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1 Introduction:

“Translating” audiences, provincializing Europe

Richard Butsch and Sonia Livingstone

This book seeks to highlight the importance of developing a comparative understanding of discourses about audiences. The focus is on *discourse*, as distinct from the complementary and more usual focus on audience composition, interpretation, and practices. We examine terms – comparative “keywords” (Williams 1976) one might say – and the discourses of which they are a part in cultures across the globe. But it is not simply an exercise in translation, nor simply a study of audiences. It is also a concerted effort to grasp the construction of meanings and power across diverse cultural contexts.

We chose this topic because audiences, discourses about them, and cross-cultural comparisons of these discourses are important not only for audience studies and global media studies, but also for policy and practices beyond the academic. First, in the media-saturated environments that are now even beginning to envelope rural peoples and poorer nations, the sheer number of hours spent at audiencing each day seems to make it self-evident that media use cannot be treated as a peripheral activity (Fiske 1994) Second, talk about audiences, public discourse, is itself important and revealing, often characterizing audiences not simply as aspects of leisure and entertainment, but in ways that link them integrally to politics and citizenship, economics and prosperity, education and cultural improvement, morality and family life. Moreover, discourses are tools of power, means of social control. They define reality and provide bases and justifications for people’s actions and institutional practices. And media constitute the modern institution of discourse where audiences are defined and framed. Third, in today’s globalized world we need to become aware of representations of and discourses about audiences across diverse cultures and languages around the world, today and back into the past. Awareness of such discourses may provide new insights about audiences and audience studies. To do this we bridge audience studies and global media studies, both relatively recent and productive areas of inquiry. While both have made great strides in the last two decades, further advance for each can benefit from linking the two.

Developing such a comparative approach to discourses is not simple, but faces daunting difficulties. Not least among these is the fundamental task of translation and anthropology: how to communicate the nuance, context, and holistic experience of one culture to those from another culture. A related task is de-Westernization, so as to peel back

Western influence in these very discourses, to attempt to reveal ways of seeing that are distinctive to these other cultures, and independent of ideas and categories imported from the West through political, economic, or cultural hegemony.

Our method was to seek new empirical evidence in diverse nations, cultures, and languages. We began straightforwardly by inquiring into terminology used at different times and places, by governments, private capital, religions, social movements, or others, to describe and characterize audiences. Answering these apparently simple questions and explaining in English their meaning and significance was in itself empirically effortful. We further considered with what consequence and to whose benefit some discourses prevailed. Our hope is that significant insights can be gleaned about these cultures and their perceptions of audiences, while minimizing any loss of nuance from translation into English. For the reader, the potential to read across from one chapter, one period, and/or one part of the world to another is likely to prove productive for future research.

We recognize that, as English-speaking Westerners, we bring a problematic dimension to a project focused on cultures outside the West. Indeed, it is with care that we specify certain continents, nations, and cultures as “non-Western,” or “other,” or “native.” We do not intend the historical baggage these terms carry, but use them for want of terms without baggage. Nevertheless, we ask you to bear with us, for we think this project important to the continued vitality of audience studies, for the critical analysis of people embedded in their often heavily-mediated societies, and for the ongoing effort to understand the flows, connections, and conflicts among cultures, including our own. Note that in this project we use the term “Western” not to indicate geography, but as shorthand for the shared cultural traditions of modern Western Europe and North America. We have sought to transcend and peer beyond those traditions to learn new ways of understanding audiences comparatively and transculturally.

Yet as revealed by the chapters that follow, there are many apparent similarities across cultures in their conceptions of audiences. This could be due to the universality of the concepts or to the advanced state of processes of globalization. Discourses of “crowd” and “community” emerge as very widespread phenomena. The concept of publics, strongly tied to the idea of democracy, seems less universal and more culturally specific. Although the concept of audiences itself seems likely to be universal, we learn in this volume that there were no ready-made terms for this in Chinese or Arabic. Indeed, using Google Ngram and the Oxford English Dictionary, in English the term “audience” only became predominant recently. “Spectator” was far more common than “audience” in nineteenth-century books. Moreover, “audience” was still used primarily in its older sense of an authority giving an audience. “Spectator” begins to decline after the turn of the century, reaching a lower plateau about 1920. It is only in the 1920s that “audience” approaches closely the frequency of “spectator,” and only exceeds it in the mid-1930s. This shift appeared about the same time as cinema and then radio, and with systematic efforts to

measure radio audiences. “Listener” appears on the scene in the 1920s along with radio, and “viewers” in the 1950s along with television. This within-culture variation seems to suggest that this terminology is culturally specific and the similarities to be observed across cultures have more to do with globalization than with universality. Arguably, future efforts to discover unique and different perspectives should focus on communities, villages or tribes as yet less touched by global influence, including modern media. However, in starting this project, it was far from obvious what patterns of similarity or difference would be revealed across the cultures already included in this volume.

Understanding audiences and discourse

Audience studies have flourished with the rise of a new paradigm of active audiences that re-established them as actors in their own lives, and placed media in the context of both the micro-climate of social interactions among family, friends, and community, and the larger landscape of cultural hegemony and resistance. It has become an established and rich field of knowledge; the field has now reached a plateau and awaits fertile new areas of inquiry. We believe that the study of *discourses* about audiences is one such promising area of inquiry. Among other things, this focus promises to integrate the study of audiences more broadly into other areas of society, such as inequality, and political, economic, and other social institutions and related issues.

There is a surprising amount of public discourse about audiences that one finds when one begins to look for it. And such discourse is consequential. When seeking historical documentation of audience composition and behavior in the US for *The Making of American Audiences*, it was often clear that many passages discussing audiences were not dispassionate, objective descriptions, not simply an historical record, but rather were insistently normative discourses about the audiences (Butsch 2000). Pursuing this research further for *The Citizen Audience*, it became evident that much American characterization of audiences – as crowds, masses, publics, consumers – could be understood as measuring audiences against a standard of good citizenship (Butsch 2008, 2011). Nineteenth-century stage audiences were characterized as disorderly crowds, and mid-twentieth century television audiences as an inert mass of isolated individuals. Talk about audiences is expressed in moral panics and censorship debates about media, or as fear of the “masses” and of deviance and social disorder, or anxieties about “dumbing down” or cultural decline. Scholars have not been neutral here, their often pejorative claims about audiences legitimating wider anxieties about audiences (Livingstone 1998). Discourses on nationhood and nationalism create imagined communities (Anderson 2006 [1983]) by telling media audiences who they are and how they should behave as members of the nation, in particular in their role as audiences. American advertising for radio sets in the 1920s constructed radio listeners at first as men and teenage boys, and later as housewives. Public forum

programs of the 1930s and 1940s framed audiences as responsible publics deliberating on the issues of the day. The tradition later extended to television (Livingstone and Lunt 1994).¹

We must also be aware of the culturally and historically contingent nature of discourse. What a term means in one language, culture, and time is not necessarily equivalent to its use elsewhere. Concepts no more stand still than does the world to which they purport to refer, so a global comparative frame must encompass not only place, but also time. While we begin with a place, and a language, as a way into cultural analysis of audiences, we also include an historical perspective, explaining “now” by locating it in a shifting and complex story of changes in both formal institutions and the practices of everyday life.

Even within present-day Europe, key concepts are differently inflected in different languages. The *Audiences and Publics* project (Livingstone 2005) began through an innocent misunderstanding – a French colleague looked puzzled at the English speaker’s talk of “the audience”: does she mean “le public,” she asked her companion. But if “the audience” is to be translated as “le public,” what of the distinction, important in English, between audience and public? A lively discussion ensued to map the French lexicon where, to summarize simply, “audience” is an invention of the commercial ratings industry, “public” is the collectivity who watches television, and “l’espace public” captures the English concept of the public sphere (originally, the German *Offenlichkeit*). Having considered the French language, the English “translation” can be seen afresh as failing to demarcate “audience” as a vital collectivity engaged with the popular from “audience” as measured by audience ratings; the public, however, maps neatly onto the public sphere, aiding the adoption of Habermas’ concept within English language social theory through its very familiarity.² But herein lies another difficulty, between British English and American English, for although both readily accommodate not only “public” but also “public sphere” to their strong democratic traditions under modernity, to British ears “public” is less opposed to “audience” than in the US, because of its strong tradition of public service broadcasting, while in the US commercial system, “public” as a descriptor of audiences turns them into customers – and thus Habermas’ gloomy prognostications about the mediated public sphere were heard with more skepticism on one side of the Atlantic than the other (Calhoun 1992; Weintraub 1997). If even English, French, and American scholars struggle to reach conceptual understanding, despite their considerable shared history and culture, what of more distant and disparate cultures? Anthropologist Stephanie Donald (2000), for example, noted that concepts of civil society and public sphere must be redefined in the context of Chinese culture and history. Such problems of translation likely occur with other terms, such as crowds, masses, and consumers, commonly used in English discourse depicting audiences (for a classic analysis, see Blumer, [1946] 1961).

This challenge spurred us on in this project, as we became aware of an even greater need and potential benefit for cross-cultural understanding. We could not accomplish this alone. Therefore we recruited contributors familiar with both Western English scholarly discourse on audiences as well as discourses within another culture who thus could act as cultural “translators” for us and for our readers.

A comparative sensibility

The core of this project was to understand audiences through the eyes of cultures other than those of Euro-American Western audience studies. We looked to other cultures as a source of ideas to renew and expand our vision. Therefore, our purpose was to deepen the connection to global studies to bring cross- and transnational issues into the study of audiences (a project already begun by, for example, Juluri 2003; Lull 1988; Mankekar 1999; Naficy 1999). This meant, first of all, revealing concepts, categories, and representations of audiences distinctive or “native” to those cultures. The intent was to raise awareness of such difference and of the fact of the historical and cultural contingency of all discourses about audiences, Western discourses included. Second, it meant revealing the distinctive interpretations attached to Western representations of audiences that have been borrowed and incorporated into discourses in other cultures. It also meant acknowledging post-colonial critique and accepting the challenge of de-Westernizing media studies. Many others have addressed these issues (Chen 2006, 2008; Craig, Covarrubias, Miike, and Kim, all in *Communication Monograph* 2007; Curran and Park 2000; Wang 2011). However, while acknowledging the need for de-Westernizing theory (and for provincializing Europe, Chakrabarti 2008 [2000]), this book is not an attempt to create distinct audience studies for different nations, but to extend audience studies generally by expanding our empirical base beyond the West and modernity, and inviting scholars from all quarters to use the resulting insights comparatively.

Post-colonial studies have their origins in colonial independence movements.³ These movements sought not only political and economic independence, but also psychological and cultural independence (Fanon 1963; Memmi 1965). But these latter aspects were particularly difficult to achieve, even after political independence. To dissect what was colonial legacy and what was “authentic” native culture in thinking, language, and culture was and is not so simple, and all the more so the more employment, language, and education became implicated in the colonial enterprise. Post-colonial studies began this intellectual independence by first rewriting colonial histories, trying to sort out fact from ideology (Chatterjee 1993; Guha 1997; Spivak 1985). But post-colonial elites could not simply shed their education. Chakrabarty (2008 [2000]: x) recounts his realization that his own efforts at rewriting South Asian history had uncritically imposed Western, in this case Marxist, categories on Indian history. According to Wang (2011) and Pollock (2011), one

legacy of colonialism has been the neglect of native intellectual traditions to the degree that these were no longer taught, thus encouraging the idea that further education required study in the West. The colonial legacy lived on in Western education (Alatas 2006). Efforts to overcome this legacy continue today as China, for example, invests heavily to create its own world-class universities and research centers.

The first principle of de-Westernizing was to shed development and modernization theories that presumed a phylogeny of national and cultural evolution in which Western societies were the standard of progress against which post-colonial societies could be measured and their future paths predicted. Chakrabarty's purpose for provincializing Europe was plainly to question Europe's universality and to treat it as any other culture – while at the same time not to “pluralize reason” (2008 [2000]: xiii). Yet, he goes on to explain the difficulty in putting this into practice, in stripping out the Western after centuries of colonial rule, and rediscovering and reestablishing a culture of “one's own.” Western institutions have long been grafted into colonial societies' cultures, and therefore are not just an intellectual exercise, but also a daily reality. He writes,

The phenomenon of ‘political modernity’ – namely the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy and capitalist enterprise – is impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history.

(Chakrabarty 2008 [2000]: 4)

This was the dilemma faced by the de-Westernizing project. Chakrabarty goes on to state that Western terms in post-colonial cultures are now “both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through various life practices” (2008 [2000]: 6), for colonialism is part of the history and culture of post-colonial societies. There is no “authentic” native culture any more than there would be if we stripped out, for example, the Mogul period from Indian history. What may be a more feasible project would have been to reincorporate the intellectual tradition, such as Jacobson (2008) and Chen (2008) have done with the traditional idea of harmony in China, or strategies that Alatas (2006) explores. As Kraidy (2011: 56) puts it, “de-centering Eurocentrism ought to be construed as a long-term incremental strategy, and not a fully and immediately executable blueprint.”

Taking this incrementalist advice, we set as our goal to parse the culturally specific meanings of representations of audiences, regardless of their origin in Europe and America or elsewhere, and to place these in the contexts of discourses and the power they wield. We bypassed attempts to determine origin and separate Western from native; instead we concentrated on the meanings of terms and the significance of their discourses in their

cultural and historical context. Our strategy was to identify terms in other cultures and languages that represented audiences, and then to explain in English their meanings. This required English phrases that may only approximate those native meanings, thus calling for fuller explanation and further qualification. Making this more problematic to sort out, Western terms have often arrived and been absorbed into native discourse about audiences along with the arrival of the media technologies and the creation of their audiences. New native terms were created that mimicked Western terms. As a result, our task here was to carefully interrogate the terms in the context of their discourses, which typically revealed linkages of audiences to many other issues, practices, and structures, including politics, economics, and inequality.

In his quotation above, Chakrabarty states that Western institutions are modern institutions. For the post-colonial project of provincializing Europe and de-Westernizing, the dilemma was to either abandon modernism or to sever the linkage of modern with Western and create a modernism independent of Western culture. Some regimes have attempted some version of rejecting both modernism and the West for their nation, but these projects have not fared well. Others have attempted to disconnect the two. No doubt as Western hegemony subsides and other nations gain global importance, some forms of modernism – or a *post*-modernism – will evolve into something beyond Western.

As a way to consider Western culture and modernism separately, we have included two studies that look at *pre-modern* Europe and others that include a brief look at the pre-modern discourse in their society, with the hope that these may reveal representations that precede modernity. Western discourses include characterizations of audiences, absent from Chakrabarty's list, that have pre-modern origins. Terms such as crowds, mobs and masses, and multitudes, indicate the people or common folk as separate and beneath an elite (Schnapp and Tiews 2006), without necessarily presuming democracy and citizenship, capitalism or individualism. These terms seem to pre-date the Enlightenment discourse of democracy and appear uncomfortably alongside it into the twentieth century (Butsch 2008, 2011), and are important to discourses beyond the West (Saussy 2006).

Implicit in post-colonial studies is a focus on the nation as the unit of analysis. We focused similarly on national discourses, more so than on subcultures, linguistic regions, or transnational cultures. Nations continue to be greatly relevant, and specifically in relation to audiences. Discourses are often national, not only when they are coterminous with a culture, but also because national governments are targets, contributors, and creators of such discourses. In the case of audiences, moral entrepreneurs typically address their discourse to governments as well as citizens, and governments regulate media and their audiences and, in the process, construct their own discourses about audience. States visibly care about audiences within their borders, for purposes of order as well as of politics.

While most of the studies focus on the nation, we recognize that some audience-related issues benefit from a transnational perspective (Beck 2007; Georgiou 2012; Robins

2001). Cultures map only weakly onto nations and nations themselves are in flux.⁴ Appadurai (1996) transcends the nation-state approach as he focuses on the cross-border flows of ideas, media, money, technologies and peoples, including the diasporic residents living within Western nations and cultures, suspended between two worlds and struggling to span them. These populations are not inconsequential politically, economically, or theoretically when trying to understand global diversity and patterns of influence.

Translation and commensurability

As much of what we have said already indicates, our contributors faced fundamental challenges of translation between two often-disparate languages and cultures that required thorough knowledge of their topics in both. Translation is a “partly opaque relationship we call ‘difference,’” (Morris 1997: xiii). Wang (2011: 254) hopes not for perfect translation but for the recognition of equivalence, as we collectively aspired to what she calls “culture-commensurability” as a point of departure. We recognize that language and culture are both commensurable and incommensurable, never perfectly mirrored when translated, yet sufficiently so. This project likewise hopes to aid a growing understanding of each other’s culture.

For Wang (2011: 267), “rushing to achieve commensurability ... tends to result in easy comparisons and analogies.” Thus we were cautious about presuming that apparent similarities did not hide underlying and subtle differences of meaning and context (see Livingstone 2012). Rather, we hope researchers are stimulated by this present collection to study further the etymology of the terms, who applies them to what purpose, and to whose benefit. And we look forward to learning more in the years to come.

We begin our project in English in order to share our findings across much of today’s globalized world. This use of the hegemonic Western language may seem contradictory to the project of de-Westernization, yet how else may post-colonial societies most effectively communicate among each other and cooperate to challenge and dismantle Western cultural, intellectual, and psychological hegemony? Such a project necessarily must be channeled through a lingua franca, which today is English, given its global use in science, scholarship, and media. We say begin, since our hope is that these studies and others like them will appear in languages other than English, to enable wider participation.

The power of discourses

Discourse is the ongoing collective conversation that expresses, renews, and changes culture; it is a “lived process” of culture, to borrow a term from Raymond Williams (1977: 112). Foucault broadens the concept to include not just the text of conversation, but also the

practices, procedures, and policies institutionalized in the organizations of a society. As culture is a shared definition of reality, so discourse defines the reality to which we respond. This is the basic premise of theories of ideology and of social constructivism, the premise used by theorists from Marx to Horkheimer, W. I. Thomas to Berger and Luckmann, Althusser to Foucault. It applies at the micro-social level of face-to-face interaction as well as to the macro level of mass communication.

Also, discourse is not a neutral instrument; it is powerful. In defining reality, discourse does so in ways that may benefit some over others. Who has greater control over the discourse has greater power to shape the actions of others. That means, again to borrow from Raymond Williams, that while one discourse may be dominant, “it is never total or exclusive [but] has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own” (1977: 112–113). In other words, there are multiple discourses vying in a discursive field (Foucault 1977).

Our focus here was primarily on dominant discourses about audiences that were effective on a macro-social level and in a wide range of discursive contexts, including the political, economic, social, and religious. Discourses about media, media texts, and audiences are ways in which societies incorporate media into their culture, through their collective talk about media and their use. Unsurprisingly, then, discourses about audiences were widespread, although sometimes disguised as only coincidentally about audiences. Moral panics about media can be understood as discourses about audiences (Drotner 1999). Reports of audience composition and behavior (Stokes and Maltby 1999) similarly reveal themselves upon re-reading as discourses about audiences. Audience theories from effects research to spectatorship theory reveal and perpetuate certain forms of discourse about audiences (Mayne 1993; Staiger 2000).

Discourses about audiences become important because such representations may become a means of social control, especially control of subordinate groups. They do so by defining audiences normatively. In Western discourses, framing audiences as publics attaches Enlightenment ideas of democracy to audience activity, and sets a positive standard of an ideal audience. When audiences are characterized as crowds, masses or mass, these negative terms express strong disapproval. Furthermore, how audiences are constructed, positively or negatively, is linked to whom audiences are imagined to be, which in turn leads to particular imagined behavior of audiences, alleged consequences, or costs to society, and finally, to how to deal with these audiences. Audiences imagined to be composed of subordinate groups (subordinated classes or races, women, children, immigrants) are often targets of regulation, while audiences imagined as superordinate tend to be praised and held up as an ideal for others who, in turn, are stereotyped as ignorant, lacking education or “taste”, inherently stupid, and easily duped or manipulated. Such

discourses then justify and sustain status hierarchies and regulate access to power and privilege (Butsch 2008).

Thus it was important to our project to recognize that the words, terms, discourses, and distinctions regarding audiences really matter. We considered whether and why the particular terms prominent in a particular time or place made a difference, thereby revealing the structures of power in which they are/were embedded and also tracing how they shape the conceptions of people's agency and participation, of the media judged appropriate for them, and of the political channels through which they might participate.

The studies

By conceiving of this as a project in comparative keywords (Williams 1976), we ask what keywords these studies report, how they are used in the discourses of these cultures, and how the findings compare. We begin with two studies of pre-modern European audiences. Looking back more than two millennia, David Roselli's chapter on Ancient Greek theater audiences questions the too facile application of modern concepts of publics and public sphere to these ancient audiences as if they were gatherings of citizens. Instead, he demonstrates that a large portion, if not a majority, of ancient theater audiences were not citizens, but a diverse gathering including women, slaves, and metics (resident "foreigners"). Ancient commentaries about audiences also reveal a more complicated circumstance. Literate elites often distinguished between the class and tastes of their peers in the audiences and the rest, which they described in terms similar to masses or mobs. At the same time, Roselli argues that theater had a political function in civic discourse, enabling these subaltern classes of non-citizens, through their inclusion and participation as audiences, to find a voice in public political discourse.

Christian Oggolder examines readership in early modern Germany in the seventeenth century before democratic and capitalist institutions had taken form and when print was just becoming widespread. In this proto-modern society, Hegel's concept of civil society rather than Habermas' public sphere offers a more appropriate frame, it being a time when private and economic interests were just beginning to be separated from family and state, so that civil society encompassed the sphere of private economic activities as well as nascent political activity in a state form of emergent citizen participation (Kittler 2009). The broadsheets analyzed by Oggolder debate the burning issue of the age, "confessional conflict," which was a public and state issue as much as an individual, religious one. Political and religious authorities were linked and mutually reinforcing: people were both subjects of the state and members of the contiguous religious community, and they shared allegiance to both earthly political and heavenly religious authority. Religious conflict therefore sometimes meant political conflict, war. Consequently, early broadsheets addressed their readers simultaneously as communities of religion, estate (status group),

and nation. These were communities that were more than the modern image of a social network or neighborhood, but rather highly political, and print was the new medium for imagining this community.⁵

Russia is, and is not, the West, reflecting an identity conflict among elites since at least Peter the Great. Sudha Rajagopalan compares Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russian discourses. In Tsarist Russia, the Latin derivative, *publika*, described only Westernized, elite audiences, and the rest of the population, mostly peasants, who rarely if ever read or witnessed public performances, were *narod*, or something close to “the people,” but without its modern political connotations, or “the folk”. The Soviet government then redefined the *narod* as the base of the ruling Communist Party and of revolutionary spirit but in need of Party guidance through government-controlled media. In the post-Soviet era, the (re)turn to private ownership and commercial media reframed audiences as consumers and “taste publics,” according them little political identity. Academic discourse, on the other hand, has tended to retain the older, elite disdain for the *narod*. The elite–masses distinction weaves through the whole history, even as the characterization of *narod* varied.

Kevin Smets, Iris Vandeveld, Philippe Meers, Roel Vande Winkel, and Sofie Van Bauwel transcend the focus of other chapters on the national to explore the characterizations of diasporic Turkish and Indian immigrant cinema audiences in Antwerp, Belgium. While there are some distinctions between Turks and Indians in these discourses, European exhibitors, ethnic distributors, and the diasporic audiences themselves framed the audiences as ethnic communities in tension with their new culture. Distributors did this through the added lens of audience as market, and exhibitors through the lens of ethnic customers with some undesirable habits. The diasporic audiences framed themselves as communities sharing a common cultural background and a common interpretation of the films, and framed the theater as a space for sociability affirming family, neighborhood, and cultural identity. Framing as a community seems related to efforts on the one hand to incorporate immigrants into the nation, and on the other to buttress belonging to the ethnic group as well as bridging the two identities.

Wendy Willems contrasts colonial Southern Rhodesia to post-colonial Zimbabwe. The colonial government directed one discourse to the European settler-citizens and another to disenfranchised African subjects. Newspapers for settlers framed their white readers as good and loyal citizens, while newspapers circulated to the urban, African middle class avoided political issues and addressed their readers instead as consumers of entertainment. Government-controlled radio was directed solely to white settlers as citizens, while it was considered unsuited to the illiterate, rural Africans who were defined as primitive, highly suggestible and prone to acting out. On independence, the new socialist Zimbabwean government defined radio’s purpose as educating the African “rural masses” to change them into modern socialist citizens, but maintained a similar elite–masses distinction as before. In the 1990s, Zimbabwe’s privatized media repositioned their

audiences as consumers as well as citizens. At the same time, an unpopular government reverted to the old colonial framing of rural Africans as a suggestible crowd prone to injudicious violence. Through this history we see a continuing thread of elite–masses distinction from colonial through post-colonial periods of the twentieth century, not unlike the framing of the *narod* from Tsarist to Soviet Russia.

Stephanie Donald explains that in China, from the Revolution into the 1990s, the concept of audiences has been an explicitly “sociopolitical construct,” built on the distinction between a Communist Party elite and the rest of the population, labeled the masses, conceived without “expectation of self-management, agency or choice,” as she phrases it. She begins by providing a landscape of Chinese discourse on audiences linked to the political history of China since the Revolution. Media were and still are, to a considerable degree, considered a means to “guide” the masses. The elderly of China that Donald interviewed for her study lived through much of this history. Their responses indicate that they internalized the Party’s definition of and role for them. With reforms since the 1980s, as China has increasingly expanded markets in its economy and grown global ties, her interviewees have begun to redefine their roles as more active, even civic audiences.

Guiquan Xu delineates Chinese terminology for audiences primarily by focusing on the period since the beginning of economic reforms in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping. She notes that the idea of a “people-based monarchy” is rooted in the ancient history of China, and continues in modern times. But people-based did not mean people-rule, or democracy. Through the Mao years, the role of the people, variously translated as the multitudes, masses, and even crowd, was defined to accept and carry out the Party line. During the era of “socialist modernization” after Mao, terms borrowed from Western audience research, including descriptors such as viewer, effects, uses, and selective perception, began to enter official and professional discourses about the media’s relation to the Party line and to the people. In the 1990s, with expansion of a market economy, audiences were also framed as consumers. By the 2000s, Western terms such as citizen and public sphere have begun to be incorporated into discourses about audiences, especially among academics.

Like Donald and Xu, Jingsi Wu begins with the Chinese government’s construction of *qunzhong*, or the masses, as a positive historical force and the instrument of the ruling Chinese Communist Party, but a force without its own agency. With the commercialization of media, public and academic discourse began to reframe audiences as active agents, albeit in their role as consumers. Wu examines how, in the recent period, audiences voting for contestants on the popular television talent show, *Supergirl*, became a contested issue in the 2000s, for fear it might suggest or encourage active citizenship. Discourse by elites in major newspapers reveals tensions in the commercial, political, and cultural framings of these new audiences over their increased agency. Through this Wu introduces an aspect of consumers taken for granted and neglected in Western scholarship – their agency. The

study reflects how audiences may be politicized (and quashed), in this case through official fears of popular activism and protests, a concern with a very long history in China.

Donald and Xu focus on what official discourses expressed audiences *should* be, perhaps since the Chinese government maintains sufficient control over public discussion to prevent anything that suggests government fears of masses as audiences. Wu adds the recent concerns about active audiences and tensions arising with commercialized media. Fang-chih Yang and Ping Shaw explore tensions between positive and negative representations of internet users in Taiwanese newspapers, through the lens of two media events. Using newspaper reports and internet responses to them, they capture a complex discursive field expressing popular and more established views of audiences. From this they extract contrasting images of internet users, on the one hand as a passive and uniform crowd, not unlike the idea of masses in other studies or of mass society in the US, and on the other hand an active public.

Joe Khalil describes the Arab world and the fit or lack of fit of the idea of publics to discourses about audiences. He examines and compares three different discourses. First he discusses Muslim religious broadcast constructions of audiences as *ummah*, the religious community of Muslims. Then he considers differing Arabic media representations of audiences as, on the one hand, *al gamaheer*, or the masses, a quasi-Marxist term used as part of Nasser's pan-Arab movement in the 1950s, and on the other hand, as the *Arab street*, a term more recently indicating the people, but also suggestive of crowds and their power of collective action, appearing variously in positive and negative terms that evoke similar images in the nineteenth-century West. Third he looks at transnational Arabic media's pan-Arabist framing of its audience, in which audiences are segmented and the three terms are repositioned apolitically for commercial reasons, such as *al gamaheer* as fans.

Aliaa Dawoud focuses specifically on Egyptian discourses about audiences for daytime serials broadcast daily during Ramadan. Mubarak's regime imagined the serials as a means to acculturate the public in ways aligned with the ruling party. Their use of the term *gomhor*, as explained by Khalil, conceived of audiences more as the masses than as a citizen public, the policy apparently being to provide the serials precisely as a distraction from politics. Hence the state discussed them in terms of their popularity among consumers, while also encouraging the incorporation of normative messages. Thus they framed serials with a double purpose, to entertain consumers and to acculturate the masses. By contrast, the serials' actors and production personnel refer to audiences as viewers, connoting a selective consumer, more active than the masses but less political than citizens. Different again, intellectual elites have focused on audience segments (women, children), often in stereotypical or patronizing terms, although with Persian Gulf investors recently beginning to finance the serials, talk about audiences is shifting further in the direction of consumers.

Manishita Dass analyzes Bengali discourse on cinema audiences as publics. The concept of publics was borrowed from the British colonizers in the nineteenth century but the word was turned against them when used by the independence movement and its demand for democratic rights for the peoples of India. But the term public also was used to describe audiences in theater of the time, suggesting not only a political public but also a consumer public. This latter re-conception of a public as consumers became more widespread with the rise of cinema, being interpreted quite literally through phrases such as the public “eats it.” Dass goes on to show how, from the 1920s on, the conception of a consuming public began to refer to a mass audience of vulgar taste, as distinct from discerning viewers, i.e., the educated elite. Thus Dass highlights a transformation apparently little found – according to our authors – in other cultures, namely the transformation from public to mass, as cinema supplemented or even took over from theater. The concept of public as consumers turns its political meaning on its head, transmogrifying it into a negative reference to the masses and mass audience, itself an act of considerable political significance.

Comparing results

Recurring among these studies of diverse cultures and languages were terms that our contributors translated into English in familiar forms – masses, publics, crowds, consumers, and less so, community, and active versus passive audiences. Hybrid representations – consumer-citizens (Bird 1999; Lewis et al. 2005), crowd-publics (Eley 1992) – also cropped up. While discourses, as all social meanings, were culturally and historically contingent, at the same time there seems reason to accept that there were similarities across nations and cultures that would be as inappropriate to deny as any differences. These seemed to occur in relation to similar circumstances, such as inequalities of power and wealth such as class, or similarities of economic conditions (agricultural feudal or industrial capitalist economies), or of social structures or cultural values (pre-modern or modern). Whether these apparent similarities will dissolve on closer examination and further research remains a question for future scholars. For the moment let us consider these comparisons in preparation for this future work.

The concept of publics is thoroughly Western and so makes for an uncomfortable fit to many of these societies. Do other terms then capture the idea of the people in such societies? Many societies, it seems, employ discourses that divide the society into elites and the masses, generally with a relatively small middle in service to elites: Russia, China, Egypt and other Arabic societies, Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Most focus on elite discourses, since these are more influential and, consequently, better documented. Such terms may well be a more authentic reflection of thinking about audiences outside the framework of Western democracy. “The masses,” or the people, the multitude, and other

such terms typically distinguish the bulk of the population from an elite, referring, for example, to peasants or the proletariat, and characterize these as indistinguishable or undifferentiated as individuals. Contrary to the negative connotation more commonly attributed to the masses in the West, masses are sometimes represented positively and ideologically – as the spirit of the nation or vanguard of revolution; at the same time, the masses are conceived as undifferentiated, comprising followers lacking in agency. Many of these studies pinpoint contrasts in representations across time or in tension at the same time, notably shifts or tensions between crowds and inferior masses to publics or masses positively constructed. Intriguingly, much less often do the studies address depictions of audiences as vulnerable and endangered, as we so often hear in Western discourses about audiences.

Similarities across some of these discourses have at least some Western provenance. Marxism filtered through Soviet Leninism no doubt influenced the fabrication of “the masses” in relation to the ruling party and, with the party-controlling media, one result was audiences constructed as the masses. Such an influence seems present in China and Zimbabwe. On the other hand, discourses constructing the dichotomy between elites and the masses significantly pre-date Marxism. For example, the Tsarist concept of the *narod*, the ancient Chinese concept of the people, and even the English colonial constructs in Southern Rhodesia suggest other, pre-modern aristocratic origins – perhaps independent, parallel evolutions emerging from similar structures of inequality.

These studies together affirm the political nature of the category of audiences, that societies treat audiences often with great importance, as representations of ideological categories, as expressions of the populace, as crowds and masses that need to be controlled to maintain social order or to contain protests. The studies of strong-government societies, including Russia, China, and Zimbabwe reveal ideologically driven official representations of audiences as part of systematic efforts to control media and information. This is more overt and systematic, especially under strong central governments, but it is also evident elsewhere.

Among other things, these studies indicate that discourses situated in similar circumstances exhibit similar representations and normative evaluations of audiences. They may do so with differing and unique inflections, yet are recognizably related. This duality parallels that of translation, words in different languages expressing similar ideas, yet also inflected by their linguistic, cultural, historic, and situational contexts that accrete nuance and connotation beyond the similarity. The studies here tend to capture the similarities and some of the nuance and connotation, but further research is needed to pursue the interrogation of meanings and to reveal such subtlety and shading of meaning and allusion.

One thread that does seem to go beyond what is usually identified in modern Western discourse is the greater attention to framing audiences as communities (Butsch 2012; Miike 2007). The chapters on Ancient Greece, early modern Germany, diaspora in Belgium, and

Arabic societies reveal the centrality of community in various forms. This raises the question: how is community (geographic, religious, or other) similar or different from modern representations as public, crowd, consumers, and what are the significances of these differences? Crowds, masses, publics, and consumers may be placed on a continuum from communal to individual. Terms such as crowds, masses, and the people depict collectivities of undifferentiated people. Publics and consumers depict numbers of individuals each deciding and acting as agents. Community suggests something more than a collectivity that is a crowd, a public, or consumers, a common identity whether rooted in social ties and networks or in a mediated imagined community.

An obvious explanation of the differing emphasis of community and publics seems to be the contrast between modernity and the pre-modern, a contrast conceived not as progress, but simply as difference and change for better or worse. Until recently, this has been conceived by scholars through a century not only as a cultural but also a structural evolution, most often as the rise of capitalism, and recently as economic globalization. Does this difference reduce to the venerable dichotomy between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* from social theories a century old? Or is the problem the dichotomization? Have we missed the different Eastern framing of yin/yang, and/both? We remain agnostic until further research.

More recently, the considerable public as well as academic attention given to the internet's potential to enable social and political interaction (Papacharissi 2004; Varnelis 2008) has produced a new discourse raising hopes and questions about internet users as community, organically building new connections that can sustain social identities and shared practices of public values; on the other hand, there are also many pessimists blaming the internet for undermining such remnants of (offline) community as can still be found in late modernity. Reports on the Arab Spring (El-Amine and Henaway 2011), China (Wu 2007), and other locations (McCaughey and Ayers 2003) have emphasized its potential for enabling collective political action, even in nations with strict regulation of the internet. Yang and Shaw discuss this type of discourse about internet-based political action. These latter communities are often imagined as Dewey (1927), and more recently, collective action research (Eley 1992; Kelly 2001; Tilly 2004) envisioned publics.

Another difference is the importance of individual versus group. With de-colonization in the mid-twentieth century, many nations adopted the concept of the citizen as an individual, as stated, for example, in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. In the West, this has been used to advance a universalist call for communication rights, though the wider ramifications of such a call in diverse cultures has yet to be determined (Hamelink and Hoffman, 2008). But a communitarian conception of membership and participation in the public sphere and the state would lead to differing conceptions. In such a setting a public would have a different meaning.

Related to matters of community as well as nation and citizenship is the issue of outsiders, such as the metics of Ancient Greek theater or diaspora immigrant moviegoers in Belgium. Our mostly national focus risks homogenizing populations and discourses, when we know there are many subpopulations, subcultures, and discourses. Its importance is obvious. But delving further into the particularities of these societies is beyond the scope of this book, and must await future research.

Where, then, do we go from here? Are there more subtle differences among cultures that we have yet to tap, perhaps in more localized, insulated, rural cultures? Are these national cultures already too much absorbed in the globalized English-speaking world? We can only say that our contributors suggest a good deal more commonality across cultures and history than we had anticipated. We will have to await other studies to take this search further and deeper to reveal whatever other cultural differences there may be. We do, however, consider this an exciting beginning, and we hope that others will have their interest piqued and find this of sufficient importance to pursue the research strategy of this opening gambit.

Notes

- 1 For further discussion of crowds see Blumer ([1946] 1961), Schnapp and Tiews (2006) and van Ginneken (1992); on masses see Williams (1976) and Briggs (1985); on “the people” see Morgan (1988); on publics see Calhoun (1992) and Warner (2002); on consumers see Lewis, Inthorn, and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005).
- 2 For the introduction of German public sphere theory into English, see especially Calhoun (1992). We leave aside for the moment the varied usages of public even within English, particularly American English, that further complicates the problem of meaning. See Warner (2002) and Weintraub (1997).
- 3 In the twentieth century many former colonies won their struggles to become independent nations. Of course, many nations were not, strictly speaking, colonies in the twentieth century, and yet were not independent either – China, for example, and almost all of Latin America (Rodriguez 2001). We use the term “colonial” broadly to refer not only to societies occupied and governed by imperial powers, but also societies over which Western nations, including the US, held political and economic hegemony over a range of types of direct and indirect control. Those nations too, while not precisely post-colonial, nevertheless confront the dilemma of de-Westernizing. The term “post-colonial” also implies that colonialism is past, which is questionable if one considers hegemony a form of colonizing relationship.
- 4 Maintaining the importance of the nation, but shifting the focus dramatically, Thussu (2012) observes that a new cartography for media and communication studies is emerging, one in which China and India occupy far more space than traditionally anticipated by Euro-Atlantic scholarship.

- 5 They are somewhat reminiscent of political factions based on community and caste in David Hardiman's (1982) study of Indian politics of the 1920s and 1930s.

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