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EPILOGUE
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power to you
In 2010, around the time that the film *Endhiran* (Shankar 2010) was to be released, fans in Tamil Nadu read in newspapers, magazines and saw on television how the release was a worldwide phenomenon. In the Introduction and Chapter 1, I have already described the film's worldwide success: it reached the top ten of popular films in the UK and the music release scored high in the i-tunes online music store. In India it was the highest grossing film ever made. The film's technological innovations were impressive. Before the film was released fans proudly linked their superstar Rajinikanth to the innovations. But these same innovations also indicated a fundamental shift.

In the previous two chapters I concentrated on a shift in publics regarding images displayed in public spaces. The removal of imagery from public spaces and its replacement with new beautification images indicates a distancing from a certain kind of populist politics and the embracing of a new middle class. I consider the release of *Endhiran* to be another turning point, in this case for the overall functioning of fan clubs. Is the figure of the fan declining in a state in which ever greater emphasis is being placed on neoliberal politics and imaginations? In this Epilogue I describe some current neoliberal tendencies which seem to indicate that the figure of the fan is indeed losing its currency in the realm of film production and watching.

Saktivel, the fan club leader and Panchayat president from Vannur, was until recently always assured of tickets for himself and at least the fans most close to him. He is in very close contact with both district leaders Rajini Ibrahim of Villupuram and Rajini Shankar of Pondicherry. For the release of *Endhiran*, however, for the first time it turned out to be difficult to get tickets. To Saktivel's humiliation, he, who as a leader it is assumed will get tickets not only for himself but also for his fellow fans could not be sure of seeing the film on the first day. In the end, however, Saktivel and many of his fan club member friends did manage to get tickets at the last minute. But then the next disappointment came. The film did not meet their expectations of a real Rajinikanth movie: it was too high-tech to appreciate the character of Rajinikanth that fans like so much.

The embarrassment of not receiving tickets and the disappointment of the film highlight three issues that I want to take up in this Epilogue. These issues indicate both a shift in publics and priorities at the level of cinema. Firstly, the humiliation that Saktivel felt by not being in a position to distribute tickets to himself and his fellow fan club members we could read as a sign that authorities who give permission for the fan show are increasingly sidelining fans. Secondly, as more and more movie theaters are being transformed into multiplexes they seem to be targeting a different public, at least not the public of relatively less affluent fans. Plush seats, popcorn and more expensive tickets exclude a public of fans that do not feel at home in that environment and often cannot afford such tickets. What's more, these multiplexes do not prioritize fan clubs in any way. Thirdly, Saktivel and other fans were disappointed about the content of the film *Endhiran*. The film suggested that Rajinikanth's typical roles were moving in a new direction: away from his fans towards a more cosmopolitan audience.

As I already pointed out in earlier chapters, the privilege of the fan show has been put to an end to once before. The city administration of Pondicherry and also that of Chennai have

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1 The photo shows an ad of the Vodafone telephone company. They are put up on the blind walls of cheap government housing estates. Chennai 2010.
sometimes made it harder for fan clubs to buy the first day tickets for film releases starring their favorite movie actor. Whereas previously in Pondicherry local patronage connections and the Rajinikanth fan club’s involvement in political canvassing activities had persuaded the city to give the fan show back to fans, in Chennai the city has been less accommodating and there fans have to obtain tickets in the same way as ordinary audiences. But even in Pondicherry there are signs that a fan show is less likely to return. This relates not only to an administrative move away from vernacular support, as I suggest in Chapter 6 with regards to beautification projects but also to a transformation of the movie theaters in which film releases are being screened.² Film distributors increasingly sell their films to state-of-the-art multiplex theaters instead of the smaller theaters that are a common sight in Tamil Nadu’s towns and cities.

Over the past decades, cinema has gained larger public acclaim. For a long time visitor numbers were decreasing in movie theaters, partly due to its stigma but also because of the increasing availability of cable and satellite television, as well as versions on VHS and VCD. However, the increasing export market of the diaspora has professionalized the industry (Vasudevan 2004). This has resulted, among other things, in the development of comfortable multi-screen, air-conditioned multiplexes (ibid.). Increasingly, older theaters are being transformed into multiplex environments and new multiplexes are appearing regularly. The following quote articulates the ways in which multiplexes situate themselves:

Adlabs Cinemas, part of the Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group and India’s leading entertainment conglomerate Adlabs Films, opened its first cinema in Pondicherry today.

Adlabs Jeeva Rukmani has a total seating capacity of 1178 seats across two screens and is one of the best known locations in the city. Kamal Hassan’s mega movie Dasavatharam was released in both screens with the first show starting at 6.45am and eager patrons thronged the box office as early as 6am…. The state-of-the-art sound and projection technology comprises of crystal-clear Dolby sound and superior Xenon projection systems, with three food and beverage counters and plush push-back seats in order to provide a world class cinematic experience. (News post on Reliance website posted on June 13 2008, http://www.rbe.co.in/news-adlabs-8.html)

The text on the Reliance website, owner of the chain of multiplex movie theaters Adlabs, describes the new but also a few traces of what once was. From plush seats to eager fans that throng the box-office as early as 6 am. The new state-of-the-art theater was the first multiplex theater in Pondicherry. Soon Raja Talkies followed suit. The movie theater just a few meters away from Adlabs was renovated and converted into an air-conditioned theater with the latest sound and projection technology. Tickets can be booked online. Another theater, Anandha, which was appreciated among Pondicherry’s residents for its quality movies, was razed to the ground a few years ago to make way for a shopping mall.

I am not describing these transformations to evoke a sense of nostalgia. However, the development of multiplexes illustrates a tendency that has been felt by theaters and fan clubs alike. Smaller or older theaters are not able to buy the latest releases anymore and are bypassed by the multiplexes that have the capital to buy the latest releases from distributors. Apart from the diffi-

² See Athique 2009 and Athique 2011 for a discussion on the rise of the multiplex in India.
cultivates this brings with it for the smaller theaters as far as earning sufficient revenue is concerned, it has also caused fan clubs to lose their fan privileges. As already mentioned, they do not have the privilege of a fan show anymore and multiplexes charge much higher prices for tickets. Even though the first day shows of films like Endhiran are always sold for much more than for other shows, multiplexes’ basic prices are much higher than those of the b-grade theaters that most fans attend. Where a ticket for a multiplex theater starts at ninety rupees, a ticket at an ordinary theater costs between ten and fifty rupees in Pondicherry, a considerable difference for the less affluent. The price of the ticket therefore excludes audiences who cannot afford such tickets and who also do not feel at ease in such an environment. In multiplexes you pay for the exclusivity. In the words of Reliance, the owner of the Adlab theaters in the quote above: “The state-of-the-art sound and projection technology comprises crystal-clear Dolby sound and superior Xenon projection systems, with three food and beverage counters and plush push-back seats in order to provide a world class cinematic experience”. The cleanliness, types of snacks, seats, and sound and projection systems contribute to the “world class” experience that Reliance describes.

Although older theaters have introduced rules to regulate audience behavior on the first day shows (see Chapter 1), multiplexes are much stricter in the kind of behavior that is allowed. Phones have to be switched off and “fan behavior” such as dancing and singing is out of the question and completely banned. In addition, banners or posters made by fans are not allowed in the theater compound. Arikrishnan, Pondicherry’s Kamal Hassan fan club leader, voiced his disappointment:

> The newly opened Jeeva Rukmani Theater told us not to place any banners or posters inside the theater. The Reliance group is imitating western style [theaters] by not putting up banners, posters or cutouts. Now we have to put up our banners on the road somewhere.

But exhibiting banners in public spaces has also been made much more difficult by city authorities as I described in previous chapters. Fans feel less incentive to put the same effort into imagery as they used to. Before the release of Endhiran Rajini Shankar said:

> The expectations for Endhiran are huge because Shankar is the director. He will do well and in addition Sun Pictures are producing it. It has a good music score too. But fan involvement will be less. They'll sell tickets mostly to people from outside [non-fans], only to rich people. […] Only if they cheer up the fans will the fans bring in the crowds to the theater. The fan show is very important but now there is nothing for fans. It goes only to rich people and only they watch the show for the first three days. We used to do decorations which attracted the crowds but now we are not going to do anything for Endhiran.

Both Arikrishnan’s and Rajini Shankar’s words suggest a feeling of loss. Although Reliance still describes the ardent fans thronging the box office as early as 6 am, Rajini Shankar and Arikrishnan do not feel attracted to such a theater environment. Banners, the once all-important images at celebrative events, are not allowed anymore. Rich people can see the film before fans can and fan involvement will be less. Fans do not feel connected to these new images of world class as they cannot support their hero by attracting crowds to the theater. The responsibility

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3 These were the average prices in Pondicherry around 2008-2011.
they feel to attract crowds to the theater has been sidelined. Even though fans feel the need to protect their hero by trying to prevent piracy (see Chapter 1), they were not happy with the simultaneous screenings of the film. Endhiran was screened throughout India in around 3000 film theaters, with at least four to ten shows a day, with an estimated 1.5 million people watching the film on the first day (India Today October 2010). This new trend of selling a film to multiplexes and screening it as much as possible on the first day(s) of the release is a way for the producer to earn its revenue before the film enters the pirate market. In this way, the film will most likely be screened for a much shorter time than was the case previously. As fans feel an obligation to keep the film running in the theaters as long as possible, the multiple screenings make it harder for fans to reach their goal of keeping the film in the theater for at least 50 or 100 days.

The third issue I observed deals with a loss of connectedness to the content of film. The film Endhiran is a continuous display of technological fireworks comparable to films such as Minority Report (Spielberg 2002) or Terminator (Cameron 1984). This is not the type of film Rajinikanth fans connect with. The story of Endhiran features Rajinikanth in a dual role, both as a scientist and as his creation, the robot Chitti. Chitti is a copy of the scientist that has human emotions. When the robot falls into the hands of a competing scientist he implants a chip into the robot and Chitti becomes a destructive force. The second half of the film in particular revolves around Chitti’s destructive forces. The film turns into a high-tech sci-fi story with countless visual special effects. The film departs here from a “classical Rajinikanth film” in which he, an outsider and low-profile person, fights the bad guys with his bare hands. In a “typical” Rajinikanth film, he saves the heroine, a family or entire communities from the bad guy’s evil and social injustice.

His everyday appearance in films and in real life is what makes Rajinikanth so attractive to his audiences. Any film in which he deviated from this role was unsuccessful. Endhiran was hyped so much beforehand that it was almost impossible for it not to be a success. Fans as well as ordinary audiences were curious to see what this new film was like. Friends of mine who have two daughters, one of whom was preparing for her final exams in high school, picked up their daughters from school with the excuse that their grandmother was severely ill and the entire family headed to one of the multiplexes on the ECR road in Chennai. Normally they never watch films in multiplexes and they usually do not allow their children to spend much time at home watching television, particularly not films. But the new Rajinikanth release was an exception. Their daughters would never have forgiven their parents if they had excluded them from this first day glimpse of a new Rajinikanth film. It was not the story that they really cared about but the opportunity of seeing the popular superstar in the collective of other people celebrating.

But even though the film was a box-office hit in India and around the world, Rajinikanth’s fan club members were in fact disappointed to meet this new Rajinikanth. Now Rajinikanth was not identifiable as the jovial character or as an angry person fighting injustice with his bare hands: the Rajini fans like so much. Instead the film was a chain of high-tech scenes overloaded with visual effects. Could we understand Endhiran’s visual extravaganza as not catering to lower socio-economic or rural audiences as the theme of the film is not something they can relate to? If we follow Dickey’s (1993a) argument that film offers a realistic yet utopian world to which the urban poor audiences can connect and dream about, Endhiran does not seem to connect with this audience anymore. Even though Tamil movies are increasingly focusing on urban, middle-class environments, Rajinikanth cannot deviate from his particular role (see Introduction
and Chapter 1). Rajinikanth's character in *Endhiran* did show some of his characteristic style and mannerisms but most of the film revolved around the high-tech visual effects that went beyond a standard feel-good Rajinikanth film.

The music in this film, and even more so in Rajinikanth's previous film *Sivaji: The Boss* (Shankar 2007), disappointed many fans. Despite the fact that the music was composed by Tamil Nadu's most celebrated composer A.R. Rahman, most fans could not repress the feeling that the music was a bit too "foreign" as they called it.

Just as images come and go, gain power and lose ground, it seems that fan practice also transforms, adapts and vanishes. Once again, I am not describing these feelings of disconnectedness to end this dissertation with a sense of nostalgia. Rather, they highlight the way in which something that seemed a sustained practice for fans is subject to change. The disappointments described here emphasize the ways in which the navigational capacity of fans in vernacular political networks seems to be losing ground.

In this dissertation I have outlined the practices of Rajinikanth fans that start by relating to film and slowly, throughout a fan's life, involve the establishment of social and political networks. I have made a particular study of the role of images in the engagement of fans with their star as well as their proliferation in a larger social world of fans. In the first two parts I showed how fans become fans and how images produce and articulate a fan's desires, ambitions, and engagements. Images, I argue, are crucial ways of articulating the agency of fans in revering their star. Fans feel the need to see their star, to be close to him. The proximity that they desire is established in the image practice in everyday spaces.

In Part II I explored the politics of fandom. Once fans are older prestige and political networks become an inherent part of fan club membership. Fans consider the fan club a way of opening up domains otherwise difficult to access because of their socio-economic background. In other words, the fan club is an environment through which fans make the system work for them. The benefits, which are often mediated by local influential big men or brokers, range from movie tickets, access to political parties to prestige. Here too images are an important incentive in establishing and nurturing these relationships. These images are made to be visible and displayed in public spaces in towns and cities. The images do not reflect the socio-political networks by which they are somehow produced; they constitute a veritable part of life itself. I have shown however, that the fans' political engagements are subject to a constant sense of ambiguity. All fans expect political success yet one is not supposed to be openly political in the fan club.

In the last part, Part III, I move from the figure of the fan via images to broader issues regarding public space, a larger visual economy and world-class ideologies. Part III reveals a more general debate surrounding public space and image politics. In this way I try to situate fan activity in a larger world of cinema and political practice, frictions around imagery and neoliberal world-class ideologies. I show how a new type of image, now prevalent on Chennai's walls, is part of a shift in political profiling directed at the middle classes of "shining India."

All the chapters have prefigured various shifts and transformations. First of all in the life trajectories of fans from cinematic desires to political aspirations. And secondly in the materiality of images, in technological changes and how these have conveyed and transformed these desires and aspirations. Transformations at the level of the visual have also informed the last two chapters where I show how regulations, opinions and ideologies have resulted in the presence or
absence of images related to film and politics. Regulations have made it harder to put up banners and posters, which make it less worthwhile for fans to spend money and time on publicity. And finally, I end by illustrating the ways in which the entertainment industry itself is approaching another public, seeing new business in an industry that had been marginal for decades. The paths fans have found to create networks that make the system work for them, to open doors which are otherwise closed will become less workable with these shifts in political attention and in the movie industry.

All the chapters describe a shift from how fans employ a political patronage system to how it is slowly being undermined. Yet, I have shown how, even though the canvas of display has remained the same, publics may have started to shift.
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**Feature Films**


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roos Gerritsen (Leiderdorp, NL 1979) graduated in 1998 from the da Vinci high school in Leiden after which she studied Cultural Anthropology at Leiden University. During her studies, she specialized in the anthropology of media. Her MA research, for example, dealt with the production and consumption of wedding videos and photo albums in the South Indian State Tamil Nadu. Roos was particularly interested in notions of romance in love in cinema, in people’s everyday lives and how these intersect in wedding media. This focus on vernacular media and its relation to cinema continued in her PhD research which Roos started in 2006 by working on fan clubs, public culture and images in Tamil Nadu. Since April 2012 Roos is working at the Institute of Anthropology at Heidelberg University teaching courses on media and visual anthropology.
NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING


Afbeeldingen staan centraal in de publieke ruimte van Tamil Nadu. Deze kenmerkt zich door levensgrote billboards en talloze posters en muurschilderingen van politieke leiders en filmsterren. Een groot deel van deze afbeeldingen wordt neergezet door fanclubs, waaronder door de fanclubs van de uiterst populaire Tamil acteur Rajinikanth. In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik hoe ‘Rajini’ fanclubs via geïndividualiseerde afbeeldingen een persoonlijke relatie met hun ster tot stand trachten te brengen, maar ook hoe zij met deze afbeeldingen hun eigen politieke ambities in de publieke ruimte uitdragen. Tegelijkertijd plaats ik deze afbeeldingen in de ruimere context van visuele straatscultuur in Tamil Nadu en schakel ik verder op naar de rol van fanclubs als verspreiders van verscheiden ideologieën in het politieke debat.

Het proefschrift is opgedeeld in drie delen. De eerste twee delen handelen voornamelijk over fanclubs en de productie van afbeeldingen, verbeeldingen en verwachtingen. Het derde deel plaatst deze afbeeldingen in een breder debat over het proces van beeldproductie en stedelijke ruimte als canvas van verschuivende sociaal-politieke ideologieën.

In de introductie die vooraf gaat aan de drie delen geef ik de politieke en visuele achtergrond weer waarin fanclubs gesitueerd moeten worden. De verwevenheid van film en politiek, zoals deze te zien is bij de fanclubs, is kenmerkend voor de geschiedenis van de deelstaat Tamil Nadu. Sinds de opkomst van de filmindustrie stonden filmsterren vaak aan de basis van politieke partijen. Ook omgekeerd verwierven personen en partijen politieke invloed via deze filmindustrie. Deze nauwe banden kwamen en komen nog steeds tot uitdrukking in een bijzondere, visuele straatscultuur. Deze straatscultuur manifesteert zich onder meer in grote billboards, muurschilderingen en posters, waarop filmsterren en politieke leiders vaak in levensgrote afbeeldingen worden afgebeeld.

Fanclubs, die als fenomeen opkwamen in de jaren zestig, steunden hun favoriete acteurs gedurende hun gehele carrière – zowel in de film als in de politiek. Deze inzet heeft geleid tot een wat eenzijdig beeld waarin fanclubs hoofdzakelijk gezien worden als een groep fanatieke aanhangers die zich ten dienste stellen van hun filmheld en daarmee ook van zijn politieke carrière. In dit proefschrift probeer ik aan te tonen dat de toewijding die aan fans wordt toegekend, gecompliceerder ligt. Mannen worden dan wel fan van een acteur vanwege zijn kwaliteiten als acteur en zij mogen inderdaad de indruk geven de politieke carrière van een acteur te ondersteunen, maar mijn onderzoek laat zien dat door de jaren heen het vooral de ambities van de fanclubleden zelf zijn die hun toewijding in de fanclub motiveren. Waar het lidmaatschap allereerst een wijze is om mee te doen aan het collectieve vermaak van films bekijken, wordt naarmate iemand ouder wordt de status en de (politieke) ambitie een belangrijke motor achter de inzet in een fanclub.
Deze inzet uit zich vooral in publieke filantropische activiteiten in naam van de acteur. Maar voor deze inzet en toewijding verwachten fans ook iets terug. Wat fans precies terug verwachten varieert echter enorm van persoon tot persoon: van gratis filmtickets, een foto met de filmheld, toegang tot een school voor hun kinderen, tot een functie binnen een politieke partij. Ik wil juist deze nuances en variaties, maar ook de veranderingen in iemands persoonlijk leven laten zien in dit proefschrift. Door deze veranderingen te tonen, wil ik duidelijk maken dat fans geen passieve pionnen zijn in de politieke carrières van hun filmhelden maar zelf bepalen wat zij uit hun lidmaatschap halen.

Dit doe ik in het bijzonder door in de eerste twee delen van het proefschrift te kijken naar de uitgebreide beeldcultuur waarmee fanclubleden hun inzet en toewijding zichtbaar maken. Hierbij tracht ik aan te tonen hoe een verandering in technologie ook een verandering in gebruik teweeg heeft gebracht. Rondom 2000 is vinyl het nieuwe canvas geworden waarop fans hun afbeeldingen van hun filmheld portretteren. Hoewel de meeste fanclubleden de digitale prints eigenlijk niet mooi vinden, is het gebruik van vinyl bijzonder populair geworden. Dit is te verklaren uit de mogelijkheden die vinyl heeft. Op digitale prints kunnen niet, zoals met geschilderde billboards gebruikelijk was, enkel afbeeldingen van filmhelden worden getoond- ook de foto’s van de fanclubleden zelf kunnen nu geportretteerd worden. Dit brengt een hogere mate van zichtbaarheid met zich mee. Deze zichtbaarheid via afbeeldingen is cruciaal in het nastreven van politieke netwerkactiviteiten van fanclubleden: het versterkt hun prestige en hun toegang tot sociaal-politieke netwerken.

In het derde en tevens laatste deel van het proefschrift plaats ik de afbeeldingen die fanclubs maken in een breder medialandschap, waarin politieke partijen en filmproducties zichzelf adverteren met levensgrote billboards, posters en muurschilderingen. De laatste jaren echter, zijn grotere steden zoals Chennai (de hoofdstad van de deelstaat Tamil Nadu) zich steeds meer gaan ontwikkelen in de richting van een neoliberale beleidsvisie, waarbij geprobeerd wordt om de stad om te vormen tot een world class stad. Politici trachten de stad aantrekkelijk te maken voor investeerders, maar in het bijzonder ook voor de middenklasse die zich in het beeld van een world class elite vertegenwoordigd ziet. Daarbij wordt niet alleen de economische infrastructuur van de stad in die richting aangepast, maar ook de publieke ruimte en commerciële plekken van vermaak zoals bioscopen. Ze lijken zich steeds meer te richten naar deze world class ideologie. Dit is zichtbaar in een verandering van afbeeldingen en in een veranderde verbeelding van de publieke ruimte zelf. Dezelfde politieke partijen die oorspronkelijk de typische beeldcultuur van Tamil Nadu in het leven hebben geroepen distantiëren zich nu van deze zelfde beeldcultuur die vervolgens als populistisch gezien wordt om zich daarna vooral te gaan richten op de world class elite. Fanclubbeelden en de alom aanwezige politieke billboards worden nu geweerd uit de publieke ruimte. Met andere woorden, publieke ruimte en afbeeldingen zijn het canvas waarop sociale projecten worden verbeeld, ze maken zelf ook fysiek deel uit van deze projecten. Visuele cultuur is, met andere woorden, niet enkel een reflectie van de realiteit, het maakt er deel van uit.

Samengevat begint dit proefschrift als een etnografie van visuele praktijken van fanclubleden, en van de productie en consumptie van beelden in de publieke ruimte, en eindigt het als een etnografie van straatbeelden door middel waarvan en waarop conflicten en neoliberale denkbeelden en ideologieën van wereldklasse worden verbeeld. Ik eindig dit proefschrift met een korte epiloog waarmee ik met de bovengenoemde veranderingen voorspel dat fanclubs terrein verliezen in de filmische en politieke sferen waarin ze figureren.