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International journalism and the emergence of transnational publics: Between cosmopolitan norms, the affirmation of identity, and market forces

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Abstract

Much has been written about transnational public spheres, though our understanding of their shape and nature remains limited. Drawing on three alternative conceptions of newswork as public communication, this paper explores the role of international journalists in shaping transnational publics. Based on a series of original interviews, it asks how journalists are oriented in their newswork (e.g. are they cosmopolitan or parochial in their orientation), and how they 'imagine' the public. It finds that interviewees imagine a polycentric transnational public, and variously frame their work as giving voice to those affected by an issue (imagining the public as a cosmopolitan community of fate), performing and reaffirming a particular kind of identity and belonging (imagining the public as a nation), or pursuing audiences wherever they may be (imagining the public as the *de facto* audience).

Keywords: public sphere, global journalism, transnational publics, international broadcasting, ritual communication, audiences, BBC World Service, Iran.

Flows of public communications, news included, increasingly traverse political and cultural boundaries raising the prospect of emergent transnational public spheres. Yet discussions on the public sphere, and the function of journalism in the public sphere, often assume that the public is a well-defined and stable category. Analytically this assumption is unproblematic, so long as public communications are nationally organized, and a parochially framed journalism aims primarily to mediate between the nation-state and its citizens (see: Fraser, 2007; Nash, 2007; Salvatore, 2007). That is, as long as methodological nationalist assumptions hold because flows of public communication obey political boundaries, creating a stable and congruent relationship between public communications and a given public. However, the proliferation of media outlets such as BBC World, Al Jazeera, or the Guardian, and indeed the rise of social media platform, that are global in their reach, and the ensuing rise of transnational flows of public communication, limit the circumstance in which nationalism remain a valid methodological assumption.

When communications spill across political boundaries, they problematizes the assumption that the public sphere is bounded, disrupting what may otherwise be a fairly congruent and stable relationship between national publics (i.e. the people composing a political community), and public communication relayed through national media and addressed to the nation-state. Some have suggested that transnational flows constitute a significant unbounding of the public sphere, affecting its normative democratic function (Fraser, 2007). Others ask whether we should (or even can) think of the public sphere as a single unified domain that acts as necessary counterpart to the state and exercises a strong legitimising function (Calhoun, 1993, 1995; Garnham, 1992)? Alternatively it has been suggested that we think of public spheres as multiple dispersed sphericules (Gitlin, 1998; Keane, 1995), without the kind of influence over the state often ascribed to national public spheres (Brunkhorst, 2002). Fraser explained that interlocutors in transnational public spheres

> "do not constitute a demos or political citizenry. Often, too, their communications are neither addressed to a Westphalian state nor relayed through national media. Frequently, moreover, the problems debated are inherently trans-territorial and can neither be located within Westphalian space nor resolved by a Westphalian state." (2007: 14)

Three interrelated sets of phenomena drive the transnationalisation of public spheres. First, transnational interdependencies (from migration to climate change), which constitute transnational public issues, escape effective resolution at the level of the nation state, generating demand for the provision of global public goods (e.g. climate stability, migrant rights and security) and the avoidance of global public bads (e.g. catastrophic climate change, forced migration, nuclear proliferation) (see List & Koenig-Archibugi, 2010). Second, such transnational issues precipitate public debates and the mobilization of public opinion across borders, and consequently transnational flow of public communication (Castells, 2008; Olesen, 2005). Consider the Arab Spring protests, or the Occupy movement, for insatnce. Increasingly public communications are neither relayed by national media nor addressed to the governments of nation states, and are thus characterized by a transnationalisation of production, circulation and consumption. The avid consumption of satellite TV and social media by Iranians and others throughout the

Middle East are examples of such transnational communication flows (Volkmer, 2014; Wojcieszak, Smith, & Enayat, 2012; (Sakr, 2001)). And third, the transnationalisation of issues, the rise in cross-border flows of public communication, and, we may add, an increase in transnational ways of life (e.g. multi-national families and migration), also give rise to a pluralization of identities and belonging that challenge the nation-state as the sole locus of political allegiance (Vertovec, 2009). Just as the erstwhile congruence between national media and national publics was crucial to the emergence and sustenance of national identity, transnational public communication "may be generating international communities" (Dahlgren, 1995: 17).

In response to this rise in transnational interdependences, and the rise of transnational publics, journalism scholars have called for a less parochial, more globally-minded journalism (Ward, 2010). While some scholars have examine the parochialism or indeed global outlook of news content (Van Leuven & Berglez, 2015), relatively fewer studies have focused on journalists, their practices, and the attendant frameworks (whether nationally- or globally-oriented) through which they approach their work (Lindell & Karlsson, 2016). To help better understand the nature of transnational public spheres, and the role of journalism within them, this paper asks whether international journalists (producers of transnational flows of public communication) approach their work through a more nationally-parochial framework or take a broader transnational view, and concomitantly whether they 'imagine' a narrowly national/local or more polycentric global public.

Journalism, public communication, and the emergence of transnational publics

I conceptualise the relationship between public communication and publics, and suggest three broad frameworks that may help understand how journalists approach international newswork, and how they may imagine *the* public: the representative/democratic, the ritual, and the market view of public communication (see Brüggemann & Wessler, 2014; Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002; Webster, 2014). Journalists are of course central agents in the public sphere, concerned with public issues, and address their news to the public (Curran, 1991; Haas & Steiner, 2001). The public "is the sine qua non of their own existence as producers" of news (Thompson, 1995, p. 99). Thus it is reasonable to expect that journalists would have some (if implicit) notion of who the public are, and thus how the news should be framed in order to be relevant to them.

Representative/democratic public communication implies the public is a community of fate: The representative or democratic framework is a widely adopted normative conception of public communication. It views the public sphere as a forum in which people can gain voice, through deliberative encounters between members of the public, or through the journalistic representation of the public's interests, and where "something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1974: 49).[1] In this sense public communication has a *representative* function, as echoed by liberal theories of the press,

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[1] Typically a distinction is made between deliberative and representative (liberal) conception of the public sphere. However, I combine them for the purposes of this paper, to highlight the role of public communication in giving voice to *the* people. This can be achieve either through direct participation, or representation.

and epitomizes the democratic axiom that those *represented* through public communication should be those who are affected by it. Journalists should be motivated by the cosmopolitan democratic imperative to achieve symmetry between decision takers and decision makers (Held, 2004; see also Berglez, 2008). As Habermas puts it, only those choices are valid to "which all possibly affected people could assent" (Habermas, 1996, p. 107). In a world where transnational interdependencies are on the rise, this means that journalists should assume a less parochial, more cosmopolitan view of the public and its interests (Ward, 2010).

This cosmopolitan-democratic framework, which emphasises representativeness, implies that *the* public is a community of fate—defined not by a common identity or residing in a common territory, but by being jointly affected by an issue. This may be a cosmopolitan or transnational community of fate. Consider issues such as climate change, or migrant rights, for instance. Newswork that adopts such a cosmopolitan framework can highlight the existence of such communities, by giving voice to, representing and addressing those affected by a given issue irrespective of their nationality or location (Chouliaraki, 2013; Hands, 2006). News media's role as 'watch dog' or 'fourth estate' derives from the same underlying principle of holding power accountable to those it affects—making it plausible that international journalists may imagine the public as a transnational community of fate.

From this perspective the public is constitutive of the public sphere, in that a part of the public sphere is brought into existence whenever members of the public communicate (or journalists communicate on the public's behalf). Given that the public necessarily precedes public communication as its cause (cf. the ritual perspective below), the representative/democratic framework requires a criterion to distinguish between members and non-members, a criterion that defines *the* public's composition (Kalyvas, 1999). Without such a criterions to determine who is included and who is excluded, "the will of the people could never take shape" (Kervégan, 1999, p. 42). It follows that this framework assumes the public as a given and stable category, that antecedes public communication and the public sphere (see Figure 1). Reflecting on this relationship between public communication and the public can be instructive. It raises the question whether we can speak of those who compose a public without some sense of prevailing flows of public communication, and whether it makes sense to speak of public communication without some notion of who constitutes the public?

Ritual public communication demarcates the public by negotiating the boundary between identity and alterity: In contrast the ritual perspective emphasizes the role of public communication in the emergence, constitution, and reproduction of collective (national) identities (Carey, 2008; Madianou, 2005), and indeed in the formation of diasporic identities and communities (Georgiou, 2006). Deutsch (1966) famously pioneered communicative theories of nationalism, arguing that societal communications where key to producing the structural cohesion that we perceive as commonality, that it was communicative interaction that held a people together from within. Anderson (1991) demonstrated how print, and the (literary) public sphere it brought about, provided the communicative infrastructure that allowed large-scale identity forming discourses to emerge, and thus made the emergence of 'imagined communities' possible.

Furthermore, Billig (1995) argued that public communication is key to sustaining collective political identities. Following this line of argument, it has been argued that journalists can be conceived as 'workers of the imagiation', who can reaffirm national identities by framing the news in more parochial, national or local terms. But, by the same token, journalism can also expand horizons, by encouraging audiences to adopt a more cosmopolitan perspective and identify with distant others (Robertson, 2010). Notwithstanding this possibility, most journalism still frames the news in parochial terms (Hafez, 2011).
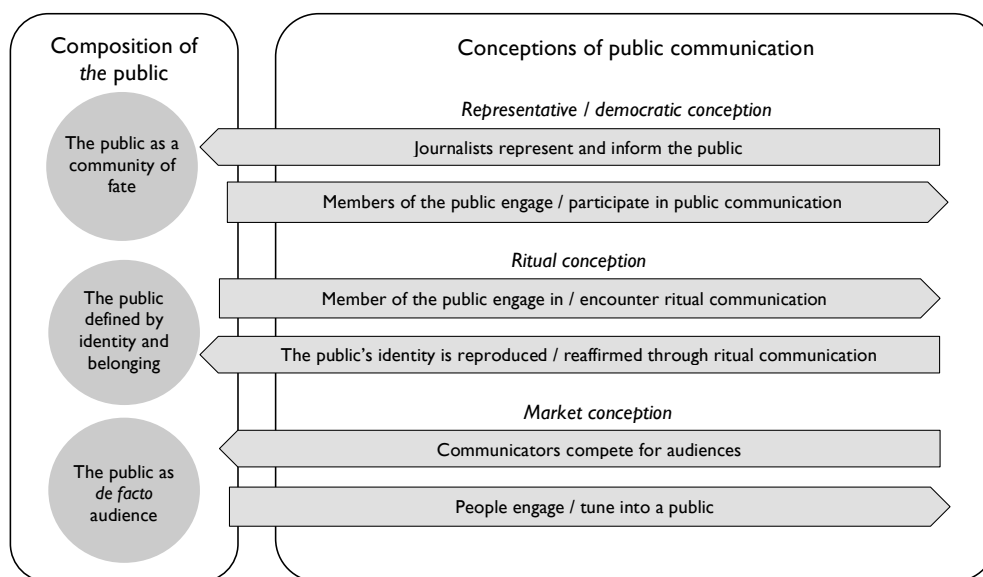

Figure 1: Composition of the public sphere and the purpose/functions of public communication as representation/deliberation, ritual and market.

The ritual perspective thus conceptualizes the public as endogenous to public communication, and public communication as dynamic practices of performing, affirming and negotiating belonging (cf. the sequential conception of public communication, as in the representative/democratic conception of public communication above). The point is that publics are brought into existence, at least in part, through public communication. International journalism, as a form of transnational public communications, may therefore be both symptom and cause of transnational publics, and transnational allegiances (Olesen, 2005). If this view is correct, what kinds of identities (and publics) are being shaped by international journalism? Do international journalists image cosmopolitan communities of fate, or do they perform and (re)affirm localised, national or diasporic identities? Identity, and its performative reification, may thus be important to understand the practices of international journalists, and how they think about the public's composition (see Figure 1).

Market-oriented public communication conceives the public as audiences and consumers: Lastly, the distinction between publics, audiences and consumers may become blurred, given the competitive media market. Livingstone (2005) raises this point when she asks, when is an audience not a public and when is a public not an audience? From the perspective of journalists the *de facto* audience may well be viewed as *the* public—

notwithstanding well-known critiques of the commercialization and marketization of the public sphere (Habermas, 1992). Journalists may be motivated to maximize the amount of audience attention they can garner, either because large audiences lend prestige to their work, because audience attention can be monetized through advertising sales, or because audience numbers are key to murky efforts to sway public opinion. Conceptualising the public sphere as a market, public communication as the competition for audiences, and the public as the *de facto* audiences (Webster, 2014), may thus be useful to understand how journalists frame their practices and how they 'imagine' the public (see Figure 1).

What these three alternative conceptions come to, is the question whether public communication plays a constitutive (causal) role in the emergence of publics, whether public communication is something done (caused) by/for pre-existent publics, or whether being a member of a public is something one opts into by becoming a member of the audience. From a representative/democratic perspective transnational flows of public communication problematize the assumed relationship between a bounded public and its public sphere, as affected communities are not necessarily territorial ones. From the ritual perspective transnational flows of public communication raise the question whether new, transnational publics, are emergent and being reified. And, from a market perspective transnational publics may be created simply by engaging in the same communications, by tuning into the same news network, or engaging with distant-others on social media, for instance. For journalism this means that the way news is framed, and the practices (e.g. representing the affected, affirming identity, or chasing audiences) through which they 'imagine' publics, correspond to different interpretations of *who* composes the public. This paper asks how international journalists—those producing news flows that traverse political, cultural and territorial boundaries—imagine the public, and related thereto, whether their news practices tend to be global or cosmopolitan-democratic in their orientation, or instead more nationally, locally or parochially focused.

These question are explored through a series of interviews with journalists working for the BBC Persian Service (part of the BBC World Service), and two non-persian BBC World Service journalists. Sreberny and Torfeh (2008) have written a compelling history of the BBC's Persian Service, in which they outline the service's long and complex relationship with the changing priorities of British foreign policy. Despite this history, they argue that the Persian Service operates at arms-length from the Foreign office, enjoying operational independence, and the same standards of impartiality and editorial independence as the rest of the BBC. They note that the Persian Service is generally considered a highly trusted source of information. The BBC World Service (and the Persian Service in particular) offered a suitable empirical setting for this study, as its international journalism produces cross-border communication flows. From its offices in London the Persian Service serves a Persian speaking audience, predominantly in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, but also a global Persian diaspora—though it should be noted that under content sharing arrangements within the BBC, interviewees would contribute to a range of international and domestic news programs. In the period prior to interviews BBC Persian TV reached a weekly audience of 4 million, of which 3.1million were inside Iran, and a total 5 million across platforms (BBC Trust 2011, a, b). As such, the complexities of transnational flows of public communication, and international journalism, that this paper is interested in, very much come to a fore in this setting.

Method

This paper draws on interviews carried out as part of the author's doctoral research. The analysis is based on 13 semi-structured in-depth interviews with journalists at the BBC's Persian Service journalist (and two non-Persian Service journalists) conducted between April and July 2010, and one in 2012 (Table 1 discloses an anonymised list of interviewees). The open-ended nature of semi-structured in-depth interviews was particularly appropriate because it allowed interviews to explore journalists' reflections on their work and their thinking on the public. The qualitative design of the study aimed to offer a rich account of how journalists think about their work, and how they conceive or 'imagine' transnational publics. The goal was expressly not generalization, but a contingent description that would support further reflection on the transnational transformation of public spheres. The first interviewees were recruited though a colleague or by contacting them directly by email. Further interviewees were recruited through referral. Email requests for interviews fully disclosed the purpose of interviews, particulars about the researcher, the fact that interviews would be anonymous and emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary. All interviewees were reminded of the purpose and nature of the interview before their interview commenced.

Interviewees were asked about what was important to making their work relevant and acceptable given that the news they produced travelled around the world. They were asked if and how their location in London made their role as journalists reporting in Persian difficult, and how this shaped their working practices. Who did they have in mind when producing news (i.e. which 'public' they were addressing, and how did they 'imagine' it). Interviews also focused on whether they saw their reporting as offering a more global perspective, or whether news was framed in more local terms. For instance, what perspective did they take on issues such as nuclear proliferation, and the 2009 post-election protests in Iran—what was the role of international versus local voices in reporting these events, did they emphasise local relevance or global concerns. Interviews were deemed complete when a point of saturation was reached (i.e. when the same themes kept reoccurring, and additional interviews added no new information). All interviews were conducted face-to face, recorded and transcribed.

Interview transcripts were coded using a thematic analysis utilizing *NVivo*, a software for qualitative analysis. A thematic analysis offered the flexibility needed for the study's qualitative exploratory design. It allowed the identification of explicit and latent themes, pre-defined as well as inductively emerging ones (Boyatzis, 1998; Braunand & Clarke, 2006). Coding proceeded in four rounds, each searching for themes relating to news practices (what was important to journalists in the way they carried out their work) and publics (who did they seem to view as the public, as beneficiaries of their work). In the first two rounds of coding themes were identified, in the third themes were clustered into overarching meta-themes. In the final round of coding a negative case search—the systematic search for evidence contradicting emerging findings—was conducted to increase the internal validity of research findings.

Individual depth interview	Interviewee's role	Date
idi 1	News editor	April 2010
idi 2	TV producer	April 2010
idi 3	Manager	May 2010
idi 4	Current affairs analyst	May 2010
idi 5	News editor and journalist	May 2010
idi 6	Editor	May 2010
idi 7	News editor	Jul 2010
idi 8	Journalist and presenter	May 2010
idi 9	Journalist	May 2010
idi 10	Senior producer	May 2010
idi 11	Journalist and presenter	Apr 2010
idi 12	Journalist	May 2010
idi 13	Journalist and interactivity editor	May 2012

Table 1: Anonymised list of interviewees.

Analysis — Practices of newswork and transnational Persian publics

The analysis is structured into three sub-sections each addressing a major theme that emerged from the interviews, and the tensions that appeared around them: a parochial and identity-oriented framing of newswork (ritual practices of performing and affirming belonging, and imagining a national public); a representative, cosmopolitan-democratic framing of newswork (imagining *the* public as a community of fate); and a market-oriented framing of newswork (that imagines *the* public as audiences). Before delving into the analysis I briefly contextualize it.

Most interviewees were migrants of some description, either having moved to the UK many years ago, or more recently. Some interviewees moved to the UK because of hostile working conditions for journalists inside Iran, for instance after 110 Iranian reformist newspapers were shut down in 2000, putting many journalists out of work (Nasr, 2005; Rahimi, 2003). The protests following Iran's 2009 election, also increased the risk of returning home for many interviewees (Fathi, 2009; Reporters Without Borders, 2011). It may be in response to this situation of involuntary exile that many interviewees reflected extensively on their own role in the transnational public sphere and on their dislocation. Similarly, their dislocation may explain why interviewees often seemed to offer implicit justifications of their role in this transnational public.

Identity-oriented newswork—ritual affirmation of identity and belonging

Interviewees frequently appeared to frame their newswork through notions of belonging and identity, permissively understood—indicating the importance of affirming identity through public communication. For example, interviewees emphasized performative aspects of identity such as the importance of speaking Farsi with a particular dialect, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of culture, society, and quotidian life.

The most revealing episodes in interviews were those where interviewees reflected on the value and adequacy of their contribution to public communications, and on potential inadequacies that may arise because of their dislocation from, what they perceived to be, the public. I read part of the variability with which they spoke about identity as an effort to negotiate their own belonging to transnational publics, and defend the adequacy and value of their work.

Being and not being a national. For many interviewees nationality played an important role in how they framed their newswork, suggesting that identity was key to their conception of the public (idi 1, 2, 3, 7, 11). Most commonly this view was expressed when reflecting on their own relationship to Iran, and their belief that journalists should be Iranian. Being Iranian was said to be key to "write about a society from the roots" (idi 6). It allows journalists to 'feel close' to *the* people. Reaffirming the centrality of nationality to the public's composition, one interviewee commented that, "at least [Iranians] feel sort of close to you, there are lots of people who know you from there, and now with Facebook they interact, they know people here. [...] It's good to be Iranian" (idi 4). In contrast not being Iranian diminished someone's suitability for the job. Non-Iranians "don't have that much of an insight especially if it's about society I usually find these stories [by non-Iranians] very dumb" (idi 2). Here interviewees appear to view the public as a national public, in which members share a social, cultural and historical heritage, which is affirmed through public communication (by signalling intimate and personal understanding of that shared heritage).

Performing belonging. Some interviewees emphasized performative and ritual affirmations of belonging, seemingly mitigating the requirement to be Iranian. They suggested that identity was just a proxy for a comprehensive appreciation of Iranian society and culture—perhaps, it seemed to me, to legitimize their own role within the public sphere. What journalists referred to is a kind of deep ethnographic understanding of all those things that an Iranian herself needs to understand to become who she is. "[I]f you know what's going on in that country, if you know the context, you know everything then... you can do the job [...]. But it's true that, for having these characteristics you are most likely to be from Iran" (idi 9). Note that belonging is here understood as performance, but not necessarily as identity. What mattered above all was not the identity the identity of journalists, but their ability to invoke a sense of belonging by reaffirming identity through public communication. This made it very important to "hire people who are experienced, familiar and knowledgeable [of ...] Iranian language, culture and values, etc." (idi 12).

Performing language. Perhaps the notion that public communication is a ritual reaffirmation of identity was most pronounced when interviewees spoke about the importance of language to, what I interpreted as, the performance of belonging. Language goes beyond deep cognizance of Iranian culture and society, to speaking the 'right' kind of Persian, which can affirm and express commonality (idi 3, 11). Language, dialect and accent manifest a community, establishing a relationship and sense of common belonging between international journalists and the public. It creates the sense that journalists were "inside, among people and we try to be inside the society" (idi 6). The 'proper' kind of language demonstrates that public communication is genuine, open

and authentic, a conversation among equals, and not some 'outsider' speaking to 'insiders.' To achieve such connections

> "you have to have a very accurate, at the same time very colloquial, but kind of conversational language. So you put yourself in a situation that *you're talking with the audience, you're not talking to them*, so you have to be very friendly, but at the same time the most important thing is that your language should be accurate, you see, because there's lots of inaccuracy in the Persian language in the Iranian media as well, because for some time they didn't give that importance" (idi 11, emphasis added).

Yet, perhaps as a means to shore up their own position in the public sphere, interviewees did not necessarily see language as an expression of national identity, since someone who possesses the requisite language skills could participate even if they were not Iranian, but Afghan, for instance. "[N]ationality is not important here, but they have to know Persian, and the Persian they have to speak should be the Persian spoken in Teheran and that part of Iran only" (idi 3). Such statements by interviewees emphasize the role of language in the performative reproduction and reaffirmation of belonging. Moreover, they indicate public communication's identity forming/reaffirming function. It echoes Deutsch's (1966) argument that societal communications is key producing a sense of commonality, and Anderson's (1991) argument that a shared vernacular was key to the emergence of national identities.

Alterity and exclusion. The idea of a transnational public defined by identity was also brought to light through discussions of alterity—non-Iranians that are different and do not belong, and are to be excluded from the public sphere (idi 3, 4, 5, 10). Iranian diaspora were not thought to be *bona fide* Iranians. Their identities were different in ways that disqualified them from participation in international journalism, and by extension from inclusion in the transnational public sphere. One interviewee noted that, "some people have been away too long, and lost touch" (idi 10). Reflecting on his work, another interviewee said: "The sheer fact that we can't go back to the country now, that's a huge problem for two reasons. One, it pushes you further deep into this exile mind-set and stance and, second, it detaches you from the realities on the ground, as well" (idi 5). Others lamented that news presenters on some international broadcasters spoke Persian with an American accent, which grated with their effort to be part of the public sphere. What interviewees seemed to identify here is consistent with the observation made by others, that domestic and diasporic Iranians do not share a common, congruent identity (see for example Ghorashi, 2004). The issue of excluding alterity demonstrates how *the* public's boundary is demarcated by differentiating between insiders and outsiders, those who are and those who are not Iranian.

Identity and belonging are not well-defined criteria; nevertheless there is a clear (even if diffuse) sense that interviewees framed their newswork through notions of identity, and by extension imagined a public unified around a common identity. Particularly the emphasis on 'knowing', and 'speaking' in the right way, highlighted how interviewees saw the ritual affirmation of belonging as important to their work. Here public communication can be understood to play a role in the emergence of publics, through the performative affirmation and reaffirmation of commonality (what is already

held in common) and belonging. However, some important tensions arose, particularly between domestic and diasporic Iranians, between deep cognizance and its other, and between different dialects. In fact, many episodes of interviews can be read as an effort to negotiate these tensions, to delimit the identity of the public, and define the most appropriate rituals for affirming someone's belonging to the public.

Cosmopolitan-democratic framing of newswork—the transnational public as a community of fate: Being affected by an issue (e.g. having skin in the game) was another recurrent theme in the way interviewees framed newswork. This theme indicates an understanding of public communication as serving a representative function. The public's composition derives from this function, as the requirement to represent the affected gives rise to an understanding of the public as a 'community of fate.' Here interviewees appeared to negotiate a distinction between being affected and being an adequate representative who knows the priorities of those who are affected—where *the* affected compose *the* pubic, and adequate representation is journalism's imperative. I read interviewee's efforts to demarcate the affected from non-affected, and *bona fide* from inadequate representatives as an effort to negotiate the legitimacy of their own role in the public sphere. At times it also appeared as though the emphasis on being affected implied a territorial conception of the public sphere—to be affected you must be present in the territorial space of Iran—which explains why interviewees sometimes saw themselves as 'outsiders' looking in.

Being affected. Many interviewees emphasized the importance of giving voice to those affected by an issue, those who enjoy its benefits or suffer its consequences (idi 2, 5, 6, 7, 10). Being affected, it is suggested, has to do with embodiment, having skin in the game, knowing what it is like to put one's body in harms way, sharing the risks and consequences. As one interviewee put it:

> "I think you cannot tell them what is the right thing to do, what is the wrong thing. […] Like today's topic was about violence. It was about the protestors becoming violent and is it right or wrong and there is this issue that, when you are being attacked, it is self-defence. This is not violence. Well I have an issue with sitting here and saying that well you didn't have to throw a stone or you should or you should not. I wasn't there. I wasn't being beaten, you know. I haven't been dragged down the streets so I don't have the right to say that unless I am there" (idi 2).

Some notion of representation, accountability and liability seem to underpin this interviewee's explanation: No one should have a voice in decisions for which they are not liable (in this case for choosing between peaceful and violent protests). Interviewees frequently reflected this attitude, for instance by emphasizing efforts to get affected locals to suggest news topics (interviewees explained that people submitted questions about inflation, environmental degradation or social problems such as drug abuse, which found their way into the news).

Some interviewees also advanced a different argument for the inclusion of the affected. Namely, that physical presence means not only that one is affected but crucially that one can also shape local developments. One interviewee made the case with some

vehemence that a person who is not in Iran and is not affected by events is also in no position to take any action: "Things coming from outside Iran are not going to change many things. You cannot, for example, stop an election from outside Iran, but you can change the direction of an election [from] inside Iran" (idi 1).

Representing/embodying the affected. Though not always explicit, many interviewees differentiated between those actually affected and those who offer *bona fide* representation of the affected, who can be seen to embody the affected in some way (idi 1, 2, 5, 10). A suitable representative, and thus participant in the public sphere, is someone who can fulfil public communication's representative function. She should, in some sense, embody the affected, should have carried the same burden. One interviewee illustrated this with reference to an exiled group of Iranians calling for constitutional reform: "So right now with this case that they have been calling for a referendum … one of them is Akbar Gangi who left Iran two… three years ago and he's been in jail for six years so, um, you know, he is relevant. So he's not somebody that went to exile 30 years ago" (idi 2).

Interviewees mostly saw themselves as suitable representatives, noting that it was hard work to offer *bona fide* representation of those affected. On a daily basis they try to gauge the priorities and concerns of the affected: "[I]t's a fast moving society […] and if you haven't lived there and if you haven't been in contact with that society recently then you lose your touch and your relevance after a while" (idi 7). Having lived in Iran recently provides an essential appreciation of the kind of news programs people desire, making journalists better representatives. As one interviewee explained, she knew how people "yearn for […] good programs. Good factual programs […]. And I think […] every bit of good quality news reports or factual programs put on air, you know, […] it changes their day, I would say, because I can remember my days in Iran a nice documentary, a nice report changes your day" (idi 10).

The converse of good representation is poor representation by those who are out of touch and unable to embody the affected. Many interviewees reflected on the question what it means to be a good representative, and pondered whether they were living up to the mark. "I'm starting to think maybe we're starting to lose [our] sense of what is happening on the ground in the country" (idi 5), commented one interviewee. There seemed to be a genuine concern amongst some interviewees that they may no longer be able to accurately represent the concerns of those affected. One interviewee makes the point that representing the affected accurately is difficult if you are removed from them: "We are not living in Iran so feedback is not direct, and that feedback can be deceiving because we are just in touch with a minority of people who are Internet savvy to go to the website and leave feedbacks" (idi 1). Which is why some interviewees said that it is important to recruit new journalists from inside Iran, to ensure they are *bona fide* representatives of the affected.

In sum, many interviewees indicated that value of public communication depended on its ability to represent the affected, and framed their newswork accordingly. The notion that being affected is the appropriate criterion for gaining voice in the public sphere seemed to underpin these views, and implies that the public should be composed of the affected. This led interviewees to reflect on their own success as representatives. In what may be read as an effort to legitimize their own role as representatives, interviewees

distinguished between those immediately affected, and those offering *bona fide* representation. Furthermore, I interpreted the way interviewees negotiated the distinction between *bona fide* and inadequate representatives to imply a territorial conception of the public: those affected *are* those persons located within Iran's territory.

Audiences—or the public sphere as market place for attention

Audiences also emerged as a relevant, though slightly less prominent, theme describing the public's composition. It indicates how market-oriented frames, characterize newswork as a competition for audiences. The relevance of audiences was anticipated, given that they constitute a necessary condition for the existence of journalists as producers of news (Thompson, 1995). Interviewees brought up audiences, as important constituents of the public, in two different ways—both of which are consistent with a view of the public sphere as a market place for attention.

Imagined Audiences. Interviewees suggested that they where accountable to their audience, indicating that audiences, in some sense, 'were' the public (idi 6, 9, 10). Descriptions of this audience were often conjectural and anecdotal, with interviewees suggesting that they were probably urban, fairly liberal, not ideologically loyal to the government, and possibly opinion leaders in their communities. Audiences were also thought to be skeptical towards Western organizations, which made gaining their confidence a task interviewees clearly thought important. Because many of these references to the importance of serving audiences appeared to rest on anecdote or conjecture we may borrow Livingstone's (2005) term to describe them as 'imagined audiences'.

Audience feedback. As interviewees considered audiences to be important constituents of the public, many considered audience interaction and feedback (e.g. through social media) important in making newswork more responsive to audiences (idi 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13). Interactions with audiences gave journalists a more empirically grounded sense of audiences' preferences. Particularly during the 2009 post-election protests, interviewees reported strong demand from audiences for news coverage to come out in support of protesters. Interviewees explained that they needed to balance these audience requests and their own professional commitment to impartiality. As one journalist explained, during the protests they were sometimes slow reporting ongoing events, because of the difficulty to ascertain the veracity of reports. In response to this lag in reporting audiences sometimes "sent me angry emails [saying] that: you are covering for [the] government; you are backing the government, [...] they thought that we had this secret agreement with the [Iranian] government" (idi 6) because we did not always manage to report all events on the day they took place.

Whether, and under which circumstance, we think it is appropriate for the pubic to be equated with audiences is an important question, though not one to be settled here. Nevertheless, what is clear from these interviews is that international journalists sometimes identify the public with the audience and consider it an important task to satisfy the audience's preferences. Though less prominent as a theme, audiences, imagined or manifest, appeared to be important to the way interviewees imagine the transnational public's composition.

Discussion & Conclusion

Interviewees—the producers of transnational flows of public communication that are the subject of this study—offered valuable insights into some of the priorities that shape their work, which allowed useful interpretations of how they imagined transnational publics. The importance interviewees gave to cognizance, language, and other performative aspects of public communication can be understood as ritual practices of enacting and affirming a sense of belonging, that involved negotiating the boundary between Iranian identity and its other. Here a more parochial frame guides newswork, making Iranian identity central to the way *the* public is imagined. International journalists also frequently emphasized the importance of representing and giving voice to those affected by an issues. Only those with skin in the game, or their *bona fide* representatives, should participate in public communication. Here newswork appears to be framed by more cosmopolitan-democratic norms, and interviewees appear to imagine *the* public as a community of fate. Lastly, interviewees also repeatedly emphasized that satisfying and serving *de facto* audiences was an important aspect of their work, whoever and wherever audiences may be. This latter view implies a public sphere imagined as a marketplace for attention, free of the constraints of identity or being affected.

International journalists thus appear to operate between cosmopolitan norms, the affirmation of identity, and market forces. Interviewees variously approached newswork through more parochial, cosmopolitan-democratic, or market-oriented frames; and accordingly implied a variety of notions about who composed transnational publics. Furthermore, no evidence that interviewees' work was shaped by the auspices of the Foreign office was found. Instead, the observed tensions between identity and alterity, the affected and non-affected, and the competition or audiences appeared to arise from the rival frameworks that shape international journalism. Ritual, representative and market practices, after all, respond to different imperatives. The transnationalisation of public spheres forces international journalists to navigate between competing political identities, while attempting to fulfil their democratic role, and operating in a competitive media market.

Nevertheless, the apparent contradiction between these different frameworks, and the attendant variety in 'imagined' publics, should not to be overstated. After all, journalists can in principle affirm belonging, while representing the interests of distant others affected by a given issue, and also satisfy audiences. Similarly, sometimes audiences are affected by the issues under discussion, and sometimes both audiences and those affected by an issue share a common congruent identity. We can thus add to Livingstone's (2005) question: when is an audience a public, and when is it not, the question when is an audience a nation, and when is it a community of fate, and indeed when is a community of fate a public, and when is it a nation. However, the area of overlap between audiences, the affected and nationals will be larger in the context of intra-national flows of public communication than in the context of transnational flows of public communication (as illustrated by Figure 2). Combining parochial-, representative-, and market-oriented journalistic frameworks will be easier in national than transnational contexts.
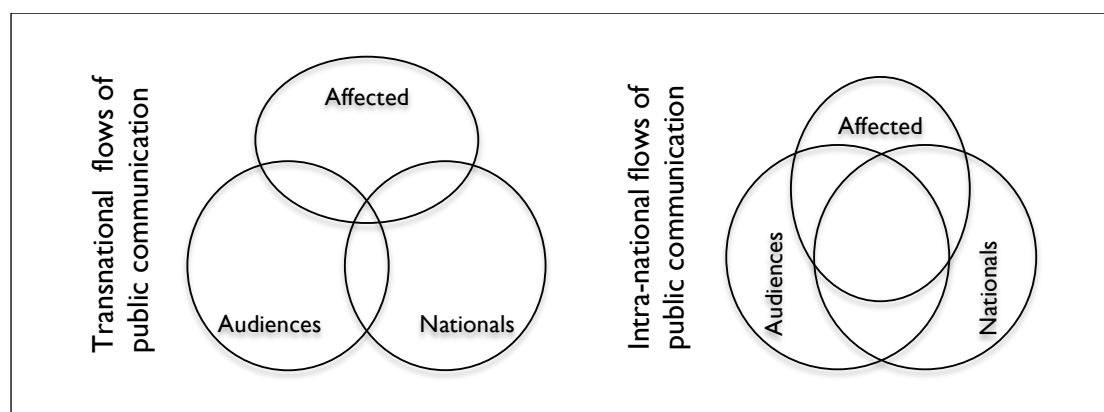
Figure 2: Intersection between the audience, nationals and the affected, in the context of intra-national and transnational public communication.

This suggests that transnational publics are characterized by a degree of polycentricism and unbounding, underlining the difficulty of conceiving public spheres as unified and integrated. By definition transnational flows of public communication do not obey the political boundaries of nation-states, depleting the analytical value of methodological nationalist conceptions of public spheres. However, this polycentcicism does not necessarily adulterate the normative-democratic value of public spheres. The democratic value of public spheres derives from their ability to generate symmetry between political decision makers and those affected by those decisions. International journalism that aims to be representative—a key framework through which interviewees approach newswork—is sufficient for satisfying this cosmopolitan-democratic norm. Of course, compared to national publics, transnational publics are not as deeply integrated into processes of democratic decision making. Nevertheless, they are amenable to the notion of 'weak publics' which have "moral influence but no legally regulated access to political or administrative power" (Brunkhorst, 2002: 677). Similarly Gitlin (1998) has argued that a single unified public is not a necessary requirement for a democratic public sphere.

The study of international journalism reveals tensions between cosmopolitan aspirations, parochialism and the need to compete in global media markets. But it can also demonstrate how these different frameworks can coexist in newswork. Studying practice of transnational public communication can help us better understand how transnational public spheres emerge, but also how they defy neat definition as they combine cosmopolitan ideas, with struggles over identity, under exposure to market forces. All these factors shape transnational publics. Describing and examining this polymorphism of international public communication (and the attendant polycentric nature of transnational public spheres) is important, as the increasing prevalence of transnational flows of public communication is unlikely to subside.

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