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Debate

A Critical Dialogue on the Cosmopolitan Turn in Communication Studies

Interventions by Cherian George, Winston Mano, Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo and Ylva Rodny-Gumede. A conversation convened by Melanie Radue, Carola Richter, and Anke Fiedler[1]

Abstract: This discussion engages with the collective volume *Cosmopolitan Communication Studies: Toward Deep Internationalization*. The editors and contributors call for a cosmopolitan reorientation of communication studies that transcends enduring Eurocentric biases. The proposed cosmopolitan approach advocates for inclusivity, context sensitivity, and the recognition of non-Western knowledge production as intellectually generative rather than derivative. By foregrounding comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives, the volume seeks to make deep internationalization a practical and ethical academic endeavor. The dialogue with scholars from around the world underscores cosmopolitanism not merely as methodology but as a mindset—aiming to reduce epistemic violence, resist authoritarian instrumentalization, and foster genuine global interconnectedness in the production of communication scholarship.

Keywords: cosmopolitan turn, communication studies, internationalization, universal values, Afrokology, media ethics

[1] This article is based on a transcript of the panel "Critical Dialogue on the Cosmopolitan Turn: Cosmopolitan Communication Studies – Toward Deep Internationalization" conveyed within the "Communication in Post- and Neo-Authoritarian Societies" Working Group at the IAMCR Annual Conference in Singapore in July 2025.

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Carola Richter:
This discussion is titled "A Critical Dialogue on the Cosmopolitan Turn" and refers to the recently published collective volume "Cosmopolitan Communication Studies: Toward Deep Internationalization."[2] The editors—Melanie Radue, Christine Horz-Ishak, Anna Litvinenko, Hanan Badr, Anke Fiedler, and myself—are delighted that four esteemed colleagues from different parts of the world agreed to critically engage with our approach.
Before they share their perspectives and feedback, let me briefly introduce the concept of the book and outline our cosmopolitan approach. Calls for the de-Westernization of communication studies have been ongoing for at least 25 years. Yet, we continue to observe a strong Eurocentric or Western perspective in much of the scholarly work produced today. For example, most leading journals and publishers are based in the West, English remains the lingua franca of academic discourse, and Western case studies continue to dominate these publications.
We still encounter epistemic violence—manifesting as the othering or exotification of contexts that are perceived as non-mainstream. At the same time, we often overlook the wealth of insights that could be gained by engaging with diverse experiences from around the globe. Political communication research predominantly compares similar Western cases—Germany, UK, USA, France—creating a self-reinforcing Eurocentric knowledge production cycle. Non-Western contexts are studied only to confirm or challenge Western normalized theory, rarely are they studied as knowledge producers themselves. The rise of populism, the spread of hate speech on social media, and the repression of journalism are not new phenomena for many in the so-called Global South. Yet, such experiences have often been neglected or marginalized in academic research, only gaining broader attention once they become prominent in Europe or North America.
In 2019, we founded a network of mainly German-based scholars concerned about the slow pace of de-Westernization in communication studies and acquired funding from the German Research Foundation.[3] Each of us works on topics—and collaborates with colleagues—beyond Western Europe's borders, whether in Russia, the Middle East and North Africa region, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, or Latin America. We noticed a growing interest among students and doctoral candidates in these regions, as well as a desire for new epistemological approaches. At the same time, many scholars in Germany remain hesitant to embrace postcolonial perspectives. Some perceive these approaches as exclusive or difficult to access, while others simply lack the contacts, knowledge, or guidance needed to integrate them into their research and teaching.
In response, we sought to develop a more inclusive approach—one that encourages all scholars, especially those in Western contexts, to broaden their perspectives by engaging with global, international, and transcultural experiences. As Silvio Waisbord has noted, "cosmopolitan scholarship is not reduced to being hospitable

[2] Richter, C., Radue, M., Horz-Ishak, C., Litvinenko, A., Badr, H., & Fiedler, A. (Eds.) (2025). *Cosmopolitan Communication Studies. Toward Deep Internationalization*. Transcript.
[3] Badr, H., Behmer, M., Fengler, S. et al. (2020). Kosmopolitische Kommunikationswissenschaft: Plädoyer für eine „tiefe Internationalisierung" des Fachs in Deutschland. *Publizistik*, *65*, 295–303. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-020-00576-6.

to 'international' research. Instead, it is a globalized perspective that critically considers world differences to probe theoretical arguments and define empirical questions."[4] In this sense, cosmopolitanism is also a mindset.

As a consequence, we believe scholars should continuously incorporate a multitude of perspectives into their knowledge production, placing greater value on migrant and international scholars within Western universities. We also argue that context is crucial for understanding any communication phenomenon, as well as the development of media and journalism. Scholars should therefore pursue comparative, context-sensitive and interdisciplinary approaches. Research agendas and regional focuses should be expanded and adapted accordingly.

This may not sound entirely new. However, in our book, we aim to offer practical guidance on how to adopt a cosmopolitan approach within various subfields of our discipline. The book chapters cover topics such as media ethics, AI in journalism, fact-checking, media systems, crisis communication, and media governance, among others. In each chapter, the authors outline a cosmopolitan and inclusive research agenda.

Ultimately, we hope to convince many more researchers to recognize that a cosmopolitan approach is both necessary and achievable in all areas of communication studies—and that it can be truly inspiring. At the same time, we wish to keep the conversation on de-Westernization alive by advocating for genuine, deep internationalization grounded in a cosmopolitan mindset. And this conversation is part of it.

Melanie Radue:

Gladly, we have four experts who enthusiastically accepted our invitation. Each of them will give an impulse note on their perspective followed by a short Q&A.

It is my honor to introduce our panelists. I am happy to welcome Cherian George, who is professor of media studies at the Hong Kong Baptist University. Then we have Winston Mano, who is a professor at CAMRI at the University of Westminster, United Kingdom. He will be followed by Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo, who is associate professor at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in the United States. Our last speaker is Ylva Rodny-Gumede, who was the head of the Division for Global Engagement and professor in the School of Communication at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa and has become the Executive Director Advancement at the University of the Free State in South Africa in late 2025. Welcome, everyone, and please share your feedback with us.

Cherian George:

It is wonderful that the book is published open access. I cannot wait to assign it to my students. I will limit my comments to one particular chapter that spoke to my

[4] Waisbord, S. (2015). De-Westernization and cosmopolitan media studies. In C.-C. Lee (Ed.), *Internationalizing "International Communication"* (pp. 178–200). University of Michigan Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv65sxh2.11, pp. 185–186.

own current interests, which is the chapter written by Barbara Thomass on global media and communication ethics.[5]

In recent years, I have been very concerned about certain trends that I see both within academia and beyond that try to conflate de-Westernization with a sort of moral relativism. And I am concerned that the human rights baby should not be thrown out with the bathwater of Eurocentrism. Barbara Thomass's chapter addresses this point, and she concludes with this somewhat tentative claim: "the demand for equality of cultures does not exempt us from taking a stand when universal values are affected."[6] I want to take off from there and perhaps recommend an even firmer position: that our field should clarify and uphold certain normative first principles.

In my view, there is no better grounding for these first principles than universal human rights. That is, everything should start from the conviction that everyone is inherently equal in dignity, which entitles them to certain basic rights, including freedom of expression. These rights are spelled out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and have been elaborated on over the past 75 years. These words are not just enshrined in international human rights law as well as in regional instruments like the European Human Rights Charter, but is also very much a part of one of the democratic world's newest constitutions — that of South Africa — and many other democracies around the world. To pre-empt the idea that this is really just a Western document, I should point out that most countries in the world have signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including China. Singapore, where we are gathered, is one of a handful, less than 20 countries, that have not signed the ICCPR.

When advocating universal human rights as a common ground on which we can build cosmopolitan research, I am not suggesting that this simplifies various moral conundrums or presents easy answers to various communication dilemmas. Even if we agree on these human rights principles, we will still need to think about, for example, how to balance various rights, such as between privacy, free speech and dignity. This framework does not settle contentious issues. As first principles they are a baseline for reasoned deliberation, not final answers.

Of course, we see clashes of worldviews, and Barbara Thomass in her chapter highlights quite rightly the controversy around 20 years ago over the Prophet Muhammad cartoons published in a Danish newspaper. She considers in her chapter that this was a classic case of a clash of civilizations. I think a more considered analysis of that event suggests that it is actually a clash *within* civilizations.[7] The societies that blew up in protest were mainly Muslim-majority societies that were internally torn between more secular and fundamentalist positions, and where political actors were using the offensive cartoons published in Denmark as an injustice symbol to act out certain domestic grievances.

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[5] Thomass, B. (2025). Global media and communication ethics. The tension between universalism and cosmopolitanism. In Richter, C., Radue, M., Horz-Ishak, C., Litvinenko, A., Badr, H., & Fiedler, A. (Eds.) (2025). *Cosmopolitan Communication Studies. Toward Deep Internationalization*. (pp. 53-66). Transcript.

[6] Ibid., p. 64.

[7] Bilgrami, A. (2003). The Clash within Civilizations. *Daedalus*, *132*(3), 88–93.

I think this is a key point to note: we should avoid essentializing the non-West just as we tend not to essentialize the West. In the same way that it does not occur to us to equate Donald Trump with the USA, it should not occur to us to assume that there is some essence in a Muslim country or a Chinese country and so on. Non-Western countries are as internally contradictory as Western societies and we need to understand this and not claim that there is some kind of *zeitgeist* that is dominant within any of these societies.

This issue of not assuming that human rights or democracy are Western is deeply personal to me for various reasons. One is the fact that many of the activist circles that I work with in Asia face accusations by their own governments that when they speak up for democracy and human rights, they are importing Western values. And I hate to see academics playing along unwittingly with this kind of authoritarian propaganda, claiming that the desire among non-Western individuals and communities for more freedom and more human rights is somehow inauthentic. I could not disagree more strongly.

This, of course, is a complex time to touch on this issue because we are in an age of democratic backsliding and also an age of extreme hypocrisy. So, there is Israel's war of genocidal self-defense, aided and abetted by Western democracies, which of course could only be possible in a moral universe where Palestinian lives are valued at a small fraction of White ones. So, I think the state of the world today on the one hand makes it obvious why we need to ground our field in principles of equal dignity, but for the same reason this is a climate in which those claims find it very difficult to thrive. And I think this makes it all the more important that we grapple with the complexities of basing our work on people's equal rights.

Carola Richter:

Thank you for highlighting this very important perspective on avoiding culture-specific relativism in cosmopolitan communication studies. When we made this book and tried to address German scholars, we noticed that among them and other Western scholars, there is indeed a tendency to interpret decolonizing approaches as identity politics and cultural relativism. And in doing this, they dismiss the intentions of de-Westernization altogether. What would you answer those people when they say, well, it is only identity politics, we do not need to subscribe to a cosmopolitan approach? What would you answer them also in regards to how authoritarian regimes instrumentalize identity politics to avoid criticism on their own shortcomings?

Cherian George:

I am not quite sure about the German context, but I can understand why there is a certain suspicion toward decolonization and so on. I am not the first to say this — Paula Chakravartty and Srirupa Roy mentioned this in an essay a few years ago[8] — but I do think that there is some instrumentalization of de-Westernization by those

[8] Chakravartty, P., & Roy, S. (2023). Questioning "De-Westernization". *Political Communication Report,* Fall(28), http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/refubium-41239.

who are using it to defend the status of their own nation states. For example, when rising powers like China and India are rightly criticized for their human rights records, you will find not only representatives of those regimes but also fellow academics protest that these criticisms are coming with a Western bias. So, unfortunately, some of that suspicion is deserved.
I think this is something we need to sort out within our de-Westernization circles. Personally, I am impatient with the idea that national prestige should come into it at all. I do not think it should matter to us as academics whether a certain country looks good or bad based on sound analysis. But this does happen.

Carola Richter:
When you look at a context more familiar to you, like the Indian, the Chinese, or the Asian context more broadly, do you see some kind of specific values that are pushed for in communication studies? Is there a different kind of universalism stemming from, for example, Asian values?

Cherian George:
The way I have always thought through this is to hold on to these first principles about equal dignity but to recognize that priorities may be different depending on context. This is even the case within the West. For example, there are major differences in how Germany versus the U.S. prioritize free speech or dignity or privacy. These are major legal as well as ethical debates. And I think those debates are perfectly legitimate. Similarly, you should expect to see differences between liberal democracies and the non-West over prioritizing what rights are most important in a given situation for cultural or historical reasons.
The other big issue is the tension between individual rights and group rights, which is a genuinely complex, fraught issue that ethicists and lawyers and others are debating. There will be these differences. But I would be extremely wary of allowing our awareness of these unsettled issues, which are really around the edges, to fester into such doubt about core values that we slip into a total moral relativism. There must be certain moral bottom lines that we can all agree on.

Carola Richter:
Thank you very much. We hope to continue this important discussion. Now let us move on to Winston Mano and his intervention.

Winston Mano:
I want to start by congratulating the authors for embarking on this urgent and important project. I believe the cosmopolitan turn is much needed in our field of media and communication studies. We always need to reflect and ask questions about what it is that we are doing in research and how we are teaching. And, I want to agree with my colleague Cherian George that it is always very important to think about why we are doing this deep internationalization at this time. The idea of emancipation, the idea of putting the value on human freedom is very important. I come to this from the African context, referring to one of the things that is emphasized in the book, the

idea that context matters. I am particularly concerned about the scornful disregard of the African context as an area where theorization can take place. Together with my colleague, professor viola milton at the University of South Africa, we approached this by recovering one of the frameworks by Dani Wadada Nabudere[9], a Ugandan historian and infusing it with other elements. As a result, we came up with Afrokology, a participatory transdisciplinary and African-centered epistemological approach for our field. We are glad that this approach is also quoted and foregrounded in the book.

One of the key things about Afrokology is the idea that the Global North should also embrace incompleteness. We borrow from the anthropologist Francis Nyamnjoh[10] the idea that incompleteness is not a weakness, and that incompleteness, once you embrace it, can open up other perspectives. Afrokology is also about conviviality, which is again accommodating the outside in. It is about relational accountability, and much more, it is about pluriversality. I liked the earlier discussion about universality. From an African point of view, we are saying that it is unapologetically African-centered in its starting point. Why do I say that? For a long time, Africa has been seen as the place which can only incorporate perspectives from outside. This is a problem, because the idea that Africa itself is without knowledge is something that we are pushing back on. In the *Routledge Handbook of African Media and Communication*[11], we projected Afrokology as a heuristic tool, not as a theory or methodology, but an impactful tool that can be used to both Africanize and decolonize. Afrokology affirms the urgent capacities of African communities to unsettle and reset epistemic boundaries that have too long governed communication and media theory and practice. We, therefore, welcome what our colleagues from the Global North are doing to unsettle and to push back on insular global North-centric perspectives. In our Afrokological push back on othering and for pluriversal inclusion and reform of the Global North perspectives, it is very important to do two things. We affirm self-assertion and reclamation, but also transformative knowledge within and beyond the Global South. That means that we are not only arguing against the Western gaze, but we are also up against the things that are not going well within our own Southern contexts. So, it is a two-pronged kind of approach. And we ask searching questions about African lived experience. How can we understand and center it in what we do? How can existing African knowledges be foregrounded in what is relevant to our own futures? And we also ask questions about epistemic sovereignty of African communicators at a global level. In doing so, we align it with others such as Walter Mignolo, Francis Nyamnjoh, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, who is based in Germany at the University of Bayreuth. Ndlovu-Gatsheni[12], for example, has famously said that some of the Western theorizations have become barriers to

[9] Nabudere, D.W. (2006). Towards an Afrokology of knowledge production and African regeneration. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies, 1*(1), 7–32.

[10] Nyamnjoh, F.B. (2015). Incompleteness: Frontier Africa and the Currency of Conviviality. *Journal of Asian and African Studies, 52*. DOI: 10.1177/0021909615580867.

[11] Mano, W. & milton, v. c. (2021). Afrokology of Media and Communication Studies: Theorising from the Margins. In W. Mano & v.c. milton (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of African Media and Communication Studies* (pp. 19–42). Routledge.

[12] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2015). Decoloniality as the future of Africa. *History Compass, 13*(10), 485–496.

transformation and modernity. We need to always question the canons. So, Afrokology joins hands with other knowledge pathways, including Cosmopolitanisms, in pushing for the emancipating voices from the margins. We are always trying to foreground pluriversality as a way to understand knowledge as interconnected and that this idea is linked to reciprocity, to respect and relationality, not dominance or assimilation. Yet, we are looking at the African knowledge context to actually stand on its own and to be part of this pluriverse of knowledges.

Transdisciplinarity of knowledge and aspects of relational accountability in the knowing process are very important for us. I invoked Afrokology to analyze, for example, the behavior of big technology companies, which are operating transnationally.[13] Just like Cosmopolitanism's quest for deep internationalization, Afrokology pushes for epistemic justice and communication rights in a broader sense. In regards to Afrokology and cosmopolitanism, I think there is a lot of connection between what the book did regarding the cosmopolitan turn, and what we did in the Afrokological heuristic tool, only that our starting point is the African context. And if you read them side by side, one gets a very rich and perhaps a persuasive new dimension of doing media and communication studies if they invoke both approaches.

I will leave you with an example of global journalism ethics.[14] When you look at what is foregrounded as global journalism ethics, you find that most of the global ethics are actually Anglo-Saxon in origin and orientation, yet presented as the "global" ethics! If we want to be serious about "global" ethics, we need to recover values of ethics from Asia, from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and put them there in the pluriverse and select aspects that can enrich and inform our notion of "global ethics". Only this would make it global, not just "global northern."

Melanie Radue:

Thank you for pointing out the aspects of incompleteness and also how you very precisely look into the African context to deconstruct knowledge production. How can we incorporate this as a research framework to approach a certain context?

Winston Mano:

Incompleteness exposes our inadequacy and is not a weakness but a good basis to hunger for more knowledge. One of the key things I like about the book is asking the question, how do we do this, and thereby going beyond the existing notions of cosmopolitanism. You read very closely Silvio Waisbord's and Claudia Mellado's views.[15] And you are quite right that there has been some kind of taken-for-grantedness that once we incorporate some knowledge from another context, we have resolved it and are cosmopolitan. However, the how-question demands that we should

[13] See Mano, W. (2023). Big Tech's Scramble for Africa. An Afrokological Critique. In W. Mano & L. El Mkaouar (Eds.), *Media Ownership in Africa in the Digital Age Challenges, Continuity and Change*. (pp. 15-30). Routledge.

[14] See Mano, W. (2022). Decolonizing African journalism ethics: From Afriethics to Afrokology. In N. Miladi (Ed.), *Global Media Ethics and the Digital Revolution* (pp. 251-265). Routledge.

[15] Waisbord, S., & Mellado, C. (2014). De-Westernizing communication studies: A reassessment. *Communication Theory, 24*(4), 361–372. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12044

actually start by questioning methodologies and re-evaluating theories and canons for their usefulness and relevance. We should not unnecessarily invoke canons that are outdated. It ought to be about relevance. I say this as a long-term teacher. Sometimes I have students looking at a democracy topic. They always start by thinking of Habermas. He is a great scholar, critiqued by others, but we should first of all think about our own context and lived experience and whether it makes sense to apply such a theory.

At the same time, some theories are not well contextualized. For example, our colleague Colin Chasi[16] has pointed us to another reading of Ubuntu. The concept of Ubuntu is often limited to a simple reading of "let us be nice to each other". But there is a counter-hegemonic reading of Ubuntu, too. Nelson Mandela had to go to prison for 27 years to stand up for human rights, to stand up for what he thought was right. This is also a version of Ubuntu which is hardly told at a global stage. We need to unpack such silences in theorization. I believe that this, as an Afrokological approach, would deepen internationalization.

Melanie Radue:

You said earlier, that there is also an epistemological interconnectedness. When we emphasize this interconnectedness, how would that support what you call a recovery of values and ethics?

Winston Mano:

I believe stronger epistemic interconnectedness as proposed by cosmopolitanism and Afrokology could provide benefits for our field. For example, in peace journalism or environmental journalism, our epistemologies and interpretations remain limited, so much that we have simply regurgitated untested norms, approaches, case studies and methodologies, especially from the West, and that has not fully worked. Once we incorporate knowledge from other contexts in ways that result in new questioning and evidence, we can actually add value to discussions of, for instance, the environment. One example is that we should learn about stewardship from the so-called forest people or indigenous people. When we are looking after the environment or how to understand some of the climate issues, we should never ignore the people who have lived in those environments for many millennia. Modernist thinking was that these are people who arbitrarily cut trees and kill animals. But actually, there was a way in which they were living in harmony with those animals and trees. To recover discarded indigenous knowledges and practices is very important. That can also change our practice and mindset. And when you look at NGOs, most of them are urban-based, most of them are West-centric in their approaches. We need to disturb the kind of settled thinking that is going on in existing approaches. Pushing boundaries and bring the other in is the only way to engender new knowledge and to push ourselves to think differently. And incompleteness is a strength, like I said.

[16] Chasi, C. (2021). *Ubuntu for Warriors*. Africa World Press.

Melanie Radue:
Thank you, Winston. We move on to Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo and his input.

Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo:
In light of cosmopolitism, I am interested in the entanglements between the North and the South and how ideas travel. As part of my work on journalism research, I came across research by Kai Hafez on media ethics in Arab countries.[17] In his study, he came to the conclusion that there seem to be some universal values. The question is, how did these values travel around the world? Do the values emanate from Europe and travelled to the Middle East, or did they travel from the Middle East to Europe? And he argued that the question of privacy is a more important question in Arab countries than it is in Western countries because of the insistence on reputation and human dignity among the Arab countries. But our contemporary understanding of the value of privacy is framed as an imposition from the West. To understand this better, we need to look at the context and the history behind all of these concepts.
I took that with me and that was a starting point when I studied the codes of ethics in five English speaking West African countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, The Gambia, and Sierra Leone).[18] My reasoning for studying those codes of ethics was that all of these codes looked exceptionally good on paper, but there were so many journalistic violations in these five countries that have adopted the codes. So, why do they write codes of ethics themselves and not follow them? I realized that they were not being practiced because context was missing. One context detail was: who wrote these codes in the first place? I learned that one German foundation (The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung) was the promulgator of many journalistic codes in Africa or the Global South more broadly. By their definition, spreading the same universal values everywhere was key. But it did not work out, because, for instance, the understanding of truth by those West African journalists differed from the German Foundation. Let me explain this to you with a practical example: I come from Ghana and from a tribe. And A is my father, who is a chief in my town. If he farts in public, I do not say it, no matter how good I am with the truth. It becomes a no-go area. Truthfulness means different things in different cultures.
I remain in Africa, and I pick another example. Assuming X and Y are my children, and they have been fighting. And X came home and said, I will beat up Y if I see him. And as a father, I am shocked, of course. When Y comes home, would I tell him everything that X had said about him because I am a truthful father? The answer is "No". So, my explication of Western truth will be to tell him all the bad things that have been said. But is that peaceful? Will that help the situation? In an African context, telling the truth would look differently: I would tell Y when he comes home that X is really, really mad at him. I would tell him to avoid X for a while and ask him to

[17] Hafez, K. (Ed.) (2003). *Media Ethics in the Dialogue of Cultures. Journalistic Self-Regulation in Europe, the Arab World, and Muslim Asia*. Hamburg.
[18] Serwornoo, M. Y. W. (2019). An Examination of Journalistic Codes of Ethics in Anglophone West Africa. *Journal of Media Ethics, 34*(1), 29–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2018.1564313

leave this place until things calm down. Rather than repeating the threats from X, I would find another way of telling him the seriousness of the situation.
I am not asking for massaging the truth. I am asking for an intelligent way to appreciating people's understanding of what truth is as a concept. And truth is just one of those concepts embedded in cosmopolitanism. There are several other concepts that we need to question, revisit their roots in context and examine the challenges of normative assumptions of universalism that we hold about them. Because when we do that, we will be questioning their presumed adaptability to different cultures. Maybe, we can then also demystify the alleged universality of values as they do not seem to exist as propagated in various contexts or are not identified with. By doing so, we would also reveal the tensions and contestations that we have in different societies about specific concepts.
I will give you one last example on differences in appreciation of concepts. During my first week in Germany as a PhD student, I was running to catch the train all the time. While my colleagues saw that as a lack of respect of punctuality, I simply had a different understanding of time. I was not used to taking a train that is so on time. I had all my life to wait for the car for hours and not being sure when the transport was going to arrive. So, I find this whole idea of being on time very difficult. And I do not think that this is a weakness. We adapt values to our life on a daily basis and in doing so we also contest them. Over time, I got better.

Carola Richter:
Can you outline on how to operationalize this kind of relational thinking to set up concepts of journalism ethics, for example? Are there some practical steps that we could take?

Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo:
Yes, I think there are practical steps. The first is to encourage societies to have a voice in argumentation, in epistemology, in writing, and to accept their positions as positions that really matter. We must be willing to listen! When I started my PhD in Germany, I wanted to study why journalists select news, do some quantitative studies and go. But after reading a few books, I chose to look at my subject from a critical theory perspective and postcolonial studies. And I remember my first presentation: I nearly collapsed because one professor said, this is brilliant, but we are not going to work with this, because this postcolonial theory is not really theory yet, it is not ready yet.
The best way to deal with this is to open up a space to listen first and to see why we can look at a phenomenon from a different perspective. There is the need for people not to prematurely dismiss things that are new to them. The first step is to understand how we can build things together with scholars who have a different approach. Rather than looking at them and ticking boxes of whether they fit to established approaches, we could have a conversation first and try to build things together, even if their approach was very different from our epistemology.

Carola Richter:
It needs an openness and a certain mindset to do so. Thank you.

Anke Fiedler:
We hand now over to Ylva for her insights.

Ylva Rodny-Gumede:
I am actually not going to talk about media. I am going to talk about higher education. As much as I am a Professor of Communication Studies, in my day work, I work in university management and used to head up the Division for Global Engagement at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa, which meant that I was in charge of all our international students, incoming and outgoing, all our international partnerships, and all international protocols. When people asked me what I do, I used to say, anything with 'int' in front of it, that's me. When I was asked to take over the international office at the university, I had huge reservations. I did not think that the way that we do these internationalization projects, whether we connect our researchers or our students, always has a grounding that comes from the perspective of actually guarding human rights, guarding perspectives that are necessary for economic growth, prosperity, individual growth. Why don't we put money into, for example, educating Zimbabwean doctors in Zimbabwe, rather than doing that in South Africa or somewhere else in the world? But I think I have been put to shame many times. I think if we do not have deep internationalization programs, including what has become known as internationalization at home, we cannot advance, we cannot renew ourselves, we cannot create an idea of global citizenship. At the same time, I do think that we cannot create better citizens in any context if we do not put money into engaging on a global scene and providing those opportunities.
If I look at cosmopolitanism, if I look at ethical foundations for global engagements, I think that we need to talk about global citizenship. This needs mutual respect and cultural openness, and we need to think about moral obligations that transcends borders. When I left for the airport to fly to Singapore, driving through Johannesburg, there were huge pro-Palestinian protests, exemplifying the need for understanding the world that we live in, in particular because of all of these new sorts of geopolitical shifts that are happening. A huge part of an internationalization program of a university is about connecting researchers and students to experiences that in concrete ways reflect the diversity of the world. We know that cross-border student and staff mobility is really important. At the same time, we know that there are huge disparities here, as there is the sense that the Global North sets the framework for these partnerships and that the West or Global North and the Global South are rarely on an equal footing with the same kind of financial capacity. That is something that we need to change!
We need to put much more effort into global curriculum development. When I did my PhD at SOAS in London, my supervisor, the late Annabelle Sreberny, coined the idea of the local in the global and vice versa. And I remember having huge discussions with her about what this means. Does that forge a global curriculum? What is the local that we speak of and how strongly foregrounded is it? And it is exactly what

you talked about, Michael. How do we enforce these things? For us as universities, it is really about operationalizing internationalization and global engagement. How are we equipping students to start to think and act globally? And how do we cultivate an ethical responsibility and openness to diverse worldviews? How do we do that within our international partnerships, within our research structures, within student exchanges and so on. It is very complex and needs to be comprehensive: it is about curriculum design, it is about faculty development, about providing training for them to think on these levels, it is how we structure global partnerships, it is about student engagement. Internationalization, in my view, is not only a strategic imperative, but a moral one.

Anke Fiedler:
It is really great to hear how you started to translate the conceptual framework of cosmopolitan education into practical terms. Regarding this roadmap you just outlined, we all know that roads can be very bumpy. And I was wondering, what obstacles do you see when it comes to putting cosmopolitanization into practice? Is it just a matter of persuasion and convincing people? Or is the real challenge the manifest nature of systemic structures?

Ylva Rodny-Gumede:
I work with a lot of people who are not necessarily academics. They are practitioners and the way that they have thought about internationalization, global engagement, even cosmopolitanism in international studies is really engaging. One of the persons who started very early on writing on these things is Jane Knight, a Canadian scholar. She has set out definitions of internationalization in higher education,[19] and a lot of people are building on that now, and I think it is quite interesting. When I talk about the strategic plan as a university we often talk about, and use words such as global footprint, global partnerships and in our own Southern African context the importance of a pan-African and Global South outlook, and the need for decolonization. Even teaching and learning has a clear understanding and articulation of a decolonization of the curriculum. And there are practical ways of implementing this: at the University of Johannesburg for example where I was the head of the Division for Global Engagement, we introduced several MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) that we opened up to all our partners. These were also compulsory for our first year's students and open to all students and lecturers at the university. One of these courses is called African Insights, which is about politics, literature, history of the African continent. As South Africans during Apartheid, our government cut us off quite literally from the rest of the African Continent and the idea that we would be part of Africa. It was not even on the conceptual map. So, the "AI" African Insights course is to deal with this and to reconnect us with our own history and our own geographical locale.
The other "AI" model is artificial intelligence, where the focus is on how we decolonize this space. In South Africa, this is a pressing issue for us. For example, when I

[19] Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 8*(1), 5-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315303260832

travel and go through the e-gates and scan my passport, I – as a White person – have absolutely no problems going through, no matter what nationality is stamped in my passport. But when Michael – as a Black person – goes through, he is not going to have the same experience. Can't read his face, they say. Why? We need to build AI tools and its capacity for interpreting diversity.

Melanie Radue:
After you have laid out your different perspectives, we would like to have a last round in which all of you may react on what the others have said. We also ask each of you to pick out one point that you want us to remember from this conversation.

Cherian George:
Provoked by various things that have been said, I would understand internationalization, literally crossing national borders, as a practical and necessary vehicle for cosmopolitanization. But internationalization and cosmopolitanization are not the same thing. People can internationalize, in the sense of superficially connecting with people from other nations, without at all becoming more cosmopolitan, without questioning the hold that national identity has on them. And if that identity is intolerant, exclusive, and all-consuming, ugly things happen.
Let's also remember that every nation state is internally diverse. Avoid unwittingly elevating certain institutions or individuals as if they represent the whole. For example, when Global North universities internationalize in the name of being cosmopolitan, who are their partners? Are they actually organic, representative institutions within their own communities? Or are they bastions of privilege?
On another note: let's try to compare apples with apples. Michael, I loved your presentation, but I was not completely persuaded because I sensed that there was a comparison between familial and community values in the Global South with public institutional values in the Global North. And I am allergic to this sort of reasoning because my own government does something similar, highlighting the fact that Asian values include respect for elders and using this observation to justify suppression of political discourse that is critical of the state. There is a difference between norms appropriate for families and norms designed for public life in a democracy. I would hate to live in a country where the way we treat our parents is used as a model for the way we treat our governments.

Winston Mano:
I want to highlight that any theory to have value and duality should relate to realities on the ground. I am very happy that Cherian is pushing towards understanding the kind of issues about power in society and the contestation of it. What we are trying to do with Afrokology is also to speak to the non-media aspects of unequal relations in the world and the way some societies are maintaining hegemonic control over others. I urge us to rethink and push forward the norms of cosmopolitanism, to think about how, for example, it speaks to the politics of the day, it speaks to the issues of power, to the inequalities that we have in the world. Then theory becomes very relevant! People will seek it, people want to use it, and people want to

understand and contribute to making it work. That is why I said that I am very encouraged by the way the book is making an entry into this. For example, the chapter on "Prefix journalism"[20] actively tries to understand what is happening in academia and why people attribute prefixes to journalism such as development journalism, advocacy journalism, etc. By asking questions and also doing well to engage with what may be the answers we can reimagine the dialogue. So, I welcome the decolonial turn but I am also saying, let's actually use it as a basis to ask questions to connect with existing knowledges and to push ourselves to think about new frontiers that can engender emancipation at a local level and at a global level.

Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo:
To me, the question of normativity is very important. The first time I thought about cosmopolitanism was when I was working for the BBC World Service in London and they call the newsroom 'Global Newsroom.' During my first day at work in the Global Newsroom, I had to report on Burundi. I was supposed to be the Africa expert even though I am from West Africa and did not even know exactly where Burundi was on the map. And the whole conflict surrounding Burundi was quite strange to me. And then it dawned on me that the BBC's idea of cosmopolitanism was having a guy with black hair in the newsroom as well as a white guy. It was just ticking boxes and not understanding culture. To me, cosmopolitanism actually means that somebody is willing to listen, not just fulfilling a quota. And I look forward to the day where cosmopolitanism will mean our willingness to blend properly, especially with values, and to provide definitions and knowledge of knowing where they are from. Until we get to that point where we are willing to learn about other people and not prematurely dismiss their ideas, we will not be cosmopolitan.

Ylva Rodny-Gumede:
In an earlier conversation we talked about whether cosmopolitanism was too soft a word or trying to be too pleasing as a concept and what it is meant to include. We talk about conviviality in anthropology. These are words that come across as caring. There are words that we think of as having a very positive connotation such as integration, diversity and/or multiculturalism. But we must not be afraid of using words of violence. Colonialism was nothing but violent. And people still live violent lives. So, we should not stay away from conversations that have elements to it where softspokenness and soft words are not always the best to capture the full gamut of what we want to say. To be truly inclusive we need to accommodate all the feelings and expressions that colonialism evokes.

Melanie Radue:
Thank you so much to all the panelists. Let's conclude with a brief summary of our discussion. We agreed on the meaning of values and universal norms for

[20] Radue, M.; Eckerl, T.; Hahn, O.; & Illg, B. (2025). Global media and communication ethics. The tension between universalism and cosmopolitanism. In Richter, C., Radue, M., Horz-Ishak, C., Litvinenko, A., Badr, H., & Fiedler, A. (Eds.) (2025). *Cosmopolitan Communication Studies. Toward Deep Internationalization*. (pp. 169-186). Transcript.

cosmopolitanism, particularly universal human rights. At the same time, we learned that contextualization without essentializing is crucial. We must ask questions and be willing to learn. I think these are basic features that every scholar should apply to their academic work. This makes cosmopolitanism a basic mindset for everyone if the aim is to prevent epistemic violence and power asymmetries. And it is only against this backdrop that we can argue against authoritarian speech that seeks to instrumentalize the concept of de-westernization to repress one's own people.

Anke Fiedler:
Another key point that emerged during this discussion was the importance of knowledge production. Contexts outside the West must be part of the global knowledge production process, just as the West claims to be relevant to it. Otherwise, we cannot experience the interconnectedness of knowledge or the need to recover ethical values from all regions of the world. This means we must constantly question our actions. We have to ask ourselves how, where, and with whom we conduct research. Only then can we acknowledge our shortcomings and pursue new frontiers for local and global emancipation. I think these are good take-home points. I hope we can follow up on this in future discussions.

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