young cheek does not need make-up: the glow of youth successfully replaces even the most advanced makeup. A young girl must wash her face thoroughly with cold water and with an emollient soap, and if she wants to never have black spots on her skin, she should rub her cheeks daily with a brush that is not too scrubby. This way, she will always have her pores unclogged by dust and fat"*³⁴.

The fashion of female academics of Timișoara - efficiency aesthetics, balance between fashion and productivity

The individuals communicate through the objects they use. The man renders a structural discourse through the clothes he wears. A garment was always a discourse in itself, which told the story of the person wearing it and of the one who created it. The communist coat was a propaganda tool, a method of legitimizing the regime and denotes an important major political burden. The utopian goal was to dress everyone equally, and with this uniformity the discursive and imaging legitimization of the egalitarian ideology was sought. This goal was largely achieved but not from a

³⁴ Arhivele Naționale al României, Fond C.C. al P.C.R. – Cancelarie, dosar nr. 64/1955, *Referat asupra felului cum s-a aplicat hotărârea C.C. al P.M.R. din ianuarie 1953 cu privire la întărirea activității în rândul femeilor*, apud. Dorin-Liviu Bîțfoi, *Așa s-a născut omul nou. În România anilor '50*, Editura Compania, București, 2012, p. 285.

women's liberating revolutionary will, but rather due to the lack of clothing alternatives from textile cooperatives outlets. The principle of productivity is applied in all areas including in the clothing manufacturing industry.

The clothing representations imposed by the images promoted in official magazines such as *Femeia*, contributed to the formation of a certain clothing behaviour, phenomenon that also affected academic women's way of clothing during the communist era. Marysa Zavalloni affirms that:

*"The identity is the central node of the individual perception, a way to organize the individual representations and the ones of its group of affiliation. In this way, the process of inclusion, as a process of mediation between the individual and the social, as a moment in the construction of social identity, calling upon the experience and context, operating categorizations, appears to us as a process of identification, but also of building social representations"*³⁵.

Therefore, we can consider that clothing items are defining the affiliation of academic women to the university environment but also to the political context of communism. The official attitudes in terms of fashion and luxury were not homogenous throughout the communist period of the Eastern Bloc, as they fluctuated depending on numerous factors: political context, degree economic planning, a relaxation of the dictatorship. Academic women's way of dressing oscillates depending on the decade, being influenced by the policies imposed from the centre. Thus there were periods of relaxation in which the ladies could even go to the Opera in evening dresses or strict periods of austerity and authority:

*„Luxury (...) is determined by changes in technology and the mode of production, shaped by ideological preoccupations and discourses, and managed through resource allocation, pricing policies, or tax regimes, all of which in turn reflect state priorities"*³⁶.

Both the development of the chemical industry and the possibility of producing at a relatively small cost for materials with colourful patterns required by the Socialist consumers

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

³⁶ David Crowley, Susan E. Reid (ed.), *Pleasures in Socialism. Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, Northwestern University Press, USA, 2010, p. 17.

resulted in fashionable clothing from synthetic fibres. Although my interviewees admit that wearing clothes from synthetic fibres also had also disadvantages, such as excessive sweating, they declare that they wore them because they were easier to find at a low price than the natural fibre clothes which were very hard to find and were more expensive. Aside from all these advantages/disadvantages, they further declare that during that period there was even a trend for dresses made of synthetic materials (lycra, nylon, viscose, etc.), as they represented the only way of wearing coloured clothes or clothes with floral designs. The forms that clothing objects have taken in the everyday Socialist life corresponded to the models promoted through the propaganda tools of the regime, but rarely reached the level of style or quality of the materials found in magazines.

In communist Romania the education system "was designed— institutionally, through the content of its educational program and the socio-geographical distribution - to meet the needs of the socialist industry and the human resource policy of the Communist Party"³⁷. The academic women of Timișoara, as a social elite of university professors, managed to contribute to the daily dissemination of the political education imposed by the regime not only through complying with the higher education programs but also through the fact that they themselves were a model through their attitudes and even by appearance, a model which was replicated further by their students, the citizens building the future society. In their capacity as consumers of clothing produced in the communist era, they were the promoters of an entire ideology and the exponents of a new way of dressing. I encountered mainly behaviours in nearly all of the academics I interviewed; the majority of them wore short hair, pants and declared that: "I was always manlier than others", "I was athletic".

Due to the fact that the new modes of production allowed efficiency on an industrial scale (the textile industry was developed in all countries of Eastern Europe, including Romania) the new female image built by the ideological discourse could be imposed even in elitist circles, such as universities, based on a functional and practical dress, close to a uniform. The women from Timișoara universities were influenced by this trend and have adopted a modest, sometimes masculine style, defined either by sober, comfortable dresses or unisex clothing. Their everyday dress was a very simple and comfortable one, not at all pretentious, made from a material that is mostly synthetic, rarely of cotton. Also, short hair was preferred either due to practical reasons "it

³⁷ Adrian Miroiu (coord.), *Învățământul Românesc Azi. Studiu de Diagnostică*, Polirom, Iași, 1998, p. 17.

was easier to take care of" or to subjective reasons "long hair was associated with promiscuous type of women, and we as university professors had a serious status and image"³⁸. The dresses as simple types of gowns, beside the fact that they were very practical and comfortable, had the great advantage that they did not require special care, were easy to maintain, and were preferred by women, even by those with careers in the universities of Timișoara. Wearing them was a common feature of women from all over Eastern Europe, far too involved in their daily activities, who no longer had time and energy to pay attention to their exterior appearance: "Overtired women, who were too exhausted to care about their looks"³⁹.

The academic women interviewed did not suffer from the shortage specific to the end of the communist period, although they admit that in order to get hold of certain goods they used their status as privileged elite of the academic environment but could not go avoid the experience of the "queues". They were concerned about the way they looked, and because the demand on the market was pretty low, they have testified almost unanimously that in order to obtain quality materials they used to make great efforts. The materials considered more expensive but also rarer could be purchased either from abroad, sent by relatives or acquaintances, or on the rare occasion of traveling to other countries (trips, research fellowships, sport competitions), or by smuggling materials produced in Romanian factories that sent fabrics to export and therefore had higher quality. From these materials, the women used to make clothing by themselves or by going to a tailor, a task that needed to be hidden from the security police because it could be considered a bourgeois activity. Since everyone was supposed to wear clothes that came only out the gates of textile factories, wearing personalized or individualized clothes was not seen well as they were against the egalitarian discourse. But, aside from the functionality requested by the regime, university professors claim to have been concerned with the way they looked and struggled to get high-quality clothes or materials, and they confessed that their and everybody's clothing was influenced by their job purposes, by the collective social practices, but especially by the official discourse that emphasized modesty and functionality. However, the majority flaunted in front of me full wardrobes of high-quality clothes, including fur coats. To the question "What did you used to wear before '89?" the university professors interviewed replied to me:

³⁸ Cf. interview with a former UPT employee.

³⁹ Djurdja Bartlett, *Fashion East: the spectre that haunted socialism*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2010, p. 210.

"There was not so much fashion back then. We were dressed quite simply. Anyway I was pretty manly, there was a male, unisex fashion, when I went on the site I had my site uniform and protective helmet"⁴⁰;

"Quite simply, they were not very concerned about fashion. Simple deux-pieces or simple dresses, sometimes colourful but there were not so many at that time to choose from"⁴¹;

"I want to tell you about the evolution of fashion which has been strongly influenced by the economic and political developments. Before the war, a woman could not leave the house without a hat, my mother (look at this picture) had many very beautiful hats. After the war, the fashion hats disappeared. Although in Timișoara there was a very good hat factory, with tradition, it perished after the 1990's. Only two hat factories existed in Romania and one of them was in Timișoara. After the war, we did not really have what to wear. The 1950's were very hard for three reasons. One: the crisis caused by the obligation to pay our war debts towards the USSR; Two: the change of regime, which confused many; Three: the awful drought from '46 - '47 which caused difficulties even after a few years. "In 1953, probably, cards were introduced for clothing and shoes. Not everyone received such cards but only some categories. In the first category were the peasants and workers, who out of conviction or from resignation yielded the regime, in the second category were the officials. These first two categories received cards for clothing and shoes. A type of overcoat was received on the card, it was the only one could be found on the market, and white crepe sole shoes. Next came the categories of small bourgeoisie, the Kulaks, and others who did not receive the card. We belonged to the third category because they did not have much land, not much, but anyway we got cards with points so we didn't have to buy clothes from shops. And then we wore the clothes our parents cleaned and modified at the tailor's"⁴².

"During 1965-1971, the period of relaxation before the madness started, the fashion became more feminine, at the Opera we wore long dresses and the skirts had underskirts. After the 1960's the textile industry was good. Even natural silk and velvet could be found, shirts and blouses were imported from China, embroidered really

⁴⁰ Cf. interview with a former UPT employee.

⁴¹ Cf. interview with a former UVT employee. .

⁴² Cf. interview with a former UPT employee.

beautifully. The leather and fur industry was good, you could find furs. You could find sheepskin coats, they had fur on the inside and leather on the outside, and there were also the so-called mouton doré fur coats. However, after the 1980's all clothes went to export, you could no longer find them not even in the factories outlets. In Timișoara we had ILSA, that made woollen clothes, but there was also Garofița, that made cotton. We also wore trench coats that were a combination of synthetic with cotton but had the advantage that they were waterproof and unisex, both women and men wore them. External pressures for paying the debts made Ceaușescu to pay them and then everything went to export, you could no longer find anything, it was really hard. After the oil crisis, when it was more difficult in the country, in the Western part it was easier because we used to buy from Yugoslavia, as it had very beautiful clothes. And not only clothes but all kinds of products that could not be found here⁴³."

The alchemy of a mechanistic epoch made it possible for "all natural or organic materials to find a functional equivalent in plastic and polymorphic substances: wool, cotton, silk or linen, found a universal replacement in nylon or in its countless variants"⁴⁴. These have been confirmed by the two ladies, chief secretaries from faculties and even by a few ladies who were on the teaching staff. That is why when I addressed the question "From what materials were then the clothes made?" their answers were quite different:

"Generally they were made of synthetic materials or cotton, these were the most practical materials"⁴⁵;

"The wool, fur, silk, cotton, silk fabrics were in small quantity, most fabrics were synthetic, I believe that the trend of stretch materials was everywhere, not only here. I also had stretch dresses, I wore one of them when I had the visit of Ceaușescu's spouse at the official opening of the academic year, while I was rector. "⁴⁶

"Synthetic. Very stretchy, but the dresses were pretty though you sweat in them. And there was cotton, but not too much and it was a not a fine one, it was coarser, as for

⁴³ Cf. interview with a former UMFT employee.

⁴⁴ Jean Boudrillard, *Sistemul obiectelor*, Editura Echinoc, Cluj, 1996, p. 27.

⁴⁵ Cf. interview with a former UMFT employee.

⁴⁶ Cf. interview with a former UPT employee.

*work clothes. But most of all, the synthetics and knitwear could be found and people wore them.*⁴⁷

The paradox of a society that aspires to eradicate the differences between social classes is that the integration of individuals in social groups (families, institutions, etc.) was doing the exact opposite and was ensuring a symbolic domination of some over the other. This symbolic domination was visible even through clothing because academic women were deviating from the socialist standards of modesty and practicality by wearing high quality items. In an era of mass-produced garments, their unique clothes (made by personal dressmakers or received from abroad) ensured a collective symbolism of privileged elite. Unconsciously they committed acts of symbolic violence, by proudly showcasing their wardrobe: "dresses and silk shirts made in China", "7 or 8 fur coats", "prototype Guban shoes"⁴⁸. The care for their look and appearance (clothes, shoes, jewellery or haircuts) indicates a sense of self-esteem, a statement of symbolic power and of belonging to a privileged class.

Conclusions

Clothing, as a symbolic item, involves an object-user relationship that speaks about both the individual identity and the system that produces it. According to the communist logic clothing items were not meant to only be produced and purchased, thereby ensuring the promised economic well-being, but also to be used as a means of propaganda, in order to reaffirm the ideological discourse. Garment is an object of everyday reality so the academics' attires from the communist-era are products of the New Man project. The discursive construction of the New Man, even though it was only an abstract generic pattern, interfered with and changed individual peculiarities in Timisoara's academic women fashion style. Their clothes tell the paradoxical story of how a dictatorial regime can include both austerity and luxury. On one hand they are the mark of a privileged elite's identity (having access to goods inaccessible to ordinary citizens) and on the other hand they are the mark of a political regime that planned any public or private matter, even how and what clothes women should wear.

⁴⁷ Cf. interview with a former UVT employee.

⁴⁸ Gathered from multiple interviews.

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