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Introduction - Visual Representations of Femininities and Masculinities

Karl Kaser*

Introduction

In the digital age, visual representations have become more meaningful than ever before in history. The Internet, countless portals, blogs, social network sites, digital television and movie images, and illustrated newspapers and magazines – they all contribute to picturizing our everyday and perhaps also not so everyday lives. From a historical point of view the creation of user-generated content on the Internet constitutes an important turning point in the relationship between the human being and the creation, consumption, and distribution of images.

The novelty of digital visual communication compared to its conventional analogous predecessors is its increasing impact on the social construction of reality in at least four ways. First, it opens the practice of visual communication to large parts of the population and blurs the distinction between producer, distributor, and consumer of visual objects. Second, it enhances the productive capacity of visual technology beyond reality itself, into the hyper-real e.g. enabling the production of images that transcend the human perspective. Third, it creates a logic for the representation of reality that enhances the social value of visual communication in the sense that a message must be visual if it has to be relevant at all.¹ Fourth, it enables and accelerates the circulation of images across material and immaterial obstacles such as borders, cultures, language, status, and gender to more conventional forms of communication.²

These components have impacted the visual construction of femininities and masculinities massively. In the digital age, pictures not only come to the people, but everybody is able to create images of her- and himself and to distribute them in abundance within one's social network sites and beyond. We could call this phenomenon post-modern, hyper-modern, or digital visual culture, howsoever; it constitutes not only a target of mass consumption but has become an integrated whole of creation, distribution, and consumption. Never before in history did

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¹ Stocchetti, Matteo. 2014. *Images and Power in the Digital Age: The Political Role of Digital Visuality*. Arcada Working Papers 1/2014.

² Stocchetti, *Images*, 2-5.

individuals independent from class affiliation, education, color, and gender have more agency in processes of the social and cultural construction of social realities and utopias such as femininities and masculinities, including recently sexual self-commodification.

Researchers argue that this online sexual self-commodification on social network sites is explicitly tied to a visual cyber culture, which has become common to the contemporary postfeminist media context. Third-wave feminism's emphasis on bodily self-expression, on the desirability of women's freedom to express themselves sexually, as "sex-objects" if they like, and the ability to choose a highly sexualized lifestyle, embraces the neoliberal focus on the idea that the self must be continually constructed and transformed. In short, these kinds of emerging new femininities in the digital age seemingly situates so-called third-wave feminism in a quite different context compared to the "second wave" in the second half of the twentieth century.³

Mentioned impacts of digitalization on emerging new femininities and new masculinities and related visual cultures are, as it looks, more characteristic for North America and Northwest Europe than for other world regions such as Southeastern Europe to which the Balkans and South Caucasus belong. Analogous economic, cultural, and social frameworks hardly exist elsewhere in the world and specifically not at the opposite Southeastern pole of the European continent. Although the inclusion of the Southeast in processes of digitalization has been time-delayed, it was included quite comprehensively; women and men are still recognizably differently situated – culturally, politically, and economically – and have comparatively unequal access to material and cultural resources, different and unequal opportunities regarding the provision and consumption of material goods, and different and unequal access to political and economic decisions. If we put post-socialist retraditionalism aside, one of the reasons is that in socialism, independent feminist movements, and herewith second-wave feminism, never existed; instead, there were party-dependent women's organizations, which were instantly abolished when socialist party dictatorship ceased. The negative socialist heritage of women's organizations is one of the reasons women's movements and feminism have never received significant social support in post-socialist countries and women's issues have been marginalized as far as possible.

The visual representations of femininities and masculinities during socialism were characterized by asexual women and traditional male functions such as granting protection, earning a living, and fighting for a better life. However, at the center of official concern was female sexual behavior. The typical socialist woman was depicted without any playfulness and sexuality. Only motherly love in moderate quantities was tolerated. Women actively mastered male skills, acquired education, and took part in public life, lacking any fashion sense and appearing utterly asexual. Beauty and desire were proclaimed indecent and harmful. As a result of this puritan-like ethic, the nude body disappeared from paintings, décolletage from TV, and love scenes from movies. Eroticism among married couples was replaced by the glorification of the woman-mother and a

³ Press, Andrea L. 2013. *Feminism? That's so Seventies': Girls and Young Women Discuss Femininity and Feminism in America's Next Top Model*, in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, edited by Gill, Rosalind and Christina Scharff. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 117-18.

socialist cult of maternity. Images of women were extremely didactic and performed ideological functions. Women have mastered control over the “parasitic” needs of leisure and aesthetics, the decadent trend of self-indulgence through fashion and beauty, and instead have focused narrowly on functional, production-driven activities. The socialist party manufactured and controlled a certain idea of femininity that had nothing to do with women’s self-expression and everything to do with the party line of gender equality.⁴

The breakdown of the socialist system did not encourage the establishment of a liberal climate towards sexual expression everywhere immediately. Independently from the question how and how fast political and economic transition set in and progressed, firstly, gender roles and gender relations did not change overnight and, secondly, the visual presentation of femininities and masculinities in the rapidly emerging non-socialist media changed much faster, and in some countries comparatively abruptly. A field of tension emerged between an intensified conservative gender ideology in *realia* and the visual representation of hypersexualized women in *utopia*. However, what did visual media suggest implementing instead of puritanical socialist morals? What all these journals had in common was the fact that they almost exclusively disseminated images of Western women. The fetishized bodies of western supermodels were meant to counteract previous socialist discourses on the quality of women.⁵ Probably typical for the wild 1990s was a more local, non-western masculinity type that has become synonymous with power and money through its association with bulletproof jeeps, dark sunglasses, and thick gold chains around the neck. He was the one who provided money for the home and education of the children and mastered the social and domestic space.⁶

Whereas ideals of Western femininities were disseminated by journals and magazines fast and seemingly without any reluctance immediately after the resignation of socialism, the visualization of post-socialist masculinities seemed to be rooted initially much more in local cultural contexts; but examples emerged conversely as well. Because of these contradictions, among the volume editors the idea emerged to organize a workshop funded by the EU project “Knowledge Exchange and Academic Cultures in the Humanities: Europe and the Black Sea Region, late 18th-21st Centuries (KEAC-BSR)”⁷, a consortium that is directed and managed by the two workshop conveners. The EU project emphasizes, among other things, gender dimensions of knowledge and cultural exchange in a global perspective – at end of the 20th or beginning of the 21st century – and critically questions seemingly one-dimensional west-east transfers without looking consciously at amalgamation processes of the global, the western, and the local,

⁴ Băban, Adriana. 2000. *Women’s Sexuality and Reproductive Behavior in Post-Ceaușescu Romania: A Psychological Approach*, in *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism*, edited by Gal, Susan and Gail Kligman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 239; Ibroscheva, Elza. 2013b. *Advertising, Sex, and Post-Socialism: Women, Media, and Femininity in the Balkans*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 115.

⁵ Nicolaescu, Mădălina. 1995. The Representation of Female Bodies in Romanian Journals for Women. *Canadian Women’s Studies* 16(1), 32-34.

⁶ Kirova, Milena and Kornelia Slavova. 2012. *Gender Identities in Transition: The Role of Popular Culture and the Media in Bulgaria After 1989*, in *Gendering Post-Socialist Transition. Studies of Changing Gender Perspectives*, edited by Daskalova, Krassimira. Vienna: Lit, 77.

⁷ <https://blacksearegion.eu/>

as well as the exploration of emerging, new, and fascinating interactions of local and Western, and more generally of global femininities and masculinities.

The workshop under the title of this special issue had been scheduled to take place at the University of Graz, March 12-13. When we fixed the date almost one year in advance, we could not anticipate that the novel coronavirus would spread and block public and academic activities throughout Europe. Two days before the scheduled opening speeches, the University of Graz announced a complete lockdown, as did other universities and countries during these days. Under the auspices of an unpredictable end of the crisis, we decided to compile this special issue instead of postponing the workshop for an indefinite period.

One of the research and teaching foci of the Institute of History, with whom we are affiliated, is gender history. Among our motivations mentioned before, it was our ambition to contribute to this focus and to enlarge its perspective by emphasising the social construction of femininities and masculinities with visual case studies from the Balkans and the South Caucasus. Gender studies and the study of femininities and masculinities are neither two separate fields, nor are they identical because gender research, among other things, usually focuses on historical and contemporary aspects, whereas the study of visual constructions of femininities and masculinities potentially also includes empirical materials on utopian perspectives – manhood and womanhood not as they are in reality but as they are supposed to be as ideal configurations, such as is displayed in advertisements, for instance.

Quite analogous to the term “gender,” the terms “masculinities” and “femininities” refer to the numerous ways in which manhood and womanhood are socially constructed within historical, social, and cultural contexts. They are results of socially, historically, and culturally determined behaviors and are formed under complex social influences during one’s lifetime. As only a small part of gender role differentiation is biologically determined,⁸ the stability of gender role patterns is almost entirely a matter of socialization. Socialization refers to how both girls and boys learn their places and roles in society.⁹ Since role norms are social facts, social processes can change them. This happens whenever the agents of socialization – family, school, work, or mass media – transmit new expectations.¹⁰

Probably the most frequently cited passages in the research history of femininities and masculinities are found in the final section of chapter 8 of the Australian sociologist’s Raewyn Connell’s 1987 book, “Gender and Power.”¹¹ In six pages, Connell introduces the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” and its relation to “nonhegemonic masculinities” and “emphasized femininity.” The subsequent canonization of her concept of hegemonic masculinity, however, also evoked serious criticism¹² – partly due to the fact that it was not fully elaborated

⁸ Connell, Raewyn W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 21.

⁹ Hofstede, Geert H. 2001. *Culture’s Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 298.

¹⁰ Connell, *Masculinities*, 21-8.

¹¹ Connell, Raewyn W. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

¹² See, e.g., Connell, Raewyn W. and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society* 19(6), 829-59; Beasley, Christine. 2008. Rethinking

in the few pages, and partly due to how gender scholars deployed it in historically decontextualized ways.¹³ In her later writings,¹⁴ she found opportunities to defend and to elaborate more on her concept.

One of the most fruitful refinement of her concept, relevant also to this study, was instead of postulating of a global hegemonic masculinity only, her concession of geographical differentiation of hegemonic masculinities because, in her own words, “we must understand that regional and local constructions of hegemonic masculinity are shaped by the articulation of [...] gender systems with global processes.” Consequently, she suggests analyzing empirically existing hegemonic masculinities at three levels: the local, the regional, and the global. The same would apply to femininities. “Global institutions pressure regional and local gender orders; while regional gender orders provide cultural materials adopted or reworked in global arenas and provide models of masculinity that may be important in local gender dynamics.”¹⁵

Meanwhile, considerable research has been conducted on the social constructions of femininities and masculinities in various world regions, especially in the previous two decades. As images play an increasingly large role, increasing efforts have been made to define visual rhetoric. Today, the social sciences are increasingly focusing on visual objects and examining the relationship between visual images and persuasion and how images act rhetorically on the viewer in an increasingly visual society.¹⁶

On the Balkans and South Caucasus, transnational and intermedia studies on the visual construction of femininities and masculinities scarcely exist. There is no research that attempts to cover both the Balkans and the South Caucasus. Therefore, I risk in my contribution the venture to tackle the two mentioned regions. This has not been my first attempt to include the two regions in my research in a comparative perspective, but the most challenging one. My study (“Visual Representations of Femininities and Masculinities – The Balkans and South Caucasus in Digital Age”) attempts to shed some fresh light on the stalled debate on the remarkable regression in gender equality in the region in the first two decades of post-socialism and in post-Kemalism. In doing so, I believe that discussing gender relations, femininities and masculinities, or both in the digital era is no longer complete without including the wide and thriving field of digital visibility.

One of few exceptions of transnational research on the Balkans constitutes a volume with a Southeast European perspective edited by Nirman Bamburać-

Hegemonic Masculinity in a Globalizing World. *Men and Masculinities* 11(1), 86-103; Elias, Juanita and Christine Beasley. 2009. Hegemonic Masculinity and Globalization: ‘Transnational Business Masculinities’ and Beyond. *Globalizations* 6(2), 281-96.

¹³ Messerschmidt, James W. and Michael A. Messner. 2018. *Hegemonic, Nonhegemonic, and “New” Masculinities*, in *Gender Reckonings: New Social Theory and Research*, edited by Messerschmidt, James W. et al. New York: New York University Press, 35-56.

¹⁴ See specially Connell and Messerschmidt, *Masculinity*.

¹⁵ Connell and Messerschmidt, *Masculinity*, 849-51.

¹⁶ Epure, Manuela and Ruxandra Vasilescu. 2014. Gendered Advertising: Shaping Self-Image to Visual Ads Exposure. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 4(1), 643-47.

Moranjak, Tarik Jusić, and Adla Isanović¹⁷ from 2006. The volume explores the stereotypical representation of women in print media and also contains contributions on visual representations, such as the article by Isanović on gender representation in some of the leading daily newspapers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia.¹⁸ More rare exceptions are Elza Ibroscheva's studies,¹⁹ which are outstanding because of her critical feminist focus on the staging of sexualised femininities in advertisements in post-socialist Bulgaria. In the Bulgarian media researcher's monography,²⁰ she extends her Bulgarian observations to the surrounding Balkan countries and to Eastern Europe alternately. In her research designated for our volume ("From Socialist Amazons to Bodies on Full Display: Gender Stereotypes in Bulgarian advertising during socialism and the post-socialist transition") she aims to explore the current trends of "sexing" the look of women in Bulgarian and Eastern European advertising in an attempt to analyze the gender identity transformation that has taken place in the years of the post-communist transition. Her essay is important because with her media and cultural studies approach she addresses an area that has been largely overlooked in academic research.

Whereas Bulgaria and Turkey are relatively well studied regarding the visual representation of femininities and masculinities, the South Caucasus remains an almost empty field in this regard. One of the reasons for this lack of research is that this kind of study, and more broadly gender studies as such, did not exist in the socialist period. Therefore, in the initial post-socialist period there was a significant backlog that had to be tackled from scratch; visibility studies had to wait, especially in the South Caucasus. It has been rather difficult to identify potential contributors from the region for contributing to our issue. Thanks to Baku based Zumrud Jalilova Hutton, who was appointed Gender Equality Consultant and teaches courses on gender relations at Baku State University, we have found an excellent author from the region. In her contribution to our issue ("Traditional Gender Roles Enacted by Men and Women in Azerbaijani Cinema") she suggests understanding Azeri society and its considerable gender problems through the prism of movie and television pictures. Her article provides analyses of scenarios – often disparaging portrayals of women – that contribute to the under-representation of females in positions of leadership and build stereotypical expectations.

¹⁷ Bamburać-Moranjak, Nirman / Jusić, Tarik and Adla Isanović. (eds.). 2006. *Stereotyping: Representation of Women in Print Media in South East Europe*. Sarajevo: Mediacentar.

¹⁸ Isanović, Adla. 2006. *Media Discourse as a Male Domain: Gender Representation in the Daily Newspapers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia*, in *Stereotyping: Representation of Women in Print Media in South East Europe*, edited by Bamburać-Moranjak, Nirman / Jusić, Tarik and Adla Isanović, Sarajevo: Mediacentar, 43-79.

¹⁹ Ibroscheva, Elza. 2013a. The Unbearable Lightness of Advertising: Culture, Media and the Rise of Advertising in Socialist Bulgaria. *Consumption Markets & Culture* 16(3), 290-310. Ibroscheva, Elza. 2015. *Turbo-Sexuality or Turbo-Sexism: The Emerging Standards of Beauty in the Pop-Folk Music of the Balkans*, in *Genre and the (Post-) Communist Woman: Analyzing Transformations of the Central and Eastern European Female Ideal*, edited by Andreescu, Florentina C. and Michael J. Shapiro. New York: Routledge, 148-64; Ibroscheva, Elza. 2012. *From 'Babushki' To 'Sexy Babes.'* *The Sexing-up of Bulgarian Women in Advertising*, in *Challenging Images of Women in the Media: Reinventing Women's Lives*, edited by Carilli, Theresa and Jane Campbell. Lanham: Lexington Books, 107-18. Ibroscheva, Elza. 2007. Caught Between East and West? Portrayals of Gender in Bulgarian Television Advertisements. *Sex Roles* 57, 409-18.

²⁰ Ibroscheva, *Advertising*.

Turkey is the only country in the region with a remarkable film industry – to exemplify, its current soap-opera production provides not only the domestic but the Balkan and Arabic markets with blockbuster movies. Therefore, one of the most central aspects of visual construction of femininities and masculinities in Turkey, which is tackled in our issue by Hasan Gürkan’s contribution, has become its movie business. After two decades of decline, Turkish cinema experienced a revival in the 1990s with some films produced that had real success and managed to seduce new audiences. New film directors emerged with diverse perspectives and styles. In the early 2000s, the new support mechanisms for film production such as purchase by TV stations and deals with sponsors created a visible growth in film production.²¹ New quests replaced the concern of finding an audience and new themes were taken into account.²²

Despite this emerging new cinema culture, film production remained a male domain, and the few female filmmakers working in Turkey (and across the Balkan countries) did not explicitly subscribe to feminist ideas until the early 2000s.²³ Between 2005 and 2013, however, there was a sharp increase both in the number of women directors as well as in the number of films with feminist themes, with 47 women making 45 films reflecting a growing feminist discourse on women’s rights. This is related to the increasing number and strength of women’s organizations during the 2000s, and these directors usually offered subversive strategies of disrupting patriarchal culture. Another factor that positively contributed to the presence of women in the cinema industry were women’s film festivals. While many European countries do not even have one women’s film festival, Turkey has two: *Uçan Süpürge* (Flying Broom) in Ankara and *Filmmor* (Purple Film) in Istanbul. These festivals constitute an important platform for the visibility of women, especially those making movies.²⁴

Gürkan’s contribution to our issue (“The Status of Women as Subject in the Films of Contemporary Turkish Female Directors”) aims to reveal how female characters are positioned and represented in female directors’ films. The senior researcher at Istanbul Arel University uses four movies (released between 2012 and 2016) to exemplify his thesis that films produced by recent Turkish female directors can in fact be called women’s films since female directors approach women’s problems in Turkey’s patriarchal society quite differently than male directors do.

Another body of research literature deals with Islamic fashion and dress, including veiling, which is not only relevant for Turkey but also for other Balkan countries such as Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria. This thematic field was included in the spring 2020-workshop but, unfortunately, is not represented in our special issue because of the scheduled paper presenter’s time constraints conflicting with a very brief deadline. Generally speaking, Muslim women’s self-definitions as being veiled have been largely neglected.

²¹ Tanrıöver Uğur, Hulya. 2017. Women as Film Directors in Turkish Cinema. *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 24(4), 324-25.

²² Kara, Funda M. and Şakir Eşitti. 2017. Women in the Cinema of Nuri Bilge Ceylan. *CINEJ Cinema Journal* 6(2), 204.

²³ Iordanova, Dina. 1996-1997. Women in New Balkan Cinema: Surviving on the Margins. *Film Criticism* 21(2), 24-39.

²⁴ Tanrıöver Uğur, *Women*, 324-31.

Whilst textual-discursive modes have been at least addressed by research, visual ones have not yet attracted much research attention.²⁵ Among the many authors paying attention to veiling in Turkey, I would like to mention very few who have worked most consistently on related topics, such as Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger, professors of marketing and business administration²⁶ as well as the two geography professors, Banu Gökarıksel and Anna Secor.²⁷ Magda Crăciun, sociologist at University of Bucharest, emphasizes in her monography the area of conflict between Islamic scholars and the fashion business in the name of religion.²⁸

The last central field that should be mentioned here that impacts the visual construction of femininities and masculinities significantly is advertising. This field is represented in this issue by Eirini Tsihla from University of Western Macedonia. The nature of the relationship between gender-related values in society and gender stereotyping in advertising is the focus of a long-standing debate. According to the “mirror” argument, advertising reflects values that already prevail in a cultural context. Therefore, the impact of advertising seems to be insignificant because the men and women featured in advertisements have been typecast to adhere to the dominant concepts of gender roles. Conversely, the “mold” argument postulates that advertising shapes and affects the values and views of the social reality of its target audience. According to this approach, advertising tends to incorporate stereotypes presented by the media into its own concepts of reality to match the promoted images. Ultimately, this process contours individual behaviors in such a way that even the relationships of human beings with themselves, their bodies, and their partners are influenced by advertising.²⁹

While Tsihla enriches this issue via a general overview on gender representation in advertising (“The Changing Roles of Gender in Advertising: Past, Present, and Future”), her knowledge is based on empirical research, for instance on Cyprus, (together with Yorgos Zotos), conducted 2011-12 based on consumer magazines. Their survey concluded that females were no longer primarily cast in traditional roles that denote gender clichés like “dependency” and “housewife”; the overwhelming proportion of female models served mere decorative or alluring purposes. The study, moreover, aligned with previous research, which acknowledged some progress in the portrayal of women in print

²⁵ Piela, Anna. 2010. Muslim Women’s Photographic Self-Representations on the Internet. *Heidelberg Journal of Religion on the Internet* 4(1), 91.

²⁶ For instance, Sandıkçı, Özlem and Güliz Ger. 2010. Veiling in Style: How Does a Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable? *Journal of Consumer Research* 37(1), 15-36.

²⁷ For instance, Gökarıksel, Banu and Anna Secor. 2014. The Veil, Desire, and the Gaze: Turning the Inside Out. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40(1), 177-200.

²⁸ Crăciun, Magdalena. 2017. *Islam, Faith, and Fashion: The Islamic Fashion Industry in Turkey*. London: Bloomsbury.

²⁹ Nina-Pazarzi, Eleni and Michael Tsangaris. 2008. Constructing Women’s Image in TV Commercials: The Greek Case. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 15(1), 29-50; Kotseva, Maria. 2014. *TV Commercial Representation of Women in Italy and Bulgaria in View of the EU Fight Against Gender Stereotypes*. *Quaderni di Donne & Ricerca* 33/34. Torino; Zotos, Yorgos and Eirini Tsihla. 2014. Female Portrayals in Advertising: Past Research, New Directions. *International Journal on Strategic Innovative Marketing* 1, 9-26.

advertisements, which slightly mirrored changes in the type of stereotyping, but not its extent.³⁰

The purposes of Tsihla's contribution to our issue is to provide an overview of the early and recent pertinent literature, to present methodological considerations to be employed in the investigation of gender portrayals in print advertisements, and to highlight important areas for future research endeavors. She identifies femvertising and dadvertising as new role stereotypes in Western magazines. Femvertising underlines the "sexually powerful" woman who is in control and gets what she wants because she is sexually attractive, as opposed to being sexually objectified to be looked at or consumed for male gratification. Dadvertising, however, is used to describe commodified representations of fatherhood that suggest that the ideal man is an involved parent and emotionally vulnerable partner.

Unfortunately, an ever-increasing field of visual construction of femininities and masculinities, the Internet, with all its social network sites, and all the other presentation opportunities, must be disregarded in this issue. In fact, the Internet has become the most important agent and transmitter of visualizations because it unites all media, including its advertising. Its apparent endlessness has become a problem for scientific research because research corpora have become hard to define and to delineate. Besides that, for the Balkans and South Caucasus no major study on visualization of femininities and masculinities appears on the web via the major search engines. We can only patiently wait for research projects to cover this field and fill a major research gap.

To conclude, this special issue on the visual representation of femininities and masculinities in digital age focuses on the Balkans and South Caucasus – a region that still lacks studies on gender relations, patriarchally structured dominance, women's systematic subordination, and, related to and beyond that, studies on the social construction of femininities and masculinities. This special issue of Contemporary Southeastern Europe can cover neither all important construction aspects and mechanisms nor all relevant media. However, this was neither the intention of the aforementioned Spring 2020 workshop nor the purpose of this issue. Rather, the underlying intention is to raise attention to an interdisciplinary field that has not received sufficient recognition by scholars of various disciplines that are involved in the study of Southeastern Europe, such as history, sociology, gender studies, religious studies, media studies, and visual culture studies. We as editors hope that this special issue might inspire some of its readers to consider including analyses of visual construction of femininities and masculinities in their research and thus, like a domino effect, seduce others to continue.

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³⁰ Tsihla, Eirini and Yorgos Zotos. 2016. Gender Portrayals Revisited: Searching for Explicit and Implicit Stereotypes in Cypriot Magazine Advertisements. *International Journal of Advertising* 35(6), 983-1007.

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