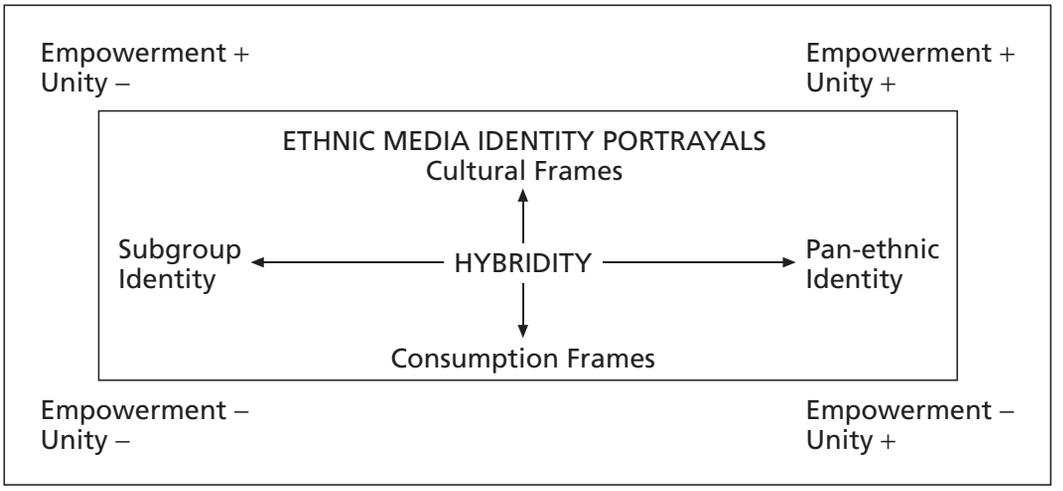
Figure 13.3 Ethnic media and cultural identity



audiences and media personalities. (For instance, although most observers might point to a talk show host's intelligence, communication skills, or personality as factors in her media success, one could speculate that beautiful brown skin also creates an on-screen warmth that penetrates the iciness of the television medium.) Traditional or digital media producers interested in creating virtual communities may value relationship-building aspects of their images more than traditional media that positioned themselves as aloof, objective, experts. Following this reasoning, brownness may be more important in media that depend on viewer/reader involvement.

In summary, ethnic identity and cultural projection research will benefit from analyses of visual content, analyses of audience interpretations of visual content, and effects of visual content on audiences. Body image is of particular interest because of its relationship to ethnic identity, its impact on individual cultural group members' mental and physical health; and its role in cultural projection. Figure 13.3 presents the full model, with the ethnic identity continua in the inner box and the cultural projection aspects in the outer box.

Discussion

Although this model was developed using Latino/a magazines as a touchstone, it should be tested with other ethnic media that are visually laden – especially television and digital media. The model is intended to be a template that can be empirically and quantitatively tested but can also be explored qualitatively. It is aimed at improving our understanding of ethnic media content, and the interaction between audiences and content. Analyzing content with a broader approach to identity may provide a fuller understanding than possible with searches for

assimilation/pluralism content. The continuum approach opens to researchers broader possibilities about media audiences' gratifications from use of ethnic media, and their interpretations of visual and text content.

There are a number of limitations to the model. First, it doesn't adequately address some of the traditional assimilation functions of ethnic media, such as serving as instruments of social control beyond consumption–orientation functions. Second, like traditional assimilation–pluralism models, it doesn't adequately address class considerations, although it begins to address class both by recognizing the prominence of consumption messages and the complexity of meaning in the concept of "color." Third, although less linear than its predecessors, it doesn't demonstrate participative or symmetric media-audience relations – important considerations of interactive media. Fourth, this model may not apply to ethnic community newspapers and radio stations. Local ethnic media will more likely continue to be language-based and place-based than national and transnational ethnic media. Because of their community affiliations, their primary audience will often be subgroups – like Mexican-Americans in San Diego or Cuban Americans in South Florida. However this may cease to be the case as the homogeneity of regional Latina/o populations begins to disappear (Davis, 2000). Fifth, just as traditional assimilation–pluralism models did not accommodate all content, some news topics and visual images might not fit into this model. Whereas future studies will extend dimensions of this model, this configuration is intended to build on current assimilation models with an initial focus on identity and cultural projection. Sixth, not all cultural projection "works," especially when it faces language and institutional challenges or visual mismatches. Valdivia and Curry (1998) note that some of the reasons the successful Latin American star Xuxa did not succeed in US children's programming included US parental perceptions of language problems and dissonance in both parents' and broadcasters' perceptions of the way Xuxa should look. The thin, blue-eyed, blonde ideal deemed suitable in programming targeted to adult men does not embody the trust factors women and US broadcasters may want in role models for their children. Another aspect of Xuxa's programs that didn't transfer well cross-culturally was the rapid pace of the children's show, with her activity described by some as frenetic (Valdivia & Curry, 1998). Perhaps the thin, light-skinned, blonde ideal should also include the word passive. Thus investigations of cultural projection can unearth many more concerns than cultural empowerment and unity. Analysis of sound, pacing, and other editing issues in moving image media like television or digital communication should be added to visual analysis.

Although this model certainly will be refined with more study and testing, it is an improvement over traditional pluralism–assimilation structures. First, traditional assimilation–pluralism models leave out class considerations. Class is not fully explicated in this model but is linked to consumption and color. Ethnic media function models also give short shrift to the commercial functions of media, which become increasingly important as ethnic media shift

from targeting first- or second-generation immigrants to multi-generations of ethnic groups and the entire population. A second weakness of the pluralism–assimilation approaches is that they tended to focus on the individual *vis-à-vis* society. They did not allow for psychological or psychosocial media functions, which are an aspect of identity maintenance and also affect physical and mental health outcomes. Third, pan-ethnic functions of media (Fox, 1996), symbolic empowerment (Riggins, 1992), and cultural transmission (Park, 1922) did not fit well into the assimilation–pluralism continuum. In another piece on Latina media (Johnson, 2000) these concepts were tacked onto the pluralism function. In this ethnic media model, the more fully explicated concept of cultural projection encompasses and replaces symbolic empowerment and cultural transmission. The cultural identity continuum stretches from the cultural subgroup to the panethnic.

Although the editorial staff controls much of media content – for instance, fashion layouts and beauty tips – ethnic groups must gain control of their own images and representations whenever they can. One way to accomplish this is through more purposeful media relations efforts by ethnic organizations to suggest interviewees and news/feature topics that allow for hybrid identities in media stories and media images. Another strategy is by serving as watchdogs for ethnic media, as well as general market media. Ethnic media are often excused from debates about cultural stereotypes because the assumption is that they are paradigms of diversity. Public praise and strongly worded critiques may attempt to keep ethnic media focused on their traditional key functions, though changing conditions, such as the ascendance of a culture of consumption and branded identities may challenge the very definition and functions of ethnic media. Finally, cultural organizations must consider visual impact of cultural events (like festivals), and how they will be covered in ethnic as well as general market media (see Halter, 2000).

A pan-ethnic, culture-oriented identity may serve as the most unified, and therefore symbolically powerful cultural projection into mainstream US culture, especially in regards to Latina/os in the US given their growing heterogeneity. Moreover a panethnic, consumption-oriented identity is the least conflictive both internally and externally *vis-à-vis* a hyper-capitalist, consumer-oriented economy. However, identities based on hybridity may present the most opportunity for realistic, ethical projection and normative ideals for ethnic media's mission and its changing role in a changing society.

Notes

1 Advertising is excluded from this discussion, but obviously, it is present, too.

2 For example, brown skin is a status symbol during winter in the North, suggesting that those who have brown skin have the resources to tan in warmer climes as opposed to the rest of the population who have no access to the sun, so to speak.

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CHAPTER **FOURTEEN**

Out of India
Fashion Culture and the Marketing of Ethnic Style

Sujata Moorti

Recently, I walked into the New York Public Library and the woman at the circulation desk who assisted me was sporting a bindi, a vermilion marking on the forehead, and a nose ring, both characteristic of Indian women's self-adornment practices.[1] In the school I teach in southern United States, several students regularly wear bindis and nose rings. Similarly, one can find henna painting kits from up-scale cosmetic companies in exclusive department stores, in toy stores, as well as in mainstream beauty outlets. This body painting style and design associated with women's beauty rituals in the South Asian subcontinent, the Persian Gulf countries, and North Africa has since the mid-nineties found its way to various parts of the United States where henna painting stalls are commonplace in community gatherings, festivals, and celebrations. A number of popular books have also been published constructing a genealogy for this cosmetic art. These books are both how-to manuals and perform the function of bringing Asian art to Western audiences. The spread of these trends in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas is at first sight unnerving and discombobulating to a South Asian immigrant but also signals the complex and contradictory ways in which contemporary US culture interacts with cultures from around the world. In some instances, the exotic becomes American and in others banal. This essay explores the manner in which media representational practices popularize "oriental" symbols and enable them to enter the mainstream vocabulary of the United States. It also underscores the consequences of this process. Since this appropriation of "foreign" sartorial habits is associated almost exclusively with women, through an examination of the use of "Indian" markers in contemporary media culture the essay unpacks as well the racialized and gendered national identities that are constituted within transnational commodity culture. The media images that I analyze in this essay are no doubt impelled by interactions with immigrant populations but they are also indicative of the ways

in which US culture negotiates with conditions of globality. They enable an interrogation of the modalities through which the global enters the field of the local to create a transnational arena of consumption.

Before I examine media images, a clarification of some key terms I use is imperative. In the essay I characterize as "Indian" some self-adornment practices that were once specific to the South Asian subcontinent. I am not suggesting that Indians, because of their historical ties with these practices, have exclusive rights to them. Indeed, no one can enjoy a proprietary relationship to any specific aspect of culture. Since culture is always dynamic, shifting, contested, and negotiated, rather than argue that US media falsely represent Indian practices I want to draw attention to the cultural work performed by these exotic symbols.

I have limited this analysis to media representations of Indian beauty rituals not only because this is a part of the world I am intimately familiar with, but also because India has a unique salience in US popular culture. As I explain later in the essay, the allure of things Indian can partly be accounted for by the romance of the Raj and partly by the exotic cultural capital that has been associated with Indian philosophy and religions. (While the term Raj in Hindi signifies rule, in popular usage it has come to be associated exclusively with the period of British colonization. In the Western popular imaginary this time frame is associated with glamorous and alluring images of romance, danger, and exoticism rather than with oppressive practices.) The trends that I identify in the uses of "Indian" markers are similar to the modalities through which other Asian cultures and those that are marked as Other enter media space.

Most discussions of globalization and culture examine the impact of the United States and the West on the Third World, the ways in which "native" culture is transformed through practices of globalization. Through the use of a powerful set of statistics and quantitative information Barber (1996), for instance, has documented the dominance of US American popular culture around the world. Appadurai (1996), on the other hand, elucidates the diverse ways in which peoples of the Third World appropriate and recodify US American popular cultural products. Through a focus on the devalued and denigrated field of media fashion culture in this essay I examine the obverse process: how "local" US culture is informed by the global and how US American popular culture mediates the social and cultural transformations that accompany processes of globalization. As several scholars have noted, the performance of contemporary capitalism is made visible at the level of the local. The circulation of "global" products in the US media, a terrain where local concerns are articulated, creates a space that forces us to re-view questions of consumption, desire, and national identity.

The paper evolves from and is located within the body of scholarship on media content and representations. The earliest studies in this brand of media theory sought to quantitatively elucidate positive and negative content in media materials. Later studies focused on the latent content of media practices to tease out the embedded ideological messages. The body of work emanating from a

cultural studies perspective has, through textual analysis and audience reception studies, underscored the significance of the dominant messages encoded in representational practices, foregrounded those that have been marginalized, and highlighted the significance of these practices. This essay is shaped particularly by cultural studies scholarship since it situates media content and representations within a broad social, historical, and cultural context.

Drawing on arguments from multiple disciplines I examine fashion spreads and fashion advertisements to unravel the discourses of nation, identity, and sexuality that come into play within the field of global flows. I observed women's magazines such as *Elle*, *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Ladies' Home Journal* and catalogs from specialty stores such as *Anthropologie* and *Pottery Barn* and clothing retailers such as *La Redoute* and *Tweeds* between 1995 and 2000. I have specifically not included elite fashion magazines such as *Vogue* and *W*, which focus on haute couture and attempt to solicit an upper-class fashion-conscious audience. Instead through a focus on mainstream publications, female magazines and lifestyle catalogs, I outline the definitions of ideal female beauty and femininity that are promoted through the use of "Indian" symbols.

Informed by scholarship within the fields of cultural studies, feminism, and postcolonial studies this essay on media representational practices develops a two-pronged argument that constantly oscillates between global and local loci. First, I demonstrate that media images of fashion culture replicate the broad contours of hegemonic beauty conventions, albeit with a touch of India, to produce a US American exotica. Secondly, since the fashion spreads and advertisements self-consciously reference India I use these images to isolate the cultural and sexual modes of differentiation that emerge to mark the problematic and generative interplay between the US and the non-Western world, center and periphery. I will show that the figure of woman in these images functions as a threshold figure, a boundary marker between home and the world, the native and the alien.

Above all, a central point I will repeatedly emphasize is that media images of fashion culture are neither innocent nor are they frivolous. Rather, they conduct important cultural work that both enables and explains transnational economic flows. At the global level, the use of Indian symbols by Western women allows them to claim a unique brand of cosmopolitanism, one where the world serves as a glossy prop for US Americans. Such a display of the global as an exotic panorama for US activities helps allay anxieties about the complex processes of globalization. At the local level, in a counter-intuitive move, the proliferation of "Indian" exotic symbols reinscribes the centrality of White womanhood to US American identity. What appears at first glance as an exemplary celebration of multiculturalism on closer analysis proves the contrary. Rather than provide a better understanding of other cultures, media images appropriate and manage difference, a move I characterize as symbolic cannibalism. The use of "Indian" markers in mainstream fashion culture domesticates and naturalizes the exotic to

produce a unique brand of (White) US American beauty. A central point in this essay is that media practices and practitioners do not deliberately and consciously construct images to produce negative or positive images of India, rather they encode dominant ideas already present in society.

As Kumar (1997) has argued the presence of crude caricatures under the influence of Orientalism – the essentialized and stereotypical modes of representing colonized peoples – requires postcolonial scholars to translate what seems natural and commonsensical into that which is political. This task also entails providing alternative histories, new readings, and a context for the consumption of cultural texts. The intent of this essay is not to seize a predetermined, correct representation, rather it seeks to intervene and transform the encoded effects and apparatus of representation. Consequently, this analysis does not engage with issues of authenticity, whether media representations are faithful to the real India or not. I do not focus on the reductive stereotypes that underlie this visual grammar, instead I examine the representations to tease out the politics and ideologies that are promoted and whose interests are served.

The essay makes an intervention into the broader arenas of commodity culture and transnational studies and urges scholars to pay more attention to media practices because seemingly innocent images perform the important function of reproducing and naturalizing key structures of global flows. As numerous scholars have noted popular culture, although often devalued, is one of the primary sites where struggles over who belongs occur and questions of national identity are worked out. Lowe (1996) has pointed out that it is through culture that the subject becomes, acts, and speaks itself as "American." I use popular culture in this spirit to unravel the specific ways in which hegemonic ideas about the globe and US are reasserted. Media representational practices thus serve as an important site where ideas about globalization processes are ritually enacted. They help us make sense of complex political and economic structures and permit an understanding of the modalities through which visual culture participates in constructing dominant ideas about "aliens" and alien cultures.

In what follows I outline first the historical role advertisements have played in promoting values of capitalism and consumerism. This brief exegesis into British advertising practices during high colonialism (the mid-to-late nineteenth century) lays the ground for the significance of my findings. A comparison with nineteenth-century advertising practices illustrates how contemporary advertising has encoded concerns central to and arising from the emergence of transnational capitalism. After a brief outline of the vast scholarship conducted in the fields of advertising and fashion studies the essay provides a series of fashion vignettes illustrating the visual and rhetorical tropes that go into the uses of "Indian" markers.

A brief detour explaining the terms globalization and cosmopolitanism though is necessary. Globalization is a portmanteau concept that covers a vast array of economic, human, and cultural activities that cross national boundaries. While it is used most often to signify high velocity transnational financial activities and

the unification of capital markets, globalization encompasses as well the disparate flows of people, products, labor, and culture. Globalization as a phenomenon threatens to dissipate the category of the nation state. While the rhetoric surrounding these processes tends to present globalization as a fairly stable and uniform phenomenon it has proved to be highly uneven. Globalization affects first and third world countries and their peoples in radically different ways.

Although the term cosmopolitanism has lengthy antecedents in the fields of philosophy and political science (beginning with Kant) it has gained new salience in contemporary society, where, like globalization, it registers a stance against nationalism. Modern usage of the term cosmopolitanism attempts to capture how conditions of globality have altered people's sense of home and belonging and thus the politics they practice. In common parlance, cosmopolitanism signifies an apolitical stance and a sense of feeling at home in the world, where one is not bounded by national borders. Hence, a cosmopolitan subject is a citizen of the world and the antithesis of the nationalist. In fashion culture and in advertising such a structure of feeling is iconically reproduced by presenting an international arena in the background. Glossy depictions of the non-western world, in particular, come to stand in for a cosmopolitan sensibility.

Global Panoramas

If the Victorian Era marked the rise of a particular kind of commodity culture, one that was facilitated by colonialism and a newly emerging capitalist mode of relations, the contemporary era of global capitalism inscribes a new set of imperial relations that are indicative of a new brand of unequal transnational relations. Contemporary processes of globalization mark radical changes in transnational relations, and we can see traces of these structural shifts in media images of fashion culture.

McClintock (1995) and Richards (1990) in their perceptive studies of nineteenth-century British advertisements have pointed out that during the moment of high imperialism commodity culture was a primary vehicle through which colonial culture and its underpinning racial ideologies were materialized. They argue that images of Africa, and the empire in general, were mobilized to not just sell products but also to justify imperial domination. During the late-nineteenth century, advertisements facilitated images of empire to infiltrate every aspect of the domestic realm and naturalized racial difference. In contemporary global commodity culture there exists an analogous structure of feeling, but with crucial inversions. In the nineteenth century, images of empire came home through advertisements. For instance, advertisements for soaps used African children with whitened bodies to highlight their cleaning capacity. In contemporary images, as the following analysis reveals, the West ventures out into the world. Specifically, US American bodies inhabit the globe and accommodate the world out there within the local. Today, the spoils of the new globalized empire are

brought home by US Americans, not by the exotic Other. The globe appears as a spectacle or the backdrop against which US American consumerism is mobilized and legitimized.

The role of the female figure too is significantly altered. During the nineteenth century, although products were clearly aimed at women, advertisements that represented the world out there did not include the female body. In the global commodity culture of transnational capitalism, it is the figure of the female that becomes central. She is the vehicle through which transactions of global products are domesticated and US hegemony is normalized. In images set against a foreign background the Western woman appears always as stylish, attractive, glamorous, and comfortable, striding confidently through the world. Both globalization and cosmopolitanism appear as lifestyle choices, which can be effected through the purchase of commodities. Rarely are men deployed similarly in media images: as unthreatening, cosmopolitan, glossy figures who inhabit the world at ease through the use of fashion accessories. Men appear in media images depicting a global landscape primarily in two arenas: sports and war.

Allure of the exotic

In this analysis I rely on two very broad areas of scholarship, that of advertising and of fashion. The studies I enumerate are specific to the arguments I make and vastly condense the sophisticated and nuanced arguments that have been developed in these fields. There exists a vast array of scholarship on advertising, its representational practices, and its relation to society. Most of these studies either elucidate or disprove advertising's status as a weapon of persuasion. Schudson (1984) for instance has discounted the power of advertising while Williamson (1978) and other feminist scholars have underlined its ability to reinforce patriarchal ideologies. Highlighting the dominant ideologies of capitalism and consumerism advertising promotes, Goldman (1992) and Jhally (1990) conceptualize advertisements as a discourse through and about objects. Advertisements offer a unique window for observing how commodity interests conceptualize social relations and facilitate the production and reproduction of ideology. They are "an apparatus for *reframing meanings* in order to add value to products. Ads arrange, organize and steer *meanings* into *signs* that can be inscribed on products" (Goldman, 1992, p. 5). In this paper I do not engage in the debate over the power of advertisements, rather I examine the social relations that are structured into their signifying practices. Through advertisements one can observe also the manner in which the logic of commodity form expresses itself culturally and socially. Although in what follows I do characterize the use of "Indian" markers in fashion culture as appropriation my purpose here is to call attention to the cultural work conducted by such imagery.

Fashion is a slippery phenomenon. It is filled with ambivalences, polyvalence, and excess; it could be conceived of as a masquerade that signals place and identity. I deploy a very broad definition of fashion in this paper, as "styles of

dressing that come to be accepted as desirable in a particular period. Defined thus, fashion embodies change, it is itself only by being forever transient. It is often understood to be a mark of the ideologically modern" (Nag, 1991, p. 93). Most contemporary theorists of fashion concur that the phenomenon is not unique to the culture of capitalism; it exists and existed in non-metropolitan centers as well. Nevertheless the structure of fashion systems coincides with the interests of a capitalist system: fashion has a built-in mechanism of obsolescence; it pivots around nowness and newness and repeatedly constructs desire for new products. The analysis in this paper is influenced also by Bourdieu's (1986) notion that fashion and clothing are performative phenomena that help establish social distinction.

Scholarship on fashion and the garment industry has emerged in recent years as a locus of cross-disciplinary studies. It has become as well a primary site from which to examine the transnational flows of labor, products, and economies. Within the realm of art history, scholarship such as that of Hollander (1978) has centered on haute couture to enumerate the aesthetic qualities of the system. Sociologists have underscored the ideological structures and class relations that are sustained by fashion culture. Crane (2000), for instance, deploys clothing as a strategic site for studying changes in the meanings of cultural goods in relation to changes in social structures, in the character of cultural organization, and in the forms of culture. Clothes and fashionable clothing styles are "carriers" of a wide range of ideological meanings or social agendas, she contends. While these studies lay to rest the cavil that fashion is a frivolous field, scholarship from a cultural studies perspective has been the most effective in transforming some basic assumptions about the field. Paying attention to audience reception these scholars have recast fashion from being considered a passive act into an active process, one where individuals resist and negotiate their own meanings (Craik, 1998).

Shifting attention from the form and content of fashion and focusing on the political economy, scholars such as Ross (1997) have underscored the labor and material conditions of production. In particular, they have pointed out that the transnational dispersal of the garment industry makes it difficult to separate the sweat from the glamour (Skoggard, 1998). While alert to the vicissitudes of fashion trends few though have examined the specific ways in which Western fashion appropriates from "foreign" cultures and the ideologies that are promoted by this construction of a transnational chic. This essay clears the space for such an intervention.

As a field and practice that centers on women feminist scholarship has repeatedly engaged with the topic of fashion but the responses have been largely ambivalent. Nevertheless, there have been significant shifts in perspectives. The early seventies movement dismissed fashion as yet another instrument of women's subordination. More recently, feminists have started to leaven this criticism by foregrounding the pleasure fashion can provoke in individual women (Wilson, 1992). Increasingly, even as scholars have started to examine the complex manner in which individuals derive pleasure from fashion, the focus has

also shifted from haute couture to everyday practices, or what Craik (1998) has termed the "technology of civility," the sanctioned codes of conduct in the practices of self-formation and self-presentation.

Reflecting the growing interest in globalization, feminist scholars too are beginning to address how processes of globalization have placed bodily adornment and fashion in the global–local nexus. For instance, Li (1998) believes that contemporary investigations in this context have to examine the conjunction between fashion, global capitalism, and modernity. They cannot avoid "questions of imperialism and colonialism, nor can they be detached from analyses of the dynamics of globalization and localization" (p. 74). Similarly, in her subtle and powerful analysis of the "Japanese invasion" of the Western fashion world, Kondo (1997) underscores the constitutive contradictions of the industry: it is transnational in its dispersal and reach yet rife with essentializing gestures that reiterate national boundaries. My analysis is informed by these studies particularly those that call attention to fashion as a productive site on an individual level but at the global level as a site where hegemonic discourses are reiterated. The essay also underscores the modalities through which certain aspects of globalization processes are naturalized through fashion practices.

Like other scholars of fashion, such as Ash and Wilson (1992), my analysis assumes that clothing and its trends invoke rather accurately wider crises. Dressing negotiates between the intensely personal and the prescribed and constructed layers of the social; it also concerns ideology, seduction, and North–South relations. Thus through bodily adornment one can acquire symbolic and economic capital.

In both fields of advertising and fashion the allure of the exotic has been a recurring motif and a strategy to construct desire. In the realm of advertising, as Schudson (1984, p. 162) has pointed out, mid-nineteenth-century patent medicines were the first products in the United States to turn to the exotic. To establish identification with their product, advertisers came up with names that seemed remote, ancient, and mystical. Consequently products with names such as Hayne's Arabian Balsam, Hoofland's Greek Oil, Osgood's Indian Cholagogue, Jayne's Spanish Alterative were commonplace. In the United Kingdom, Richards (1990) and McClintock (1995) have persuasively demonstrated the ways in which soap advertisements in particular deployed empire and the exotic. They suggest that the use of such imagery naturalized imperial ideology. Shifting the focus to contemporary advertising where the rise of ethnic-based niche marketing has made the exotic a "hot" commodity (Halter, 2000; Dávila, 2001), this essay facilitates a similar unraveling of the ideologies promoted by the use of exotic markers.

Within the realm of fashion, Craik (1998) and Steele (1996) have suggested that the use of exotic motifs is commonplace because these symbols are seen as transgressive. Since all fashion relies on the tension between the familiar and the foreign these systems tend to rely on discourses of exoticism, the primitive, orientalism, and authenticity. Craik clarifies that in Western fashion the term exotic is used to refer to elements of new fashion codes or "new looks" codified

as profoundly different from previous or contemporary fashion techniques. The ethnocentric underpinnings of Western fashion (European or European derived) ensure that difference between codes of exoticism and mundanity are played up. By narrowing the focus to the appropriation of "Indian" symbols within fashion, my analysis underscores how such representational practices mobilize new structures of desire, identification, and relations of looking.

While the use of the exotic in fashion and in advertisements is not novel, I contend that within the context of globalization they provide an important aperture from which to understand the specific ways in which the logic of commodity form expresses itself culturally and socially. I read fashion advertisements as producing what Schudson (1984) has termed capitalist realism, "a set of aesthetic conventions" that celebrate and promote the values of the transnational political economy.

In the analysis that follows I examine media representations from within the contours of commodity cosmopolitanism and femininity. In these representations ideas of femininity and globalism converge in a spectacle of the commodity. They envisage globalization as coming into being through the figure of woman, in effect through the domestic realm. Within a cosmopolitanism that is configured through woman, her body becomes the space for the display of global spectacle. In what follows I describe the particular ways in which so-called Indian markers are deployed by fashion advertisements to register multiple meanings of transgression and the allure of the different.

Fabricating Karma

"Indian" motifs and fabrics have long been used in haute couture and high fashion culture. However, the appearance of this form of poaching in everyday fashion advertisements signals a proletarianization of this practice. According to Craik (1998), haute couture has institutionalized plagiarism, borrowing elements from different style systems and underscoring the foreign origins of their designs. She describes designers as "birds of prey" who "rob the nests of other fashion systems in their quest for new ideas. Stylistic motifs are reconstituted in a process of bricolage – the creation of new patterns and modes from the kaleidoscopic bits and pieces of cultural debris" (p. ix). Haute couture deliberately inscribes its exotic origins, highlighting difference. The deployment of "Indian" markers in everyday advertisements is remarkably different. The exotic and the Other may be integral to depict a glossy cosmopolitan style but they are stripped of their foreign origins and are presented as ordinary symbols Western women can meld with comfortably. India and Asia in general contribute to the glamour these advertisements strive to achieve. India becomes an affect; it represents difference.

There are two dominant forms in which India and the Orient appear in images of everyday fashion culture: either as a backdrop against which Western fashions

are displayed or as symbols that have been integrated in everyday fashion so thoroughly as to appear mundane and ordinary. In media images the use of India and Indian symbols becomes a shorthand term for presenting a glamorous and exoticized persona. One could read this pervasive use of India and Indian symbols as another example of neo-imperialism, the global is deployed exploitatively to serve the interests of the First World. Advertisements and the global commodity culture underpinning this system of signs, though, call for a more nuanced and complex understanding, one that underscores issues of interdependency and exploitation.

It is difficult to identify an originary moment for India-exotica chic since a counter-culture India style consisting primarily of the use of incense, cotton skirts, and yoga has existed at least since the sixties. As Islam (1994) points out nostalgia for the glamour of the Raj has always kept India, the jewel in the British Crown, visible in the West. The contemporary structure of feeling is different though. Media images have transformed what had been isolated to alternative stores into mainstream practices, similar to those that I have alluded to in the beginning of the essay. I characterize the nineties popularization of Indian symbols as the proletarianization of India chic. It includes a full-fledged domestication of the "Indian" exotic and is marked by the commoditization of all aspects of Indian culture as ethno-exotic chic.

For instance, the lead singer of the pop group No Doubt, Gwen Stefani, has for long worn a bindi, the marking on her forehead, both in her everyday appearances and in her albums. Popular magazines now refer to it as her "trademark" bindi. Similarly, Madonna and Janet Jackson have deployed bindis, sari fabrics, nose rings, and henna decorations in their music videos and in their everyday appearances. Since then the presence of bindis, nose rings, and henna decorations have become commonplace, especially in fashion spreads oriented to youth culture. It is easy to dismiss the pointed use of these body markings as another effort made by celebrities to mark out their brand and by youth to carve out a new identity, as integral to the presentation of the self as "different." Nevertheless, these practices conceal important cultural processes. Markers of "Indian" female beauty rituals function as props for the display of hegemonic (white) femininity. Following Frankenberg (1993) I use the terms white and West here to signify not so much a skin color or a geographic space as to refer to a position of privilege and power. By repeatedly erasing the cultural specificity of "Indian" symbols, these representational practices transform the meanings associated with them, metamorphosing them into an integral aspect of a brand of American fashion.

Under Western eyes, differences among Asian women and Asian countries are flattened; motifs from Southeast Asia are blended with those from South Asia as though they were the same cultures. Fashion spreads use bindis, bangles, and sarongs within the same spread; or use Indonesian batiks against a Chinese landscape. This selective and decontextualized use of foreign traditions permits Americans to feel they are partaking a cosmopolitan ethno-exotica culture. Shed

of all referents to the cultures from which the trends originate cultural difference is reduced to curry, something that can be easily consumed by the dominant culture. Cultural critic hooks (1992) has characterized such commodification processes as consumer cannibalism. The difference the other inhabits is eradicated and all other cultural specificity is erased. In fashion spreads we see a similar form of cannibalism enacted except that in this case it is made possible symbolically.

The presentation of India as integral to fashion is not limited to these symbols but encompasses a broader range of accoutrements. Designer lines such as Liz Claiborne advertise their collections through the use of Indian fabrics and emphasize the practice of poaching by providing close ups of body art associated with some Indian traditions that mark the model's legs. Similarly, cosmetic spreads from powerhouses Revlon and Maybelline try to capture the general aura of India and the East by juxtaposing disparate symbols to produce the affect of an alluring and exotic Orient. India is made present through stereotypes that emerged in high colonialism. Elements such as hookah (the smoking pipe), silhouettes of buildings that resemble the Taj Mahal, and elephants that represent India in the collective imaginary are highlighted to signify an India-inspired fashion. These objects form the frame through which India and Indian culture are filtered into fashion consciousness. Many of these spreads share a representational grammar; their visual codes never explicitly spell out the Indian roots of the exotic aura they seek to cultivate. By presenting the aura of a majestic, mysterious, alluring, and primitively glamorous land these advertisements recreate a nostalgic, romantic, and imaginary India. These images emerge from and continue to reproduce key features of Orientalist discourses.

The appropriation and cannibalization of "Indian" symbols culminate in the complete domestication of the product/symbol. The everyday use of the pashmina shawl or the use of paisley designs exemplify this process whereby the products shed all reference to their cultures of origin and are instead seen as Western or as British as is the case with paisley (Askari & Arthur, 1999; Lévi-Strauss, 1987). An examination of the pashmina shawl's integration within the fashion vocabulary in the West is instructive here. What once started with references to the exotic, with slogans lyrically referring to the origins of the wool in Nepal and the Himalayan mountains, has now lost all linkages with the Indian subcontinent. It has instead been thoroughly incorporated as US chic.

Commodity multiculturalism

The production and circulation of these images of Indian artifacts and symbols in such a broad arena is significant. It reflects the increased presence of middle-class South Asians in US society; everyday Americans come into contact with South Asians in numerous contexts. Singer Gwen Stefani has noted that one of her boyfriends was of Indian origin, and this association may have contributed to her use of the bindi. The use of these markers may reflect as well a liberal

response to a marginalized, oppressed group. In the eighties, Indian women in New Jersey who wore bindis faced violence from groups of White US Americans who proclaimed themselves dot-busters. Today, we find the meaning associated with the bindi has been radically transformed by its location. The use of the bindi permits Western women to perform an enlightened, multicultural appreciation of other cultures, but when used by Indian women, it continues to point to the residues of a primordial, primitive culture.

Notwithstanding the obduracy of the stereotypes associated with Indian women, among diasporic populations the proletarianization of India chic has resulted in an appreciation of "home" culture and traditions. Durham (2001) and Maira (2000), among other scholars, have enumerated the effects of this appropriation of "Indian" symbols on immigrant populations. I have also explored elsewhere how these trends in US media images have transformed responses to traditional practices within the subcontinent itself. Indeed, the symbolic capital associated with these images lends credibility and cultural capital to particularized "native" uses of such invented traditions. Indian fashion magazines mimic Western practices and ironically participate in a process of self-Orientalizing, or what Savigliano (1995) has termed autoexoticizing.

The proletarianization of India chic in the US is a unique phenomenon. As I have indicated already, haute couture designers market their wares by deliberately poaching from other cultures and have underscored their appropriation of exotic motifs from foreign lands. The use of the exotic provides symbolic and cultural capital both to the designer and those who wear the clothes. The exotic functions not only to mark difference but also to signify a cosmopolitan aura. In the proletarianization of this practice we find that the exotic roots of the motifs are erased or referenced obliquely. India appears as affect, an indirect reference to the exotic, whereas in high fashion the appropriation of Indian motifs are not only celebrated but explicitly referenced to bestow the aura of romance, danger, and the exotic to everyday fashion. Negative stereotypes associated with India are held in abeyance by locating the symbols on Western women's bodies. In fashion culture, the use of Indian markers enhances the desirability of Western woman but does little to alter the existing Orientalist discourses.

US fashion culture taps into Asian culture and the Orient with a voracious appetite. When India is deployed as background, every aspect of the image is saturated with markers of the Orient. The entire continent of Asia is collapsed into a site where the Western woman could enhance her desirability through the use of a fantastic exoticism. Against an Asian panorama, Western women's self is recentered; the globe is transformed as a stage for the construction of a desiring (White) female subject. Indeed, Western woman emerges as the "master" subject in the transnational arena of consumption. She is the consummate consumer subject. Such representations libidinize the global arena as an erotic zone.

Further, the images of Western women cast against a foreign/global backdrop help associate the home with the world, and the world with the home, thereby domesticating the global arena. These representations tap into dominant

understandings that associate woman with the domestic arena, the private space, to allay anxieties associated with globalization processes.

Simultaneously, even as she stakes her claim to a cosmopolitan identity the figure of woman continues to function as a metonym for nation. The figure of woman stitches together the fragments of a gendered transnational political economy. In this visual grammar, national and cultural identities are resurrected as glossy commodities in the transnational libidinization of the market. They produce a space where Jameson (1991) suggests commodity and ideology become indistinguishable. Yet, because of their reliance on only Western woman as "carriers" of the exotic, these representations produce a desired and desirable femininity that domesticates and naturalizes the exotic. In the following section I elaborate on this aspect.

Racial hierarchies

In addition to the appropriation of "Indian" markers, media images are also characterized by a near-complete absence of Brown women. (I use the awkward phrasing Brown women to reference Indian women and those from the subcontinent; as Kondo (1997) and other scholars have noted haute couture often uses Black women to add exotic color when they use foreign motifs.) At the very moment that aspects of Indian society are positioned at the center, Brown women themselves are banished to the invisible regions of the periphery. For the most part, Asian women disappear from the use of Orientalist imagery; the East and India are deployed to add an exotic dimension to dominant beauty standards. The erasure of Indian/Asian women from these representations allows consumer culture to present a decontextualized international ethno-exotica.

When Brown women appear in media representations, as in the advertisement for the Swissair commercial, they resemble White women in brown face. The so-called Indian women are identical in features to the White woman, the only distinguishing features are the color of their skin. Thereby even though these representations may escape the charge of monochromatism they continue to reiterate dominant beauty standards.

These advertisements are often slyly reflexive, commenting on their practices of poaching. They acknowledge with a nod and a wink the conditions of their own production. "I wonder what makes a tradition become a trend?" the Swissair advertisement queries. The smaller text indicates that trends are rooted in traditions. These ideas are used in a playful manner to promote a new consumption. Like Madonna or Gwen Stefani this image transforms a tradition into a trend to market its iconicity. In these instances, the Orient serves to demarcate and confine cultural boundaries.

There is an aspect of this postmodern pastiche that is very playful and appealing. "Pastiche designates a cultural form built on copying, scavenging and recombining particles of cultural texts regardless of context. Pastiche is the visual representation composed of decontextualized and fetishized signifiers" (Goldman,

1992, p. 214). It is also considered a central mode through which postmodern concerns are articulated. As I have already elucidated, in media representations cultural markers from disparate cultures are juxtaposed to produce a seemingly apolitical product.

On the surface, these representations seem to belie Kipling's oft-repeated statement, "Oh East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." On the bodies of (White) Western women the two seem to meet. However, on closer examination these glamorous images can be seen to reify the differences between East and West. The presence of brown-skinned women or even the use of "Indian" symbols may appear at first glance to be a celebration of multiculturalism and the diversity of cultures that coexist in the US. Nevertheless, the decontextualized manner in which the exotic is mobilized fractures any sense of heritage. In the final analysis, these images are about the cultural representation of the West to itself by way of a detour through the Other.

These images in everyday fashion are propelled by the climate of multiculturalism prevalent in the larger society. Yet, the manner in which India and other cultures are represented reinscribes the normative power of the center; the Other is apprehended only in terms defined by the dominant culture not on their own terms. The ethnic spectacle of these fashion spreads demonstrates how a certain kind of "Indian" identity is created, gains currency, and is promoted through the body of the non-brown woman. India is contained within a cultural garden of bindis, nose rings, henna, and sari fabric. Indianness is repackaged as a newly improved product and sold as Oriental fantasy of female identity and desire.

There is a surplus value to these images. They recuperate a particular US nationalism, one where it remains central to the operations of global flows. It also constitutes a female subject who is desirable and exotic by using "Indian" symbols; thereby the presence of the Western woman allows for a partial new understanding of some key facets of Orientalist discourse. If these symbols were placed on Indian women the messages conveyed about globalization would tap into a series of stereotypes about the hypersexualized, dangerous, and exotic Oriental female, which would hardly serve to quell anxieties that have been prevalent since colonial times.

In media representations of "Indian" symbols all culture is turned into commodity. These images celebrate difference and yet manage and regulate diversity. These images facilitate a sense of home as no place, or, at the very least, home as a composite of different parts of the world. They produce India as commodity sign; instead of a Third World country, they present an exotic and romantic view of India that is a legacy of Orientalism and a hangover of the fascination with the Raj. India becomes not only portable commodity but an integral element in the discourse of style. As Appadurai (1996) has hypothesized under conditions of global flows pastiche and nostalgia are the dominant modes of image production and reception. We see both these aspects, particularly a nostalgia for a mythical India, repeatedly inscribed in these representations.

The images I have examined in the essay exemplify the West's fascination with the Other, the desire to know the Other so it can become less potent, and the repeated efforts to position the Other within a discourse of being always-already different, condemning the Other in perpetuity to the land of difference. Despite the use of "Indian" markers, the performance of race and identity (of whiteness) in these representational practices is predicated on an opposition to being not-Indian. This visual grammar gains salience only in the context of the transnational circuits of capital and culture. The tensions and ambivalences that structure these representations are specific to contemporary conditions of globality; they exemplify how the West looks at the globe and also how the West positions itself within it. The world and all cultures are only apprehended through consumable goods. Further the global arena is presented as a feminine, domestic space which naturalizes US hegemony in processes of globalization.

Above all, India becomes a site for the articulation of a capitalist nostalgia. The consumer can experience the world without jeopardizing the comforts of advanced capitalism. Tropes of Orientalism continue to circulate in the fashion world and gain new visibility. Indeed, as I have illustrated in this essay, in the battleground of style, Orientalist tropes are transposed, recuperated, and recodified. Media images, including those that are rarely considered significant, such as advertisements and fashion spreads, perform the important cultural work of helping us understand and re-produce a specific brand of globalization. The analysis of media content and representational practices, as this essay has indicated, provides an important vantage into complex economic and political practices.

Note

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PART FOUR

Media Audiences

CHAPTER **FIFTEEN**

Resuscitating Feminist Audience Studies

Revisiting the Politics of Representation and Resistance

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Questions of what constitutes the most appropriate object of study and related debates over the academy's potential to challenge structures of domination have come to occupy a central position in recent speculations on the future of critical media studies. One crucial strand linking these critiques of media research in the cultural studies tradition is a growing dissatisfaction with the celebratory tenor of ethnographic projects, which have claimed that readers'/viewers' interpretive creativity offers evidence of subversive political resistance in audiences' everyday lives. In arguing for a reinvigorated approach to media audiences, one that insists on recentering issues of ideology and power, this chapter builds on and responds to those critiques of populist audience ethnographies that have attempted to recuperate critical media studies' originary allegiances to a progressive global politics of race, class, and gender. I articulate my engagement with the politics of knowledge production and audience representation through the lens of my specific location within a newly emerging body of work in postcolonial feminist media studies.

This chapter's discussion comprises four parts. The first section contends that in battling tendencies toward audience populism and media polysemy, First World media scholars, who urge the abandonment of audience ethnography and a nostalgic return to media texts and political economy, fail to recognize the racial privilege and ethnocentrism that lurks beneath the surface of their prescriptive arguments. I suggest that instead of ignoring the audience (women or men), what we need at this specific juncture, when corporate globalization is eager to conquer new territories *and* religious fundamentalism endeavors to capture the imagination of local and transnational diasporic communities, is a renewed commitment to discovering global media's role in constraining *and*

enabling progressive social-democratic practices. In the second and third parts, I address critiques of the problematic ways in which some strains of ethnographic audience research have theorized the import and implications of audiences' interpretive skills. In these two sections where I draw on my research among young middle- and upper-class women in India, I show that historically inflected and locally contextualized feminist audience studies can avoid the pitfalls of resurrecting the autonomous, rational, identifiable, and predictable subject of Enlightenment and capitalist discourses.

The Limits of Multiculturalism/Internationalism in Media Studies: Challenging Western Ethnocentrism

Following the boom in media reception studies during the eighties, a slowly brewing backlash against empirical audience research has been steadily gaining momentum. Within the field of feminist media and cultural studies, for instance, Radway's ethnographic research on romance reading in the United States was first hailed as a pioneering effort to rectify the self-indulgent tendencies of textual analyses and the elitist economic determinism of the Frankfurt School and allied political economy approaches (Allor, 1988; Markert, 1985; Newman, 1988; Schudson, 1987; Schwichtenberg, 1989). Gradually, however, Radway's research on romance readers was criticized for its exclusive focus on middle-class readers and for her failure to theorize the impact of readers' class positions on their interpretations of popular literature (Press, 1986). Another critical response to Radway's work has suggested that in her over-reliance on individual readers' statements, Radway (1984) did not adequately account for the larger social/material context of women's lives, and for the possibility that interviewees, in their extreme anxiousness to please the feminist ethnographer, could have been less than forthcoming about the realities of their lives (McRobbie, 1990). Focusing attention on the material and discursive forces that influence the process of media reception, recent critics of populist audience studies have also argued that ethnographies, which celebrate audiences' consumption practices as effective forms of resistance, ultimately disavow the unequal distribution of economic resources and cultural capital in society (Angus et al., 1989; Budd, Entman, & Steinman, 1990; Carragee, 1990; Clarke, 1990).

While the above critiques directed against Radway's work were articulated in the spirit of advancing the feminist project of audience ethnography, textual critic Modleski went one step further when she attacked Radway (and feminist ethnographers in general) for embracing the ideology of mass culture. Modleski (1986) argued that the danger of ethnography lies in the fact that "critics immersed in their [the audience's] culture, half in love with their subject are incapable of achieving a critical distance from it" (p. xii). Targeting feminist ethnographic research on women audiences in particular, Modleski charged that in mindlessly

celebrating the critical "micro-resistant" viewing/reading practices of female soap opera fans and romance novel readers, feminist scholars have naïvely colluded with capitalist entities. When confronted with charges of cultural colonization and manipulation, corporations also claim that savvy consumers, who possess keen skills of discrimination, have the power to accept or reject commercial culture in a "free marketplace." Similarly, other critics advocating political economy approaches have alleged that audience ethnographies (painting them with a broad stroke) have led critical media studies away from its original intent of intervening into and challenging the power of dominant social and economic institutions (Garnham, 1995; Kellner, 1995; Murdock, 1989).

In some cases, despair over ethnographic audience studies' repeated production of the resistive consumer, a subject who is excised from her ideologically infused economic context, has led critics to renounce any progressive possibilities for empirical audience research. In a leading undergraduate text on race, gender, and class in the media, the introductory chapter outlines and reviews production, textual, and audience approaches to media research (Dines & Humez, 1995). In the section on audience studies, after citing problems with populist ethnographies of media reception (avoidance of class and lack of attention to media ownership and marketing), the author concludes that one solution to ending the celebration of the active audience at the expense of mapping out the social structures of late capitalism is to avoid the human audience altogether: "A new way, in fact, to study media effects is to use computer databases that collect references to media texts (such as Dialog or Nexis–Lexis) and to trace the effects of media artifacts through analysis of references to them in the news media" (Kellner, 1995, p. 14). Although it is crucial to examine the ways in which diverse media texts creatively harness audiences as consumers or as citizens, analysis of the imagined audience alone cannot speak for the myriad complexities of everyday social experience.

A vital, ongoing critique of research practices is essential for promoting self-reflexivity in critical media studies, an enterprise that strives to be vigilant of the ways in which modes of knowledge production can silently reproduce power asymmetries. However, the recent questioning of and backlash against empirical audience research at recent conferences and other academic settings is more reminiscent of regressive turf policing rather than thoughtful wrestling with theories or tools of interpretation. One "trendy" mode of demonstrating a sympathetic alignment with grassroots activism, socialist political practice, and ideological critique is to distance oneself from the field of audience studies and the research practice of ethnography. Assumptions guiding critiques that frame the return to textual analyses/political economy as an antidote to problems with audience research include the notion that audience studies cannot release itself from the trap of regurgitating Fiske's early emphasis on subversion/polysemy and the belief that the field has produced all that we need to know about audience activity.

As feminist scholars and activists working within the academy, it is critical that we interrogate trends in academic research before we participate in or endorse research agendas that gain currency as the latest "fashion." In fact, many of the problems with ethnographic audience research in the United States including the facile insistence on polysemy and preoccupation with viewers'/readers' individualized voices and interpretations, can themselves be traced to the appetite for "cutting edge" theories and the impulse to promote a culture of academic stardom and celebrity (Moran, 1998). The temptation to earn cultural capital by blindly emulating the latest academic celebrity's theories can lead to the unreflexive recycling of reified concepts or the combative impulse to trumpet the contributions of new research by dismissing wholesale the tentative observations of pioneers in the field. Postcolonial feminist Ganguly (1992, p. 69) questions the politics of feminist audience researchers who "take up the latest critical practice as they do clothing fashions," but she also argues against the disciplinary divisions created by those who posit the only analytical possibility for audience research as located in the banal reaffirmation of the active consumer. Guided by Ganguly's felicitous move to recuperate a politics of accountability for audience studies, I argue that in deliberately turning away from the audience as an object of study, media studies could be throwing the "baby out with the bathwater."

Rather than advocating a wholesale renunciation of the audience, media scholars can begin to seek out refinements in interpretive theories and innovative modes of analyses that are better equipped to transcribe the wide spectrum of everyday relations between structures of power and audiences' media practices. Undertaking precisely such an ambitious project to redirect the future of audience studies, Nightingale (1996) points to the need for a more enlightened and interdisciplinary orientation to media reception research. Nightingale argues that although audience studies has undoubtedly demonstrated the merits of fieldwork engagement with communities of readers and viewers, media researchers have yet to pursue the provocative methodological implications of anthropology's radical critiques of ethnography (pp. 114–17). She suggests that the term "ethnographic," in its superficial context in media and cultural studies, has come to be associated with a set of qualitative research terms like "empirical," "cultural," or "depth interviews," but debates on ethnography in anthropology have become entangled with far transformative epistemological questions of colonial histories, ethics of research practices, and the politics of representation.

Taking seriously Nightingale's imperative to chart new horizons for audience research, I contend that exhortations to bury the project of audience ethnography so we can move on to new pastures overlook the historical marginalization of race and ethnicity in the academy. It is dangerous to pretend that the body of work on White metropolitan audiences in critical media research can masquerade with its "unnamed, universalizing normativity as knowledge of audiences everywhere" (Juluri, 1998, p. 85). Examining the corpus of writings in feminist media studies, for instance, it becomes apparent that until very recently, ethnographic research on audience activity was mostly confined to the experiences of