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## **Editorial: (De-)Westernizing Media and Journalism Studies: Demarcating, Transcending and Subverting Borders**

**Anne Grüne & Dirk-Claas Ulrich**

### **Introduction**

Since the early days of the new millennium the scholarly debates in global/international media and communication studies have faced an increasing awareness of an obviously existing disjuncture between theoretical approaches and systems of analysis predominantly rooted in North-Western academia and complex media realities that go beyond the narrow scope of Western experience.

Essentially, questions related to issues of “de-Westernization” could be thought of as a scientific legacy of the work of James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (2000). A decade ago, the authors criticized “the self-absorption and parochialism of much Western media theory” (2000: 3) within the discourse about globalization, media, power and society. They already pointed to the abovementioned academic supremacy of American and Eurocentric approaches on a theoretical and methodological level. Moreover, the authors observed an imbalance of the empirical foci in favor of Western nations and societies and called for the increasing integration of peripheral experiences into the discussion. Analogously, Daya K. Thussu (2009: 3) claims that “[t]he internationalization of the field can be seen as the third key intervention in the evolution of media studies”. The aforementioned statement reflects consonant demands of Kai Hafez (2002) as well as Markus Behmer and Jeffrey Wimmer (2009) for an intensified organizational entrenchment and increasing interconnectedness of the German research efforts in international communication studies.

Interestingly, at the time of preparing this special issue of the *Global Media Journal* the designated president of the *International Communication Association* Peter Vorderer stresses the importance of the necessity of an ongoing globalization

of communication studies.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein Georgette Wang (2010), based on an eponymous conference in 2008, interrogates the prevailing Eurocentrism and explores ways of decentering theory creation as well as the establishment of genuine Asian communication theories. Overall there seems to be some evidence of an incipient perspective change within or even beyond subject-specific boundaries. Alongside most recently intensified de-Westernization efforts of communication scholars an analogy can be drawn to the rising significance of Global History Studies and increasing reflections in the disciplines of International Relation (cf. Cornelissen et al. 2011), Political Theory (cf. Godrej 2011) or Anthropology (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2011).

Although it seems obvious that there is a multiplicity of terminological readings, research traditions, emphases and objectives, for us a basal tendency of an increasing academic relevance of “de-Westernization” appears to be palpable.

But nonetheless concerns on theoretical applicability and on adequate empirical capture are seemingly growing in international communication studies, it seems rather difficult to document a status quo of “de-Westernizing” thoughts and efforts – due to an epistemic situation in a state of flux.

This may also be caused by the fact that even definitions and understandings of the term itself remain a bold venture since “de-Westernization” as a reference frame for the study of media and communication refers to a rather vague semantic field of internationalization, globalization, cosmopolitanization, hybridization, indigenization as well as post-colonial, subaltern and critical (cultural) media studies.

Crucial points in the academic production of knowledge are regressive tendencies of inappropriate generalization and universalization related to Western experiences.

The points of departure for criticism were often based on subtly preconceptions of an overarching Western cultural imperialism. As early as in the 1970s formerly subaltern voices from Latin America, Africa and Asia have been raised against dominating American and Eurocentric products as well as perspectives in international media and communication. Non-Western research perspectives successively became emancipated as illustrated for example in the post-colonial and cultural studies.

From a more theoretical perspective, “de-Westernization” does not indicate a rejection of Western theories and paradigms but rather their critical revision and improvement through an openness for flexible integration of “peripheral paradigms” (Gunarathne 2010) and “creative acts of translation and appropriation” (Iwabuchi 2010). Methodologically, especially the strength as well as the problems of comparative research as an integral part of international and intercultural communication research are considered (cf. Livingston 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Statement for ICA-Election 2012. URL: [http://mkw.uni-mannheim.de/neues\\_aus\\_der\\_mkwic\\_statement\\_peter\\_vorderer\\_2012.pdf](http://mkw.uni-mannheim.de/neues_aus_der_mkwic_statement_peter_vorderer_2012.pdf) (07.Nov.12).

Nevertheless, an overarching consensus exists towards a felt deficit of a fundamental debate of peripheral perspectives on universally proclaimed or assumed concepts which are themselves predominantly rooted in North-Western academia. But even the categories of “West” and “non-West” undoubtedly remain fuzzy concepts. Can we really identify a genuinely non-Western type of media and communication research? Are we not to fail the heterogeneous landscape of Western research traditions when talking insistently of Euro-American media studies as a single, uniform block? What constitutes a Western and non-Western perspective today? In which way do “West” and “Rest” relate to other, critically questioned antipodes such as the “Center” and the “Periphery”, the “Global” and the “Local”, the “Universal” and “Particular”? What about spaces that transverse these categories? Do we simply reproduce a bipolar thinking when insistently speaking about westernizing and de-westernizing? Would “de-centering” be a rather neutral term to circumscribe approaches that try to contextualize? But then how can we still interrogate hegemonic structures in current academia, exemplified for example by the remaining English monolingualism (cf. Downing 2008, Shome 2009)?

Ironically, even the critical examination of Western models and the call for the “de-Westernization” of media studies have largely been voiced by Western researchers. But first of all: who is a “Western” researcher? How can we conceptualize the relation of privatized homes, and the places and spaces of academic socialization, the interweaving of personal experiences and academic traditions? What are the effects of internationalization processes in academia? Does transfer lead to reinforced global standardization, indigenization or rather hybridization? How can we characterize the structure that embeds the production of knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

The prevailing aim in this special issue is not to answer the whole bundle of questions but to reinforce a critical reflection on the epistemological foundations and developments of international and intercultural communication studies and to inspire research practice acknowledging the diverse socio-cultural, political, economic and historical settings of any given research objects.

To grasp and exploit the epistemic potentials of an insightful dialogue of presumed Western-centric and non-Western perspectives has been the underlying aim of the international conference “*Beyond “Center” and “Periphery”*: (De-)Westernization in International and Intercultural Communication”<sup>2</sup> which took place at the University of Erfurt in autumn 2011. This special issue of *Global Media Journal – German Edition* is dedicated to the mentioned conference fostering “cross-border” approaches. Some of the papers presented at the conference became revised and extended articles or essays in this volume. They will not reflect the entire spectrum

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<sup>2</sup> The conference was the annual conference of the International and Intercultural Communication section of the German Communication Association held in Erfurt, Germany, October 27-29, 2011. <http://www.uni-erfurt.de/kommunikationswissenschaft/conference/conference/>

of issues “de-Westernization” might provide. But they can be contextualized within two levels of abstraction. On the one hand, contributions are referring to a meta-reflexive level of discussion, on the other hand they are part of a growing body of case studies that illustrate the shifting empirical focus and reflect the increasing effort to improve Western theoretical frameworks by adapting them to variable local contexts.

### **Analytical Perspective: meta-reflexive level**

On a meta-discursive level an academic self-positioning or self-reflection as an evaluation of the current status quo of international and intercultural communication studies seems to be worthwhile in order to elucidate terminological ambiguities and theoretical omissions. As particular research traditions and analytical perspectives of international and intercultural communication processes could always be described as object and subject to contexts of cultural specificity and political hegemony, a multiplicity of Western and non-Western perspectives is indispensable.

Principally, dimensions of reflection could include the interrogation of research agendas, the institutional environment, and actor specific profiles. The first dimension could cover the character of content-related or geographical attention cycles or their theoretical and terminological embedment within the published studies. The second dimension should be concerned with a global-comparative investigation of research facilities, and academic programs in a sense of organizational characteristics. A third dimension could deal with auto-ethnographic explorations of the researcher him- or herself – itself an often neglected aspect in the communication research landscape. Hence, a multi-dimensional aggregation will reveal structural restrictions and capacities as well as developmental trends in current international and intercultural communication studies. In this special issue of the *GMJ-DE* discussions will be initially confined to the agenda or theory dimension, while others remain, for the moment, as desiderata.

### **Analytical Perspective: phenomenological/ instance level**

Apart from a meta-reflexive analysis, “de-Westernization” can be explored in respect of specific research fields. One significant scholarly discourse is, indubitably, that of globalization theory. The awareness of varying (Western and non-Western) perceptions and terminologies on the one hand and the analysis of proximity and distance between media products and systems, within the contexts of production, circulation and reception, on the other hand might help to reassess the explanatory power of globalization theory.

The relation of media and diasporic communities depicts another interdisciplinary research strand that provides suitable breeding ground for exploring discursive

spaces and dynamics beyond stable cultural or national entities. Questions concerning the impact and role of communication and media in the formation of hybrid identities as well as ultimately political communities, that emerge in spaces between homeland, diasporic communities, and contexts of immigration, underline the importance of acknowledging “cross-border” approaches.

The contributions in this special issue can be located within the field of journalism research, political communication, media ethics, and comparative media system analysis – in which fruitful debates on the reciprocal influences between “Center” and “Periphery” and “beyond” have been stimulated.

Cooperation and interdependence of media institutions based in the “West” and “non-West” raise certain questions of how the agenda and the form of news reporting is shaped in local, regional and national as well as in transnational media landscapes. Closely linked are questions concerning the interrelations of changes in professional images, working methods and organizational cultures within a framework of entangled environments. The role of technical innovation, their integration and implication for, again, regional, national and transnational journalism constitutes another auspicious set of research issues. Furthermore, the emerging field of global media ethics gained considerable attention focusing, for example, on the generation of media ethical standards which are applicable and shareable in worldwide journalistic contexts. What are the implications of recognizing that media content not only demands moral justification vis á vis a national audiences? Nonetheless, the de facto global reach and impact of news media today remains fundamentally questionable in multiple dimensions (cf. Hafez 2007).

International and intercultural communication research aims to critically discuss the foundations for conception, methodology and evaluation of media assistance which itself is becoming increasingly important in development and post-conflict contexts. In general, conceptions are based on the assumption that media plays an important role in democratization, in conflict resolution and good governance. But the classical media functions such as criticism, control and mediation derive from Western democratic experiences and are based on Western concepts of democracy. Hence these presuppositions shape concepts and expectations of media assistance programs rendered by Western donor countries and organizations but often do not meet the realities in post-war countries or developing countries. More importantly, prevailing circumstances and contexts of the local partners are often neglected and approaches to the merits and benefits of media in development appear to be simplified as well as top-down oriented. In consequence, measurements often miss local needs and are rather short-term than sustainable in their effects. Even more seriously, economic and political interests underlying normative ideals in Western developmental efforts have become a central issue of critical discourses. Thus, substantiated empirical insights into the conflictual relation between conditions and presuppositions of the implementing organizations on the one hand and local demands on the other hand could enrich conceptual discussions on the Western and non-Western connections in the field of media and development.

Once again, the articles in this special issue of *GMJ* do not cover the vast array of research areas comprehensively but contribute to the discourse of “de-Westernization” in journalism and media studies by encouraging debates and valuable empirical insights.

## Article Section

In her contribution **Natalya Ryabinska** takes a closer look into the structural patterns of the international news production in one of the previous Soviet satellite states – the Ukraine. Based on a multi-methodological approach this post-Soviet media setting is analyzed in terms of its specificity of the international news flow and news geography. In paying attention to aspects of the socialization of journalists as well as organizational characteristics of media institutions the author identifies language proficiency as one of the principal variables in defining the agenda, validation, and interpretation of international news, hence the entire foreign news flow into the Ukrainian media system. This mechanism of two-stage-filtering by and through Russian news agencies and online news portals is entitled to be an “indirect or circuitous movement of foreign news”, especially if Russian media outlets are acting as interpretative instances. The results also could be read as another example of transitive or filtered worldviews on foreign news events, comparable to existing relationships between India and the UK, France and the variety of former African colonies. Moreover, the findings could be integrated into the contentious debates on globalization and the importance of geo-linguistic imperatives.

By his study **Igor Prusa** takes another step towards a progressive decentering by drawing his attention to the Japanese media landscape. Through a critical discourse analysis he focuses on the mechanisms and interrelations of media and political scandals in the context of corruption. Hence, he discloses a set of universal and culture specific characteristics of Japanese scandals, as a media nation denoted by geopolitical proximity and a concurrent cultural distance. By including aspects of human agency as well as structural settings the political scandal case of Ozawa Ichiro is exemplified and indicates the contentious interdependence of the media and the political power system where the notion of truth is being marginalized irrespectively of western or non-Western contexts.

In her essay on the connections and disconnections of research communities in communication studies **Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz** scrutinizes the juxtaposition of research milieus often demarcated in national terms. The professional meta-reflection proposed here is informed by a historical viewpoint. By focusing on disciplinary development and generations of researchers the essay aims at tackling the transnational influences between scientific communities. Moreover, an exploration of the usage of rather recent concepts such as transnational or globalized communication revealed different understandings and denominations

between and within communities due to basic theoretical assumptions or disciplinary backgrounds. Thus, the essay depicts the fluid and fragile structure of research milieus and stimulates discussion about the benefits of a profound self-reflexion on future conceptualization in communication studies.

**Sarah El-Richani's** essay on "*Comparing Media Systems in the West and 'beyond'*" critically revises Hallin and Mancini's seminal work "Comparing Media Systems" and reflects on previous attempts of adapting the proposed framework for comparative research on media systems. The author argues that uncritical attempts of fitting example under the framework might not exploit the potentials of advancement in theory building. It is also the empirically-grounded analysis of media systems beyond the confines of the West which informs about the blind spots, adds potential and unconsidered features and thus, transforms existing models. Thus, the essay stimulates discussion about the ways of adaptation in theory building and the importance of detailed regional knowledge in "de-Westernization" efforts.

In her fieldwork report **Nidzara Ahmetasevic** offers insights into her critical survey of media assistance projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What moves into focus here are the abovementioned disparities of Western claims and local needs in the highly disputed interrelation of media and democratic development. Different experiences with independent media and the lack of communication and trust between internal and external actors and factors influencing post-war reconstruction are only two elements which consequently may lead to incommensurable perspectives towards media assistance projects. The article stimulates further debates on both the requirements of researchers in international communication as well as on the rather pragmatic hurdles researchers have to overcome when they immerse into conflict-laden "peripheral" places.

The power of comparative research in international and intercultural communication is an underlying subject to the discussion in **Lea-Sophie Borgmann's** paper in the graduate section. Her contribution is framed by the discourse of global media ethics. Based on the assumption that journalism and media have to be investigated within a global framework, she discusses the importance and possibility of the evolution of media ethical principles and their universal applicability. Dominant approaches within this rather classical field of journalism research, the author argues, reflect again the bias of Western academia. Her explorative study reveals similarities and differences in the ranking and interpretation of journalistic ethical standards by German and South African journalism students. Borgmann discusses her findings within the framework of a normative theory of *protonorms*. Moreover, with the South African concept *ubuntu* she incorporates an axiological philosophical model derived from non-Western thought as a relevant category into her discussion of a culturally sensitive analysis of media ethics beyond Western-centric conceptualizations.

## Outro

As reflected by the contributions above for us it seems to be rather appropriate to appreciate a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches. Against possible claims of scientific arbitrariness we are basically conceptualizing global communicative relations as “entanglements” following Shalini Randeria’s approach of “entangled histories/modernities”. Therein global relations are understood as mutually co-constructed social, political or communicative demarcations by oppression or appreciation as well as presence or absence as possible *modi operandi*. In doing so the inevitable juxtaposition of the meshed “Self” and “Others” in global communication processes requires an often missed sensitivity and a presumably still neglected or omitted awareness towards peripheral, non-eurocentric perspectives on global, international or intercultural communication, as strongly claimed above (cf. Randeria 1999; Conrad and Randeria 2002).

Conclusively, in our perception De-Westernization as an interrogation of a prevailing self-centered epistemological status quo in current communication studies will neither depict “the rise of the rest” as threat nor sympathize with an all too simplifying idea of anti-globalization or indigenization nor represent an all encompassing denouement.

What we are purposely encouraging is a dedicated, theoretical and empirical engagement with the global margins, due to the obvious inequalities and disparities in global communication *and* communication studies.

Above all, these indisputable imbalances left us with what the Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen in a similar context coined as “global doubts” (Sen 2000). So in sum our primary concern on global media and communication is a redistributive approach at political as well as scientific levels nurturing a more equality oriented, a more de-westernized alternative to the common understanding of globalization – within a so called alter-mondialization frame.

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International and Comparative Communication Studies of Kai Hafez, established a platform of tremendously inspiring exchange and hopefully helped to shed some light upon the still debatable questions of “de-Westernization”.

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## **Authors / Guest Editors**

*Anne Grüne is research assistant at the chair for International and Comparative Communication Studies at the University of Erfurt. She holds her master’s degree in cultural studies, journalism and English language and literature from the*

*University of Leipzig. In her current research project she comparatively investigates processes of cultural transfer in television entertainment in Germany and Egypt focusing on the (g)local contexts of production, representation and reception of adapted television formats within the framework of cultural globalization. Her field of research interest refers to globalization and cultural theory, popular culture, cultural and media sociology.*

*Email: anne.gruene@uni-erfurt.de*

*Dirk-Claas Ulrich is doctoral student at the chair for International and Comparative Communication Studies at the University of Erfurt. He graduated from Otto-Friedrich-University of Bamberg and holds a master's degree in Information Systems with an emphasis on digital media. Besides issues related to the conference his research interests include Globalization Studies, deliberative democratic theory & the global public sphere, and United Nations Studies, especially media descriptions and the legitimacy (crisis) of UN-institutions.*

*Email: dirk.claas.ulrich@gmail.com*