Towards Cosmopolitan Media and Communication Studies: Bringing Diverse Epistemic Perspectives into the Field

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Why Academic Cosmopolitanism?

The field of media and communication studies increasingly witnesses perspectives that push for more diversity and inclusion of epistemic perspectives in recent years. 'Academic cosmopolitanism' (Beck, 2006; Boczowski & Siles, 2014; Ganter, 2017; Ganter & Ortega, 2019; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014; Waisbord, 2015) is one of many concepts at the heart of the debate that questions who gets to speak for the field and shape its contours in an increasingly globalized and interconnected academic world. This debate calls for re-conceptualizations, deconstruction and transformation to push conversations on inclusion, diversity and merit to move beyond the Western perspectives of media and communication studies towards suggesting concrete fields of action.

Different concepts within the scholarly meta discourse acknowledge the 'geopolitics of knowledge' (Walsh, 2007) and its influences on the possible knowledge we can make. Varying in tone, reformative and radical calls have shaped the debate towards normative inclusiveness and building a worldly open discipline. The distinct concepts have their own premises: *de-westernization* focuses on moving beyond the Anglo-American and Eurocentric epistemic and analytical views (Curran & Park, 2000). The concept *internationalization* (Thussu, 2009) or *deep internationalization* (Badr et al., 2020) focuses on the open approaches towards establishing representative knowledge from the entire world. In recent years, the debate on imbalances in the field of media and communication studies have gradually moved from the subdisciplines international communication, and cultural studies towards more dominant fields. *#CommunicationSoWhite* (Chakravartty, Kuo, Grubbs, & Mclwain, 2018; Hirji, Jiwani & McAllister, 2020) reveals and discusses structural asymmetries for exclusion or inclusion of scholarly voices. These multi-faceted debates inspired further conversations on structural privilege and marginalization in our field (Ng, White & Saha, 2020; Rodriguez, Dutta & Desnoyers-Colas, 2019). The debate on academic openness and diversity of epistemic perspectives takes place across the world, sometimes in more localized non-English contexts (Suzina, 2020; Wiedemann & Meyen, 2016); one example is the collective stir that happened after calling for more cosmopolitanism in German-language media and communication studies (Badr et al., 2020).

As the contributions in this special section confirm, adopting academic cosmopolitanism combines intellectual and structural critique towards academia and aspires to create common spaces with room for differentiation. At the individual and educational level, academic cosmopolitanism encourages an open-minded and impartial attitude towards scholars and their work and seeks dialogue on even grounds (Ganter, 2020). In that sense it is a complementary response to the long ongoing calls for de-westernization, which have trailed off repeatedly, to actively foster scenarios where the invisibles are not talked *about* but *with*, in the scholarly community.

In this special section we aim at creating more sensibility for cosmopolitan media and communication studies, as we believe that it is an imperative to shape our field towards more openness as 'research thrives in diversity, and not in the singular dominance of certain methods, theories, or approaches' (Tandoc Jr., Hess, Eldridge II., & Westlund, 2020). The structural conditions have led to invisibility of entire research landscapes (Ganter & Ortega, 2019), and nuanced linguistic terrains because of the prevalence of English language as *lingua franca* (Suzina, 2020) and difficulties to create and sustain a horizontal dialogue among communication scholars' communities (Averbeck-Lietz & Löblich, 2017). In that, we are well aware that regardless the ample critiques, post-colonial practices prevail (Ganter & Ortega, 2019, 2020; Carpentier, Ganter, Ortega, & Torrico Villanueva, 2020) and dominant modes of knowledge production continue to determine our field. With this special section, some of the epistemic consequences this unilateral legitimacy has for our field are underlined and confirmed that in the long run, it will be necessary to open up towards new epistemic paths to create more possibilities to shape inclusive and open communication and media studies.

A Critical Scholarly Response

Instead of lamenting the situation, we consider this Special Section a practical scholarly response to contribute to opening media and communication studies without dismissing the structural conditions leading to the inequalities that triggered calls for academic cosmopolitanism in the first place (e.g. Badr et al., 2020; Ganter & Ortega, 2019, 2020). In the spirit of a more open discipline, beyond a Westernized 'methodology trap' (Hafez, 2013), we choose using the concept academic cosmopolitanism as a helpful way of thinking to create more inclusive networks, as an open approach to scholarly exchange, and to foster the 'epistemic transformations' (Walsh, 2007) by adding more canons, enriching our repertoire and methodological toolbox.

This Special Section *Towards Cosmopolitanism in Media and Communication Studies* engages with the ongoing conversation on diversifying perspectives in the field through theoretical and empirical work, teaching and being a researcher. We believe that this form of critical knowledge production can be a transformative act from within academia. This Special Section is an endeavor to practice 'mindful inclusiveness' towards marginalized geopolitical, methodological, and theoretical perspectives (Rao, 2019). By discussing the idea of academic cosmopolitanism, its chances, obstacles and limits, the three articles help understand the roots of the dilemma academic cosmopolitanism reflects, and they help unravel structural issues that foster the imbalances and talk with, rather than about, different scholarly communities and realities.

All three contributions engage in the conversation on academic cosmopolitanism through offering critical reflexive research from around the globe. The contributions

showcase possibilities of shaping cosmopolitan answers to the urgent questions on how the current imbalanced research scene influences media and communication studies.

In their Original Article "Covid-19 from the Margins: Crafting a (Cosmopolitan) Theory" Silvia Masiero, Stefania Milan and Emiliano Treré actively contribute to the epistemic transformation of our field by offering an illuminating theoretical construct that includes systematically marginalized voices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their contribution explains by establishing a research agenda around the concept of "data injustice" how the pandemic only exacerbated the global inequalities by further silencing marginalized narratives. To the end of establishing a detailed analytical lens, the authors develop and utilize three key concepts; data at the margins, data poverty and datafication of antipoverty programmes to map out a research agenda that is sensitive to global inequalities and emerges from theorizing data from the margins. The authors apply cosmopolitanism as normative and explanatory dimension throughout their work. In that line, they argue that taking a cosmopolitan perspective on the COVID-19 pandemic does not only push a moral agenda towards justice but enhances their work conceptually to better investigate fields and realities where Westernized epistemologies and ontologies no longer adequately narrate. With that Masiero's et. al's article could serve as example for future studies that aim to follow the objectives of academic cosmopolitanism, and to construct theories from the Global South, which is itself an original act of knowledge production (Mamdani, 2018).

In their essay "A Global Communication M.A. Double Degree Program: Conceptualizing and working through diversity" Byron Hauck and Joseph Nicolai take a different approach to examine the pitfalls and challenges of academic cosmopolitanism in curriculum building. Using autoethnographic accounts, the authors reconstruct the Global Communication MA Double Degree Program between Simon Fraser University and Communication University of China, a Canadian-Chinese academic exchange across two universities. Offering their own accounts as critical, but also privileged white, Canadian-based observers of the programme, the authors investigate how international structural formations in higher education can reproduce asymmetries and pose limitations for attempted "cosmopolitanization". Discussing the structural and the cultural constituencies, the article adopts the transcultural political economy approach to question the mutual and reciprocal openness in the students' transformative experiences. Contrasting positions in the authors' subjective encounters the article reconstructs several sites where positionality shapes the pedagogic expectations and outcomes. The authors conclude that embracing a cosmopolitan transformation of academia across professional, linguistic and economic barriers needs more endurance and efforts than just welcoming positionalities. Their essay confirms that academic cosmopolitanism needs workable frameworks and resources that ensure its viability beyond good will and short-lived enthusiasm.

In the third essay "Towards cosmopolitanism in German academia? Shedding light on colonial underpinnings of communication research in a globalized world" Camila Nobrega Rabello Alves and Débora Medeiros draw from their experience as researchers to urge for decolonization of media and communication studies as important angle within cosmopolitanism. With that they echo increasing calls which criticize hierarchy of knowledge and discuss resistance against power structures in shaping knowledge. The essay asks about the possibilities to develop a decolonial cosmopolitanism beyond the Euro/US-centered notions of internationalization. Inspired primarily by wide literature on decolonializing knowledge, the essay draws on subjective experiences in the German academic system and showcases the consequences of a lack of academic cosmopolitanism on the micro-level of an academic system. Inspired by ethnographic work, the authors sketch out four "vignettes", or personalized encounters in German research institutions which expose the limits of practices and discourses in the mainstream German academic context. These personal encounters, re-narrated through snippets, illustrate how exclusion through hierarchical power practices such as the use of dominant language in daily communication works in real life and the consequences they carry for productivity and the sense of being welcome in a system. The authors call on the urgency of tentative steps for countering unequal access to funds and other resources and ensuring more horizontal forms of knowledge production in our globalized world. The essay pointedly creates awareness that hierarchies need to be made visible, otherwise the concept of cosmopolitanism will remain trapped in logics of tokenism and exploitation that mark many of the current transnational relationships in global academia. The authors' sensitivity to micro-practices opens the door for developing a theorization of techniques of subtle exclusion and how to counter them.

A Starting Point for a Conversation!

To this day, calls for academic cosmopolitanism have remained widely aspirational. This special section is proof of this dilemma, and at the same time showcases potential ways forward towards cosmopolitan media and communication studies. Including diverse perspectives from three continents in this Special Section- showcases the width of the canvas of academic cosmopolitanism. The three texts exemplify ways forward to understand, reflect on and practice academic cosmopolitanism with the aim to open media and communication studies up; to inform and shape scholarship; without losing sight of the structural conditions that cause the inequalities and invisibilities that shape academia until today. However, once more it has become evident that working under the umbrella of academic cosmopolitanism requires considerable access to resources, time to constructively engage with our surroundings (Wessler, 2020) and the affordances to be able to reiterate the call to practice more 'knowledge humility' (Echchaibi, 2020). This entails accepting vulnerability, uncertainty and transformation. This underscores Nobrega Rabello Alves and Medeiros call for "decolonial cosmopolitanism" as a mandate for scholars, to question the structures, potentials for agency, and to reflect on their own positionality.

We had hoped for more entries from within marginalized geographies and positionalities for this special section. However, the production process itself confirmed that we cannot expect for these changes to happen out of a sudden, but we can advocate for what Helen Margetts (2019) has described as "tiny acts" that sum up and trigger over time much needed small transformations. These include individual everyday practices such as reading, referencing and networking practices which foster diversified cooperation, and institutional practices such as offering proof reading support for faculty not as comfortable with English as lingua franca, creating spaces for dialogues across silos to explore different pathways academic cosmopolitanism could take and displaying support for cosmopolitan research agendas und curricula through actions in terms of evaluation and recognition (Badr et al., 2020; Ganter, 2020; Ganter & Ortega, 2019).

The three contributions in this special section therefore are thought off to further the conversation of the role, functionality and limitations of academic cosmopolitanism as a way to dialogue about the future of our field in research, teaching and academic life more broadly.

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