

INTRODUCTION

This issue of the *Review of Women's Studies* began as a collection of selected student term papers culled from submissions from 2007 to 2009 in the course Media 260 (Media, Gender and Sexuality), an elective offering of the Master of Arts Media Studies Program of the College of Mass Communication, UP Diliman. The course, which examines the part of media in the social construction of gender and sexuality, encourages students to conduct research using different strategies to produce knowledge about the relationships between media and gender and sexuality. Furthermore, students are asked to consider the intersections between gender and sexuality and other identity categories like class, race, ethnicity, religion and nationality and their discursive representations and images in media texts as well as their relevance to the structuring of media organizations and the ways in which media text readers generate meanings.

The compilation may not cover the broad range of issues that touch on the subject, but it indicates an understanding of the questions that scholars must pose to challenge the taken-for-granted “truths” about gender that the media tend to perpetuate and at times oppose. The essays, eight in all, analyze various media texts as well as comment on the social institutions that produce those texts. The first, “Women as Articulations of Nation-Space and an Agency of Insularity: An Analysis of Selected Films by Jeffrey Jeturian” by Katrina Ross A. Tan, looks into the imaging of nation in the female character in film, an extension of the *Inang Bayan* character in early 20th century Tagalog *sarsuelas* that used the metaphor of the female as a symbol of the nation. Tan contends that an analysis of the characterization of the women protagonists in Jeturian’s films reveals a discourse about nation as well as about gender politics. She suggests that the film medium has the potential

to actively engage in the formation of progressive discourses about nation and identity, using women characters as the trope in which to articulate such discourses.

Another inquiry into film, this time linking gender and religiosity, Erika Jean Cabanawan's "Women in Religion-Themed Films" explores the connection between this particular sub-genre of films and the Filipino consciousness of a female God as well as the imaging of the Filipino woman in the context of a hybrid religion. Cabanawan argues that this hybrid religion – a product of the imposition of Christianity over pre-colonial animism – may have pushed the supernatural woman to the margins of society, but the films she analyzed betray a counterforce as they serve to subvert the patriarchal religious ideology and draw the female deity back to the center of spiritual leadership. While the melodramatic plotlines of the films do not resolve the contradiction, the texts provoke the audience to recognize patriarchy in the dominant church and offer a subversive agenda to redeem a lost spirituality and identity.

The only scrutiny of the ubiquitous television among the essays, "The Way They See It: Gender Readings of Filipino Children's Programs on Mainstream Television" by Daphne Tatiana P. Tolentino-Canlas sifts through children's programs to uncover the stereotyped gender portrayals and roles of the program presenters and lead characters. An advocate of more and more intelligent children's programs sensitive to children's needs rather than commercial considerations, Tolentino-Canlas reasons that what children see in supposedly "educational" and instructive programs present gender cues that shape how they perceive the world and the roles they and others must play in that world, consequently perpetuating unequal gender relations and other unquestioned truths about that world. While acknowledging the commercial structure of television, she challenges both the networks and program sponsors to abandon stereotypes and show more complex themes and characters and diversity in thought and standpoints.

The next two essays consider the positive potential of the media to offer alternative perspectives on gender. "Media for Justice and Healing: The Case of Philippine Comfort Women Survivors" by Myrna Elizabeth P. Borromeo, traces the role played by the media in helping comfort women survivors find justice and healing beginning in the 1990s when the bitter experience of women forcibly turned into sex slaves during World War II in several Asian countries finally received wide media exposure. Borromeo accounts

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for coverage by radio, television, newspapers, film and the Internet as the force that compelled the Japanese government to acknowledge the comfort women. In the Philippines, radio was first to air the stories of the comfort women, affectionately called *Lolas*, beginning their healing from the torment of decades of shame and silence.

While effective in reaching its target, radio airtime is costly for NGOs. This is how Jean Francis Barcena's "Women 'Owning' Radio: A Case Study of KAKAMMPI's Radio Experience" explains an NGO's migration of its radio programs to the internet as a more cost-efficient alternative. While crediting radio for accomplishing its objectives, including reaching and organizing returning women OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) and their families, the *Kapisanan ng mga Kamag-anak ng Migranteng Manggagawang Pilipino* (KAKAMMPI) also experienced difficulty in conforming to commercial radio's identity and policies, which tend to constrain its "voice." On the other hand, Barcena describes KAKAMMPI Online as more liberating not only financially but in its ability to open up spaces for previously and frequently suppressed topics on radio, such as reproductive health.

David R. Corpuz's "Subverting *Zsazsa Zaturannah*: The Bakla, the 'Real' Man and the Myth of Acceptance" stands as the lone essay in this collection that confronts the media's discourse on homosexuality. Treating all three of the text's literary permutations as a single cultural text, Corpuz critiques Carlo Vergara's commercially and critically acclaimed graphic novel *Ang Kagila-gilalas na Pakikipagsapalaran ni Zsazsa Zaturannah* [The Amazing Adventures of *Zsazsa Zaturannah*], adapted into a musical play and film, as an attempt to "un-stereotype" gay men. The text may have succeeded in challenging gender assumptions, but its subversions are diluted by the subtexts of heteronormativity, revealing an underlying homophobia and heterosexism, as it imposes a patriarchal relationship between a feminized man and a "real man," a symbolic distinction mirroring the binary between the dominant male and the dominated female.

The final two essays investigate the intriguing possibility posited by Donna Haraway of a post-gender world and Sadie Plant's expectation of freedom for women within cyberspace. Both articles look into online gaming. Kim Homer C. Garcia, in "The Cyborg Search Fatal Error: The Images of MU Online," looks for Haraway's cyborg, a hybrid of machine

and organism that liberates humans from the biological determinism of sex and the cultural construction of gender by the symbolic order and masculine history. Garcia's search is frustrated; he finds that the online game images are encoded for satisfying the male fantasy, based on the social construct of women that disciplines female identity; the images of vamp and virgin. Female gamers have to assume male characters to transcend this tyranny. The combination of a female consciousness and a male cyber character is oppressive as the latter subjugates the identity of the former. In the game, the cyborg never emerges as the game is an extension of male-dominated reality—encoded for and by men.

We end on a more optimistic note with Jongsuk Ham's "Fluctuating Identities in Cyberspace and Cyberfeminism: A Comparison of Philippine and Korean Experiences," which includes a comparative survey of how Filipino and South Korean online game players deal with gender issues and choices of avatars, or the computer images that represent and are manipulated by their users. Ham is interested in figuring out the rate at which gamers choose an avatar whose gender is not the same as theirs, blurring identity boundaries. He found that such boundaries collapse in cyber games at a much higher level among South Koreans than Filipinos, but accounting for the difference will require another study. In the meantime, Ham proposes that the collapse of identity boundaries apply not only to gender but also to race, nation, culture and religion, making possible the return of the repressed.

The process of producing this issue has been long but fulfilling. Teaching graduate students in the last several years has been a delightful opportunity to learn, debate and work with them. This edition is a fruit of such collaboration. Hopefully, this encourages more students to conduct research, develop critical thinking, question assumptions, and produce new knowledge that will increase our understanding of our social realities and suggest possible directions for social change.

Elizabeth L. Enriquez