

“GLOSSY” POLITICIANS: PORTRAYING WOMEN POLITICIANS IN ROMANIAN CONSUMER MAGAZINES

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Abstract

Women consumer magazines (glossies) represent the most important part of the specialized media all over the world. The main ingredients of their editorial “recipe” are the positive tone of the articles, and the optimistic, yet shallow approach to all the theme/subjects covered. Magazines are considered to be beautiful objects that inspire people to cherish them.

Women magazines have been criticized in feminist media studies for portraying women in a stereotyped way and for encouraging a consumerist behavior among them. The role models offered by these media are mainly taken from the show business and fashion industry. Women politician are rarely present in the pages of these publications, especially in countries as Romania where the political participation of women is one of the lowest in Europe.

The paper presents in the first part official figures regarding the political participation of Romanian women, and it discusses the results of the most important academic studies on women and media. A previous research showed, for example, that in a four years period, three important Romanian magazines published only 9 article presenting women politicians. The general assumption in magazines desks (and in the society) is that politics is a dirty business that does not match the beautiful world of magazines.

The second part will focus on a case study, considered to be relevant for explaining the general image of women politicians and politics in Romanian consumer magazines. A visual analysis (from the popular culture perspective) will be done to Elena Udrea’s pictorial feature for Tabu (Taboo) magazine (November 2011). The choice of the case study was motivated by the following reasons: Elena Udrea is a controversial, yet successful politician, she has impersonated popular culture icons (Madonna, Jackie, Cleopatra) and the feature has generated many positive and negative comments in media.

Keywords: *women politicians, consumer magazines, popular culture, icons, Romania*

Introduction

Women magazines have been always criticized in feminist media studies for portraying women in a stereotyped way and for encouraging a consumerist behavior². The role models offered by these media are mainly taken from the show business and fashion industry: famous actresses and actors, models, singers usually pose in magazines.

Women politician are rarely present in the pages of these publications, especially in countries as Romania where the political participation of women is one of the lowest in Europe. Nevertheless, women magazines (also known as ‘glossies’) are one of the most successful editorial segments within the magazine industry all over the world, with millions of readers and billions of US dollars

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Acknowledgments: This work was supported by the strategic grant POSDRU/89/1.5/S/62259, Project „Applied social, human and political sciences” co-financed by the European Social Fund within the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

² Gaye Tuchman et al., *Hearth & Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Janice Winship, *Inside Women’s Magazines* (Pandora, 1987); Liesbet Van Zoonen, *Feminist Media Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 1994); Joke Hermes, *Reading Women’s Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002); Anna Gough-Yates, *Understanding Women’s Magazines: Publishing, markets and readership* (London: Routledge, 2003).

from advertising³. Women's magazines are also important in building gender identity, being the one of the most important pillars of "the social construction of womanhood today"⁴. Therefore, the researcher must focus on these media, taking into account their major contribution to the socialization of girls and young women, all over the world.

The goal of this paper is to show how the Romania consumer magazines are portraying women politicians. The research is based on a case study methodological approach, and it will try to answer the above question by doing a visual analysis from the popular culture perspective of a pictorial feature from a Romanian magazine. The hypothesis of the paper is that editors of women magazine feel that politics and glossies do not match. Being in the situation of presenting a woman politician, magazines will draw attention on her physical aspect. The articles tend to focus on the woman as an attractive person, not as professional, although editors' declared intention is not to be gender biased and stereotypical. "In general, though, women's magazines speak the language of 'popular feminism' – assertive, seeking success in work and relationships, demanding the right to both equality and pleasure."⁵ They actually want to empower their readers by distributing powerful women as role models.

Women in decision-making. Women in media

Currently, European statistical data regarding women's participation in decision-making show that the number of women MPs in Romania is one of the lowest in Europe: 10 percents⁶. The situation has been the same in the last 20 years after the fall of communism. In 1992, for example, women represented only 4% out the total number of MPs. Ten years after, in 2004, there were only 50 women in the Parliament and 419 men – the percentage doubled (10%), but it remained low, compared to other countries in region, and to the general distribution of women and men in the Romanian society (51%-49%)⁷.

Women are also underrepresented in other key positions in decision making: local and national public authorities and they cannot efficiently intervene against procedures, laws or legislative initiatives that are or may be prejudicial to women. In political parties, women are kept in unimportant positions, marginalized and isolated in internal structures like women organizations⁸.

The research recently conducted in Romania has shown that women's interests are not on the public agenda, and the social exclusion of women is a reality⁹. Women are generally not taken in consideration in decision-making process. The access of women to the public sphere is limited – they are bystanders, not active participants. "Women in politics adopt – willingly or unwillingly – the patriarchal agenda and the masculine style of doing politics."¹⁰ Therefore, the political parties do not include women's problems on their agenda. On the other hand, media tend to follow the public agenda set by political leaders, ignoring most of time topics important to women's lives.

³ Tim Holmes and Liz Nice, *Magazine Journalism*, chapter2: The political economy of magazines (London: Sage Publications, 2012).

⁴ Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity*, 187.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/politics/national-parliaments/index_en.htm

⁷ Oana Baluta, "Reprezentare 'in oglinda'", in: *Gen si putere. Partea leului in politica romaneasca*, ed. Oana Baluta (Iasi: Polirom, 2006), 140.

⁸ Baluta, "Reprezentare", 140-142.

⁹ For a pertinent discussion on this subject see: Oana Baluta, Alina Dragolea, and Alice Iancu, *Gen si interese politice. Teorii si practice* (Iasi: Polirom, 2007).

¹⁰ Mihaela Miroiu, *Drumul catre autonomie. Teorii politice feministe* (Iasi: Polirom, 2004), 221.

According to research reports on women and media¹¹, gender stereotypes in Romanian media could be one of the roots of the low level of women's political representation. "Women in public life are not only less visible than men, but judged according to different standards: (...) family life and physical aspects", concluded Daniela Roventa-Frumusani¹². Women politicians and men politicians' wives are equally represented in Romania media. When it comes to role models, women in media are portrayed as stars (VIPs, singers, actresses), and housewives. Newspaper and TV news present women as prostitutes, agriculture workers, and homemakers. Business women and politicians are rarely subject of hard news stories¹³.

In television political talk shows, women politicians tend to embrace the values of a patriarchal and conservative society. The topics of discussion are influenced by the public agenda set by the men politicians. The political solutions proposed by women MPs in television talk shows are "an interesting mixture of conservatism and gender empowerment". On the other hand, the physical aspect of women politicians becomes, in some cases, a topic of discussion in the talk shows, along the political subjects¹⁴.

Magazines as beautiful objects. Politics as a dirty business

Women consumer magazines (also known as glossies) represent the most important part of the specialized media all over the world. The financial force is given by the perfect symbiosis with the advertising industry, especially with the beauty products segment. The main ingredients of their editorial 'recipe' are the positive tone of the articles, and the optimistic, yet shallow approach to all the theme/subjects covered. Magazines are considered to be beautiful objects that inspire people to collect and cherish them¹⁵.

A magazine is an aesthetic object. It conveys a message to the reader through its format and page quality – a premium or up-market publication will be glossy and have a large format that allows layouts with high quality photographs¹⁶. "The paper used by, say, consumer monthlies such as *GQ* or *Harpers* and *Queen* is expensive but helps to establish the brand image of the magazines and is an essential support for the high quality artwork which is a part of the attraction of those publications"¹⁷. Therefore, many journalistic resources are invested in making an appealing layout, on taking interesting pictures, and innovating graphic design.

On the other hand, politics is, traditionally, considered to be a dirty business. Politicians are portrayed as being selfish, corrupt, and greedy. This is one of the reasons why women have been advised not to participate in political fights. In past, they were prevented to get involved in the dirty political world. One historical account could help us understand the Romanian situation: in 1930 the daily *Universul* (the Universe) conducted a journalistic inquiry on how important is to allow women to participate in the political life of Romania. Men politicians (e.g Constantin Argetoianu, A. Em. Lahovary, Al. Bratescu-Voinesti) declared that women and politics do not match, and the main reason was the vicious nature of political fights, characterized by "anti-Christian feelings", "intense

¹¹ Ana Bulai and Irina Stanciugelu, *Gen si reprezentare sociala* (Bucuresti: Politeia, 2004); Laura Grunberg, ed., *Mass media despre sexe: Aspecte privind stereotipurile de gen in mass media din Romania* (Bucuresti: Tritonic, 2005); *Imaginea femeii in societatea romaneasca: raport de analiza media* (Bucuresti: ALTFEM, 2011).

¹² Daniela Roventa-Frumusani, "Identitate feminina si discursul mediatic", in: *Femei, cuvinte si imagini* (Iasi: Polirom, 2001), 64.

¹³ According to the conclusions of the report quoted above: "Mass-media despre sexe", 56-57, 76-77.

¹⁴ Romina Surugiu, "Femei si doamne in talk-show-ul politic din Romania", in: *Gen si putere*, 229-230.

¹⁵ Losowsky, Andrew, ed. *We Love Magazines* (Luxembourg: Editions Mike Koedinger SA, 2007); Tim, Holmes, "Mapping the magazine", in: *Journalism Studies* (Vol. 8, No. 4, 2007, 510-521); Charon, Jean-Marie, *La presse magazine* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).

¹⁶ Tim, Holmes, "Magazine design", in *The Magazines Handbook*, Jenny McKay (London: Routledge, 2001), 165.

¹⁷ Jenny, McKay, *Magazine Handbook*, 144.

emotions” and “not so noble intentions”. “It is a privilege for women to avoid them”, concluded one interviewee¹⁸.

In present days, politics and its fights are also associated by people with negative issues. In a recent interview (December 2011) the UNDP representative in Romania, Yesim Oruc, declared that women in Romania feel that politics is “dark and dirty” and do not want to get involved in it. Nevertheless, Oruc said that if women participate in the political field, the politics will transform in a positive way¹⁹.

Romanian politicians in glossies

The topic of women politicians’ image in magazines has not been approached by many Romanian researchers, as the general theme of women’s representation in media is still under scrutiny. One exception is a master dissertation dedicated to women politicians in glossy magazines²⁰. The research showed that on a four year time span only 9 articles on women politicians were published in three different magazines (*The One*, *Tango* and *Felicia*).

The underrepresentation of women politicians in women magazines reinforces by itself the gender stereotypes related to politics. By ignoring it, women magazines send to their readers the message the idea that politics is men’s business and women seldom adventure in this domain. “We do not usually present women politicians, for two main reasons: the readers are fed up with politics and we work at a lifestyle magazine that has nothing to do with politics”, commented the editor-in-chief of *The One* magazine, Doru Iftime, quoted in the mentioned paper. “I’m sorry, but women politicians are not part of our editorial interest and do not represent topics for the stories in our magazine”, explained the editor-in-chief of *Felicia* magazine, Carmen Muntean.

The research conducted by Adela Rapeanu showed that all nine features were interviews. There were selected only young women politicians, attractive and the focus was mainly on their looks and their private life rather than on their political activity. Three of them (Daciana Sarbu, Lavinia Sandru and Raluca Turcan) were presented as mothers, in one article entitled “Politics and maternity”.

Only one person – Elena Udrea - was twice interviewed in a women magazine (*The One*). “We placed twice Mrs. Udrea on the cover, because she is very much alike the magazine’s profile: chic, fashion-driven, controversial – she is a character that perfectly serves the commercial and advertising interests of the magazine” explained Doru Iftime, editor-in-chief *The One* magazine. That explanation and other reasons detailed above has taken us to the idea that one of Elena Udrea’s pictorial features could be the material of a pertinent academic case study on the subject of woman politicians in glossy magazines.

Case study – posing for a glossy women magazine

The academic literature considers the case study to be a “comprehensive research strategy”²¹ which takes into consideration both the social phenomenon and its context. The advantage of type of empirical inquiry is that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”²².

¹⁸ “Sa se inscrie femeile in partidele politice?”, *Ziarul nostru*, IV (2), February, 1930.

¹⁹ Ana Ilie, “Femeile din Romania, lumina in politica intunecata si murdara”, *ziare.com*, December 13, 2011, accessed January 24, 2012, <http://www.ziare.com/social/romani/femeile-din-romania-lumina-in-politica-intunecata-si-murdara-interviu-video-ii-1138738>.

²⁰ Adela Rapeanu, *Politica revistelor pentru femei privind femeile din politică* (Unpublished Master diss., University of Bucharest, January 2010).

²¹ Robert K. Yin, *Case study research. Design and Methods*, third edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 14.

²² Yin, *Case study*, 13.

In the present paper, we comment upon a single case, considered to be representative or typical for our theme. We follow a research protocol designed for case studies, which includes five steps: asking a question, formulating the propositions, identifying the units of analysis, establishing the logic link between the data and the propositions, finding the criteria for interpreting the findings²³.

The first step of the study case is the question, formulated as it follows: “How are women politician portrayed in women’s magazines?” The study propositions lead us to the second and the third question: “Why choosing Elena Udrea’s pictorial in *Tabu (Taboo)* magazine to be relevant for the portrayal of women politician in Romanian magazines?”, “How to analyze the pictorial in order to obtain fail proof conclusions?” The third step (finding the units of analysis: the photographs of Elena Udrea in *Tabu* magazine) leads us to another question: “Why images are more important than words, in this particular case?”

Elena Udrea, age of 39, is a controversial Romanian politician, with a successful political career. She is an important member of the ruling Democratic Liberal Party. She has been a MP (the Lower Chamber) since 2008 and the minister of Regional Development and Tourism since 2009. Previously, she was the counselor of president Traian Basescu. Her political activity was characterized by the media as being daring, as she is assertive and has been a main part of important political scandals²⁴. On the other hand, she maintained a provocative attitude, in order to draw media attention on herself. She knitted in a TV studio; she invited journalists to see her cleaning the floor with a mop or cooking a Romanian traditional dish. In the same time, she wears designer clothes and shoes²⁵. Her motto – as it appears in the pictorial taken into discussion – “You can be in politics on high heels”. She also stressed the idea of challenging cultural stereotypes related to blondes. In other words, she wants to be feminine, doing a man’s job.

The pictorial feature was published in November issue 2011, of *Tabu (Taboo)* Romanian magazine. The magazine itself has a strong editorial strategy of being “the most courageous women’s publication”²⁶, by constantly breaking taboos and challenging stereotypes from the Romanian society. One example is illustrative: it is the only magazine for women with a column for gay people. The concept of the main story in every *Tabu* issue (and of the cover) is to show public figures - women (in most of the cases) and men - playing a role or impersonating a well-known figure. The persons are always selected from the showbiz industry, with a few exceptions.

The feature (defined by media professionals as a long, comprehensive, narrative story, typical for magazines) of Elena Udrea consists of an interview and a series of studio photographs. The article is considered to be relevant for an academic case study for three different reasons:

The character. Elena Udrea is the most prominent woman politician of the moment. She is young and controversial. She has also posed for *Tabu*, in September 2008, and twice for *The One* magazine, in 2006 and 2009.

The story. It is the main feature of the November issue of *Tabu*. The image of the cover is a part of the photo session taken for the feature. The editorial theme of the issue is “powerful women”. The main cover-line is: “Elena Udrea, parables of power”. The title of the feature within the

²³ Yin, *Case study*, 21.

²⁴ Romanian journalists claim that she provoked a political crisis in January 2007, when she made public a personal note sent by the prime-minister Calin Popescu-Tariceanu to the president Traian Basescu. (See for example: Adriana Dutulescu, “Istoria relației Elena Udrea – Traian Băseșcu”, *jurnalul.ro*, November 4, 2009, accessed January 31, 2012, <http://www.jurnalul.ro/special/istoria-relatiei-elena-udrea-traian-basescu-526070.htm> and Razvan Braileanu, “Cronologia ‘afacerii biletul’”, *Revista 22*, January 26, 2007).

²⁵ “International media writes about Romanian minister Udrea’s expensive D&G dress”, *romania-insider.com*, August 18, 2011, accessed January 31, 2012, <http://www.romania-insider.com/international-media-writes-about-romanian-minister-udreas-expensive-gd-dress/31485/>.

²⁶ This is the slogan of the publication, inserted under the logo, on the magazine cover.

magazine is: “Elena Udrea, I can do politics on high heels”. The magazine also contains another feature about powerful women (“25 Romanian women famous worldwide”).

The context. When interviewed for magazines, celebrities usually tend to establish or maintain a myth about them²⁷. In this particular interview, Elena Udrea acts as she wants to follow the trend: she behaves like a celebrity in process of establishing a myth.

The analysis will try to identify the pattern matching between the theories of women politicians’ representations in media, previous researches done on the popular culture field and the data collected from the present research work.

Taking into consideration that a magazine is – first of all – a visual medium, we will focus our analysis on the photographs from the feature. The five pictures shot for the pictorial feature will be discussed from the popular culture perspective, which we consider appropriate in the given context. In our opinion, every picture of the feature is overloaded with signs and mythical elements conveyed by the mass cultural products (such as Hollywood movies). The pictures refer to contemporary public (political) figures – even the image of ancient queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, is a modern one, constructed in the twentieth century by the Hollywood productions.

Discussion

The pictorial feature²⁸ under discussion consists of seven photographs: (1) the cover photo – Elena Udrea impersonates Madonna, 2) the main photo of the article – Elena Udrea is Jackie Kennedy, 3) the first portrait – Elena Udrea is Cleopatra, 4) the second portrait – Elena Udrea is Eva Peron, 5) the third portrait – Elena Udrea is Margaret Thatcher, 6) the fourth portrait – Elena Udrea as herself, 7) the fifth portrait – Elena Udrea as herself.

We will mainly analyze the five pictures in which Elena Udrea impersonates powerful women, as these images send the most powerful message to the readers. The function of the two photos of Elena Udrea as herself is to illustrate the interview, so they are left aside in the present analysis.

The cover photo, inspired by Madonna’s cover of *Vanity Fair*, US edition (May, 2008) is powerful and meaningful. It is a full shot photograph (full body of person). The main photo of the feature (Jackie Kennedy) is a long shot, because it contains setting and other characters. The three portraits (Cleopatra, Eva Peron, and Margaret Thatcher) are medium close-up. In all three types of photos, the angle of the camera is normal (which implies neutrality), the composition is conventional and the lighting is somehow artificial, studio-like, even in Jackie Kennedy’s impersonation picture where the lighting might have been naturalistic (documentary style).

The portraits’ emphasis is on the face and the jewelry worn by Udrea. The key word is seduction. The distance of the camera to the subject implies even in the portraits’ case a social (not personal) relationship. The audience observes, but do not intrude²⁹. The conventional composition and the artificial lighting from all five pictures suggest a low degree of involvement of the subject (Elena Udrea) in the role-playing.

She is good-looking, but she does not act. She stands still, and she does not touch any object (her hands are at a certain distance to the green world globe in the cover photo). The camera caught no movement and no intention of the subject to move, even in pictures that imply action from the nature of their subject. In her attempt to be closer to the image of popular icons, Udrea fails to perform the roles of Jackie, Cleopatra or Evita, as the audience would have expected.

²⁷ McKay, *Magazine Handbook*, 117.

²⁸ The feature was realized under the coordination of the publisher Dan-Silviu Boerescu, well-known for being the editor-in-chief of *Playboy Romania*, for several years. The photographs were shot by Dragos Cristescu, and the interview was made by Ramona Pop.

²⁹ Nick Lacey, *Image and Representations: Key Concepts in Media Studies* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 23.

She is Madonna.

For magazines, the cover is the most prominent and useful selling tool, and the main carrier of the magazine's brand values³⁰. The feminist critique considers that: "The cover photograph then, insofar as it represents an editorial stance or identity, also reflects the ideological implications of content that in turn reflect the producers' perceptions of culturally agreed-upon rules, goals and values. In addition, producers emphasize cover photographs as potential sources of readers' identification, thereby reinforcing the importance attached to their selection and presentation."³¹

The cover photo of *Tabu* is not based on an original idea. The editors of the magazine chose to re-interpret a cover of Madonna in *Vanity Fair* US, May 2008 issue. The pop star and icon Madonna, who made a fortune from selling her sexy image, is posed in front of the world globe, in a provocative posture. The main cover-line is: "Madonna, unbowed, uncowed, still taking on the world". The feature, inside the magazine is entitled: "Madonnarama!" The *Vanity Fair* editorial concept was to introduce to the readers a reinvented Madonna, activist and filmmaker, involved in tackling issues as orphans in the Third World³².

The original image of Udrea as Madonna was altered, with the help of digital technology. A décolletage was inserted to the black dress worn by Elena Udrea. The retouching (denied by the magazine's editors) is obvious when someone compares the images from the making-off photo sessions to the images on the magazines. Journalists, e-readers, and bloggers negatively commented upon the change³³, although magazines pictures are retouched on a regular basis despite the ethical controversies related to this aspect³⁴.

Being Madonna could equally be a positive and negative thing. The positive aspect is that Madonna, as popular icon and a "commodity of the cultural industries" has the unique quality of being whatever the consumers want her to be³⁵. John Fiske, in his research on popular culture considered Madonna as an "exemplary popular text" and explained: "Madonna as a text, or even as a series of texts, is incomplete until she is put into social circulation. (...) She is an exemplary popular text because she is so full of contradictions – she contains the patriarchal meaning of feminine sexuality and the resisting ones that her sexuality is hers to use as she wishes in ways that do not require masculine approval. (...) she is excessive and obvious. (...) she is a provoker of meanings, (she is) a set of meanings in process."³⁶

In our context, Udrea's impersonation of Madonna may be interpreted as a statement of a powerful woman. She dominates the world and she enjoys the situation. She is self-assured, calm, and sexy.

But being Madonna could be a negative thing, too. Madonna is a pop star, and stars are defined in sociology as "the powerless elite"³⁷. Stars have limited institutional power, but are an object of interest, identification and collective evaluation: "their lives, their social relationships become an object of identification or a projection of the needs of the mass of the population, a

³⁰ John Morrish, *Magazine Editing. How to develop and manage a successful publication*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2003), 167.

³¹ Marjorie Ferguson, "Imagery and Ideology: The Cover Photographs of Traditional Women's Magazines", in: *Hearth&Home*, 99.

³² <http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/toc/contents-200805>.

³³ See, for example, the article and the readers' commentaries: "Iulia Albu: 'Elena Udrea a fost decoltata cu japca'", *realitatea.net*, November 2, 2011, accessed January 31, 2012, http://www.realitatea.net/iulia-albu-elena-udrea-a-fost-decoltata-cu-japca_883633.html.

³⁴ Tom Ang, "Magazine illustration and picture editing", in *Magazines handbook*, McKay, 171.

³⁵ "To be popular, the commodities of the cultural industries must not only be polysemic – that is capable of producing multiple meanings and pleasures – they must distribute by media whose modes of consumption are equally open and flexible". John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), 158

³⁶ Fiske, *Popular Culture*, 124.

³⁷ Francesco Alberoni, "The Powerless 'Elite': Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars", in: *Stardom and celebrity*, ed. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007), 65-77.

benchmark for positive and negative evaluation, the chance to have experience in the domain of the morally possible and a living testimony to the possibility of achieving a rise in personal status"³⁸. From this point of view, Udrea sends to the female audience a message of a powerful person, but not the message of a powerful politician.

She is Jackie.

The main picture of the pictorial feature inside the magazine reenacts the famous scene of President John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jackie Kennedy arrival at Love Field in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963. The *Tabu* editors took the original photo and placed Udrea's image instead of Jackie's. It is a photomontage, in journalistic terms. The impersonation of Jackie Kennedy has its ups and downs, too.

Jackie is the wife with the capital letter. Her public image was constructed in relation to her two famous husbands: John F. Kennedy and Aristotelis Onassis. Media of her time, especially magazines, turned her in a heroine. She was praised for her qualities, pitied for her loss and criticized for her life of luxury. Her image is associated to important messages for women: "women lose their identity in the men to whom they are married"³⁹, "women cannot be alone, and men both take care of women and bear responsibility for women's life"⁴⁰.

She is Cleopatra.

The "modern" image of Cleopatra has embedded traits taken from the mass cultural products (Hollywood movies and popular stories), originated in Shakespeare's work, and not on historical accounts.

In the twentieth century's popular culture, the most known Cleopatra is the character played by Elizabeth Taylor in 1963, in the Hollywood production *Cleopatra*, with Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton and Rex Harrison in the leading roles. The image of Cleopatra has important cultural stereotypes attached to it: extreme luxury and unorthodox methods of achieving and maintaining power (seducing a powerful man in order to obtain military support). Of course, the criticism is modern, her actions being immoral from the Christian point of view.

It is this image of modern Cleopatra that Elena Udrea impersonates in the pictorial from *Tabu* magazine. She wears the same make-up as Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra, her hair is done approximately the same and the dress and jewelry tries to match the movie character. Udrea associates herself with the image of ostentatious luxury.

She is Evita.

Eva Duarte de Peron was the First Lady of Argentina (1946-1952). She was a powerful woman in Argentina: during her husband's office she ran the Ministries of Labor and Health, and she was an important figure in the Peronist Party. Eva Peron was extremely admired by the working class (who were referred to as "descamisados" or "shirtless ones"). After her premature death, she was given the official title of "spiritual leader of the nation" by the Congress in Argentina.

Nevertheless, her image, as popular icon, was mainly constructed worldwide by Madonna's interpretation of Eva Peron, in the Oscar-winning Hollywood movie, *Evita* (1996). In the pictorial feature in *Tabu*, Udrea is impersonating Madonna playing Evita, and not the real Eva Peron, wife and politician.

"Hollywood cinema has a long standing tradition of constructing women as a spectacle for voyeuristic pleasure", commented Liesbet Van Zoonen⁴¹. In this context, Udrea as Evita is a

³⁸ Alberoni, "The Powerless Elite", 76.

³⁹ Carole Lopate, "Jackie!", in: *Hearth&Home*, 133.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴¹ Van Zoonen, *Feminist media studies*, 87.

beautiful woman, but not a politician. She also displays ambition, motivation, openness (she smiles to the camera).

She is Thatcher.

Also known as “The Iron Lady”, Margaret Thatcher was the prime minister of United Kingdom between 1979 and 1990. Thatcher’s though reform program led to high unemployment, racial tensions, and strikes. During her office, the controversial Falklands war took place. “Twenty five years to the day since she entered Downing Street, Margaret Thatcher remains a controversial figure. To her supporters, she was a revolutionary figure who transformed Britain’s stagnant economy, tamed the unions and re-established the country as a world power. Together with US presidents Reagan and Bush, she helped bring about the end of the Cold War. But her 11-year premiership was also marked by social unrest, industrial strife and high unemployment. Her critics claim British society is still feeling the effect of her divisive economic policies and the culture of greed and selfishness they allegedly promoted.”⁴²

Posing as Thatcher, Udrea puts the researcher in a difficult position. Thatcher cannot be discussed from the popular culture perspective. The portrait photo shows a brown hair lady, self composed and calm, with the typical British attitude. Udrea does not resemble Thatcher in the mentioned picture: she is too young and too attractive. The only explanation behind Udrea’s choice of impersonating Thatcher could be that she aspires to be Thatcher. That is: to be a powerful politician.

Conclusions

The hypothesis mentioned in the introduction is validated. The feminist media research should take into consideration the context of journalistic text and image production. In our case, the authorial intent was to introduce to audience a powerful woman. The magazine has proposed an editorial theme focused on powerful women and cast Elena Udrea in the main role. However, the oppositional reader position (in Stuart Hall words) leads to a not-so-powerful woman, trapped in a stereotypical world of meanings.

The message of the pictorial feature is characterized by ambiguity. She impersonated powerful women (two wives, one mistress, and a pop star), but not powerful politicians (with one exception, Margaret Thatcher). In this context, Udrea is a role model for readers, due to her physical characteristics, but she fails to be a role model as a politician. After all, she impersonated stars, popular icon, not politicians.

On the other hand, the visual analysis showed that she does interpret the role of well-known public figures, but she mimics. The photographs’ lack of movement, the rigid posture of the character, the conventional setting and angles created the idea of mimicking the role of powerful women, and not actually being one of them. Udrea puts the emphasis on seduction. Therefore, she is a prisoner of a constantly contradictory relation between her image in magazines – attractive, seductive - and her political activity which implies a certain level of professionalism and distinction.

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⁴² “Evaluating Thatcher’s Legacy”, *BBC News*, Tuesday, May, 4, 2004, accessed January, 31, 2012, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3681973.stm.

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