Book Review: Katharine Sarikakis and Leslie Regan Shade (eds), *Feminist Interventions in International Communication: Minding the Gap*

Katharina Lindner

*Media Culture Society* 2012 34: 122

DOI: 10.1177/0163443711426244

The online version of this article can be found at:

http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/34/1/122

Published by:

http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *Media, Culture & Society* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://mcs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://mcs.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

>> Version of Record - Jan 31, 2012

What is This?
Book Reviews


This anthology provides a wide-reaching account of those, often insufficiently contextualized, under-researched as well as marginalized, areas of overlap between the study of international communication and feminist debates and concerns. The ambitious and timely aim of the book is an exploration of the current state of the field of international communication – in itself vast and not easily defined – with ‘feminist curiosity’. It achieves this aim by making visible the gaps within the current scholarship in international communication (particularly around women’s position and their activities within various communication contexts), by highlighting the existing feminist work frequently ignored within the key literature in the field, and by pointing to fruitful possibilities for future, ‘curiously feminist’ research in this area.

The collection contains contributions from a group of authors with expertise in a wide range of areas and fields, including media, communication and journalism, cultural studies, literature, gender studies, development studies, sociology, and education, which allows this anthology to provide an overview of feminist concerns that is constructively wide-reaching in scope. At times, this is perhaps at the expense of a more in-depth exploration of specific topics – although the aim of this collection is, of course, to identify relevant and pressing issues, to make those issues visible, and to provide a starting point for much needed further research.

A collection of 20 chapters with diverse aims and concerns, the anthology provides a focus on mainstream as well as alternative and grassroots media, on the contexts of production and consumption as well as representation, and on various national (‘local’) as well as inter- and transnational (‘global’) communication contexts. At the heart of the research presented here is also an acknowledgement, however, that recent developments in communication technologies, as well as related economic, cultural and political changes, mean that the distinction between these categories (alternative–mainstream, production–consumption, local–global,) become increasingly blurred, providing additional challenges to the study of women/gender in communication internationally. One of the main arguments put forward, therefore, is that the complex intertwining and multi-layering of these categories and structures, especially as they relate to the position of women, needs to be taken into account, and that new conceptual and analytical strategies need to be developed in order to do so.

The numerous chapters in this collection are grouped together according to themes and divided into five parts. The first part (‘Revisiting International Communication Studies’) provides a critical introduction to the field of international communication
from a feminist perspective and sets the tone for the remainder of the book. This part begins to identify those issues and themes that are underexplored and marginalized due to the dominant theoretical, conceptual and analytical frameworks employed in the field. Margaret Gallagher, for instance, emphasizes the need for feminist research in this global era to explore the interrelations between women’s employment and decision making power in the media and communications industries, questions of representation (particularly in the news media) and policy development in the digital age. Gillian Young explores how new media and communication technologies blur the distinctions between the public and the private, while also pointing to the ways in which the ‘private’ (associated as it is with women, femininity and a lack of rationality) is often neglected within the established conceptual and analytical frameworks, where the ‘international’ tends to be equated with the ‘public’. Ursula Huws develops this idea further and relates it to questions around democracy and citizenship, challenging conceptions of the ‘information society’ as a necessarily democratic and gender-free sphere by focusing on questions of access to communication technologies in particular.

Part 2 (‘Gendering Policy Regimes’) engages with questions of (inter-)national cultural policy, ranging from Kieran Prasad’s discussion of policies around broadcasting, telecommunications and ICTs, and their impact on women’s socio-cultural and economic standing and development (with a main focus on India but also touching upon other developing countries in Asia and Africa), to Katherine Sarikakis’s and Zeenia Shaukat’s account of the pornography industry as an inter- and transnational system of production and distribution with an increasingly global infrastructure, involving a global (one-way) flow of labour and the development of a universally understood language, all of which has significant consequences for gender equality and human rights globally. Additionally, Barbara Crow and Kin Sawchuk, in their chapter on mobile phone technology, which focuses specifically on (inter-)national policies governing the use of the communications spectrum and infrastructure, highlight the urgent need for feminist scholars to become more familiar with the ways in which policy is linked to technological development. Only then can a sustained critique of gender inequalities around, for instance, the distribution of spectrum as a public resource be produced.

Part 3 (‘Mediating Meanings, Mediating Regimes of Power’) includes chapters that variously explore the ways in which meanings around women, gender difference and power are constituted and reinforced through media representation. There is a useful emphasis here on a range of different kinds of media (from print and music videos to the internet), on a range of different national and regional contexts (from Canada and Arab countries, to South Africa and Western countries), and on different kinds of themes (from representation of violence against indigenous women and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, to the sexualized depictions of the Muslim female body).

Part 4 (‘Labouring International Communication’) engages with the crucial, but significantly under-researched issue around women and labour in the context of the increasingly global nature of the communication and cultural industries, including the transnational flow of (cheap, often female) labour and the increasingly ‘immaterial’ nature of the labour required. This section includes chapters concerned with the increasing ‘corporatization of development’ with a particular focus on the router manufacturer Cisco Systems (by Lisa McLaughlin), and on the exploitation of girls labouring in Bangladeshi sweat shops (by Leslie Regan Shade and Nikki Porter). There is also a
chapter concerned with the role of female labour in the context of the blurring of boundaries between home and work that has come with recent technological developments (by Vincent Mosco, Catherine McKercher and Andrew Stevens).

Part 5 (‘Glocalizing Media and Technology’), finally, provides various accounts of the interrelationship between technology cultures and ‘glocal media’, with chapters on the impact of digital technologies on the feminist book industry (by Simone Murray) as well as on issues around media classification and censorship in New Zealand (by Mary Griffiths).

As such, this anthology engages with an extremely wide range of topics, but there are certain overarching themes that run through the collection, reappearing at various points and providing a sense of the intrinsic links between the various issues explored. These include the significance of the public–private/work–home binaries and their gendered dimensions; they also include the need to confront gender inequalities (both symbolic and material) in contexts in which communication technologies are employed to aid development and fight hunger, poverty and larger global inequalities; and they include the need for a more explicit acknowledgement, exploration and (activist) critique of the patriarchal structures that characterize media and communication systems globally and in all its dimensions, including labour, production, ownership, representation, use, consumption, policy and access to technology.

While perhaps painting a seemingly dark picture, the work presented here also, and crucially, points to those areas where ICTs have impacted positively on girls’ and women’s lives and those areas that provide potential opportunities for activism, agency, empowerment, sustainable development and a move towards increasing gender equality – which should, after all, the authors variously argue, be at the heart of any attempt to fight global inequalities.

Overall, this is an ambitious, engaging and, most importantly, necessary ‘intervention’ in a field (international communication) in which feminist concerns have historically been marginalized – and it seems to me that this intervention might have positive implications for the field of international communication as a whole, as the neglect of issues around women and gender necessarily restricts and negatively impacts on the insights that international communications scholarship might provide.

Katharina Lindner
University of Stirling, UK


Fortune’s Fool is a worthwhile read for those intrigued by the political, economic and technological issues pertinent to the contemporary music industry, and it provides a detailed assessment of the reasons why large industry players are having so much difficulty navigating the digital music economy. It is a timely follow-up to the author’s The Mansion on the Hill (1998). Goodman introduces and effectively situates the industry executives who, while often caught up with their egos, have shaped not only immensely influential mergers, but also the ways in which artists are produced, distributed and promoted to audiences.

Countless record labels, entertainment companies and executives are referenced, cited and commented on throughout, and Goodman does a solid job of highlighting the various interested parties central to the functioning of the music business over the past few decades. The primary figure that moves the reader through this extensive narrative is Edgar Bronfman

Downloaded from mcs.sagepub.com by guest on February 6, 2014