

## ODESA WOMEN'S MAGAZINE "ROBITNYTSIA I DOMASHNIA HOSPODYNIA" AS A FASHION GUIDE IN 1926–1927

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### Summary

The article analyzes the content of *Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia* (Female Worker and Housewife), a free supplement to the newspaper *Visti*, published in Odesa in 1926–1927. The magazine stood out for its feminist orientation and significant focus on fashion, which was atypical for the Soviet press. Among eight issues, 23 publications dedicated to fashion, clothing design, and sewing were documented. The magazine featured diverse genres, including advisory articles, instructions, satirical essays, and advertisements. Special attention was given to European fashion trends, the adaptation of French and British ideas to Soviet life, and the promotion of embroidery as an element of modern attire. The magazine's content demonstrates a subtle opposition to communist ideology that likely triggered its closure. The article emphasizes the cultural significance of the publication, the role of editor Izrail Khait in popularizing European trends in Ukrainian fashion, and the magazine's importance in the context of Ukrainization and the development of national fashion. Issues of aesthetics and self-expression through fashion became central to the debate between Soviet ideology and women's desire for individuality, making the magazine a significant cultural phenomenon in Ukrainian fashion journalism.

**Key words:** Soviet women's press, *Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia* magazine, Odesa during Ukrainization, Ukrainian fashion during Ukrainization, anti-Bolshevik views, feminism, fashion journalism.

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### 1. Introduction

The study of the Soviet press, particularly women's magazines, has become widespread in the academic community in recent years because of an urgent need to reinterpret the Soviet legacy in the Ukrainian context. The analysis of women's magazines of the totalitarian era reveals the unique aspects of social transformations, ideological influence, and the formation of gender identity in Ukraine under the Bolshevik occupation. Domestic studies tend to focus on more general aspects of Soviet culture, but some periodicals, such as *Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia* (Female Worker and Housewife), remain unnoticed by scholars. The magazine published in 1926–1927 in Odesa stood out for its feminist orientation and significant focus on fashion, emphasizing the influence of European trends.

**The purpose of the present work** is to introduce "Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia" into scholarly discourse by analyzing its publications, involving ones devoted to fashion, and identifying its role in the context of the Soviet press, gender policy, and the formation of Ukrainian cultural identity. The study also focuses on progressive editorial ideas and opposition to totalitarian ideology, which led to both the closure of the magazine and repression against its editor, Israil Khait.

## 2. Main part

To achieve the research purpose, i.e., to introduce “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” into scholarly discourse and analyze its contribution to the development of gender policy, fashion, and cultural identity, the following tasks are formulated:

1. To study the magazine’s content and genre structure, particularly publications on fashion.
2. To identify the cultural and gender context of fashion articles with an emphasis on their opposition to Soviet ideology.
3. To analyze the role of Israil Khait, editor-in-chief, in the formation of the content and ideological focus of the magazine.

**Materials and research methods.** The article studies the content of the Odesa women’s magazine “*Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia*” (Female Worker and Housewife) during its operation in the day of korenizatsiia (indigenization), namely 1926-1927. In scholarly discourse, the issues of the relevant magazine’s existence and functioning have been omitted by Ukrainian scientists. A little more broadly, in the context of the epoch, the topic was considered in the works by Kolyastruk O. A. “On characteristics of the situation of the Odesa intelligentsia in the 20s of 20th century” (*Koliastruk, 2006:127*), “The intelligentsia of the USSR in the 1920s: everyday life” (*Koliastruk, 2010:362*), “On the problem of relations between the Bolshevik government and the intelligentsia in the 1920s” (*Koliastruk, 2007:173*); Savchenko V. “Problems of the first Ukrainization company in Odesa in 1923-1929” (*Savchenko, 2010:87*); Tkachenko V.V. “Exemplary political processes of the 20s – early 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their role in the extermination of the Ukrainian scientific intelligentsia” (*Tkachenko, 2008:55*); Babiuk L. “The Soviet press of the 20s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a means of forming a new type of a working woman” (*Babiuk, 2015:95*); Labur O. “A new woman”: normalized images of a woman-socialist and a woman-worker in Soviet literature of the 1920s – 1930s” (*Labur, 2010:213*). The methodology of the present research is based on the following principles: analytical, comparative, comparative-historical method, retrospective analysis, and genre typology. To assess the cultural and ideological context, an interdisciplinary approach combining history, cultural studies and gender studies is used.

**Results and discussion:** “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” is a free supplement to the newspaper “Visti”, a mouthpiece of the Odesa gubernia committee (hubkom) of CP(b)U under the jurisdiction of which the illustrated socio-political and literary fortnight magazine “Shkval” was also published. “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” was published in 1926–1927 in Russian, with its numbering in the form of a separate journal. It is kept in the collection of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. Information about this supplement is introduced into scholarly discourse for the first time, since it has not yet been studied and presented in scientific papers by other press researchers. In total, 8 issues of “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” came out in 1926: Issues 1–4, 6–7, and in 1927: Issues: 1–2. The journal had a feminist focus but was not sufficiently involved in communist ideology, which led to its further closure. We can even call the magazine progressive: compared to its Ukrainian contemporaries from Kyiv and Kharkiv – Selianka Ukrainy (“Countrywoman of Ukraine”) and Komunarka Ukrainy (Female Communist of Ukraine), the editorial board, not afraid of the wrath of the totalitarian authorities, openly wrote about the need to follow capitalist countries, particularly France and the UK, in terms of fashion, attitude to women, and household.

Israil Abramovych Khait, rector of Odesa Institute of Public Education and editor-in-chief of “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia”, was repressed and shot on September 12,

1938, in Kyiv. His anti-Bolshevik views expressed in “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” likely caused further repression. In the present study, we will dwell on fashion content. Thus, it is essential to note that the magazine consisted of 8 pages, two of which were devoted to fashion every issue. This is a truly significant volume compared to its contemporaries – Selianka Ukrainy and Komunarka Ukrainy, where, at its best, enlightenment in the fashion and clothing industry was elucidated about 4–5 times a year until 1929. Therefore, multi-genre publications about fashion in each number of “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” prove anti-Bolshevik views in the editor-in-chief. In total, we registered 23 publications about fashion in eight issues of “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia”.

It is pertinent to mark that no permanent sections were introduced for such materials. This is likely due to the fact that the formation of materials was chaotic, and it was not known in advance what volume and content of fashion articles would be submitted to the next issue. As a result, among 23 publications on cut-and-sew and fashion trends, we can find advertisements for sewing schools and ateliers: “Machine and hand embroidery for the summer season” (*Do litnoho sezonu*, 1926:8) “Hat sewing tutorials” (*Uroky kapeliukhiv*, 1926:8), “Newly opened cutting and sewing school” (*Novovidkryta shkola kroiu i shyttia*, 1926:8), “Shelkova school of cutting and sewing” (*Shkola kroiu i shyttia Shelkovoï*, 1926:8), “I give cutting and sewing lessons” (*Daiu uroky kroiu i shyttia*, 1926:8), “Cutting and sewing courses by M.P. Volhina” (*Kursy kroiu i shyttia M.P. Volhinoï*, 1926:7), “Cutting and sewing courses by A. Tostohanova” (*Kursy kroiu i shyttia A.Tostohanovoï*, 1926:6); as well as advice columns and feuilletons on style and fashion trends: “What are dresses decorated with?” (*Chym prykrashaiut sukni*, 1926:7), “Clothes: about materials for clothes” (*Odezha: pro materialy dlia odiahu*, 1926:6), “The fashion is crazy” (*Moda dybky*, 1926:6), “Housewife corner: about a suit” (*Kutok hospodyni: pro kostium*, 1927:7), “Allowed or not: about a hat, powder and silk stockings” (*Mozhna, chy ni*, 1927:7); announcement of a competition for a female suit sketch: “Women’s suit contest” (*Konkurs na zhinochyi kostium*, 1926:4); and necessarily instructions for cutting and sewing women’s and children’s lightweight clothing: “Cutting and sewing corner: children’s underwear” (*Kutochok kroiu i shyttia: dytiacha bilyzna*, 1926:6), “Advice to housewives-dressmakers: instructions of an English housewife” (*Porady hospodyniam-kravchyniam*, 1926:8), “Corner of cutting and sewing: pants for a child up to 2 years old” (*Kutochok kroiu i shyttia*, 1926:2), “Nutrition. Apartment. Clothing: Ruthenian shirt for a boy” (*Kharchuvannia. Kvartyra. Odiah*, 1926:7), “Needlework corner: white embroidery” (*Kutochok rukodillia*, 1926:7), “Home and household: needlework” (*Dim i hospodarstvo: rukodillia*, 1926:5), “Children’s sewing patterns” (*Dytiachi vykriiky*, 1927:10), “Children’s costume” (*Dytiachyi kostium*, 1927:11); as well as step-by-step instructions for making a female tailor’s dummy: “How to cut a sleeve yourself” (*Yak samii vykroity rukav*, 1926:8), “How to make a tailor’s dummy” (*Yak vyhotovyty maneken*, 1926:8).

The above list of publications shows that the genre palette is quite diverse as for the supplement to the newspaper. In fact, the high status of “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” is evidenced by the fact that such a small magazine organized a women’s suit competition, and the first sketches for the competition were submitted by the famous Odesa illustrator Naum Sokolyk: “Women’s suit competition. The women’s magazine organizes a competition for an exquisite and comfortable suit for a Soviet female official. We attach sketches of suits received for the competition. These sketches are the works of artist Sokolyk” (*Konkurs na zhinochyi kostium*, 1926:4).

Analyzing the content of “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia”, we see advertisements for private schools of cutting and sewing of Ms. Shelkova, P. Volhina, and A. Tostohanova, as well as hat-making courses. These are important beacons that indicate the functioning

of clothing manufactories in Odesa in the 1920s, which the Soviet authorities fought so actively by destroying all private sewing enterprises and schools and promoting factories that were supposed to provide the population with the same type of low-quality mass-produced clothing. At the same time, small manufactories, which were almost always a family business, ensured the durability of generations and top-notch custom-made clothes. It is crucial that the editorial board of “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” contributed to popularizing sewing manufactories and private cut-and-sewing schools.

The fascination of the editor-in-chief of “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” with capitalist countries is also evident in the title of the publication “Advice to housewives-dress-makers: instructions of an English housewife”, which shares the British secrets of embroidery with a sewing machine, as well as the removal of various kinds of stains from clothes (*Porady hospodyniam-kravchyniam: nastanovy anhliiskoi hospodyni, 1926:8*). “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” paid attention to French fashion trends, with an emphasis on Ukrainian fashion designers. Thus, from the publication “What dresses are decorated with” we learn about the Ukrainian fashion designer in Paris – Sonia Delaunay: “The Frenchwoman [...] Sofia Delaunay specialized in decorative embroidery and fabric painting. The better half of Parisian manufacturers produce fashionable fabrics using Sofia Delaunay’s sketches. The works of her followers were presented in Paris at last year’s exhibition of decorative arts in a separate pavilion and made a big hit. Having visited the exhibition, foreigners spread all over the world the fashion for exoticism and decorativeness in women’s suits” (*Chym prykrashaiut sukni, 1926:7*).

Interestingly, Ukrainization coincided with the fashion for embroidery onto clothing. “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” emphasized the importance of actualizing folk embroidery in modern clothing and introducing the world trend into everyday life: “For centuries, women’s suits have been decorated with ornamental embroideries. Now women’s clothes are again decorated with embroidery or a pattern. For 20 years in Paris, there has been a fashion for hand-embroidered dresses – it holds out stubbornly. Lately, it is evident everywhere. Hand-made ornaments supplanted all sorts of other decorations [...]. The decorative mark in women’s clothing, embroidered or painted, is absolutely in harmony with the general tone of the current glazed city with a mass of light spots and refractions [...]. Handmade piece is valued more expensive than velvet, lace, etc.” (*Chym prykrashaiut sukni, 1926:7*).

The publication’s author advises women on how to update their wardrobe on their own following fashion trends in embroidery: “It is rare, quite rare, to find original women’s clothing with truly artistic embroidery. Meanwhile, this does not require expensive items; every woman can shade her dress and decorate it using only a rough canvas of any color and combine it with a dress by sheathing it with threads of the appropriate tone, or a tone that pleasantly contrasts with the decoration” (*Chym prykrashaiut sukni, 1926:7*).

It is essential to note that the magazine’s editorial staff took care of their subscribers’ savings and tried to give as much guidance and advice as possible for the economical manufacture of clothes, in particular, the tools required: “Many women sew their dresses at home. But it is very difficult to sew for yourself without a tailor’s dummy. Not everyone can afford buying or ordering it. We recommend doing a tailor’s dummy yourself. Hence, you need to sew a so-called “classic bodice” closed to the neck from a dense canvas. The bodice should be such that it fits snugly into the figure” (*Yak vyhotovyty maneken, 1926:8*).

European views on fashion, certainly with some disguise as Soviet ideology, are expressed in the article “Housewife corner: about a suit”. The author reflects on how a woman of the totalitarian era should dress, stressing that fashion as a separate phenomenon has its laws: “Disputes about whether a woman should watch her suit are no longer disputes. Indeed. How

should a Soviet woman dress? Simple and exquisite. Easier said than done. Women's attire depends on fashion. Don't be intimidated by the word 'fashion'. However, it has an aura of the cheap chic of bourgeois confectioners and signs like "the ladies' delight", which the French writer Zola described in his novels. A suit's form, after all, should have its laws. These laws create fashion. There is nothing wrong with that" (*Kutok hospodyni: pro kostium, 1927: 7*).

The author stresses that the disadvantage of European trends is their inconsistency with the climatic conditions in the territory of the then Ukraine occupied by the Bolsheviks. Hence, it is necessary to create own fashion industry: "[...] We are in captivity of Western fashion, which is guided by considerations that are far from our way of life. The nudity of the female body is a driving lever of European fashion. Simplicity and convenience, symmetry and expediency should regulate suit shape in our country. We need to create our own fashion. [...] We sometimes follow Western fashion too blindly, ignoring either the climatic features of our country or whether a particular suit corresponds to our overall image" (*Kutok hospodyni: pro kostium, 1927: 7*).

The author calls for the involvement of leading artists in the formation of new Ukrainian fashion. Predicting future trends, he states that while domestic fashion has not developed enough, it is necessary to follow European trends: "The style of clothing will be determined by its practicality and convenience. It is certain that white shirts are gradually replaced with dark ones. The increasing pace of urban traffic is killing long and narrow dresses. Folding hairstyles are already giving way to short-cropped hair [...]. Fashion is global and, like the epidemic of measles and scarlet fever, infects everyone, regardless of borders. The only thing that influences fashion is the purchasing power of the population. With its gradual growth, we are witnessing the tireless approach to fashion Europeanization. However, it is temporary. Until we have our own fashion, we will have to follow Western fashion. So far, our fashion magazines borrow their patterns from foreign ones. So far, we borrow sketches of fashionable dresses from foreign magazines. Therefore, a new way of life with its labor pace and the will to simplicity and health will create a new suit" (*Kutok hospodyni: pro kostium, 1927: 7*). Such pro-European views expressed in the article are too bold for the totalitarian era and could provoke the early closure and liquidation of the magazine.

It is interesting to analyze the feuilleton "Allowed or not: about a hat, powder and silk stockings", which describes the controversy between young girls regarding the relevance of dressing fashionably and brightly in case of involvement in social and party work. Such a feuilleton demonstrates the absurdity of the communist view of fashion with all its taboos on a woman's self-expression through appearance. Ordinary Ukrainian women understood it and, in the feuilleton, they discussed the likelihood of combining social work with self-representation following fashion trends, so as not to become the object of ridicule and jeering on the part of communist-minded colleagues.

One of the feuilleton characters stated that a woman in a hat is respected everywhere, unlike the one who wears a kerchief. The other supported her, recalling how in the cooperative shop, where she often quarreled with sellers, women in hats were always served better and faster. One of the participants in the conversation resolutely claimed that 1921 had come, and it was time to give up leather jackets and kerchiefs because a nice dress helps to impress in the modern world. She stressed that you can buy a simple hat for little money and look even ten years younger. However, others were cautious: one woman noted that when working, it is inconvenient to dress in silk stockings and lacquered shoes, but for the holidays, it is nice to wear a beautiful dress and even to powder a nose. That sparked a new wave of discussion. One of those present complained that her friend was afraid to come to the meeting so as not to be

derided as she was used to dressing exquisitely and painting her lips. That line caused outrage among others: they considered lipstick unacceptable for a “genuine socialist”. Some said that a serious woman would not dress up, and others denied it, claiming that everyone wanted to dress more beautifully. In the end, the talk turned to powder. Some considered it harmless and even pleasant, while others called it superfluous. As for lipstick, opinions were even more divided: someone stated that it was an extra luxury, and another boldly expressed her opinion that light and natural makeup was not bad at all.

As a result, we can see that aesthetics for the Ukrainian woman of the Ukrainization era was crucial. It is impossible to deny own nature and desire for self-expression through exquisite elegant clothing. “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” secretly tried to encourage Ukrainian women to ignore the Soviet postulates that the female socialist and the female worker should be almost devoid of gender differences with men in the aesthetic sense (*Mozhna, chy ni, 1927:7*).

**Discussion.** The analysis established that the magazine “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” had a unique format for the Soviet press – fashion, everyday routine, and women’s rights. Numerous publications about fashion, including cutting-and-sewing instructions, feuilletons, advertising, and interpretation of European trends, prove the editorial staff’s desire to form a new cultural identity. Opposition to Soviet ideology was manifested in a focus on personal aesthetics, Europeanization of the female image, and criticism of the unification of the role of women in society. The findings demonstrate the magazine’s contribution to the development of Ukrainian culture and acknowledge its ideological innovation.

### 3. Conclusions

The periodical “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” occupied a special place among the women’s press of the 1920s in Ukraine due to its feminist orientation and focus on fashion. It was distinguished by its genre diversity and the number of publications devoted to cutting, sewing, and modern fashion trends, which made it an essential tool for cultural enlightenment. The magazine “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” contributed to popularizing private sewing schools and manufactories, which remained an important element of the local economic and cultural environment of Odesa. The magazine elucidated European fashion trends and emphasized the significance of preserving national identity through embroidery and other elements of traditional art. “Robitnytsia i Domashnia Hospodynia” presented the fashion of France and Great Britain as an example of aesthetics and practicality, adapting these ideas to the life of a Soviet woman. It reflected the editorial staff’s desire to “Europeanize” the Ukrainian female image, even within the totalitarian system. The ideological trajectory, which was formed by the editor-in-chief, Israil Khait, highlighted the cultural opposition to communist ideology. The progressive views of the editorial board were one of the reasons for the magazine’s closure and also triggered the repression against Khait. Therefore, the magazine has become both a source of information about fashion and a platform for discussing the female role in society demonstrating an innovative approach that makes it an important object for further research.

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