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FEMINISM,  
MULTICULTURALISM,  
AND THE  
MEDIA

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GLOBAL DIVERSITIES

EDITED BY

ANGHARAD N. VALDIVIA

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—ANGHARAD N. VALDIVIA

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## PART I

# The Production of Interventions

One of the major areas of study in mass communications theory is production. In this area we consider overlapping and often inextricable levels of analysis. As McQuail (1987) notes, these levels are theoretical and methodological models for the purposes of intellectual examination, but most of us live these levels simultaneously and inseparably. Thus in the study of production we have institutional, organizational, and individual levels of analysis. At the institutional level of analysis we study the norms and values that govern a particular institution. In the case of media studies we have the mass media as the overarching if evanescent institution, but we also have more specific ones, such as the press. Institutions, if I may be allowed to simplify matters a bit, have no address, no building where we can find them. On the other hand, the organizational level of analysis refers to the conventions and practices that govern a particular organization. Here, we can find these places on the map. For example, the *New York Times* is one such organization, with practices such as timeliness and objectivity that govern the production of the daily newspaper. Similarly, NBC, MTV, Paramount, Sony, and others are all organizations with buildings and addresses wherein rules, written or unwritten, govern the steady and repeated production of mass media. At the individual level of analysis, we study the particular producer who functions within an organization that in turn more or less obeys values and norms at the institutional level. Although it is important to consider the socioeconomic makeup of individual producers—that is, their gender, class background, race and/or ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, national origin, and physical ability—we cannot forget

that these individuals function within organizations with established practices that, in turn, respond to institutional norms and values.

All three levels overlap, and chapters in this section explore some of the issues and contradictions facing the production of media from a feminist multiculturalist perspective. While other parts of the book focus on textual analysis (Part II) and the combination of approaches (Part III), the chapters in this first section privilege the area of production.

Consistent with the comments made in Chapter 1, the issue of identity politics, for example, is lived by sociohistorical subjects at all three levels. At the individual level of analysis, multicultural subjects often face double, triple, or multiple binds as they attempt to negotiate, consciously or unconsciously, their individual goals and needs with those of their organizations and their institutions. This is why identity politics strategies cannot be successful from an individual level alone. Organizational practices, most of which were developed and adopted prior to the explicit consideration of multiculturalism, are not sensitive to these issues of identity. Similarly, the norms and values that govern media institutions do not include multiculturalism. Quite the contrary, as Chapter 1 notes, the binary approach that underscores much of Western intellectual thought precludes multiculturalism.

Isabel Molina Guzmán (Chapter 2) illustrates the binds and contradictions faced by a multiculturalist feminist subject as she navigates the individual, organizational, and institutional issues in the setting of higher education. At the individual level of analysis, Molina faces attitudes and comments from both fellow students and teachers that underscore her otherness from their perspective. Molina also faces and challenges organizational pedagogical practices that would mute her experience. As a feminist woman of color, Molina has to wait until her senior year in college to study issues that seem pertinent to her lived experiences. It is not, as some critics charge of the multiculturalist project, that Molina demands that her experiences be the only basis for the educational curriculum, but rather that inclusion of multiculturalist experiences be integrated throughout the curriculum rather than singled out as aberrant and other. The curriculum is not set up to include the study of everyone's multicultural identity. At the institutional level of analysis, both the organizational practices and individual attitudes reflect the fact that higher education as an institution does not value multiculturalism. From the system of rewards and promotions to overarching "universal" values, multiculturalism falls between the cracks. It is thus only too easy for a feminist woman of color to continually face challenge after challenge or to drop out of

the field altogether. Similarly, as her mini case study suggests, Molina demonstrates that a minor intervention, such as Chino Wilson's in the *Daily Collegian*, is met with strong and concerted resistance for it challenges individual attitudes, organizational practices, and institutional values. It is not so much that Wilson challenged the cherished value of objectivity, which is held at all three levels of analysis, but that he revealed just how limited that notion is from the perspective of multiculturalism, and that is why the reaction is so virulent.

Lorna Roth, Beverly Nelson, and Kasennahawi Marie David (Chapter 3) explore the intervention of three differently situated women in a moment of geographic and cultural struggle. Here we encounter a basic production issue—namely who will speak for whom. In this case, the news value of the confrontation between a First Nation community and the Canadian government lures the attention of national and international news agencies. The only ones present at the site, however, are two women and their outside contact, another woman. This chapter highlights the agenda-setting role of the media, and the battle over the terms that will be used to refer to the confrontation and the people who will be allowed to cover the confrontation. Clearly, these three women make a difference as individual producers of media. They do so partly because of their own tenacity and endurance but also, due to their access to a more or less independent community radio station, at the organizational level of analysis. Finally, at the institutional level of analysis, the cultural clash was multiple, involving not just two communities with different norms and values, but gender issues as well. Though gender issues were different in the Mohawk and Québécois communities, they nevertheless existed in both. One could also see the similarity in terms of women's socialized roles that teach us to value community and oral communication, both of which were central to the continued operation of the radio station. As an intervention, these women showed that in times of crisis, the struggle over meaning and production presents barriers and opportunities.

In Chapter 4, Marina Heung discusses the intervention of Asian American female filmmakers. While Asian chic appeared to be the rage, especially after *The Joy Luck Club*, Heung finds that Hollywood film still draws on time-worn stereotypes for Asians in general and Asian women in particular. She then explores mostly independent films made by Asian American women. Again, as in the previous chapter, what appears to make the difference is the combination of individual intervention outside of an organizational structure that limits or predefines the possibilities for a particular multicultural group, in

this case feminist Asian American filmmakers. The filmmakers use narrative and stylistic innovations to represent themselves. Under these conditions, filmmakers can challenge and possibly alter or modify organizational practices (e.g., what constitutes a good shot) as well as long-held values and norms at the institutional level (e.g., do multiculturalist subjects make worthwhile cinema). The change can be aimed at Hollywood film in particular and media production in general. The task is all the more onerous, given the long history of global influence enjoyed by Hollywood film, an influence that extends to our very imagination, and, as Heung notes, to the imagination of both Asian American film scholars and film producers.

Finally, Carolyn M. Byerly (Chapter 5) provides a study of the Women's Feature Service (WFS). Whereas the previous two chapters focused on bottom-up interventions, this chapter analyzes the top-down style of the United Nations, an organization that has attempted or contributed to many such undertakings with varying degrees of success. Although the United Nations possesses resources unavailable to the independent producers in the previous two chapters, the incipient news organizations nevertheless encounter resistance from mainstream individuals and organizations because of the WFS's challenge of cherished institutional norms and values. Expanding the news to include women challenges the basic premise of news as the arena of public, mostly male, events. Expanding the focus beyond Western parameters to developing countries pushes the boundaries even further. As such, the WFS intervention goes beyond creating an alternative news agency for and by women by challenging the current definition of news. It is not surprising then, that even with the support of the United Nations, some of the agencies did not become self-supporting organizations and therefore did not survive. On the other hand, as WFS headquarters moves to India and continues to be run by Third-World women, it promises to be a long-lasting intervention. None of this, of course, would be possible without the commitment of individuals such as Anita Anand and the many other journalists who keep WFS going.

The five chapters in this first section give the reader a taste of the possibilities of interventions in the area of media production. Though apparently different, all chapters demonstrate the interrelatedness of the three levels of analysis. Although independent media production seems to offer more possibilities for challenge and creativity, major global organizations such as the United Nations also contribute to the challenges and challengers. It is hoped that these challenges will not remain at the margins, that at the institutional

level the challenges will become the norm and feminist multicultural intervention will not be challenging by definition.

### Reference

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# 1 Feminist Media Studies in a Global Setting

*Beyond Binary Contradictions  
and Into Multicultural Spectrums*

ANGHARAD N. VALDIVIA

*Multicultural feminist media research* is quite a mouthful. In both practical and theoretical terms there is so much to consider, so much to discuss. This book strives to provide a map with some of the major signposts for this discussion. The map is neither static, two-dimensional, nor complete, for there is no monolithic vision for multicultural feminist media studies. As Jesús Martín Barbero (in Rowe & Schelling, 1991, p. 13)<sup>1</sup> has noted, this “map is nocturnal because the terrain has still to be made visible.” The reader is encouraged to fill in the gaps and to see them as “instigations for future work” (p. 13). The gaps will be extensive, because we are just beginning to draw it. Conditions and locations that may have been ignored or considered unimportant will rise to new prominence, making this map a living document of our emerging knowledge about our multicultural identity and the media’s role in it. Think of it as a living map, one with active volcanic eruptions, with no clear

beginnings or ends. This book is a nocturnal map to some of the eruptions marked by media.

I want to acknowledge that *feminism* and *multiculturalism* are highly contested concepts. It is beyond the scope of this book to engage in the history, debate, and resolution of these terms. Rather, the book begins from an assumption that these are worthy areas of study and that the reader has a cursory background of the conversation surrounding these concepts. *Feminism* in this book is broadly understood as the theoretical study of women's oppression and the strategic and political ways that all of us, building on that theoretical and historical knowledge, can work to end that oppression. It should be a given or an understood component that we simultaneously mean the oppression of all women while acknowledging that there are differences among women. That has not been the case, however, so we have to engage in what is now known as *multicultural* studies, thus specifically naming and addressing the fact that ours is a multicultural situation. Needless to say, this step should not even be necessary in a truly multicultural situation, but it underscores the fact that tendencies in a dominant culture serve to obscure the multiculturalism that is present in nearly every setting. By *multiculturalism* we mean not just a spectrum of race, ethnicities, class, global regions, and sexual orientation but the different cultural settings that we encounter as we traverse through our lives. Thus one of the cultural settings that is relevant to this book would undoubtedly be the area of media production. Another is the area of media reception—how do we encounter media products and with whom? Yet another would be the production of knowledge about media studies. We encounter media and media studies in the family, within a diverse spectrum of formations, the street, our work, and our friends. The cultures in all of these are quite different.

Because the study of mass communications is central to the contemporary condition, it is not surprising that media studies research yields provocative answers or paths to the understanding and discussion of multicultural feminist issues. In fact, Betty Friedan's groundbreaking book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), privileged the mass media as an indicator and site of struggle over gender politics. Lessons about diversity and multiculturalism have not been easy to learn, however. In the more than three decades since Friedan's book was published, feminists have learned much about the pervasiveness of sexist patterns, the difficulty of changing these patterns, and the media's role in the establishment, continuity, and breaking of these patterns. To make

matters more complex but infinitely more realistic, a major additional lesson learned by dominant culture feminist scholars, or one that, as Haraway (1987) notes, they “were forced kicking and screaming to notice” (p. 11), was that the term *women* applied to differently situated individuals. Women occupy a spectrum of identities as well as positions of power. Or as de Lauretis (1987) reminds us, the subject of feminism must be positioned in relation to social relations other than gender. Nevertheless, as Rakow (1992) notes, despite the many spaces opened up by a broad range of diversity focused groups, “feminist scholarship as a collective and public endeavor in the field has been by and about white women” (p. 4).

On the other hand, there is a growing amount of work on race and ethnic studies. Much like feminist work has focused largely on white women, ethnic and race studies have focused primarily on African Americans, and within that group the focus is usually on men. By omission, much of this work generalizes the race experience across genders. Recent readers include chapters addressing both race and gender (e.g., Friedman, 1991; Gonzales, Houston, & Chen, 1994), but these remain in the minority. To be sure, there are some commonalities about being an African American person as opposed to a Native American or Caucasian. However, we can also say that there are some commonalities to being women. Nevertheless these caveats do not obviate the need to study and understand some of the specific issues surrounding multicultural women and media studies. This book addresses such a need.

Recent work promises to expand the boundaries of previous scholarship, boundaries that have already been exploded by feminist multiculturalist scholars in many other disciplines (e.g., Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). The reader also should note that though Moraga and Anzaldúa’s work dates back to 1981, multicultural feminist scholarship cited in this chapter is quite recent, most of it published in the past 3 years. Feminist work in communications has tended to simplify the multicultural experience. Although most authors begin their work by acknowledging that race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, and global issues intersect with the topic of gender and the media, the vast majority of books and articles available on this topic focus primarily on white, middle-class, heterosexual, Western women. For example, Pribram’s (1988) elegant collection of women and film contains but two chapters on women of color, and both of these chapters are about African American women. Granted, one of the wonderful aspects of Pribram’s book is that the two chapters do not present a unified approach to African American issues. In fact,