

**“She’s been an exemplar of modern, fit and confident
middle age”:**

Representations of Michelle Obama in three English-language newspapers

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Median vastuullinen tehtävä on luoda representaatioita eli kuvauksia yhteiskunnallisista ilmiöistä ja tapahtumista, jotka muovaavat käsitystämme maailmasta. Näin tehdessään se luo representaatioita myös ihmisistä. Nämä representaatiot ilmentävät erilaisia arvoja, asenteita ja ajattelutapoja. Yhdysvaltain ensimmäiset naiset edustavat maataan presidentin rinnalla ja ovat jatkuvan tarkkailun alaisina. Obamat olivat ensimmäinen afroamerikkalainen presidenttipari ja siksi erityisen mediahuomion kohteena. Michelle Obamaa sekä ylistettiin että kritisoitiin mediassa, sillä hän toimi poikkeuksellisen aktiivisesti politiikassa ja ilmaisi mielipiteensä avoimesti.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on tarkastella englanninkielisten sanomalehtien verkkojulkaisujen diskursseja ja niiden muovaamaa kuvaa Michelle Obamasta. Tutkimusaineistoni koostui yhteensä yhdeksästä artikkelista, jotka käsittelivät samoja aihealueita ja ilmestyivät vuosina 2016 ja 2017 <i>The New Zealand Herald</i>, <i>The Guardian</i> ja <i>The New York Times</i>-lehdissä. Valitsin tutkimukselliseksi viitekehukseksi kriittisen diskurssianalyysin, sillä se pyrkii näitä representaatioita tutkimalla paljastamaan yhteiskunnallisia eriarvoisuuksia ja stereotyyppioita.</p> <p>Tutkielmassani ilmeni, että Michelle Obaman representaatiot näissä kolmessa lehdessä usein joko korostivat naisen stereotyyppistä roolia perheessä ja keskittyivät hänen ihonväriinsä tai kehuivat häntä rohkeaksi ja esimerkilliseksi. Tästä jakautuneisuudesta voi päätellä, että median luoma naiskuva on selkeän muutoksen alla. Näin ollen representaatioita voisi jatkossa tutkia analysoimalla ja vertailemalla pitemmällä aikavälillä julkaistuja artikkeleita.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The media's influence on the way we see the world has been widely studied and recognised. According to Ross (2013), power, influence, gender and culture are present in discourses on media and representations. Van Dijk (1998: 9) explains that these representations are socially linked with ideologies and interests shared by social groups. As a powerful institution, the mass media influences these ideologies. In democratic countries, political figures are chosen by the people to represent the nation and its interests. Thus, they are constantly under media's surveillance. When it comes to media's representations of people, however, gender continues to be a factor that largely affects these representations (Braden 1996).

First Ladies of the U.S., the FLOTUS (Merriam-Webster Online 2017), represent their country alongside their husbands, and during the past decades, have become more vocal about their values and beliefs, and are now more involved in politics. It is a challenging position to behold, as they are under constant media attention and have risen to be public figures mainly because of their marriages, as the wives of presidents. Often, the representations of FLOTUS are contrasting combinations of motherhood and career ambition that question one or the other. Therefore, it is important to analyse them in order to reveal possible discrimination and stereotypes. Michelle Obama is the first African-American First Lady (The White House 2017), and thus, has gained a large amount of media attention during her time in the White House. She has also actively taken part in politics, especially towards the end of Mr. Obama's presidency. These factors make her a unique First Lady, and consequently she has been both praised and criticised in the media, often based on her gender and the colour of her skin.

As the Obamas' time in the White House is over, it is now possible to critically analyse the media coverage of Mrs. Obama to see how she was represented in worldwide media, for example in online newspapers that reach millions of readers across the world. By doing so, we can learn more about the way media treats people of different gender and appearance. This thesis will start with an introduction into key theoretical concepts such as mass media and gender, and Critical Discourse Analysis, which will function as a framework for the analysis. The analysis consists of nine articles

from three newspapers, which aim to give a wide view into the ways Michelle Obama is represented. To conclude the thesis, the results will be summarized and discussed.

2 ANALYSING REPRESENTATIONS IN MASS MEDIA

2.1 Mass media

To thoroughly comprehend the nature of the data used in this study, it is important to familiarise oneself with the concept of mass media. According to work by several scholars (e.g., Wells and Hakanen 1997; Sterin 2012), mass media is the result of rapid changes in the world of technology, and therefore, closely linked to industrialisation. Throughout the years, it has enabled both remarkable cultural and social changes (Sterin 2012: 9). The concept of mass media includes for example newspapers and magazines, television, and radio, with the help of which the exchange of information between people and different groups takes place (Wells and Hakanen 1997: 3-4). In a broader sense, it refers “to the entire gamut of technology-based communication media” (Sterin 2012: 9). However, as the continuous development of technology provides the consumers with new communicative platforms, the concept of mass media is proving to be more challenging to define. Khan (2010: 1-2) points out that for example cell phones and video games function essentially as communicative tools between two people or a few individuals, but can potentially enable conversations and exchanges of information between large groups via internet. Whether these are considered as tools of mass communication, or mass media, scholars are yet to decide.

Along with the development of technology, communicating became easier and faster between people. Now we are all connected to each other and share the same media world, where video, film and print claim more ground every day (Wells and Hakanen 1997; Sterin 2012). It is argued that because of the constant flow of information independent of geographical or cultural borders, the dominance of mass media will lead to the “homogenization of culture” (Wells and Hakanen 1997: 4). This refers to the sharing of same cultural features and values between all groups, and therefore, to the inevitable loss of less dominant cultural features. After all, communication can be defined as the attempt to create a shared ground with someone (Schramm 1997). However, Sterin (2012: 17) argues that “the more different cultural groups are from one another, the more critical and challenging communication between them becomes”. Therefore, because of the way cultural

differences can complicate communication between individuals or groups, this merging of cultures is relatively unlikely to happen.

As mass media has been both the source and the target of several studies within the past few decades, it is now known what an important role *media literacy* has (Sterin 2012). Media literacy is the ability to understand mass media; how it works and affects the consumers. According to Sterin (2012), one of the key aspects to remember is that all medias are, in some ways, partial and transmit more information than what is displayed. In accordance with this, Wells and Hakanen (1997: 3-6) add that the amount of information at our reach is larger than the amount we can understand. Therefore, the human brain registers only the information that responds to our own interests. A skilled media reader understands this and is able to recognise the cultural context and values contained in each message (Sterin 2012).

In addition to the rapid diffusion of information, the validity of different messages must be taken into account and studied. According to Stein (2012: 10-11), there are *passive* and *active media platforms*, of which the latter refers to sources of media content that are controlled by the user and created based on their needs and wishes. Therefore, such content is challenging to analyse for its validity, and this affects its interpretation. The passive media platforms, such as television, books and newspapers cannot be affected by the user to the same extent, but according to Khan (2010: 13), constant competition for consumers has led to decreased funding for important news research, and thus, to the lack of informative, analysed news. In the current era, especially internet based newspapers profit from sensationalist and misleading headlines that attract a larger number of readers. As the data of this study are online newspapers, it is important to acknowledge this selective nature of newspaper business, in order to understand the way mass media represents different people and the world.

2.2 Media & Gender

According to Dijk (2008: 55), mass media affects the way power structures are created within societies. He states that “those who control discourse may indirectly control the minds of people” (2008: 9), and adds that this power over one’s mind extends to the control over one’s behaviour and awareness. Taking this into account, one could argue that those in control of mass media, such as

newspapers and their coverage, are also in control of how the audience perceives certain aspects of the society. In its early days, this feminist field of study was criticised for the lack of analyses of men's representation, and has since seen the growth of more general research on gender and media (Gill 2007). As the current study focuses on representations of a woman, how she is described and introduced to a larger audience, it is necessary to recognise and understand some of the fundamental features of gender representation in the media.

In her study, Kosut (2012: xx) explains that while media content modifies our sense of identity, it also affects our gender identity, thus leading to the classification of certain behavioural aspects as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. This, in turn, has led to certain characteristics branded as 'masculine' to become more positive or desired. One could question whether this is the result of, or the reason why women continue to hold fewer high positions both in business and media industry than men (see e.g. Kosut 2012; Dijk 2008; Vavrus 2002; Creedon and Cramer 2007). Because all media content is biased to a certain extent and reflects the ideologies and values of its creator, the lack of women and other minorities in these important positions undoubtedly affects the way they are, or are not, being represented. Feminist studies conducted on the topic of gender representations have discovered that the "mediated invisibility" of women is the result of "non-representation of women's points of view or perspectives on the world" (Gallagher 2014: 23). This narrow visibility, especially in American media context, has been limited to the stereotypical roles of a housewife or a carer whereas men and masculine features are linked to violence and power, for example (Gallagher 2014; Kosut 2012). However, in a content analysis of network programming conducted by O'Kelly and Bloomquist in 1976, it was pointed out that larger media coverage does not necessarily mean a change in people's attitudes on discrimination, and thus, the focus should be on the quality, rather than the amount of such coverage and representations they imply. In addition to this, it would be crucial to study how female representations in the media differ from each other depending on whether women are given a voice in the form of an interview, for example, or they are discussed as a separate person or a group.

According to Wells and Hakanen (1997: 511), the media framing of women concentrates mainly on physical aspects and sexuality, and this helps to maintain traditional stereotypes. However, as Gallagher (2014: 25-26) points out, when women need to be represented as a functioning part of the society in favour of a certain ideology or political cause, their sexuality or appearance plays a less

significant role. Adding to the discussion on discrimination in the media, Kosut (2012: xxi) suggests that although sexual minorities have recently gained more ground in television and other media platforms, the mass media continues to maintain a heteronormative division of gender, and therefore helps to sustain certain stereotypes linked to each gender. These findings are an example of how hidden ideologies and stereotypes can be found in the media, and why it is important to uncover the ways genders are constructed and represented by linguistic choices. In a newspaper context, they can be studied by applying an analytical framework, such as CDA, that focuses on quality rather than the quantity of representations.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA, is a line of study that considers language as a social practice (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). It focuses on social inequality and how it is structured, expressed and maintained by using language (Wodak 2001). This line of study focuses on discourse, which are both ‘verbal objects’ and interactions within a certain historical or cultural context (Dijk 2008: 3). CDA is used to analyse how texts, spoken or written, work within a social context (Fairclough 1995a: 7). Therefore, it is not only a theory for analysing a conversation, but includes all other features of interaction, such as ‘why’ and ‘how’ something is being said and ‘where’. Referring to these features and characteristics of text and interaction, Fairclough (1995a: 2) developed a three-dimensional framework in order to combine these three different approaches to analysis: the analysis of texts, discourse practice and discursive events. According to him, this framework seeks to connect these features of text to each other, because no discursive practice can be analysed without acknowledging its context (1995a: 87-88). Fairclough states that CDA offers both a theory and a method for studying language’s connection with power and ideology (1995a:1) but is criticised by Dijk (2008) for lacking actual methods of analysis. Dijk (2008: 2) states that CDA cannot be a method, as methods of discourse analysis, according to him, do not exist. He prefers the term Critical Discourse Studies, as it implies that any method considered relevant to the research projects in question can be applied.

Dijk (2008: 4) explains that while language is the same for everybody (i.e. those who understand and speak it), power can only be expressed through text when there is room for variation or opinions. An example of this are newspaper headlines and articles: what names or terms are used when referring to people, groups or events, and how they express certain ideologies or power. In

their study on Critical Discourse Analysis as a framework for investigating gender stereotypes in political media discourse, Sriwimon and Zilli (2017: 141-142) explain that media “generates ideologies through linguistic choices”, and that by applying CDA framework, these ideologies can be disputed more easily. Justifying their choice of analysis method, they state that it can help to reduce possible bias when analysing the data, and it may help to unveil prolonged social phenomena and how gender stereotypes are created by the media (Sriwimon and Zilli 2017: 142). Further supporting the choice of CDA as an analytic framework for such study, Hawes and Owens (2015) explain how their comparative analysis of two British newspapers reveals the way certain attributes were applied to women more often than men, and how the actions of women were often portrayed as submissive. Further analysis on one of the newspapers also revealed, that although women were nominated more frequently than men, they were often referred to in an informal manner, for example by nickname (Hawes and Owens 2015: 18-19).

This is important to acknowledge in terms of the current study, as newspaper headlines or the content of an article itself can be seen as demonstrations of power, position or ideology. While Dijk’s work highlights the use of power through language, Fairclough (1995a: 19) explains that more attention should be focused on the social context of a discourse, such as historical events, as they undoubtedly influence the way certain discourses have been formed or developed. He states that this is important to recognise especially when collecting data for a critical discourse analysis. As the data of this present study comes from three different cultures but was produced within the same period of time, it is important to acknowledge how these online newspaper articles might have been affected by the social, historical and cultural context around them.

3 PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Research aim and questions

There have been several studies conducted on the topic of CDA and representations of public figures. However, the focus has not been on First Ladies, or on the way representations of a public figure are formed by English-language newspapers from different countries. Therefore, the aim of this study is to compare and analyse the representations of a first lady, Michelle Obama, by three

online newspapers, each from a different English-speaking country. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How is Michelle Obama represented in the articles of the online versions of three, English-language newspapers?
2. Do these representations differ from each other?

According to Flowerdew (2017: 165), text and social context are related, and as culture forms part of the context, I expect to find slight differences between these representations that may have been influenced by cultural factors. It is likely, that Michelle Obama has been more closely followed in the U.S., and therefore she may be portrayed more in contrast with her predecessors and in the light of her country's history. It is also probable that foreign representations of Michelle Obama depend on the way political events of the U.S. are reported by foreign media, and therefore there may be fewer references to cultural history.

3.2 Data and methods

International newspapers report on political events and decisions conducted in the U.S. because of the country's influence on international affairs and powerful organisations such as the UN (Roberts 2017). The data of this study are nine articles which are shown in Table 1. They were selected from the free online versions of three English-language newspapers: *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *The New Zealand Herald*. The articles were published in 2016 and 2017 in the United Kingdom, in the U.S. and in New Zealand. These were the last two years of Barack Obama's presidency and the couple were closely followed by the media. I aim to gain a worldwide view on the representations of Michelle Obama, and therefore chose these countries as they represent different continents and share English as their official language. The newspapers were chosen based on their worldwide and national popularity. According to Statista (2017), *The Guardian's* digital version reached nearly 8 million readers monthly during the years 2016 and 2017, making it the most popular online newspaper in the United Kingdom. *The New York Times'* digital version was the second most accessed worldwide in 2012 (comScore 2012), and in 2017, *The New Zealand Herald* was the country's most widely read publication, both in print and online (Roy Morgan 2017).

Table 1. The selected newspapers and articles.

	Newspaper editorial	Report on a political event	Michelle Obama outside of a political context
<i>The Guardian</i>	The Guardian view on Michelle Obama: missing her already (Editorial 2017)	Michelle Obama speech crushes Trump with weight of women's experience (Gambino 2016)	Michelle Obama: 'She took first lady chic and made it modern' (Cartner-Morley 2016)
<i>The New York Times</i>	The Authentic Power of Michelle Obama (Bruni 2016)	Voice Shaking, Michelle Obama Calls Trump Comments on Women 'Intolerable' (Hirschfeld Davis 2016)	The White House Correspondents' Dinner and the Obama Effect (Friedman 2016)
<i>The New Zealand Herald</i>	Cheers for First Lady Obama (Wallis 2017)	Michelle Obama: Donald Trump 'has shaken me to my core' (NZHerald 2016a)	Michelle Obama's massive impact on fashion (NZHerald 2016b)

The articles chosen for this study represent three categories: newspaper editorials, reports on a political event and articles discussing Michelle Obama outside of a political context. These categories were chosen to gain a view on how Michelle Obama is represented by the three newspapers. Following the criteria for data set by Wodak and Meyer (2009: 98), the chosen reports on a political event all regard the same *specific period of time*, a speech by Michelle Obama in New Hampshire. The newspaper editorials were chosen to represent *specific semiotic media*, and the articles discussing Michelle Obama outside a political context concentrate on *specific discourses*. Some of the articles do not solely focus on Michelle Obama; therefore, I chose to focus on the parts in which she is present. Due to the limitations of this study, the analysis of visual resources such as photos was excluded.

According to Wodak and Meyer (2009: 2), CDA focuses on complex, social phenomena rather than single, linguistic units. Therefore, it requires a multi-methodical approach. Fairclough (1989: 109) states that although the analysis of text is a single, important part of discourse analysis, it is

important to remember that there are two more elements to discourse: interaction and social context. Fairclough (1995b: 104) further explains that the analysis of representational texts is an analysis of choices. In other words, it takes into account the inclusion and exclusion of information, what is implicit and what is explicit, what is given more attention and what is left in the background. CDA takes into account all this: text, discourse and sociocultural practice (Fairclough 1995b: 57), and thus, it was chosen as the method of analysis for this study.

According to Fairclough (1989: 109), critical discourse analysis consists of three stages: description, interpretation and explanation. To begin with, the text is described, then its relationship with interaction is interpreted and finally, the relationship between interaction and social context is explained. Fairclough (1989: 110) presents ten main questions that can be asked of a text. These questions focus on vocabulary, grammar and textual structures. Vocabulary questions focus on metaphors, for example, and grammar questions focus on negative and positive sentences, among others. In order to gain an understanding of the representations of Michelle Obama by using CDA as a method, I attempt to analyse the data by paying attention to re-occurring discourses within the articles, as well as word choices, rhetorical modes, and argument structure.

4 REPRESENTATIONS OF MICHELLE OBAMA

4.1 In newspaper editorials

Most newspapers save a separate section for editorials, because they are usually less objective than news reports. In other words, editorials often include the opinion of the editors. They represent the newspaper's point of view on different issues, which can vary from politics to sports, for example (Walbert 2017). In order to analyse a newspaper's representations of a certain person or phenomenon, it is therefore advisable to start from editorial pieces as they represent the whole newspaper's position on the matter.

The Guardian's editorial (2017) represents Mrs. Obama in a context that is a mixture of formal and informal word choices, declarative mode and active sentences that aim to make a statement, but also appeal to the readers' emotions.

- (1) - - and the similarly non-existent tape in which Mrs. Obama was said to rant against "whitey".
(Editorial 2017)

(2) Her hugs and goofy “mom-dancing” appearances spread warmth as well as cool. (Editorial 2017)

According to Fairclough (1989: 126), the use of declarative mode, as seen in the examples above, is often present when the writer has the position of ‘a giver’ of information. Declarative arguments are presented as facts, and the reader functions as the receiver of information. By using informal words and making statements, the writer relies on “the relationship of solidarity between newspaper and audience” Fairclough (1995b: 71). In the examples above, the writer questions negative allegations presented about Mrs. Obama, and portrays her both as a victim of lies (*similarly non-existent tape*) and a warm person (*goofy, appearances spread warmth*).

In an editorial by *The New York Times* (Bruni 2016), Mrs. Obama is also presented in a warm way and unlike in the case of many other representations of women (see e.g. Wells and Hakanen 1997; Gallagher 2014), she is discussed as a powerful figure, by using superlatives and metaphors. The choice of using metaphors could be seen as an attempt to link the writer’s argument with common knowledge shared with the readers (Fairclough 1995b: 71), they give the impression of her being important (*embodied the nation’s conscience*) and respectful (*the most earnest guardian*) as seen below:

(3) - - she embodied the nation’s conscience and staked her claim as the most earnest guardian of our most important values. (Bruni 2016)

Despite the article discussing her as a powerful and unique figure, racial and gender-related discourses are constantly present (see Example 4). The arguments in the article are built in a way that represents social domination (van Dijk 2009: 63), as the phrases that acknowledge her impact on the political environment of the U.S are followed by phrases that list the weaknesses of her ‘opponents’. This structural order, combined with the presence of racial discourse, may be a sign of the writer’s dismay at the success and active participation of Mrs. Obama. Adding to this, the writer’s word choices are not typical for a political discourse (Fairclough 1995b: 70-71), as can be seen in Example 5. These word choices are a mixture of both colloquial and official language. This, in turn, could either add to Mrs. Obama’s credibility or weaken it.

- (4) - - Donald Trump could receive his final death blow from a black woman: the president's wife?
(Bruni 2016)
- (5) - - Michelle Obama, octopus slayer. (Bruni 2016)

The unusual word *octopus* in Example 5 refers to women's sexual harassment accusations aimed at Donald Trump, whereas *slayer* refers to Michelle Obama as his defeater. Thus, the article represents the other as 'good' and the other as 'bad'.

Following the typical ways of portraying a politically active woman in the media (see Kosut 2012: 331) *The New Zealand Herald's* editorial (Wallis 2017) focuses on Michelle Obama's personality traits (see Example 6), and her responsibilities as a mother (see Example 7). The opening line of the article includes presupposition (Jäger and Maier 2009: 55), which links the editorial to a larger discourse about the First Ladies. These types of presuppositions are statements (see Example 8), that the writer claims to be true and expects the reader to acknowledge too:

- (6) Her sense of humour and sense of self- - have been priceless. (Wallis 2017)
- (7) - - she just got on with her life: bringing up the kids and maintaining a marriage- -. (Wallis 2017)
- (8) - - United States First Lady showed the optimist she has always been. (Wallis 2017)
- (9) - - the dignity she brought to the job - -. (Wallis 2017)
- (10) She was labelled an angry woman. (Wallis 2017)

The use of active sentences in the text (see e.g. Example 9) have experiential value (Fairclough 1989: 111), as in a motherhood discourse they portray Mrs. Obama as a hard-working mother (see Example 7), but applied to a FLOTUS discourse, they highlight the mistreatment she has faced as a woman (see Example 10). Thus, the writer makes it easier for mothers and other women who are under scrutiny and criticism to relate to her arguments.

4.2 In reports on a political event

Although the focus of newspapers has traditionally been to inform the public about issues that are of their general interest, the media have been moving towards a more entertaining style which sees the readers as possible customers and consumers, rather than citizens who have a right to truthful and

objective information (Macdonald 2003: 55-57). Therefore, an analysis of recent news reports can thus reveal attitudes and ideologies hidden within a text that, in general, is expected to be objective. The articles in this section report on a speech conducted by Mrs. Obama in New Hampshire in October 2016 as part of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign rally. In her speech, Mrs. Obama addressed issues such as sexual harassment claims aimed at other candidates.

The Guardian's report on Mrs. Obama's speech (Gambino 2016) is what Fairclough calls "a hard-news story" (1995b: 72). It is structured to include a headline, the main core or message and several paragraphs that add to the story and develop it further. Even though the report mainly focuses on the actual speech and its main points, more depth is added by discussing Mrs. Obama's physical reactions as she spoke (see Example 11). These descriptive phrases follow direct quotations of her speech, and thus, the text uses contrasting official and colloquial discourses (Fairclough 1995b: 70). The mixing of genres, in this case, elaborates the report into a direction where it appears to be more of a report on a woman's experiences, rather than an official speech during a presidential campaign:

(11) - - she said, her voice trembling with emotion - -. (Gambino 2016)

Race and power discourses are repeatedly present in the text. The writer uses persuasiveness as rhetoric means (Jäger and Maier 2009: 55) by citing the parts of Mrs. Obama's speech that draw on common, shared values such as family (see Example 12). These emotional features are typically added to discourse on woman (Ott and Mack 2013: 198).

(12) "She's a devoted daughter who cared for her mother until her final days". (Gambino 2016)

The report published by *The New York Times* (Hirschfeld Davis 2016) also concentrates on Mrs. Obama's speech, but elaborates it further. Sexual harassment discourse and the discourse on woman take centre stage, and in accordance with *The Guardian's* approach, the report is another example of "hard-news stories" (Fairclough 1995b: 72). Although the article's main focus is to report on the speech, it is a good example of the "one-sidedness" of media discourse (Fairclough 1989: 49): the

words used to describe Michelle Obama's reaction to allegations about Donald Trump are sentimental (see Example 13) and her gestures are described with detail (see Example 14).

(13) - - 25-minute speech during which her voice at times quavered with emotion. (Hirschfeld Davis 2016)

(14) - - placing her hand against her heart for emphasis as she spoke about Mr. Trump's treatment of women. (Hirschfeld Davis 2016)

This choice to highlight Mrs. Obama's feelings and physical reactions portrays Mrs. Obama as a worried woman and mother, both in *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*' articles. Using the word *emotion* several times is typical of representations of women in the media. However, the use of superlatives paints an image of a powerful, brave woman (see Example 15).

(15) In remarks that were among the most outspoken by a first lady in modern history- -. (Hirschfeld Davis 2016)

The New Zealand Herald reports on the speech in a different way compared to the previous two newspapers, by applying more direct quotations (NZHerald 2016a). It is a clearer example of reported speech (Fairclough 1995b: 70), as more attention is paid to what Mrs. Obama said, rather than how something was said. The vocabulary in the article is typical of news report (Jäger and Maier 2016: 128), and the article does not draw attention to Mrs. Obama's personality traits. The sentences are declarative, and not notably negative or positive (Fairclough 1989: 125). In between direct quotations of Mrs. Obama's speech, it is noted that she gave it as a part of presidential campaign (see Example 16). Therefore, she is portrayed as a political figure, and political discourse is present throughout the text. In conclusion, the writer gives more power to the reader to develop and opinion on Mrs. Obama.

(16) Of course, Mrs. Obama's speech had a political purpose - -. Still, she insisted she wasn't just playing politics. (NZHerald 2016a)

4.3 In articles outside of a political context

According to Caroli (1995: 320-321), throughout the history of First Ladies, the attention of the press has been on their looks, for example the colour of their clothing or hairstyle. In a pursuit to benefit of their publicity, their photographs have even been used illegally for marketing purposes. While this could seem mild and relatively harmless, it has meant that less attention has been paid on the women's intellectuality. Today's media, however, aims to connect the First Ladies' physical appearance with their intellectuality and contributions to societal matters. This can be seen in *The Guardian's* article (Cartner-Morley 2016), as it discusses the remarkable amount of pressure the First Ladies receive on their looks. The article aims to analyse Mrs. Obama's appearance and fashion choices, but by linking them to how she has used her position as a First Lady. However, the article does represent Mrs. Obama very "selectively" (Fairclough 1995b: 17-18), as attention is drawn to how she communicated with her clothing choices rather than verbally (see Example 17).

(17) Obama is seen a good deal more than she is heard - -. (Cartner-Morley 2016)

(18) She has broken an unspoken rule of modern culture, which holds that a serious person must have a sober wardrobe. (Cartner-Morley 2016)

It is highlighted how Mrs. Obama has been brave with her outfit choices, but when it comes to politics, she has not addressed controversial causes (see Example 18). She is also compared to Jackie Kennedy, who had "offered a new model of womanliness" (Caroli 1995: 224) and was considered "chic" (Caroli 1995: 221), but their different skin colours are pointed out, and thus, race and racism discourses are present. Via this use of symbolism and comparison as an argumentation strategy (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 28), the article portrays her as a silent but thoughtful figure who has mainly been a traditional First Lady and stayed in the background, rather than being politically outspoken and active. This, in turn, could portray the writer's own values or their opinion on the matter (Fowler 1979).

Considering the image of women in newspapers being outdated and "complacent" (Lovenduski, Commonwealth, Campbell and Sampson-Jacent 2002: 100), *The New York Times'* article (Friedman 2016) takes on a slightly different approach to Mrs. Obama's physical appearance. The article is not entirely dedicated to her, but she is mentioned in the headline and given centre stage in a context that is more about fashion, dress code and a change happening in the White House, rather than her

appearance. The change, according to the article, has been largely brought on by her. Unlike many, systematic representations of women, the article consists of active sentences (Fairclough 1989: 111) and Mrs. Obama is not represented in terms of her role in the family.

The writer uses declarative mode in the text, thus leaving no space for uncertainty (Fairclough 1989: 111). By listing the criteria behind Mrs. Obama's clothing choices (see Example 19), the writer appeals to readers who share the same values:

(19) - - leveraging her position and her profile to promote local industry and emerging designers- -
(Friedman 2016)

(20) It's very, very French. It's very, very 1 percent. It took the old rules and tossed them out the window and dared everyone to get upset. (Friedman 2016)

By mixing both colloquial and formal expressions, and repeating words to emphasize her message (see Example 20), the writer portrays Mrs. Obama in a light that makes her a person who should be taken seriously, but also make her seem more approachable and grounded (Fairclough 1989: 111). This mixed representation could be seen as the writer's attempt to appeal to as many readers as possible, as "the ways in which women (...) are represented in the media send important messages to the public about women's place, women's roles, and women's lives" (Ross 2013: 68).

The New Zealand Herald's approach (NZHerald 2016b) to Mrs. Obama's look is similar to *The Guardian's*, as it focuses on the way Mrs. Obama uses fashion choices to express her values and opinion, rather than expressing them verbally. It highlights the way *she* has been the one behind a big change in The White House, and the use of superlatives in the headline (*Michelle Obama's massive impact on fashion*) supports this claim. What is notable about the article is that the writer's word choices have a great amount of expressive value (Fairclough 1989: 112), in other words, they reflect the writer's perception on the subject matter, in this case, Michelle Obama's impact on fashion industry in and outside the White House.

The verbal performances (Fairclough 1989: 115), such as the use of present perfect tense "has been" in the article (NZHerald 2016b) are examples of presupposition (Reisigl and Wodak 2009: 94). This presupposition means that Mrs. Obama has been a powerful figure and has brought on change, but

that might be over now. The article also portrays her in a narrow context, which can be seen from the use of evaluative attribution (Reisigl and Wodak 2009: 94), or in other words, the way she is described (see Example 21). Race discourse is also strongly present in the article, as the attention on several occasions is drawn to Mrs. Obama's skin colour and her arms (see Examples 22-24). This is done in a context where her less successful fashion choices are mentioned. She is also compared to another first lady, and this explicit comparison (Reisigl and Wodak 2009: 94) continues to focus on their different skin colours. Thus, despite the article being long, its representation of Mrs. Obama is relatively narrow and one-sided, and it is continuously pointed out that she represents minority or outgroup, rather than majority (van Dijk 1998: 269).

(21) She's been an exemplar of modern, fit and confident middle age. (NZHerald 2016b)

(22) What made critics roar over her bare arms - -. (NZHerald 2016b)

(23) But Kennedy was not a statuesque black woman with muscular arms. (NZHerald 2016b)

(24) A lot of people had never seen a black woman so confidently glamorous - -. (NZHerald 2016b)

The aim of this study was to shed light on how Michelle Obama is represented by English-language newspapers, and to learn whether these representations differ from each other. The articles represented Mrs. Obama in a different context, but despite these contextual differences, there were reoccurring discourses in each of the nine articles. Among these discourses were racial issues, motherhood and the position of women. Depending on the type of the article (e.g., editorial or news report), they had a different approach to these discourses, but in most cases Michelle Obama was represented in a way that is considered typical for media's representations of women.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to my analysis, the representations of Michelle Obama varied depending on the type of the article in question, but the same discourses were applied by every newspaper. *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*' representations of Mrs. Obama were more thorough than that of *The New Zealand Herald*, and their articles often focused on Michelle Obama as a person. Regarding newspaper editorials, Mrs. Obama was represented in terms of the mistreatment she had faced, her personality traits and her position in the family. *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* represented

Mrs. Obama in their editorials as an influential, unique woman, whereas *The New Zealand Herald* described her more stereotypically as a hard-working mother. In reports on a political event, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* focused on how Mrs. Obama delivered her speech, rather than focusing on the speech itself. They described her reactions, and portrayed her as a worried mother. Thus, these articles were typical examples of how women politicians' behaviour, looks and their role in the family are often the main focus of journalists (Braden 1996: 1). However, *The New Zealand Herald's* approach was different, as it solely focused on Mrs. Obama's speech and the message itself. Thus, the article did not offer a ready representation of Michelle Obama but left it for the readers to form themselves.

In articles discussing Mrs. Obama outside of a political context, two factors were constantly present: her way of communicating through fashion choices and the colour of her skin. *The Guardian* and *The New Zealand Herald* approached Mrs. Obama's appearance in a more stereotypical way, and she was portrayed as a quiet wife who expresses her values through clothing choices. *The New Zealand Herald* also took the race discussion further than the previous articles, whereas *The New York Times* discussed the impact she has had on fashion since entering the White House. Unlike the others, this article did not represent her in a traditional family context.

From the combination of the reoccurring themes, membership categorisation (Reisigl and Wodak 2009: 94) and the discourses present in the articles, one could say that the media's traditional ways of portraying a woman (see e.g. Caroli 1995; Braden 1996) remain popular and common. However, the way of representing political women is changing, especially in the case of First Ladies, as their roles continue to be more active. They are no longer portrayed as "hostesses and style-setters" only (Caroli 1995: 320). Nonetheless, what is stereotypical about the representations of Michelle Obama is the way she is represented in terms of her skin colour and position in her family. This is understandable to a certain extent, as she was the first African-American woman in the position of a First Lady, but as she is continuously portrayed in those terms, the media's representations of her remain limited. This could be understood as an example of "cultural racism" (van Dijk 1998: 2), the preference of one culture over another. It is also an example of how today's reporting style focuses on individuals separate from important societal factors and context (Macdonald 2003: 63). This can be misleading and therefore important to acknowledge, as the media has a powerful role in shaping ideologies (van Dijk 1998: 2).

Due to the pre-set limits of this study, not every aspect of CDA analysis could be taken into account and thus, the data could have been analysed in more depth. This however, would mean that the topics of the articles should be limited to one. As my aim was to gain a view on the variety of representations of Michelle Obama, I chose to include more articles from each paper that were of different type and covered several topics. I believe that these findings may be helpful in further studies on how media treats women of minorities in political and public positions. Further studies could also be made using one country's newspapers as data and analyse the way political women are represented within a certain country. Such study could be useful in an attempt to prevent media from forming one-sided representations of people based on gender, race, age or culture.

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