Book Review

The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender

Carter, Cynthia; Steiner, Linda & McLaughlin, Lisa (eds.) (2014): The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender. Routledge. 672 pages. ISBN: 978-0-415-52769-9 (hbk), ISBN: 978-0-203-06691-1 (ebk).

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The research field of gender and media today is well established in communication studies. For those studying and teaching in undergraduate courses, however, it could be difficult to find accessible and up-to-date- reading material from the various fields of Gender Media Studies (GMS), across media, texts and genres. The editors of the *Routledge Companion to Media and Gender* succeeded to present a comprehensive and impressive overview on five different themes with 59 contributions on 670 pages. The compendium shows to be extremely useful for students and lecturers in international courses with English-speaking undergraduates in non-English countries, i.e Germany, because of the scarcity of academic English literature about gender and media in many university libraries. The articles in the book are mostly condensed on ten pages. For some subjects this seems to be pretty short. Few articles lack some basic information, charts or data, which would make it easier to comprehend without previous knowledge. However, the critical perspective
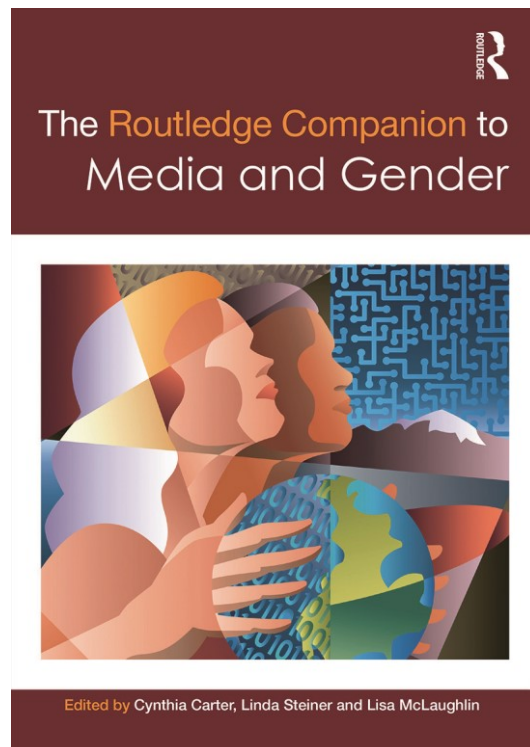
of most articles helps to open up particular research arenas and stimulate interest, which is an opportunity for a more detailed consideration. Moreover, a strength of the book are the transnational and transcultural perspectives on GMS. It comprises articles and topics from various cultural and national backgrounds.

The compendium is structured into five parts. Part I begins with „Her/histories". This chapter offers an overview of various approaches and important topics of GMS. The first article can be seen as an introduction into this chapter. In „Media and the representation of gender" Margaret Gallagher (23) gives examples of historic milestones in GMS such as Tuchman's study about images of men and women in the media, the links of media image and ideology, when it comes to the representation of women of colour, and also feminist discourses and feminist media activism.

In „Redescovering twentieth-century feminist audience research" (Hermes, 61) for example the author argues that multi-platform media and increasing interactivity today tends to blur media production with media consumption (67). In this context ethnographic audience research relating to audio-visual popular cultures of the 1980s and 90s needs to be rethought, in order to understand the existing power relations, still valid in a prosumer culture. As such, this is not a particulary new observation, but still offers a starting point for further investigation of more recent studies.

The strong point of Part I is its inclusion of current theoretical approaches like intersectional feminist media studies (Molina-Guzman/Cacho, 71). Their article provides a literature review „on women of colour feminism and queer of colour critique" (72) in European and US research. A useful definition of intersectionality and its theoretical foundations is followed by case studies in the field. As such the authors makes clear how gender inequality and racialisation build a dynamic interplay of „symbolic colonization" in media content (77). The first part of the compendium also refers to recent topics like trans-identities in the 21st century, i.e. „Sexualities/queer identities" (Yue, 81) and „Gender, media, and trans/national spaces" (Hegde, 92).

Part II picks up subjects around „Media industries, labor, and policy" (103). Carolyn M. Byerly (105) explores the important matter of the missing female representation in media control and the macro-level as such. Using the example of big transnational corporations such as *Time Warner* or *Disney* she provides data of the number and percentage of women involved on the policy level in the boards of the companies (108). Whereas in *Disney* four out of ten board-members are female, in the Germany-based *Bertelsmann AG* only five out of twenty-one members are women. The author unveils also the reason why or why not companies tend to accept women in their highest control and decision body.

In "Gender inequality in culture industries" Denis D. Bielby explores the „unequal distribution of employment and earnings between men and women in the culture industries of film, television, and music, among others such as video games" (137). Bielby goes back to the beginning of Hollywood to show how the studio system, where women played major roles, transformed into a centralized industry where female writers and actors became marginalized. The commercial aspect is once more considered in Dafna Limish's „Boys are... girls are..."(179). She explains how children's media and merchandising construct gender, i.e by exploiting female bodies for sexualized representations – even in movies for kindergarden-kids. This part clearly shows the socio-political dimension of gender inequality and a neoliberal market economy. It also becomes obvious that the editors strove to acquire articles that put an emphasis on comparative research about women and men/girls and boys.

Part III – „Images and representations across texts and genres" (257) – presents mainly case studies from different parts of the world like a piece about a South-African miniseries, *Society* (Bradfield, 280). Other than Western television series, *Society* „offers a unique perspective on the feminine possibilities available to women in post-apartheid South-Africa" (ibid.). Also beauty regimes in India, that are inflicted by European and US-American beauty norms (Parameswaran, 363) and a gendered perspective on Islamophobia implied by the representation of the Islamic veil in Western media are discussed (Eltantawy, 384). The transnational perspective of the compendium shows its potential here, because the signs of intersectionality and the erosion of solidarity in Western feminism with women from other parts of the world, their different beliefs and socio-economic status could best be encountered with a de-westernized research focus.

Part IV concentrates on „Media audiences, users, and prosumers" (407) and as the title promises research about all types of media, from TV to radio to social media and also digital games is presented here. Da Viault's and Schott's article for example tackles the issue of gender portrayal within gaming (440). The hot topic of cyberfeminism is set against the events, known as Arab Spring (Khamis, 565).

Part V, entitled „Gendered media futures and the future of gender" (577), is conceptualised as an outlook. Topics like post-feminism (Lumby, 600) consider the actual feminist discourse in the light of it's historic development. Whereas the term postfeminism for some mark the point where all feminist goals already have been achievedothers use it to differentiate between second generation feminists from the 1960th and 70th and younger women who fight for equality with men and not against them. A third explanation leans to a far more nuanced perspective based on postructuralism which is by no means defined by now. Lumby however, offers an insight into the various discussions on the conceptualization of post-feminism and proposes a concept of post-postfeminism.

An article about the crisis of masculinity (Malin, 610) reflects on media and the male image, i.e. the hypersexual character in US-American movies and series of the 1990th like *Sopranos*. Today, with less traditional perspectives on masculinity hypersexuality – and it's attributed whiteness, heterosexuality and aggression – is also used for parody or with an ironic reflexivity of the male character. Leurs and Ponzanesi (632) explore forms of intersectionality and digital identities on a case study of Moroccan youth in *The Netherlands*. They conclude that migrant youths use Social Media for identity formation, to create a realm of their own and to connect with the majority of society.

Looked at the parts and the companion in its entirety the reader conveys an idea of the wide span of different topics in GMS. Also, two strong undercurrents (and conflicting areas) of gender and the media unfold while reading: the neoliberal market ideology as a strong frame for the representation and participation of men and women in the media, but also counterpublics and –cultures that perceive women and men not only as consumers or sexualized bodies, but also as active citizens. On the other hand the companion by definition is only able to mark out the complexity of the discourse, but is certainly not sufficient to mirror in-depth-results of Gender Media Studies. However, the up-to-datedness, as well as the transnational and transcultural approach makes it a vade-mecum particularly recommendable for students and lecturers in various degree programmes like communication studies, media studies, or gender studies.