

“DISCO LADIES” – PRODUCTION OF SEXY FEMININITIES WITHIN THE YU-DISCO CULTURE: THE EXAMPLE OF LOKICE

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Abstract: *This paper deals with the popular Yugoslav dance and singing group Lokice, which was active towards the end of seventies – right at the time when the local music business was adopting elements of disco. My goal is to understand how the kindred tropes of sexiness, sexuality and eroticism were employed in the production of femininities, and what these processes can tell us about the music industry in Yugoslavia, as well as its relationships with the female body. I thus wish to shed light on a specific case in which female sexuality was produced and offered for consumption, bearing in mind the specificities of Yugoslav market socialism. As a dance group, Lokice were, from the very beginning of their activities, associated with corporeality and sexiness, and their popularity grew in parallel with the expanding sexualization of Yugoslav culture. Therefore, I argue that, along with the adaptation of a commodified version of the American disco, Yugoslav popular culture also adopted the commodification of a specific form of styling and representation of female sexuality. The article offers an analysis of various television appearances, a few of the available interviews and newspaper articles, as well as songs from their album Ja sam dinamit ('I am dynamite').*

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My goal in this paper will be to understand how femininities were produced within the Yugoslav disco culture and the music market, mainly through the styling of women's bodies in accordance with ideas of sexiness or eroticism. I want to show how those ideas are tightly bound to the inner workings of the music market, and the profit-making possibilities. I will focus my attention on the popular dance group

Lokice (named after their founder, Leposava Lokica Stefanović¹), active in Yugoslavia from 1977 up to the early eighties, a group that, as one contemporary internet portal has noted, “had Yugoslavia at their feet”². In my analysis, a few converging ideas will be of importance: Disco was imported into Yugoslavia through the media and entertainment industry, that is, as a commercial product largely void of its original subversive aspects,³ disco’s flamboyant, colourful visual features were readily adopted by the Yugoslav music and show business (known as estrada), and especially by the so called šou program (‘show programs’) aired on television; with that in mind, I will examine many aspects of Lokice’s (sexy) femininities taking into account that they were offered for consumption via the market and the entertainment industry; the emphasis on the visual within the disco culture converged with the same kind of emphasis that shapes the production of femininities within the media spaces; in such a context, representation and production of female sexuality flourished, contributing to the ever-increasing sexualization of (Yugoslav) culture. I thus argue that understanding how sexy femininities were produced in the case of Lokice – through their various public appearances as well as songs – can contribute to shedding light upon the local disco culture and the complexities and contradictions of the late socialist Yugoslav society, as well as help map one step in the history of representations and branding of femininities within the musical market and the entertainment industry.

As Marko Zubak noted, “Yugoslav disco can be seen as a reflection of major late socialist transformations: a ‘musical box’ of sorts, which conveyed the era’s aspirations and neuroses, decadence and contradictions”⁴, and to this I would add that it can tell us much about femininities and sexualities, as represented and ultimately lived in Yugoslavia. I will analyse selected appearances of Lokice in TV shows, as well as with Zdravko Čolić, a few available newspaper articles and album reviews, together with some songs and lyrics from their 1980 album titled *Ja sam dinamit* (‘I am dynamite’) (PGP RTB – 2320061).⁵ Before doing so, however, it would be constructive to outline my position, as well as my relationship towards the writings

1 See also the interview with her in this volume.

2 Jelena Manojlović: “Igrale su sa Čolom, Tito ih je obožavao, a Jugoslaviju su bacile pod noge: Čuvene Lokice život je ipak kaznio”, <https://nova.rs/zabava/showbiz/igradle-su-sa-colom-tito-ih-je-obo-zavao-a-jugoslaviju-su-bacile-pod-noge-cuvene-lokice-zivot-je-ipak-kaznio/> (accessed on February 12, 2024). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author of the article.

3 Marko Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’: Yugoslav Disco Under Late Socialism”, in: *Made in Yugoslavia. Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen. New York and London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 89–98, here p. 90.

4 Marko Zubak: “Yugoslav Disco: The Forgotten Sound of Late Socialism”, in: *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, ed. Flora Pitrolo and Marko Zubak. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. 195–221, here p. 197.

5 <https://www.discogs.com/master/1274132-Lokica-Lokice-Ja-Sam-Dinamit> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

that typically deal with issues of female gender and sexuality within popular music and ultimately, their relationship with feminism.

Namely, my thinking on the topic at hand is clearly and deeply shaped by the writings about, broadly speaking, gender and popular music that originate from the Anglo-American context. Not wishing to enter the debate regarding its hegemonic status within the academia in general, I do feel it's important to express my awareness of the fact that I am using concepts and ideas closely related to liberal capitalist contexts in order to understand phenomena and artefacts from a socialist country. In other words, my theoretical position is largely influenced by my wish to be mindful of the very complex and multi-layered relationship between the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav space and the so-called West, considering the undeniable influences and permeations, without oversimplifying my analysis and focusing 'simply' on transpositions of tokens of Western cultures into the local one. Although I will have to make comparisons between popular music and certain ideologies in the United States and Yugoslavia – given disco's rather straightforward introduction into the country's culture – I nonetheless wish to avoid seeing the first as a kind of 'original' and the latter as a 'copy'.⁶ My research is also driven by the fact that the Yugoslav music industry is an especially provocative field for understanding the place capitalist and consumerist logic had within the very specific context of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia,⁷ as well as by the belief that understanding how various concepts present in the music business of the US or the UK were renegotiated into a different cultural and political context can reveal some of their otherwise potentially hidden aspects. Investigating how Lokice's sexy femininities were produced and offered for consumption to the audiences in former Yugoslavia can tell us a lot about the fact that the apparently liberated expressions of female sexuality within the music industry of the time in fact serve to commodify a *certain* type of that sexuality, and that they are mainly used as tools for turning a profit within the music business.

In that sense, this article will lean on writings about female sexuality and disco, as well as popular music and gender, that, in a way, take for granted their close relationship to the second-wave feminist movement in the US. However, it will deal with a group of women who were active in a context that envisioned the fight for women's rights quite differently than in the United States,⁸ through a proclaimed gender equality, official state policies targeted towards women and

6 See also Magdalena Fürnkranz' and Juri Giannini's article in this volume.

7 This topic is addressed in greater detail in: Dijana Jelača, Maša Kolanović, and Danijela Lugarić (eds.): *The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia: (Post)Socialism and Its Other*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

8 See Adriana Zaharijević: "The Strange Case of Yugoslav Feminism: Feminism and Socialism in 'the East'", in: *The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia. (Post)Socialism and its Others*, ed. Dijana Jelača, Maša Kolanović, and Danijela Lugarić. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 263–286.

so on. I will thus avoid labelling my case studies as feminist (or non-feminist), or judging whether their activities were meant to be tokens of liberation of women's sexuality or not. What I would like to focus my attention on is how productions of female sexualities that have undoubtedly been influenced by those of their US disco counterparts were produced within the Yugoslav music market, and were to a large extent void of potential activist connotations. I thus want to offer some concrete examples of how femininities are produced as almost always sexualized (in different ways) within the music market, and offered for consumption to the audiences. Yu-disco has proven to be an excellent case study for this.

(FEMALE) SEXUALITY, FEMININITIES AND (YUGOSLAV) DISCO

Since its beginnings, disco culture had a “sexy reputation”⁹, being associated with various expressions of sexuality and, in no small part because of its tight bond with the dancing culture, with corporeality. In that sense, it was part of and contributed to the increasing sexualization of cultures that followed the development of the entertainment industry, and furthermore it contributed to the commodification of certain styles of expressing one's sexuality. As I already mentioned, Yugoslav popular culture adopted the commercial, mainstream attributes of disco, which is why I would argue that the analysis of the ways in which female sexuality was produced and represented within it must take into account the forces that shaped the music business of the time. In that sense, for the topic I'm covering in this article, writings that deal with the production of femininities within neoliberalism prove to be of importance, even though they are focusing on different socio-political and cultural contexts. For my thinking on the subject of how femininities are produced within various musical cultures (in this case, disco), their zooming in on the relationship between capitalism (or more precisely, the market) and the ways in which femininities are produced, styled, branded and ultimately offered for consumption, is of great importance. I'm referring here to writings that belong to the field of media and/or popular culture studies that employ the concepts of “postfeminism” or “postfeminist sensibility”¹⁰ as critical tools to understand how tokens of femininities, as well as second-wave feminism, have been utilised by the various industries (advertising, entertainment, music, film, TV...), and how they have been caught in the complex web of meanings and ideas produced and used by the capitalist market to, ultimately,

9 Diana L. Mankowski: *Gendering the Disco Inferno: Sexual Revolution, Liberation, and Popular Culture in 1970s America*. PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010, p. 294, https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/77806/dlmankow_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed on February 12, 2024).

10 Rosalind Gill: “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility”, in: *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10/2 (2007), pp. 147–166.

boost consumption of various products. Not wishing to make a comparison between ‘then and now’, I do want to point out that sexualization of femininities has played an important role within the capitalist markets – and although a socialist country, the Yugoslav entertainment and music industry were mainly organized around the demands of the market –, and that the market has, for decades, been shaping the favoured and acceptable ways in which female sexuality has been styled and branded. Much of that sexuality has been styled according to the norms of what Amy Shields Dobson has labelled as “heterosexiness”¹¹, referring to the fact that it is, to a certain extent, liberated within the media cultures – in the sense that it is being shown openly –, yet that it nevertheless caters to the so-called male gaze.

Writing about female sexuality and sexual liberation within the disco culture of the US, Diana L. Mankowski noted that “disco allowed women to be sexual subjects even if they also remained sexual objects in the eyes of men”¹², “allowing different women to interpret individually the role of sexual liberation in their lives by being a genre open to a wide variety of sexual expression”¹³. US disco mediated various social changes that were brought about by the so-called sexual revolution and second-wave feminism that came before it, offering women the possibility to express their physicality, simultaneously inserting it into the processes of production and consumption that shaped the music industry of the time. As Zubak has already noted, the commercial version of disco was readily adopted by the Yugoslav entertainment and music industry that was “heavily influenced by market forces and pro-Western tastes”¹⁴. In that sense, the local culture adopted its sexy reputation as well, and its “transparent sexualization”, offering the consumers a “proposition of uninhibited sex”¹⁵. Within such a framework, women’s sexuality and sexiness were, foreseeably, caught in the “empowered or objectified dilemma”¹⁶. This proposed duality is, I would argue, a well-established strategy through which women’s bodies are operationalized by the market. That is not to say that the showing and styling of female sexuality in popular culture can’t be liberating in cases where it’s originally considered ‘immoral’ – on the contrary. What I argue is that the music industry is counting on women’s sexuality and corporeality, and that these dichotomies are in fact part of the processes through which they are being produced within those contexts.

11 Amy Shields Dobson: “Hetero-sexy Representation by Young Women on MySpace: The Politics of Performing an ‘Objectified’ Self”, in: *Outskirts* 25 (2011), <https://www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-25/amy-shields-dobson> (accessed on October 15, 2024).

12 Mankowski: *Gendering the Disco Inferno*, p. 351.

13 Ibidem, p. 350.

14 Zubak: “Yugoslav Disco”, p. 199.

15 Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’”, p. 94.

16 Kai Arne Hansen: “Empowered or Objectified? Personal Narrative and Audiovisual Aesthetics in Beyoncé’s *Partition*”, in: *Popular Music and Society* 40/2 (2015), pp. 1–17.

With this in mind, the case of Lokice can be illuminating because it reveals how the above-mentioned processes functioned within Yugoslav market socialism, to which they were quite successfully adapted. Additionally, I would argue that the reverse is true as well: the way female sexuality within disco cultures was produced and renegotiated into the Yugoslav context can reveal a lot about the relationship between female sexuality and the market, precisely because of the fact that its expression in Yu-disco was, in a way, stripped of the relationships with second-wave feminism and women's liberation movements that were nurtured in the US.

LOKICE AND DISCO IN YUGOSLAVIA

Lokice were founded on 24 January 1977¹⁷ by the Belgrade dancer and architect Leposava Stefanović, better known as Lokica, who was the leader of the dance troupe and its most prominent member. Before Lokice, she had led a modern/jazz ballet group called Džez-bal ('Jazz ball'). According to her, film directors Dragoslav Lazić and Maksut Maksa Čatović (who both also produced different magazine shows for television) asked her on a few different occasions to create choreographies and dance acts for their shows, which is why she eventually formed Lokice in 1977. Although active until the mid-eighties, Lokice were at the height of their popularity at the very turn of the decade, roughly around the time when the disco culture in Yugoslavia was at its peak. They were famous for their collaboration with the singer Zdravko Čolić that began during the *Zagreb 77* festival of *zabavna*¹⁸ music and culminated on his national tour *Putujući zemljotres* ('Traveling earthquake') in 1978. Lokice also danced frequently in different TV shows envisioned to be 'light' and 'entertaining', such as *Sedam plus Sedam* ('Seven plus Seven'), hosted by the comedy/singing group *Sedmorica mladih* ('Seven young men'). In 1980, they released an album, preceded by a few singles.¹⁹ Owing much of their popularity to appearances on TV, Lokice

17 RTS Tako stoje stvari – Zvanični kanal: "Tako stoje stvari - Intervju - Lokica Stefanović - 07.02.2017", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Agt7HY-taxc> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

18 The term is used for a specific kind of "light" or "entertainment" music produced in Yugoslavia that "emerged in 1950s [...] designating a homegrown form of Western-style popular music". It was stylistically very diverse and influenced by "genres derived from German, Italian, French, Russian, and American models included šlager (Schlager), kancona (canzone), šansona (chanson), romansa (romance), and evergrin (evergreen)". See Jelena Arnautović: "Networking *Zabavna Muzika*: Singers, Festivals, and *Estrada*", in: *Made in Yugoslavia. Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen. New York and London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 15–24, here p. 15.

19 See discography under: <https://www.discogs.com/artist/894766-Lokice> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

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“became a recognizable TV face of the Yugoslav dance craze”²⁰, influencing the growing trend of including flamboyant and extravagant dance acts in live TV show programming, festival performances and so on. As one inspired fan commented on a YouTube video of their performance titled “Baletski čas” (“Ballet lesson”): “These beautiful ladies, especially the legendary Lokica, made our childhood prettier, as well as our socializing in front of the TV, simultaneously bringing the spirit of the wide world and the elegance into that beautiful land of workers and peasants in the hilly Balkans”²¹. Lokica Stefanović also worked as a choreographer, notably creating the choreography for the closing ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games held in Sarajevo in 1984. After Lokice disbanded, Lokica Stefanović gave dance as well as fitness lessons, joining the trend of making fitness tapes with different workouts people could do at home. As she likes to point out, she did it even before Jane Fonda released her famous exercise tapes.²² Jelena Tinska, another member of Lokice, pursued the similar career path, designing her own dance and fitness protocols.²³



Example 1: Lokice, promotional picture²⁴



Example 2: Lokice, promotional picture²⁵

20 Marko Zubak: “Socialist Night Fever: Yugoslav Disco on Film and Television”, in: *Popular Music and the Moving Image in Eastern Europe*, ed. Ewa Mazierska and Zsolt Györi. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019, pp. 139–154, here p. 148.

21 Lokice: “Baletski čas”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zGYvrQSypM> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

22 The statement was given by Lokica Stefanović in the already-quoted interview from 2017 (RTS: “Tako stoje stvari”). Two videos from her series *Lepo telo za 30 dana* (“Beautiful body in 30 days”) are available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWx1vwBIAE0>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuXI0tHl-F8> (both accessed on February 12, 2024).

23 <https://tinska.com/vezbe/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

24 Source: <https://tinska.com/lokice/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

25 Source: <https://tinska.com/lokice/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

LOKICE AND SEXUALITY/CORPOREALITY

As a dance group, Lokice's role was, of course, to enhance the visual aspects of various televised or live events and musical performances. Especially during the beginning of their career, they were confronted with the judgement that they were nothing more than "moving décor" – which is a label that, according to Lokica Stefanović,²⁶ mostly came from professional dancers, music experts or (wannabe) intellectuals. In an interview for the magazine *Nada* from 1981, she explained that, at the beginning of their career, Lokice were "indeed 'moving décor.' Today, however, [... they] have solo numbers during concerts. [... They] also recorded an LP because, why should 'Lokice' only scuttle behind a singer, when they can sing well themselves."²⁷ Further commenting on malicious remarks regarding the perceived simplicity of their choreographies, Lokica Stefanović explained: "I do this for the audience, and, as it was proved many times before, the audience loves it."²⁸ What seemed to attract the viewers to Lokice's performances was not necessarily the complexity of their choreographies, but their visual presentation, reliant on a kind of elegant eroticism that, from contemporary points of view, seems rather lowkey and discrete.

The signature distinction of the group was uniformity in the way they looked. In fact, Lokica Stefanović explained that she had very strict rules when it came to her dancers. They had to move as one, and follow her choreography to the letter. In addition, no member of the dance group was allowed to be photographed on her own, with the exception of Lokica Stefanović, who was, in her own words, "a 'constant measure' in the group, while the rest of the girls come and go"²⁹. All dancers had short hair (most of them blonde), they wore the same outfits during performances, and mostly danced in colourful leotards, hot pants and high heels (often boots), showing off their long and slender legs. In fact, I would argue that the legs were the most prominent body part flaunted by the group – for example, most photographs are taken from a slightly lower angle, elongating their lower extremities, and no matter how complex or simple the upper part of their costumes were, their legs were always showing. This, of course, isn't unusual for women whose movements shouldn't be inhibited by long skirts while dancing, yet the way Lokice

26 RTS: "Tako stoje stvari".

27 Ljiljana Matejić: "Lokica Stefanović '81: Da li je Boba Zović izbačena iz Lokica zbog toga što se slikala za Plejboj?", in: *Nada* (August 1981), <http://www.yugopapir.com/2015/01/lokica-stefanovic-otvara-svoj-baletski.html> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

28 Ibidem.

29 Ibidem.

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were visually represented was often reminiscent of cabaret or can-can dancers and so on. However, despite the fact that their dancing revealed their bodies to a great extent, Lokica Stefanović carefully nurtured an image of elegance and sophistication that is associated with classical and even modern ballet. In that sense, the title of their song “Disco Lady” which I will come back to below, describes the public image Lokica Stefanović was constructing in a quite precise way – they were sexy, often flamboyant, yet always remained ladies.

For example, such a strategy is visible in the performance of their song “Duga luda noć” (‘A long crazy night’), whose brief lyrics connect dancing and, I would assume, love making: “Prepusti se sad ti/Ovom ritmu ljubavi. Nek zvuk nosi nas/Sve zaboravi” (‘Allow yourself to give into/This rhythm of love/Let the sound carry us/Forget everything.’) The choreography that was performed with the song in a holiday edition of the *Sedem plus Sedem*³⁰ show is, I would argue, meant to express a similar sentiment. Lokice begin the song dressed in fur coats that they theatrically remove during the song to reveal glittery red, high-slit dresses that show off the dancers’ legs, especially in situations when the choreography calls for them to lift or spread them. Their movements are carefully planned and timed, giving off a feeling of grace and elegance, as would be expected from ballerinas who were trained in classical or modern/jazz ballet. In that sense, their bodies were styled according to norms of heterosexiness and offered to the audiences who, up until that time, weren’t particularly used to seeing female bodies exposed in such a way on primetime TV. In an interview from 2017 (that marked forty years since the founding of Lokice), Lokica Stefanović remembered an appearance with Čolić on his disco song “I’m Not a Robot Man”³¹, intended for the foreign market. In the video, everyone was dressed in silver costumes, with Lokice wearing short silver shorts and high heeled boots. According to Lokica Stefanović, this appearance was “shocking for that time”³², because of how short the pants were, and because such attire was paired with boots.

30 Lokice: “Duga luda noc”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-ayZS8Iorw> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

31 Zdravko Čolić: “I’m Not a Robot Man”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSptgzZzGhc> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

32 RTS: “Tako stoje stvari”.



Example 3: Film Still: Zdravko Čolić: “I’m Not a Robot Man”³³



Example 4: Zdravko Čolić and Lokice³⁴

33 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSptgzZzGhc&t=82s> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

34 Source: <https://www.vesti.rs/Zdravko-%C4%8Coli%C4%87/Jugoslovenke-su-fantazirale-o-Co-li-a-ove-poznate-dame-uspele-su-da-mu-osvoje-srce.html> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

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Example 5: Film Still: Members of Sedmorica mladih as Lokice in the *Sedem plus Sedem* show³⁵

Furthermore, the silver boots and leotards/short pants became something they were recognised for, so much so that one satire appearance by Sedmorica mladih in their show *Sedem plus Sedem* featured the men dressed as Lokice, in pink leotards and silver high-heeled boots, dancing with Čolić to his hit song “Glavo luda” (a literal translation to English would be ‘You, crazy head’). Remembering the performance in the interview from 2017, Lokica Stefanović said that it was an excellent example of the discipline she expected from her dancers, which earned her the nickname “Hitler”.³⁶ She explained that it took her weeks to get the men in line, teach them the choreography and have them do it flawlessly for the performance, and that they whined the entire time, but still did it incredibly well. As a side note, although this

35 Source: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xakvde> (accessed on July 7, 2024).

36 RTS: “Tako stoje stvari”. This is also an information that appears in various online articles on entertainment portals. For example: Jelena Manojlović: “Igrale su sa Čolom: Tito ih je obožavao, a Jugoslaviju su bacile pod noge: Čuvene Lokice život je ipak kaznio”, <https://nova.rs/zabava/showbiz/igrale-su-sa-colom-tito-ih-je-obo-zavao-a-jugoslaviju-su-bacile-pod-noge-cuvene-lokice-zivot-je-ipak-kaznio/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

act was perhaps meant to be funny – men in drag were quite popular in Yugoslav popular culture at the time, frequenting various comedy films, TV programs and so on –, it also goes to show that disco opened the door to various sexual transgressions. Although I wouldn't go as far as to say this particular performance was subversive, it can be understood as part of a wider cultural climate that was marked by sexual liberation, although that liberation was, as most things are, constrained by various social and gender norms.³⁷

SEXY FEMININITIES AND “MORALS”

Despite the fact that Lokica Stefanović insisted on professionalism and primarily showcasing the dancing capabilities of the group, the public often associated them with erotic imagery, sexuality and so on – which is something that some members of the group welcomed. The article from the aforementioned magazine *Nada* begins with a question for Lokica Stefanović regarding Boba Zović, a (former) member of the group who posed in the nude for *Playboy* and whose pictures were later published in *Start*, apparently without her permission. The leader of the group explained that they had a deal and that Zović would leave the group after the photographs were published in order to pursue a career as a dancer in the US. After the breakup of Lokice, other members of the group also took the opportunity to pose for photographs that would be considered ‘provocative’ or ‘sexy’, for example Jelena Tinska, who was often on covers of magazines during the eighties.

In an already mentioned interview, Lokica Stefanović also revealed that she herself would never expose herself to “millions of strange men” in the nude, and that she simply isn't interested in such things, even though she did get some offers.³⁸ “Furthermore”, she said,

our mentality still isn't on a level where people could understand that this is part of someone's job, that someone likes to do it. I'm also in charge of the reputation of the entire group, because now that I want to form my own private ballet studio, I can't allow myself to be in a situation where mothers of the girls who would dance with me say ‘Absolutely not, am I to send my child to the woman who takes naked pictures for the newspaper?’.³⁹

37 One example of such, more serious transgressions is Oliver Mandić's television broadcast *Beograd noću* ('Belgrade at night') from 1981. See Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’”, p. 94; Zubak: “Socialist Night Fever”, p. 194.

38 Matejić: “Lokica Stefanović '81”.

39 Ibidem.

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Example 6: Jelena Tinska on the covers of various magazines⁴⁰

In other words, the activities of Lokice – as a group, but also as individual dancers – were perpetually balanced between the various social norms related to feminine bodily displays that were inevitably related to sexuality and sex, and a wish to prove that such expressions were something of an industry standard (at least in “the world”, as they liked to say, referring mainly to the countries of North America and Western Europe), and therefore didn’t speak to their individual morals. The fact that they had to tread this very fine line is also visible in a statement Lokica Stefanović gave decades later, in regards to a performance they gave for Tito on New Year’s Eve 1979.⁴¹ As she explained, they danced in longer dresses and to old pop hits (like “Jambolaya”, “Istanbul”, or “16 Tons”) because they needed to be “decent” for the President.⁴²

At the height of their career, Lokice released their only LP, containing eight tracks, most of which could be classified as pop music, but with a substantial influence of disco, especially in some numbers, like the already-mentioned “Disco Lady”. Music was composed and produced by Aleksandar Sanja Ilić (Lokica’s personal friend), Đorđe Novković (for “Ja sam dinamit” and “Šta Sam Mogla Drugo” [‘What else could I have done’]), and Dejan Petković (“Zvoni jednom” [‘Ring the doorbell once’] and “Očigledno Nije Mi Svejedno” [‘Obviously, it’s not all the same to me’]), while the lyrics were written mainly by Marina Tucaković, as well as Željko Pavičić (for “Ja sam dinamit”) and Vojkan Milanović (“Dodirni me” [‘Touch me’]). According to Lokica Stefanović, the album was created and released because

40 Source: <https://tinska.com/novine/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

41 A photo taken on this occasion is featured on the cover of this Special Issue.

42 RTS: “Tako stoji stvari”.

they realized that there is no need for them to dance exclusively to other people's music – they could perform their own songs and use them as a backdrop for the dance numbers they choreographed.⁴³

Much like their dancing, the music on the album also provoked criticism from the often elitist and predominantly male rock critics that dismissed it as a frivolous work undeserving of real attention. Indeed, Petar Luković, a famous propagator of new wave music, published a detailed, sarcastic and at times offensive review of the album in the *Džuboks* magazine in January 1981, in which the critic was introduced as the magazine's "virtuous sex-collaborator"⁴⁴. Using pretentious language to ironically describe the album that was, according to him, as historically significant as *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* by the Beatles, the critic didn't fail to take a stab at the fact that Lokice were exposing their bodies for a living. The long quote from the review below nicely illustrates, for one, the well-known double standards that are frequently invoked by the society whenever female sexuality and the exposing of female bodies is in question, but also speaks to the various ideological strands that marked the Yugoslav popular music at the time. Luković wrote:

Conservative musical-social powers may be bothered by the element of eroticism that is only hinted from the uniforms of the artist who are, we should bear this in mind, dressed just like that at their workplace. But the costume and its hiding or revealing of the body is the strongest weapon in the fight against moralizing and outdated tendencies that are overcome by a progressive social flow. The small surface area of these costumes isn't meant to provoke a vulgar erection, nor is that possible based on these pleasant, colourful, lively, natural photos. The exposing of the body is here a primal protest against the enthroned, backward conventions, an authentic monadism (in Latin: mundus) – of a spiritual world. The decaying remnants of a society can only scream in despair, not understanding the ingenious move of the artists who, by revealing themselves, have revealed the rotting attitudes of the darkest reactive powers.⁴⁵

43 Ibidem.

44 Petar Luković: "Prvi album Lokica: Čovečanstvo će ga večno pamtiti", in: *Džuboks* 107 (1981), p. 54. It was not uncommon for articles and reviews in *Džuboks* to be prefaced by a few sentences written by the editorial. Luković was called "virtuous sex-collaborator" in such an introduction to the review that follows.

45 Ibidem. The author uses the phrase "Sepedonični ostaci društva" in the last sentence, which I translated as "decaying remnants of a society." He is most likely referring to a kind of fungal potato blight, *Clavibacter sepedonicus*, to further illustrate his point, and embellish his writing. The author wishes to thank Daniela Codarin for her help in translating this passage. The paragraph in its original language is as follows: "Konzervativnim muzičko-društvenim snagama može da zasmeta element erotike koja se tek naslućuje iz uniformi umetnica koje su, treba imati na umu, na svom radnom mestu baš tako odevene. Ali, kostim i njegovo skrivanje ili otkrivanje tela najjače

Wishing to give a condescending and brutal review of the album, Luković offered a kind of black box that gives insight into the web of various processes that shaped the production, as well as the perception of femininities within the public sphere and popular culture of Yugoslavia. For one, he is obviously trying to criticize the “exposing” of the bodies of Lokice as an empty gesture that was supposed to provoke the base instincts of (base) men who would be drawn to purchase the LP out of a superficial need to look at partial nudity. Simultaneously, he seems to ridicule the very idea that such exposing of the female body could in any way be progressive or liberating, for the women or the society as a whole. Finally, the quoted paragraph, as well as the review in its entirety, speak volumes about the ideological battles that were fought within the domain of popular music, that were situated on the clearly stated attitude of rock critics whose job, on the one hand, is to judge the value of various products of the established music industry, but that, on the other hand, always assign greater value to those artists that employ the ideas of originality, authenticity, and so on, as part of their strategy for positioning themselves on the music market. In other words, it speaks to the fact that rock critics, who had tremendous influence over how discourses regarding popular music were shaped, glorified rock and punk/new wave, with disco being treated, as Zubak noted, “with disdain and portrayed as an exploitative product with no artistic value”⁴⁶. In such a climate, of course, the production of femininities around notions of eroticism and female sexuality was bound to receive a similar devaluating treatment.

Luković’s review offers harsh criticism of the music and lyrics of songs published as part of the album, neither of which were composed or written by the women the criticism is directed towards which is a piece of information that should be important to someone who respects authorship so much. He does, however, see them as “feminine”, and therefore less “serious”. His attitude is, as can be expected, rooted in the age-old notion that the act of creation is more important than the act of performing, as well as the well-established idea that popular music songs that are composed to be ‘light’ or ‘entertaining’ cannot possibly have any ‘true’ artistic value (despite the fact that no one ever says they do). Furthermore, the proof he offers for such a determination comes primarily from the visual aspect of the album

je oružje u borbi protiv moralisanja i zastarelih tendencija koje su prevaziđene progresivnim socijalnim tokovima. Mala kvadratna površina pomenutih kostima ovde nema za cilj da izazove vulgarnu erekciju, niti je to moguće na osnovu ovih prijatnih, koloričnih, životnih, prirodnih fotosa. Otkrivanje tela ovde je iskonski Protest protiv ustoličenih, zaostalih konvencija, autentični mundanizam (latinski: mundus) – duhovog sveta. Sepedonični ostaci društva mogu samo da vrisnu u očaju, ne shvatajući ingeniozni potez umetnica koje su otkrivajući sebe, otkrile i truležne stavove najmračnijih snaga reakcije.”

46 Zubak: “Yugoslav Disco”, p. 202.

and the sexualized corporeal expressions of the women whose photographs appear on the cover – women who are dancers who use their bodies as tools of artistic expressions.

OF LOKICE, DYNAMITES, AND THEIR DISCO MUSIC

The album itself is, I would argue, ‘simply’ a product of the music industry meant to be entertaining and, as I mentioned already, to offer Lokice their own songs to which they could dance. It was, to quote Zubak again, a “manifestation of the explosion of market socialism”⁴⁷ in Yugoslavia and as such, it offers insights into how various tropes of women’s sexual liberation, produced within US disco, were renegotiated into the late socialist, consumerist society. The lyrics of most of the songs are dedicated to subjects of love, or at least, heterosexual relationships, also touching on themes like partying, hinting at sexual acts and free love. Most numbers are written in the disco, or disco-ish, style, with a more or less lively beat and the unavoidable four-on-the-floor. Exceptions in that sense are “Dodirni me” (‘Touch me’) that leans more towards mainstream pop and the title number “Ja sam dinamit” that recycles well-known, classic R’n’R beats and riffs, but with a ‘disco vibe.’ The LP also contains two slower love ballads: “On i ja” (‘Him and I’) and “Šta sam mogla drugo” (‘What else could I have done’). In other words, it could be said that many of the music industry standards that relate to how music performed by women should be produced, constructed, and represented were employed in the making of *Ja sam dinamit*. The music was composed mainly by Aleksandar Sanja Ilić (1951–2021), an artist and music industry figure who didn’t work in a specific genre, but rather composed and performed songs for/with different artists and occasions.⁴⁸ In addition, some songs are signed by Đorđe Novković, a songwriter famous for composing music for stars of pop or zabavna muzika such as Mišo Kovača, Kemal Monteno, Neda Ukraden, Zdravko Čolić, Tereza Kesovija, Gabi Novak, and many others, as well as Dejan Petrović, one of the few disco/funk performers and producers from Yugoslavia. Thus, I wouldn’t claim that Lokice had a unique sound that made them distinguishable within the Yugoslav music industry, but rather that the songs they performed make effective and skilful use of various musical genres and styles, especially disco or rock and roll, all suitable for dancing.

47 Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’”, p. 96.

48 He was perhaps best known for his world music project Sanja Ilić i Balkanika (2000–2021) that also represented Serbia at the Eurovision Song Contest in 2018.

“DISCO LADIES”



Example 7: Lokice: *Ja sam dinamit* Cover (featuring Lokica Stefanović)⁴⁹



Example 8: Lokice: *Ja sam dinamit* Inside⁵⁰

In the lyrics of most of the songs, the already-mentioned tropes are present as well. First and foremost, Lokice’s femininities are tied to their physicality and sexuality. For example, the lyrics of “Disco Lady”⁵¹, written by Tucaković – a veritable master when it comes to following global music industry trends and incorporating them into the local culture – , apparently address the relationship between “Disco lady and DJ”, as the refrain states. The song essentially describes the disco lady who likes to dance the night away, and not just because that is fashionable (as the lyrics tell us). The ‘lady’ is mainly produced within the song through an emphasis on the bodily aspect, but also through her physical interaction with the sonic environment – she is a disco lady, after all. A potential translation of the lyrics is: “Such slender legs, breath and a soft body/I’ll lead like I do others./That’s a call from the DJ/In a discotheque/He’s playing new hits./With sound is her love/With song the love calls her/Through sound she also makes love./Sings while she dances/Not just that what she loves/Because all of it is now in fashion.”⁵² The lyrics thus establish a

49 Source: <https://www.discogs.com/master/1274132-Lokica-Lokice-Ja-Sam-Dinamit> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

50 Source: <https://www.discogs.com/master/1274132-Lokica-Lokice-Ja-Sam-Dinamit> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

51 Lokice: “Disco Lady”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-ywWdl0JLA> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

52 “Takve vitke noge/dah i meko telo/vodiću k’o ja druge, To me DJ zove/u nekoj diskoteci/hitove pušta nove. Zvukom je ljubav njena/zvukom je ljubav zove/zvukom i ljubav ona vodi. Peva dok igra ona/ne samo to što voli/jer je to sada sve u modi”.

connection between disco, music, dancing, physicality, sex, and eroticism, exemplifying an overall sexualization of the popular culture that was sweeping across Yugoslavia, and showing how female sexuality and physicality were placed within such culture. The song is, as can be expected, an excellent example of disco, as Ilić employed all the crucial signifiers of the genre – four-on-the-floor beats, prominent use of synthesizers, flanger effects and so on.

Interestingly, the lyrics for the song “Očigledno, nije mi svejedno” (‘Obviously, it’s not all the same to me’)⁵³ are directed precisely towards the potential objectification of Lokice that happens while they are on stage, but with a twist. The song is envisioned as a kind of lament over a man who doesn’t take Lokice seriously, although Petrović’s disco beats and synthesizer effects contribute to the song’s generally light-hearted feel. The lyrics are sung by multiple members of the group (who are not credited separately), but in singular form, that is, they are singing as if they were one woman, which can create a hint of a confusion in my translation that follows: “In me, you see only an image/Rhythm, movement and nothing else./A girl with a lot of adventure/Who is admired and about whom everyone writes”⁵⁴, state the lyrics at the beginning. “Maybe this is why it appears strange to you/When I gently look at you from the stage./Because you are just a regular guy/So why would I be attracted to you”⁵⁵, continue Lokice, displaying their agency as they proclaim their interest in this mysterious, regular guy. In the second verse, the sentiment is clearly expressed, as they sing: “I’m sorry that tonight we’ll go in completely opposite directions”⁵⁶. In the refrain, they conclude: “Obviously, it’s not all the same to me”, listing the reasons: “What you think of me”, “That I don’t have you by my side”, “That for you I’m just a star on the stage” and finally, “That you still think I’m not right for you”⁵⁷. Furthermore, the lyrics reveal that the song’s protagonist just needs someone “normal” with whom they can spend their days in peace. The song, thus, combines various tropes that have become typical for the pop music performed by female artists: a relationship with a man, eroticism, agency, sadness because of the fact that her love isn’t reciprocated. The lyrics also juxtapose the way Lokice are perceived in public, with the particular focus on their bodily displays, and their ‘real’ wishes

53 As a side note, and to avoid confusion, I’d like to mention that Slađana Milošević (1955–2024), another popular rock singer from the era, performed a song of the same name, released in 1979: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uND564U0OQQ> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

54 “U meni vidiš samo sliku/ritam i pokret i ništa više. Devojku s puno avantura/kojoj se dive, o kojoj se piše”.

55 “Možda ti zato izgleda čudno/što te nežno gledam sa scene/jer ti si samo običan mladić/i šta bi tu privuklo mene?”

56 “I žao mi je što ćemo noćas/poći na sasvim suprotne strane”.

57 “Očigledno, nije mi svejedno/šta ti misliš, misliš o meni. [...] Što te nemam, nemam kraj sebe [...] što sam za tebe zvezda na sceni [...] što misliš ipak nisam za tebe”.

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that are the same as those of any other person. It could thus be argued that the song touches on what Lokica Stefanović mentioned in her interview for *Nada* – that the Yugoslav people weren't ready to accept that such displays are part of someone's job, despite the fact that they seemed to enjoy them very much.

AGENCY

My final remark regarding how femininities are produced through Lokice's songs refers to how their agency was deployed. One example of this can be found in the song “Ja sam dinamit” that seems to be a renegotiation of the figure of an empowered woman that was beginning to dominate Western, as well as local, popular music at the time. In this song, the singer is essentially telling the man that she is too strong for him, because she “always loves as if the end of the world is near”. The lyrics describe the woman as fiery, and the man as too romantic for her. “I kiss like fire/I hug like a storm./Because of it,/I'm unattainable for many”, begin the verses that flow directly into the refrain that explains: “I'm a wild flame./I'm dynamite”. On the other hand, the man who, the audience can only assume, is interested in such a woman is “Just a tender guy with a guitar/You are tender for the fire that burns from within me/Forgive me but you'll never be mine.”⁵⁸ Again, the representation of female strength is enveloped with an atmosphere of eroticism, as the character Lokice perform is free to choose her partner. She is sexually liberated because she is empowered, and vice versa. YouTube offers one video⁵⁹ in which Lokice are dancing to the song – in rainbow glittery leotards, they perform a rather simple choreography that involves, among other moves, jumping from one leg to the other and often shaking their behinds as if they were dancing the twist, with Lokica Stefanović taking the role of the lead performer.

In most of the other songs from the album, agency seems to be framing the performance of Lokice's femininities as well, even though this feature may not be as prominent in the number where Lokica proclaims herself to be a stick of dynamite. In that sense, Lokica and Lokice are set as the main ‘deciders’ in the lyrics, the subjects that appear free to express their desires, feelings and dreams, openly explaining their thoughts and emotions to the men to whom they sing. In “Duga luda noć” (‘A long crazy night’), another upbeat disco/funky song, they invite someone to

58 “Ljubim kao vatra/Grlim k'o oluja./Zato sam za mnoge/Nedostižan mit./Divlja sam vatra./Ja sam dinamit./ Ti samo si nežan lik/Na gitari./Nežan si za požar što iz mene žari/ Oprosti ali nikad nećeš biti moj./Zanesenjak pesme/Stih je život tvoj./Nežan si za požar što iz mene žari/Oprosti ali nikad nećeš biti moj”.

59 Lokice: “Ja sam dinamit”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FI3bbAqzss> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

let themselves be taken by the “crazy rhythm of love”⁶⁰. In “Očigledno, nije mi svejedno”, which I have already mentioned, they clearly express their desires to be with their fan, as well as their sadness that this can’t happen. The pop ballad “On i ja” sings about the differences between a man and woman – each of them with their own thoughts and beliefs, who are happy together precisely because of those differences. In other words, I would argue that it is the very expansive and flexible notion of agency that delineates the production of Lokice’s (sexy) femininities by always underlining their subjectivities and always positioning them as active agents.

Furthermore, it could be said that it is women’s agency, a trope so important for second-wave feminism, that, through the disco culture, resonated within the late-socialist Yugoslav context. In that sense, what could have been interpreted and labelled as feminist within the disco culture of the United States, was renegotiated into the quite different context in which Lokice worked, through the framework of an independent woman who could freely exercise her choices – a framework that is wide enough to accept different interpretations of both feminism and the socialist context that, to differing extents, encouraged gender equality.

CONCLUSIONS

“It was unimaginable for someone to appear with naked legs on the scene”⁶¹; “Lokice: A curse followed the most beautiful Yugoslav women”⁶²; “The best-looking dudes were crazy about her”⁶³; “The curse of Lokice: they were the hottest chicks in Yuga, but ended up like this”⁶⁴. These are only some of the titles of online articles available today on various internet portals. From them, one thing is clear – Lokice were hot and sexy, and everyone (including them) knew it. That piece of information, coupled with a hint towards their sad life stories, makes for a perfect click bait. In other words, through the workings of history, show business, media, and the entertainment indus-

60 “Preпусти se sad ti/ovom ritmu ljubavi. Nek zvuk nosi nas/sve zaboravi”.

61 Maja Gašić: “Lokica Stefanović i Sanja Ilić o čuvenim ‘Lokicama’: Bilo je nezamislivo da se neko pojavi golih nogu na sceni”, in: *Gloria* (2017), <https://www.gloria.rs/zvezde/price/129401/lokica-stefanovic-i-sanja-ilic-o-cuvenim-lokicama-bilo-je-nezamislivo-da-se-neko-pojavi-golih-nogu-na-sceni> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

62 Buka: “Lokice: Prokletstvo pratilo najljepše Jugoslovenke”, in: *Buka* (2016), <https://6yka.com/kolumne/lokice-prokletstvo-pratilo-najljepse-jugoslovenke> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

63 Glossy: “Najbolji frajeri su LUDELI ZA NJOM, jedna rečenica je okončala prijateljstvo sa Čolom: Životna priča Lokice Stefanović”, in: *Glossy* (2022), <https://glossy.espresso.co.rs/poznati/ves-ti/204247/leposava-lokica-stefanovic-zivotna-prica> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

64 24 sata: “Prokletstvo Lokica: Bile su najbolje ribe u Jugi, a završile ovako”, in: *Blic* (2016), <https://www.blic.rs/zabava/vesti/prokletstvo-lokica-bile-su-najbolje-ribe-u-jugi-a-završile-ovako/n6f-hsj6> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

try, Lokice have largely been reduced to their sexy look and bodily displays. To be fair, each article credits them for changing the face of Yugoslav television programs with their dance acts, and speaks of Lokica Stefanović as a respectable professional, but nevertheless, if Lokice are to be associated with just one thing, it is almost exclusively their ‘good looks.’ This kind of perception further shows that the dance group didn’t only embody the ‘sexy reputation’ of disco in Yugoslavia and the expressions of female sexuality it promoted, but that such expressions contributed to establishing a norm of what kind of bodies were ‘sexy’ and acceptable for the music market. The bodies of Lokice were tall, slender and fit, and while their bodily displays do testify to the actuality of processes of liberation of representations of female sexuality in public spaces, they also reveal the rapid adaptation of the market to such, potentially subversive, acts. The way Lokice’s bodies were styled for the audiences was primarily influenced by the various commercial products of disco that were adopted by the local estrada, and of course adapted to the local cultural context.

In that sense, a thread that I have purposefully avoided pulling all the way in this text is the potential relationship between displays of female sexuality in Yu-disco, and the local movements that dealt with the so-called women’s issues and feminism. When it comes to the US context, the usual way of perceiving the various productions and stylizations of female sexuality in the popular culture of the time has to do with second-wave feminism and the women’s liberation and civil rights movements, and so on. In fact, Mankowski argues that those movements and popular culture were inseparable, and that there is no feminist movement that existed prior to, or separately from, the various popular culture products that ensure the adoption of feminist ideas into people’s everyday lives.⁶⁵

When it comes to Yu-disco, however, some of these trends were adopted as well, which is especially visible in Lokice’s *Ja sam dinamit* album – the songs’ lyrics speak of casual sexual encounters, they portray empowered women who are free to make their own life choices and so on, centring agency as the primary framework through which their femininities are produced. However, as far as I could tell, these aspects of Lokice’s activities weren’t (necessarily) understood as signs of progress in the domain of ‘women’s issues,’ primarily because of, I would argue, the ‘complex relationship’ socialist Yugoslavia had towards them, which is outside of the scope of this article.⁶⁶ In fact, as was visible from Luković’s review of their album, Lokice’s

65 Mankowski: *Gendering the Disco Inferno*, pp. 6–7.

66 By ‘complex relationship’ I mean the fact that, for one, the equality of women was tightly woven into the revolutionary roots upon which Yugoslavia was built, which made the fight for the improvement of women’s lives that would be separate from a class struggle, a slippery slope. In addition, during the early seventies, ideas of Western feminism were becoming more prominent, with more and more women becoming interested in incorporating such ideas into the existing socialist discourses.

activities were often perceived as empty gestures and cheap tricks meant to boost sales of products that didn't have any 'real' value (they did boost Lokice's popularity, though). What I would like to emphasize, however, is that the way these ideas were adopted into the Yugoslav market reveals the fact that issues like women's sexual liberation, empowerment, and emancipation in a broader sense were from very early on encapsulated into music industry products that could, but needn't be interpreted as feminist. In fact, Lokice's activities show the multiple layers of meaning that envelop the production of femininities within the music market of the period, showing that displays of sexuality are always caught in the jaws of the market, and simultaneously 'packaged' in ways that would suit different strategies, audience preferences and so on. In Lokice's case, it is clear that their femininities were produced in accordance with different norms of heterosexiness that require, among other things, the disciplining of women's bodies, as well as with the demands of a still-traditional, patriarchal society, that, as Lokica Stefanović stated, wasn't yet ready to accept that dancing – in the disco or elsewhere –, and everything that goes with it, is part of someone's profession.

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