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De-Westernisation

Key concept paper

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De-Westernisation: Key concept paper

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1. Executive Summary

This paper outlines the main debates surrounding De-Westernisation, which addresses global imbalances in the creation and distribution of academic knowledge. In addition to providing a comprehensive overview of the field, the working paper suggests further steps in order to enrich a global set of philosophical, social and political theories. The paper foregrounds East and South Asia, as well as Africa, in its consideration of non-Western philosophical traditions.

The following observations can be summarised:

- De-Westernisation concerns all stages of the research process; across professional academic cultures, theoretical and methodological perspectives and the choice of research subjects.
- The main criticisms revolve around a dominant elitist Western axiology and epistemology, with synchronous neglect of indigenous philosophical traditions. The paper points to some of the historical reasons for why indigenous concepts remained under-researched.
- The current state of research is characterised by countries of the global South remaining at the 'periphery', while the 'hegemonic centre' is largely occupied by Northern America, Europe and Australia. Funding inequalities create persistent asymmetrical structures in academic cooperation, with research largely initiated within Western countries. This rift is further deepened by deploying Western approaches with little localised adaptation or the integration of local frameworks.
- Suggestions to overcome those imbalances comprise: the improvement of academic infrastructures in countries of the global South, including cooperation in research, journal and publishing activities; the development of 'indigenous' instruction textbooks; the acceptance of regional differences versus universalism; and more self-reflective academic cultures.

2. Introduction

The primary purpose of De-Westernisation as a concept is to provoke an analysis of how global knowledge is generated. It suggests an *epistemic shift* away from ideas of parochialism or Eurocentrism, which have long defined world-wide research, and an integration of ideas stemming from historical and current intellectual debates within countries of the global South.

Although academic disciplines, such as communication studies, social and economic sciences or political studies have been taught since colonial times, the contributions of non-Western scholars have remained marginally recognised. We have witnessed the global dissemination of arguments originally created for a particular historical socio-economic context and an intellectual tradition applicable to a narrow set of societies in Europe and North America (Kassab, 2013, Mignolo in interview with Mattison, 2012, Thussu, 2009, Waisbord, 2015). This process, also referred to as an ethno-sociology of metropolitan society, includes arguments usually framed as universal (Connell, 2007).

The end of the colonial empires has seen calls for an emancipation and integration of knowledge surge from different parts of the globe. De-Westernisation can be understood here synchronously as a co- as well as a counter-debate, because it wants to achieve both – to complement the existing body of knowledge and to question it. At the same time, it denounces the ambiguity of removing ‘things Western’ without specifying which elements should be removed (Wang, 2011).

This key concept paper aims to outline and critically discuss the main scholarly debate(s) surrounding De-Westernisation. It seeks to provide a brief but comprehensive overview of the main discursive fields, and to find out how new insights can be developed, enriching – in the classical sense – a global set of philosophical, social and political theories. It also asks if De-Westernisation is necessary – and if it is possible.

This paper is divided into four sections.

The first section outlines what De-Westernisation denounces. Parallel to this, it pursues a conceptual clarification of the wide range of key terms used in the De-

Westernisation debate by scholars in different parts of the world, and how they relate to each other. In addition, this section integrates a short historical treatise.

The second section provides a critical analysis of the current research system, which outlines the reasons why countries of the 'global South' are still part of the 'periphery' and not of the 'hegemonic centre' of academic research (Wallerstein, 2004, 2006). How to move on from here will be suggested further in the paper.

Subsequently, the attempts to actually 'de-westernise' current academic research bring together a broad variety of alternative discourses that show the theoretical and empirical implementations of the debate.

Finally, the last section suggests a variety of conclusions.

3. Clarifying the concept: What is De-Westernisation?

De-Westernisation can be understood as an ongoing process and intellectual shift. The definition of the term is not clear-cut, as it currently comprises a wide range of meanings, such as 'an act of cultural defense, an anti-imperialist strategy to nurture academic sovereignty, a call for embracing an analytical perspective that reflects a de-centered, dynamic contemporary world' (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014, p.363). De-Westernisation challenges and repositions 'the West's dominance (real or imagined) as a conceptual 'force' and representational norm' (Bâ and Higbee, 2012, p.3).

A de-Westernisation of academia or global knowledge production in general is suggested in all areas of the research process – it encompasses 'the subject of study, the body of evidence, theoretical and methodological perspectives, research inquiries, and academic professional cultures' (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014, p.363). Special emphasis lies on non-Western cases in order to strengthen conclusions and to guarantee the generalisability of findings and arguments.

De-Westernising academia can be approached from both Western and non-Western perspective. Western scholars strive for more cross-cultural inclusiveness and subaltern perspectives to enrich research and curricula, so that it does not fall prey to provincialism through the experience of few, untypical countries. Contrary to this, non-Western academics try to reorient their intellectual work against Eurocentrism, foreign-imposed categories and ontology. They emphasise outlining alternative

frameworks and tailor interpretative paradigms in order to understand local social processes (Curran and Park, 2000b, Dissanayake, 2009, Ray, 2012, Breit et al., 2013, Waisbord and Mellado, 2014, Waisbord, 2015).

A recent attempt to focus on colonialism and world inequality stems from Wallerstein who in his world systems theory divides the world into a centre, semi-periphery and periphery to describe existing power relations (Wallerstein, 2004, 2006, see also Gunaratne, 2009a). The dominant influence of Western academic research as the centre is strongly criticised by Gunaratne. He speaks of an 'oligopoly of social science powers' (Gunaratne, 2010, p.474, Gunaratne, 2009b) which in his view is led by the US and the UK but includes also France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, and Italy as second tier. This oligopoly determines to some extent the existing 'European universalism' (Wallerstein, 2006, Gunaratne, 2009a). Gunaratne claims that this entails a culturally bound worldview based on ideas of the Greek and the Enlightenment periods.

In consequence, this can lead to a lop-sidedness in research approaches, resulting in a defined selection of topics, operational definitions, methods and data interpretation according to Western axiology and epistemology, the neglect of indigenous literary and philosophical traditions, a dominant elitist perspective with an absence of minority points of view, and an uncritical adaption and imitation of Western-origin contents, for example notions of agency and personhood (Alatas, 2006, Gunaratne, 2009a, Waisbord and Mellado, 2014, Chen and Miike, 2006).

Two examples illustrate the implications of these concerns. Firstly, the understanding of the professional role of journalists differs worldwide; for instance, while journalists in Western countries usually regard themselves as information gatherers or watchdogs, journalists in Africa or India prefer more interventionist concepts of national developmental journalism or activist journalism (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, Goswami, 2014). The second example relates to socio-economic developments. Societies in the global South did not experience a transition from feudalism to capitalism, therefore applying Marx or Weber with little reflexivity might miss the point.¹

¹ It needs to be noted here that terms like 'feudalism' and 'capitalism' cannot be applied without recursively using the terminology shaped by Marx or other Western authors. This should be no problem in itself, as an essential view on non-Western societies with culture-relativist approaches cannot be considered an alternative.

Within disciplines such as communication sciences or psychology, Levine summarised the predominant bias that ‘applies only to white, upper-middle class, Christian, American young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 who attend major research universities’ (Levine et al., 2007, p.206).

Gunaratne’s strong stance evoked criticism which mainly focuses on differentiating the debate without putting his major assumptions into question. Ray (2012) finds it necessary to criticise the de-Westernisation discourse as it is practiced. Although he understands it to be motivated by a postcolonial impulse of cultural decolonisation, Ray sees no need to hastily reject theories of Western origin, as they are labelled in this manner ‘through an accident of geography and history’ (Malik, 2002). The ‘Western’ ideas of the Enlightenment were influenced by Islamic learning, as the Greek had been influenced by the East. Moreover, it would be a mistake to assume that Western models cannot explain non-Western situations, and only indigenous models could. For instance, the ancient Indian Sadharanikaran model of communication does little more than to pack ideas of Western models into Sanskrit (Adhikary, 2009, 2012, 2014, Ray, 2012).² Criticism also relates to an unwanted essentialism of Asian and other cultures which show large differences within societies. Finally, the old de-Westernisation complaint about a positivist quantitative empiricism is no longer valid as many qualitative methods have found a way into academic debates. Such criticism has emerged from within the Western academic community.

Having outlined some theoretical foundations of de-Westernisation, the following paragraphs will explain a few terms relevant to the debate. Among these are multiculturalism, Eurocentrism, Pluriversality, European and universal universalism, post-colonialism, Re-Westernisation, feminism, and Subaltern Studies.

Under the umbrella label Southern Theory, Connell (2007) put together a diverse range of alternative sociological ideas linked by their origin in the periphery. ‘Southern’ refers not to categories of state or society, but to relations such as authority, exclusion and inclusion, hegemony etc. between the actors in the centre and the

² Sadharanikaran, a Sanskrit term, might be translated into English as ‘generalised presentation’. It stems from ancient Hindu poetics. Translating to communication theory, it denounces the attainment of sahridayata (a state of commonality or oneness) by communicating parties. It speaks of actor and audience who are in a communicative relation and achieve commonness of a shared experience. The Sadharanikaran model incorporates common terms from Western communication studies, such as sender, recipient, noise, coding, decoding, and message, as well as adding elements such as context or moods and emotions (Adhikary 2009).

periphery. One of Connell's major criticisms of western academic work claims that categories produced in the metropole do 'not dialogue with the *ideas* produced by the colonised worlds' (2007, xi). Southern Theory emphasises theory-generation and social thought happening *within* the South, as Connell attributes an equal intellectual strength to ideas produced there. However, to explore them in their entirety, one needs to take into account that different forms of theorising are based on different grounds. Among the many slightly arbitrarily selected and connected theories are the Iranian Gharbzadegi, the Indian Subaltern Studies, or the African philosophy. Others are missing, for example certain ideas of East Asia. Despite all this optimism about voices from the periphery, an engaged coherent 'Southern' scientific community remains rather absent.

De-Westernisation can be put into practice by de-linking several fields, such as the level of decision making related to economic control, or a religious-political and epistemic de-linking (i.e. in Islamic scholarship; Mignolo-Interview with Mattison, 2012). This struggle for the power over knowledge systems belongs to postcolonial theory as part of postmodern approaches. Postcolonial scholars often stem from indigenous or diasporic backgrounds (Hall, Bhabha, Spivak) and ask for the representation of marginal or subaltern groups as well as empowering forms of hybridity, which allows a rewriting of former nation-centred imperial grand narratives into decentric and diaspora ones (Hall, 1997). A related concept is polycentric multiculturalism.

One of the major issues during the colonial times was a lack of recognition of non-Western ideas, and their branding as 'primitive', as, for example, by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (Connell, 2007). While the term Decolonialisation was used from the 1950s onwards, decolonity appeared only in the 1990s. The latter term was coined in the global South and refers partially to an end of economic coloniality in abandoning the ideology of constant growth and development (Mignolo in interview with Mattison, 2012).

Identifying De-Westernisation as a necessary requirement for the development of a more inclusive theory of the humanities has led to a formulated criticism of the status quo of academia. This plight has been expressed via several metatheories, the most influential among them being Eurocentrism and Orientalism.

Eurocentrism is 'a set of doctrines and ethical views derived from a European context but presented as universal values' (Wang, 2009, p.360, Wallerstein, 2006). Some thinkers consider Eurocentrism as an ideology supporting Western economic exploitation by legitimising European expansion (Kassab, 2013, Gunaratne, 2010). Often Eurocentrism sees its base in inheriting a rational philosophy from Greece. Europe is considered unique and superior.

A version of Eurocentric perspectives survives and reappears as **Re-Westernisation** (Mignolo-Interview with Mattison, 2012). In a rather political manner Mignolo puts forward the idea that some local actors in non-Western localities tend to act subconsciously as agents of re-Westernisation, as they still believe in the superiority of the West without being aware of it. This accusation extends partially up to speaking of 'collaborative colonialism'.

Another well-known and fundamental part of the de-Westernisation discourse was **Orientalism** which was seen as an instrument of imperialism and colonialism, as a Western construction of knowledge about understanding Islam and the Middle East/Asia, or as a justification for a syndrome of beliefs and theories affecting all areas of the Orient (Macfie, 2014).

Several scholars engaged in this debate; however, it was Edward Said who achieved the biggest impact with his book 'Orientalism', in which he analyses the discursive dimensions of British and French colonialism in the 19th century (Said, 1978).³ This theory distinguishes fundamentally between Occident and Orient. Said pointed out that Western societies and values, as well as Western/Judeo-Christian concepts of individualism, rationality, atomism, libertarian democracy, or the free press, are presumed to be superior to Eastern cultures or concepts, like the Buddhist idea of no-self and middle-path democracy (Gunaratne, 2005), or the philosophy of ongoing change, no-selfness or unity between individuals and cosmos (Gunaratne, 2009b). Politically, it is a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said, 1978, p.3).

In Said's 'Orientalism', the discursive construction of the 'Other' appeared as a manifestation of power relationships. It shaped 'a discourse which represents the

³ Orientalism originally referred in 18th/19th century either to a scholar studying the Arab world or Asia, as well as to a style of art objects commonly associated with Eastern nations (Macfie 2014).

exotic, erotic, strange Orient as a comprehensible, intelligible phenomenon within a network of categories, tables and concepts by which the Orient is simultaneously defined and controlled. To know is to subordinate' (Turner, 1994, p.21). Stereotypes emerged of the rational energetic Western versus the lazy and unpredictable Oriental, the individualism and personal autonomy versus the absences of civil society and autonomous individuals. The Orient appears as primitive, strange, exotic, mystic, and sensual. A whole continent like Africa was equated with traditional thinking and superstition (Kassab, 2013, p.327).

The outcome of the debate regarding Orientalism and its criticism allowed Turner (1994, pp.103-4) to show what was learned from this approach: academic self-reflexivity and self-criticism with writings about Islamic or other areas improved after Said's book; cultural essentialism was reduced. Science is not automatically neutral by nature. Turner suggests focusing on sameness instead of difference between cultures. He points to the influence of globalisation, which brings a transcultural flow of ideas and therefore allows a shift away from ethnocentricity in Orientalism.

Resulting from Orientalist criticism was **Occidentalism**, a counter movement which describes a 'rejection of everything to do with the West and an implicit rejection of the legacy of modernization' (Turner, 1994, p.7), which included, for example, in the realms of Islamic knowledge attempts to establish Ibn Khaldun⁴ (1332-1406) as the 'real' founding father of sociology.⁵

If Orient and Occident are to be understood as fixed geographical entities, a simple demarcation of 'East' as the Orient and 'West' as the Occident is destined to fail. Following Maxwell (2011), the East-West civilisational slope can be considered shifting as (in Europe) everyone looks down on one's Eastern neighbour while feeling inferior to the Western one. The 'West' therefore becomes a geo-cultural or geo-political framework (Bâ and Higbee, 2012). 'West' as 'East' remain subjective designations of symbolic geography which are usually connected to a political agenda. At the same time, they can be understood as imaginative geographies, because the

⁴ Ibn Khaldun lived in Spanish Andalusia and Cairo. He can be considered as the most important scholar in history and sociology of the Muslim world. In his major work 'Al Muqaddima', he tried to explain the rise and fall of Arab dynasties, which included an analysis of civilisation and culture.

⁵ In this context, Ibn Khaldun's work faces criticism that it was not systematically developed further, and that it was unsuitable for explaining industrial urban societies (Turner 1994).

borderlines between East and West are mostly set by human decision-making, not by facts (Said, 2000). This can blur the complex history of human development.

Criticism of the concepts of Orientalism and Occidentalism came with the emergence of **globalisation**, as it blurred the boundaries between clear-cut autonomous and separate oriental and occidental cultures. The term **Postmodernity** also appears often in this context, referring to the extension of commodification processes of everyday life and the impact of mass consumer cultures in relation to dominant ideologies, whereby a distinction between high and low cultures are less and less easy to make out (Turner, 1994). **Postmodernism** once again philosophically emphasises otherness, difference, and local meanings, in contrast with tendencies of universalisation, as well as patriarchal, rationalist and hierarchical structures of Western modernism. It is often joined by anti-colonial and feminist discourses. One of the fields where this gains importance is history. Here, earlier tendencies of an essentialist universalism in history writing based on Marxist-historicist polarities, such as Asiatic v. Western or change v. static, need to be understood in the same manner, in which there are no peoples 'without' a history, but simply histories that European historians have failed to record (Said, 2000, pp.355-356). Criticism on Postmodernism relates to a perceived narrowness in establishing its own canon of knowledge, and hastily discrediting other points of view as modernist or essentialist (Connell, 2007).

Another general complaint is directed at **Essentialism**. It presupposes that 'certain entities, in this case analytical and theoretical frameworks, are absolute and permanent' (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014, p.367). This applies to Western scholarship as well as to non-Western criticism which assumes Western ideas as stable and fixed, essentialising all Western scholarship in an undifferentiated way as positivist, rational, and based on principles of self-interest.

Against essentialism and European universalism stand the ideas of **Pluriversality** (Mignolo, 2013) and **universal universalism**, proposed by Wallerstein (2006) and others (i.e., Gunaratne, 2005), which will be outlined later.

4. Why is the global South regarded as 'behind'?

The increasing awareness of Eurocentrism has led to a shift towards more multiculturalist approaches. However, despite active de-Westernisation efforts,

globalisation and new network technologies connecting place, space and time, the global South is far away from gaining a voice as powerful as that of its Western academic counterparts (Thussu, 2009). Why, despite many efforts, the effects remain limited can be understood by a closer examination of imbalances in research interests and practices, the academic infrastructure, distribution of power and resources, as well as ideology and political systems.

Firstly, modernisation theory has a lasting ideological effect on countries of the global South. It gained significance in the 19th century with thinkers like Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim or Max Weber, who focused on the changes in social norms and relations during the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society. Later, in the 1960s, the emphasis was on progress and development comprising economic growth, breakdown of primary kinships, urbanisation, secularisation, or democratic political institutions. This eurocentric model of social development has been considered a universal standard for humanity to follow (Fukuyama, 2009), and has been criticised for being ‘ahistorical and contemptuous of local histories and knowledge’ (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014, p.366).

A second point is the way research is put into practice. If research is carried out in non-Western areas, it is often carried out *about* the region, but not *with* the region, with scholars originating and anchored in the researched locations (Jaber and Richter, 2014). As research often originates outside the region (via area studies, cross-cultural studies), the general research infrastructure shows an apparent lack of South-South cooperation in the social sciences and humanities (Schlumberger, 2010), a lack of interdisciplinary exchange of theoretical alternatives to Eurocentrism (Wang, 2009), as well as a lack of cooperative efforts within regions, such as the formation of a pan-Arabic research association in the MENA region. There was little agreement on standardised terminology for a coherent regional research approach (Hammami, 2005).⁶ With MENA, the first serious effort occurred only in 2013, when Areacore (Arab-European Association for Media and Communication Researchers) was founded – in Germany (Jaber and Richter, 2014).

⁶ Arab countries even failed to agree about a specific terminology due to the different linguistic colonial heritages of English and French, which also hindered the shaping of an Arab ‘scientific community’.

In terms of resources, a look at the universities reveals technical inequalities. Not every research institution in the global South has access to and operative experience in 'sophisticated quantitative tools their Northern colleagues take for granted', for example the statistics software SPSS (Ray, 2012, p.245).

The presence of Western-educated scholars complicates the situation further, as those potentially 'captive minds' (Alatas, 1974) might create academic dependency, 'trapped in their unquestioning acceptance of the Western concept in the name of modernization', warns Cobbah (1987, p.329). It is not uncommon that learned Western approaches are applied without much adaptation, for example, midrange theories and quantitative methods, as Western knowledge is accepted as superior (Gunaratne, 2009a, Jaber and Richter, 2014). At best, this imitation tests American communication theories in non-Western settings; at worst, 'foreign' categories with particular ontological and analytical distortions are insensitively applied (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014). This is also due to a lack of motivation of researchers who, for career reasons or otherwise, are too keen to borrow imported frameworks (Wang, 2009). Linked to this is the founding of offshore universities by US or European institutions, for example in the Arab countries of the Gulf.

If we look into another relevant academic institution – the publishing sector, Western-based publishers face allegations of being exclusive or practicing 'academic imperialism' (Gunaratne, 2010, p.489). The relevant Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), for instance, does not consider the very few 'peripheral' communication journals, with one exception (Asian Journal of Communication). In addition, there is not a single journal covering the Arab media research (Jaber and Richter, 2014). Even if contributions from the South reach international journals, they fail to impact central research agendas (Wasserman, 2011).

Besides everything mentioned so far, political systems have considerable influence on the ideology and practice of academic systems. Some countries regard social sciences and media studies as sensitive areas in the (potential) interest of development and national integration – therefore it is probable that a certain form of control will be exercised (Jaber and Richter, 2014, Alatas, 2006).

5. What next? Some recommendations

Establishing a global knowledge system with equal access takes a long time. Presently, one of the major problems concerns how to 'connect different formations of knowledge in the periphery with each other' (Connell, 2007, p.213), and what would be polycentric and multidirectional, non-essentialised alternatives to Eurocentrism (Bâ and Higbee, 2012). A recurrent concern is 'how to modernize without imitating the West and losing one's soul?' (Kassab, 2013, p.338). Not all reactions to cultural colonialism will contribute to a truly global knowledge creation, such as cultural self-depreciation and self-glorification, Anti-Westernism and anti-openness (Kassab, p.327)

Approaches to global media inequalities will avoid an understanding of the world in terms of centres and peripheries (Wasserman, 2011). Spivak created the notion of 'critical regionalism' (Rao, 2010), which sees the local as dynamic and embedded within larger geographies. This could create new networks in the South.

Walter Mignolo coined the term 'pluriversality' to overcome the limits of a Western cosmologist's universality, which was 'dismissing the fact that all known civilizations are founded on the universality of his [sic] own cosmology' (see also with Mignolo, 2013, Willems, 2014). Mignolo sees the entanglement of several cosmologies as the only realistic way. However, pluriversality as well as universal universality are regarded with scepticism as each of these concepts brings up a new set of complications (Wang and Kuo, 2010).

To overcome these deficits, firstly it is suggested to provide for an enormous growth in the institutional infrastructure in the global South in order to produce social knowledge among universities and peer-reviewed journals (Arjomand, 2008, Connell, 2007, Gunaratne, 2010). It is also proposed to provide textbooks in indigenous languages like Urdu or Malaysian to replace English as the dominant instruction language (Gunaratne, 2010). However, this has not been translated into praxis, as national academic communities might be even further marginalised by taking this step.

In addition, the suitability of geocultural-regional classifications has been put into question as well (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014). There had been suggestions to strengthen the field of area studies in order to set a focus for a de-Westernised research (Jaber and Richter, 2014). However, it is unclear whether area studies are an adequate way to truly de-westernise research, as they not only neglect the

differences within large regions ('Africa'), but also might lead to a balkanisation of scholarship instead of a more cosmopolitan approach in which problems are ideally examined from a global perspective, drawing from various media and political systems (Waisbord, 2015). The perspective of area studies complicates a dialogue across regions as it tends to encourage parallel debates and academic insularity.

A higher degree of self-reflexivity among Western scholars is also necessary (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014, p.365) and it is suggested that criticism of Eurocentrism is a necessary part of the social science curriculum (Gunaratne, 2010). Findings should not be assumed to automatically be generalisable (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014).

Questions of content concern the reframing of issues grounded in Western theories against positivist and universalistic pretensions, and the search for a link between different non-Western approaches (Wang and Kuo, 2010). Gunaratne (2010, p.486) proposes the exploration of axial Asian philosophies and indigenous literature for potential models, and the creation of new comprehensive theories linked to (complex) systems theories. For example, due to their normative base, religious conceptions of communication differ strongly from the secular-individualistic and scientific premise (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014). Ideas about how knowledge, humanity, or identity is shaped can vary widely, as can the relationship between media and media populism (Waisbord, 2015). In journalism, while the Western world emphasises coverage about disaster, business and environment, Eastern approaches could focus on development journalism and agriculture reporting (Ullah, 2014). Also, UNESCO model curricula are treated cautiously because of their normative (Anglo-American) content. There is criticism that warns of an overestimation of the potential to de-westernise, as over centuries cultural assimilation and globalisation have brought about hybrid (academic) cultures (Fourie, 2007).

Local debates (i.e., development journalism) should be related to global debates, and conversations that go beyond local interests and address global questions could be encouraged (for example, globalisation of news practices, spread of infotainment, or the mediatisation of politics).

On a methodological level, **De-Nationalisation** needs to take place. The 'methodological nationalism' (Beck, 2007) prevails in areas like media policy, and

despite influences of globalisation, the 'nation' and a national political authority regulating media systems remain relevant concepts (Curran and Park, 2000b).

De-nationalising research can then integrate a wider range of voices and concerns. The national remains a major issue but is not dominating other formations (Iwabuchi, 2010). This often comprises 'national questions' limited within the boundaries of modern states (Waisbord, 2015, Wasserman, 2011). Comparative approaches can either implicitly test the conclusion of one country (like the U.S.) on others, or explicitly compare certain phenomena in two or more countries. A selection should take into account sufficient similarities between the cases, small N-comparisons, and more variation in the findings (Przeworski and Tune, 1970).

As news events are interrelated and journalism routines globalised, it should be carefully examined how local differences manifest themselves. A danger exists that cross-national research cannot use its full potential and remains a mere 'panorama of the field', outlining not a cohesive discipline with a shared theoretical base but rather fragmented approaches (Nordenstreng, 2009, p.255). Even so, this diverse range of experiences could make a rethinking of epistemological and methodological assumptions worthwhile (Wasserman, 2011).

6. Alternative discourses and their critics

6.1 Past discourses

A history of the contributions of non-Western scholars to social sciences would be too long to be outlined here comprehensively. Ideas about society stem from various religions of the world, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam. Among those scholars are the Arab Andalusian historian mentioned previously, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) and the Indian Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) with his non-violent resistance philosophy (Alatas, 2006, Gunaratne, 2010). But have those approaches, or more recent ones, such as **African Philosophy**, developed a sustainable base of knowledge?

Critics tend to point out that many of those ideas were not systematically 'developed over the centuries' into overarching meta-theories (Alatas, 2006, p.105),

which relate to the past 500 years. Another difficulty in integrating ancient theories comes from the rules for intellectual production in the present academic setting (Connell, 2007).

In the following, some of the main debates originating in the global South will be outlined to present the diversity and variety of the non-Western world. Examples from current debates among scholars from Asia and Africa will be given to highlight key concerns and controversies.

6.2 Present discourses

In order to establish a self-knowledge of global society, it is important to combine the broad range of approaches and theories about the world and society. This has been done in some cases, but it tends to remain in the case study design as non-Western regions have in part developed very different ideas from each other, rooted in deeply held local and regional beliefs and practices.

Few coherent theories from the global South have reached prominence, and often they are related to religious spirituality or actual socio-political movements. For example, in cinema studies 'Third Cinema' is a famous, explicitly anti-imperialist and polycentric cinema movement (Bâ and Higbee, 2012). However, with regard to the concept of media and democracy for instance, 'Southern' discourses did not achieve recognition in international academic circles (Fourie, 2007).

Kincaid (1987) and Gunaratne (2009a) provide a rather rough division of the main differences between Western and in this case Eastern ideas on communication, among them the independent self versus inseparability from a network or group, rationality versus emotionality, atomism versus holism, or control of nature versus harmony with nature. This illustrates, on a very general level, the distances that separate thinking patterns across the globe.

The discussion about Afro-/Asia-centricity adopted by some scholars runs the risk of ending up in another extreme, a 'deification' of Afro- or Asia-centricity (Tomaselli, 2003, p.427, Wang and Kuo, 2010, see also Dei, 1994). This can lead to an unwanted relaunch of essentialised ethnocentric cultural stereotypes, similar to Eurocentrism. Rejecting all non-Western approaches due to different basic values leads to auto-

Orientalism (or reverse Orientalism; Takahashi, 2007). Questions are posed if there is actually 'an African or Latin American or Arab identity' or philosophy (Kassab, 2013, p.336). The Japanese version of essentialising one's own culture is called *nihonjinron* tradition. It has its roots in the 1930s and rejects any assumed Western influences. Similarly, on the Indian subcontinent Adhikary suggests that de-centring the Western paradigm is not enough; he pledges strongly for a return to **Bharatavarshiya**, an ancient geo-cultural location that would include present day Nepal and India (Adhikary, 2014).

This overemphasis on one's own cultural roots has not achieved much success, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, indigenous theories are either similar to the case of Africa lacking in essential areas of life; or are marked with a 'Western-taintedness' (Ngomba, 2012). It is also suggested that today's social science development in the periphery cannot help but use concepts from the metropole (Connell, 2007). A third criticism relates to 'de-Asianising/de-Africanising' research as it is impossible to achieve a comprehensive understanding of global cultural flows with using only 'traditional' methods (Iwabuchi, 2010, p.404). As those three points make clear that Western concepts have to be integrated, Chen argues for a 'dialectical and dialogical relationship' (Chen, 2009, p.407) between Eastern and Western researchers, but also in the negotiation of dichotomies. To un-dichotomise, Chen points to yin and yang with their interpenetrating and interdependent relationship.

However, tendencies of a romantic and essentialist 'deification of **Afrocentrism**' (Tomaselli, 2003, p.427, see also Dei, 1994) in African academic research are countered pragmatically by scholars who argue against judging theories based on their origin rather than on relevant criteria.

The following sections will present the discourses of two different world regions where ideas of de-Westernised academic knowledge production have triggered a particularly vivid debate. The world regions themselves are far from homogenous; they are exceptionally diverse. Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Arab world are not included as their contribution to knowledge production has not (yet) been studied as intensively as that of Asia or Africa.

Eastern Europe is geographically close to Western Europe. Although it is a part of political Europe, it has difficulty following many mainstream theories. One example

is the 'media-political complex' in the mass media, shaping public discourses (Curran and Park, 2000a, pp.14-15). The Arab world has a broad variety of thinkers, from Ibn Rushd to Ibn Sina or Ibn Khaldun, who influenced medieval European thinking (Kassab, 2013). Latin American thinkers also have some relevant ideas, but this continent is not the focus of MeCoDEM.⁷

6.3 Regional discourse 1: Asia

De-Westernising South Asian thinking after approximately 200 years of British colonisation is a challenging endeavour. Colonial structures are still present, directly or indirectly, in many subcontinental institutions and knowledge routines (Hanitzsch et al., 2010). Although South Asian philosophy provides a richness of ancient ideas stemming from Hinduism and Buddhism, only a few of them have been intensively explored for their value to the present, e.g., the Sadharanikaran model of communication (Adhikary, 2012). India's past was to a large extent shaped by the Vedas, the religious Sanskrit texts constituting Hinduism. From that period of Indian philosophy stems the discourse of Sankara (Jayaweera, 1988) or the dharma principle. A more recent surge was ahimsa, or non-violent resistance (Gunaratne, 2009a); the latest Subaltern Studies provided another one in the 1970s. The following paragraphs outline two of many thinking traditions which are relevant currently: Subaltern Studies and its particular application to journalism.

Subaltern Studies relate to movements 'from below' or 'from the bottom upward' and has risen to prominence first in India, and later in Latin America, since the movement was launched by Ranjit Guha in 1982.⁸ Among Western scholars, it is the best known Indian discourse and is subsumed within postcolonial studies.

⁷ An example that can be briefly mentioned here is Paulo Freire's philosophy of critical consciousness, which emphasises local knowledge and active participation instead of discourses in (neo)colonial interests (Ullah 2014). Indigenous ideas stem, for instance, from the Aymara and Quechua who propagated Tawantinsuyu ('from where the communal is derived'), which considers the communal as an alternative to democracy or socialism.

⁸ For a complete picture, it should be mentioned that the subaltern studies discourse emerged originally from conversations between English and Indian historians in England in the 1970ies (Ludden 2002).

Stemming from a Marxist and Gramscian orientation, Subaltern perspectives have become one of the most important critical traditions in the struggle for political and cultural decolonisation, giving an authentic voice to those excluded from power (Turner, 1994). It focuses on relations of power, comprising class struggles, insurgencies, discourses about nationalism and modernity, though Indian caste specifics remain neglected. Subaltern scholars contrast colonial power/knowledge institutionalised in the Indian modern state with non-modern social knowledge (Arjomand, 2008, Connell, 2007). Although achieving an intellectual cohesiveness has never been a priority (Ludden, 2002), one major aim is found in – metaphorically – ‘provincialising Europe’ (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Western readings of Subaltern Studies differ from Indian ones, as different knowledge traditions and ‘fashions’ are at work (Ludden, 2002). Competing with the Subaltern are national Indian narratives and Hindu majoritarianism.

In South Asian journalism, journalists are more than simple newsgatherers: they can be social reformers, political analysts or environmental advocates (Ullah, 2014). The professional role of journalists differs from that of their Western counterparts, as India represents a different environment, posing different challenges.

Similarly to the Indian subcontinent, East Asia with its traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism provides a fertile ground for an ontology and epistemology different from Western approaches. In general, Asian researchers are not yet clear about aiming to develop mid-range theories or approaches with universal universality (Chen and Miike, 2006, Wang, 2009). In addition, consensus over critical issues is not omnipresent (Kim, 2009).

Subsequently, a small selection of relevant East Asian theory concepts are briefly discussed, among them Asian system thinking, the Buddhist *Paticca Samuppada*, and the Japanese *Enryo-Sasshi*, *Kuuki*, *Uchi/Soto*, as well as the rather recent ‘Asian Values’ debate.

For East Asia, Dissanayake (2009) sees two types of theories that need to be considered important in the production of knowledge, for example in communication studies: theories dealing with traditional Asian ideas about human communication, and theories, such as postcolonial theories, that critically examine current experiences and European conceptualities in order to provide space for more indigenous approaches

(Dissanayake, 2009). The latter was considered by Gunaratne (Gunaratne, 2005), who, after criticising 'Four theories of the press,' presents his own approach to communication outlets and free expression, using both Asian and Western philosophy. He suggests complex dynamical systems theory, cybernetics and complexity science as a 'natural arena of axial Asian philosophies' (Gunaratne, 2010, p.483), highly consistent with the system thinking of Eastern worldviews (Gunaratne, 2009a).

The Buddhist paradigm of *paticca samuppada* contains dependent co-arising or mutual causality. Its basic premise is that nothing is independent, and the universe is a non-linear, dynamic self-organising system which includes ever-changing networks. Contrary to many Western theoretical ideas, *paticca samuppada* does not include independent variables to explain causality (Gunaratne, 2008). This Buddhist (and similarly Daoist/Hindu) onto-cosmology of interconnectedness presents quite a challenging approach on Western thinking as it casts doubt on the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm.

Japan showed a remarkable set of own concepts. Ishii's *enryo-sasshi* communication relates to the sender's silence and ambiguity while the receiver shows sensitivity. The Buddhist Bodhi (or path to enlightenment) could be considered as ultimate communication, while *kuuki* denounces an atmosphere requiring compliance and producing social consensus (Gunaratne, 2010). The *uchi/soto* distinction (interior, us vs. exterior, them) refers to the 'belonging of people to social groups linked by close interpersonal relationships' (Takahashi, 2007, p.6). While a belonging to one *uchi* was usually the case, modern communication devices allow a multiple *uchi* belonging.

Other approaches are Kim's (2009) culture-relative theorising for a multicultural perspective; Kuo and Chew's (2009) culture-centric approach with culture at the centre of an attempt for a distinct but open cultural perspective (the 'Chinese Knot' which relates to one common thread linking distinctive elements, Wang and Kuo, 2010), and specific East Asian contributions, like discourses of Buddhist Nagarjuna (Dissanayake, 2007), the Filipino *kapwa* (recognition of shared identity; see Gunaratne, 2010) as well as Laozi (Combs, 2005) or the Chinese philosophical principle of yin-yang, the dialectical complementarity of relative polarities, or diversity within unity (Gunaratne, 2009a).

Moving from past concepts of Asian history towards the present, the 1970s saw the emergence of the idea of distinct **Asian Values**. It became more prominent at the beginning of the 1990s, mainly as a counter attempt at modernisation theory; it was led by the former prime ministers of Malaysia and Singapore who declared human rights as culturally relative to Western societies (Brown, 2013). 'Asian values' sees Asia and the Western world as separated by sharp differences in their value orientations, such as placing society, community and loyalty to the extended family above the individual; valuing order and harmony instead of personal freedom and contestation; or hard work, respect for authority, liberal economics and appointed authority instead of democracy⁹ and popular vote (Jenco, 2013, Zakaria, 1994). In brief: Asia prefers social stability and economic prosperity above the West's primacy on political and civil rights (Brown, 2013).

Those values are usually related to Confucianism, as China claims a leading role in Asia, and less so to Hinduism or Buddhism. Nevertheless, it can be seen as a rather modern invention, based on negotiating globalisation and its social consequences. It can have manifold interpretations – as a political strategy to conserve authoritarianism; a countering of the Western modernisation paradigm; and as a strategic essentialism which empowers, at least the ruling elite (Goh, 2012). In the case of Singapore, it was thought to promote national teamwork and consensus-building processes, and to discourage class distinctions.

In China it was meant to represent the base of a 'new governmentality for neoliberal globalization' (Goh, 2012, p.1062), positively seen as socialist strategic essentialism against the dominant neoliberal culture (Beng-Huat, 1999), or in general as providing a possibility to non-Europeanise the East Asian futures (Jenco, 2013).

Criticism relates above all to Asian values as politically motivated and not rooted in culture. This lack of authenticity also points to the cultural relativism at work, and to the ambiguity of the definition of 'Asian values'. Moreover, Asian countries are very diverse; any tradition can be easily manipulated to serve political purposes, such as favouring authoritarianism over democracy, and a state-centric approach to economic development (Brown, 2013, Jenco, 2013). Goh (2012) relates the rise of both

⁹ In modernization theory, democracy is considered to be the final stage of development after several stages of economic transitions.

Confucianism and subsequently the Asian values debate to postcolonial identity issues: here comes the 'Westernized colonial subject's drive for self recognition' (p. 1062).

6.4 Regional discourse 2: Africa

Africa is a huge continent with a very diverse set of languages, religions and beliefs, and social conventions. Here the focus will be on sub-Saharan Africa. Subsequently in this section, the state of African theorising will be briefly touched upon, as well as its manifestation in journalism theory and Ubuntuism.

In Kenya, writer Ngũgĩ explores in 'Decolonising the mind' (1986) how imperialism and colonisation remain in the minds of people even long after the end of colonialism. This often remains unexamined and unnoticed. To remove this cultural Imperialism and change the present geo-political relationships, Ngũgĩ later suggests 'moving the centre' (1993).

Hardly any coherent 'pure' Afro-centric theories exist to date (Ngomba, 2012); as African academic research counters potential Afrocentric tendencies by judging theories not for their origin but for their criteria of relevance. Western theories can be appreciated and extended according to contextual relevance and cultural sensitivity (Dissanayake, 2009, Kim, 2009, Ray, 2012). The most relevant for academic research should be the 'cultural profile of the society of interest' (Ngomba, 2012, p.169). As a positive example, Ngomba (2012) demonstrates the flexibility of the systems theory of Gurevitch and Blumler (1977). He shows that it appears to be open enough to incorporate the cultural specifics of political communication in Africa, where political processes are usually less mediated.

In media studies, African academics are still strongly influenced by external, especially Western scholars (Ndlela, 2009), although there are indications of a distinct 'African' way. Skerdal (Skjerdal, 2012) identifies three common streams of journalism deployed in Africa, which differ essentially from the Western libertarian ideas; among them, journalism for social change with journalists as interventionist change agents, communal journalism and journalism inspired by oral discourse.

From South Africa stems the prominent concept of **Ubuntuism**, a philosophy that ‘values humanness, dialogue, the public good, consensus, and community care’ (Fourie, 2007, p.25) as well as compassion (Ullah, 2014). Cooperation and collective responsibility characterise the Ubuntu idea, which is believed to provide a common thread to be found within beliefs, customs, value systems and socio-political institutions of societies in sub-Saharan Africa (see Dube, 2010, Cobbah, 1987). Communal interests are placed above those of the individual (McDonald, 2010); community is understood up to the level of pan-African unity. It emphasises relationships between people and subsequently demonstrates an inclusive, participative character. Ubuntu rejects a notion of solitary humans; rather it considers hospitality and caring about others as essential features. Especially in South Africa it can be seen as a break with the colonial/apartheid past.

The understanding of African society as determined by cooperative and deliberative values as well as consensual democracy (Wiredu, 2001) leads correspondingly to a different kind of journalism. Ubuntu journalism should serve the need of the local community, less than the professional identity of journalists (Skjerdal, 2012). It relates to Western-based civic/public/community journalism.

However, the concept of Ubuntu remains contested; as perspectives of the establishment of a human society with journalism serving society’s needs rather than ones of journalists worried about power abuse by elites, uncritical journalists, and a marginalization of dissenting voices (see Dube, 2010, Skjerdal, 2012). Furthermore, there is the suggestion that ‘corporate elites and neoliberal policy makers in South Africa have simply found a language that makes it appear as if there is significant change taking place, without actually altering practices on the ground’ (McDonald, 2010, p.148). This critique at Ubuntu can equally be applied to African politicians like Mugabe and Zuma who frequently instrumentalise ideas of ‘African values’ to fend off criticism of corruption and authoritarianism.

Ubuntuism also connects to ideas of **Afriethics**, a normative framework proposed by the Zambian Francis P. Kasoma (1996), who thinks within the ‘African exceptionalism’ or ‘African particularism’. Kasoma emphasises a sense of ‘African morality’ which describes the bonds of community life and urges Africans to turn towards their own values, and against media-driven selfishness and divisionism. He argues against money and power-centred journalism, but for a journalism centred on

African society and communal values. However positive, his intention is to find a particular 'African way', Afriethics has received criticism for its essentialist and static notion of African culture ignoring diversity, an ignorance of foreign influences on African society via colonialism and globalisation, which has led to a hybrid identity of many Africans and a creolised environment for local journalistic practice today, whereas the neglect of Western theories although his journalism model clearly shows an inclination towards Etzioni's (2003) moralistic communitarian ethic (Banda, 2009, Skjerdal, 2012).

7. Some preliminary implications for MeCoDEM

It is hard to ignore the strong dynamics present in democratic processes and news production currently – be it technologies, routines, or global interconnectedness. This needs to be considered for any cross-national analysis. Empirical case studies can give a diverse range of observations, which could make a rethinking of epistemological and methodological assumptions worthwhile (Wasserman, 2011).

In conclusion, the following ideas summarise and critically reflect on the de-Westernisation discussion:

- Challenging Western scholarship is important in order to reflect on the basic assumptions on which our knowledge is built.
- Thinkers who demand indigenous scholarship seem to ignore the inherently hybrid nature of present culture, communication and politics. This gives rise to the danger of fragmentation and a new provincialism.
- There is no unanimous view in non-Western societies. While some feel the need to shield their culture against the power of globalisation (which in most cases means Westernisation), there are also many people, in particular women, for whom ideas of equality and self-determination entail opportunities to escape from the constraints of collectivist, patriarchal societies.
- More important than the essentialist discussion about African/Asian scholarship, journalism etc. is the critique of contemporary power structures that shape the production and flow of knowledge (see citation index, location of major publishing houses etc.)

- While grand theories are important, there is also the need for bottom-up research: what meaning people in different cultures attach to cultural products, 'democracy', citizenship, 'the good life'.

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