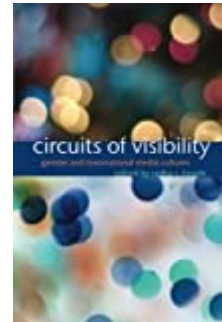


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Radha S. Hegde, ed. *Circuits of Visibility: Gender and Transnational Media Cultures*. Critical Cultural Communication Series. New York: New York University Press, 2011. viii + 317 pp. \$79.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-3730-9; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-3731-6.



Reviewed by Tracy Lucht (Iowa State University)

Published on Jhistory (April, 2013)

Commissioned by Heidi Tworek (Harvard)

Appropriately for its title, *Circuits of Visibility* is an eye-opening read for anyone who studies gender and the media. The global perspectives in this edited volume work cohesively to demonstrate the interconnectedness of sexual politics, transnational ideologies, and cultural practices. The book makes an important contribution to intersectional feminist scholarship by expanding the analysis to include issues of transnationalism and globalization. Indeed, scholars who read the volume will likely be motivated to reconsider their own work through a transnational lens. While the book's methodology may not be directly relevant to journalism historians, the theories it articulates will contribute to scholars' understanding of historical constructions of women, gender, and sexuality.

The authors challenge their readers to consider the gendered implications of media texts, media use, and media structures within the context of global communication networks that appear to transcend space and time. The authors provide poignant, well-researched case studies that point to the pervasive, perpetual influence of Western hegemony and postcolonial discourses despite the decentralizing, democratizing potential of the Internet. They demonstrate various ways in which the liminal spaces created by a digital superstructure continue to

be influenced and constrained by material realities, such as government policies and on-the-ground sociopolitical dynamics. The authors make a convincing argument that mediated constructions of gender and sexuality can only be understood in the digital era if one considers the economic structures and outcomes of globalization.

In part 1, the contributors ask who is given visibility in the media, and they interrogate the meanings carried by those representations. For example, Susan Ossman considers how the bodies and narratives of individual Muslim women, such as Princess Salma of Morocco, are used to stand in for entire nations or ethnic categories with regard to how modern the societies are. Similarly, Zala Volcic and Karmen Erjavec deconstruct the nationalism of Balkan turbo-folk star Ceca, exploring how the transnational flow of capital and media enables the staging of new malleable identities which are both defined by the national and exceed its boundaries (p. 50).

In part 2, the authors assess the nuances of political ideologies that present themselves as progressive in the context of globalization. For example, Felicity Schaeffer-Grabieli analyzes the United Nations' framing of sex trafficking as the "new slave trade," a depiction replicated in the news media that distinguishes sex work from other

migrant labor and avoids discussion of the structural conditions that make it possible. The slavery frame, she argues, is "a critical fiction dramatized in the media to bolster the nation-state's global moral authority" (p. 105). Likewise, Spring-Serenity Duvall considers the humanitarian displays of celebrities, such as Angelina Jolie, arguing that the depictions serve to reinscribe colonial discourses about white saviors and American exceptionalism.

The contributions in the third part consider the economic structures and labor dislocations created by networked technologies. The essays demonstrate how constructions of women's labor and sexuality play into longstanding conceptions and dichotomies, such as the regional/traditional vs. global/modern (often read in non-Western cultures as local/moral vs. Western/immoral). In a particularly compelling essay, the volume's editor, Radha S. Hegde, describes the impact of Western call centers in India, which upend the lives of female workers and mark them as Westernized and thus sexually transgressive. The women's altered lives and impugned identities make them particularly vulnerable to violence and scapegoating within their local culture.

Finally, in part 4, the contributors address sexual subjectivities and the creation of communities made possible—but also controlled—by governmental policies.

For example, Noor al-Qasimi studies the expression of queer subjectivities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), both on the ground and in cyberspace. The low-visibility, highly controlled status of queerness within the UAE has facilitated a high-visibility, low-control queerness online, she argues. That may change, however, as the UAE adapts its policies to more tightly censor content that it considers objectionable.

Collectively, the authors demonstrate the value of Aihwa Ong's conceptualization of neoliberalism as a technology of governing (*Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* [2006]). The essays demonstrate that while a neoliberal ideology might appear to devalue government by recommending private solutions for social problems, it also relies on host governments to make "calculative choices to produce conditions and possibilities for governing and for optimal economic productivity" (p. 181).

Circuits of Visibility provides many concrete case studies that would be useful to instructors who teach courses related to gender, globalization, ethnicity, and the media. Some of the discussions could use more historical context, but overall the volume is of exceptional quality. It is a must-read for anyone interested in intersectional feminist analysis or globalization.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/jhistory>

Citation: Tracy Lucht. Review of Hegde, Radha S., ed., *Circuits of Visibility: Gender and Transnational Media Cultures*. Jhistory, H-Net Reviews. April, 2013.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38634>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.