

# Cosmopolitanization of war coverage research

## Empowering non-Western narratives

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### **Beyond borders: War as events of cosmopolitan relevance**

From the Russian–Ukrainian War to tensions between Israel and Iran, from the Gaza War to the Houthi attacks on international shipping, to the friction between China and Taiwan—these wars and conflicts are currently dominating the global media headlines.

Throughout history, the media have been drawn to the captivating and influential nature of wars and armed conflicts, which have always characterized news cycles and public attention. Their attraction lies in their inherent news value, which includes several key factors, such as harm, negativity, and personalization, that strongly influence journalistic choices in topic selection (Eilders & Hagen, 2005). In addition, wars attract public interest because, from a Western European perspective, they mostly take place in distant regions beyond our immediate experience. We therefore rely on media coverage as a source of information (Wolff, 2018)—it shapes our understanding of wars (Jungblut, 2023) and often contributes to the escalation of conflicts (Hoxha & Hanitzsch, 2018).

However, empirical studies reveal a prevailing tendency within the media to focus on a select few high-profile conflicts, leaving many others unnoticed (e.g., Zerback & Holzleitner, 2018). This results in selective and disproportionate media war coverage, which either leads to significant attention or minimal coverage of a given conflict (Maier et al., 2011; Zerback & Holzleitner, 2018). In particular, Western media tend to focus their attention on conflicts in countries often situated at the periphery of mainstream news (Löffelholz, 2004), and they are criticized for “excessively focusing on “bad news” about developing countries while neglecting stories about positive events and progress” (Sobel et al., 2020, p. 172). This phenomenon is notably widespread in media war coverage and foreign news reporting, where the media selectively and crisis-drivingly cover non-Western regions, such as Africa, the Arab world, or Southeast Asia (Hafez, 2002). This presumably explains why “Western media repeatedly fail to report on the world’s most significant (in terms of casualties) conflicts and crises” (Robinson, 2017, p. 189).

A parallel trend can be observed in communication research. The field of war communication has received considerable scholarly attention (Wolff, 2018), particularly be-

tween 1990 and 2005, resulting in an extensive corpus of case studies that continues to dominate the existing literature (Löffelholz, 2004). However, academic studies focus less frequently on wars and armed conflicts that have gained limited visibility in Western media (Löffelholz, 2004). Instead, existing research predominantly centers on a few very salient and high-profile conflicts, notably the Gulf War (1990), the Kosovo conflict (1999), the Afghanistan War (2001), the Iraq War (2003), the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and the war in Ukraine (Jungblut, 2023; Löffelholz, 2004). In addition, research focuses on the analysis of media war coverage—the main research attention is on the topics, patterns, and quality of war reporting with most studies’ attention on current conflicts (Eilders & Hagen, 2005; Löffelholz, 2004). Despite some revealing individual findings, systematic research into the forms and content of war reporting in the media remains largely incomplete (Jungblut, 2022). This concentration on media war coverage leads to a large number of content analyses, while studies in the field of communicator research, such as the strategic communication of political elites and the role of war correspondents or journalists, remain comparatively scarce. Similarly, research on media platforms, audience reception, and media effects, including the impact of such reporting on war-related policy, is less prevalent. Due to the dominance of media content research, this article examines the state of cosmopolitanization in research on media war and conflict coverage. In doing so, we consider conflicts to be the basis for wars and crises. Conflicts that break out between states or parties within a state can be described as wars or armed conflicts if they escalate, as the latter do not require a formal declaration (Zerback & Holzleitner, 2018).

Research about war is a deeply cosmopolitan field of study because when presented in the news worldwide, wars and global conflicts can also influence processes of globalization, deepen our sense of globality (Zhang & Luther, 2020), and potentially contribute to what Beck (2009) called a cosmopolitan perspective: in a connected world, globally mediated crises like wars and armed conflicts transcend the traditional boundaries that define the local and the global by fostering a cosmopolitan perspective (Zhang & Luther, 2020, p. 405; see also Estella et al. in this book for a similar discussion).

Zhang and Luther (2020) argued that apart from a few cases, there is a notable absence in the research regarding the interplay and diffusion of global conflicts and their reliance on the global news media and new forms of global journalism. This points to a gap in the field of communication studies’ understanding of wars and conflicts as cosmopolitan events. The question therefore arises as to whether the observations that apply to communication studies as a whole also apply to academic research on the media representation of wars and conflicts. Data from Demeter (2018) showed that around 90% of the publication output of the *Journal of Communication* comes from the West, without a significant increase in output from the Global South. Within the Global South, inequalities persist, with the developing countries in Asia (especially China) and South America making some contributions, while other regions, such as the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe, remain largely ignored (Demeter, 2018). In addition, Hanusch and Vos (2020) presented the results of a systematic review of comparative journalism studies from 2000 to 2015. Analyzing 441 articles from 22 major journals, they found consistent patterns, including a focus on Western authorship, Western countries, and elite media (Hanusch & Vos, 2020).

The need to rethink cultural differences in academic discourse is obvious (Demeter, 2020). Proponents of de-Westernization criticize the dominance of Western perspectives and call for revising power relations in global knowledge production and dissemination (Glück, 2018): it aims to expand academic knowledge by incorporating diverse global perspectives and theoretical frameworks (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). Consequently, de-Westernization aims to overcome Anglo-American and Eurocentric perspectives, while deep internationalization (Badr et al., 2020) advocates open approaches to representative academic knowledge production from around the world (Badr & Ganter, 2021). This is not a simple internationalization, that is, a whole range of case studies worldwide in English that do not sufficiently address common issues and questions or do not build on theoretical concepts, arguments, or conclusions of Western sciences or can be linked to them (Waisbord, 2015).

Therefore, de-Westernization should promote the development of a cosmopolitan perspective that raises awareness of global differences and similarities, develops a broader understanding of global issues, and fosters a scholarly environment that is sensitive to comparative and global studies (Waisbord, 2015). In essence, cosmopolitanization requires an epistemic paradigm shift toward theoretical and methodological inclusivity in order to overcome the marginalization of certain voices (Ganter & Badr, 2022). To advance the de-Westernization of communication studies in the sense of cosmopolitanism, Waisbord (2015) proposed three research strategies: (1) ask questions that are absent in Western research and search for “empirical and theoretical blindspots that reflect the powerful influence of Western concerns and categories,” (2) conduct comparative studies with non-Western cases and have an “interest in exploring whether and why ‘context matters’ to explain similarities and differences,” and (3) analyze global, transnational phenomena and “study ‘global media events’” (pp. 187–188).

To explore the de-Westernization and associated cosmopolitanization of research on war coverage, we examine three key areas of global media coverage of war in the following sections. First, we delve into studies analyzing the visibility of different conflicts. Second, we investigate studies examining how conflicts are portrayed in the news, including the framing process and the factors influencing media war coverage. Third, we review studies that assess the overall quality of reporting. Within each section, we provide a research overview and identify shortcomings in the cosmopolitanization of the research field. We discuss approaches to adopting a cosmopolitan perspective and explain the prerequisites for cultivating such a viewpoint in the research field. In conclusion, we address the initial question regarding the extent of cosmopolitanism in war reporting within the research media and propose recommendations for advancing the cosmopolitanization of the research field on war reporting.

### **Selective choice: Research on the visibility of conflicts in media coverage**

One strategy for de-Westernization proposed by Waisbord (2015) is to conduct research that transcends national and regional boundaries and focuses on global issues. This approach emphasizes both common and diverse characteristics and examines causes and effects. A genuinely global research topic is the international flow of news, which con-

cerns investigating global patterns of war and conflict reporting and which wars play a role in the media and why. According to Hafez (2018), this research field not only attempts to capture news geographies worldwide but also to explore the causes of similarities and differences in a global comparison.

Wars and armed conflicts are intensively researched, but little is known about the factors that influence their visibility in the news media. Empirical studies on news values shedding light on the factors that influence the visibility of conflicts in the media have shown that contextual factors such as a country's population, economy, and political influence and event-related factors, in particular high casualty figures, influence media attention (Jungblut, 2022; Zerback & Holzleitner, 2018). Event-related factors are directly linked to the conflict or war itself, whereby it is often assumed that conflicts with a high number of victims receive more media attention, although empirical evidence questions this assertion (Hawkins, 2011; Zerback & Holzleitner, 2018). On the other hand, contextual factors are intertwined with the characteristics of the nations involved in the conflict. While the importance of these factors in the context of war is still not fully understood (Zerback & Holzleitner, 2018), observations so far suggest that conflicts involving nations with larger populations, greater economic power, or greater political influence most often receive greater media attention (Jones et al., 2011). This trend unveils the reasoning behind a country's attractiveness and how this impacts the amount of foreign media coverage it receives, arising from factors such as its global power, cultural affinity, economic ties, or conversely, its marginalization and geographical distance (Hafez, 2018). Additionally, the relationship between the countries facing conflict and those reporting on it is crucial. Media outlets exhibit a higher tendency to cover conflicts occurring in countries that share geographical, cultural, political, or economic proximity to their own (Heimprecht, 2017).

However, it is problematic that these empirical studies largely look at Western media and their selection mechanisms. For example, Zerback and Holzleitner (2018) limited themselves to analyzing German news coverage, while Jones et al. (2011), Hawkins (2011), and Sobel et al. (2020) mainly examined US-American media and interpreted them from a US-centric perspective. Specifically, Sobel et al. (2020) analyzed the relationship between visibility in reporting and US-American interests, thus creating a very one-sided perspective on news values from a global perspective.

In order to understand the dynamics of international news flows, comprehensive international comparative studies on news selection in conflict and war reporting are essential—another strategy to de-Westernize media studies in the sense of cosmopolitan scholarship, according to Waisbord (2015). The author also explained that comparative research is motivated by the need to overcome the prevailing “US-centrism” in the literature and develop evidence-based, theoretically informed arguments based on diverse cases (Waisbord, 2015). International comparative studies offer added value by providing theoretical insights into the drivers of global media discourses that go beyond the assumption of universal news factors (Hafez, 2018).

However, comparative studies on international media war coverage are rare, with only a few exceptions. For example, Fengler et al. (2020) analyzed media coverage of the Ukraine conflict in 13 countries, including Western, Central, and Eastern European countries as well as Russia. They noted that while the structures of foreign reporting in West-

ern Europe have been extensively researched, Central and Eastern European countries have been comparatively little studied. Their study found that the representation of conflicts varies from country to country, possibly influenced by factors such as geographical and cultural proximity to the conflict area or economic relevance (Fengler et al., 2020). Jungblut (2020) also revealed that media coverage of international conflicts often depends on ethnocentrism and elite status.

Heimprecht (2017) selected an even more global sample in her study on foreign news coverage in television news from 16 countries, including Chile, China, Egypt, and Singapore. The aim was to identify overarching patterns by including countries with significant differences in state structures and media systems. The main findings confirmed earlier observations that country characteristics influence foreign reporting and that conflicts are not automatically newsworthy, but depend on the relevance of a country to the reporting media system and are influenced by country-specific interests (Heimprecht, 2017). Furthermore, the study showed that journalists consider the interests of their own countries when reporting on political conflicts, which is reflected in the relevance of the crisis status and proximity to the conflict.

Overall, further cross-cultural studies are essential to fully understand how news factors, together with event- and context-related factors, influence news selection processes. However, Hafez (2018, p. 142) emphasized that effective news value analysis is primarily applicable only to “free” media systems, which poses a challenge when transferring this concept to non-Western contexts, especially authoritarian media systems. Therefore, the feasibility of applying the news value concept in these contexts needs to be assessed. It is important not to transfer all theoretical concepts and approaches to non-Western contexts uncritically. Nevertheless, there remains a need to extend the study of media coverage of war beyond the currently dominant case study designs. There is an increasing need to systematically compare “how different types of conflicts from different regions of the world are covered in different types of media outlets in the context of different journalistic working environments” (Jungblut, 2023, p. 131): “In doing so, studies will be able to identify generalizable patterns of news coverage and determinants that shape how conflict is covered, for instance by influencing the power relations between the press and politics or by posing a challenge for journalistic research” (Jungblut, 2023, p. 131).

Research should also focus more on conflicts without major Western involvement, as these conflicts have so far been largely ignored by researchers (Jungblut, 2023). The selective choice of salient and high-profile conflicts as research objects described above favors the thematic interests of academics based in the USA and Europe (Waisbord, 2016). Scholarship has also largely focused only on those wars that play a role in the Western media and on issues that are of interest to Western academia, and it has marginalized wars and related issues that are relevant in other regions. These priorities may have been influenced by third-party funding and publication attention, leading to a distorted perspective on conflict issues and “the danger is that Western thematic preoccupations overshadow non-Western questions in the globalized academia” (Waisbord, 2016, p. 879).

However, this bias could be balanced by deliberately including other previously overlooked conflicts in the research agenda. Advancing the cosmopolitanization of research requires the development of novel research agendas that encompass non-Western sub-

jects (Waisbord, 2015). Studies outside the mainstream of communication studies focusing on media from non-Western nations, such as Frère's (2007) work on media and conflicts in Central Africa, could leverage these insights, potentially by linking up with Western studies that deal with media selection mechanisms. Similar considerations extend to the research agendas of other regions, as highlighted by Kozman (2021), in the context of Arab media research. She noted that "not surprisingly, the studies dealt with issues pertinent to the region and reflected topical areas that are most relevant to Arab audiences and journalists" (Kozman, 2021, p. 244). These areas include topics such as the attribution of blame and mistrust of journalistic reporting on conflict negotiations as well as the politicization of photos. However, in the perspective of cosmopolitan research, case studies on individual wars or countries neglected by communication studies scholarship should not be limited to issues and arguments that are relevant only to specific regions. Instead, it is essential that the research questions and findings are linked to larger theoretical and empirical debates, contributing to the overall body of knowledge within the discipline (Waisbord, 2015).

### **Context matters: The role of the global and the local**

Empirical studies scrutinizing war communication primarily focus on analyzing the characteristics of media war coverage—mainly on topics, patterns, and the quality of war coverage (for an overview, see Jungblut, 2023).

Empirical studies show that news stories, framed by details, myths, and shared values, influence audience understanding and evaluative attitudes toward wars and conflicts (Baden & Meyer, 2018). This framing process emphasizes specific aspects of reality: "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Framing studies, for example, examine which actors have been given a voice in conflict reporting (e.g., Golan, 2013; Jungblut, 2020). Here, the focus remains on Western media coverage, with studies analyzing the framing in Western European media (e.g., Ojala et al., 2017).

"Given the West-centric nature of research agendas, important questions in the Global South have not been at the forefront or even discussed in the West" (Waisbord, 2015, p. 187). However, it is important to learn more about authoritarian regimes because "in countries dominated by authoritarian regimes or where governments exert powerful influence on media economics and access to information, journalists' strategies to navigate government restrictions are different from the West" (Waisbord, 2015, pp. 187–188). Studies by Liu (2022) or Chernov (2023), which dealt with the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, or Baden and Stalpouskaya (2020), which examined the Syrian Chemical Weapons crisis, explored ways to de-Westernize research on war media coverage. Going beyond the commonly studied Western democracies, they analyzed the media framing of Russian media in comparison to liberal democracies, such as the US-American and British news media.

However, overall, there is a lack of existing comparative studies that include the countries of the Global South. One example that includes the perspective of the South is the analysis of the Ukraine conflict by Kuisz and Wigura (2023), who identified four compet-

ing narratives on the conflict: First, the Russian narrative portrays Russia's actions as a defensive war against the West, referred to as a "Russian fairy tale." Second, the "Western European fox" narrative aims to avoid a military confrontation between NATO and Russia. Third, the "Ukrainian hedgehog" emphasizes the struggle for national existence. Finally, another view from the Global South sees the conflict as a "white man's war" in which people would instead not get involved (Kuisz & Wigura, 2023, pp. 67–70).

In addition to framing patterns in media coverage, studies have also dealt with the influence of journalism cultures (e.g., Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2020) and different political and media systems (e.g., Chernov, 2023) on the journalistic framing of wars. The study by Baden and Stalpouskaya (2020) revealed that established news frames, rooted in cultural perceptions and elite groups' strategic framing, continue to influence journalists' framing practices. These findings imply the substantial impact of journalists' preexisting attitudes on news selection and framing (Baden & Stalpouskaya, 2020). This highlights the significance of cultural influences in news production, where journalists' selection of specific frames often carries cultural nuances (von Sikorski & Merz, 2022). Also, different media cultures are expected to be framed differently (e.g., Peng, 2008). The research emphasizes the role of normative pressures stemming from political and social systems, as well as factors like political climate, public opinion, and journalistic practices (Nygren et al., 2018; Peng, 2008).

To sum up, media war coverage cannot be separated from the influences of their production conditions as well as the political and cultural environment (Wolff, 2018). A contextual approach is crucial when analyzing media coverage of war and conflict; for example, political and media systems play an essential role in understanding the research subject, as each war and conflict has its own unique dynamics (Fröhlich, 2018). Such comparative research designs should also include countries and interpretations from the Global South. Waisbord (2015) emphasized the importance of cross-national analyses to understand how media and political systems interact and influence war reporting. This raises the question of the factors that influence media war coverage. Such comparative studies are intended to explore whether and why context matters to explain similarities and differences in media war coverage.

A comprehensive understanding of global journalism requires a systematic comparison of coverage of different types of conflict in different regions of the world that take the diverse media landscape and journalistic environment into consideration (Jungblut, 2023). As Waisbord (2015, p. 184) argued, "global" thinking requires broadening analytical perspectives in media studies. Given the international nature of war reporting and the influence of globalized news, especially through social media platforms, the role of journalists and new media in conflicts cannot be adequately captured from a national perspective alone (Fröhlich, 2018; Zahoor & Sadiq, 2021). Therefore, de-Westernization also involves the analysis of communication phenomena that transcend traditional geopolitical boundaries and encompass events, processes, and trends that go beyond specific countries and regions (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014).

To better understand the complex relationships between media and conflicts, Gilboa et al. (2016) proposed six levels for media analysis, drawing from Gilboa (2009): local (e.g., urban television and radio stations, local newspapers), national (e.g., The New York Times, CNN-US), regional (e.g., Al Jazeera Arabic), international (e.g., Al Jazeera En-

glish, RT), global (e.g., BBC World, CNN International), and glocal media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)—“glocal” is a portmanteau coined from combining global and local. According to Gilboa et al. (2016), glocal media allow for the analysis of interactions between media, conflict parties, and other stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations. They noted that the key distinguishing features among media are geography, content, audience type, and ownership structures. Using this approach, the authors explained, future research can answer these critical questions: How do global and local media dimensions empower actors inside and outside conflict zones, such as the diaspora, to advance their agendas, and how does this influence global and international responses?

Even if war and conflicts are translocal, transnational, and globally embedded, studies should not ignore the cultural specificity of conflict dynamics and the existence of local means of conflict resolution. For example, the recourse to anthropological approaches that add local perspectives to national and international interventionist approaches to conflict resolution could be useful (Bräuchler & Budka, 2020). At this point, anthropologically informed communication research could make an important contribution to the further development of conflict research due to its cross-cultural and context sensitive approach with its ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and qualitative interviews. However, studies that analyze conflicts and the media tend to rely solely on media content and quantitative datasets to determine the role of the media in conflicts (Bräuchler & Budka, 2020).

To understand the role of the media in conflicts and to ensure an inclusive view of it, studies need to combine insights into the case-specific characteristics of each individual conflict and the contextual factors that shape media roles. These factors can be summarized as follows: “a) culturally embedded conflict perceptions and belief systems; (b) audiences’ media reliance and trust; (c) the configuration, diversity and freedom of relevant media; (d) the constellation of conflict actors, including regional and international powers; and (e) the course and intensity of conflict” (Baden & Meyer, 2018, p. 45).

### **Moving away from negativity: Studies on assessing the quality of media war coverage**

Wars often elude journalistic quality standards, such as objectivity (Imhof, 1995). This raises the question of the quality of reporting on wars. Empirical studies focus, in particular, on the partiality or impartiality of the media. Springer et al. (2022) examined patriotic journalism in reporting on the Ukraine conflict in Sweden and Ukraine. They analyzed how journalists in both countries adhered to the standard of objectivity. The results indicated that Swedish journalists showed value-based loyalty to allies, while in Ukraine, official views were disseminated. However, the researchers found that the latter were not generally framed in a positive light, as one might expect from patriotic journalists (Springer et al., 2022).

The universal application of such quality criteria to all research topics is a challenge, especially in the context of wars and conflicts, where the media function according to their own internal dynamics, according to Stremlau et al. (2016). The authors illustrated

this with the example of Somalia, where the media landscape, characterized by owners, business interests, and journalists seeking political and financial gain, operates according to its own incentives and rules. Efforts to promote typical journalistic standards, such as neutrality and objectivity, face significant hurdles due to the deeply entrenched political economy of Somali media. While many owners and journalists recognize ethical standards, ongoing conflict hinders their implementation. Therefore, the de-Westernization of media studies should also include a critique of research conventions, such as those of news value research, which often measure results from other environments against Western contexts.

In addition to patriotic journalism, other forms of journalistic war reporting that are frequently examined and criticized by empirical studies are those that involve othering and stereotyping. Research shows that war and conflict reporting often adopts a one-sided ethnocentric perspective (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018), which is influenced by deeply rooted socialization and enculturation mechanisms (Wolff, 2018). Opinions of ingroups are presented uncritically, while outgroups, such as opposing parties, are downplayed and sometimes dehumanized (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018). State sources dominate reporting, suggesting limited press independence (Björge & Kalnes, 2021; Robinson et al., 2009). In conflict situations, journalists may orient themselves toward the government's narrative and report in a one-sided manner (Robinson et al., 2009). In the ongoing Global War on Terror, for example, the media often perpetuate an Orientalist narrative in which Muslims are portrayed as the "other," and this conflation of xenophobia and war propaganda reflects a worrying trend (Nohrstedt, 2016). Stereotypical friend–enemy images are constructed with content analyses focusing on language to uncover prejudices and opposing representations (Löffelholz, 2004).

Study findings also indicate a prevalent tendency in war coverage to prioritize narratives steeped in violence and negativity (e.g., Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018). This emphasis persists even when the reported events do not necessarily involve violent conflict. Simultaneously, reports on peace negotiations are at the periphery of media attention (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018). An automated content analysis of coverage of four conflicts in 17 different media outlets revealed a dominant focus on violent actions and their repercussions within conflict reporting (Jungblut, 2020), which may lead to a diminished public perception of efforts aimed at conflict resolution (Wolfsfeld, 2004). The same seems to apply to research on media war coverage. Despite clear indications of the power of the media for peacebuilding (Bräuchler, 2020), media research has so far focused more on conflict (Bräuchler & Budka, 2020).

A pioneering way to promote cosmopolitanization in the research field of war reporting could, therefore, be to direct a positive focus on media war reporting. In this context, communication studies already offer established concepts, such as constructive journalism or peace journalism, which help not only to assess the quality of reporting appropriately but also to measure it. Closely linked to cosmopolitanization is the research question of the extent to which journalism can invite cosmopolitan solidarity, which constructive journalism can generate. Specifically, Morse (2018) analyzed how Al Jazeera English reported on the 2008–2009 Gaza War and how media representation can promote global solidarity by making distant suffering morally significant. Using the concept of "media-

tized grievability,” the study showed how Al Jazeera constructed narratives of Palestinian suffering, bridging emotional and geographical divides to create a sense of shared humanity and solidarity (Morse, 2018, p. 385).

The normative concept of peace journalism (Galtung, 2002; Kempf, 2003) emphasizes a non-violent approach to conflict reporting, which proves to be more supportive. This approach promotes proactive media coverage that focuses on humanitarian issues, balanced reporting, conflict resolution, and peace (Gouse et al., 2019; Zahoor & Sadiq, 2021). War journalism and peace journalism are two competing frameworks for conflict reporting, with war journalism propagating violence, victory, and an elitist orientation, while peace journalism highlights cause and solutions, giving all parties a voice (Gouse et al., 2019). However, this concept has faced criticism in communication research (e.g., Hantitzsch, 2007), as it attributes political and military responsibilities to the media and neglects the common structural constraints and traditional processes of journalism (Zillich et al., 2011). Balabanova (2017) outlined how increased human rights reporting in peace journalism can cultivate a cosmopolitan global consciousness. Her study thus examined a global research subject that serves to promote a cosmopolitan research agenda (Waisbord, 2015). While some see the global media as a tool for building a cosmopolitan culture (Szerszynski & Urry, 2006), others warn of its potential exploitation by authoritarian forces and news oligopolies (Chouliaraki, 2008). However, there is a risk of graphic media content becoming “disaster pornography,” and constant exposure to human rights violations can lead to “compassion fatigue” (Balabanova, 2017, p. 236).

Peace journalism research primarily relies on content analyses of conflict reporting using war and peace frames (e.g., Gouse et al., 2019; Ishaku, 2021). A study by Neumann and Fahmy (2016) proposed an index for conflict reporting that combined 18 practices of war and peace journalism, including aspects such as emphasizing elites linked with war journalism or covering psychological damage associated with peace journalism. So, despite the effects of globalization, research has revealed significant disparities in normative values among journalists worldwide, particularly concerning the principle of professional detachment (Waisbord, 2012).

## Conclusion: Implications and future research directions

To answer the initial question of whether the genuinely cosmopolitan research subject of media war coverage is appropriately studied by communication and media research, it can be concluded that much of the literature on the relationship between media and conflict focuses on state-centric Western political communication and the performance of journalism and how Western media coverage of conflict has influenced Western governments (Gilboa et al., 2016). The academic US- and Eurocentrism discussed in previous sections are deemed insufficient to explain the realities in many environments outside the West. As de-Westernization is a multi-layered process, it requires changes in four dimensions (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). First, de-Westernization involves examining research subjects that are either understudied or absent in Western contexts or extend beyond traditional geographical boundaries (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). To de-Westernize research is not only to broaden the analytical scope but also to address topics that

might be overlooked by Western scholars but are significant in the non-Western world. For instance, examining how non-Western media cover proxy wars waged by superpowers adds layers of analysis to understanding how global events are represented in different contexts. De-Westernization aims for a more inclusive and balanced portrayal of conflicts, challenging dominant Western-centric perspectives in reporting conflicts (Wasserman & de Beer, 2009).

As a second point, de-Westernization refers to expanding the body of evidence in communication research: it highlights the importance of considering non-Western countries to arrive at more nuanced conclusions (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014, p. 364; see also Gazzamatta in this book). Transitioning from single-case studies to emphasizing comparative research is crucial. To propel future theoretical advancements in the realm of media war coverage and communication during conflicts, it is imperative to validate concepts through comparative approaches across diverse national and international conflict cases, media productions, practitioners, and political contexts (Fröhlich, 2018). Recognizing the inadequacy of understanding the role of journalists and (new) media in conflicts solely from a national perspective, there is a crucial need to shift toward a more global viewpoint (Fröhlich, 2018). In addressing this, there is an urgent call to de-Westernize the field by expanding both theoretical and empirical engagement with research beyond the Euro-Atlantic sphere (Kaneva, 2023). However, many comparative studies have disproportionately focused on the West compared with other parts of the world (Hanusch & Vos, 2020). Waisbord (2022) further underscored the significance of expanding cross-national comparative research—by broadening the scope of comparative projects to encompass countries from the Global South, researchers can gain deeper insights into how local knowledge shapes conventional forms of communication. Kotišová (2024) examined the collaboration between “parachute journalists”<sup>1</sup> and local journalists, known as “fixers,” to explore how the personal proximity between these two groups influences the quality of reporting. Interviews with journalists, including those from Ukraine, revealed that local journalists are sometimes trusted less due to their proximity to events (Kotišová, 2024). Nevertheless, the proximity of local journalists is viewed in practice as valuable knowledge for fact-based and ethical reporting. Examining the relationship between parachute journalists and fixers in war zones provides valuable insights into these dynamics.

Third, reconsidering Western theories and concepts is a crucial step for the discipline, necessitating a critical examination of normative assumptions, especially regarding the universality of liberal-democratic values (Kaneva, 2023). Robinson et al. (2017) emphasized “the need to expand our theorising beyond the traditional focus on elite Western media, publics and their associated foreign policies so that we recognise more fully the truly global and multi-level nature of the contemporary media environment” (p. 337). A cross-cultural perspective on the media’s role in conflicts, as proposed by Gilboa et al. (2016), can be utilized as a theoretical starting point to operationalize this expanded

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1 Financial constraints often compel journalists, especially those in countries not directly involved in the conflict, to travel to conflict zones without possessing sufficient knowledge (Jungblut, 2022; Sobel et al., 2020).

focus in empirical studies and contribute to the de-Westernization of research by involving various actors.

As a fourth point, a primary measure for advancing research in the field of media war coverage and communication is the adoption of a cross-cultural research perspective. However, comparative studies in war reporting predominantly focus on the Western context, often comparing arguments from the USA in a European setting. The widespread knowledge of English among European academics and the incentives to publish in English favor comparative research (Waisbord, 2015). Müller and Knieper (2019) underscored the importance of international exchange among research groups, advocating for the establishment of collaborative research consortia that leverage diverse language and cultural competencies (see also Kozman, 2021). Nygren et al. (2018) emphasized ongoing cooperation between researchers from conflicting sides, fostering a common understanding and providing insights beyond nationalistic discourse.

The research consortium should also incorporate researchers from the countries under study. Based on a review of the most reputable European journals and academic conferences on communication studies from 2010 to 2016, Ganter and Ortega (2019) demonstrated that discussions of Latin American contexts in European media and communication studies often fail to incorporate perspectives from within the continent. They advocated for a critical implementation of de-Westernization, which necessitates “more geographically diverse editorial boards, greater international cooperation, and comparative accounts to capture diversity in regional contexts” (Ganter & Ortega, 2019, p. 68).

Integral to the analysis of war coverage is the incorporation of historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts, as this enhances contextual awareness and understanding (Kaneva, 2023). International collaboration and a cooperative approach to research play vital roles in including diverse perspectives, combining experiences from Western and non-Western countries and ensuring more representative and inclusive narratives. This collaboration facilitates resource sharing, including data, access to local sources, and journalistic networks, enabling a comprehensive analysis of conflicts from multiple perspectives (Fröhlich, 2018). Of course, this claim is often countered by the argument that this collaboration would not be feasible in current international comparative research practice. The main reasons for this are the lack of or unequal access to research funding worldwide and differing levels of methodological expertise (Heimprecht, 2017).

Furthermore, existing conflict research should extend beyond moments of escalation, encompassing other conflict phases, such as peace processes and fragile peace situations (Jungblut, 2023). Badr et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of overcoming the one-way knowledge transfer from democracies to non-democratic states, advocating for learning from non-Western regions and embracing innovative communication models. For instance, Frère’s work exemplifies the expansion of knowledge beyond traditional perspectives. In particular, her contributions have improved the understanding of Francophone Africa in journalism studies, as Mutsvairo and de Bruijn (2021) wrote in their obituary for Frère. She promoted research from and about Francophone Africa within English-speaking academia through publications and editorial roles, underscoring the importance of cross-cultural comparisons to dismantle barriers in African journalism studies (Mutsvairo & de Bruijn, 2021).

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