Feminist Research in an Era of Globalization

Carolyn M. Byerly

Today’s rampant, uncontrolled global financial system is a woman’s issue.

HAZEL HENDERSON\(^1\)

The world has experienced a fundamental change in its economic relations... and women have played a major role.

Women in a Changing Global Economy\(^2\)

[W]e must be prepared to investigate the interrelations of public and private, of the economy and the domestic, of male and female roles, and of ideologies of work and politics and ideologies of gender, in our attempt to theorize the global dimensions of culture and society.

JANET WOLFF\(^3\)

ABSTRACT

Feminist communication scholars have moved both slowly and in fragmentary ways to develop a political-economic analysis of women’s relationship to global media industries. Instead, feminist research has remained focused mainly on gender representation in texts, with some (though less) attention paid to the economic and political structures within which media policies and procedures are formed and texts are created. As a result, communication research today lacks a substantial body of empirical data or theory to help us understand where females fit into the scheme of capital, ownership, employment, or decision-making levels of media enterprises. Such a research agenda is the subject of this essay, which explores ways that feminist research might be directed at these aspects of the women-and-media relationship. Feminist research agendas in an era of globalization must also be concerned with women’s efforts at changing the media, analyzing how women have or might intervene in large systems at micro, meso, and macro levels of media systems.
INTRODUCTION

For more than a quarter of a century, feminist media scholarship has been predominantly concerned with the analysis of women’s representation in media content and significantly less so with the relations of production through which texts are produced and distributed. Because feminist research has been overwhelmingly focused on women’s mediated representation, we lack a substantial body of empirical data and theory to help us understand where females fit into the larger scheme of today’s global media in terms of access to capital and ownership, employment, and decision making. We also know little about the overall effect of women’s alternative media structures on mainstream media industries or women’s ability to speak publicly and become fuller social actors. Although feminist scholars actively participate in globalization discussions, feminist media scholars per se so far have had less to say. My goal here is to contribute to the development of a feminist perspective in the dialogue on media globalization, and in the process, to suggest lines of inquiry that feminist researchers might pursue in defining women’s relationship to media in an era of globalization.

The concept of globalization is both fuzzy and controversial, and feminist scholars are not in agreement about the worthwhileness of using structural frameworks of analysis to examine women’s relationship to their world. This essay makes a case for structural analysis, but it also addresses the production of culture, which often occurs outside the formal economic and political structures where women have been particularly active in creating alternative communication forms. Feminist-generated communication is significant to creating democratic communication that includes women. The notion of democratic communication serves as the organizing principle for this essay, which ranges far and wide theoretically to assimilate the threads of critical and feminist scholarship necessary to define a feminist communication research trajectory that is at once theoretical, empirical, and practical. In the end, feminist scholarship must enable women to intervene in public policy and media operations, and encourage them to establish alternative media structures that strengthen women’s voice and role in public deliberation, governance, and other sites that determine relations of power.

GLOBALIZATION

The Common Definition

Globalization is a macro-level concept that has a primary definition and various meanings, depending on one’s subjectivity. The term globalization generally refers to the global economy that has come about since the early 1980s through an international economic restructuring. The process has meant a decrease in the importance of national borders, the integration of economies into a single capitalist world-system, a single division of labor, the location of production sites for labor-intensive processes in the developing nations, the privatization of many publicly held functions and enterprises, and a concentration of ownership among transnational corporations (Walker and Fox, 1995; World Investment Report, 1996; Women in a Changing Global Economy, 1995). While manifested mainly through economic institutions—banks, investment houses, service and manufacturing enterprises, and consumer markets—globalization has also deeply involved and affected communication systems on several levels. Haring (2002) observed...
that since the 1970s, telecommunications has become the central nervous system of the global economy. Computerized information networks allow records and investments to be transmitted within and among nations, creating an abstract and fluid economic system such as the world has never known. The news and entertainment media, which represent a major part of telecom industries, both in relation to investments and content that flows through the technology, connects diverse societies in new arrangements that are problematic in ways that this paper and will be explored in time.

There are several things to emphasize about the process of globalization. First, economic globalization has evolved through a carefully constructed political framework of laws and other public policies aimed at deregulating the flow and accumulation of capital across national borders. These laws have been written and passed by national legislatures, by administrative agencies at the national and international levels, and by recently formed bodies such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), its successor World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Its players are openly self-conscious about the intentionality of globalization, seen in statements such that by former WTO Director General Renato Ruggerio. Ruggerio opened the first ministerial meeting of the group in December 1996 by referring to the drafting of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, which he said was like “writing the constitution of a single global economy” (Clarke and Barlow 1997: 30). Remembering that globalization didn’t just happen, but was brought about systematically by particular individuals who have a responsibility to specific publics is important in order to conceptualize citizen action and political change, as the last part of this paper will show.

Second, globalization is motivated by profit and control on the part of those who own and control the large transnational corporations (TNCs). The barons of communications industries are chief among these players. Globalization has been accomplished technologically through telecommunication networks that extend to all corners of the globe and that help to track and move capital across geographies, real and imagined, and that represent huge income generators in and of themselves. Revenues in the decade from 1986 to 1997 nearly tripled, according to Compaine and Gomery (2000). United Nations’ data for the same period indicate that the global telecommunications industries generated profits of $2 trillion in that timeframe, more than doubling the $745 billion they had earned in the decade before (World Investment Report, 1996).

Therefore, it’s essential to ask who own these media, whether their philosophies and practices serve the public interest, and how their profits are put to use. Because all of these TNCs are privately held businesses, it’s also important to ask how citizens might exercise greater control over entities that create infrastructures employed in the systems of governance as well as commerce.

Third, globalization and the media industries associated with it have a gender and race. The quantum leap in profits just mentioned was good news for the few wealthy owners whose mega-TNCs had spent years gobbling up smaller companies, streamlining their manufacturing and other operations (including the laying off of workers), and growing richer in the process. But this burgeoning of wealth benefited a relatively small number of already rich and powerful men located in nations with the highest gross national products — the industrialized core nations. While women have risen in terms of literacy rates, life expectancy, managerial occupation, and political participation, in general, the majority of the world’s women (62%) still live in
poverty, particularly in the developing nations of the southern and eastern hemispheres (Chen, 1995; *Women in a Changing Global Economy*, 1995). Neither has women’s ownership and control of media industries expanded through the years of economic globalization.

### Meanings of Globalization

There are numerous perspectives on what the globalization of capital and industries *means*. Therefore, it is useful to summarize and critique some of the major positions on globalization, in general, and with respect to media, in particular, beginning with Wallerstein, whose world-system theory provides the baseline interpretation that many of the other perspectives argue with. The discourse overall is still largely —but not entirely— male in origin and orientation. Several critical male theorists attempt to account for the location of gender and race in their analyses, but their inclusion is minimal; others sidestep gender altogether. The emerging feminist views move usefully toward an analysis of gender in research on women, media and globalization.

*A universalizing world-system: Wallerstein.* World-system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein (1994) reminds us that globalization didn’t dramatically happen when corporate giants flexed their muscles in the 1980s. Rooted in the early capitalism of fifteenth-century Europe, today’s capitalist world-system was both expansionist and global in orientation from the start. World-systems theory builds on Marx’s theory of capital and Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to demonstrate how nations negotiated their relationships to each other over time. In the process, they formed groups of core, semi-peripheral and peripheral states. Though the core nations have varied some in their membership through the centuries, they have always been European in fact or affiliation, with a sequence of hegemons —Holland, England, United States— at their helm. Both dynamic and historical the model has resonated with leftist intellectual seeking a macro (structural) analysis of today’s political economy. The concepts of core and periphery were also useful to post-colonial theorists developing critical theories of colonialism, neo-colonialism, dependency, and liberation in the 1970s and 1980s. That this terminology has also made its way into mainstream discourse can be seen in news stories that refer to the “core nations of the G-7” (actually, now the G-8 major industrial nations) and the “poorer nations of the periphery” to describe least developed nations. Other aspects of the world-system theory, such as its basic critique of capitalism, have never found a place in a popular culture shaped by consumerism and capitalist values. Some aspects of the theory are also controversial among feminist and critical scholars.

Wallerstein’s fundamental argument is that capitalism universalized itself by way of a dominant idea-system, or “culture,” which by the late 1980s had manifested its victory in the disintegration of Marxism-Leninism as a viable model of governance (Wallerstein, 1994: 167). Believing that culture has always been a weapon of the powerful, and that now a kind of “geoculture” in the form of popular communication (films, television, magazines, advertising) emanates from the U.S. and other core nations to less powerful nations, he says:

The heart of the debate, it seems to me, revolves around the ways in which the presumed antinomies of unity and diversity, universalism and particularism, humanity and race, world and nation, person and man/woman have been manipulated. I have previously argued that the two principal ideological doctrines that have emerged in the history of the capitalist world-economy
— that is, universalism on the one hand and racism and sexism on the other — are not opposites but a symbiotic pair. I have argued that their “right dosage” has made possible the functioning of the system, one which takes the form of a continuing ideological zigzag. (p. 167)

We recognize Marx in Wallerstein’s discussion —his insistence that those who control the means of production also control the ideas produced, his effort to show a clear relationship between base and superstructure, and, finally, his recognition that every system contains its own contradictions in his reference to “continuing ideological zigzag” (the last of which he explains at some length). Wallerstein’s dialectical model is at once appealing and unsettling. He brings together the macroscopic (capitalism’s dominance) and the microscopic (racism and sexism), and he visualizes the cultural realm as the critical space where identity movements against racism and sexism are formed to challenge capitalism and make the world more democratic. At the same time he insists that the capitalist world-system universalizes itself through a dominant geoculture that becomes a tool of the corporate rulers: “Culture has always been a weapon of the powerful” (1997:99). Wallerstein’s remedy for geoculture is a path of what he calls “social particularisms” that represent large unified groups (not individuals) with shared goals of resisting dominant culture in order to make political and economic structures egalitarian (1997: 104-105).

Multiple subjectivities: critical scholars. Other scholars argue with or refine the notion of the universal. Stuart Hall (1997a) rejects the Euro-centric notion of a world-system in which the core nations control the rest of the world. He sees not a single world-system but two world systems struggling with each other:

... an older, corporate, enclosed, increasingly defensive [system] which has to go back to nationalism and national cultural identity in a highly defensive way, and to try to build barriers around it before it is eroded. And, then, this other form of the global post-modern which is trying to live with, and at the same moment, overcome, sublate, get hold of, and incorporate difference (p. 33).

Hall, who came to England in the 1950s, has symbolically been there for centuries:

I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. . the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children’s teeth. There are thousands of others beside me that are, you know, the cup of tea itself … Where does tea come from? Ceylon —Sri Lanka, India (Hall 1997b: 48-49).

Insisting on keeping the “local” within sight in an era of globalization, he walks around the data that demonstrate the fact of an integrated capitalist system and asks: “What about the people who did not go above the globalization but went underneath to the local?” (p. 33) The return to the local is often a response to globalization. It is what people do when, in the face of overwhelming change, they feel out of touch and control and return to what they know best, Hall observes. In one of the most lucid and convincing arguments that I have read against the totalizing force of globalization, Hall (1997b) raises the possibility of a new counter politics born of local and cultural identities and their mediated expressions through film, television, books —the same products that Wallerstein suspects for their universalizing influence—. Hall
makes a limited attempt to factor gender into his analysis by observing that “the new forms of
global power are the most sensitive to questions of feminism” (p. 32). For example, women are
now part of the workplace, and how will they and the children they have been expected to care
for, be accommodated?

Roland Robertson (1997) extends what Arjun Appadurai has called the central problem in
global relations, “a tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization,”
by conceptualizing the point where the particular and the universal meet as being “a globewide
cultural nexus” (p. 77). Robertson contributes several useful ideas to understanding globaliza-
 tion. He suggests that the two seemingly polar entities, the local/particular and the global, meet
and complement one another. He also reminds us not to forget that individual human beings
have major roles in global processes, and that some of these roles manifest themselves through
non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that mediate and promote individual liberties —edu-
cation, human rights, the rights of women, and so forth (p. 80)—. Robertson soundly identifies
a role for feminism in globalization to help make sense of international politics. Citing Cynthia
Enloe’s (1990) Bananas, Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics,
in which the author casts woman as a “global victim,” Robertson argues for what he calls a “se-
lective response” to globalization. Such a response envisions whole societies rejecting global
influences (p. 89).

Political economists Edward Herman and Robert W. McChesney (1997) are almost wholly
concerned with the structural arrangements of globalization and their effects on media indus-
tries. Their book The Global Media: the new missionaries of global capitalism is an encyclope-
dia of the players and events of the 1980s and 1990s that restructured national media industries
and created a global commercial media market. They show how the rapid conglomeration of
transnational corporations (TNCs) led to control of mass channels of communication by a few
corporate giants in and then illustrate how these channels serve as a kind of delivery system
for western ideas and goods (both through advertising and a proliferation of US television pro-
grams and films). Drawing on world-system theory (without ever naming it such or citing
its most obvious scholars), Herman and McChesney, like Wallerstein, critique a globalizing
culture that is capitalist and consumerist at its core and that serves a wealthy western oligopoly
intent on consolidating its influence and squeezing out critical voices at every level. Herman
and McChesney’s central concern is with the inherent threat to democracy in this process. They
point to the displacement of diverse political points of view and any real dissent by light enter-
tainment —sports, soap operas, music, and so forth— in both print and broadcast news, films,
and magazines. Habermas’ theory of an ideal democratic public sphere serves them well here,
as they explain how media are the means by which most citizens today experience and par-
ticipate in the public sphere —that imagined space where public debate and deliberation may
occur free from political and economic influences—. They give “heavy weight to the media’s
ability to contribute to the public sphere” in their assessment of the media’s social role, and they
argue that the public’s ability to participate in that sphere through the media “is an important
determinant of the quality of democracy” (p. 4).

Herman and McChesney —and, more recently, McChesney (2004)— suggest a useful
analytical framework to feminist scholars, even though they make no attempt themselves to
sort out the ways that men and women may experience media globalization differently. Their
concern with the role of media in democratic social participation approximates the principles
set forth by global feminism since the 1970s. They would do well to inform the historical as-
pects of their work with the closely related, longstanding feminist analysis and to take account of the interventionist efforts that global feminism has made since the mid 1970s. This would also strengthen another aspect of their otherwise comprehensive political-economic analysis, the acknowledgment of a dialectical process by which people marginalized by world capitalism are engaging the problem. As it is, their talk about a “struggle for democratic communication” late in the book but do little to really explore this. McChesney’s (2004) more recent work gives much greater credence to media activism as the route to a new dialectical relationship between the powerful media owners and the marginalized citizens who, at least in the United States, rose up in magnificent resistance to media deregulation in 2003 in organized, loud demands for more democratic national media policies. Still, there is little historical context for the long, continuous struggle waged by women, people of color, and gay and lesbian citizens either U.S. or other societies to gain access to media.

WOMEN, GLOBALIZATION AND THE MEDIA

Feminist Interrogations of Globalization.

The decade of the 1990s saw several useful analyses of women’s relationship to globalization emerge. Zillah Eisenstein (1996) brought into focus the privatization of public services and spaces that has displaced women in both industrial and developing nations. She said:

Forget federal regulations on the workplace or the environment. Forget Medicaid or Medicare. Forget vaccinations for poor children. Forget the public/nation as an imaginary/reality. This privatization takes place on top of the existing patriarchal and racist inequities that structure the public/private divides.

Eisenstein reminded us that globalization trickles down to women’s daily life in material ways: the disappearance of abortion rights, prenatal and other health care, workplace safety. In addition, in the global economy, labor is not only divided along gender lines but also by race, ethnicity and religion. The international impact has been broad, with divisions occurring within the borders of industrial nations, within the post-Soviet Eastern Europe, and within all of the developing nations.

In Globalization and Its Discontents, Saskia Sassen (1996) scrutinized what she calls the “global city,” i.e., centers where immigration and migration have been heaviest as a result of TNCs locating their production facilities there, or from other upheavals. Sassen “unbundled” the global city to reveal how it operates as a partly de-nationalized platform for global capital. Like Eisenstein, she recognized that the nation state’s sovereignty is under attack, and that such attack also weakens the possibilities for mobilizing political action to change laws and policies. Sassen called for new sites of women’s presence which also have no national boundaries. One example analytic platforms, such as she tries to build, to help women understand what they are up against and how they might organize themselves in this new era. Sassen also called into question the “male narrative about globalization,” which she believes is too concerned with the “upper circuits of capital, not the lower ones; and particularly with the hypermobility of capital.
rather than place-bound capital.” Looking at the underside of global capital is necessary, she said, even with jobs of the global information economy, because:

Once this production process is brought into the analysis, we see that secretaries are part of it, and so are the cleaners of the buildings where the professionals do their work. An economic configuration very different from that suggested by the concept of information economy emerges. We recover the material conditions, production sites, and place-boundedness that are also part of globalization and the information economy.

Reintroducing the State into analyses of globalization allows us to conceptualize transformation of certain agencies, and this, in turn, helps us to raise the gender questions. Like Hall, who wouldn’t let us forget that he was the sugar in the bottom of the Englishperson’s teacup, neither will Sassen let men who conduct the male narratives about globalization succeed in disappearing women from the picture. Fixing her analysis at the bottom of globalization, she brings back into view the underpaid wage earners, who are overwhelmingly female and often immigrants.

Maureen Turim (1997) urged us to analyze the production of culture if we want to understand the meaning of globalization. She argues that it’s more complicated than meets the eye. For example, an American company put up the money to make the film “Paris, Texas” in rural America a few years back. The director was German. Though the film used an American distributor, it was more likely to have an international audience with its European sensibility of American subjects (sex, relationships, wife battering, and pornography). We can define the political economy of the film fairly easily, she said, but “the means of production and the manner of distribution will not necessarily reveal how the texts of culture are consumed” (p. 146). This particular film is so heavily laden with gender messages that her exhortations to account for contradictory readings and unclear meanings across audiences holds a certain logic. Globalization to many is the popular culture they see before them, and, as Turim illustrates, these “all combine to create a distortion to the map we might attempt to draw of our global culture” (p. 148).

Janet Wolff (1997) used textual analysis to examine cultural products, the space where she believes:

... ideologies are constructed, and the social relations are forged. The very codes of art and literature, the narrative structures of the text, are part of the ongoing process of the construction of meaning and, hence, of the social world. (p. 171)

The challenge in the end, she said is to interrelate our understanding of how economic structures give rise to meaning and representation. At the heart of our problem is the need to construct an international-level theory of culture that is “sensitive to the ways in which identity is constructed and represented in culture and in social relations” (p. 172). Gender will have to be central to the theory because identity always has a gender. But, finally, an account of culture in the contemporary world which grasps the fundamental economic factors in an international capitalist economy will analyze the cultural industries within given societies and sort out their relationship to what is often touted as “cultural imperialism.” New systems of representation,
Wolff said, can ultimately subvert that imperialism. Where and how these representations are to be disseminated is left unanswered.

**COMMUNICATION AND WOMEN’S POWER**

Underlying this essay is the assumption that the globalizing media industries present a presumed and imminent threat to women’s public speech and participation in democratic processes. But what are the nature and extent of that threat? Has globalization meant fewer media jobs for women? Has it lessened the amount or quality of information in the media about women and poverty, employment, health care, the effects of downsizing on families? Have women been meaningfully involved in setting public policies (nationally and internationally) that have resulted in media and other globalization? What is the relationship between women’s employment in the corporate media and their ability to be gatekeepers on women’s behalf? How can feminist and other alternative media help to mobilize public support for intervention in globalization?

If we think of women working in communication fields as among the revered gatekeepers of women’s interests, then we would do well to consider to what regard to what is happening with women’s place within media industries. A decade ago, Gallagher (1995) found that most nations still have a less than 50 percent of women in media work forces. Women’s share of jobs reaches more than 40 percent in Botswana and Lesotho but plummets to below 20 percent in Malawi and Mozambique. Central and Eastern Europe each average 45 percent female media professionals, and the Nordic states have around 45 percent, but in Western Europe that falls to 35 percent. In Canada and US (which she combines) the figure is 39 percent, in Latin America around 25 percent, in Australia 39 percent, but in Japan only 8 percent. This is only part of the story. Very few women —about 12 percent across all media— hold jobs that could be considered to have decision-making authority, according to Gallagher. In addition, women are poorly paid compared to men, and subject to both part-time and unstable job arrangements. Stana Martin (2002) found that women’s employment in information sector (i.e., jobs involving the routine production and distribution of data and other information) had soared, but not at the managerial levels. That women need to push for more advancement to decision making levels within both mass media and information industries is clear. Research shows that women also do not fare well in media content. Gallagher’s recent work (2002) reporting the findings of the Global Media Monitoring Project showed that women accounted for only 18% of the news subjects in print and broadcast news stories in the 70 participating reporting nations. This low percentage was up only 1% over the same monitoring exercise five years earlier.

**DIRECTIONS FOR FEMINIST RESEARCH**

There are many possible lines of inquiry for feminist media researchers to pursue in order to fill gaps and expand what is currently known about women’s relationship to mass media industries. The approaches that I suggest incorporates Diane Elson’s (1994) explication of macro, meso and micro-levels in economic systems as these have related to feminist reform. I apply these specifically to media industries and women’s relationship to them in suggesting paths for feminist scholarship.
The first line of inquiry might answer the questions, “What is feminism’s impact in mediated spaces?” Has feminism served to place a new language and thinking about women into mainstream spaces? And, how has this progress varied from nation to nation? These follow from Elson’s observation that the micro-level of institutions have often been the most convenient for women to challenge and affect. Although such pursuit might seem to be counter-intuitive given the dismal picture painted till now, this line of inquiry is needed to more accurately discern how new laws advancing women’s educational and economic opportunities, reproductive rights, and other rights borne of modern-day women’s liberation movements from nation to nation have entered into news reporting, television programming, film, and other popular culture. That women are still marginalized in mediated realms is unquestionable. And yet feminism’s production of new language has spawned nations. Nancy Fraser (1993) noted that feminists invented new terms for describing social reality, e.g., the words “sexism”, “the double shift”, “sexual harassment”, and “marital, date and acquaintance rape”, thereby reducing, although not eliminating, the extent of our disadvantage in official public spheres.” Fraser shows how feminists’ articulation of a language of experience, moved first from the private sphere to a feminist-created women’s public sphere, and then on into the dominant sphere and presumably also other counter public spheres. Focusing specifically on violence against women, some of my own work (Byerly 1998a) suggests that feminism has helped to reverse some myths (e.g., that women are to blame for their victimization) and offer alternative explanations (e.g., that assailants and abusers are responsible) with the help of mainstream media, in many cases. Though arguably first formulated in women’s own parallel discursive spaces (i.e., newsletters, public forums, etc.), feminists have relied on mainstream media for these ideas’ dissemination through routine news coverage of new legislation, arrests and convictions of offenders, new books and research, feminist protests and marches, etc.

A second line of inquiry focused on gendered macro-level concerns would answer the question, “What are the effects of the economic globalization on women’s relationship to media?” Canadian media scholar Gertrude J. Robinson (2005) noted that this question has not been pursued in a systematic manner in either North America or Europe (her nations of focus), but in fact, such might be said for the rest of the world as well. Robinson identified two specific communication questions associated with the globalization issue. The first is how the meaning of “public interest” has become redefined in what she calls a “radically privatized media scape of the 21st century” (p. 189). The second is how the “independent” news function so intrinsic to democratic process has become undermined. Her concern is to bring feminist scrutiny particularly to media conglomeration and concentration of ownership, both associated with globalization and the public policies that guided it. These have largely escaped feminist media research for the most part. Riordan (2002), Steeves and Wasko (2002), and Byerly (2004) provide some baseline research to build a feminist political-economy framework of analysis for studying media industries.

A third line of inquiry might focus on communication law and policy, examining these in relation to gender. We can look to the excellent work of Steeves and Arbogast (1993), who showed how feminist analysis might be used to assess whether macro-level debates on news and information flow and reflects real-life micro-level development projects in nations undergoing development. They ask, for instance, what is the role of sexist ideology in communication policies that privilege some forms of communication over others? In developing nations with higher literacy rates for men than women, they ask whether national policies place sufficient resources
into developing radio and television, in order to assure that women can access information they need? This line of inquiry also presumes that there will be policy and resources toward the development of programming that is truly useful to people in their day-to-day lives.

The policy questions that these researchers raise help to point out the gross neglect of feminist scholarship to legislative processes affecting communications. We have a great and troublesome silence in our literature, as well as in our activist circles regarding the development and passage of communications policy. The debate and passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 by the US Congress lacked critical voices in general and feminist voices in particular. The act, which deregulated US telecom industries, thereby paving the way for media mergers, represented the single greatest milestone in establishing the globalization of media, the problem central to this paper. This was a moment in which feminist scholars missed their activist cues to speak out in women’s behalf and which they largely continue to ignore.

A fourth line of inquiry might focus on a meso-level issue, which Elson (1994) identifies as the day-to-day struggles associated with the internal running of institutions. Byerly and Ross (2006) apply Elson’s concept to describe things like struggles over news definitions, story assignments, and production standards and codes. At the heart of these struggles is an unconceptualized and unexamined notion of social consciousness among the various actors (owners, managers, reporters, producers, etc.). Hall (1980) referred to this as “frameworks of knowledge” and applied it both to those on the inside of media who encoded messages, as well as those in the audience who decoded those messages. But much more scholarly attention should be given to an explication of consciousness and to empirical work that seeks to discover how it is formed and then used within the media world. De Bruin and Ross (2004), Byerly and Warren (1996), Robinson (2005) and Joseph (2006) are among the researchers who have attempt to get at this through both survey research, interviews, and other methods. However, consciousness and its role in media at every level remains relatively uncharted scholarly territory, and feminist research has much to contribute in examining gender, consciousness and media products.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.**


NOTES.


4. Feminist scholars are not alone in giving greater attention to representation rather than the modes of production that define and produce that representation. Nicholas Garnham (1995) points out that critical scholars have also preoccupied themselves with representation in mediated communication to the exclusion of political and other forces. I agree with his assessment that “Important as these questions are, they miss the central and most urgent question now raised by the developing relationship between the media and politics because they fail to start from the position that the institutions and processes of public communication are themselves a central and integral part of the political structure and process” (p. 361).

5. One important example of such policy can be found in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which Canada, the United States, and Mexico signed in the mid 1990s, and which opens up cross-border manufacturing, trade and investment on an unprecedented scale among nations.

6. Contrary to myth, there has never been anything inevitable about the coming of globalization. Policies are written and adopted one by one, in most all cases within elected bodies or agencies supposedly accountable to their electorates. In fact, accountability is much at issue. There has been little public debate about most of the policies that form the building blocks of today’s globalizing political-economy. Media political-economists Herman and McChesney (1997) and others would point to the corporate-owned commercial news media, themselves largely owned by transnational conglomerates, as a primary inhibitor to a critical public dialogue around globalization. The latest example of media blackout on policy development of monumental public interest can be seen in the US media’s total failure to cover the drafting of a Multilateral Agreement on Investment, in the OECD, which began in 1995. The document has been developed almost entirely in secret for the last three years. Well-organized citizen action in Canada and some western nations has helped to bring it out into the news media in those few nations; for the most part, citizens in the OECD member nations are unaware of the policy or its potential to extend full legal and economic rights to large corporations, greatly curtailing citizens’ ability to intervene democratically. For a full discussion of the MAI, see Clarke and Barlow, The Multilateral Agreement on Investment and the Threat to Canadian Sovereignty (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co, 1997).

7. For a fuller explanation of how US media serve a propaganda function in world affairs, see Herman and Chomsky’s, Manufacturing Consent (New York: Pantheon, 1988).