FASHION JOURNALISM IN THE ERA OF TOTALITARISM, ACCORDING TO FASHION ARTICLES OF THE MAGAZINE "KOMUNARKA UKRAINY" (1920-1934)

Abstract. The article examines an array of materials about fashion and clothing manufacturing that were published in the columns of the magazine "Komunarka Ukrainy" ["Communard woman of Ukraine"] during 1920-1934. The content of the specified materials is critically analyzed, taking into account its ideological color, and the publications are classified into groups according to the specifics of the coverage. Topics of fashion and clothing production. It was found out what views on fashion the magazine promoted and who were the fashion experts who published articles about clothes and trends. The concept of the editorial staff of the magazine regarding the coverage of the phenomenon of fashion in its socialist and capitalist discourses is analyzed.

Keywords: Soviet Ukraine, fashion, cut and tailoring, Ukrainization of the 1920s–1930s, fashion journalism of the totalitarian era, fashion of the totalitarian era, the magazine "Komunarka Ukrainy" ["Communard woman of Ukraine"]

Problem Statement. The socio-cultural layer of fashion journalism in Ukraine, annexed by the Bolsheviks, was laid during the era of the policy of indigenization. Creating a Ukrainocentric media product at that time was extremely difficult, so now we have for research communized women's magazines, in which, if you look closely, you can read both traces of gravitation towards the European civilized world and the desire to preserve the continuity of generations through national symbols and historical monuments. Interwar Ukraine allowed women to touch the world of fashion only through the iron bars of red ideology. Fashion was
not conceived as an aesthetic phenomenon; instead, all its functions were reduced to one - to provide the proletariat with hygienic clothing for work in collective farms, factories, and plants. The connection with the world of fashion was ensured by two party women's magazines – "Selianka Ukrainy" / "Kolhospnytsia Ukrainy" ["Peasant woman of Ukraine" / "Collective farmer of Ukraine"] and "Komunarka Ukrainy" ["Communard woman of Ukraine"]. While the first magazine informed peasant women about the basic aspects of clothing culture at a very primitive level, "Komunarka Ukrainy" was considered an elite magazine for workers and the wives of factory and plant workers. The elitism was manifested in the quantity and quality of the informational product on the topic of fashion.

**Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.** The magazine "Komunarka Ukrainy" has been studied within the feminist discourse by Ukrainian scholars O. Poda ("From 'Komunarka Ukrainy' to 'Kolhospnytsia Ukrainy'; "The Theme of Women's Health in the Magazine 'Komunarka Ukrainy' in the First Half of the 1920s"; "The Role of the Gender Factor in Shaping the Editorial Policies of Soviet Ukrainian Magazines in the 1920s") [42; 43; 44], and O. Labur ("Mass Women's Publications 'Komunarka Ukrainy' and 'Selianka Ukrainy': A Source Study Aspect") [21]. The aspect of fashion in the magazine "Komunarka" has been explored by us for the first time, introducing new factual material regarding the reflection of fashion trends on the pages of the magazine, considering its communist orientation, into the scientific discourse.

**Purpose of the Article.** The purpose of this article is to examine the quality and volume of fashion-related materials, particularly clothing, published in the magazine "Komunarka Ukrainy" during the period of 1920-1934.

**Presentation of the Main Material.** "Komunarka Ukrainy" was a magazine for female workers and the wives of workers. It was the printed organ of the Central Department of Women Workers and Peasant Women of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine. Founded in Kharkiv in November 1920, it was published until May 1934 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine publishing house "Komunist".

The first issue of the magazine was dedicated to the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Women Workers and Peasant Women. The appearance and content of this issue fully reflected the socio-economic situation of that time. Without a cover, without any illustrations, printed on thick "sugar" paper, it testified to the poverty the country was experiencing. "Komunarka Ukrainy" became a guide for working women in their political and social work, production, and family life [50, p. 17].

The magazine explained women's rights and the Soviet laws that protected them as equal citizens of Soviet Ukraine, as workers, and as mothers. It encouraged women to eradicate illiteracy, raised their cultural and political levels, taught peasant women how to manage their households better, and organized female workers to fight for skill improvement and increased labor productivity. "Komunarka Ukrainy"
served as a helper and advisor to working women and peasant women in organizing their new lives and raising children, and it fought against any manifestations of conservative, insensitive attitudes towards working women and peasant women [17, p.1].

Interestingly, the editorial policy of "Komunarka" was ideologically ambiguous. On the one hand, the magazine published articles by Khrystia Alchevska, reports about foreign countries, clothing model sketches following European fashion trends, and popularized the political views of Mykola Skrypnyk. On the other hand, all this was heavily interspersed with Bolshevik-centric informational materials that distorted the "female face" of the magazine.

In its first two years of existence (from 1920 to 1921), the magazine was edited by Varvara Moirava, was entirely in Russian, had a communist orientation, and was aimed at organizing female workers and the wives of workers. From 1922 to 1927, the magazine was edited by Klavdia Filatova and Olga Pilatska. The magazine became bilingual, with Ukrainian and Russian articles published in the same issue, though the percentage of the latter was significantly higher.

Then, from April 17 to 25, 1923, the XII Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) was held in Moscow, proclaiming a policy of "indigenization" — the involvement of native populations of Soviet republics and autonomies in local governance and granting their national languages dominant status to strengthen Bolshevik influence. Thus began the process of Ukrainization. At the same time, on April 30, 1925, the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR issued a decree "On Measures for the Urgent Implementation of the Ukrainization of the Soviet Apparatus," and on July 6, 1927, a decree was issued "On Ensuring Language Equality and Promoting the Development of Ukrainian Culture."

Thus, in 1928, "Komunarka Ukrainy" also embarked on a course of radical Ukrainization. In June 1928, issue 11 of the magazine was published entirely in Ukrainian. The magazine transformed into a Ukrainocentric publication with a distinct socialist tint, featuring materials on fashion, Ukrainian culture, book publishing, domestic life, health, and more.

In the article "Ten Years of 'Komunarka'' from June 1928, the editorial team explained the transition of the magazine to the Ukrainian language as a tool to "help working women master this language, and through it, the Ukrainian book and newspaper, to help them assimilate Ukrainian culture" [17, p.2].

The issues of increasing political activity and cultural levels of female workers and the wives of workers created the need to publish the magazine more frequently than twice a month. From January 1929, the magazine began to be published weekly [17, p.2].

We have documented a total of 52 publications in "Komunarka Ukrainy" from 1920 to 1934, including essays, advertisements, and propaganda articles.

It is important to emphasize that the concept of fashion in its socio-cultural sense was eliminated in the early years following the proclamation of Soviet
Ukraine, and was replaced by the term "proletarian clothing without excess," which embodied Soviet constructivism and the image of the "builder of communism." After World War I, the Ukrainian SSR entered the so-called "period of reconstruction" of light industry, during which the Soviet authorities expropriated and destroyed private sewing cooperatives and ateliers to increase the sale of state-manufactured clothing and footwear in rural areas.

At the same time, before World War I, it was customary in villages to make clothes independently. In cities, each tailor used their own methods for cutting and sewing clothes, based on personal practical experience. This knowledge was passed down to apprentices, meaning there was a generational continuity among craftsmen. There was no need to document this experience in manuals. However, after the establishment of the proletariat dictatorship, this generational continuity of craftsmen was eliminated. In 1921, it was replaced by a new economic policy, technical reconstruction of the light industry, and mass production with labor division.

The transition from individual clothing production to mass production caused a colossal shortage of professional tailors and seamstresses, as those who created fashion before the Bolsheviks were effectively repressed, branded as "bourgeois-nationalist hostile elements." There arose an acute need for both popular science publications on independent cutting and sewing of clothes, and practical manuals for industry workers. Women's magazines such as "Komunarka Ukrainy," "Selianka Ukrainy," and "Kolhospnytsia Ukrainy" played an important role in this transition to mass production. They published patterns for practical women's and children's clothing. With these patterns, women could sew their own clothes, making them completely independent from the ready-made clothing market, which always suffered from a total shortage of necessary goods.

So, what was the specificity of fashion representation in the magazine? First and foremost, the concept of fashion was industrialized, and its appearance in the magazine dates back to 1927, when the new economic policy was actively functioning. As a result, the industrial process of fabric and knitwear production was widely covered. The editorial team not only introduced readers to the latest developments in domestic light and textile industry but also provided reports on the functioning of this sector abroad, for instance, in France and Japan [1; 26; 31; 38; 40; 41; 54; 56; 57]. In 1933-1934, the magazine initiated sections "Master the Technique" and "Help in Preparing for the Socialist-Technical Exam," which detailed the entire process of industrial clothing production from fabric spinning to designing and cutting sewing patterns [3-9; 13; 15].

Another aspect related to the functioning of fashion was the coverage of clothing care and proper dressing for infants and preschoolers, with answers published in sections such as "Household Tips," "Domestic Economy," "Household Advice," "Help for Mothers," "Advice for Mothers" [10-12; 16; 18; 19; 45-47; 53].
In 1928, a free supplement to the magazine "Komunarka Ukrainy" called "Help for the Housewife" was introduced, which was published until 1930 as a separate four-page sheet with its own sequential numbering. The supplement included culinary recipes, handcraft patterns, as well as clothing patterns for women and children, while explanations for the patterns were printed on the back cover of the magazine [2; 29; 32]. In the same place (on the back cover) in 1928-1929, sketches of women's and children's clothing models based on contemporary European fashion were published, along with embroidery patterns for decorating finished garments [14; 20; 22-25; 30; 33-37; 39; 48; 49; 52].

Before the publication in Kharkiv in 1929 of the first Ukrainian-language manual by O. Yakovenko, "How to Cut and Sew Peasant Clothing. How to Cut and Sew Clothes: A Guide to the Simplest Way to Learn Cutting by the New System," advertisements for a Moscow clothing manual were printed on the back covers of "Komunarka Ukrainy" in early 1928 [51]. However, as the policy of Ukrainization gained momentum, such advertisements ceased to be printed.

Overall, subscribers were satisfied with the quality of the materials on clothing making and fashion. At a Kyiv conference in 1929 dedicated to the magazine "Komunarka Ukrainy," positive feedback was given regarding the high quality of fashion content, which allowed subscribers to save money by not attending cutting and sewing courses, and instead learning independently based on the materials in "Komunarka Ukrainy": "The patterns and designs of clothing presented in 'Komunarka' and its supplements are useful. Comrade Goltzman mentioned that they used to charge fees for the members of the sewing circle at their factory. So, women managed without the circle because everything they needed was in the magazine" [28, p.11].

Regarding fashion content, the perception of the fashion phenomenon on the pages of the magazine was reflected through the cognitive filters of the Communist Party, and therefore had a somewhat specific character for the modern reader. For example, in the article "Cultural Revolution and Everyday Life" from 1928, L. Turkeltaub clearly defines the direction of the development of contemporary Ukrainian fashion in the context of resisting the objectification of the female body and promoting gender equality and comfortable "unisex" clothing: "Our fashion is beautiful simplicity, lightness, flexibility. For socialist construction, strength and health are needed. This means that our fashion is hygiene. For socialist construction, friendly relations between men and women are needed. Our fashion is against everything that degrades a woman to a means of enjoyment, that turns her into merchandise sold at public auction" [55, p. 6].

The author of the publication also reflects on the class essence of fashion, emphasizing that women's fashion develops more intensively than men's precisely because in bourgeois societies, women were put in direct economic dependence on men. That is, the material insecurity and lack of rights of women led them to seek
protectors and providers by using fashionable clothes to emphasize their attractiveness [55, p. 6].

As experts on children's fashion in the magazine "Komunarka Ukrainy," doctors often contributed. In the publication "How to Dress a Child" within the section "Help for Mothers," pediatrician K. Weinstein concludes that clothing, as a main component of fashion, must regulate the body's heat exchange, protect the body from sharp temperature fluctuations, and not interfere with the skin's respiratory activity. Dr. K. Weinstein formulates the ideal clothing for a child as follows: "(1) appropriate material quality; (2) proper cut; (3) color" [11, p. 16].

The author further specifies that clothing for preschool children should: (1) stay on the shoulders; (2) have a loose and simple cut; (3) be designed so that the child can easily dress and undress by themselves; (4) be lightweight to not burden the child's muscles; (5) be the appropriate size for the child's body [11, p. 16].

In the article "Sewing Industry: Designing and Cutting Clothes" from December 1932, engineer Volobuyev reflects on the phenomenon of fashion, associating it with the material culture of humanity, closely tied to the class development of society and its culture. The author emphasizes that with the development of industry and the emergence of the bourgeois order, clothing changed towards simplicity and convenience. The sharp distinction and regulation of clothing among classes and social strata disappeared. However, the author remains critical of the fashion industry in capitalist countries, accusing their fashion legislators and manufacturers of promoting bizarre clothing styles for profit, and the frequent change of trends prevents mass production of clothing in Western countries [8, p. 16].

Engineer Volobuyev characterizes the fashion industry in Soviet Ukraine, emphasizing that the clothing of workers building socialism should be practical, comfortable, and aesthetic, reflecting the style of the era. From the publication, we learn that in the 1930s in Soviet Ukraine, significant importance was given to the design, modeling, and artistic presentation of clothing in the sewing industry, with a scientific basis applied to this responsible area. Special research institutes and laboratories dealt with organizing the wide production of the best forms of clothing for workers. Thus, the process of mass clothing production was as follows: "Research institutes periodically conduct partial measurements of the population to gather data on height, volume, etc. After such surveys, specialist designers develop size tables and create precise patterns, i.e., individual templates for parts of different garments. Samples of clothing are made based on these patterns, taking into account the need for maximum convenience and aesthetics for mass and individual production. These samples are discussed by special councils of the sewing industry, involving many scientists, anthropologists, and top sewing industry specialists" [8, p. 16].

However, the author does not mention that mass-produced clothing and textile materials were scarce, low-quality, and unaesthetic. Attempts to reduce fashion to mass production led to a loss of individuality. Excessive practicality and uniformity
made the clothing a faceless uniform. However, for women who did not want to buy ready-made factory clothing, there was an alternative—patterns of fashionable clothing based on European trends in the "Komunarka Ukrainy" magazine, which they could use to sew fashionable outfits themselves.

**Conclusions.** Thus, it can be concluded that the Ukrainization project of the "Komunarka Ukrainy" magazine positively influenced the emergence of a wide thematic and genre range of materials on fashion and clothing production. We state that the editorial team of "Komunarka Ukrainy" in 1928-1929 tried to bring the magazine as close as possible to European standards, as far as it was possible and safe for the editorial board members under a totalitarian regime. The curtailment of the Ukrainization policy "closed the window" to the world of foreign fashion and "opened the door" to total industrialization, thereby erasing the gender features of the "Komunarka Ukrainy" magazine. However, that glimpse of Ukrainized 1920s will forever remain in the history of Ukrainian fashion journalism as undeniable evidence of the existence of a high culture of beauty and clothing aesthetics in the European discourse in Ukraine.

"Komunarka Ukrainy" propagated a socialist view of fashion: practicality and hygiene. Experts on fashion in the magazine were doctors and industrial engineers, but not fashion designers. At the same time, in 1928-1929, the magazine actively published sketches of women’s and children’s clothing based on European fashion samples, and also included a supplement with fashionable clothing patterns. Thus, during the Ukrainization policy, "Komunarka Ukrainy" tried to balance between the socialist and capitalist discourses of fashion, favoring the latter.

**The prospects for further research** in this direction involve a thorough study of fashion content in the chronology of fashion magazines' emergence in Soviet Ukraine.

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