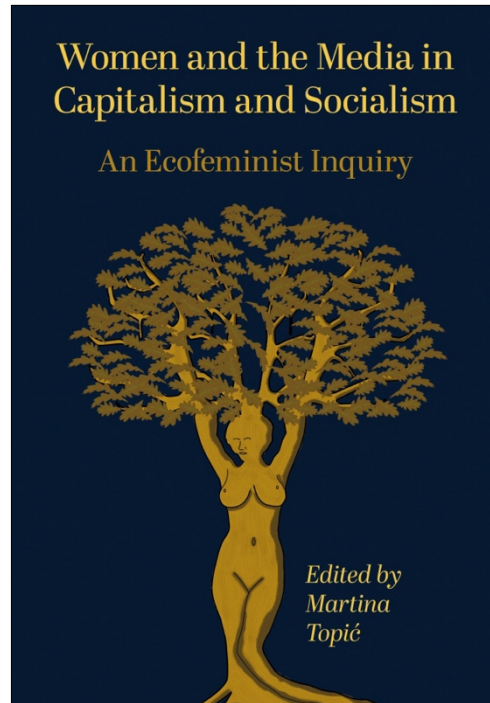


Martina Topić (Ed.), **Women and the Media in Capitalism and Socialism: An Ecofeminist Inquiry**, Chicago, IL: Intellect, 2023, 290 pp., \$149.95 (hardcover).

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The book ***Women and the Media in Capitalism and Socialism: An Ecofeminist Inquiry*** invites readers into an exploration of the intersectionality between media representation and gender dynamics in a variety of economic contexts across the world through an ecofeminist lens. Ecofeminism, as the editor Martina Topić argues, refers to the synthesis of feminism and ecology, asserting that the oppression of women is intrinsically linked to the oppression of Nature, stemming from a matrix of hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and capitalism. The book is structured into two sections. The first section analyzes countries operating under a capitalist paradigm, such as Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, and Spain. The latter part addresses countries with socialist heritage, including but not limited to Croatia, Serbia, and Cuba. The two sections each serve to empower the reader to compare and contrast the representation of women and the status of gender equality within various political economies.



The first chapter lays the groundwork by examining gender dynamics in Dutch-speaking Belgian news media. Topić reveals a nuanced picture where, despite a narrowing gender gap in newscasts, significant disparities persist. Women remain underrepresented in news content, and while television news shows some improvement in gender diversity, newspapers lag behind. Additionally, there was no notable increase in the proportion of female actors or sources in the newscasts. This sets a precedent for understanding the broader challenges faced by women in the media industry across the globe.

In the United Kingdom, Fenner and Henderson build upon work by Franks and O'Neill (2016) and delve into the realm of sports journalism, uncovering that the visibility of women sports journalists has little improved over the past five years. The findings highlight not only a persistent underrepresentation of women in sports journalism but also the unique challenges they face, such as ageism and the paradox of appearance affecting their credibility and employment opportunities.

The exploration extends to the portrayal of women in popular culture, with Weinbaum discussing the emergence of the "new-new-new" women in television shows and news. This representation emphasizes women's right to professional careers, alternative family structures, and motherhood, reflecting a gradual shift toward gender equality yet acknowledging the slow pace of change.

The narrative then shifts to the experiences of female political journalists in France. Based on field study and interviews, Damian-Gaillard and Saitta contextualize an opinion piece published in a French national daily paper, which the authors describe as a denouncement of the patriarchal power structure prevalent in the political sphere. The chapter highlights sexist working conditions and the need for women to maintain close, sometimes compromising relationships to access information.

The critique extends to the Spanish media sphere, where Zurbano-Berenguer, Sola-Morales, and Sanz-Marcos investigate the sexist murder stories published by three Spanish newspapers in 2016. They find that journalists depend on experts or officials as sources of information. However, they critique the overreliance on police information over women's narratives, which may create a distorted view of women's experiences. Moreover, the dependency on information agencies, such as the news agency and police department, is perceived to compromise the quality of the content, thereby affecting the depth of understanding and societal awareness of the issue of violence against women.

In Portugal, Cunha and Cruz examine the role of women in the nation's print media. Their findings indicate that despite advancements in gender equality policies and the increased number of women in the news industry, women continue to face job precarity, disparate wage conditions, and a lack of participation at the executive decision-making levels. This is mirrored in the portrayal of women in news framing, where stereotypes and traditional norms perpetuate male domination.

The book also tackles the representation of women in Nigerian media. Through an analysis by Nwasum, Ogbodo, Chukwu, and Nwakpu, which inspected content from two Nigerian newspapers over two years, it was observed that, even with a slight improvement in the number of female journalists, the newspapers remain predominantly staffed by male journalists. In terms of content, there is a marked gender-based delineation of subject matter, with male journalists dominating "hard news" topics such as politics and the economy, whereas female journalists are often relegated to "soft news" areas such as entertainment and arts, education, health, and youth-related topics. This pattern of male predominance is not confined to Nigeria but is a recurrent theme in the media landscapes of the countries discussed.

The latter part of the book delves into countries transitioning from socialism to postsocialism, highlighting unique challenges and continuities. For instance, in Croatia and Serbia, although female journalists have indicated that they do not personally experience discrimination in their workplace, they still face a gender pay gap, glass ceiling, and prevailing patriarchal mindset. This contradiction underscores the deep-rooted gender stereotypes and complex dynamics at play in transitioning societies.

Through interviews with female journalists in Serbia, Bajić, Vujović, and Prokopović present an interesting case wherein many female journalists report that the practice of journalism has become more challenging in the current era as opposed to during the socialist period. Previously, journalists were primarily tasked with uncovering authentic news amid state-controlled and obscured information sources. However, in the contemporary landscape, they are confronted with discerning the veracity of news, understanding its context, and navigating the multifaceted influences, including advertiser demands that shape news reporting. The study also highlights that female journalists once enjoyed secured jobs and salaries and clear working hours. Presently, the proliferation of privately owned media has led to job

insecurity, lack of protective measures, and a pervasive fear of job loss, culminating in increased instances of self-censorship among journalists.

In Cuba, Díaz and Makarchuk notice the significant advancements in gender equality, which they attribute to “a favorable political will and structural changes in the socialist society” (p. 226). However, traditional gender roles and stereotypes persist. The Cuban film industry, in particular, reflects this duality, where women have made inroads but still face challenges in breaking away from traditional expectations.

The narrative then moves to the representations of women in Yugoslav academic discourse and fashion magazines in chapters 11 and 12, highlighting how socialism promoted gender equality but never fully challenged traditional gender roles and responsibilities. The last chapter provides a historical review of the representation of women in the newspaper of the early communist installment in Romania. It reveals that the newspaper of the time promoted an idealized version of communist women that emphasized their multifaceted roles in the production process and “a whole series of responsibilities such as mother, wife, worker, volunteer, and citizens” (pp. 277–278). These three chapters also demonstrate how narratives of women serve as a tool to support the desired ideology and evolve in response to political agitation.

In conclusion, the book offers a multidimensional analysis that spans various countries, media landscapes, and sociopolitical contexts, illustrating the pervasive nature of gender inequality and the challenges of dismantling patriarchal structures. The editor notes that women encounter inequality under both capitalist and socialist political systems. Socialism, while ostensibly valuing all professions equally and reflecting such in media representations of women, still succumbs to traditional gender roles, imposing a dual burden. Capitalism, with its notion of a public–private dichotomy, often fails to acknowledge women’s roles and interests as equal to those of men. The chapters in the first section confirm that women’s positions in media reflect their unequal and disrespected status in capitalist society, thus leading to various biases and stereotypes. Therefore, Topić believes that socialism shows more respect for women, as demonstrated in the second part of the book, despite it also being influenced by masculine thinking and rationality. Topić suggests the need for socialist ecofeminism, which acknowledges and challenges patriarchy and focuses on the common good. While the book ambitiously sets out to incorporate an ecofeminist lens within its analysis of women’s representation in media, one might gently observe that the presence of ecofeminism is predominantly anchored in the introduction. It would be enriching to see the ecofeminist theme more cohesively woven throughout the entire book. This work not only contributes significantly to the fields of gender studies and media studies but also serves as a call to action for addressing the intertwined oppressions of women, media, and nature in the quest for a more just world.

Reference

Franks, S., & O’Neill, D. (2016). Women reporting sport: Still a man’s game? *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 17(4), 474–492. doi:10.1177/1464884914561573