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Perspectives from India, Russia and the USA

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ENGLISH SUMMARY

Politics and the political in women's fashion magazines:

Perspectives from India, Russia and the USA

The central theme of this thesis is a broad engagement of women's fashion and lifestyle media with politics and the political. In the first quarter of the 21st century, fashion media's coverage of political and social issues, although still largely perceived as novel and unusual, has become ubiquitous. The thesis focuses on the increased visibility of political coverage in fashion media, and its main research questions concern how politics and the political are expressed in fashion publications, and what change the newly sharpened focus on politics signifies in the genre of the fashion magazine. To address these questions, the research examines how fashion publications' political coverage relates to locally and globally shifting views on citizenship, activism, and civic duty, while also considering how this coverage aligns with the traditional genre of the fashion magazine. The study explores the conflation of spectacle, activism, consumption, and politics that characterises the current moment, alongside the exigencies, limitations, and historically gendered nature of fashion media.

The study focuses on the time span between late 2019 and early 2023, and analyses political discourses in fashion media situating them within wider political and cultural contexts. It is based on data from three countries – India, Russia and the USA, and draws on examples from nine mainstream fashion and lifestyle publications for women. In these three countries, lifestyle media have developed in very different ways, under very different historical and cultural circumstances, but what is characteristic of all three societies is the prominence of political divisiveness, polarisation and hostility. These are societies in turmoil, with democracy in varying stages of peril, and their mainstream media are affected by misinformation and polarisation, are used to justify political ends and goals, endorse policies or disseminate propaganda. This work closely examines how different socio-cultural circumstances impact the magazines' coverage of politics and the political,

while also exploring the consistency (or lack thereof) in political coverage across the globe and among international titles.

The thesis begins with the *Introduction*, where I outline the primary and secondary research questions. Here, I explain my understanding of politics and the political, provide theoretical perspectives on recurring terms and issues throughout the thesis, and define the genre of the fashion magazine. I also elaborate on my choice of methodology and explain the discursive analytic approach I apply throughout the thesis.

The following three chapters of this work are dedicated to political discourses in Indian, Russian and U.S. fashion publications for women. Each chapter delineates a scope of salient themes and discourses that recur across the publications. Thus, the second, which examines three Indian fashion publications, focuses on the discourses around women's role in society, Indian nation, and diversity and inclusion. It reflects on fashion media's ambivalent relationship with the ideology of Hindu fundamentalism promoted by India's government and mainstream media, as different fashion media either reinforce or repudiate it, depending on the context. The third chapter addresses political discourses in Russia's three fashion and lifestyle publications – these are discourses around the political situation in Russia, relationship between Russia and the West, and the so-called 'new ethics' (a Russian term that loosely refers to matters associated with women's empowerment, inclusivity, diversity, sustainability). This chapter highlights how fashion media resist the anti-Western discourses advanced by Russia's autocratic government, while also chronicling the precarious and often impossible nature of fashion magazines' engagement with politics amid censorship and repression.

The fourth chapter, focusing on U.S. fashion publications, explores discourses around U.S. American identity, 'us' vs 'them', which reflect a worsening polarisation in US society. It also delves into the 'neoliberalization' of political discourses, exploring in greater detail some of the themes introduced in the previous chapters. This chapter engages with the ambivalence of political coverage in women's fashion publications and the limitations imposed on fashion media's engagement with politics by the conventions of the fashion magazine genre.

In the *Conclusion* to the thesis, I summarise my observations about the modes, characteristics and limitations of political coverage in fashion media for women. I reflect on the emergence of global political discourses in fashion magazines and how differently they are approached across countries and publications. As I outline the global similarities and differences in political discourses, I also comment on the dominant and secondary discourses across the analysed publications and address the evolving nature of the fashion magazine as a genre.

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Politiek en het politieke in modetijdschriften voor vrouwen:

Perspectieven uit India, Rusland en de Verenigde Staten

Het centrale thema van deze scriptie is de brede betrokkenheid van vrouwenmode- en lifestylemedia bij politiek en het politieke. In het eerste kwart van de 21e eeuw is de berichtgeving van modetijdschriften over politieke en sociale kwesties, hoewel nog steeds grotendeels als nieuw en ongewoon ervaren, alomtegenwoordig geworden. Deze scriptie analyseert de toegenomen zichtbaarheid van politieke berichtgeving in modetijdschriften en de belangrijkste onderzoeksvragen betreffen hoe politiek en het politieke worden uitgedrukt in modepublicaties en welke verandering de nieuw verscherpte focus op politiek betekent voor het genre van het modetijdschrift. Om deze vragen te beantwoorden, examineert het onderzoek hoe de politieke berichtgeving van modepublicaties zich verhoudt tot lokaal en globaal veranderende opvattingen over burgerschap, activisme en burgerlijke verantwoordelijkheid, terwijl ook wordt gekeken naar hoe deze berichtgeving past binnen het traditionele genre van het modetijdschrift.

De studie onderzoekt de vermenging van spektakel, activisme, consumptie en politiek die kenmerkend is voor het huidige moment, naast de eisen, beperkingen en historisch genderspecifieke aard van mode media. De studie richt zich op de periode tussen eind 2019 en begin 2023 en analyseert het politiek discours in modetijdschriften door ze binnen bredere politieke en culturele contexten te plaatsen. Het is gebaseerd op gegevens uit drie landen – India, Rusland en de VS – en put uit voorbeelden van negen mainstream mode- en lifestylepublicaties voor vrouwen. In deze drie landen hebben lifestylemedia zich op zeer verschillende manieren ontwikkeld, onder zeer verschillende historische en culturele omstandigheden, maar wat kenmerkend is voor alle drie de samenlevingen is de prominente aanwezigheid van politieke verdeeldheid, polarisatie en vijandigheid. Dit

zijn samenlevingen in beroering, met democratieën in verschillende stadia van gevaar, waar mainstream media worden beïnvloed door desinformatie en polarisatie en gebruikt worden om politieke doelen te rechtvaardigen, beleid te onderschrijven of propaganda te verspreiden. Dit werk onderzoekt nauwgezet hoe verschillende sociaal-culturele omstandigheden de politieke berichtgeving van de tijdschriften beïnvloeden, terwijl ook de consistentie (of het gebrek daaraan) van politieke berichtgeving wereldwijd en tussen internationale titels wordt onderzocht.

De scriptie begint met de Inleiding, waar ik een overzicht van de primaire en secundaire onderzoeksvragen geef. Hier leg ik mijn begrip van politiek en het politieke uit, bied ik theoretische perspectieven op terugkerende termen en kwesties door de hele scriptie heen, en definieer ik het genre van het modetijdschrift. Ik werk ook mijn keuze voor methodologie uit en leg de discursieve analytische benadering uit die ik door de hele scriptie toepas.

De volgende drie hoofdstukken van dit werk zijn gewijd aan het politieke discours in Indiase, Russische en Amerikaanse modepublicaties voor vrouwen. Elk hoofdstuk schetst een reeks opvallende thema's en terugkerende discussies in deze publicaties. Het tweede hoofdstuk, dat drie Indiase modepublicaties onderzoekt, richt zich op thema's rond de rol van vrouwen in de samenleving, de Indiase natie en diversiteit en inclusie. Het reflecteert op de ambivalente relatie van modemedia met de ideologie van het hindoeïstisch fundamentalisme, zoals gepromoot door de Indiase regering en mainstream media. Afhankelijk van de context versterken of verwerpen verschillende modepublicaties deze ideologie. Het derde hoofdstuk behandelt politieke thema's in drie Russische mode- en lifestylepublicaties, zoals de binnenlandse politieke situatie, de relatie tussen Rusland en het Westen en de zogenaamde 'nieuwe ethiek'. Deze Russische term verwijst losjes naar kwesties rondom de emancipatie van vrouwen, inclusiviteit, diversiteit en duurzaamheid. Dit hoofdstuk belicht hoe modemedia weerstand bieden aan het antiwesterse discours dat door de autocratische Russische regering wordt bevorderd, terwijl het ook de precaire en vaak onmogelijke aard van politieke betrokkenheid van modetijdschriften beschrijft te midden van censuur en repressie.

Het vierde hoofdstuk, dat zich richt op Amerikaanse modepublicaties, onderzoekt thema's rond de Amerikaanse identiteit, 'wij' versus 'zij', die de sterker wordende polarisatie in de Amerikaanse samenleving weerspiegelen. Het verdiept zich ook in de 'neoliberalisering' van het politieke discours, waarbij enkele van de in eerdere hoofdstukken geïntroduceerde thema's in meer detail worden onderzocht. Dit hoofdstuk behandelt de ambivalentie van politieke berichtgeving in vrouwenpublicaties en de beperkingen die worden opgelegd aan de politieke betrokkenheid van modemedia door de conventies van het genre van het modetijdschrift.

In de conclusie van de scriptie vat ik mijn observaties samen over de manieren, kenmerken en beperkingen van politieke berichtgeving in modepublicaties voor vrouwen. Ik reflecteer op de opkomst van globale politieke discoursen in modetijdschriften en hoe deze op verschillende manieren worden benaderd in verschillende landen en publicaties. Terwijl ik de wereldwijde overeenkomsten en verschillen in politieke discoursen schets, geef ik ook commentaar op de dominante en secundaire in de geanalyseerde publicaties en bespreek ik de evoluerende aard van het modetijdschrift als genre.