

Michèle Mattelart and the open veins of communication and gender in Latin America

Michèle Mattelart e as veias abertas da comunicação e gênero na América Latina

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript highlights Michèle Mattelart's contributions in the context of the intellectual history of communication studies in Latin America since genealogies in this field have underestimated the role and importance of female researchers. The methodological approach aims to create memories and build a path that goes through the intellectual biography and history of communication studies from a feminist point of view that maintains its subjective and situated dimension. By considering such aspects, key moments in Michèle's intellectual trajectory – 1960s/1970s – are described, especially the ones focused on the links between communication and gender studies, which she was a pioneer in Latin America.

Keywords: Michèle Mattelart, research, communication, gender, Latin America

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RESUMO

Destaca-se a contribuição de Michèle Mattelart no contexto da história intelectual do campo comunicacional na América Latina, uma vez que geralmente as genealogias da área têm subvalorizado o papel e a importância de pesquisadoras. A via metodológica pretende fazer memória, construindo um percurso que transita entre a biografia intelectual e a história da pesquisa em comunicação, mediante um modo de pensar feminista que afirma sua dimensão subjetiva e situada. Considerando essas particularidades, recuperam-se momentos-chave do seu itinerário intelectual – anos 1960/1970 –, sobretudo daquele focalizado nas articulações entre comunicação e questões de gênero, em que foi precursora na América Latina.

Palavras-chave: Michèle Mattelart, pesquisa, comunicação, gênero, América Latina

MY GOAL IS to highlight Michèle Mattelart's contributions in the context of the intellectual history of communication in Latin America, given the genealogies of this field often undervalue the role and importance of female researchers¹. I will consider and describe certain features of Michèle's stance and I point out key moments of her intellectual trajectory through the 1960s and 1970s. This article focuses on her journey, which was affected by her experience in Latin America and the links between communication studies and gender issues. She was a leader for all female researchers in communication, including me, who stand at the intersection of interest areas and the Latin American subcontinent².

I aim to create memories despite the current process of historical memory loss, thus building a path that goes through an intellectual biography – although partial – and the history of communication studies in Latin America. It is partial because I use pieces of Michèle's intellectual works that explore gender issues and her contributions based on her experience in Chile. I also pay special attention to statements and interviews she gave on several occasions during the time she lived in Chile³. This bio-intellectual trajectory thus presents epistemological, theoretical and methodological continuities, conflicts, and disruptions related to different ideas and theoretical discussions from that time.

I turn to Michèle's contributions and a formation (Williams, 2011) where certain political-cultural debates and ideas – relevant to a specific context – are still very much alive and connected to her way of thinking. To do so, I will summarize some key moments of communication studies in Latin America,

with the 1960s marking the beginning of a new angle on communication, one [in which] the political landscape of the region largely prompted a theoretical perspective

¹ I will be referring to the scholars mentioned throughout the text by their first name to emphasize their intellectual works, which quite often are masked by a neutral last name. In fact, because it is inevitable not to mention Armand Mattelart, given the numerous intellectual collaborations with Michèle, by using their first name I will make it clear to whom I am referring. Thus, for that same reason, I will be using Armand instead of Mattelart.

² My previous approach still stands today: "Latin America is home to a range of cultural backgrounds, a wealth of ethnic groups, economic diversity, different experiences, and structural inequalities. So, talking about Latin America as a whole is misleading, because it is an unfinished project that is yet to be fully realized, and by doing so we are trying to standardize its diversity" (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 2010, p. 18).

³ Some of Michèle's early texts could not be fully accessed. However, she restates her argumentation from many of them in her later works, to which I had direct access. This is why I refer to texts that were published both before and after the specific period under analysis. I also draw on third-party reviews and analyses, as well as Michèle's and Armand's statements concerning her works, to bridge gaps and finish my analysis, according to the proposed methodology.

that strongly took the relationship between social and economic structures and communication models into account. (Christa Berger, 2018, p. 38)

The recently mentioned methodological proposal was explored in the reconstruction of other intellectual trajectories, for example, that of Stuart Hall (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 2016) and Jesús Martín-Barbero (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 2018), as other authors have done with distinguished intellectuals/researchers. Charlotte Brunson's research (2000), whose goal was to understand how soap operas have become an object of study because of the interest from feminist researchers, is especially important in this regard due to the focus on gender issues.

The method employed by Charlotte Brunson in this cultural history lineage came into existence through the integration of two types of reports: written (the intellectual production of selected researchers) and oral (interviews with these researchers, who are important to the emergence of this line of research). The analysis of documentary sources was thus complemented by and interwoven with the interviews conducted by the researcher. In her case, the interviewees were actually her friends, but she explains that, although the interviews include personal stories, they are exclusively about intellectual journeys.

This friendship bond was also experienced by Jorge Huergo in conversations with Jesús Martín-Barbero, published in *Memória e Promessa: Conversas com Jesús Martín-Barbero* (2018), along with Kevin Morawicki, the second interviewer in this set of conversations. Disregarding the differences between the results of Charlotte's work and that of Jorge and Kevin, what matters in the process of interviewing and producing subjective information is the "conviction that the theoretical power of some authors is not restricted to the pages that describe their theories, it is also in the narrative of their life experiences, which are exactly what make questions even more complex considering their knowledge" (Morawicki, 2018, p. 20).

Despite the difficulties, I would like to adopt a way of thinking that incorporates this subjective dimension, recognizing that, from a feminist point of view, "a new epistemic agent is outlined, not isolated from the world, but rooted in its core, not neutral nor impartial, but subjective and sure of its distinctiveness" (Margareth Rago, 2019, p. 380). This premise also echoes in the way I write and in my voice as an author.

However, unlike the two works mentioned before, I do not have a friendship bond with Michèle Mattelart nor have I interviewed her. I rely on interviews conducted by third parties, which had different purposes. This situation itself is not an obstacle, and such strategy has already been used on another occasion (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 2012), when I interwove three personal stories, including mine, connected to communication studies and gender issues in Brazil.

However, the challenges faced here are different. In many interviews, books, articles, and tributes, Michèle is right next to Armand Mattelart, her sentimental and intellectual partner, as well as the duo's main figure. Because of that, she often acts as a coauthor. Disregarding such position would be inappropriate given the contradictions and markers that arise, although, at times, Michèle stated that this does not affect her – for example, in Fonseca (2016) – and, at others, she recognizes the existence of a symbiosis between her trajectory and that of Armand (Michèle Mattelart, 2018)⁴.

To take these conditions into consideration, one must acknowledge how they are related to the time, place and perspective concerning women/intellectuals/researchers/activists in the context of a certain Latin American society that is rife with inherited values and female roles previously prescribed by male domination⁵. By documenting seemingly minor characteristic features of her stance, not only can we see male domination, but also women's resistance, as is the case in Michèle's career.

Therefore, I combine the proposal of a critical-reflexive analysis⁶ (Maria Immacolata Lopes, 2016) of her intellectual trajectory with feminist premises that, in general, assume that produced knowledge is never neutral nor merely an objective phenomenon. As a consequence, epistemological neutrality is refuted. This understanding allows us “to think about the epistemic importance of identity, as it reflects the fact that experiences in

⁴ Original text by Michèle: “no puedo separar mi trayectoria de la de Armand con quien escribimos muchos libros juntos”. This and other translations were originally provided by the author of this article.

⁵ This premise is a guiding value for the conceived methodological proposal and is inspired by the proposal of Maria Odila Leite da Silva Dias (2019): “The craft of history is necessarily the connection between our contemporaneity and the past from which we would like to be free or at least see at a distance, with our eyes glimmering with multiple possibilities of our becoming in the future” (p. 362).

⁶ Maria Immacolata Lopes (2016) states that “the critical-reflexive analyses on the practices of research and studies in the field ... show that science can reflect on itself and help clarify its applications, its procedures, the value of its results and the scope of its possibilities” (p. VII). In the collection organized by Maria Immacolata of the twelve compiled trajectories, four are from female researchers who stand out on epistemological themes in the field in Brazil: Maria Immacolata herself, Vera Veiga França, Lucia Santaella, and Lucrecia D'Alessio Ferrara.

different locations are different and that location is important for knowledge” (Djamila Ribeiro, 2017, p. 29).

The relationship with this idea in what I intend to submit “implies that we should pay attention to the ‘situated’ production, that which is shaped by the speaker’s standpoint” (Angela Arruda, 2019, p. 346). Hence the reason to acknowledge that Michèle (1941-) is a white female intellectual/activist/researcher of French origin and educational background, having completed her studies at the University Paris-Sorbonne in comparative literature. Married to Armand (1936-), a Belgian white male who studied law, political science, demography, and political economy in Belgium and France⁷.

In an interview, Armand (Mattelart, 2010) recognizes that Michèle’s educational background is very different from his: “She was less influenced than me by religious teachings and shared the secular and republican values on which the French school system was grounded” (p. 50)⁸. Michèle belongs to a generation that was influenced by Boris Vian (1920-1959), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), and Albert Camus (1913-1960). Moreover, she admits (Michèle & Armand, 2005) that she was not an activist in the feminist movement in the early 1960s; instead, she was engaged in the political culture of the time, especially in student demonstrations that called for the emancipation of Algeria (Armand, 2010).

Michèle met Armand in April 1962 precisely at the International University Campus in Paris, where she lived as a student. At that time, he was already committed to a professional position as a demographer at the Catholic University of Chile, so he left in August of that same year, determined to marry Michèle in the following year. Michèle stayed in Paris to finish her studies. In June 1963, their wedding took place and they traveled together to Chile, where they lived for about ten years (1963-1973). It was also during this period that their children were born: Tristan, in 1965, and Gurvan, in 1967.

In Chile, during the 1960s, Michèle experienced a period of intense popular mobilizations that sparked a strong desire for social change, as well as the short-lived Popular Unity administration (1970-1973), which

⁷ My comments on Armand Mattelart will be limited to what is essential, especially because his intellectual trajectory has been praised by many authors. Mariano Zarowsky and Efendy Maldonado Gomez de la Torre are some of the most remarkable names. However, I would like to highlight the entry “Armand Mattelart”, proposed by Christa Berger (2014).

⁸ From the original: “Ella estaba menos marcada que yo por la educación religiosa y participaba de los valores laicos y republicanos sobre los que se fundó el sistema escolar en Francia”.

was seen as “an unprecedented attempt to build socialism in freedom”⁹ (Michèle, 2011, p. 75). The collapse of the Allende administration orchestrated by the far-right, including women taking the streets on December 1st, 1971, in the *March of the Empty Pots and Pans*. This was considered by Michèle (2011, p. 79) as “the real starting point ... [when] women of the bourgeoisie, in response to the call of Christian Democracy and the National Party, rallied by banging on pans to protest against a yet non-existent shortage”¹⁰. These experiences and, in particular, this mobilization, along with the analysis of magazines for women from that time, which addressed the middle and upper classes, but questioned these women *on behalf of the people*, would later be the object of an original examination by Michèle, defining her interest in communication and gender issues.

The period leading up to the coup is marked by both the growth of the popular movement (Michèle, 2011, p. 80) and the increasing number of clashes triggered by the right wing, climaxing with the bombing of the La Moneda Palace. In a report that evokes this intense and emblematic experience, Michèle (2011) briefly concludes her testimony about the end of this unique experience: “Weeks later, general Pinochet was sworn into office. We all know what happened then” (p. 80)¹¹.

Banished by the coup d'état on September 11, 1973, the couple returned to Paris and only returned to Chile in 1991, two months after the ban on their entry into the country was lifted. On this short visit, Michèle was troubled by the transition experienced at that moment: “It was no longer the Chile we once knew. The people had no voice, it was a nation under leaden skies. Many people died, and everything had changed”¹² (Fonseca, 2016, para. 11).

Her experience as a Latin American resident was central to her thought, which was formed by a pendular movement of circulation and production of ideas from the center to the periphery (Paris-Chile) and from the periphery to the core in *exile*¹³. Indeed, for Michèle, “it is odd to expand the meaning

⁹ From the original: “esta tentativa inédita de construcción del socialismo en libertad”.

¹⁰ From the original: “manifestación de las ollas’. . . Las mujeres de la burguesía, respondiendo al llamado de la DC y del Partido Nacional, manifestaron blandiendo ollas para protestar contra una penuria que aún no existía”.

¹¹ From the original: “Semanas más tarde, el general Pinochet entraba en el gobierno. Se sabe lo que siguió”.

¹² From the original: “Ya no era el Chile que habíamos conocido, el pueblo ya no tenía voz, era una nación que tenía sobre sí un cielo de plomo. Mucha gente había muerto y todo había cambiado”.

¹³ I will follow, in part, a vein that was opened by Mariano Zarowsky (2012).

of this word”¹⁴ (Fonseca, 2016, para. 5), but it is possible to live in exile when banished from a territory in which one was not born.

Once the methodological premises and some biographical information about the researcher/activist are provided, I will develop my argumentation. The following section will associate general characteristics of communication studies in Latin America with some brief notes on Armand Mattelart’s career to outline Michèle’s first steps on her intellectual trajectory, focusing on the characteristics of the development of her interest in women’s issues and the media, which is a formula used during the 1970s/1980s. A second section describes a movement towards reviewing premises and a transition to the acknowledgement of the role of target audiences. Despite the originality of Michèle’s approach, her individual contributions are invisible and do not play a significant role in the Latin American history of communicational thinking. Finally, I will provide some brief closing remarks.

In general, restoring Michèle’s trajectory involved collecting and analyzing various records, sometimes more generic, sometimes more specific. However, given the prolific production *by* and *about* Armand, gathering the contributions of this “Latin Americanized”¹⁵ female intellectual showed that the genealogies in the field, meaning, the intellectual history of communication studies in Latin America, have underestimated the role and the importance of female researchers, including Michèle Mattelart.

OPEN VEINS OF COMMUNICATION AND GENDER

Eduardo Galeano’s book, titled *Open Veins of Latin America* (1971/1983), serves as a tool to address a part of the history of communication studies in this subcontinent, instead of the depiction of its economic exploitation and political domination, which is the original purpose of his work. Published in 1971, it is also helpful to refer to a period marked by dictatorial regimes enforced in Latin American countries and certain anticolonial and revolutionary feelings. A cultural and revolutionary period of turmoil that deeply influenced Michèle’s life in Latin America.

¹⁴ From the original: “Exilio. Es raro ampliar el significado de esa palabra”.

¹⁵ Based on Zarowsky (2012), I understand that this characterization also applies to Michèle’s work, given that it was fundamentally built from her experience in Chile, as shown by her intellectual production, compiled in this article.

The segment to describe the history of communication studies coincides with the 1960s and 1970s, period when strong links are established between the practice of research and professional and activist practices. Michèle's intellectual itinerary begins in this context, introducing a concern with communication and women's issues in Latin America. I will briefly mention Armand due to his academic collaboration with Michèle, but also because of his importance as one of the most influential authors in Latin American communicational thinking of that period (Fuentes Navarro, 1992). The path I am taking allows us to notice theoretical and methodological continuities and disruptions, along with subtle conflicts between them with regard to the problem of communication.

If in the early 1960s the field largely welcomed international intellectual trends – especially North American ones – with “communication being associated with television (with *modernization* [emphasis added]) and funded by the United States (with *development* [emphasis added])” (Christa Berger, 1999, p. 3), the end of the decade saw deconstruction process of this theoretical apparatus, along with the development of a critical perspective. Just as the objects and theoretical references were borrowed from the United States, so were the methods and techniques.

Considering that this is not about restoring all the research aspects of this stage, but about highlighting their links with gender issues, it is important to note that, in the analysis of Silvia Elizalde (2009), the American functionalist approach, predominant in the 1960s, “is hardly likely to consider gender as ‘something more’ than a mere criterion for classifying human beings according to the ‘evident’ and ‘natural’ anatomical differences that distinguishes them”¹⁶ (p. 8). Therefore, the gender category was not discussed, while

sex was introduced into studies (market, audience measurement, audience development, etc.) as a variable and referred exclusively to the biological differences that distinguish human bodies in a binary and exclusive way and

¹⁶ From the original: “es poco permeable a considerar al género como ‘algo más’ que un mero criterio de clasificación de los seres humanos según la ‘evidente’ y ‘natural’ diferencia anatómica que los distingue entre sí”.

whose “measurement values” only include two possible and equally juxtaposed elements: woman and man¹⁷. (Silvia Elizalde, 2009, p. 10)

This view has persisted for a long time in communication studies, both in the marketplace and the academia. In the latter, research linked to diffusionism (associated with the instrumentalization of media towards *modernization*) and developmentalism (linked to the idea of driving *development* through media) stands out, which is a singularity of the developments of research on communication and *women* – since the term gender was still uncommon – in Latin America¹⁸, with the label *woman* as a valid option, although it was assigned cultural aspects, as is the case with Michèle’s contributions from the 1960s/1970s/1980s.

In the mid-1960s, in the context of discussions on population growth, development, regional integration and policies on birth control, Michèle started her career as a researcher. In Chile, she was part of a research study funded by the Chilean Agrarian Reform Training and Research Institute, where Armand worked as a researcher. This study aimed at analyzing the behavior of Chilean women from urban and rural areas regarding birth control campaigns supported by American organizations that were part of the Alliance for Progress.

These campaigns used advertisement strategies to target women and persuade them to adopt a behavior that was deemed *modern*, using celebrities and movie stars as examples and/or role models of such conduct. Within the scope of diffusionism, these actions used the media to spread awareness and motivate women who lived *in developing* or periphery countries to adopt models of behaviors associated with core countries, which were economically rich and developed. Hence Armand and Michèle’s focus on considering the uses of the media by women, even though they were not exactly an object of study with a specific approach – at least in the initial stage of each of their intellectual

¹⁷ From the original: “o ‘sexo’ era introducido en los estudios (de Mercado, medición de audiencias, construcción de públicos, etc) como variable, y referida exclusivamente a las *diferencias biológicas* que distinguen a los cuerpos humanos entre sí, de manera binaria y excluyente, y cuyos ‘valores de medición’ sólo contemplaban dos únicos registros posibles, e igualmente yuxtapuestos: mujer y varón.”

¹⁸ By contrast, a similar understanding of the gender category also had repercussions in Latin American reception studies, a tradition that began in the mid-1980s, deeply influenced by very different theoretical approaches, sometimes originating in Anglo-American cultural studies, and sometimes with local contributions, with Jesús Martín-Barbero and Guillermo Orozco being major figures (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 2002, p. 5-6). This is an interesting fact, as Anglo-American cultural studies foster one of the first movements in the exploration of issues that articulate popular mass culture and feminist contributions, including gender issues.

trajectories. Therefore, this research study precedes the interests focused on communication that will be revealed in the following pages.

Contrary to the understanding assumed by these campaigns in which women were thought of only as users and/or clients, Michèle (2014) highlights that the research took an “anthropological perspective,” and women were addressed as “subjects” (p. 2)¹⁹, and its main interest was identifying the attitudes of women from different social classes in the face of social change – from the upper bourgeoisie to the popular classes. Carla Rivera (2015) confirms this very notion, concluding that this study was conducted from the perspective of a “social ethnography”, deploying “innovative methodologies” (p. 357) in the Chilean academic field²⁰. This means that her research was not part of the mainstream investigation work from that time.

Published in 1968, *La Mujer Chilena en una Nueva Sociedad* focused on

the problem of the role of the ‘image’ of women in the modernization process within the structure of a series of sociological investigations that, since the beginning of the 1960s, raised the issue of sociocultural change as a dynamic factor in the development and modernization process²¹. (Zarowsky, 2008, para. 8)

The results of her research include the image of women as the combination of a traditional figure (wife, mother, housewife and sexual object) and a modern counterpart (worker, professional, citizen), with the predominance of a traditional conception in terms of women’s and men’s destiny and role. There was also a link between the popular, middle and upper classes, unified by the understanding of women as the pillar of a family²². This variation of aspects of a traditional model and a modern one could be explained by the fact that “the process of economic industrialization was not correlated with a process of social and cultural modernization, given its nature of ‘incomplete industrialization’”²³ (Zarowsky, 2008, para. 9). However, there was a concern

¹⁹ From the original: “opusimos un método de encuesta de corte antropológico, que ubicaba a la mujer como sujeto”.

²⁰ From the original: “etnografía social”; “metodologías novedosas”.

²¹ From the original: “el problema del papel de la ‘imagen’ de la mujer en el proceso de modernización, en el marco de una serie de investigaciones sociológicas que, ya desde inicios de la década del sesenta, llamaban la atención sobre la cuestión del cambio sociocultural como factor dinámico de los procesos de desarrollo y modernización”.

²² I draw these conclusions based on Claudia Fedora Rojas Mira’s analysis (1994).

²³ From the original: “el proceso de industrialización económica no había tenido su correlato en un proceso de modernización social y cultural dado su carácter de ‘industrialización incompleta’”.

with the cultural dimension of development and, consequently, with the role of media in this process.

Although Michèle is a coauthor of the volume with the results of this research, this study ignites her interest in her intellectual trajectory, which can be seen in the convergence of media and women, continuing to live on and marking her intellectual production. However, we must highlight that, in Michèle's view during the mid-1960s in Chile, there was "no awareness of the peculiar domination women are subject to; no one talked about gender, it was not until the 1990s that we started having this conversation"²⁴ (Michèle & Armand, 2005, p. 149). This perspective is completely opposite to that of other reports²⁵.

More specifically, Michèle's focus on the uses of the media by women is prominently placed in her trajectory, unlike that of Armand. It is also worth noting the preference for empirical research and data collection with women, a bias that we will see later on in her investigative career (Michèle Mattelart & Mabel Piccini, 1974), establishing a different concern from that of Armand Mattelart, who favors a materialistic analysis of culture and communication, as well as the development of a critique of political economy. These aspects are not unconditionally expressed in Michèle's intellectual production. It seems that, with this controlled detachment, she seeks to follow a unique path, opposed to the proposal of her intellectual partner.

However, before restoring Michèle's works from the early 1970s, it is important to note that Latin American communication studies as a whole showed clear signs of disruption with the American perspective in its diffusionist and developmentalist branches. Furthermore, "between the late 1960s and early 1970s ... an effective Latin American reflection on communication emerged, as the structural conditions of underdevelopment were considered and integrated into the analysis of the media" (Christa Berger, 2001, p. 247).

Thus, the late 1960s marked the confirmation of a literature that denounced American imperialism. This scheme indicated that Latin America was experiencing a kind of advanced stage of colonial expansion and that, in the cultural realm, it

²⁴ From the original: "ninguna conciencia de la dominación peculiar que sufre la mujer. Todavía no se hablaba de género, eso apareció, se consolidó, en los años 90 sobre todo".

²⁵ For example, for Chilean feminist theorist Julieta Kirkwood, the emergence of a feminist conscience in Chile is characterized by a period of fight for the right to vote (1930-1950); by the role of women in the Christian Democratic government (1964-1970) and the Popular Unity administration (1970-1973), as well as by the denial of the democratic process and the appearance of several "female rebellions" – protests against the repression and creation of solidarity and community organizations (post-1973). See Kirkwood (1986).

presupposed the imposition of a culture originating in a metropolitan nation, specifically the United States (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 1993).

In an analysis of Armand's career, Christa Berger (2014) points out that the concept that unifies the first set of his works is that of *dependency*. In general, *dependency theory* sought to explain the socio-political and economic impact of late industrialization in developing countries. And, in the field of communication, it was used to analyze cultural issues in the context of this very theory, which sought to identify the effects of the process of ideological domination in Latin America. Therefore, the *ideological functions* of the media were prioritized – according to the economic interests of those who exploited them –, as well as the *contents* conveyed that supported domination tactics. In this regard, there is indeed a theoretical connection between Michèle and Armand at the turn of the 1960s to the 1970s, when they investigated the ideology of Chilean liberal press (Armand Mattelart, Mabel Piccini, & Michèle Mattelart, 1970/1976).

It is evident that, from a critical point of view, this type of approach would provide space for accusations. However, this perspective assumed an excessively schematic position in the communication process, both for the sender and the receiver. In particular, the receiver had no freedom to read or engage with the messages conveyed by mass media, an understanding that was rejected by Michèle, as I will show below.

These ideas involve Michèle's life in Chile, both theoretically and politically, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and can be seen in her first movement of relocation of her work within the scope of policy planning for development and social modernization (Armand & Michèle Mattelart, 1968), towards a perspective of ideological criticism of mass media (Michèle Mattelart, 1971/1973, 1970/1976). Later on, in the mid-1970s, making yet another transition, her ideas move to questioning the passive nature of reception.

First crossing

At first, considering that Chile was nearly a *developing* country, Michèle (2014) recalls that this condition caused her to

face issues associated with the relationships between North and South that were crucial in the 1960s/1970s. For instance, with guidance on development policies,

informed by *diffusionism's* doctrines, meaning, by the one-sided idea of the modern era seen as an expression of Western civilization's higher status²⁶. (p. 2)

At the heart of these issues, but increasingly in contact with the structural focus of discourse and already interested in the communication processes, after her first experience with the topic, Michèle, who is professionally linked to the activities of the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Nacional (Ceren)²⁷, was against the analysis of functionalist content, which was predominant at the time in Latin America. In general, she condemns its use as a universal strategy that can be transferred from one country to another, or from one society to another, without relating it with a particular social body and with historical focus.

Because of that, her trajectory went in a different direction. Two works are repeatedly mentioned by Michèle²⁸ as representative of the *ideology rediscovery* lineage –both of which are strongly influenced by the French tradition of discourse analysis. Furthermore, these very studies will confirm her interest in communication and its relationship with women, they are named: “El nivel mítico de la prensa pseudo-amorosa” (1970/1976) and “Apuntes sobre lo moderno: una manera de leer la Revista Feminina Ilustrada” (1971/1973). From then on, her interest in the role of the media as a fundamental element in the creation of a unique modern era grew, especially in publications targeted at women – photonovels, and women's magazines – and in how the female audience was influenced by this *ideology of the modern era*.

The conceptual basis for these analyses, according to Michèle (2014), is established “in a source of decisive inspiration for discourse analysis [which] was the notion of myth, put forth by Barthes in his work *Mythologies* (1957)” (p. 3)²⁹. In short, the myth states that the social world and its differences are natural; the myth avoids the underlying sources of conflict and presents society

²⁶ From original: “me puso frente a cuestiones vinculadas con las relaciones Norte/Sur que fueron cruciales en los decenios 60/70. Por ejemplo, con la orientación sobre las políticas de desarrollo guiadas por las doctrinas del ‘difusionismo’, es decir, por la idea unilateral de una modernidad interpretada como la expresión de la superioridad de la civilización occidental”.

²⁷ Christa Berger (2001) highlights the importance of this research center in the history of communication studies in Latin America.

²⁸ Michèle's most recent texts are characterized by self-reflection and reconstruction of memories of her life as a researcher/ intellectual/activist in Chile.

²⁹ From the original: “Una fuente de inspiración determinante para el análisis del discurso fue la noción de mito, elaborada por Barthes en su obra *Mythologies* (1957)”.

in a harmonious fashion. “We view the myth as a model of reality dogmatically imposed on the masses to control and guide the behavior of individuals”³⁰ (Zarowsky, 2008, p. 3), said Armand, Michèle, and Mabel Piccini (1970/1976) when they showed their research on the ideology of Chilean liberal press, in which that first study I mentioned falls into.

It is worth noting that *Los Medios de Comunicación de Masas: La Ideología de la Prensa Liberal en Chile* (1970/1976) consists of a presentation of the analysis made by Armand, an analysis of the structure of Chile’s information power, concentrated in two editorial groups, also prepared by Armand, and three case studies: the first one, on the mythology of youth in the coverage of *El Mercurio*, was about the student movement and the fight for university reform under the responsibility of Armand, the second one was by Mabel Piccini, dealing with celebrity magazines, and lastly Michèle’s, about photonovels.

Michèle Mattelart (1970/1976) considers that this cultural product faces the problem of love as something seemingly psychic, individual, and generic, denying it any historical-social specificity. Or, if this *sentimental literature* accepts to assume a certain degree of specificity, it restricts its answers to the private scope, denying the possibility of finding solutions through the connection between private problems and the plane of social structures.

“The order of the heart” – the order that governs the organization of this kind of melodramatic discourse – is the one that invalidates any form of struggle against social inequalities (the existence of which is admitted) by means of this diffuse explanation: only love can cross class barriers. Not only is the solution individual – never collective – it is also linked to the miracle of love.... Love becomes a universal explanation that can solve social contradictions by denying them, for the order of society, like love, is founded on Fate. (Michèle, 1997, p. 30)

The two works mentioned above (Michèle, 1971/1973, 1970/1976) deal with women’s magazines published by either transnational companies or Chilean editorial groups. Theoretically, these publications converge in the use of the notion of myth and are presented as propellers of a project of the modern era (1971/1973). However, in the second article (1971/1973), when connecting the discourse of women’s magazines with the modernizing process that both

³⁰ From the original: “Interpretamos el mito como un modelo de representación de la realidad impuesto dogmáticamente a las masas, con el fin de controlar y manejar el comportamiento de los individuos”.

frames and forms it, the author takes on a perspective that combines gender bias and historical-social bias.

In Michèle's analysis, the discourse in these magazines fostered a modernist model that merged traditional roles that originated in *feminine nature* and modern ones that included their incorporation into work. Thus, the role of women as workers and consumers was required.

The implicit core in the theory of female liberation that is aimed at in this model consists of rescuing women from their domestic intimacy to introduce them into the outside world, where they become individuals and, therefore, liberate themselves, thanks to a competence based on the acquisition of goods and thorough obedience to fashion³¹. (Michèle, 1971/1973, p. 150)

Furthermore, the development of this *universal* modernist project consisted of spreading characteristics assigned to a class of women – the bourgeoisie – of a dominant country, and the model of that country was somewhat mechanically applied to the reality of a developing country.

Still, according to Michèle herself,

The concept of modernity led me to study the mythology of modernity, applying the structuralist method because it was predominant at the time and starting from the myth as a key notion to highlight that inequalities reabsorbed and solved in the myth of the woman who accesses modernity as if by magic³². (Ayala Marín & Herrera, 2011, p. 82)

If the cultural products analyzed diminish social conflicts and reinforce female oppression through their melodramatic narratives and female images mobilized, they are also useful to the hegemonic social system. Marked by a judgmental tone, these analyses were aligned with rather mechanical and deterministic perspectives that will be questioned later on in Michèle's journey.

³¹ From the original: "El núcleo implícito en la teoría de la liberación femenina que se persigue en este modelo consiste en rescatar a las mujeres de su intimidad doméstica para lanzarlas al mundo exterior donde se individualizan y, por tanto, se liberan, gracias a una competencia basada en la adquisición de bienes y ardiente obediencia a la moda".

³² From the original: "El concepto de la modernidad me llevó a estudiar en esa ocasión la mitología de la modernidad, aplicando, porque era la época, el método estructuralista, y partiendo del mito como noción clave para destacar que hay una reabsorción de las desigualdades, que se resuelven en este mito de la mujer que accede a la modernidad como encantamiento".

Second crossing

The circumstances experienced in the beginning of the Allende administration – on the one hand, social and political intervention through political and research practices that aimed not only to identify the consumption and reception habits of the media, but to integrate portions of its audience in the message production process³³; and, on the other, the emergence of a growing process of radicalization of right-wing activists, mainly since 1972, who sought to undermine the democratically elected government – supported Michèle’s second movement of relocation. This time, she was driven towards a recognition that both reproduction and transformation took place in the cultural realm, which caused her to question the passive nature of reception.

Two texts are identified as triggering the reexamination of the critical and reproductivist approach adopted up until that point: “La televisión y los sectores populares” (1974), in partnership with Mabel Piccini, and “El golpe de Estado en femenino o cuando las mujeres de la burguesía salen a la Calle” (1975/1977), written after the coup, when Michèle returned to Paris³⁴.

The first is an account of an investigation conducted in 1973 in three working class neighborhoods in Santiago, Chile, on the importance of television in everyday life. The purposes of the investigation were twofold: “to unmask ... the concept of mass communication that uses the dominant class according to which the masses have no other role or power than that of consumers”³⁵ and to question the “abstract concept of ‘audience’ ... [because it represents] trends, tastes, and class interests that are often antagonistic”³⁶ (quoted in Lenarduzzi, 2014, p. 46).

³³ Michèle (2011) details, in retrospect, the strategies adopted by the force field that supported the Allende administration with regard to the transformation of communication through the mobilization of new values. In general, the plan was to build a new culture both in the content of the popular classes and in the ways they participate, either in the first instance or in the management of the media. This led to the understanding of the cultural realm as a place for the establishment of hegemony. See Carla Rivera (2015) as well.

³⁴ These two texts were not fully available for use. Given their importance in Michèle’s trajectory, as well as in previous reception and audience studies in Chile and Latin America, they deserve an even more in-depth analysis than I can conduct here. It surprises me that the surveys and analyses on reception studies in Chile I referred to do not mention these texts. “El golpe de Estado en femenino o cuando las mujeres de la burguesía salen a la calle” was originally published in *Les Temps Modernes*, in 1975, and later as a book chapter.

³⁵ From the original: “desmitificar el ... concepto de comunicación de masas que utiliza la clase dominante según la cual las masas no tienen otra participación y otro poder que el del consumo”.

³⁶ From the original: “concepto abstracto de ‘público’ ... tendencias, gustos e intereses de clase muchas veces antagonicos”.

Therefore, as part of the reception study, Michèle and Mabel reassembled cultural experiences collected in three groups through interviews and testimonies: one that reproduces the current social order, one that develops secondary claims, and one that produces a radical questioning about society. They conclude that reception is different according to how supportive people were of the Popular Unit administration, their gender and their social class.

In the most mobilized female popular classes, we can see that the way messages [melodramatic feuilletons] were read did not necessarily correspond to the implicit meaning conveyed by the sender, and that the act of reception contradicted the logic of structural features, causing deviant consumption procedures³⁷. (Michèle, 1982, p. 25)

However, it is noteworthy that, although the authors recognized “barriers in class consciousness” (Michèle & Mabel, 1974, p. 75), they stressed the importance of individual and biographical contexts and backgrounds in decoding receivers. That is, a combination of factors that help receivers decode the message.

At the time, in a context of strong Marxist influence, by not recognizing the determination of the class code, Michèle and Mabel took on a stance that questioned the existing premises in the critical field and shifted further away from them. Moreover, when Michèle shows that she is interested in the scope of the audience and its practices, she questioned both the current concept of domination in that period and the passive role of receivers that came with it. Another stance that was deemed controversial at the time in light of the dominant ideas.

As such, its disruptive nature, distant from the previous reflection focused on the ideological criticism of messages, is all the more evident. Foreseeing what would later be endorsed in Latin America, the authors assume:

the meaning of the message is not enclosed in itself as an intangible and immutable property outside its historical categories. Meaning is conveyed in the dialectical relationship that is established between the message and the receiver, who is the producer of meaning, claiming their fundamental role in the creation of an alternative

³⁷ From the original: “En los sectores femeninos populares más movilizados descubrimos que la lectura de esos mensajes [folletines melodramáticos] no correspondía necesariamente a la deseada implícitamente por el emisor y que el acto de recepción desmentía la lógica de los rasgos estructurales, ocasionando procedimientos de consumo desviado”.

cultural project as they read and decode the universal word of the bourgeoisie based on their class interests³⁸. (quoted in Natalia Andrea Vinelli, 2006, para. 12)

For this reason, when a period of *self-criticism* is identified, especially in Armand's trajectory in the 1980s, regarding disinterest in the practices of actual social subjects (for example, Christa Berger, 2014; Kaplún, 1988/2007), associating an equivalence with Michèle's trajectory even if indirectly, she neglects the originality of her intellectual production when compared to Armand's. Although this aspect of the recognition of meaning production in reception, especially in the context of Latin America, did not deserve visibility in the analysis of her contributions to communication studies, Michèle repeatedly tried to distance herself from Armand's views in that regard.

In addition to the works that have already been mentioned, her testimonials were mainly used as an opportunity to distance herself even further. For example, in an interview for the newspaper *Zero Hora*, hosted by Christa Berger and Sérgio Caparelli (Berger, 2010, p. 23), she stated that, "to be honest," her intellectual concern regarding the receiving subject "dates back to 1971 or 1972." Likewise, in an interview with Mario Kaplún (1988/2007), she said: "on the emergence of a revaluation of the receiver, even if it can be seen as disruptive from the outside, I must say that I feel that it is closer to a continuity"³⁹ (para. 16).

Although written and produced after the coup d'état – unlike the previous one (1974), which involved an investigation during Allende's administration –, the other text (Michèle, 1975/1977) that drives this movement of focus review provides an analysis of women's magazines as agents that called women, their clients, to political action. Instead of treating their target audience as passive consumers, the discourse of women's magazines mobilized and transformed their readers into counterrevolutionary political agents. This is where the perception of the importance of the *March of Empty Pots and Pans* originates from. Led by women at the end of 1971, the demonstration showed that they had been incorporated into the defense of a military state that used equality discourses to demand their political and active endorsement.

³⁸ From the original: "La significación del mensaje no está encerrada en éste, como propiedad intangible, inmodificable fuera de las categorías históricas congeladas en él. La significación se desarrolla en la relación dialéctica que se establece entre el mensaje y el receptor, un receptor definido como productor de sentido, que reivindica, en el mismo momento en que lee y desmisticifica la palabra universal de la burguesía a partir de sus intereses de clase, su papel protagónico en la construcción de un proyecto alternativo de cultura".

³⁹ From the original: "en cuanto al surgimiento de esa revaloración del receptor, aunque desde afuera se la pueda ver como una ruptura, debo decir que en mí la siento más bien como continuidad".

In times of crisis, they go from readers/consumers to engaged female readers, able to mobilize themselves in direct defense of class interests, no longer implicitly (though never categorizing those interests as such). In times of peace, by dividing and disorganizing them, women's magazines help maintain order⁴⁰. (Michèle, 1982, pp. 63-64)

Therefore, strongly tied to the specific features of a historical context, she breaks away once again from mechanical and universalist perspectives. In this analysis, Michèle chooses a communicational perspective that highlights the importance of the relationship/interaction between text(s) and female reader(s) that, in a given historical context, causes different effects⁴¹. However, these ideas were not yet well-received in the mid-1970s in Latin America, and consequently did not thrive or attract the attention they deserved.

CLOSING REMARKS

Nowadays, not too many people refer to the ideas of their predecessors, something even clearer when it comes to female predecessors. In movements that exaggerate the process of historical memory loss, the latest trends in current thinking are favored, as well as objects in vogue. In view of this, previous and substantial knowledge that underpins intellectual trajectories of fields of knowledge – such as that of communication studies linked to gender in Latin America – are forgotten; such academic amnesia also contributed to erasing the originality of trajectories like Michèle Mattelart's, as well as to minimizing her role in the emergence of connections between communication and gender studies among Latin Americans.

Finally, I realize that the veins opened by Michèle not only started a field of overlapping themes between communication and gender issues in Latin America, but in some cases led to a departure from current views at the time and the disruptions that have been mentioned in this manuscript. Moreover, her resistance was obvious, especially in the works listed as key moments in her journey. However, her viewpoints were generally regarded as being based

⁴⁰ From the original: "En época de crisis, se pasa de la lectora-consumidora a la lectora-mujer de acción, capaz de movilizarse en defensa directa y ya no implícita de los intereses de clase (aunque sin identificar nunca como tales dichos intereses). En época de paz, atomizándolas y desorganizando-las, las revistas femininas contribuyen al mantenimiento del orden".

⁴¹ From a historical and political perspective, Michèle's approach is also lauded as innovative and brave, as in this article, she focuses on the right-wing women's movement, a theme often shunned by the feminist perspective. See Margaret Power (2004).

on those of Armand, revealing the losses that exist both in society and in the intellectual field concerning the role of female intellectuals.

As a result of her choices – in terms of research objects and theoretical views – and precisely because she is a woman/researcher/intellectual/scholar/activist, she did not deserve the recognition and notoriety in a subcontinent marked by strong gender inequalities. In Michèle’s testimonies (Michèle & Armand Mattelart, 2005), her objection about her own experience is almost invisible, except for sarcastic remarks such as: “In the 1960s, certain behaviors found in the left-wing political parties in Chile attracted the attention of women”⁴² (p. 106). Today, possibly, this subtlety or irony would be considered sexism⁴³. ■

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⁴² From the original: “Y había en los años 60 ciertas actitudes en los partidos políticos de izquierda chilena que llamaban la atención de una mujer.”

⁴³ This paper was translated into English by Luiz Lendengues.

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