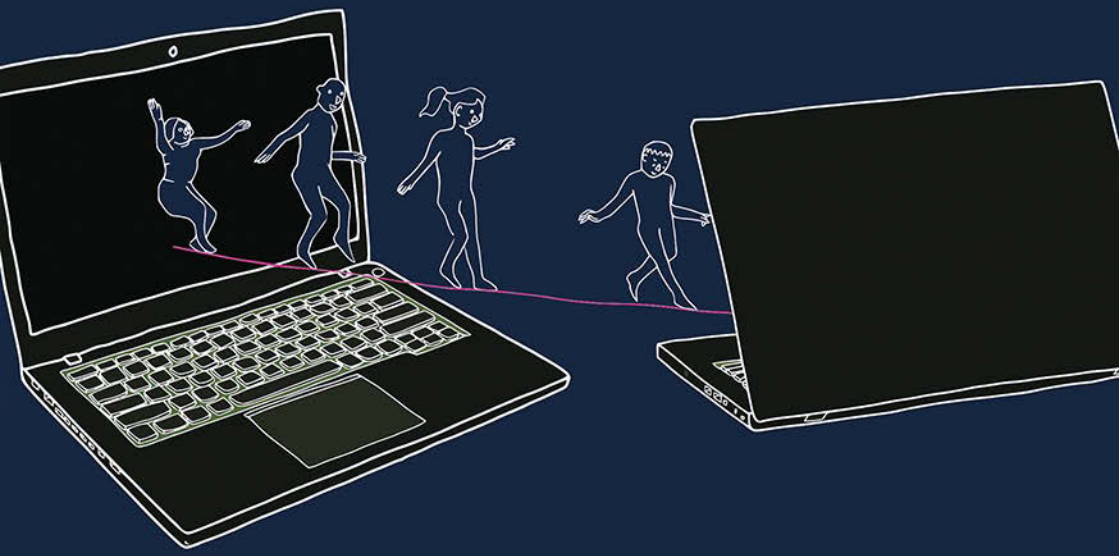
Fergal Lenehan, Roman Lietz (eds.)

REIMAGINING DIGITAL COSMOPOLITANISM

Perspectives from a Postmigrant and Postdigital World



[transcript] Studies in Digital Interculturality

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Editorial

As cultural boundaries blur and virtual and physical spaces merge, interculturality and digitalization mould our everyday world. We believe these entangled concepts should be viewed together. Our interdisciplinary book series is dedicated to the idea of a scholarly Intercultural Communication, informed by the perspectives of critical Digital and Internet Studies: **Studies in Digital Interculturality**. In this series we wish to publish thematically relevant monographs, anthologies, dissertations, and edited volumes of the highest quality.
The series is edited by Luisa Conti, Fergal Lenehan, Roman Lietz and Milene Mendes de Oliveira.

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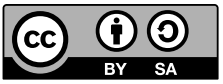

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Introduction: Understanding Digital Cosmopolitanism in Terms of Materiality and Postmigration

Fergal Lenehan and Roman Lietz

Cosmopolitanism is a varied and flexible concept and has the potential to help scholars, we argue, in new and interesting ways. This relates especially to the conception of the relationship between human beings, their cultural contexts, and the wider communicative world. The potential innovation from the use of the cosmopolitanism term may be seen in a number of aspects; in relation to the theoretical re-thinking of the internet as a global and connecting technology, in terms of analyzing those who use the internet and how this usage may result in personal and cultural change, while the cosmopolitanism discourse also helps scholars when theorizing about the online spaces of encounter and the myriad of digital connections contained in, and possible with, digital technologies. But Digital Cosmopolitanism is really best viewed and theorized, we also argue, when viewed additionally in terms of materiality and ubiquitous mobility and migration. Materiality is understood here as represented by the postdigital debate regarding the materiality-digitality dichotomy which has lately fed into discussions regarding platformization, and ubiquitous mobility and migration, as represented especially by the concept of postmigration and newer interdisciplinary approaches, such as Digital Migration Studies and Digital Diaspora.

Cosmopolitanism and the Growth of Adjectival Cosmopolitanisms

Cosmopolitanism is a long-established set of discourses with roots in ancient Greece, generally linked to Diogenes and the Cynic movement (Nussbaum, 2019: 2). The term cosmopolitanism comes from κόσμος (*kosmos)* i.e. "world" or "universe" and πολίτης (*polites)* meaning "citizen". Thus, early forms of cosmopolitanism may be seen as a conscious rejection of available identity scripts in favour of being a "citizen of the world". During the enlightenment in Europe in the 18th century, cosmopolitanism re-appeared and was conceptualized by a number of philosophers, most notably Immanuel Kant (Nussbaum, 2019: 2). Enlightenment forms of cosmopolitanism have often been criticized as actually harbouring a type of dom-

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ineering European, or Western, universalism (Delanty 2009: 18). Newer studies, however, have unearthed what Go (2013: 208) has termed "an array of non-Western cosmopolitanisms."

Cosmopolitanism discourses have remained varied and diverse. According to Holten (2009: 3), the study of cosmopolitanism threatens to "become overburdened with so many disparate elements and implications" that it at times comes close to "incoherent chaos". Yet, at the centre of this – potential – intellectual chaos there remains a consistent conceptualization of a cultural opening to the wider world which may be seen as a thread running through all cosmopolitanism discourses. This sense of cultural opening is, of course, conceptualized very differently in an array of contexts. Cosmopolitanism has also been theorized in ideological terms as a "direct counterpart to racism and ethnic nationalism" (Ritter, 2023: 5); although others have also suggested the existence of an actually racist (alter-)cosmopolitanism, with a decidedly darker and exclusivist cultural opening at its centre (Lenehan, 2022: 22–24).

Cosmopolitanism undoubtedly became a fashionable term in academic discussions in the 1990s (Neilson 1999: 2; and Calhoun 2017: 190). Calhoun (2017: 190) believes that the volume of cosmopolitanism literature exploded in this period for three contextual reasons: The fall of communism and the spread of democracy; the "growing recognition" that people around the world are joined in a "common community of fate", linked by global issues such as climate change; and because of globalization which "calls forth cosmopolitanism" resulting in, he believes, a "host of different patterns of interconnection." It is interesting, and perhaps an oversight, that Calhoun does not explicitly mention digitality and the internet in his reasoning here. Academic discussion in the 1990s was also marked by a rush to develop a vast array of what Harvey (2015: 50) calls "adjectival cosmopolitanisms". Holten (2009: 212–216) indeed counts a total of 144 adjectival cosmopolitanisms in academic circulation which he calls "instances of cosmopolitanism" (Holten, 2009: 212), from "Abject" to "Working Class" cosmopolitanism via e.g. "Islamic" and "Post-Universalist" cosmopolitanism. Holten's list of adjectival cosmopolitanisms – from 2009, it must be stated – also does not contain any form of cosmopolitanism linked to information technologies, such as "Virtual" or "Digital" Cosmopolitanism, which were at this stage still to be fully theorized. Digital Cosmopolitanism may, thus, be seen as an adjectival cosmopolitanism which has acquired a degree of sustainability.

Macro-Categorizations of Cosmopolitanism

There have also been a number of macro-categorizations of cosmopolitanism, which have generally been oriented towards a three-way categorization. Calhoun (2017: 191) clusters cosmopolitanisms into a style orientation, a universal ethics, and a cosmopolitanism that deals with growing connections; Delanty (2006: 28) writes of a

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moral, political and cultural cosmopolitanism; while Harvey (2015: 50–51) also perceives three macro-categories, namely a moral philosophy tradition, a rights orientation which comes he believes from sociology, anthropology and political science, and a cosmopolitanism espoused by what he calls "the cultural studies crowd" who celebrate "hybridity" (Harvey, 2015: 51). Differing slightly, Ritter (2023: 5–6) decides on a four-way macro-categorization, writing of moral, political, cultural, and economic cosmopolitanisms.

All of these macro-categorizations retain a degree of validity and may be seen as discursive antidotes to Holton's (2009: 3) warnings of the "incoherent chaos" surrounding the cosmopolitanism discussion. We also suggest that cosmopolitanism discourses may be usefully grouped around three macro-categories. This categorization is chosen as it is clearly mappable onto the scholarly literature surrounding the digital, which will also lead into the macro-categorization of Digital Cosmopolitanisms.

Political-Philosophical Cosmopolitanism

The first grouping consists of a cosmopolitanism centred on political-philosophical discussions, which is often ethically and/or morally-based with a normative critique and, at times, even contains visions of possible world institutions (see e.g. Nussbaum, 2019; Kumar Giri, 2018; Hahn, 2017; Costa, 2016; Cavallar, 2015; Warf, 2012; Appiah, 2007). This elite philosophical strand was clearly dominant for many years, and for all intents and purposes, *was* cosmopolitanism for many scholars and non-scholars alike. Holten (2009: 2) notes how the concept has been re-thought in a variety of scholarly contexts and prised away from "the grasp of philosophers."

Cultural Mixing and Solidarity Beyond the National

A more descriptive and wider perspective, drawn from sociology but also history, has examined lived forms of cultural mixing and solidarity beyond the national. Here cosmopolitanism appears as "a practice, a cultural form", "a 'way of being in the world'" (Sluga & Horne, 2010: 370), and a series of "behaviours, [and] social habits" (Jacob, 2006: 4). Historical studies, especially, have examined an array of solidarities beyond or before the national, giving rise to an array of adjectival cosmopolitanisms, for example "Catholic cosmopolitanism" (Albrecht, 2005: 354), "Protestant cosmopolitanism" (Riches, 2013), "Muslim cosmopolitanism" (Alavi, 2015), "Confucian cosmopolitanism" (Park & Han, 2014: 187), and "coloured cosmopolitanism" [sic] (Slate, 2012). It is important to note here also the project of a cosmopolitan sociol-

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ogy, as initiated and theorized by, especially, Ulrich Beck (2002; 2011) and Beck and Sznaider (2010).

Critical and Processual Cosmopolitanism

Lastly, a cultural studies and social theory approach has drawn partly on both normative-philosophical and descriptive approaches and is often conceived in terms of a critical cosmopolitanism and/or as processual, and often views cosmopolitanism either in terms of transformation, or in relation to complex multi-layered connections from "below". Rabinow (1986: 258) has written of a cosmopolitanism which conceives of both a "specifity" [sic] of experience coupled with "a worldwide macro-interdependency encompassing any local particularity." Delanty (2006: 25, 27) writes of a critical cosmopolitanism seen in terms of "social processes" and based on "moments of world openness" arising from the encounter of the "local with the global." Holliday (2020: 44), building on Delanty, has viewed critical cosmopolitanism in terms of a cultural studies-inspired decentring; "a hidden, alternative, 'vernacular', local cosmopolitanism." Delanty (2008: 218, 219) has further theorized a processual cosmopolitanism, seeing it as referring to a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance", as a "self-problematization and as learning from the other". While all three of our macro-categories of cosmopolitanism may be seen as clearly mappable onto the digital context, processual and critical cosmopolitan understandings have probably achieved most resonance in the scholarly digital cosmopolitanism discussion, and are linked clearly to debates which look to bring together discussions surrounding migrancy and digitality.

At this stage it is appropriate to discuss a number of related theoretical concepts which, we argue, should accompany the contemporary digital cosmopolitanism concept, here especially the concepts of postmigration and postdigitality.

Postmigration

The term "postmigration" (derived from "postmigrant" and the "postmigrant society") has gained in popularity primarily in the German-speaking world. The first use of the term occurred at the end of the 2000s and outside of academic discourse by the theatre director Shermin Langhoff (Espahangizi, 2016). Langhoff refused to simply speak of "migration" and the "migrant" and sought to give "an artistic expression to the new social realities that have emerged as a result of the different immigration movements in Germany" (Epahangizi, 2016).

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In the following years, the German social scientist Naika Foroutan in particular embraced the term and theorized it. According to her, viewing a society as "postmigrant" is intended to shift the focus away from aspects of "migrancy", which are often viewed as deficient. The dichotomy of either "successful" or "failed integration" should also be resolved and viewed in a more nuanced way (Foroutan, 2015). Integration in the postmigrant society will no longer be a one-sided adaptation effort by migrants (Mecheril, 2014); in any case, the clear distinction between "migrant" and "non-migrant" lifeworlds has become obsolete.

At the same time, in the Anglophone context, discourses surrounding the term "superdiversity" have gained in popularity (Vertovec, 2007), which – comparable to the concept of postmigration – looks to reimagine the "old" notion of diversity and emphasizes that society does not diversify along homogeneous groups, but a "diversification of diversity" has been taking place for a long time (Vertovec, 2007: 1024–1026) in which essentialist ideas concerning "foreigners" and "locals" are no longer valid (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011: 2–4).

Instead – and this is one thing that the concepts of *superdiversity* and *postmigrancy* undoubtedly have in common – it is important to recognize that acculturation processes and (multiple) affiliations are ambiguous, dynamic and hybrid, and that all members of society equally, not just newcomers, are called upon to integrate in a society (Foroutan, 2015). Foroutan (2019: 60) points out that tension inevitably arises here, especially when changes in society are denied and not recognized as a "constitutive component of the social order".[1] Thus, in today's postmigrant societies, new alliances exist alongside antagonisms and a polarization of society around the migration issue may also be viewed as having taken place.

Espahangizi (2016) describes the post-migration discourse as a "self-empowerment process of the […] second generation", who have often had to fight individual and collective battles for recognition, respect and participation. The generalized and wider diversity of societies has so far mostly been neglected in the "migration discourse" – another parallel seen between postmigration and superdiversity. Society as a whole, and not just the parts that concern newcomers, is structured by the experience of migration, and society as a whole is transformed on a social and cultural level (Tsianos & Karakayali, 2014).

Making a comparison with the conceptualization of *postcolonialism*, Foroutan (2019: 51) explains that the discourse regarding the *postmigrant* society should question and renegotiate power asymmetries and dominance structures. These structures are adapted according to the (postmigrant) reality: Resources, permeability, basic beliefs, etc. are subsequently re-negotiated, which leads to defensive reactions and distributional struggles (Foroutan, 2015). The postmigrant society undergoes a processual transformation, which will result in a new social structure

1 All translations by the authors, except where stated.

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(Foroutan, 2019: 52). Accordingly, a postmigrant perspective triggers the empirical-analytical question: "What changes after migration?" (Foroutan 2019: 54). The "post" in "postmigration" does not mean that the age of migration is over; it describes a society "after migration" (Yildiz & Hill, 2014). Thus, the term "post" retains a similar meaning to the post of "postdigitality", as discussed in the next section.

Postdigitality

The area of postdigitality has theorized the relationship between the digital and the material. In 1998 Negroponte was already suggesting that the digital would soon be noticed by "its absence, not its presence", while two years later Cascone (2000) was the first person to use the term "post-digital". While not actually using the term post-digital, Stalder (2019: 18) views any material/immaterial dichotomy critically, suggesting that the immaterial is not without materiality and that any such dichotomy remains foolhardy. As Warf (2021: 1) suggests, "the dichotomies of off-line/on-line do not do justice to the diverse ways in which the 'real' and virtual worlds are interpenetrated."

The term postdigital does not signify a world without computers and the internet, but the opposite in fact (Schmitt, 2021: 7). Cramer (2014: 13) sees the "post" in "postdigital" as denoting a "continuation" rather than a rupture, while the postdigital also refers to how computation becomes "experiential, spatial and materialized in its implementation", part of the "texture of life" (Berry & Dieter, 2015: 3). Recent discussions have viewed the postdigital in terms of a critical understanding of technology's pervasion of the social (Jandrić et al., 2018) – not least its re-ordering of the physical world (Levinson, 2019: 15) – and a complete "rejection of binaries" (Sinclair & Hayes, 2019: 130). For Knox (2019: 358) the term postdigital is an attempt to outline what is indeed "new" regarding our relationship to the digital but also highlights the ways that digital technologies are "embedded in, and entangled with, existing social practices and economic and political systems."

Thus, the lifeworlds in which various (human) actors exist have become entangled with ubiquitous digitalization (Conti et al., 2024), which means that lifeworlds have also become entangled within a variety of economic, political and social systems that help to actually mould lifeworlds. These systems are structured and communicated via the digital architecture of the platform, and the discourse surrounding platforms has become central to internet studies, as the platform has become the *dominating* architectural structure of the internet, including both the web and mobile apps. Indeed, in the past decade, "studies have demonstrated the structural changes that platforms are bringing to economies and societies around the world – a process that has been termed platformization" (Chen et al., 2024: 1). Poell et al. (2019: 6) have also suggested a cultural perspective on platformization which views it

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in relation to "the reorganisation of cultural practice and imaginations around platforms". Thus, platformization is an inherently postdigital process, and platformization and postdigitality should be seen, it is argued, as theoretical bedfellows: It is now impossible to think of one without the other.

Digital Migration Studies

Postmigration and postdigitality, however, do not exist in a vacuum and scholars have already sought to combine notions surrounding migration and digitality. In the 1990s, scholars such as Arjun Appadurai (1996, quoted in Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018: 247) had already argued that: "Electronic mediation and mass migration are shaping the contemporary world." A variety of terms were used to couch this bringing together of migration and digitalization. Diminescu (2008) introduced the concept of "connected migrants". This term emerged in order to "conceptualise the post-internet experiences of migrants, pushing beyond binary notions of one's 'home' or 'host' country and instead, considering migrant's increasingly digitally mediated experiences" (Moran, 2022: 2). With the suggestion of several further neologisms – e.g. "e-diasporas", "mediatized migrants", "smart refugees", "digital deportability" and "migrant polymedia" – the topic was engaged with further (Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018: 248), but a central and widely accepted conceptual foundation was still lacking. From circa 2015, scholars from fields such as Migration Studies, (Digital) Anthropology, Media Studies, Diaspora Studies and Postcolonial Studies began labelling the field connecting digitality and migration as "Digital Migration Studies" in order to "unpack the impact of digital technologies on culture and identity as well as shaping these technologies in practice by migrants" (Candidatu & Ponzanesi, 2022: 2). At that time, with the increased migration of 2015, the phenomenon was examined in a more focused manner, and "Digital Migration Studies" was seen as an "umbrella term to refer to the study of migration in relation to digital technologies" (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2024: 18).

Uniquely, and for the first time in history, the smartphone was seen to play an essential role in all phases of migration and integration: This is evident in preparing, in self-organization and overcoming challenges along the way, in developing the key skills for acculturation and integration at the destination, and in establishing and maintaining "virtual intimacy" with relatives and friends (Moran, 2022: 1, 9–10). Internet usage plays a key role in participation at a local level at all layers of integration: structural, social, cultural and identificatory (Lietz & Loska, 2024). As Leurs and Prabhakar (2018: 247) summarize: "While migration remains one of the most challenging life experiences one could face – which technology cannot magically solve – the increasing global adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has altered a variety of migration dynamics." According to Leurs and

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Ponzanesi (2024: 17), "people on the move mediate their being and belonging in increasing conditions of datafication and digitization." The full infrastructure of the internet, especially social media, is "used to shape the transnationally connected, and locally situated, social worlds in which migrants live their everyday lives".

Digital Diaspora

The sub-field of "Digital Diaspora" has also appeared: This describes "modern day, highly digitalized, transnational networking among migrants" (Laguerre, 2010, quoted in Moran, 2022: 11). Diaspora Studies is a fruitful field, especially for empirical studies on the communication and acculturation practices of (post-)migrants. Indeed, the term "diaspora" also applies to the (post)digital world, especially since "diaspora" has always been the expression of a deterritorialized community (Hepp, 2009: 37). Of course, we must acknowledge the "paradox in studying digital diasporas" (Candidatu et al., 2022: 40), as when we look to understand and deconstruct diasporas, we simultaneously call forth a fixed structure that, according to the logic of a superdiverse and postmigrant society, does not actually exist. Certainly, historically migrants have always used media (letters, newspapers, radio, satellite television and the telephone), "however, in recent years, both the scale and types of migration and digital networking have drastically changed" (Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018: 247). Bozdag and Möller (2015: 338), as well as Candidatu et al. (2019), outline the brief history of the digital diaspora, from the negotiation and communalization of media content in the 1990s, to the advent of social media. Since its first conceptualization, the digital diaspora has been seen as an entity that "reproduces imaginaries of belonging, creating virtual connections between the 'home' and the 'homeland' where migrants can forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations" (Moran, 2022: 11). The digital diaspora, thus, acquires the function of an "imagined community […] that seeks to reproduce cultural norms outside the homeland, in a simultaneous attempt to build new hybrid spaces of belonging" (Candidatu & Ponzanesi, 2022 :4).

Controversies in a Postdigital and Postmigrant World

Emerging digital diasporas expand and transform agency in the digital age (Nedelcu, 2018). At the same time, they also reinforce struggles for resources, access to social institutions (e.g. representation in politics and the media), visibility and recognition that are characteristic of postmigrant debates. These negotiations are increasingly taking place online and are often not just superficially debates about or rejections of migration, but rather defence mechanisms against changing

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realities, against hybridization, plurality and, especially, the cultural opening at the centre of *every* kind of cosmopolitanism. Wölfer and Foroutan (2021) write of "plurality resistance": A not insignificant part of the population is simply not able to cope with the increasing complexity of society and longs for clear categories in the attribution of people and occurrences (Forotuan, 2019: 115). Frustration is sometimes left unfiltered and expressed on social media and this constellation of feelings and digital strategies are at times motivated by authoritarianism and a direct refusal of plurality and cosmopolitanism (Strick, 2021).

Macro-Categorizations of Digital Cosmopolitanisms

Parallel to these discussions on postmigrancy, postdigitality and Digital Migration Studies/Digital Diaspora have been an array of dispersed attempts to bring the cosmopolitanism discussion together with debates surrounding digitality. Disentangling the various forms of Digital Cosmopolitanism is not an easy task as many texts incorporate various aspects of the cosmopolitanism discourse. We argue, however, that the categorization suggested above may be mapped successfully onto the scholarly literature which already exists, and which brings the digital and cosmopolitanism together; and which needs to be thought further and also consciously connected with questions of both materiality and migration, with the postdigital and postmigrant discourses.

1) Political-Philosophical Digital Cosmopolitanism

Many digital cosmopolitan texts engage with this phenomenon from what may be called a political-philosophical perspective, or at least from a perspective in which a normative critique is coupled with a visionary element which looks to re-imagine the internet, often from a cosmopolitan perspective. Some authors, on the other hand, argue that digital technologies need to be decoupled from a western-dominated form of cosmopolitanism. Material aspects, in a variety of manners, are often central here but are rarely very explicitly commented on.

Connolly (2000) and Ess (2001) were the first authors to bring together concepts of cosmopolitanism with arguments relating to the internet from a political-philosophical perspective. Ess (2001: 18) is here especially influential and suggests that internet technologies come embedded with a type of ethno-centric cosmopolitanism, as the online world remains U.S.-dominated and not culturally neutral, arguing ultimately for a cultural-digital education which may, he believes, provide the middle ground for the global internet, beyond the dichotomies of global-local and utopian-dystopian (Ess, 2001: 27). Ess does not foresee here the emergence of alternative internet architectures, not least that of China, and the problems which may come

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when the internet becomes intertwined with forms of authoritarianism rather than a western, and cosmopolitan, idea of democracy. Combining digital anthropological case studies with normative critique, Srinivasan (2017) similarly argues for what he calls the "provincialization" of the internet and its distancing from a western-dominated cosmopolitanism. Steeped in cyber-utopian thought, Castells (2004: 39–40) argues that the global network society, brought about by internet technology, will result in a type of cosmopolitanism beyond the philosophical dreams of abstract philosophical cosmopolitan thinkers – namely a practical, everyday diversity which will bring about the end of the ancestral fear of the other. Similarly to Ess, authoritarianism does not make an appearance in Castells' internet vision.

Zuckermann (2015) was the first author to write explicitly of "Digital Cosmopolitanism" as a distinct adjectival cosmopolitanism and he presents a clear thesis regarding how the internet may be rethought and re-wired in a more cosmopolitan direction, meaning here an ambivalent sense of world opening. For Zuckermann (2015: 69–78) homophily – the love of the same – has become a major problem on the internet, creating what he calls the sub-discipline of Echo Chamber Studies. Instead, the digital realm needs to be re-adjusted from a cyberutopian perspective, initiating a real Digital Cosmopolitanism, with a new orientation towards transparent translation, bridge figures and an engineered serendipity central to this re-imagining of the internet in which the digital realm becomes a real force for a global cultural opening (Zuckermann, 2015: 163–211). As ever with utopian-inspired thinking, it is easy to criticize Zuckermann on grounds of practicality – or lack thereof. But democracy and even the nation-state were of course also once 18th century utopian follies – until circumstances and very concrete actions turned them into realities. In a similar vein, Stiegler (2016: 162) dwells on the ownership of the internet and believes this should be non-corporate, allowing for a new cosmopolitanism and a new "Republic of the Digital". Lambert (2019) sees the internet in terms of as a dialectic between intimacy and cosmopolitanism, which could also be seen perhaps as a slightly differently theorized homophily/cosmopolitanism dichotomy. He (Lambert, 2019: 307) calls for experimentation on new algorithms that "focus on enabling enduring cosmopolitan sociality"; also thus a cosmopolitan re-wiring, of sorts, of the internet.

2) Digital Cosmopolitans and Digital Solidarity, Beyond the National

A number of texts have looked to measure and describe internet users in relation to cosmopolitanism, using a variety of social scientific methods, but especially survey and interview methodologies. Such approaches generally see cosmopolitanism as a generalized cultural openness and as the ideological 'other' to nationalisms of various kinds. Thus, Lindell (2014a) has investigated the cosmopolitanism of digital natives, while Lietz and Lenehan (2022) have examined what they call "cosmopolitan tweeters". Some quantitatively approached empirical studies have also been under-

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taken which have examined a large volume of data in relation to cosmopolitanism and internet usage (Katz-Gerro et al. 2024; and Verboord, 2017). Other studies have centred on digitality in relation to other adjectival cosmopolitanisms, such as Consumer Cosmopolitanism (Emontspool & Woodward, 2018) and Aesthetico-Cultural Cosmopolitanism (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2018); indeed both of these texts are marked by the logic of a postmigrant society, even if this not clearly expressed, using this language, by the authors. Critique points here in terms of this orientation include the ambiguities in relation to what exactly cosmopolitanism is in this context, how it may manifest itself in human agents and, how, exactly, this is to be measured. These are criticisms which the authors are, generally, acutely aware of.

Digital Cosmopolitanism has also been understood as a form of digital solidarity beyond the confines of localized cultural groupings. While historically-based studies of cosmopolitanism have investigated a vast array of cosmopolitan solidarities beyond the national, solidarity-oriented studies are still emerging in the area of Digital Cosmopolitanism. Texts have engaged with this form of Digital Cosmopolitanism from both a theoretical and a Media Studies perspective which has been qualitative and analytical rather than quantitatively-empirical. Stalder (2013), while not using the term Digital Cosmopolitanism, has written an important study of digital solidarity. Narayan (2013) has engaged with the (then) emerging discourse on virtual/digital cosmopolitanism (not deciding on which term to use) when discussing what the author calls "clickable solidarity". Yang and Lin Pang (2023) have examined live streamers in a border area of China and Myanmar, while Kwok-Leung Chan et al. (2023) have engaged with Korean-Hong Kong solidarity in a social media context, innovatively engaging with the area of Meme Studies. Elkins (2019) has analyzed what he calls "algorithmic cosmopolitanism" as a type of rhetorical marketing strategy, which platforms – he examines Netflix and Spotify – use to situate their platform-imperialist dominance in a positive light, looking to legitimize their globally-expanding businesses as cosmopolitan rather than faceless and mathematical. Digital solidarity-based cosmopolitanism is definitely an emerging area of study. But is it really necessary, and does it help the research approach, to couch transnational solidarity in the language of cosmopolitanism?

3) Critical and Processual Digital Cosmopolitanism

This form of Digital Cosmopolitanism is very much informed by debates taking place in Cultural Studies, Social Theory, Postcolonial Studies and, especially, Migration Studies. There is also a large degree of cross-over evident here with the wide and interdisciplinary areas of Digital Diaspora Studies and Digital Migration Studies. This orientation has a decidedly theoretical focus but has also ventured into more empirical spaces, at least viewed from a hermeneutic Cultural Studies perspective. Postcolonial and processual understandings of a critical cosmopolitanism – as a form of

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contact with the "other" leading to self-reflection and cultural change, not only in a European context and to be seen in non-elite contexts – have been very influential here.

McEwan and Sobré-Denton (2011) use the term "Virtual Cosmopolitanism" but see it actually as a potentially elite and exclusive phenomenon. They view cosmopolitanism itself as a concept which has often been "critiqued as elitist", while "the notion of 'virtual cosmopolitans' extends that critique as ability to access virtual spaces could be viewed as inherently privileged" (McEwan & Sobré-Denton, 2011: 253). Sobré-Denton (2016) has developed the term Virtual Cosmopolitanism further in relation to social media. Discussing three activist, grass-roots social media case studies, she sees "virtual cosmopolitanism as a space for social justice and intercultural activism" and is defined as "global intercultural concerns bringing together local and rooted activist networks through social media" (Sobré-Denton, 2016: 1718), and Virtual Cosmopolitanism can provide a "global/local bridgework for transnational and trans-local social movements" (Sobré-Denton, 2016: 1720). Lindell (2014b: 74–75), on the other hand, writes of a digitally "mediated cosmopolitanism" and of the "cosmopolitan agency" of internet technologies.

Leurs and Ponzanesi (2018: 6) connect the discourse of Digital Cosmopolitanism explicitly with the area of Digital Migration Studies. The concept of cosmopolitanism from below, drawn from postcolonialism, is centred as digitally-connected migrants exist, they argue, in networked and co-constructed multi-layered worlds between the global and the local, in an attempt to theoretically overcome the dichotomy of the global and the local (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018: 11–12). The incorporation of the postmigrant discussion could help in this theorization, not least in relation to changing power flows. Other authors see Digital Cosmopolitanism as intertwined with postdigitality, even if they do not use these exact terms. Hall (2019: 406) argues that the internet enables the "discursive construction of distinctive cultural and political types of critical cosmopolitanism." The author critiques virtual cosmopolitanism which, he believes, sets up the virtual in opposition to the "real" (Hall, 2019: 407), and it is argued that the internet facilitates a type of soft cultural cosmopolitanism which can become hard and meaningful – i.e. linked to material processes, such as political demonstrations – in the discursive construction of transnational networks and in the symbolic-imaginative construction of political communities (Hall, 2019: 410–414). These theoretical musings have added greatly to the discourse, but also come with a large degree of abstraction.

There are further examples of Digital Migration Studies, Digital Diaspora Studies, and Digital Cosmopolitanism coming together. For Ponzanesi (2020: 1) this may be viewed in terms of "shared imaginaries on the move", while for Machirori (2024: 135), in relation to a specific and theorized African Digital Cosmopolitanism, this has to do more with the ability to "distribute worlding experiences created by digital publics and counterpublics who re-centre discursive power." Ponzanesi (2020:

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3) also critiques the term Virtual Cosmopolitanism, as the word "virtual" was "often used in early debates on cyberspace and the utopian idea of an online world as separated/different from offline worlds" whereas, she argues, "the digital is a more contemporary definition that breaks down the boundaries between offline and online, and posits digital practices as embedded in everyday life." Thus, the author interestingly brings together here the Digital Cosmopolitanism discourse with diaspora and questions of materiality. But does the term digital really communicate an embeddedness in everyday life? The postdigital discussion, summarized above, would suggest this is not actually the case and a combining of the Digital Cosmopolitanism discourse with this discussion, and the linked and emerging area of platformization, is surely apposite. Ponzanesi (2020: 4) also suggests that Digital Cosmopolitanism is not just the "potential of new technologies to create connections", but also to "create bias, othering, and classifications" – an important centring, thus, also of the darker aspects of cosmopolitanism.

The Present Volume

The present volume is based on selected papers presented at the Second ReDICo (Researching Digital Interculturality Co-operatively) Online-Conference held from 26 June to 7 July 2023, which was dedicated to the topic: "Cosmopolitanism in a Postdigital, Postmigrant Europe, and Beyond". The volume is divided into three sections: "Theoretical and Methodological Reflections", "Media and the Frameworks of Learning", and "Analyzing Online Discourses". Each section engages with (digital) cosmopolitanism and either/or postdigitality and postmigration from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, while also arguing from a multiplicity of culturally-embedded academic traditions.

The "Theoretical and Methodological Reflections" commence with Gerard Delanty's chapter, which is situated within the area of social theory. Delanty's principal interest is in how socio-cultural changes play out and where cosmopolitanism is to be situated in relation to this. He argues for the location of the postdigital in a wider and more sociological framework, while also emphasizing the importance of structural change when thinking about cultural change. For Delanty, theories of postdigitality but also of postmigrancy only really make sense in the context of a wider theory of social change. Delanty concludes by suggesting that generational opposition could form the bulwark of social conflict in western democratic societies of the future.

Fergal Lenehan offers some reflections on internet histories and how they may be rethought in relation to platformization and cosmopolitanism. He suggests the establishment of new Critical Internet Histories, while he also believes that the internet should be viewed as a patchwork of (often competing) platforms. Bringing

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together methodological aspects drawn from internet histories and internet theory, he argues that platformization represents the postdigital transformation of the life-world, while internet histories may also be written from a perspective oriented towards the critical junctures of platformization, which would also examine the shifting contexts of postdigital cosmopolitanism. He suggests, ultimately, that media history and internet histories represent histories of interculturality via technical and digital means.

Simon Pistor commences his chapter with a history of the idea of cosmopolitanism from, largely, a political theoretical and philosophical perspective. He argues that the history and contemporary use of the term cosmopolitanism need to be combined in order to assess the theoretical and practical plausibility of the concept. He juxtaposes cultural, constitutional and contestory cosmopolitanisms with accounts from social theory and claims that those who utilize the concept need to reconsider its social dimensions, not least in relation to the context of potentially ubiquitous digital news and social media. He concludes by discussing solidarity-based cosmopolitan conscious-raising as an appropriate direction in a global, digital world.

Emilian Franco's contribution to this volume retains a bridging function between the theoretical and methodological reflections of the first section and the more empirical chapters which follow. The author reflects on the results gleamed from an ethnographic study he conducted, while this discussion remains embedded in a wide-ranging theoretical reflection relating to cosmopolitanism and digitality, exploring more specifically the intersection of cosmopolitanism and technological development in the Brazilian AI research community, focusing on the Center for Artificial Intelligence (C4AI) in São Paulo. Based on interviews with key researchers, the chapter delves into the sociotechnical imaginaries that shape the development of Brazilian AI, revealing a distinct form of compulsory cosmopolitanism that emerges from the (perceived and factual) peripheral status of Brazilian AI research in the global field.

The second section "Media and the Frameworks of Learning" commences with the contribution from media and communications scholar Alexa Robertson. The notion of communication rights is informed by a cosmopolitan worldview: The right to access information, to participate in public communication, to be heard and understood, and the right to privacy apply equally to people everywhere, according to UNESCO. While both the philosophical-regulatory discourse on communication rights and the scholarly discourse on changes in the journalist-audience relationship tend to be couched in general and sometimes universal language, this does not fit easily with new postdigital, empirical realities on the ground, the chapter suggests. Informed by the experiences of journalists reporting on unequal conditions from a global perspective, and tech activists concerned about developments in communication technology and what they might mean for people living in places where liberal

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notions of rights are not a taken-for-granted starting point, the sort of journalism that might contribute to a cosmopolitan outlook has to do with understanding – narrative knowledge – as opposed to information, it is argued.

Maria Rieder, Marta Giralt, Stephanie O'Riordan, Galia Xiomara Agudelo and Isolde Quirante, in their contribution, also engage with print and digital media in the postdigital context of a society that has experienced migration and is shaped by this experience, and discuss how media representation can promote a cosmopolitan mindset. Based on an Irish case study, they argue that the underrepresentation and almost complete absence of representation of migratory minority communities is evident and – when represented – minorities are depicted in terms of a marked differentiation from what is seen as uniquely Irish. The authors also introduce the Limerick-based 'Tell Your Own Story' project, which aims to provide a space in local media for diverse identities and voices with an emphasis on transcultural aspects. Such a project, the authors suggest, can help in the spread of a cosmopolitan mindset in the postdigital context, where cosmopolitanism is seen as a general cultural openness and a willingness to engage with the other, and may help to mitigate the social imbalances of representation.

Bernd Meyer and Roman Lietz, in their chapter, engage with the everyday postdigital reality of communication via language translation apps on mobile phones. They argue that the cosmopolitan promise of translation apps, at least as depicted in the advertisements of the companies – such as Google – which produce them, remains an oversimplification. While such advertisements generally represent Western elites holidaying in a jolly manner among docile, non-Western peoples, the reality of translation app usage is actually one marked by a (postdigital) cosmopolitanism from below and the lifeworlds of migrants, refugees and non-elite travellers, as the authors show via a literature review. They conclude that language apps may indeed be extremely helpful in multilingual contexts where members of society would otherwise be excluded from access to information but remain, essentially, also problematic, inadequate and simply not available for many language combinations. Trained on written language, language apps are often deficient when it comes to the complexity of oral communication.

Jennifer Bartelheim and Milene Mendes de Oliveira's contribution deals with Virtual Exchange (VE). More specifically, they examine the intercultural online game *Megacities* and ask whether it may be seen as an example of a transnational VE project, and whether it aligns with postdigital cosmopolitan ideals. Their study is based on the analysis of two datasets: the task descriptions from the game itself and student reflection reports. The analysis of the reflection reports unveils four major learning outcomes, they argue: Appreciation for difference, a critical examination of the self, appreciation for English as a lingua franca (ELF), and dealing with difficulties, which align essentially with transnational approaches to VE. They conclude that these outcomes are also compatible with some descriptions of postdigital cos-

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mopolitanism which centre on a processual-based change in self-understanding and an increased sense of sensitivity towards cultural others.

Nick Ludwig, in his chapter, also deals with postdigital cosmopolitanism and brings this concept together with discourses relating to the facilitation and evaluation of experiential learning in a postdigital context. The chapter begins by exploring how the entangled manifestations of materiality and digitality cause uncertainty and what postdigital cosmopolitanism has to offer as a response. The discussion then introduces the facilitating of cosmopolitanism via experiential learning in a postdigital environment as a new didactic approach in the field of cosmopolitan learning. From there the analysis presents virtual action learning as a methodology for investigating the facilitation of postdigital cosmopolitanism via experiential learning. The chapter yields insights especially for researchers and educators interested in facilitating and evaluating experiential learning via digital means as well as for scholars interested in the practice and facilitation of postdigital cosmopolitanism.

The final section of the volume "Analyzing Online Discourses" commences with the chapter by Alina Jugenheimer. Utilizing Ulrich Beck's concept of cosmopolitanization and bringing it together with Fergal Lenehan's notion of postdigital cosmopolitanism, the contribution deals with constructions of threat in (extreme) right-wing online discourses on the German-language, right-catholic website Kath.net, and how threat constructions may actually be sustained and reinforced due to the (quasi-)cosmopolitan context. These supposed threats include feminism and gender discourses, abortion, immigration and birth rates. The author argues that emancipatory processes appear as an even greater threat, as they enable legal access to abortion, the disturbance of biological and traditional gender roles and ideas of family, which, in such discourses, aggravates the threat to the (white, Christian) "Volk", thus reinforcing existing uncertainties and enabling right-wing online narratives to appear especially efficacious.

In her contribution, Carmen Pereyra examines the discourse surrounding an article that appeared in *The Washington Post* during the 2022 Football World Cup, entitled: "Why doesn't Argentina have more Black players?" and which aroused an extensive discussion on the platform Twitter/X. The chapter discusses how Argentine online imaginings of nationhood have parallelled historical imaginings of the Argentine nation and have oscillated from a cosmopolitan, freedom-based, (quasi-)postmigrant and diverse type of Argentine nationality to a nationalist, essentialist conception oriented towards "Whiteness". For weeks, Argentine Twitter users went from direct attacks on the author of the article – mostly accusing her of being ignorant of Argentina's racial reality, denying the prevailing "White Narrative" that the article sought to point out – to sarcastic mockery and, finally, to the accusation of academic colonialism. Carmen Pereyra argues that a societal paradox is present in this collection of more than 5,000 tweets: 'Argentine society',

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as reflected in this discourse, perceives itself as post-migratory and post-race, while simultaneously perpetuating a racist and colonial imaginary through the enduring myth of the 'crisol de razas' (melting pot).

Roman Lietz and Carmen Pereyra, in their chapter, examine links between social media postings, international football fandom and ideas of cosmpolitanism. They use qualitative methods to examine a corpus of 12,907 social media comments, from YouTube, Twitter/X and Instagram, which document the unexpected football-based sense of fraternity which developed digitally between football fans from Bangladesh and Argentina during, especially, the 2022 World Cup. This discussion is interwoven with the colonial-historical background of both countries, not least their relationships with Britain and the unlikely history of Argentine-Bangladeshi friendship, and is theoretically underpinned by concepts drawn especially from digital cosmopolitanism while also remaining embedded in the postdigitality discourse. They argue, ultimately, that this corpus represents a cross-country online fandom which may be seen as a type of banal solidarity-based expression of digital cosmopolitanism.

Yolanda López García's chapter explores the construction of narratives surrounding Europeanness, skin colour, and multilingualism of the public Instagram account @the_whitexicans and discusses how dominant imaginaries of coloniality and Mexicanness are reconfigured in what she calls the "postdigital field of action". Engaging in netnographic, thematic and hermeneutic analysis, she argues that the neologism whitexican and the narratives linked to it on Instagram may be viewed as E-maginaries, a type of emerging digital imaginary which contributes to the changing of collective meanings. Ultimately, she concludes, this discourse and its imagining of both a cosmopolitan and essentialized type of Europeanness reveals socialized categories that highlight various forms of discrimination which are typical for plural societies, including racism, despite discursive arguments suggesting a Mexican quasi-postmigrant reality.

Luisa Conti's chapter addresses polarization, misinformation, and the erosion of social cohesion by examining dynamics within digital spaces that reinforce anti-cosmopolitan attitudes. Utilizing a multimodal approach that combines netnography with expereintial hermeneutics, she explores the Facebook page of the German newspaper *Bild*, focusing on news posts that stimulate discussions arousing anti-cosmopolitan sentiments. The analysis reveals a convivial atmosphere characterizing these spaces, where Othering practices foster easy consensus, facilitating community building, a sense of belonging, and the internalization of anti-cosmopolitan sentiments. She argues that the central distorted imaginary may be seen as a fundamental error, as it creates a scenario in which the (national) "imagined community" is perceived as endangered, thus undermining the foundations of society by legitimizing a disregard for the constitutional principles of pluralistic democracy.

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Theoretical and Methodological Reflections

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Understanding Socio-Cultural Change Today: Reflections on the Implications of the Postdigital for Cosmopolitanism and Europeanization

Gerard Delanty

Abstract *In this chapter I look at how socio-cultural change should be understood in contemporary society. My focus will be Europe, though some of what is discussed has more general application, at least to western societies. I discuss the concept of the 'postdigital/digital' and argue for locating this concept in a wider and more sociological framework. Essentially, I am interested in how socio-cultural change plays out today and to what extent cosmopolitanism is part of the picture. I argue that cultural change cannot be explained only by reference to culture; it is also necessary to consider wider structural change.*

Introduction

How to understand socio-cultural change today?[1] What key markers of socio-cultural change come to mind? The digital, cosmopolitanism, generational shifts, post-truth and conspiracy theories, post-material values (including life-styles and identities), and, within Europe, the consequences of Europeanism are some examples of phenomena that can be seen in terms of socio-cultural change. Climate change can be included, for it too is a cultural matter, not simply a political or structural one, in that it has an existential dimension and is expressed on the level of the symbolic and is now part of the cultural model of society in that contemporary societies now interpret themselves through climate politics. All of these examples are related to shifts in self-understanding and collective identities.

In this chapter I discuss the big picture of major transformations in the socio-cultural make-up of contemporary society, with a focus on the specificity of the European context. In view of the interest in this volume on the digital/postdigital and

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its relation to Europeanism – which I prefer to call Europeanization – I will give particular attention to the claim that we are living in a postdigital age.

I have used the term socio-cultural to highlight the fact that a feature of culture – not just today – is that it cannot be separated from the social domain, in the way that older and now largely discredited views of culture took for granted, for example the idea of a high culture uncontaminated by society or the idea of cultural anarchy, a mismatch between the cultural sphere and social reality.

As a starting point, I see culture (beliefs, values, meaning, traditions, identities etc.) as entailing symbolic, normative-ethical, aesthetic, and cognitive dimensions. It contains the imaginary and is the site of learning. We know now from phenomenological sociology that culture consists of practices; it is performative and constructed, in the sense that it is not fixed or given, and it is material. Culture is embodied in social reality, and it is political and thus contested, the site of struggles over power and meaning.

I would also like to assert that from a sociological perspective an analytical distinction needs to be made that distinguishes the cultural dimension of society from the structural (economy, state, the biochemical, and material foundations of society) and also from the political. In reality, these are not separate from each other, but they have to be analytically separated. So, cultural change can occur before or after structural change. They relate to each other in complex ways.

Major Structural Transformation in Contemporary Society

Today, there is a major transformation in the structural context. We are in a period that can be characterized as the end of stability, at least as far as western or European societies are concerned. The period since 1945 was one of exceptional stability and one in which peace also reigned. It was, to be sure, a European peace and one in which several dictatorships (in Central/Eastern Europe and the Iberian peninsula as well as Greece) survived and was, for a time, compatible with colonialism. This social world was based on industrial capitalism, the geopolitics of the cold war, highly rigid gendered divisions, conventional morality sustained by fairly strong social institutions such as the family and churches, all of which domesticated society. The structural context that was the basis of this social and political order has gone, beginning with the crises of the 1970s, the rise of neoliberalism, the fall of the European dictatorships, the end of the cold war, and globalization etc.

Two main perspectives dominate any account of social change. One that sees change occurring within a broader situation of stability, continuity or persistence as the dominant trend; and one that sees change in the present crisis and transformation. The former position, I think, has been refuted by historical events.

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The current situation is marked by a strong sense of rupture that comes with the final end of the era of stability. This is not primarily one of cultural, or socio-cultural change, but of structural change as well as political change. The model of capitalism that developed with neo-liberalism, essentially one of global markets, globalization and the dominance of financial capitalism, has entered into a serious crisis, with a return to protectionism and with that political authoritarianism. In Streeck's (2014) terms, capitalism is quite literally running out of time, having successfully postponed the day of reckoning through various strategies of 'buying time'. In addition, there is the dual crisis of climate change and energy, the latter exacerbated by the war in Ukraine.

The result of this situation is a deep division in most societies between those who can be described as the 'winners' and the' losers' of globalization. There are now many examples of a 50/50 divide – deeply engrained social and political polarization – in western democracies between what can also be characterized as a conflict between the post-national political community and the nationalist one (Delanty, 2018; Fligstein, 2008). In other words, there is a new division between those who largely identify with national culture and those whose horizons have been extended beyond the limits of the traditional markers of class and nation. In the context of the post-2008-10 upheaval following the financial crisis that began in 2008 this set the conditions for a further cultural and political clash between two very broad spectrums of the population, which can also be termed "nationals" and "cosmopolitans". The resulting polarization is not just the outcome of different cultural values spheres, but of a deep transformation within capitalism. The illusion that capitalism is something everyone benefits from is now no longer a credible claim, in view of the stagnation of wages, major income disparity and a supra wealthy global elite (Turchin, 2023). This has driven a deep wedge in contemporary societies and, as Peter Turchin has shown, has brought about a major transformation in the political landscape in the United States, to the point that democracy is in danger.

This conflict plays out in different ways, including across generations, but there is a general clash between the radical or populist right (with the support of the extreme right) and the centre ground as well as the left. This is reflected in, for example, the politics regarding climate change. In western countries at least, it appears to be the case that climate change is regarded as high priority by the educated urban middle classes, but very low priority for other groups. This difference maps across patterns of social polarization that are evident in the support basis for Brexit in the UK and for Trump in the United States and generally for support for right-wing populism. It also plays out in adherence to conspiracy theories, which have become a feature of political culture today.

Capitalism has produced a new class of the precariat and has underlined the security that the middle class once enjoyed. However, the resulting clash is not simply a cultural clash, as in the notion of cultural wars between the winners and the losers

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of globalization, for there are no real winners. The cultural wars are driven by the transformation in work, and by the lack of security and precarity that now extends into the middle class (Asmanova, 2020). The Covid-19 Pandemic exacerbated these trends. It should be noted that these groups, which I have referred to as cosmopolitans and nationals, are not tightly defined or homogenous, but are rather internally variable and volatile.

Finally, there is the context of the war in Ukraine, with the ever-present danger of an escalation leading to nuclear war but the more likely prospect of a 'forever' war between Ukraine (and hence Europe) and the Russian Federation. This situation has led to a new Iron Curtain, and a new global division that re-organizes the multi-polar world that appeared to be taking shape in the 1990s between the U.S. and China. According to Branko Milanović (2019), there are now two types of capitalism competing with each other, liberal meritocratic capitalism and political authoritarian capitalism, including failing democracies.

So, my argument so far is that I do not think any account of cultural change can ignore the structural situation (both in national societies and in the global context) and the major crises of our time, which I have briefly sketched here. In other words, cultural change cannot be explained only by reference to culture.

The Concept of the 'Post'

Before going to the question of cultural change and the vexed question of the post-digital, let me begin by addressing the notion of a 'post'-phenomenon, which I have already invoked twice (post-material) and can easily add 'post' to cosmopolitanism, as in 'postcosmpolitanism.' What does it mean to say something is post and is this a helpful term?

As I understand it, the prefix 'post', in the most meaningful sense possible indicates (1) that something is at a sufficiently advanced stage whereby by the continued use of the term without the qualification 'post' would see only the old form and not the emerging new shape, which contains elements of the old and the new.

It can also (2) imply a strong critique of the phenomenon as a redundant concept to describe something that has ceased to exist or (3) in a yet stronger form it refers to 'something' that never in fact existed, an illegitimate category.

Thus, to take the most famous post concept, the postmodern. The most useful rendition of the term I suggest is that of Zygmunt Bauman, who in *Legislators and Interpreters*, one of his most interesting books, defined the postmodern as a reflective stage of the modern, modernity taking a critical look at itself (Bauman, 1987). In this sense, it is not something fundamentally new, but integral to modernity itself. In the second sense I indicated, as in Lyotard's famous definition in *The Postmodern Condition*, it signals a rupture with modernity, which is no longer a relevant term to

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understand the present (Lyotard, 1984 [1979]). Then, in this vein, we have Latour's stronger argument in *We Have Never Been Modern* that modernity is not necessarily coming to an end – it never existed in the first place (Latour, 1993 [1991]). In other words, it is a mistaken or illegitimate term to begin with (Latour, of course, did not use the term postmodern, but it was implicit in his argument and often used in this sense). While similar, all three signal different meanings of the notion of 'post,' with the first two being the principal meanings. My view is that the first use, as in Bauman's use of the term, makes the most sense. In any case, Lyotard's argument has been mostly contested since it is based on a caricature of modernity and does not take account of the many counter-currents that have been as much constitutive of modernity as the 'grand narratives' that he sees debunked by the postmodern, a term that was later used by Frederic Jameson and David Harvey as the condition of late capitalism.

I would like to suggest that all three senses of the post can be found in the notion of the postdigital. Lack of clarity gives rise to much confusion and much confusion remains. As indicated, my view is that the most meaningful use of the term is the first sense, namely the idea that the phenomenon – be it the digital, modernity, American, the west – continues (it is not at an end) but has undergone a sufficient degree of transformation that its continued use fails to recognize the changed circumstances of the present context. This applies to the whole of culture and relates to the problem of the 'in-between,' the time of crisis and transformation. I think we can discard the third sense and the second is highly problematic – i.e. that the phenomenon is passé.

A further problem of course relates to how one should know where we stand in history? If the post refers to the end of something and the beginning of a new era, how do we know that a new era is about to start? We may be at the beginning of an era, as the notion of the Anthropocene suggests. This notion challenges the very idea of the post.

Before proceeding further, I would like to comment on another problem with the post concept, since what I just argued is not a vindication of the term. It can too easily be just a bad theory. Here is why. Post-arguments, as in the notion of the postmodern, are essentially corrective arguments, unless they are very strong arguments, as in Lyotard's thesis, which I think has been invalidated. That is to say, a post-argument is a corrective of an argument that needs to be qualified. Now, with the passage of time the corrected position comes to be accepted as the only reasonable one. I think that was Bauman's position, namely a more critical and reflective interpretation of modernity than outright rejection and an announcement of something entirely new. While I agree with this attempt to bring a stronger dimension of self-problematization to bear on the phenomenon in question in order to correct a problematic theory, there is the danger that one of the other senses of the term becomes, in effect, a substitute for the loss of meaning of the old term. Even if this is

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not the case, there is the problem that the corrective becomes in time the new norm, when in fact it is based on a correction of an illegitimate theory or concept. My view, then, is that many of these post arguments are based on bad theories of the past that have been used to interpret the present.

This is the case with the notion of the postdigital (which I discuss later). However, there is a sense in which it can be meaningful, as in the claim that the digital revolution is now over (assuming this to be true) and that digitalization is the current reality of contemporary society. This reasoning could also apply to the notion of post-modern society: The modern has arrived everywhere, it is no longer new. So, once we have agreed on that, we can continue to use the term, digital, modern etc. My conclusion then is that the prefix 'post' is not ultimately helpful. One problem nevertheless remains: Since almost every concept in social science is contested, we can easily have a situation in which every concept is defined as a post-concept. Erik Swyngedouw (2020) has argued that, for the discipline of geography, there is now a post-political condition in which solutions that oppose the existing regime are constructed as impossible. But what does this really mean? In effect, it means nothing more than the condition of hegemony, where the given order, in this neo-liberalism, is naturalized and cannot be criticized. Considering that market-based politics are indeed questioned, and while dominant are not hegemonic, this is a problematic argument.

Perhaps, one way of overcoming some of these conceptual problems is not to over-burden a concept as a theory. The notion of the postdigital can only make sense when located within the context of a wider theory of social change.

Major Socio-Cultural Change Today

My argument in the foregoing is not what it may appear to be, namely a pedantic exercise. I wanted to draw attention to an aspect of cultural change, which is that cultural change over the past three decades or so has now come to an end. The new has arrived, but it is nothing new anymore. That is to say, the tremendous transformations brought about by the internet, the new social movements of the 1970s/1980s, European integration, the end of the Cold War, globalization and the cosmopolitanism that was a feature of the 1990s have reached a point at which they are no longer transformative. That is obviously not to say that an endpoint has been reached, but their transformative potential has been reached, if not exhausted. These movements have crystalized and only their consequences remain, but they continue as important currents in our historical present. We cannot say that they have simply vanished.

Let's take some examples. The New Social Movements that came to the forefront of politics in western societies since the 1960s have now been largely exhausted of

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their revolutionary impact. Feminism is nothing new anymore (which is not to say it has not achieved its aims or that it no longer exists). Emancipation can be as much the rallying call of the extreme right as of the left. As we know from the writings of Foucault, the pursuit of emancipation can be the basis of new kinds of domination which appear as forms of emancipation. The New Social Movements of the 1970s are in any case now the old ones. The new ones are Black Lives Matter [BLM], eco movements, for example, as regards progressive politics, and there is a plethora of social movements of the right, which all see themselves as emancipatory.

Europeanization fits into this pattern whereby a process enters into a more complicated situation with numerous crisis tendencies and counter-currents. The post-Second World War project of European integration is widely believed to be in crisis today. But is it? Examples of crisis tendencies include some of the following. There has been a weakening of internal cohesion; since 2016 Brexit has been a major weakening of the EU as an economic bloc; the problem of non-compliant members, e.g. Hungary and general political instability as a result of the growing dominance of the extreme right; eastern enlargement has stalled with several members of the former Yugoslavia frozen out (Serbia, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia) as well Albania; uncertainty around Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, and Turkey probably permanently out. Sleaze in the European Parliament has added to the EU's legitimacy problem. The rise of new authoritarian regimes on the margins of the EU, principally Russia and the Russian-Ukrainian war, presents a serious challenge that the EU is ill-equipped to handle. The EU was born of a desire to prevent war in Europe. While war within the European Union is now the past of Europe, the reality today is that war has come to haunt Europe again as the current war will in all probability morph into a frozen war with a permanent threat to security resulting from the need to protect Ukraine, which will inevitably acquire union membership.

However, without going further into the woes of the EU, I do not think these crises mean Europeanization is in terminal decline or there is a deep legitimacy problem or some kind of systemic fault. On the contrary. Rather, many of its objectives – for example, peace between France and Germany – have been realised. New problems inevitably arise when the old ones have been solved. In many ways, its success has led to the onset of new problems. European integration is simply an accomplished fact; it is no longer a project. European societies have been irreversibly Europeanized. This is true too of Brexit Britain. In fact, Brexit – aside from being a catastrophe for the UK; it is an example of a failed project which is now deemed to have officially failed – demonstrates the impossibility of leaving the EU, or at least the impossibility of leaving behind Europeanization. It has served as a warning to others. Strangely, in this case the recognition of failure does not extend to regret. We may nonetheless see a gradual process of re-alignment with the UK slowly returning to the EU. It should also be noted that the nation-state itself is also in crisis – the idea that the EU is in crisis in contrast to stable nation-states is a myth.

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The European project has from the beginning been a multi-tiered and perhaps also a multi-speed project that does not require the abolition of the nation-state but its structural transformation. As with any process of integration, there will be degrees of re-balancing and re-structuring (see Jones, 2018, Patberg, 2020). So, I do not see a return to something historically prior. This is also the case with Brexit: The UK has not gone back to where it was before it joined. The current situation regarding the EU is rather one of partial reversals and reorientations. The EU may not be going forward to 'ever greater union,' but is also not going backwards. A pertinent example is that since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 there has been a re-orientation of the EU around a common security and energy policy.

Let me give a short digression on a related matter. I have argued in various publications that Europe today is 'post-western', in the sense that it is no longer defined by the context of the Cold War when it was largely shaped by the western core states allied to the USA (Delanty, 2003, 2006). Since 1989, Europe has been redefined in a way that encompasses the wider diversity of civilizations that have constituted its history. This, what I have referred to as an 'inter-civilizational constellation', includes the relationship to Russia, as it does the Byzantine, Jewish, and Muslim heritages. The term captures the sense of multiple and entangling civilizations, as opposed to a singular and now discredited notion of 'Western Civilization' and its modern successor 'The West.' Inspired by T.W. Adorno's use of the term, the concept of a constellation suggests a pattern that is not underpinned by a fixed or objective structure.

Where does cosmopolitanism fit into this picture? This is more complicated since the term has many meanings. I do not use it in the sense of world government or the overcoming of the nation-state by some kind of supra-national body, nor do I use it as a highly normative term to describe a desirable state of affairs. Cosmopolitanism, as I see it, is essentially a condition of openness to the world. It is expressed in the opening or expansion of horizons—not just the fusion of horizons—and comes into play in the encounter of the Self with the Other whereby a shift in self-understanding takes place. In this sense, cosmopolitanism accords with the logic of dialogue, since dialogue entails incorporating the perspective of the other. So, this is a hermeneutic understanding of cosmopolitanism but one that is also critical in that it goes beyond mere understanding, beyond the other to self-problematization and a questioning of what was previously taken for granted (see Delanty, 2009, 2019).

The appeal of cosmopolitanism can be accounted for as an alternative to the violent nationalism that was a feature of much of the 20th century, but also due to the desire for a normative critique of globalization. Rather than being an affirmative condition, it is transformative and is produced by social struggles. It is arguably the case that despite widespread anti-cosmopolitan trends, there has been a worldwide increase in the recognition of cosmopolitan principles and the carriers of it are more likely to be oppositional movements seeking to advance global social justice.

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In this sense, it is more of a 'bottom up' movement than one deriving from global elite culture or transnational institutions. The notion of a rooted cosmopolitanism has been invoked to capture this notion of an everyday cosmopolitanism. The reception of cosmopolitanism in the social sciences, as well as in post-colonial thought, whereby cosmopolitanism becomes linked with empirical social phenomena, makes it difficult to claim that cosmopolitanism is only an elite phenomenon or something that has somehow failed. It is increasingly associated with the claims to rights of groups previously excluded from political community.

There is no doubt that the current situation has seen the rise of counter or anti-cosmopolitan trends. But these do not define the present. I am also suggesting, in line with the argument I have established, that cosmopolitanism is no longer something new. But that is not to claim that the present is an era of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan currents are an inextricable aspect of contemporary society; but so too are the counter-currents.

To be sure, a significant shift in political discourse has taken place in recent times, but not a major transformation in the EU, which has remained remarkably stable. The resurgence of nationalism does not alter the fact that the world is more interconnected than it is divided. Anti-cosmopolitan currents have certainly become more pronounced, but like all movements they are fraught with contradictions. The 1990s saw a rise in cosmopolitanism but a drop in labour protection, which unleashed anti-cosmopolitan trends. For all of these reasons, I do not think it makes much sense to say that cosmopolitanism is exhausted, or indeed the contrary, that we live in a cosmopolitan world. The reality is that cosmopolitanism is a force in the world, as is anti-cosmopolitanism. Social reality cannot be understood as a zero-sum condition, whereby something is either absent or present. It makes more sense to see degrees of a phenomenon present.

In this context, we can consider the notion of post-migrancy, a concept I take to refer to a situation that exists in many European countries, but by no means all, but especially those Western European post-colonial societies, such as Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, that experienced waves of migration from their former colonies since the 1950s. In some cases, this includes migration from the south to the north of Europe and Turkish migration to West Germany. In all of these cases, migration transformed the host societies such that, as vividly illustrated by Britain, there is no longer a clear-cut native culture, assuming there ever was one. This has led to a changed understanding of multiculturalism, which is no longer premised on the existence of a majority culture that tries to accommodate minority cultures. The reality is that the majority culture has been transformed. In that sense, we have post-migration societies, that is societies that have already been transformed by migration (and not societies that no longer have migration). Again, this also demonstrates the futility of Brexit, which was driven by the desire or fantasy of a specific segment of society to return to a world in which Britain was inhabited by white people.

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Another feature of socio-cultural change that I would like to discuss is generational change. Following Karl Mannheim in a classic essay, generations are not just a group born at the same time but have an identity shaped by the events that define their cohort, which may be a traumatic event or a major historical experience (Mannheim, 1952 [1927]). The notion of a generation reveals the impact of major demographic trends. Let us look at some examples, mindful that many notions of generations are loose popular terms, not socio-scientific concepts.

Baby Boomers: Those born circa 1945/6–1964/5 (sometimes seen as born in the 1940s and 1950s). The term was created by the U.S. Census Bureau, but it includes the '68 generation, i.e. those who went to university in late 1960s, many of whom were agents of cultural and political change in Europe (the 1968 generation were the first of the baby boomers, born in post-1945 period).

Generation X: Those born in mid 1960s–1980s, the era of "alienated youth" who grew up in the emerging neo-liberal era. The term apparently was coined by Douglas Coupland's 1991 novel *Generation X*.

Millenniums (or millennials): Those born in the early 1980s to mid-1990s, the generation who grew up in a more globalized era, but one that was also neo-liberal. The Millenniums brought racial and cultural diversity to the mainstream and can be characterized as "cultural omnivores", i.e. for whom there is no distinction between high and low culture (see de Vries, 2021).

Generation Z: Those born from the mid-1990s to circa 2010 (early 2000) Generation Z are the 'Zoomers', the first to have grown up in a digital age, in contrast to the baby boomers, who grew up in the era of the car.

The generations that came after the boomers had to compete with larger populations, which kept wages down (Duff, 2021: 25). With some generations there is a strong cultural difference, even a clash, between them and their parents, especially between the baby boomers and their parents, who were born before the Second World War. Generations are characterized by collective historical experience. They are not necessarily exclusive and can overlap and co-exist. While the notion of a generation in part reflects popular culture, the notion does correspond to something authentic that is not captured by other collective categories, such as class, gender, and ethnicity. Generations are nonetheless agents of socio-cultural change, as Karl Manheim recognized, or at least expressions of cultural change.

The arrival of Generation Z is perhaps a point of entry to the digital/postdigital situation.

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Digitalization, the Postdigital and AI

What I am essentially doing is placing the digital in a wider context, and more generally to interpret the current situation or the major transformations of the present time. Digital culture and digitalization are part of the fabric of social formation. As I suggested in the foregoing, we have to see it as part of the socio-structural context.

As I see it, the postdigital is not a term that can be applied to the wider society, as in the notion of a digital era, as there are other designations of our time that are more appropriate. It is a term that can only refer to digital phenomena, namely the conversion of analogue information into other forms, such as texts, images, sounds etc. But the notion of the postdigital does open up wider issues – in the sense it invokes other social processes that are not themselves digital. A key point, in line with the above reasoning, is that the current situation is one in which digitalization is no longer new, or revolutionary. It has become the new normality. So, the 'post' prefix is seeking to qualify the newness of the digital and affirming a continuation rather than a rupture with digitalization.

This characterization is consistent with the other examples I have mentioned, especially postmodernity. However, it is perhaps worth suggesting that there may be just one sense that marks the digital era as different. Perhaps it may be the case that the real revolution has yet to come. I am thinking here of the potential impact of Artificial Intelligence. This may not be quite within the technological limits of the digital, but it is clearly part of the technological innovation begun by digitalization (and the related field of nanotechnology). AI has brought the information age to a new stage, letting aside for now whether the term 'information age' is an adequate account of contemporary capitalism, as Manuel Castells argued in the 1990s.

So, I venture the claim that the most significant transformation in the digital world is the advancement of AI. This is a major, even revolutionary transformation of digitalization (Elliott, 2022, Nowotny, 2021). The massive amount of data that digitalization generates – as a result of Big Data, datafication, and algorithms – produces the need for artificial intelligence in order to make sense of the data, which is too large for the human mind to process. Thus, AI is given a rationale in computational decision-making. This represents a step more significant than cyber-reality, mediated interaction that came with the digital revolution.

Now, as I said, while it is being increasingly recognized that digitalization is becoming the new normal – and hence the notion of the postdigital – I am not convinced that this is the case with AI as it potentially morphs into AGI – Artificial General Intelligence. We may be at an early stage in its development, but it is important to note that this is not yet a reality. AGI refers to a super artificial intelligence whereby robots acquire the ability to learn without being confined to performing logistical or mechanical tasks given to them by humans. Unlike AI as it currently stands with generative AI as its most advanced embodiment, AGI is a different phe-

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nomenon that is not dependent on humans for input or control. It is in effect no longer based on the model of a machine but an autonomous form of super-intelligence (Bostrum, 2016).

Castell's famous account of the "Information Society" was characterized by a strong sense of the capacity of human agency to control it. It was also compatible with cosmopolitanism and the notion of autonomy that is often seen as a basis of modernity, the fundamental impetus of freedom. But what if it were the other way around? Is there not a danger that the new brave world of robotization/AGI represents a movement into the post-human domain – another post? What about some of the potential technological developments yet to come? Some of these may be benign, products of human intelligence and subservient to human needs. But there are also the dystopian scenarios and potential visions of the end of humanity. The possible rise of AGI can be seen as a postdigital development that while a continuation of the digital it marks a significant movement into a new context, which has been called the 'new singularity' (Kurzweil, 2005). What if it seized control? This is a risk, which is probably implausible. It has been argued that it cannot come about (Landgrebe & Smith, 2023). Such scenarios are of course examples of the very long term, but they do give a sense of the direction of technological transformation that has already begun, since the fear now is that such developments could come about as a result of things spiralling out of control following on from, as yet, unanticipated technological innovation. Were such a scenario to come to pass we would definitely be in the domain of the postdigital in a more ominous sense of the term.

Conclusions

Cultural change today is more bound up with technological change than ever before. The transformation of digitalization by AI is one of the greatest developments in the structural context. It is obviously not specific to the EU. One outcome of cultural change arising from digitalization is the fragmentation of consciousness. The individual lacks not a direct relation to social reality, but also lacks a mediated one since there is only mediatization. There are potential advantages for the future from AI, but also great dangers in developments around super intelligent machines that go beyond the dangers that lurk in algorithmic governance. It is impossible to draw clear conclusions about future trends from the current situation. It may be the case that our fears of AI are related to anxiety about the unknown.

This relates to a wider aspect of our historical present, namely the fact of deep anxiety that is probably a product of a great deal of uncertainty in many areas of social life. As mentioned, precarity has now extended into the middle class and increased social polarization has led to a more volatile political context that is now complicated by climate change. While there is some justification in seeing in the

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present the signs of a permacrisis – a concatenation of multiple crises – democracy is not static and a major force in the world, as is cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan sensibilities are most evident in young people, who are today especially in Europe more likely to be university educated than their parents, as well as being more digitalized in their lifestyles. It may quite well transpire that the generational difference will play a major role in shaping the future. At the moment, this is largely expressed as a cultural clash, but it has the potential to become a greater force of change. For the first time the current generation of young people will be less well off than their parents. The resulting discontent has not yet found a political voice. This is a contrast to the discontent of older people, whose experience of loss of status in our digitalized and globalized societies has found a voice in authoritarian and anti-cosmopolitan politics.

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Critical Internet Histories and the Charting of Postdigital Cosmopolitanism: Historiography and the Junctures of Platformization

Fergal Lenehan

Abstract *This chapter contains a variety of methodological arguments relating to the topic of internet histories and how they may be rethought in light of platformization and cosmopolitanism. Part 1 provides an overview of some leading trends within internet histories. It is ultimately argued that Critical Internet Studies could provide a basis for a more unifying approach to internet histories in what would be a new Critical Internet Histories that also centres questions of power relations. Part 2 examines platformization as a theoretical (but also very real) concept and argues that the internet should be seen as a patchwork of (often competing) platforms, in what may be viewed as a (partial) closing of the internet. Platformization has also resulted in the postdigital transformation of the lifeworld and, therefore, platformization has also radically changed the material context of internet histories. Part 3 brings together the topics of globalization, cosmopolitanism and platform history (as a subfield of internet histories). It is here argued that platformization also represents a spatialization of the internet via processes of bounding/bordering, while platformization also remains interconnected with the material postdigital processes of globalization. Platformization, as a type of digital globalization, structurally enables postdigital cosmopolitanism – if only on terms created by the platforms themselves – in a type of platform cosmopolitanism. This chapter ultimately argues for an internet history inspired by methodological approaches to the history of globalization, which would view platform history – as a sub-field of internet histories – as an orientation that engages with the critical junctures of platformization; moments and spaces in which platforms are created, questioned, lose mass appeal or are discontinued. This would also be a type of internet historical writing examining the shifting contexts of postdigital cosmopolitanism.*

Introduction

The phrase "to understand the present, you need to understand the past" is a truism. Certainly, an informed and critical appraisal of the events that have led to the present remains central to many academic strands and disciplines. This is also true

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for both Internet Studies and Intercultural Communication; interdisciplinary fields that have borrowed methodologically from a variety of areas. This chapter sets out the wide recent landscape of internet histories and brings the historiographical-methodological discussion at the centre of internet histories together with areas such as Critical Internet Studies, platformization and the interdisciplinary discussion surrounding cosmopolitanism. The chapter ultimately argues for an approach to internet history inspired by methodological approaches to the history of globalization. This would view internet histories as centring on the *critical junctures of platformization*; moments and spaces in which platforms are created, questioned, lose mass appeal or are discontinued. This would also be a type of internet historical writing examining the *shifting contexts of postdigital cosmopolitanism*, which takes place on platforms and on the platforms' terms.

1. Internet Histories: An Overview of Some Leading Trends

While internet history, as a form of historiography, is a relatively new phenomenon, it has been marked by a vigorous methodological discussion, and has been heavily influenced by developments within wider Media History and Cultural Studies. Indeed, the very notion of what the internet itself may constitute and how it should be defined and perceived, has remained a central and still very relevant topic of discussion (Goggin & McLelland, 2017: 4; and Shah, 2017: 50); internet theory and understanding how to undertake internet history remain interwoven. Some of the leading trends within Anglophone and German-language internet history will now be discussed, albeit necessarily in a non-exhaustive manner that centres on specific examples.

Wider Contextual-Materialist Internet Histories

The establishment of what actually constitutes the material and temporal context has remained a central question in internet histories. In relation to the then dominant type of U.S.-centred internet historical narrative, Rosenzweig (1998: 1530–1531) emphasizes the wider cultural and intellectual context and the variety of actors involved in the internet's construction, requiring thus, he believes, the adoption of a variety of perspectives; biographical, bureaucratic, ideological, and social. Krämer (2022: 10), on the other hand, extends the temporal context even further in her description of the possibilities of what she calls a cultural history of digitalization. She situates this as not necessarily intertwined with computer technologies, but as also evident in the early coding and the pre-computer mathematical combinations and re-combinations of early modern and 19th century figures, such Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Ada Lovelace (Krämer, 2022: 12–16).

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Most historiographical contextual widening does not, however, look to completely transform our perception of central internet-based concepts in order to gain valuable extended contextual insights. Haigh et al. (2015: 144) emphasize that the term "internet" has evolved well beyond the hardware and software of the network itself and incorporates "the mind-bogglingly diverse variety of human activities conducted over it." Intensive and holistic historical study of some of these human activities means extending the perspective to the earlier technologies that directly preceded them (Haigh et al., 2015: 149–159). Thus, a study of the streaming giant Netflix would incorporate the history, for example, of mail order video libraries, cable television and the DVD, while a history of Wikipedia could also investigate the development of encyclopaedias since the 1700s.

A number of authors (e.g. Ning, 2022; Driscoll, 2022) have recently engaged with the "prehistory" of social media, understood as the wider history of computer social networking; here particularly the bulletin board system in the United States which utilized telephone lines to create an early infrastructure of networked social computing. Prior to the wider commercialization and opening up of the internet, a number of localized small-scale systems were hosted throughout the U.S. and Canada and "the fundamental structure of the modern internet was forged on a dial-up BBS", according to Driscoll (2022: 2). Such methodologies retain similarities to the media archaeology[1] approach within media history which emphasizes the importance of materiality, and the "material ecologies of media objects, systems and processes" (Goddard, 2015: 1762). A media archaeological approach to the internet incorporates technical components but also "the economic, social and environmental relations that both sustain the internet and are generated by it" (Goddard, 2015: 1764).

Text-Oriented Internet Histories

Another orientation within internet histories sees the internet and especially the web as a vast sea of text requiring bounding, archiving and interpretation. Parikka (2011: 54) actually creates a division within wider media history between contextual materialists and those looking to interpret text, essentially seeing two dominant camps: "The German variant of hardcore/-ware media archaeology and the cultural studies Anglo-American style of focusing on content, users and representations." Indeed, Wellbery (1990: ix) describes the media historical approach of Friedrich A.

1 Thanks to Professor Alexa Robertson of Stockholm University for pointing out the importance of media archaeology following the oral presentation of this chapter during the Second ReDICo E-Co-Conference "Cosmopolitanism in a Postdigital, Postmigrant Europe, and Beyond".

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Kittler as a type of "post-hermeneutic criticism"[2], while Parikka (2011: 59–60), writing chiefly in relation to the German media scholar Wolfgang Ernst, sees media archaeology in similar terms as a non-interpretive "anti-hermeneutics".

Yet, this division into something resembling a "German" materialist approach and an "Anglophone" Cultural Studies oriented towards text-interpretation in the widest sense, is surely overly simplistic. Siegfried Zielinski (1986: 37–39) – generally seen as one of the leading figures of German media archaeology – is actually in full agreement with Raymond Williams, one of the founders of the field of Anglophone Cultural Studies, in his doctoral thesis on the history of the video cassette and, like Williams, believes that television needs to be seen as a social process, as part of technological and socio-cultural developments. Writing about the internet of the 1990s, Zielinski (1999: 291) is of the opinion, despite the multimodal nature of the internet, that "text clearly dominates." Thus, Anglophone Cultural Studies also engage with material aspects of context and German-language Media History is not exactly anti-textual. Indeed, the German scholar Hartmut Winkler (1997: 55), in his media theory of the computer, even suggested – in the late 1990s – that the interconnection of computers would result in the re-invigoration of text, in a potentially universal "Datenuniversum".

Thus, textual-interpretive and material-contextual approaches to internet histories are not necessarily easy to untangle. Probably the most important work of a textual-oriented approach to internet histories has come from Niels Brügger. A large part of Brügger's work has dealt with the area of web history, seeing this as an aspect of internet history and wider Internet Studies (Brügger, 2009: 115; Brügger, 2012: 753). He (Brügger, 2009: 115) has sought to theorize web history and website history, including what he calls the constituent components of websites (Brügger, 2009: 116) and the many (textual) "strata" of the web in general (Brügger, 2012: 753–754), while questions relating to web historiography (Brügger, 2012: 755) and web archiving (Brügger, 2009: 116, 122; and Brügger, 2012: 757–759) have also remained central.

More recently Brügger (2016: 1064) has engaged with the nexus of the web, social media and mobile media. A further monograph has re-visited web archival and historiographical issues and views the "archived web" as "a semiotic, textual system" that tells us something about the past but that also requires a "broad perspective", including "cultural, social, political, [and] technological" context (Brügger, 2018: 7–8). Brügger (2018: 5) also argues for the importance of "digitality", which he sees as the manner in which a digital medium is constituted as a media artifact and "as a textual phenomenon, in the broad sense of the word *textual* (original italics)", as digital media are not "necessarily digital in the same way." Thus, while contextual issues are

2 Winthrop-Young and Wutz (1999: xx) see the early work of Kittler as engaging in a type of Foucauldian discourse analysis, focusing on exclusionary logics.

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certainly not ignored, web history is oriented towards the archiving and interpretation of large amounts of (originally) digital text.

Discursive Internet Histories

Another orientation within internet histories diverges from directly examining the internet itself – however one wishes to view this – and engages with the layers of meaning imposed upon the internet, or aspects of the internet, as a collectively understood technological and socio-cultural phenomenon. Methodologically, such internet histories have drawn from a variety of historiographical strands including discourse history, historical semantics, conceptual history, and intellectual history, while some approaches have also been indebted to social scientific methodologies. The central questions here relate to how collective meanings are generated, where these are to be found and indeed how such meanings may be analyzed and depicted.

Discursive internet histories have viewed a variety of aspects and contexts. Fred Turner's (2006) monograph *From Counterculture to Cyberculture,* examining Stewart Brand and the Whole Earth Network magazine and catalogue from the late 1960s, is also an intellectual history of digital utopianism and early U.S. imaginaries of the internet, while for example Craig Jarvis (2022) has more recently examined the anarchist and countercultural ideas behind what he calls the mid-1990s "cyberpunk ideology". Matthew Allen (2012: 261) has criticized the influence of the "discourse of versions" which, he argues, has become the dominant mode of popularly understanding the history of the internet, suggesting that "web 2.0 bears meaning only in comparison to an imagined previous period." More recently, Miltner and Gerrard (2022) have examined the changing discourse in relation to understandings of the social media platform MySpace.

Further authors have used oral history methods together with discursive historical approaches and have examined nostalgia as a dominant discourse through which early internet users have viewed their own prior usage (Driscoll, 2020). Others have viewed the mid-1990s discourse surrounding the internet, with a clear nod to Raymond Williams, as a "structure of feeling" (Streeter, 2017). Hösl (2019), utilizing Reinhart Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte* or history of concepts method, has traced the changing contours of the meaning given to the term internet itself within selected German media publications over a thirty-year period.

The discursive orientation is, therefore, a varied and important strand within internet histories, shedding light on popular and widely shared understandings of the internet, and/or aspects of the internet.

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Internet Histories as Microhistories of Discontinuities

In many ways all internet histories have necessarily become microhistories, as no one would now seriously attempt to write a history of all aspects of the vast global-spanning complexity of the internet. A trend, however, may be noticed by which discontinuities within internet histories – aspects which came to an often sudden end – have aroused interest due to both their uniqueness and their possible influence on later and more fully realized aspects of the internet. This orientation may also be seen as congruent with certain orientations within German media archaeology.

Kerssens (2020: 33) has argued for a "legacy systems" perspective as the "theoretical fundament [sic] for a genealogical understanding of internet history" as opposed to what he calls a "legacy perspective" which traces "the historical origins of *the* (original italics) Internet to establish lineages of continuity that demonstrate how American pasts still operate in and affect our internetworking present." His (Kerssens, 2020: 33) approach would attend to the "discontinuities of internet histories" and "the historical conditions of possibility that gave birth to now lost, forgotten and obsolete networks", seeing the history of the internet also as "a legacy of European pasts." This is a history, thus, of possible alternative paths. A micro-historical approach to discontinuities may also challenge preconceptions regarding notions of media and social media – also in North America – as Stevenson (2016) has shown in his micro-history of *Hotwired*, the web-only publication of *Wired* magazine.

This approach retains many parallels with a media archaeological history. As Parikka (2011: 54) has written, media archaeology has often "been closer to media genealogy: writing counter-histories of such practises, ideas and contexts which are not included in mainstream film and media histories." Siegfried Zielinski (2006: 34) sees this as an "anarchaeology of media" centring on "a collection of curiosities", by which he means "finds from the rich history of seeing, hearing, and combining using technical means", aspects which point "beyond the meaning or function of their immediate context or origin", and from which we may learn something relating to wider media questions. Counter-histories and "curiosities", thus, exist beyond the dominant continuities of mainstream media and internet reality, from which scholars may learn more about adopted and dominant realities which have become the mainstream.

Beyond the U.S.-Centric Perspective

The first histories of the internet, especially Abbate's (1999) important early monograph, centred on North America and the development of early internet technology in the U.S. military and U.S. and Canadian universities, while simultaneously acknowledging the need for internet histories to acquire a wider cultural context. Indeed, in the introduction to the first issue of the leading internet history jour-

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nal *Internet Histories: Digital Technology, Culture and Society*, the editors (Brügger et al, 2017: 6) emphasize explicitly the need to "look beyond a sometimes U.S.-centric history and to broaden the scope"; a point also underscored by Turner (2017) and Abbate (2017) in the same issue. Indeed, many of the first German-language internet histories (Bunz, 2008; Schmitt, 2016) also centred on the United States, the development of early Arpanet internet technologies and the internet's "arrival" from North America.

There have, thus, been numerous calls for a movement away from a U.S.-centric approach to internet histories, as "important gaps remain" (Tréguer, 2017: 8) in the internet histories of many contexts worldwide. While internet histories have still to fully engage with some global regions, there have definitely been advances in the extension of the perspective, with, for example, studies of the professionalization of web culture in France (Schafer & Thierry, 2016), a history of the early internet in the Soviet Union (Peters, 2016), an examination of "revolutionary cybernetics" in 1970s Chile (Medina, 2014), and a transnational history of global wi-fi connectivity (Rikitianskaia, 2022). In the *Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories* there are chapters, for example, on the history of the internet in Israel (John, 2017), Mexico (Gutiérrez, 2017), Poland and Estonia (Kamińska-Korolczuk & Kihewska, 2017), Japan (McLelland, 2017), China (Yu, 2017), Papua New Guinea (Logan & Suwamaru, 2017), and Portuguese-speaking Africa (Salgado, 2017), among other (localized) "global internet histories".

While the U.S. legacy should not constitute the sole strand of internet histories, it still remains greatly important, however. Röhr (2021) has shown how elements of a dual narrative approach may be taken in his history of the arrival of internet technologies to West Germany in the 1970s and the 1980s, seeing this as a trans-Atlantic negotiation process involving, on the West German side, decentralized communities of enthusiasts (such as the Chaos Computer Club from Hamburg), and centralized state and federal authorities (from the areas of telephone communications, the postal service, and the televisual media). An approach incorporating the study of U.S. legacies in local contexts coupled with localized discourses and discontinuities may provide an innovative contextual avenue.

Critical Internet Studies as a Basis for Internet Histories?

'Critical Internet Studies' may provide elements of a unifying orientation from which internet histories could also draw inspiration, with critical internet histories combining a material-contextual and text-interpretive approach with a heightened sensitivity towards power relations in both material and textual internet-based contexts. Such an approach would be close to Zielinski's (1986: 27) theses regarding an early vision of an integrative techno-cultural history of television and also con-

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gruent with his (Zielinski, 1999: 20) later vision of a media history concentrating on "the materiality of the triadic relationship of technology-culture-subject."

Hunsinger (2020) has set out a vision of Critical Internet Studies that, he believes, should always remain conscious of two things: The very real materiality of the internet, and its use in the generation and rapid distribution of meaning. Thus, he firstly highlights the necessity of viewing critically the materialities of the internet and the power relations inscribed within this technology, "its software and hardware and those owning and regulating it" (Hunsinger, 2020: 273). Secondly, Critical Internet Studies is also inherently textual, he believes, and attends to the meaning frameworks that are central to the internet; "the discourses, ideologies, social imaginaries and fictums" and "the spheres of meaning generation and distribution" which is "one of the primary modes in which the Internet operates" (Hunsinger, 2020: 273–274). But relations of power reflected in the multitude of texts produced in internet communicative contexts also remain central to Critical Internet Studies as a methodological perspective and should be central to critical internet histories. As Hunsinger (2020: 274) writes: "Regarding utterances, as the Internet is a medium of utterances, Critical Internet Studies has a responsibility to ask the perpetual question of 'in whose interest?' or 'who benefits' from the actions, policies, or utterances."

2. Platformization

Methodological reflections relating to platform history as a "sub-genre" of internet histories is central to this chapter, but before engaging further with this historical-methodological discussion, we need to firstly engage with the scientific discourse surrounding platforms and platformization. Indeed, it has become clear that this discourse has become central to internet studies, as the "internet" – in terms of its inclusions and exclusions, the organization of software, and the structures of textuality contained within it – should now be seen, it is here argued, as a patchwork of, at times competing, platforms.

The dominating structure of the internet, including both the web and mobile app landscape, is indeed now the "platform". According to Kenny and Zysman (2016, no page numbers), "the term 'platform' simply points to a set of online digital arrangements whose algorithms serve to organize and structure economic and social activity", while "in a sense, the Internet itself is the foundational platform, with Google as its cataloguer." A vast variety of platforms structure the internet across potentially a wide series of devices. These include for example social media, app stores, online market-places, payment services, gig economy platforms, search engines, communication services, and streaming platforms. Gillespie (2010: 348) details how YouTube first began describing itself as a "platform" in the late 2000s and how the term gained currency from then on. According to the author (Gillespie, 2010:

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348), the "discursive positioning" of the term was ultimately successful, as it was "specific enough to mean something, and vague enough to work across multiple venues for multiple reasons."

Helmond (2015: 1) was the first author to define the phenomenon of 'platformization' which she saw as "the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web and its consequences." The increased algorithmic underpinning of online activity has become evident (Kenny & Zysman, 2016), which Hallinan and Striphas (2016: 119) view in terms of a new "algorithmic culture." Nieborg and Poell (2018: 4276) have also emphasized how "the 'platform metaphor' actually obscures the power potential of the platforms themselves", which do not "just facilitate socio-economic, cultural, and political interaction, but very much organize and steer this interaction."

Platformization should also be seen as part of an inherently postdigital process, understood in general terms here as the loss of meaning accorded to the dichotomy between the digital world and the material world which should now be viewed as intertwined spheres,[3] as platformization not only facilitates the moulding of online interactions, but also penetrates material reality and facilitates the re-moulding and re-structuring of the material realities of distinct lifeworlds. Poell, Nieborg and van Dijck (2019) have advanced thinking on platformization as a postdigital phenomenon by suggesting a two-pronged definition. From Software Studies, Business Studies and -political economy perspectives, platformization is understood as "the penetration of the infrastructures, economic processes, and governmental frameworks of platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life" (Poell, Nieborg & van Dijck, 2019: 5). From a Cultural Studies perspective, they (Poell, Nieborg & van Dijck, 2019: 6) view platformization as "the reorganisation of cultural practice and imaginations around platforms."

The postdigital impact of platformization, as a moulding and restructuring process beyond but also intertwined with the digital, is especially evident in relation to cultural artifacts, with Nieborg and Poell (2018: 4276) arguing that "cultural production is progressively 'contingent on', that is, *dependent* (original italics) on a select group of powerful digital platforms," in the West at least meaning here Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft. Davis (2020: 84) has built directly on these arguments and has shown, by focussing on Amazon, how the platform has changed many aspects of the publishing industry, arguing that this has involved five concurrent processes: resorting (platforms acting as cultural mediators and tastemakers); transmutation (the aesthetics of form changing to more easily fit a platform); enclosure (bringing new practices into the market, such as public displays of reading habits); surveillance (a data-oriented activity of all cultural platforms); and capture

3 For a more extensive overview of the theoretical postdigital discussion, see Lenehan (2022: 14–16).

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(seeking to keep users on the platform for as long as possible). As Davis (2020: 84) notes, these processes do not "somehow replace the human but intersect with human factors in a hybrid post-digital environment where digital and human practices intermingle." It is important to also note that different platform logics with different postdigital effects and interconnected with various cultural contexts and histories exist world-wide, and this is not just a 'western' phenomenon (Davis & Xiao, 2021: 104–105).

The platform, as a digital-informational structure, now also has a fundamental and inherently postdigital role in the global economy. As Cohen (2017: 135) emphasizes "the platform is not simply a new business model, a new social technology, or a new infrastructural formation (although it is also all of those)", rather it constitutes now "the core organizational form of the emerging informational economy." Platforms have clearly changed the institutional and working dynamics of the media industry (Ihlebaek & Sundet, 2023), with a "growing macro-trend of platform dependence occurring across the sector" (Meese, 2023: 105), as well as helping to shape new contexts of digital teaching and learning (Garcia & Nichols, 2021: 15). While there are some continuities to be seen between "platform capitalism" and earlier forms of e-commerce (Langley & Leyson, 2017: 17), platforms have also contributed to massively changing many aspects of the forms and institutionalizations of work. As Pasquale (2016: 314) notes, according to one of the most dominant narratives of understanding in relation to platform capitalism, a platform-oriented "deregulated gig economy" is a path towards "precarity, prone to condemn laborers to insecure and poorly paid conditions."

Indeed, a number of extensive studies have engaged with platformization in relation to the changing world of work (e.g. Huws, Spencer & Coates, 2019; Woodcock, 2021), in what Woodcock (2021: 85), in his study of the platforms Uber and Deliveroo, has termed "an emerging new global composition of platform work." Zukerfeld (2022: 100) has suggested a practical and convincing "typology of platform-related work" that distinguishes firstly between "work behind and work *through* (original italics) capitalist platforms", while also highlighting of course the widespread existence of "non-capitalist platformisation", including "co-operatives, commons-based peer production and state agencies." Thus, platforms and platformization are central to contemporary phenomena inherent to economic globalization, as well as dominating the infrastructure of the internet, and remain postdigital driving forces that increasingly mould the materiality of the lifeworld.

Platformization has also transformed perceptions of the potentiality of the internet, as well as the realities of usage. According to ten Oever (2021: 349, 345) what he calls the "sociotechnical Internet architecture" has gone from being perceived in the early 1990s as "an engine for innovation", "an information highway" and "a tool for democratization", to being now viewed as a contested space in which power is accumulated. As Hesmondhalgh et al. (2023: 297) state, "the internet infrastructure

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that underpins so much contemporary media and communication" was framed by its developers as a "common resource available to all" "enabling the creation of an international network of networks, based on values of openness." They (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023: 301) also believe that the "role played by digital platforms in 'closing down' this openness" seems "poorly understood." Yet, authors such as Cohen (2017: 143) have already theorized the role and function of platforms within the internet landscape and the global economy, seeing platforms as representing "infrastructure-based strategies for introducing friction into networks" and the internet, formerly called the "network of networks", is becoming a "network of platforms." Platforms "supply infrastructures that facilitate particular types of interactions", but also "represent strategies for bounding networks and privatizing and controlling infrastructures" (Cohen, 2017: 144).

Thus, platforms represent the bordering of the internet, the creation of at times exclusive and 'walled' micro worlds existing on the wider internet, often in an unsystematic way, and not necessarily connected with other platforms. The contemporary internet is, thus, a (partly) disjointed and haphazard patchwork of platforms, some aspects of which may indeed be interconnected, but this structure does not in any way warrant the term 'network' anymore, which is suggestive of a systematic and interconnected structure. Systematic interconnection is now no longer an aspect of the wider internet. This is conducted, rather, *within* platforms.

3. Globalization, Cosmopolitanism and Platform History

Plantin et al. (2018: 295) have argued that the area of digital infrastructure studies – as an aspect of science and technology studies dealing with software and information science – should be brought together with platform studies in a merging of technological and media studies, bringing together an orientation that looks towards the study of internet structure and an orientation dealing with the study of meaning arising from these structures. As we have already seen, Cohen (2017: 144) has convincingly argued that platforms may also be essentially perceived as bounding and bordering structures which bring friction and, thus, exclusion onto the internet. It is here argued that platforms, because of this digital bordering, may also be viewed as a spatialization, as an institutionalization of the internet. The creation of at times exclusive digital spaces remain analogous, in many ways, to the creation of exclusive material spaces, such as nation-states and corporations, while digital spaces are also intertwined with and (partly) constituent of such lifeworld materialities and spatialities.

Indeed, authors have increasingly seen platforms as structures and agents of globalization, with Cohen (2017: 135) even arguing that "the platform is now key" to globalized economic interactions, as "platforms do not enter or expand markets;

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they replace them" becoming central agents in the emerging "informational economy". While in the 19th century corporations emerged as "a means of orchestrating economic activity and organizing markets", in the 21st century, platforms appear to take on this role (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). According to Canarello et al. (2022: 2333–2334), the third wave of globalization commenced in 1989 as the Cold War began to lose relevance and technology advanced, while other economists – connected to Citi Group – (Citi GPS, 2023: 9) believe that "we are now entering a third phase of globalization based on trade in services, as remote work technologies are becoming increasingly good substitutes for face-to-face interaction." According to Kenney and Zysman (2016): "Platforms and the cloud, as an essential part of what has been called the 'third globalization', reconfigure globalization itself." Thus platforms are central contemporary processes of globalization.

But how may the relationship between globalization and cosmopolitanism be configured? According to Delanty (2009: 250), globalization "creates a world of enhanced connections" which are not in themselves the "cosmopolitan condition", but globalization establishes "preconditions for its emergence." Delanty (2009: 251) writes: "Thus where globalization generally invokes an externally induced notion of social change, such as the global market, cosmopolitanism understood in terms of immanent transcendence refers to an internally induced social change whereby societies and social agents undergo transformations in their moral and political self-understanding as they respond to global changes." This is an understanding of cosmopolitanism as personal and collective/societal transformation due to increased and wider contacts via the preconditions and structures of globalization; a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008: 218). Thus, cosmopolitanism occurs (Delanty, 2008: 219) "through deliberation", as a "self-problematization and as learning from the other."

Platforms, as digital globalizing structures, may also act as agents of contact and thus as agents of cosmopolitanism, understood in the Delanty (2008; 2009) sense. As already discussed, platforms create boundaries within the internet, but also create new forms of interaction – if of course, however, solely on the platforms' terms – which may also be meaningful and may retain transformative characteristics of cosmopolitanism. Cohen (2017: 149) writes that "platform users can more easily find and connect with others who share their hobbies and passions, their political affiliations and goals, their racial, religious, or gender identities, their affiliations." Thus platform users may engage in "networked collective action" and "new forms of collective meaning-making", as well as "new capacities for rapid organization of mass protests, such as those of the Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter movements" (Cohen, 2017: 149); or for that matter the events of 6 January 2021. Cohen is describing here essentially internet-based solidarity-building (see e.g. Hall, 2019): A form of "postdigital cosmopolitanism" (Lenehan, 2022) or indeed more accurately here a

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form of platform cosmopolitanism, arising from the inherent postdigitality of platformization, seen here in terms of a type of digital corporality.

So, where does this leave us in relation to our original discussion regarding internet histories and the platform? Approaches to platform history have generally been in terms of a chronological narrative detailing software and infrastructural development, with an orientation towards platforms as a type of extended text. Thus, Brügger (2015) has written a short history of Facebook as a series of extend digital-media texts, Burgess and Green (2018) have charted the development of YouTube, while Burgess and Baym (2020) have written a "biography" of the platform Twitter.

But what if we view platforms as the spatialization and bordering of the internet, and platformization as largely analogous to wider (material) globalization, as well as being a central facet of globalization? An engagement with the historiography of globalization can point us towards new approaches and methodologies for writing platform history and, indeed, critical internet histories. Engel and Middell (2005: 21) have suggested a new way of writing the history of globalization that looks at "Bruchzonen der Globalisierung" (critical junctures of globalization) understood as the "historischen Räume, Momente und Arena von Globalisierung, […] in denen um die Herstellung *neuer* Raumbezüge gerungen wird" (historical spaces, moments and arenas of globalization […] in which the creation of *new* spatialites and spatial reference points are struggled over).[4] They suggest, thus, a new history of globalization concentrating on (new) territorializations, re-territorializations, bordering processes, and territorial and spatial change.

A new method of internet history as platform history is, thus, argued for here which would examine the critical junctures of platformization: The (historical) spaces, moments and arenas in which platforms, as spatializations of the internet, are created, questioned, lose mass appeal or are discontinued for economic, political or cultural reasons. If platforms and platformization are seen as central to the internet understood as a patchwork of platforms, then such an approach to internet histories would also chart shifting (potentially) global structures which also provide the possibility and potentiality of meaningful online connections and thus cosmopolitanism, understood as transformation due to such connections (Delanty, 2008; 2009). This type of approach would also consist, therefore, of the historical charting of the shifting internet contexts of postdigital cosmopolitanisms. Possible topics could include here – from a western perspective – the movement from MySpace to Facebook (see: Miltner & Gerrard, 2022), the rise of TikTok, PayPal and Uber, and the movement away from Twitter/X and towards platforms such as Mastodon, BlueSky and Threads. Such a platform history would also chart the very real and material dynamics of change which buttress global media power relations and, indeed, economic and cultural globalization.

4 All translations by the author, except where stated. Original italics.

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Conclusion

Barmeyer and Busch (2023: v), in the introduction to their extensive overview of Anglo-German intercultural research, begin by firstly offering a common working definition of one of the most central terms of Intercultural Studies: "The term interculturality is used to describe the process of mutual comprehension among people who belong to different cultures or who ascribe to themselves and to each other different identities that are marked as culturally singular." This has been, traditionally at least for many years, the central interaction at the nexus of scholarly Intercultural Studies and Intercultural Communication: Person A from "culture" A meets Person B from "culture" B, they look to achieve a sense of mutual understanding creating a "culture" C, an interculture. The German media theorist and historian Zielinski (2006: 7) defines media as "spaces of action for constructed attempts to connect what is separated", while he (Zielinski, 2006: 34) sees media history sees as "the rich history of seeing, hearing, and combining using technical means." Viewed in this manner, Media History is also the examination of a series of interactions and attempts at agentive comprehension beyond the act of meeting in material space and solely via technical means – means which connect agents who would otherwise remain unconnected. This is actually where Intercultural Studies and internet histories, as a central aspect of Media History, meet: Media History is therefore the examination of a type of wider interculturality via technical means. Histories of the internet may also be, therefore, histories of interculturality via digital means. The present chapter charts one specific methodological-historigraphical approach for the examination of the history of digital interculturalities, an approach expressly embedded in discussions surrounding platformization, postdigitality, and cosmopolitanism. It is hoped that other scholars may engage with this perspective and may also advance the study of digital and internet-based interculturalities, looking for further innovative methodologies.

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Varieties of Cosmopolitanism: Cultural, Constitutional, Contestatory – and Social?

Simon Pistor

Abstract *This chapter engages with the history of the idea and contemporary varieties of cosmopolitanism. My argument is that the history and contemporary use of cosmopolitanism need to be combined to assess the theoretical and practical plausibility of the concept. Concerning the history of cosmopolitanism, I argue that the idea oscillates between advocates and sceptical voices. In the contemporary political and social world, cosmopolitanism is a powerful analytical device for investigating current problems. I outline contemporary cosmopolitan political theory as providing normative answers to such problems. However, these normative accounts are further developed in the three varieties of culturalization, constitutionalization, and contestation. In juxtaposing these three varieties of cosmopolitanism with accounts from social theory, I establish the claim that cosmopolitan thought needs to reconsider its social dimensions. I conclude by discussing the theme of cosmopolitan consciousness-raising as solidarity as an appropriate direction for further cosmopolitan thought in the globalized and digitalized constellation.*

Introduction

Cosmopolitanism is, of course, not a new idea. The notion of cosmopolitanism commonly refers to the idea that everyone is not only a citizen of a particular state but also a citizen of the world.[1] The Cynic philosopher Diogenes famously declared himself a *kosmopolitês* – a citizen of the world – when asked where he came from (Diogenes Laertius, 1925: VI 63). Since then cosmopolitanism has denoted some sense of allegiance beyond the city, community, or state, to a shared humanity. Through its

1 I thank audiences at several workshops and conferences: The Critical Theory Conference in Rome in April 2022, the ECPR Joint Sessions of the Kantian Political Thought Standing Group in April 2023 (online), and the ReDICo Conference in June and July 2023 (online). I thank all audiences for challenging and perceptive questions. Especially, I thank Fergal Lenehan and Roman Lietz for comments on an early draft of this paper. Parts of this research were generously funded by a research grant by the Research Commission of the University of St. Gallen.

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long history, the idea of cosmopolitanism has taken many shapes and meanings. As with all ideas, its content has differed over space, time, and context. In what could be called a cosmopolitan revival over the past thirty years, the rather old idea of cosmopolitanism has been significantly rejuvenated in various strands of Philosophy and Cultural Studies, as well as in political and social theory. Therefore, it is important to invoke precise conceptions when utilizing the idea of cosmopolitanism today. My contention is that it is an important intellectual and practical task to include engagements with the history of (Western-)political thought as it sheds light on the cosmopolitan tradition. Of course, we can find other traditions of cosmopolitan thought in other areas and periods of the globe (Gehrmann, 2016; Park & Han 2014; Xiang, 2023: 28–70). However, to get this actualizing question off the ground, I will start from the classical texts in the Western tradition. Hence, this contribution takes Niesen's (2006: 247–248) approach to varieties of cosmopolitanism seriously in not merely searching for commonalities between distant political philosophies but rather in also pointing out cracks and breaks in their arguments. This engagement between the history of the idea, normative arguments, and contemporary usages gives us some indication of the theoretical value and the empirical purchase of cosmopolitanism today.

In this contribution, I oscillate between historical inquiry and more practical contemporary conceptualizations in order to discuss some varieties of cosmopolitanism as they appear in contemporary political theory. Historical and philosophical inquiry delineate the content and form of an idea. Practical engagement with the idea of cosmopolitanism tells us where to look and where to find cosmopolitanism today. I argue that these places can be found especially where the developments of a globalized social world intersect with highly mediatized and high-paced cultural and material interactions. In a postdigital world, that is a world in which we can neither step outside nor behind the mechanisms, processes, and effects of a digitally mediated lifeworld, the idea of cosmopolitanism becomes particularly relevant. Felix Stalder (2018) similarly describes this as the "digital condition". Today, cosmopolitanism as a guiding idea navigates individuals and social groups in the face of challenges in the globalized and digitalized world. Cosmopolitanism should foster practices which create consciousness and raise awareness above and below common political and social bonds. This contribution lays the basis for this claim.

After presenting some existing approaches in contemporary cosmopolitan political theory, my conceptualization includes varieties of cosmopolitanism which may be conceptualized as cultural, constitutional, and contestatory approaches. However, I do not claim that this categorization is exhaustive. Rather, I take it to be indicative of how political theory and philosophy conceives cosmopolitan ideas and translates them into our own contemporary historical and political situation. This approach flows into my argument: While contemporary cosmopolitan political theory can account for the cultural, constitutional, and contestatory dimensions of

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interactions beyond the (nation-)state, these approaches tend to lose sight of the groundedness of cosmopolitanism in social relations and social practices. Hence, I argue that cosmopolitanism is best understood when theorists and practitioners alike take the necessarily social dimensions of cosmopolitanism into account.

This contribution is constructed in the following steps: Firstly, I revisit some central historical sources of cosmopolitan thought and facilitate a juxtaposition with sceptical voices. Secondly, I turn to a brief description of some of the prevalent problems of our own (political) world and turn to contemporary cosmopolitan political theory as providing basic concepts of justice and culture. Thirdly, and most importantly, I outline three persistent contemporary varieties of cosmopolitanism. *Culturalization* refers to the place of the cosmopolitan individual in a globalized world. *Constitutionalization* rethinks the basic conditions of democratic states in an ever-evolving constellation of states. *Contestation* challenges cosmopolitanism within a (radical-) democratic framework in order to unsettle the ground of global interrelations. These three varieties of cosmopolitanism are all valuable in their own right. However, I show that the social dimensions of cosmopolitanism tend to fade away. Therefore, I juxtapose the political theory and philosophy of cosmopolitanism with social theories of cosmopolitanism. Finally, I outline a form of cosmopolitanism in social relations and in social practices that is compatible with the predicaments of our globalized world which is increasingly mediated via digitalized means.

1. Oscillations between Cosmopolitan Thought and Sceptical Appreciations

Intellectual histories of the idea of cosmopolitanism typically place a high emphasis on two historically disjointed eras, namely, Stoic philosophy in Antiquity and philosophical and cultural thought in the Enlightenment (cf. Kleingeld & Brown, 2019). Diogenes' founding moment of cosmopolitanism remains inspiring because it is uncompromising, resolute and, as Gebh (2013: 66–67) has put it, even "shameless." Besides the above-mentioned provocative statement by Diogenes who declared himself as a citizen of the world, reference to Stoic cosmopolitanism is especially important (Nussbaum, 2019: 19–63). Nussbaum's reconstruction of Stoic cosmopolitanism, especially that of Cicero, oscillates between an appreciation of Cicero's appeal to duties of justices and a criticism of his alleged restrictions of material aid to national compatriots. Nussbaum (2019) claims that Stoic cosmopolitanism harbours an immensely important insight, that of the quasi-natural rights of every individual, whereas it fails in accounting for ways to implement these rights.

In the Enlightenment period, cosmopolitanism refers to two central strands: cultural and moral. The cultural strand is perhaps most famously articulated in the

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entry to Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopedia* project. Here Diderot defines the "cosmopolitan" as:

> "This name is sometimes used jokingly to mean a man who has no fixed domicile, or a man who is not a stranger anywhere. It comes from κόσμος world and πόλις city. When an ancient philosopher was asked where he was from, he replied: I am cosmopolitan, that is, a citizen of the universe. I prefer, said another, my family to myself, my country to my family, and the human race to my country." (Diderot, 1754: 297)

Apart from the tongue-in-cheek tone of this definition, it stands out that Diderot's definition is clearly addressed to mean individuals – which is elaborated in the second half of the definition in paraphrasing Diogenes. However, reference to the polis, city, or country is not further elaborated. Cultivating higher than individual allegiances is the hallmark of Diderot's definition. Diderot highlights the role of the Philosophes in the cultural development of the time and reforms of rethinking itself (Adams, 2011: 74). However, even though Diderot paraphrases Diogenes' original cosmopolitan claim, that of being a citizen of the world, this political dimension is superseded by the cultural dimension, that of nowhere-being-a-stranger which refers to self-identification, cultural learnedness, and versatility (cf. Rosenfeld, 2002). Enlightenment cosmopolitanism includes border-crossing (Jacob, 2008: 4) as a cultural technique.

It is another French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who picks up critically on the idea of the cosmopolitan individual. Juxtaposing the citizen of a small republic and a citizen of the world, Rousseau claims that "cosmopolites" are those who justify "[…] their love of fatherland by their love of mankind, boast of loving everyone so that they might have the right to love no one" (Rousseau, 1997: 158). Rousseau's charge against cosmopolitanism is that it is essentially an apolitical virtue, as he deplores commerce and travel as cultural conformity (Jacob, 2006: 126–127; Rosenblatt, 2008: 61). Cosmopolitan values, at least for Rousseau, do not seem to fit into small-scale democratic life.

The moral strand of cosmopolitanism in the Enlightenment period is centrally expressed in Immanuel Kant's political theory. In various late political writings, Kant emphasizes the moral place of the individual in the world in order to argue for a strong notion of moral and political autonomy that can only be realized through republics in a concert of free republican states (Kant, 1991; Kleingeld, 2012). Especially in his essay on Perpetual Peace, Kant argues that republican orders are the condition for peace; that a federation of states shall govern international affairs; and that every individual has a right to universal hospitality (Kant, 1991: 98–108).

Cosmopolitan right, which is possibly the main conceptual innovation developed by Kant concerning international affairs, is not merely a right of subsistence,

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a negative duty that individuals have against foreign states not to perish in the face of peril. Moreover, cosmopolitan right also grounds the basis for the development of a more just cooperation. Under globalizing conditions of the public sphere, violations of justice are felt everywhere (Kant, 1991: 108). For Kant, cosmopolitan right is a mediating force in the enduring process of establishing more just political orders: "The idea of cosmopolitan right is (…) not fantastic and overstrained; it is a necessary complement to the unwritten code of political and international right, transforming it into a universal right of humanity" (Kant, 1991: 108).

As in the case of the thinkers across the river Rhine, a critical appreciation of Kant's conceptualization promptly followed. Among these critical appreciations is the political philosophy and theory of the state by G.W.F. Hegel. In his sweeping and foundational text *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), Hegel criticizes the political form of cosmopolitanism:

> "*A human being counts as such because he is a human being*, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, etc. This consciousness [of the individual – S.P.], which is the aim of thought, is of infinite importance, and it is inadequate only if it adopts a fixed position – for example, as cosmopolitanism – in opposition to the concrete life of the state." (Hegel 1991: §209A; 240; emphasis in the original)

Hegel is committed to a universal humanism, according to which human beings' individual worth or dignity is independent of their origin or identity. However, the political form of cosmopolitanism is not capable of promoting this end. Yet, Hegel's statement is aimed against world-statism and not primarily a republican account of cosmopolitan right, as discussed above.

The critical appreciations, represented here by Rousseau and Hegel, challenge cosmopolitanism productively. Rousseau alleges that cosmopolitans are selfish creatures and Hegel claims that the political form of cosmopolitanism is empty or merely formalistic. However, both Rousseau and Hegel wonder about the normative and social conditions under which individuals can live together in political communities and orders. This challenge persists and is helpful to delineate the usefulness of cosmopolitanism. Then again, oscillating between proponents and critics of cosmopolitanism helps to clarify some baselines. Cosmopolitanism contains at the minimum some version of three components. Firstly, it contains a self-identification or motivation which does not merely lie with one's nation or tribe but also with some reference to the whole of humanity. Secondly, it contains at least some cultural openness and, furthermore, cultural learnedness or versatility. Thirdly, it contains normative reference to the individual as the unit of moral concern.

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2. Some Problems of our (Political) World and Contemporary Cosmopolitan Political Theory

After this brief historical and critical exposition, we are in a place to turn to the contemporary history of the idea of cosmopolitanism. I start with a practical, that is more empirical, description of some aspects of our current political world and contrast this with efforts in contemporary cosmopolitan political theory. This method of contextualizing an historical time in contrast to normative political thought is common to the cosmopolitan approach to politics and social life.

2.1 Understanding the Globalized and Digitally Mediated World

Many everyday and extraordinary activities are border-crossing or transnational in very mundane ways. Crossing borders, for example in Europe, is a nearly unfelt experience – at least for European citizens – under the freedom of movement regime provided by the European Union. For some, travelling to foreign places, for example, is an extraordinary and yet habitual task. Online tools such as maps and translation tools help to navigate our movements in previously unknown places. For others it is common to use their second or even third language in their workplace. The news often includes events in faraway places about which you nevertheless may strongly care. These mundane examples speak to the transnational experience many people are accustomed to. By now, many of these everyday activities are mediated via digital media and technologies. We are thinking here of social media as well as online news outlets (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2018; Lietz & Lenehan, 2022).

However, we do not tend to engage in these practices because we consciously think of these actions as 'cosmopolitan': We think of these practices as being part of common and increasingly widespread practices under the conditions of a globalized world and multicultural societies. For example, unfortunately only a few have thought of the COVID-19 pandemic as a cosmopolitan event as it rather displayed a re-nationalization of politics that needs to be avoided in the future from the point of view of the cosmopolitan imagination (cf. Delanty, 2021: 19; Chernilo, 2021). On the contrary, with scarce resources of medical supplies a new phenomenon of "vaccine nationalism" arose (Bollyky & Bown, 2020). Another example is the somewhat involuntary participation in the (global) economy of global supply chains. The interdependence on the global supply chain only ever becomes superficially visible when it is prominently disrupted, as was the case with the Evergreen Ever Given cargo ship in the Suez Canal (Safi, 2021) or the pirate attacks by the Houthis in late 2023 and early 2024 (Al-Ansi, 2024; Stigant, 2023). This is to name only a few instances where postdigital proliferation refers to material, and thus, real and/or natural phenomena. Postdigital proliferation transmits information globally almost at light speed and makes events known and accessible in an instant. Many times, occurrences of

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this kind are turned into events of a global scale through their multiplicated reach via digital dissemination.

Politically and organizationally speaking, the world can barely keep up with what is going on elsewhere. It is commonplace to claim that political problems cannot (primarily) be solved on the national level. But the political will to organize beyond the national level is often disrupted by nationalistic or regressive forces. Hence, acknowledging that global problems cannot be solved solely by national means remains a rhetorical nicety, but not exactly the political and social reality. Two further impasses add to this conundrum: Firstly, in the social sciences, approaches – both normative and empirical – often undertake their studies through a lens of "methodological nationalism" (Beck, 2007; Beck & Grande, 2010; Dumitru, 2014; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Nation-states are, then, taken to be the 'natural' form of the political and social world (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002: 302, 304). Methodological nationalism refers to implicit or explicit assumptions that place (nation-)states as units of analysis at the front and centre of social scientific or philosophical engagement. For example, GDP is used as the benchmark to evaluate economic growth, which is measured for nation-states regardless of regional differences within a country.

Beck (2007) has argued that social theory takes societies to equate with nation-states, whereas others have recently argued that methodological nationalism is also prevalent in mainstream approaches to contemporary political philosophy on issues of social and global justice (Dumitru, 2021; Sager, 2021). In a globalized world, this methodology seems increasingly outdated while cosmopolitanism at least partially seems to offer alternative ways of describing and theorizing the world.

Secondly, in political practice, we may speak of something which may be described as an "organizational localism." Federal and supranational political decisions need to be made on-the-ground locally; there are very few binding or enforcing mechanisms beyond the state. We may think of the problematic and lack of implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement to tackle anthropogenic global warming as an example of this. Whereas the concert of states pledged to act, this kind of international agreement lacks proper enforcement and implementation mechanisms to achieve the aims that were set. Beck has coined a somewhat useful phrase of "global risk" for conditions that need to be tackled beyond, above, and below the nation-state level: "Global risks tear down national boundaries and jumble together the native with the foreign. The distant other is becoming the inclusive other. Everyday life is becoming cosmopolitan" (Beck, 2007: 287).

Taking these two contradictions into account should lead us to rethink the empirical and methodological necessity of taking on a cosmopolitanism perspective in relation to our current political and social world. What is necessary is a cosmopolitan outlook on the social conditions of our time.

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2.2 Contemporary Cosmopolitan Political Theory as a Reaction to the (Political) World

The academic interest in the idea of cosmopolitanism was rejuvenated in the wake of the revival of political philosophy after John Rawls' publication of *A Theory of Justice* (1999 [1971]). As Katrina Forrester (2019: x-xii; 140–161) argues, everyone undertaking research on political thought in general and in normative political theory in particular is somewhat in the shadow of Rawls and his social contractual type of theory-building. This includes the investigation of the normative basis of global developments and contemporary research on cosmopolitanism. Key authors in the subsequent debates, such as Charles Beitz, Thomas Pogge or David Held, are considered Rawlsians (cf. Beitz 1999; Pogge 1989; 1992). The academic engagement with cosmopolitanism is rich and cannot be condensed in a few words. If pressed, a cosmopolitan would state that she is not only a citizen of her particular nation-state or place of origin but a citizen of the world. Cosmopolitanism is a plea for a global egalitarianism modelled after Kant's practical philosophy (Brock, 2011; 2013; 2017). The philosophy of cosmopolitanism can be accounted for as providing normative outlooks. Furthermore, in the philosophical literature, a distinction between ethical and political dimensions can be made. While ethical approaches only take the role of the individual and her relation to the world into consideration, the political approach almost always issues proposals for a just transnational and global institutional design (cf. Caney, 2006).

In contemporary cosmopolitan political theory, a plethora of distinctions may be found. For example, Samuel Scheffler has proposed making a distinction between cosmopolitanism as a doctrine that concerns justice or as something which concerns culture and a conception of the self (Scheffler, 1999). Scheffler thus makes the distinction between cosmopolitanism about justice and cosmopolitanism about culture. In some sense this distinction is peculiar because "justice" may refer to a number of things here: moral principles, political processes or even institutions. Scheffler (2008: 68), on the other hand, has also stated that cosmopolitanism is not a "determined political philosophy". Scheffler (1999: 256) remains influenced by Rawls's theory of justice, which is reflected in his definition of cosmopolitanism about justice: "Cosmopolitanism about justice is opposed to any view that posits principled restrictions on the scope of an adequate conception of justice. In other words, it opposes any view which holds, as a matter of principle, that the norms of justice apply primarily within bounded groups comprising of some subset of the global population." As Scheffler argues this definition articulates a strong version of cosmopolitanism about justice. A weak version assumes that principles of social and domestic justice rank higher than principles of global justice.

Scheffler's (1999: 257) argument about culture more or less coincides with the direction of ethical cosmopolitanism: "Cosmopolitanism about culture and the

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self, meanwhile, is opposed to any suggestion that individuals' well-being or their identity or their capacity for effective human agency normally depends on their membership in a determinate cultural group whose boundaries are reasonably clear and whose stability and cohesion are reasonably secure". This cultural form of cosmopolitanism is further elaborated in Scheffler's engagement with the cultures of a community. His argument is that culture is a concept about change: Only when cultures are open to change, may they be sustained over time (Scheffler, 2007).

Gillian Brock sees a two-by-two distinction at work in contemporary varieties of cosmopolitanism: Firstly, 'identity' vs. 'responsibility' cosmopolitanism; and secondly, 'moral' vs. 'institutional' cosmopolitanism (Brock, 2013: 690). The identity approach in cosmopolitan thought points out that every human being is a member of the global community. "Belonging to a particular culture", according to this view, "is not an essential ingredient for personal identity or living a flourishing life" (Brock, 2013: 690). The consensus in moral cosmopolitanism is that every human being is of equal moral concern, as the person is the ultimate unit of equal moral concern: Not a social group or entire communities, as communitarianism would have it. Institutional cosmopolitanism then asks for the feasibility and possibilities of the implementation of cosmopolitan moral concern in the system of global governance. In a further step, she recollects various approaches to cosmopolitan justice, which range from utilitarianism to Kantian rights-based approaches to contractarianism (cf. Brock, 2013: 691). Furthermore, in cosmopolitan thought it is highly debated whether universal and particular commitments can be reconciled (cf. Brock, 2013: 694–695). These remarks make it clear that cosmopolitanism is not a single unified and coherent set of ideas.

Finally, Simon Caney (2009: 388) proposes the differentiation between ethical, political, and juridicial cosmopolitanism. Ethical cosmopolitanism overlaps with what Scheffler has described as cosmopolitanism about culture. Political cosmopolitanism is an approach to identify viable supra-state political institutions and discusses whether there should be an overlapping system of multi-level governance. Juridical cosmopolitanism is concerned with identifying and then applying the 'right' criteria and scope of principles of distributive justice. Juridical cosmopolitanism is – similarly to Scheffler's account of cosmopolitanism about justice – concerned with a correct construction of principles of justice and an achievable implementation in legal institutions.

3. Varieties of Cosmopolitanism: Cultural, Constitutional, Contestatory

So far, I have outlined the historical tradition of cosmopolitanism in an oscillating mode between proponents and some critical appreciations. Furthermore, I gave a sketch of the global nature of some of the most pervasive political problems the

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world is facing. The postdigital constellation is marked by the existence of the internet and digital social media as a deeply pervasive social fact. We cannot imagine a world in which digitality does not play a role anymore and, tendentially, most social interactions are mediated through the use of digital media. In this constellation, politics in the current global political climate is also very often influenced and mediated through digital media.

So far, I have argued that contemporary cosmopolitan political theory may be seen as a normative project that looks to provide answers to the changing landscape of global political problems. The aim of this section is now to turn to three important strands in Political Theory which seek to refine cosmopolitanism. The following approaches cut through the individual, moral, and institutional categorizations of cosmopolitanism provided above. In this sense, the varieties of cosmopolitanism already constitute a step forward. There are three varieties of cosmopolitanism which I will introduce as indicative. Culturalization refers to the place of the cosmopolitan individual in a globalized world. Constitutionalization rethinks the basic conditions of democratic states in an ever-evolving constellation between states. Contestation challenges cosmopolitanism within a (radical-) democratic framework to shake the ground of global interrelations. The conceptualization of cosmopolitanism which I sketch below does not claim to be exhaustive. Rather I take it to be indicative of the need to reconstruct cosmopolitanism from the ground up, in order to live up to the challenges of a globally and digitally mediated world.

3.1 Cosmopolitanism of Lifestyles: Culturalization

The legal and political philosopher Jeremy Waldron (1992: 752) situates the concept of cosmopolitanism within the context of the communitarianism-liberalism debate in political philosophy. This debate reiterates questions concerning the relation of the individual on the one side, and community, societies, and states on the other side. Typically, cosmopolitanism is associated with the liberal side of this debate. For Waldron, cosmopolitanism is a cultural term because it is essentially non-political and not codified in law. However, note that this is a rather peculiar setting for Waldron's discussion of cosmopolitanism. One could assume that Waldron (2018), as a legal theorist, is interested in the legitimacy of concepts used and their potential application in codified law. Waldron does indeed seem to be aware of this conundrum.

However, for Waldron, cosmopolitanism primarily concerns lifestyles in our contemporary social world. Waldron develops an outlook on "cosmopolitan culture" for multicultural societies which necessarily need to place a high emphasis on individual and minority rights (Waldron, 2003). As part of cosmopolitan culture Waldron mentions metropoles, cities, and urban centres, like New York, Paris, or Mumbai. A further illustration is made in reference to trade, tourism, and migra-

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tion. Waldron highlights that cities, trade, and tourism are representative practices of the human condition. We mingle and interact with each other:

> "Humans are curious and adventurous animals: they travel, they migrate, they trade, they fight, and they plunder. And they report back what they have found out about the ways in which others live (and trade and fight etc.). They bring back tales of exotic customs as well as the exotic goods they have purchased or stolen." (Waldron, 2000: 232)

Of course, Waldron does not tell merely a feel-good story for the professors at the coastal shores and metropoles of the United States. Rather, I would say, he makes a point about the human condition which he views as basically cosmopolitan. Waldron does not claim that this cosmopolitan culture is equally accessible for everyone all of the time. Cosmopolitanism, for Waldron, is a matter of acting locally in national or parochial sets of legislation. Law is universally binding even though jurisdictions and realms of application are bounded or limited (Waldron, 2018). What I take Waldon to say is that he urges us to take other cultures seriously in the debates of politics and law and to take parochial legislation for what it is: parochial. Laws are not eternally valid and individuals, societies, and legal systems alike must be open for cultural and global change. However, this is quite a curious perspective from a legal and political philosopher.

Additionally, it is quite a pressing question how this cosmopolitanism of lifestyles and culturalization could be updated in the age of digital and social media. Digital media makes the world more accessible and opens more possibilities of engagement with far and distant places, cultures, and influences. Waldron certainly applauds this. However, cosmopolitanism in digital spaces is not immune from malign influences. This is reason enough to look further into practices of cosmopolitanism, as I do below.

3.2 Cosmopolitanism of Norms: Constitutionalization

Seyla Benhabib and Jürgen Habermas exemplify what I deem to be a constitutional cosmopolitanism. Habermas is highly indebted to the Kantian project of cosmopolitan right. In his indispensable contributions to political theory, Habermas (1996) has developed a discourse theory of democracy and justice. In a series of contributions in the past thirty years, Habermas has argued for an active imagination of the "postnational constellation" and for a deepening of European democratic integration (Habermas, 2001; 2008; 2011; 2014). Throughout all of his contributions Habermas has argued that a constitutionalization of democratic norms beyond the nation-state is necessary.

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In a similar vein, Seyla Benhabib (2006) has forcefully argued that "cosmopolitan norms" are emerging out of a reflection on and the working-through of the mass atrocities committed in the 20th century. Both Habermas and Benhabib view the constitutionalization of cosmopolitanism as political processes concerning citizens in their respective lifeworlds. Benhabib (2006: 15–16) argues that we are in a historical situation where a transition from "international" to "cosmopolitan norms" is taking place making the empirical observation that "cosmopolitan norms" arise out of global civil society. Benhabib (2006: 16) claims: "Cosmopolitan norms of justice, whatever the conditions of their legal origination, accrue to individuals as moral and legal persons in a worldwide civil society."

Benhabib has a strong normative and cosmopolitan commitment to the individual as "person" and moral agent who is a member in processes of justification. This process is open-ended and has the condition of membership in a political community (Benhabib, 2006: 18). Benhabib argues that cosmopolitanism is a project of "mediation" of the paradox of "bounded communities" (Benhabib, 2006: 18–20). I take this approach to be implicitly committed to a Hegelian view of mediating politics and universalism. She discusses the complex relation of moral universalism versus ethical particularism: "I will insist on the necessary disjunction as well as the necessary mediation between the moral and the ethical, the moral and political. (…) Cosmopolitanism is then a philosophical project of mediations, not of reductions or of totalizations" (Benhabib, 2006: 20).

This quote fits nicely into a short comment on the status of the universal in Hegel's thought: "For Hegel, the universal constitutes itself as the universal by abstracting from and negating difference; every claim to universality is thus linked to a moment of exclusion. […] but […] Hegel juxtaposed the abstract to the concrete universal, and maintained that one could aspire to a form of universality that did not simply dismiss the moment of constitutive otherness" (Benhabib, 2006: 161). I am not claiming that Benhabib has Hegel in mind when arguing for cosmopolitan norms, rather she argues that they are a "Kantian legacy of cosmopolitanism", but it speaks volumes that she turns to Hegelian language when arguing for the applicability and feasibility of such norms. Benhabib argues in reference to the ontological status of cosmopolitan norms in a "postmetaphysical universe" that

> "such norms and principles are morally constructive: they create a universe of meaning, values, and social relations that had not existed before by changing the normative constituents and evaluative principles of the world of 'objective spirit', to use Hegelian language." (Benhabib, 2006: 72)

On a democratic-theoretical level, Benhabib glosses the notion of "democratic iterations" to argue that continuous struggles, as never fully concluded processes, strengthen the ideals of democracy and cosmopolitan norms (cf. Benhabib, 2006:

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47–51; 67–74). Benhabib defines democratic iterations as "linguistic, legal, cultural, and political repetitions-in-transformation, invocations that are also revocations. They not only change established understandings but also transform what passes as the valid or established view of authoritative precedent" (Benhabib, 2006: 48). Benhabib uses contemporary challenges of norms – such as the French headscarf case or the German dual citizenship case – where constitutional norms are democratically challenged on a moral-universal basis. This kind of challenge comes from the sphere of civil society to create change in the legal and democratic spheres. System and lifeworld are not fully separated. Democratic iterations, according to Benhabib, transform the constitutional state from within on the grounds of potentially cosmopolitan norms. Below, I will return to Benhabib and Habermas and their conceptualizations of cosmopolitan solidarity.

3.3 Cosmopolitanism of Conflicts: Contestation

Étienne Balibar and James D. Ingram exemplify a (radical-)democratic approach to cosmopolitanism. Both develop cosmopolitanism in such a way as to incorporate conflict, struggle, and contestation more directly. Cosmopolitanism, for both, is a locally practised politics of the universal. Reference to the universal here means that claims are proposed to be recognized as valid – at least in the form of making the claim to equality or dignity – in order to respect basic human capacities. Balibar invites us to critically rethink the basics of politics, democracy, and universalism. His interventions are wide-ranging but a common thread through his works is a democratization of cosmopolitanism (Balibar 2002; 2004; 2012; 2018). James Ingram's contribution to the theory of cosmopolitanism lies in the politicization of cosmopolitan thought. By referring to the tradition of radical democracy, Ingram conceptualizes "radical cosmopolitics" as a politicization and universalization of norms from below (Ingram 2013; 2016). Cosmopolitanism needs to be articulated and enacted locally and cosmopolitan agents are part of contemporary struggles (Ingram, 2016: 76).

Balibar's various contributions to cosmopolitan thought interrogate how communities, universalism, and the global are related. Balibar utilizes the term cosmopolitanism to highlight the clash between universalism and particularism, between universal claims and particular communities. To articulate these tensions Balibar's engagements can be structured under two headings: (world-)citizenship and borders.

Citizenship is a key concept in politics. With citizenship comes membership, rights, and duties for individuals within a specific political unit. As a citizen you are typically allowed to take part in elections, both passively and actively, and you enjoy basic political and social rights. So far, so straightforward. What is sometimes forgotten is that being a citizen of a state also subjects everyone to its laws. The citizen is always already also a subject (Balibar, 1991). Being subjected to external

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decisions leaves citizens vulnerable, which is an unavoidable double bind in democratic states. This too is the case when we turn to the idea of world-citizenship. Here, however, Balibar reminds us that individuals and inhabitants of this planet are subjected to severe external global forces without equal political or social rights on the global level. Balibar also reminds us that Kant's conception of the cosmopolitan (Weltbürger) in cosmopolitan right is a counterpart to the cosmopolitanism of commerce: "This world citizen was not an imaginary member of a civitas or a polis without boundaries, whose limits would coincide with the expansion of the universe; on the contrary, he was a being in relationship who circulated (or not) between territories and states" (Balibar, 2015: 71). Balibar, thus, credits Kant with not merely imagining an additional legal or political category but also of reminding us that humans are border-crossing entities oscillating between customs, communities, and even polities.

Just like citizenship, borders are an equally defining political category. In his essay "World Borders, Political Borders", Balibar (2002) discusses the notion of borders for our contemporary political life. Balibar's essay addresses the relationship between centre and periphery in political orders and the "discursive implications" of political thinking about borders, membership, and sovereignty. Border demarcation is a central political problem that marks borders, territory, and sovereignty and produces them from within itself (Balibar, 2002: 74). Balibar understands borders as points of crystallization between politics and popular sovereignty. Contesting where borders of a political unit are drawn, decides who is included and excluded. This membership, then, decides rights and duties in this political unit. Borders are a deciding factor of demos. Democratizing borders, that is laying open the political question involved in demarcating the 'who' of a political unit, is a crucial question in our contemporary political world. Balibar, thus, helps to pose these questions.

James D. Ingram provides a conceptualization of cosmopolitanism as politics of radical universalism. Ingram urges us to rethink cosmopolitanism and universal values to include where they came from and "above all, how they can be put in practice" (Ingram, 2016: 67). Ingram's version is inherently political – similar to Balibar and even more so than Habermas and Benhabib – and places a high emphasis on individuals and groups as agents of universal politics. Ingram argues that it is not the content of cosmopolitanism that fails to be convincing but, rather, it is the form through which cosmopolitan values, echoing Hegel's argument against the political form of cosmopolitanism, are implemented. Ingram distinguishes "top-down" from "bottom-up" approaches. In favouring an approach from below, Ingram emphasizes the role of contestation. Ingram's claim is that "cosmopolitanism must be contestatory" (Ingram, 2016: 68).

Contestation, as challenging the status quo and political mainstream, should be the form which cosmopolitanism takes to realize its universal claims. For example, as a challenge to the methodological nationalism of ordinary politics or as a chal-

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lenge to preconceived notions of belonging. Ingram's version of contestatory cosmopolitanism builds on Walter Mignolo's (2000) understanding of cosmopolitanism as project and design (Ingram, 2016: 72). Mignolo and Ingram agree when they point out that modern cosmopolitanism never fully detaches itself from dominating logics of empire or global capitalism. Building on Mignolo, Ingram develops an account of cosmopolitanism which challenges mainstream conceptions and liberal visions of politics. This challenging and conflictual feature is a hallmark of new and radical cosmopolitanism, as Robin Celikates points out. These cosmopolitanisms are

> "always situated, rooted in particular contexts, experiences and practices, which, however, are not conceptualized as standing in tension with the universalist aspirations of the cosmopolitan ideal but are seen as necessary mediations for the articulation of these aspirations." (Celikates, 2020: 217)

Radical approaches to cosmopolitanism are, therefore, based on conflicts and contestation. This approach highlights the political dimension of cosmopolitanism. This approach is not merely moral, as the historical examples discussed above mostly draw on, and not merely individual, as for example the cultural varieties. Moreover, the radical contestatory approach is based in collective engagement with the negative dimension of the status quo of the world. Ingram (2016: 73) argues: "Rather than a politics of implementing or instituting cosmopolitan goals that have been theoretically arrived at in advance, such a contestatory cosmopolitanism would consist of a politics by which particular forms of exclusion, domination, exploitation and marginalization are challenged by those who suffer them."

This definition of contestatory cosmopolitanism shifts the focus towards criticizing and changing the status quo. It is thus a negativistic account, whereas cosmopolitanism is typically perceived as too lofty or positive. However, this contestatory approach seems more realistic as it also connects to deep implicit insights of modern politics, at least in the terms Balibar utilizes, namely the concept of "equaliberty" (Balibar, 2014: 35–65). This portmanteau combines equality and liberty or freedom. Balibar describes with it the two basic and interlinked claims of modern politics since the French Revolution. Equaliberty, according to Balibar, refers to the basic claims of freedom and equality which individuals as citizens issue vis-à-vis a state. Ingram (2016: 74) picks up on this radically political notion to point out how conflict and cosmopolitanism are related: "(…) struggles are universal to the extent (which will never be total) that they participate in the general struggle for equal freedom which has animated emancipatory politics through modern times."

Balibar and Ingram both politicize and democratize cosmopolitanism through their contestatory approach to cosmopolitanism. However, this approach comes at a price. A radically democratizing cosmopolitanism needs to give up on constitutionalizing hopes and rather acknowledge that contestation cannot be fully institu-

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tionalized. Celikates (2020: 217) formulates this issue in the following way: "As contestatory practices can never be fully institutionalized, and as institutions cannot be replaced by contestation, which requires some form of background stabilization, there is an irreducible tension between the contestatory and the institutional." Constitutions – local, cosmopolitan, and otherwise – try to institutionalize values into a fixed set of norms. Practices of contestation can even take place in the digital realm. As Celikates (2015: 166–172) has pointed out, digital contestation transforms the public sphere significantly. Contestation, in this realm, becomes a border-crossing and challenging activity. Unforeseen actors may become actors with democratic agency.

Contestation, however, as a mechanism and form, cannot be institutionalized fully because it would, then, lose its challenging form. In our case, contestatory cosmopolitanism would lose the ability to challenge the status quo and would lose its edge to criticize past and present injustice. Contestatory cosmopolitanism, as a practice, is the sting which makes the demands of a radical universalism felt in the complacency towards the status quo.

4. The Cosmos in the Social?

Political philosophers seem to have issues when the social world does not look like their thought experiments. In rather general terms, one could say that there is a lack of empirical grounding apparent in many philosophical reflections on cosmopolitanism. While this claim certainly holds with respect to mainstream contemporary cosmopolitan political theory, the authors of the presented varieties of cosmopolitanism in the previous section seek to avoid this approach towards the social world. In the previous section, I outlined three varieties of cosmopolitanism which cut across previous mainstream definitions of cosmopolitanism. Therefore, this chapter continues the plea for the political theory and philosophy of cosmopolitanism to take the social world seriously.

In doing so, I take up the baton of the contemporary social theory of cosmopolitanism (cf. Beck, 2003, 2006; Calhoun, 2002, 2008; Delanty, 2009). Social theories are distinguished from political philosophy insofar that the unit of analysis is different. Political philosophy questions values, norms, and ideas and how they are implemented consciously by individuals. Social theory typically asks how individuals, groups, and systems cooperate, interact, or intervene with one another. Political philosophy and social theory are, of course, kindred spirits but tend to speak past each other. I take this to be the case for cosmopolitan thought as well. Mainstream political philosophy of cosmopolitanism, as discussed in section 2, outlines how cosmopolitans should behave or how a more cosmopolitan global system could be designed. The varieties of cosmopolitanism, as discussed in section 3, ask about the cultural and political dimensions of cosmopolitanism. However, social theories

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of cosmopolitanism can also illuminate the social dimensions, backgrounds and settings in which cosmopolitanism might seem appealing to individual and social groups.

Delanty outlines what he calls a critical cosmopolitanism. This social theory of cosmopolitanism, according to Delanty, resides in "social mechanisms and dynamics that can exist in any society at any time in history where world openness has a resonance. […] Cosmopolitanism concerns processes of self-transformation in which new cultural forms take shape and where new spaces of discourse open up leading to a transformation in the social world" (Delanty, 2006: 43–44). The anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (2007: 79–83) distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up cosmopolitanism as well. The top-down version is mostly associated with the political philosophy and neighbouring conceptions of global governance. Bottom-up versions are harder to grasp. It is fair to assess that an anthropology of bottom-up cosmopolitanism consists of an analysis of the locality of social movements and civic involvement with a potentially global reach. Hannerz (2007: 84) concludes: "The anthropology of cosmopolitanism is thus likely to be one of inquiry into emergent experiences, commitments, and relationships; and also a study of its opposites, critics, and adversaries in debate and in life."

Along these lines, cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall (2008) has contextualized cosmopolitanism in the conditions of capitalist globalization. Hall argues that speaking of interconnectedness and interdependencies in the era of globalization veils massive inequalities. Hall goes on to emphasize and highlight the role of diasporic identities and cultures in rethinking the legacies of cosmopolitanism. Hall conceptualizes a cosmopolitanism from below as well when people, such as migrants or refugees, become cosmopolitans by accident: "It bears down on people who have no choice as to whether or not to become cosmopolitans. They have to learn to live in two countries, to speak a new language and make a life in another place, not by choice but as a condition of survival" (Hall, 2008: 347). Newcomers to different countries and cultures necessarily reflect on their social surroundings and tend to relearn what it means to find a home in the world. In this sense, migrants and detached business elites strangely seem to be alike, as Hall (2008: 347) points out: "They have to acquire the same cosmopolitan skills of adaptation and innovation which an entrepreneur requires – but from a different place." With the conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism from below as provided by Hannerz and Hall we can appreciate a grounded version of a cosmopolitanism of culture. It is, then, not merely a matter of picking and choosing a lifestyle to follow but rather a matter of making ends meet under the external conditions of the globalized and digitalized world.

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5. Cosmopolitan Consciousness-Raising as Solidarity

Political philosophy needs to confront social reality in its conceptualization of cosmopolitanism. It should be clear by now that the conceptual resources of cosmopolitanism are endless. By going through different taxonomies, I have shown that there are various ways to conceptualize the individual's moral standing vis-à-vis others, states, and the world. Cosmopolitanism is imagined on all kinds of levels and with all kinds of aims in the minds of authors. My conceptualization of cosmopolitanism, with its reconstruction of varieties of cultural, constitutional, and contestatory approaches, cuts across common associations of individual, moral, and institutional cosmopolitanism. Each of the introduced approaches goes a step further towards a fuller understanding of cosmopolitanism.

However, my contention remains that all three varieties I have sketched above tend to lose sight of its original subject: individuals in their social surroundings. Therefore, my aim in the remainder of this contribution is to highlight the social dimensions in practices and relations which ground cosmopolitanism. I ground cosmopolitanism in practices and relations which constructively seek to enlarge an individuals' consciousness through awareness and solidarity. In my approach, this does not only entail intersubjective relations between at least two individuals. What is more, I take this to mean that cosmopolitan individuals enhance their consciousness in social surroundings as well as in social structures. However, this should not lead us to think that cosmopolitanism in a socialized setting is entirely cultural either. I argue that cosmopolitan social practices and relations mediate between the local social surrounding, individual positions in the world, and broader tendencies on political or global levels.

Turning back to Habermas is a helpful step to rethink the interplay between democratic life in the "postnational" constellation. Among other things, modern democracies are defined as efforts of collective self-determination. As Habermas (2001) argues, in democratic political communities there needs to be at least some sense of civic solidarity. Habermas proposes that we imagine cosmopolitan solidarity as a kind of social mechanism for fostering solidarity beyond already practised locally bounded communities. In this sense, the task of cosmopolitan solidarity is to foster learning mechanisms through reflecting on and remembering past atrocities and injustices (cf. Habermas, 2011: 38–57, 108–112; Pensky, 2007).

However, cosmopolitan solidarity perhaps cannot produce thick civic solidaristic bonds as in the local and national cases. For a start, because there are not the same global binding mechanisms as on local or national levels. Habermas (2001: 107) addresses this tension: The "ethical-political self-understanding of citizens of a particular democratic life is missing in the inclusive community of world citizens." And he continues this theme: "Cosmopolitan consciousness could in any case take on a

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more concrete form by delimitation of the temporal dimension – a stylization of the resistance of the present to the past of the nation-state." (Habermas, 2001: 184).

In my understanding, cosmopolitan consciousness should be viewed as prior to solidarity, awareness or other social mechanisms which could potentially foster and develop a more cosmopolitan outlook. However, this understanding of the potential of a more cosmopolitan consciousness is contradicted by Habermas' more constitutional and top-down view of the postnational constellation: "Civic solidarity is rooted in particular collective identities; cosmopolitan solidarity has to support itself on the moral universalism of human rights alone" (Habermas, 2001: 108). Of course, Habermas is right in insisting on the legitimizing function of human rights. Without respect for the rights and dignity of every single human being, democracy worldwide is at least damaged to some extent. However, Habermas' insistances on the normative status of human rights does not tell us enough about how cosmopolitan solidarity might be implemented on the ground in social practices.

More recently Seyla Benhabib (2023) has argued that cosmopolitan solidarity expressly needs to consider the perspective of the "Other" against counter-cosmopolitan movements such as nativism, populism, or destructive exploitation of nature. Showing solidarity with the Other, according to Benhabib (2023), creates productive tensions and struggles for the self-transformation of the self. Cosmopolitan solidarity, she explains, leaves behind old dichotomies between East and West, North and South. I tend to view her approach to cosmopolitan solidarity as a conscious-raising and awareness-creating effort for what is missing in the contemporary social and political climate. Benhabib's conceptualization of cosmopolitan solidarity goes one step towards moving cosmopolitanism from a philosophical top-down approach to a multi-sited and bottom-up approach. Benhabib, and this is a lesson learned from radical contestatory approaches, conceptualizes cosmopolitan solidarity as a bulwark against regressive forces in global politics.

This is where a socialized understanding of cosmopolitanism needs to go. Political theory and philosophy need to be aware of cosmopolitan social practices where they occur in real life: In times of globalization and digitalization, individuals and social groups can act in a cosmopolitan manner if they react in an open-minded and world-inclusive manner. This means, for example, viewing migration as a chance for intercultural learning and development rather than as a threat. Cosmopolitan hubs are not only the metropoles and city-centres, but rather also every-day places such as classrooms, workplaces, and playgrounds. Here you practise openness, awareness, and even some solidarity in first, very basic encounters. A cosmopolitan consciousness creates the cognitive and emotional capacities to approach new experiences.

This counts just as much for the realm of digital media. In the digital realm, we find an oscillation again. On the one hand, digital news outlets significantly lower barriers to information and even participation. Potentially everyone may be informed about every political, social, and cultural aspect in the world. Online

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forums have in fact created spaces, especially in diasporic communities, to stay connected and to express concern (cf. Sobré-Denton, 2016; Ponzanesi, 2020). Digital diasporic communities also express a sense of cosmopolitan solidarity (Laguerre, 2021: 324–325). In general, digital solidarity can be viewed as one tool among others to foster new allegiances and create awareness for dormant issues (Srinivasan, 2017: 80–81). Swarms, digital networks, and assemblies constitute practices which seek to develop digital solidarity (Stalder, 2013). On the other hand, the destructive potential of unhinged digital social media is clear since at least the campaigns for Brexit, Trump, and Bolsonaro (Flew, 2020; Lenehan, 2022: 24–25; Strick, 2021).

Cosmopolitan consciousness is, thus, in tension with such exclusionary and nativistic movements. A cosmopolitan outlook rejects these kinds of limitations to worldviews. However, cosmopolitanism does not mean the rejection of one's own roots. On the contrary, cosmopolitan consciousness means to step outside and move beyond one's comfort zone every now and then, and when it is necessary. No one can care for everything, everywhere and at all times. But cosmopolitanism is a perspective which creates awareness, care, and concern for others on personal, local, and global levels.

To conclude, cosmopolitanism does not need to be thought of in relation to big gestures, but rather it should be further conceptualized through real and existing social practices. Cosmopolitanism is at its best when oscillating between past and present, between local and global, between general and concrete. This method helps to guide between theory and practice as reconsidering normative commitments and empirical realities. A more social understanding of cosmopolitanism is, thus, paramount to fostering our awareness of what is changing in the world, what is necessary for solidarity to arise, and what is missing on the way towards a more just future.

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O Futuro está Nebuloso: Contaminated and Cosmopolitan Imaginaries in Brazilian AI research

Emilian Franco

Abstract *This chapter explores the intersection of cosmopolitanism and technological development within the Brazilian AI research community, focusing on the Center for Artificial Intelligence (C4AI) in São Paulo. By conducting an ethnographic study, including interviews with key researchers, this research delves into the sociotechnical imaginaries that shape the development of "Brazilian AI". Amidst the global competition dominated by antagonistic nation-states and monopolistic tech corporations, Brazilian AI researchers occupy a unique position. The study reveals a distinct form of compulsory cosmopolitanism (Appadurai, 2013) that emerges from the (perceived and factual) peripheral status of Brazilian AI research in the global field. Researchers at the C4AI articulate visions of technology that seek to address local and global challenges, reflecting a critical engagement with the dominant technological paradigms and the geopolitical dynamics of AI development. This provincialized form of a sociotechnical imagination, contaminated (Tsing, 2015) and influenced by Brazil's socio-political context and historical coloniality, challenges techno-optimistic narratives of technological progress, highlighting the aspirations and struggles of Brazilian researchers to contribute meaningful AI advancements. These advancements are not merely technological feats but are imbued with the hope of addressing pressing societal issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. By analyzing visions of AI development that are deeply influenced by the "realidade brasileira", this study aims to contribute to a critical understanding of tech-cosmopolitanisms in the postdigital age.*

1. Algorithmic Cosmopolitanism in a World of Antagonistic Nation States

In *The Everyday Life of an Algorithm*, Daniel Neyland (2019: 3) appears alarmed about the increasing power and agency of algorithms "in making decisions over our futures, decisions over which we have no control". While he is referring to the sociological context of the everyday, the so-called "algorithmic drama" (Neyland, 2019) is

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paralleled by questions of global power politics, as Kai Fu Lee (2018) outlines in his book *AI Superpowers*. Here, the development of powerful artificial intelligence (AI) becomes the decisive factor in the geopolitical striving for technological hegemony, fought out between the United States and China. All other actors are relegated to the role of inconsequential bystanders or, at most, mere chaperones. The shaping of AI's future unfolds elsewhere.

While these narratives feed on a dystopian momentum and highlight negative aspects of technology in a globalized world of "antagonistic nation-states" (Szerszynski & Urry, 2002: 461) other authors try to shed light on the connecting qualities of digital technology and media. In *Rewire*, Zuckerman (2013) describes how unlikely opportunities for encounters through the internet could lead to new global lines of connection. William E. Connolly (2000: 614) argues in favour of a "plural matrix of cosmopolitanism", which is informed and driven by digital transnational structures – like the internet – which accelerate speed and enable new forms of cosmopolitan sociality. Evan Elkins (2019) uses the concept of "algorithmic cosmopolitanism", to describe the role of streaming platforms in constituting global habits of watching and listening. Here, algorithms and AI systems are promoted "as engines of multiculturalism" (Elkins, 2019: 384), bringing together people all over the world, crossing all national borders and boundaries. From this standpoint, it seems that a type of cosmopolitanism is already intricately woven into the fabric of AI technology.

However, whether algorithms unite or rather divide the world is not my direct concern in this text. Instead, I aim to delve into the fragmented imaginative construct of a particular type of cosmopolitanism as it manifests itself at the foundation of technology development. Moreover, as I do not wish to replicate the dominant narrative centred on the United States or China, I seek to shed light on a cosmopolitan imaginary as it appears within a specific country often overshadowed in the discourse surrounding AI: Brazil.

I spent three months at the Center for Artificial Intelligence (C4AI) in São Paulo and spoke to researchers there who are trying to make "Brazilian AI", as one of the researchers framed it. The researchers have a unique view of the world and technology development, which may tell us something about the possible cosmopolitan implications of AI. Also, the self-positioning of the researchers and their visions of the future strike me as counter-narratives to the classic Western story of ongoing (technological) progress as a linear, predestined progression from point A to B. Appadurai (2013: 223) identifies this teleological belief as the "meta-trap" of the West and calls it "trajectorism". Appadurai (2013: 225) further highlights that a certain universal ideal of 'cosmopolitanism' participates in a Eurocentric meta-narrative, supporting and perpetuating the ideologies underlying imperialism and global capitalism.

In contrast, the particular cosmopolitanism on display at the C4AI can be understood as a form of "vernacular" or "compulsory" cosmopolitanism, as will later be discussed. The results presented here are a first attempt to make sense of the AI lab-

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oratory and the stories told by the AI researchers. The following questions guided the research: Which sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim, 2013, 2015) converge at this C(enter)-4AI outside of the supposed bi-polar centres? How do the researchers of the C4AI position themselves and how do they imagine the future of AI and their societies? And how are the polarized and globalized positions of the broader AI discourse re-narrated and re-imagined?

The perspective of a genuine "realidade brasileira" [Brazilian reality; all translations by the author, except where stated] and the AI imaginaries that are negotiated by my interviewees could represent a counter-narrative to the powerful centralization discourse surrounding AI, that may lead to a deconstruction or at least a questioning of a dominant "Western" future imaginary. While the future was described as nebulous, the AI researchers at the C4AI also sketched visions of futures in which technology helps to eradicate hunger and poverty.

However, these futuristic imaginaries did indeed not so much entail grand cyber-utopian notions (see Turner, 2006, or Featherstone & Burrows, 1995) but are, rather, informed by a problem-ridden *Gegenwart* or present, leading to more humble visions and seeks to find smaller technical solutions to existential problems. Here, cyber-utopianism (Zuckerman 2013) appears reformulated and transcended in a postdigital (Peters & Besley, 2019; Cramer, 2015) imaginary. Those existential future imaginaries can further be interpreted as a consequence of coloniality (Quijano, 1992, 2007) and a positioning at the periphery or border of tech development in the world.

Before I present and discuss the results of my field research at the C4AI, the concept of cosmopolitanism will be operationalized via the lens of postmodern critique.

2. Cosmopolitanism

2.1 Mapping the Cosmopolitan Landscape: From Universal Concept to Postcolonial Perspective

Sandra Ponzanesi (2020: 2) depicts cosmopolitanism "as a universalism of a specifically Western concept". Consequently, to examine the concept in depth, many authors go back to the Stoics (Pollock, 2002: 25; Appiah, 2006: xiv), begin their explorations with Immanuel Kant (McCarthy, 1999; Cheah, 2006a; Lindell, 2014: 6; Beck & Sznaider, 2006: 9), or – in a non-Eurocentric attempt – identify early cosmopolitanism in the thoughts of Confucius (Park & Han, 2014). I will not go that far, but will rather try to operationalize the distinction between a more traditional, philosophical conceptualization and a view on cosmopolitanism which is informed by postcolonial critique and emphasizes the procedural nature of the concept.

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In a traditional vein, cosmopolitanism can be described as a normative position or philosophy (Van Hooft, 2014), which advocates a global perspective on ethics and moral responsibility. It propagates the ideal that all individuals, regardless of nationality or cultural background, share a common humanity and should therefore be treated with equal dignity and respect. Cosmopolitanism encourages people to think and act beyond the nation (Cheah & Robbins, 1998) and embraces a broader sense of belonging to a global community (Lindell, 2014: 10).

As a sort of "progressive humanistic ideal" (Skrbis et al., 2004: 116), cosmopolitanism is deeply linked to the concept of global citizenship (Mansouri et al., 2017), favouring a legalistic standpoint of rights and responsibilities. For others, it foremost means "being a citizen of the world" (Appiah, 2006: xv), with emphasis on a sense of belonging. However, in Kwame Appiah's (2006: xv) perspective, cosmopolitanism unites two partly conflicting features: on the one hand, a "universal concern" with all people, and on the other hand, respect for "legitimate difference" – be it cultural, social, political or class.

Appiah is interested in the tension that arises in the twilight zone of lived cosmopolitan practice, when the universalist claim of the traditional cosmopolitan worldview collides with particular realities. He is not alone with that observation. Idealized cosmopolitanism may present "a picture that is too neat and celebratory", as Hensby and O'Byrne (2012) put it, and has therefore increasingly attracted postmodern critique and revision, or as Pollock et al. (2002: 11) phrase it with regard to the Kantian philosophical base of cosmopolitanism: "Postcolonial Africa is off the cosmopolitan map for Kant".

In a similar vein, Ponzanesi (2020: 1) emphasizes the onto-epistemological background of Kantian cosmopolitanism, which, in its further development originating in the West (McCarthy, 1999) and finding its way into other regions of the world, was characterized by a "complicity between cosmopolitanism and colonialism" and promoted a form of Western liberal universalism. Robbins and Horta (2017: 4) are more careful in their assessment of the linkage between cosmopolitanism and colonialism, but they also admit that "there has probably never been a cosmopolitanism that did not have colonialism lurking somewhere in the vicinity." Indeed, drawing on Ferri's (2022) broadening postcolonial perspective, it can be argued that this observation applies not only to the concept of cosmopolitanism but also to the entirety of Western philosophy and science.

Correspondingly, Mignolo (2002: 159) develops an argument from the perspective of contemporary coloniality (Quijano, 1992), introducing "critical cosmopolitanism." Here, cosmopolitanism needs to be addressed as both, "a set of projects toward planetary conviviality" (Mignolo, 2002: 157), and also as a storage imaginary for an implicit Eurocentric "imaginary of modernity" (Mignolo, 2002: 162). Mignolo (2002: 177) outlines in three stages the evolution of cosmopolitanism as an epistemological method to grasp the world since the 16th century. Starting with

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Christianity's "global project'" of missionization, through centuries of colonial and European history, and culminating in the dynamics of the Cold War, he explains how cosmopolitanism adapted its epistemological parameters and categories of inclusion and exclusion, yet maintained its universalistic premise despite these changes. Cosmopolitanism, Mignolo (2002: 177) concludes, was a political, elite, and Eurocentric endeavour, but always also allowed a variety of different imaginaries of planetary conviviality. Thus, he pleads for a new epistemology of "border thinking", to now include the perspectives of people in subaltern positions, whose lives are often characterized by visible and invisible borders.

Neither Mignolo nor Ponzanesi wish to completely deconstruct cosmopolitanism or replace it with other concepts. However, they advocate a critical examination of the real effects of a cosmopolitan worldview that recognizes the foreign as a valuable resource but cannot leave it in its foreignness and therefore ideologically classifies it and embeds it in a capitalist-colonialist ideology. Rather, critical cosmopolitanism is concerned with examining the diverse modes and manifestations of an imaginary directed towards the world as a whole, taking seriously the fact that the universal character of world assumptions and images of humanity are tested, dissolved or asserted in the tension of glocal assemblages.

2.2 Compulsory Cosmopolitanism

For Delanty (2009: 67), cosmopolitanism can be seen and observed in fields of tension "between the global and the local, on the one side, and on the other the universal and the particular." In these tense situations (see also Delanty in this collection), Delanty (2009: 27) identifies "moments of openness", in which people may develop new relations between themselves, others and the world. These open moments may appear when and wherever, and the "cosmopolitan imagination" then occurs thanks to the hybrid and intercultural nature of the encounter. This said, not all intercultural encounters are indeed cosmopolitan – but the cosmopolitan imagination can be characterized as a potentially positive outcome of a conflictual, tense (inter)cultural encounter, which points beyond itself to (universal) commonalities (Delanty, 2009: 27; Hannerz, 1990: 239). Speaking with Blommaert (2017: 44), the cosmopolitan imagination could be seen as one reaction and part of "vernacular globalization" meaning that "global forces are being enacted and turned into locally performed meaning".

The distinction made by Beck and Sznaider (2006: 6) between "cosmopolitanism as normative principles and (actually existing) *cosmopolitanisation* [emphasis in original]" is helpful in highlighting the role of socio-cultural contexts and performativity. Beck (2002: 28) describes the routine, day-to-day process of gradual, often inadvertent cosmopolitanization as "banal cosmopolitanism", exemplified by activities such as watching television, listening to "pop and rave", or eating foreign food.

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Conversely, Woodward and Emontspool (2018: 11) refer to it, perhaps with greater precision, as "consumer cosmopolitanism".

While a normative cosmopolitanism may, for example, include the de-construction of "antagonistic nation-states" (Szerszynski & Urry, 2002: 461), the banal "cosmopolitanization of reality" may still be surrounded by enduring national symbolism, categories and narratives (Beck & Sznaider, 2006: 8). In Cheah's postcolonial assessment (2006b: 104), the nation-state may even play a crucial role in critical cosmopolitanization, functioning as a basic condition for the advancement of progressive global-local networks in the South.

Thus, the conception of cosmopolitanization draws attention to the often coerced or unconscious character of multifaceted cosmopolitan engagements. This "cosmopolitanism from below" (Robbins, 2017: 42) or "compulsory cosmopolitanism" (Appadurai, 2013: 213) imagines the individual as exposed to diverse cultural influences from around the world and compelled to navigate and negotiate these new and sometimes conflicting cosmopolitan spaces. This experience of a "compulsory cosmopolitanism" is indeed not a choice but a result of the globalizing forces that shape contemporary life. Cosmopolitanism, writes David Hollinger (2017: 92), "recognizes that there are fewer places to hide from forces that operate in a global arena."

On the negative side, this exposure can generate feelings of dislocation, cultural loss, and anxiety as individuals struggle to maintain a sense of identity and belonging in the face of ubiquitous global influences.

On the other hand, "compulsory cosmopolitanism [can become] a vital source of energy […]" (Appadurai, 2013: 213). To gain a positive momentum, Appadurai (2013: 213) links cosmopolitanism to the ability of "imagining possibilities […] rather than giving in to the probabilities of externally imposed change." For Appadurai, a cosmopolitan mindset is characterized by its ability to create and think in global connections, to appreciate the interconnectedness and to work with it, even if one's own position in the world is characterized by relative powerlessness.

The changeability and disputability of cosmopolitanism demonstrates that we are now no longer dealing with an "ideal and a privilege of the West but a travelling concept" (Ponzanesi, 2020: 1), which may change its concrete meaning in different fields of practice. This is why Pollock et al. (2002: 577) and Kendall et al. (2009) write that one should actually speak of "cosmopolitanisms" in the plural – even though this may contradict the universal character at the core of it as holistic philosophy. But cosmopolitanism "is a lived experience, and one that does not necessarily shy away from particular, local forms" (Skrbis et al., 2004: 123). Lenehan and Lietz (2023), for example, dive deeply into Twitter (now X) and follow traces of a particular digital "cosmopolitan Europeanism", while Assaf and Pagès-El Karoui (2021) sketch the outlines of a vernacular cosmopolitan movement in the Gulf region. Delanty (2009:

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67) indicates that these "new conception[s] of cosmopolitanism" are more aptly captured by the notion of "post-universal cosmopolitanism".

Such post-universal cosmopolitanisms may be found anywhere. In his concept of "cosmopolitan contamination", Appiah (2006: 112) draws attention to the myriad cultural possibilities of feeling, (re)acting and speaking in the many fields of glocal tension. Quoting Salman Rushdie, Appiah describes it as a problematic site, as "[m]elange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that" (Appiah, 2006: 112). How a person positions themselves in this "mess" is both culturally dependent and indeterminate.

While Appiah (2006: 112) uses the term "contaminators" simultaneously for the first stoics and cosmopolitans, Anna Tsing (2012, 2015) sees in contamination a fundamental principle of global conviviality. Tsing (2012: 95) uses the term "contaminated diversity" to describe cultural and biological ways of life, which emerge "as the detritus of environmental destruction, imperial conquest, profit making, racism, and authoritarian rule – as well as creative becoming" (Tsing, 2012: 95). For Tsing (2012: 96), every human being already lives in "cosmopolitan kinship with the rest of us", whether we want to or not, connected by natural landscapes, biological processes, cultures, trade and digitality. Further building on Lenehan's (2022: 15) discussion of the "postdigital", it is important to add that the dichotomous distinction between the material world and the digital has long been blurred and "both spheres have become inseparable". Through a postdigital lens, the messy, entangled and complex "web of various cosmopolitanisms" permeate the material, the social and the digital, which Lenehan (2022: 15) depicts as a "labyrinth of postdigital cosmopolitanisms".

Echoing this sentiment of inseparable and intertwined entanglements, Tsing (2015: 27) writes: "We are contaminated by our encounters; everyone carries a history of contamination – purity is not an option." Therefore, every postdigital cosmopolitan narrative is also a contaminated narrative.

I will further follow the notion that cosmopolitanism may not be imagined as a pure essence or ideal (Skrbis et al., 2004: 121), but shows itself in forms of multiple cosmopolitanizations and as a contaminated narrative and imaginative practice. On an initial stage, cosmopolitanization is a narrative act of positioning oneself in contexts that are somehow necessarily at an intersection of local and global flows, because as Beck (2002: 30) formulates it, possible cosmopolitanisms can only show themselves glocally. This act of positioning is one important part of cosmopolitanization, as it reveals an understanding of the world and one's own and others' position in it.

But, as Pollock et al. (2002: 8) put it, "cosmopolitanism seeks to take the large view". Therefore, on a second, interconnected stage, cosmopolitanization then lives from developing common imaginaries or theories of conviviality. The sole positioning in and feeling of belonging to a global community is not enough, I would argue,

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but cosmopolitanization also longs for a somehow active formulation and imagination of living together in solidarity.

This applies all the more to a world that appears to be networked by digital technologies and references in far-reaching structures that enable virtual (simultaneous) temporalities and spaces. The possibility of digital connection alone, as Zuckerman (2013) demonstrates in *Rewire*, is not sufficient to really develop a cosmopolitan outlook. Shaw (2017) adds to this discussion with his thoughts on Solidarity by Connectivity, fearing that "digital cosmopolitanism" may just be a modern myth in the light of hate speech and filter bubbles. The real question is how people relate to each other in meaningful ways beyond fixed stereotypes, filter bubbles or digitized conflict. The implemented algorithmic systems and AI tools that underscore or surpass them, often carry hidden biases, assumptions and decision criteria that are difficult to understand and can even lead to discriminatory behaviour. This makes it all the more important to take a close look at where and by whom these AI systems are being developed.

This also means that a qualified statement about certain (postdigital) cosmopolitanisms must be grounded in their proper reality. Lindell (2014: 3) goes even further and writes that "cosmopolitanism becomes meaningless without being anchored in empirical reality." He favours an approach that works at the intersection of theory and empiricism (Lindell, 2014: 10), while Skrbis et al. (2004: 121) add that "the fluidity and complexity of cosmopolitanism are only likely to be revealed by the empirical study of its mundane reality."

2.3 A Scenery of Mundane Reality: Brazilian AI Research

This brings me back to my field of research. The researchers at C4AI find themselves at a specifically glocal juncture and (maybe not so) mundane reality: As a Brazilian research institute, the C4AI is integrated into the local research agendas of the state of Brazil, the federal state of São Paulo and the university, as well as the requirements of the international sponsor IBM. The material conditions, above all the hardware such as the supercomputers, but also the software and code bases, originate for the most part from U.S. productions. The researchers themselves at the C4AI have globalized biographies, with study or research stays in Europe, Canada, Japan and the USA. As already indicated, the floating AI discourse is polarized between the USA and China, with Europe being predominantly criticized but also acknowledged for its association with legal constraints.

How do the researchers position themselves in this specific environment? How do they see themselves and their research on AI? How do their perspectives influence their outlook on the world and the progression of AI within it? Lastly, what can this narrative approach reveal about the cosmopolitan ideals circulating within the domain of AI development?

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3. Methodology

3.1 The Center for Artificial Intelligence (C4AI)

The Center for Artificial Intelligence (C4AI) is a research centre that focuses on the field of AI and its applications. It was established in 2020 with a significant grant from IBM and FAPESP (the São Paulo Research Foundation) at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) and works in partnership with other institutions such as the Instituto Tecnológico de Aeronáutica (ITA), the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP), and the Faculty of Industrial Engineering (FEI). The centre aims to conduct "cutting-edge research" in the field of AI, with the goal of contributing to the development of new technologies and the use of AI in various domains, such as industry, healthcare, and education. Additionally, the C4AI seeks to contribute to the training of human resources in the field of AI, and to foster partnerships between academia, industry, and society. In its vision statement it aspires "to be[come] a world-class center of excellence in Artificial Intelligence" (C4AI, 2023).

The C4AI (2023) has currently around 250 researchers and employees, including faculty, post-docs, graduate and undergraduate students. During my research stay from July to October 2022, the C4AI was organized into five sections, each further subdivided into different project groups.

3.2 Ethnographic Strategy

While developing the ethnographic strategy (Neyland, 2007: 14), I decided to primarily address two methodologies. The first methodological approach I found to be useful is organization ethnography (Atkinson et al., 2007), which, with its focus on organizational form, work structures, and the everyday (working) life (van der Waal, 2009), may provide a broad as well as thorough view of the C4AI as an organization. I also wanted to shed light on the sociotechnical imaginaries regarding artificial intelligence which may be seen as floating around in the C4AI.

Thus, by classifying the C4AI as an AI research laboratory, the additional perspective of "laboratory ethnography" according to Latour and Woolgar (1979) or Rheinberger (1993) was deemed suitable. Here, the focus lies more on processes of knowledge generation or construction (Knorr-Cetina, 1981), on questions such as: How does AI actually "come into being" or is created? How are the researchers constructing, talking, and interfering with (or around) the technology? The "epistemische Ding" (epistemic thing, Rheinberger 1993) "AI" thus moves to the centre of the ethnographic interest. To address both the character of the C4AI as an organization and its qualities as an AI lab, John Law's (2004) assessment of the indefiniteness or messiness of places, circumstances, and therefore suitable methods, provided a reassuring guardrail during my stay in the field. While characterizing the C4AI in

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concrete terms remains difficult, it is certainly a hybrid form of university research institution and privately financed laboratory.

Over the course of these three months I took field notes, observed programmers and researchers while they worked on projects, often typing code, or looking at graphs. I participated in work meetings, drank the typical cup of coffee in the hallway – an ethnographic classic (Latour & Woolgar, 1979: 19) – talked to people casually and conducted 17 narrative, ethnographic interviews (Heyl, 2001; Spradley, 1979). In this paper, I will follow Bryant and Knights' (2019: 19) methodological indications, who see the identification of orientating social imaginaries and narratives as a possibility for gaining an "ethnographical hold" on technological futures in the making.

In the following, I concentrate on eight of those interviews. Of the interviews five were conducted on-site, and three were conducted via an online video conference provider, as many researchers associated with the C4AI often work remotely. While all of the interviews initially started in Portuguese, me or the interviewees sometimes switched to English during the course of the interview for better comprehension. The (originally Portuguese) extracts from the interviews used in this text have all been translated into English.

The (anonymized) names of my interviewees are Paula, Pedro, Michael, Daniel, Ismael, Carla, Robert, Sandra. As my interviewees are important figures in their respective projects, it is argued that their ideas, visions, and leadership strongly influence the organization as well as the development of the AI research at the C4AI.

After transcribing the interviews, I conducted a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). In the following, I will focus on two main categories that emerged from the material: firstly, the self-positioning of the researchers and the C4AI in the realm of global forces, and secondly a certain related non-imagining of futures. Together, both categories point towards a unique compulsory (Appadurai, 2013: 213) cosmopolitan disposition.

4. Results: Positionality and Non-Imagining of Futures

In the following presentation of results, I have deliberately included long and barely edited passages from the transcripts. This is intended to achieve two effects: On the one hand, I want to give as much space as possible to the direct statements of the actors, and on the other hand, it opens a space for dialogue that allows the readers to interact with the statements and come up with their own interpretations, assumptions and questions. My interpretations offered afterwards may and should be critically examined, questioned and reinterpreted. With this in mind, I present a first quote from Paula, a senior researcher at the C4AI and part of the KEML group, who proved to be one of my most important interlocutors.

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4.1 Positionality: Somewhere at the Periphery

When I asked about Paula's visions of the future, especially regarding technological development, she initially responded with an interesting global positioning:

> "It is not enough time [to compete in every field of AI]! So, let's see what the ability is, the possibility for us to really dominate this technology in the future, to be like: this is us [i.e. the C4AI, or Brazil]. So that we can see how we can take Brazil to a good place within this whole eco-system. But we know it is not easy. Because you saw: China invested, invested heavily. And as the type of power, the type of regime they have there, they have a greater control, right? And they said their goal, while in Germany it was what? 2050? China said 2030. And you can see that if you look at the publishing curves [...] the publishing curves are growing exponentially, the Chinese are growing exponentially!" (Paula)

In this excerpt, Paula is not so much speaking about a specific technological innovation but almost immediately referring to certain limitations and power structures in a globalized world: The C4AI will not be able to compete in every aspect of AI development but will have to find its own way or identity as a research facility. Following this, China is brought in as an example of how state investments and plans influence what future developments will look like. In this sense, Paula adds that Germany will also struggle, as China is "growing exponentially". This statement can be complemented by Sandra's assessment, as she does not believe that "Brazil has the money to compete with the United States, China, Japan or Germany." In this context, Michael positions himself, and Brazil, as follows:

> "[W]here I come from it's the third world, ne? The world is thinking that it is the third world, aren't they? Because third, there's a first and a second. In the cold war you had the United States and the Soviet Union, the two worlds, and the third world was never part of them! And Brazil still suffers a little from this."

Michael, Sandra and Paula highlight the precarious situation of their own research activities in comparison with other 'big players' in the world. In doing so, they actively draw a difference between the C4AI in Brazil and other research institutions in the "first world", adding China's special role. This differentiation, however, takes place along established imaginations (and their respective realities) of national borders (Anderson, 1987), reinforcing a quite "banal nationalism" (Billig, 1995: 114). The USA and China stand out the most as comparative dimensions in the interviews, followed by Japan and Germany. Interestingly, the cultural proximity of Brazil to the USA, at least when it comes to pop-cultural products, is mentioned by both Michael and Daniel, and Robert mentions two other researchers at the C4AI whom he depicts as very influenced by "the American way" of doing things.

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A look at the (academic) biographies of my interlocutors reveals a certain international mobility, directed towards the "West". Paula, for example, has spent a number of years in Europe, Michael and Daniel have spent some time in the United States, and Robert and Carla frequently travel to Canada and Australia for conferences and research cooperations. They are embedded in and travel alongside a global AI development community and try to engage with researchers worldwide.

At this point, I want to highlight the narrative position of the interviewed researchers: They present and consider themselves as belonging to the periphery of a global structure, that consists of powerful centres like the United States, China or Europe and a peripheral rest, called the "third world". The interviewees also showed knowledge regarding the colonial past of Brazil, which was in part deemed responsible for the current position of Brazil and its AI research in the world (Michael, Carla).

Taking the accounts of experienced or at least argumentative coloniality seriously, one could argue with Cruz (2021), that the researchers living in the former colonized Brazil still perpetuate "internalized collective understandings [of technological inferiority]", while assigning "the West" the general ability to "solve whatever techno-scientific challenge we might face" (Cruz, 2021: 1851). In this scenario, the researchers of the C4AI naturally orientate themselves towards tech-developments that are made elsewhere. The researchers are, and I am loosely quoting Marcus (1995: 4) here, trying to understand their own present by "borrowing from […] an emergent future", which is (maybe not so) "cautiously imagined" in the West.

While the self-depiction as a somehow deficient "third world" at first seems quite undesirable, the narrative act of distancing the C4AI from the rest of the world also establishes the necessary foundation for creating an own, self-confident research profile and identity.

4.2 What about Brazil?

> "Because, in these big AI events there are many panels, there is a lot of discussion. So, there was a specific one on the future of Europe and AI. There is always this question: What about Brazil?" (Sandra)

Sandra's question "What about Brazil?" will further develop my argument and give this paper a new direction. When it came to the role of the C4AI in developing AI technology, Daniel was sure that this "centro brasileiro" will create research that "can only be done here". Sandra puts it this way: "[T]he idea was to become an internationally recognized player in the field of artificial intelligence. A player from South America, a player from the equator downwards […]."

Next to the already cited, most of the other interviewees also expressed self-confident hopes and visions of the C4AI as a research centre that could be on a par with the already established "players" in the world. A strength was seen in the specific

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"realidade do Brasil" (Daniel), which shows itself in various forms, be it in the vast amount of available data (Sandra, Robert), the huge size of the country and its "map" (Carla), its unique natural environment (Michael, Robert), a long academic tradition with "top universities" (Ismael) or a certain "culture of curiosity" (Paula) when it comes to new technology.

There was a certain pride with respect to the position of the Brazilian research centre. While mentions of pride referred to certain initial conditions, as soon as I asked about more concrete contours of possible future developments, these statements faded away, became unclear and blurred. Here, too, Paula distinguished herself with a determined response.

4.3 Provincial Tech-Futures

> "Today we are seeing that […] the monopolies are getting too big, right? […] We want to see if we can break this paradigm that is leading to the conclusion that there will be only super-powerful machines and huge machines, huge data memories, giant processing power and that [only a few] can control the services and the technologies that can be developed. […] We are trying to break this down". (Paula)

The desire to actively "break" or disrupt the existing paradigm is directed against the monopolies of large tech companies and seeks alternative ways within the C4AI. As an example of how a differently framed tech development might look like, Sandra told me, that:

> "[…] there is much to be done in the development of AI in terms of natural language processing for Portuguese, because it is a fact that much of what we have today in the development of artificial intelligence goes through natural language processing, and if Brazilians or Portuguese are not translating it back into Portuguese, it will not be Americans, Germans or Japanese who will be doing it." (Sandra)

It is true that today's most powerful AI tools, such as the recently introduced ChatGPT (OpenAI 2023), have been trained and developed mainly in English – and therefore also achieve excellent results primarily in this language. When ChatGPT 3.5 and especially 4 was released, I spoke with some of the researchers at the C4AI who indeed were quite surprised by the performance of the AI bot. Carla even compared it to the Sputnik crisis in the 1950s[1]. Similarly, the ChatGPT release demonstrated how advanced U.S. companies already are in comparison to the research at the C4AI. This said, in Carlas' vision the C4AI will try to bridge this gap, bringing Portuguese into AI

1 The so called "Sputnik Shock" (Dickson 2001) refers to the global astonishment triggered by the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik, the first artificial Earth satellite, in 1957, marking a significant moment in the Cold War space race.

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development and therefore "make an AI more Portuguese and Brazilian [...] to solve a problem for many other Portuguese-speaking people around the world."

Michael enhances the postcolonial perspective, also touching on the issue of technological lag:

> "The Southern Hemisphere ends up losing a bit of access to this type of [AI] knowledge, models, and solutions. So, there's a lot that is developed in these ["Western"] countries and doesn't reach here, and there are other developments that do arrive, but are not useful because they need adaptations; they don't fit our reality."

Similarly, Robert, thinks "that developed countries [...] dictate these technologies, they move forward, they have advantages that we can't reach." However, Robert also identifies a strength in being a research centre in the South, as:

> "[...] we [the C4AI] will have a very big advantage in problems that don't exist there [Europe], for instance. So, in problems that involve the distribution of food in very poor areas, detection of tropical diseases, recovery of areas where nature has been degraded. I think there is a great chance for developing countries to supply this type of technology created for solutions, and in countries that are developing."

In *Whose Global Village? Rethinking How Technology Shapes our World*, Ramesh Srinivasan (2017: 1) points to the "asymmetric diffusion of digital tools and systems" in the world, which are "produced and shaped by powerful corporations and institutions from Europe and North America [...]". This assertion is echoed and felt by Robert, Michael, Carla and Sandra.

However, building upon extensive fieldwork, Srinivasan (2017: 209–211) also shows that a collaborative praxis of re-imagining and building technology from the South and by marginalized communities can lead to alternative technology, providing a "provincialized" but likewise "cosmopolitan solution" to problems of subaltern communities worldwide. One may detect a variant of this practice of envisioning "provincialized" or "decolonial tech-futures" (Cruz, 2021) in the statements made by Paula, Sandra, and Robert; whether it's through developing a Portuguese AI, adapting Western technology to the Brazilian context, or creating AI solutions tailored to the unique challenges faced by poorer countries in the Southern Hemisphere.

4.4 The Non-Imagining of Futures

Notably, active and positive projections or visions stand quite alone in the research data. Most interviewees said they would not like to talk about the future or admitted that "it's very difficult [...] to imagine futures differently" (Robert). Often, they articulated future visions that are a "continuation of what was already happening"

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(Daniel), hoping that "we do better than what we have already done. We want 5G internet, we'll wait for 6G, even faster" (Pedro). Carla's statement regarding the "ChatGPT shock" also revealed a certain perplexity in view of the superiority of U.S. AI development. Also, Carla admitted, they will surely try to make use of the GPT 4 frame for their own research.

I encountered similar sounding future stories when I undertook research with developers on GitHub (Franco, 2022, 2023), who also expressed techno-scientific imaginaries populated by ever better technology and ripe with pragmatic techno-optimism. In *What Tech Calls Thinking*, Adrian Daub (2020: 90) shows that the "tech sector takes pleasure in a weak utopianism of results", which envisions "giving everyone a self-driving car or putting a man on Mars. Or in bringing customers a burrito in less than thirty minutes."

But other than this typical "mundane optimism"-imaginary of the Californian tech-elites (Barbrook & Cameron, 2015 [1996]: 4), the mundanity or "weak utopianism" (Daub, 2020: 90) of the tech-visions articulated by my interviewees at the C4AI have a divergent structure and different baseline:

> "So, I have this social responsibility. […] To achieve equality. And technology is – we will not be able to do so many amazing things, how the people like to think, if we do not look for these very basic needs. I don't think that we can just forget about a big part of our population that has almost nothing to eat." (Ismael)

Instead of achieving the goal of delivering a burrito even faster, the main concern of Ismael is to establish food security in the first place in a country that only recently returned to the United Nations (UN) Hunger Map[2] (Guedes, 2022). In the interviews, the extreme social inequality in Brazil was addressed and the development of AI systems was subordinated to the goal of reducing poverty (Michael, Pedro), malnutrition (Ismael) and social injustice (Paula, Daniel). In fact, more elaborated technological utopias (like self-driving cars, internet of things, etc.) did not appear in the data, instead Michael just hopes that "[the future] won't be a complete dystopia." Michael also said that the C4AI should primarily focus on small and effective fixes, instead of ground-breaking innovations. He called this tendency to look for small solutions to mitigate the worst consequences "dar um jeitinho" – loosely translatable with "finding a small solution". This specific method of finding a way to accomplish something

2 The UN Hunger Map is an interactive tool developed by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). It visually represents global hunger and food insecurity data, allowing users to understand the scale and distribution of hunger worldwide. The map highlights regions facing food scarcity challenges, aiming to raise awareness, inform policy decisions, and guide humanitarian aid and development efforts to alleviate hunger and improve food security. For more information see: https://hungermap.wfp.org/.

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by bending or sidestepping known ways or even breaking social conventions was recognized by the historian and sociologist Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (2012 [1936]) as a typical Brazilian practice in his book *Raízes do Brasil* (Roots of Brazil). This stereotypical depiction of a Brazilian approach to dealing with problems of the future is used by Michael in an act of positive self-identification: As a Brazilian researcher, he may come up with a working code system or AI structure that follows the principle of "dar um jeito".

Finally, Paula pointed out that the typical "americano" likes to state "[that] in ten years we will have this! […] We discover everything! I don't have this character trait. […] I don't like to talk about the future." In this direct rejection of the Californian "mundane optimism" and of the praxis of utopian tech-imagining one may detect another cautious indication for a vernacular practice of cosmopolitan imagination, which is not directed towards grand universal solutions, but tries to think from the borders, from the South, and to work towards common basic future needs. Srinivasan's (2017) concept of "provincialized" technological imaginations, leading to cosmopolitan solutions, is fitting to describe this particular praxis of post-universal cosmopolitan imagination at the C4AI.

It is precisely this "non-imagining" or reduced imagining of jeitinho solutions which draws a line between the C4AI as a (Brazilian) research laboratory and a dominant discourse around AI which is deeply influenced by vivid imaginaries of technological optimism and utopias.

5. Nebulous Futures and Contaminated Cosmopolitanism

The narrated positionalities as well as the dependent future imaginaries of the researchers reveal a certain global, post-colonial nexus, which is primarily characterized by power inequalities and non-predictable futures. Be it by framing oneself as "third world" or by thematizing the difficult economic and social developments in Brazil, the interviewees showed great awareness regarding global and domestic power inequalities and did engage in questions of universal concern.

Out of this precarious positionality, active and positive future imaginaries were hard to find. Paula shed light onto this constellation by admitting:

> "The future is very nebulous because there are these forces that are dominating. […] Nowadays we don't see much of this light at the end of the tunnel, ne? It's very foggy." (Paula)

This nebulous or foggy future could be interpreted as a logical result of the previously introduced "open moment" (Delanty, 2009) and the "compulsory cosmopolitanism" (Appadurai, 2013), that arises in the glocal tension at the C4AI. When the past is char-

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acterized by a lack of power and the present is seen as a continuance of this precarious situation, it may be difficult to actively formulate a clearly positive future. In the non-imagining and the formulation of a nebulous future the negative aspects of the "cosmopolitan kinship" (Tsing, 2012) can be identified, meaning a feeling of dislocation, cultural loss, and anxiety. The "forces that operate in a global arena" (Hollinger, 2017: 92) are directly addressed by Paula and may seem overwhelming, the important developments in AI are made elsewhere.

The narratives show themselves as contaminated by a global externality (like the ChatGPT Shock) and coloniality (technologically, economically, culturally, intellectually in form of patents, innovations, etc.). One's own power to act was accordingly perceived to be low. This leads either to "non-imagining" of futures or a tendency towards a pessimistic view of a nebulous future.

However, in these situations also lies the potential to resist the pull of solutions originating from a hegemonic world. The projected "breaking" of the monopolistic tech-world indicates a certain self-confidence in this regard. While the West (especially the USA and Europe) as well as China were used as comparative backgrounds, in the light of which Brazilian AI research will have a difficult time, the "realidade brasileira" was addressed by some to argue quite confidently in favour of engaging with technological futures "Made in Brazil".

Initially grounded in banal nationalism, the self-positioning relied on the national category "Brazil", with researchers inclined to position themselves in a narrative counter-positioning against the rest of the world, especially the "West" and China. However, future imaginaries of conviviality also emerged from this foundation. In this sense, the nation state functions as a central condition for the advancement of progressive development in the South, just as Peng Cheah (2006b: 104) proposed it in his postcolonial take on cosmopolitanism. The problem-ridden present serves as a setting and as a stage for a specific practice of envisioning "existential futures", which are forming around existential threads and looking for correspondingly fast or urgent solutions. Those AI-"jeitinhos" are not only thought of as nationalistic solutions, but aim to help the South and the so called "third world" in general. In this case, the compulsory cosmopolitanism may indeed serve as a "vital source of energy" (Appadurai, 2013) to envision future possibilities and technology; that serves the good and may help the disenfranchized and subaltern (Srinivasan, 2017).

This said, the source of those technological solutions may again depend on the "West" and its technological products. Doing so carries the risk of onboarding onto the "West as steward discourse of culture in which so-labelled 'non-Western' people are Othered as needing help […]" (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017: 247). In this narrative, the "West" still acts as a role model and illuminates the path to the future. The interviewees' visions of the future therefore oscillated between self-confident formulations of "Brazilian AI" and rather stagnating visions of relative powerlessness.

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The analysis of the empirical material displayed a certain vernacular cosmopolitanization from the South, which shows itself concerned with existential threats and "small futures", offering the perspective of a post-utopian cyber-imaginary, while a classical Western tech-cosmopolitanism may still pursue grand solutions and digital utopias.

Indeed, Charles Ess, as early as 2001, highlighted how the discourse surrounding technologies is heavily influenced by a dominant U.S. tech-imaginary, oscillating between utopian futures or dystopian scenarios. Ess (2001) suggests that the content of the utopian tech-imaginary can be linked to a form of tech-cosmopolitanism, encompassing notions of the "global village" (McLuhan, 1964) and leading to the successful promotion of democratic principles. The concept of a small future tech-imaginary doesn't neatly align with the dominant discourse, yet it does reflect the qualities of an "alternative" or even "middle ground" vision, as Ess (2001: 4) described possible local manifestations of tech-cosmopolitanisms in *Culture, Technology, Communication: Towards an Intercultural Global Village*. Lenehan (2022: 20) emphasizes, in light of the dominance of U.S. tech-narratives discussed by Ess (2001), that in contextualized and culturally adaptive use of technology there is always also potential for the creation of "native" or local (post)digital cosmopolitan spaces.

The "small" or "existential" future visions at the C4AI are a consequence of compulsory cosmopolitanism, contaminated with coloniality and precarity, but nevertheless aiming to improve the lives of the people living at the "borders" (Mignolo, 2002).

The geo-historical self-classification as "third world" as well as the developed images of existential futures may refer to the larger discourse of coloniality, but it would be presumptuous and wrong to classify and construct the technologically excellently equipped C4AI and its highly trained researchers as "deficient Other[s]" (Amadasi & Holliday, 2017: 247). Rather, they present a particular C4AI-community of practice that is still in the process of establishing its own identity as an AI laboratory "from the equator downwards". Speaking with Cruz (2021: 1581), tech-development from the South lives from "dreaming and co-constructing […] other possible worlds from the bottom-up." The researchers at the C4AI are indeed dreaming of and experimenting with their own sketches of – sometimes nebulous – techno-sociological AI imaginaries.

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Cosmopolitanism and Communication Rights in a Postdigital World

Alexa Robertson

Abstract *The notion of communication rights is informed by a cosmopolitan worldview. The right to access information, to participate in public communication, to be heard and understood, and the right to privacy apply equally to people everywhere, according to UNESCO. This chapter asks what is happening to those rights in postdigital settings. In focus is the journalist-audience relationship, which is the point at which the right to inform, the right to be informed and the right to privacy intersect. Both the philosophical-regulatory discourse on communication rights and the scholarly discourse on changes in the journalist-audience relationship tend to be couched in general and sometimes universal language, that does not fit easily with empirical realities on the ground. The chapter considers these discourses in a reading that is informed by the experiences of journalists reporting on unequal conditions from a global perspective, and tech activists who are concerned about what developments in communication technology mean for people living in places where liberal notions of rights are not a taken-for-granted starting point – perspectives that are specific, and grounded in individual experience, rather than generalizing and universalist. It is argued that the tension between the right to information and the right to privacy makes it difficult to maintain what Arendt called 'proper distance'.*

Introduction

Shortly after the Al Jazeera network launched its English-language news channel in 2006, a young boy began peering at its viewers through a space in a wall on the screen. The space is both an opening, possibly the result of an explosion, and a barrier, blocked by metal rods. Judging from the way he is dressed and the satchel on his back, the boy was hurrying to school when he caught sight of the spectator, stopped and made eye contact. The boy and his curious gaze turned up at regular intervals throughout the year, in an advertisement typical of those used by global news providers to promote their way of working. "You need to be able to see the world from many perspectives in order to report the world back to itself", was the sense made of the moment by the reporter's voiceover. The image is a useful

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heuristic because of its ambiguity. It is not clear whether the boy is on the outside looking in, or the inside looking out, which is apparently the point.

Figure 1: Still image from a 2006 advertisement on the Al Jazeera network for its new English-language news channel.

Narrative techniques such as these are enduring traits of global communication. They can be considered part of a repertoire that represents, and can conceivably cultivate, a cosmopolitan outlook. In Silverstone's terms, they are part of the "mediapolis" in which "relations between self and other" are conducted in a global sphere, and "through which we learn about those who are and who are not like us" (Silverstone, 2007: 22, 31). They can also be related to the communication rights that have long been enshrined in United Nations discourse. In the two decades that have elapsed since Al Jazeera (AJE) first aired the advertisement described above, digital technology has added a number of striking, and often pedagogical, techniques to the communication toolbox. Location data, drone journalism and Geographical Information System (GIS) interactivity are making it possible for journalists to draw new maps of the mediapolis, forge stronger connections with their audiences, and to tell stories to and for people who have previously been "off the radar". It is not so much the case that emerging communicative technologies and practices replace extant ones, as that they overlay and become imbricated with them. What news consumers have come to experience, and what scholars need to capture in their research, is hybridity rather than replacement of one communication technology with another (Bollmer, 2019; Chadwick, 2017).

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The same can be said of power relations. New technology can give a voice to the voiceless, to use Al Jazeera's catchphrase, but it can also be used to reinforce and indeed expand the might of actors, be they economic or political, who have historically wielded power and exercised control in society, to the disadvantage of others. The international regulatory discourse on communication rights calls for protection against the nefarious wielding of such power, and for the benign use of digital technology. Like the scholarly discourse on changes in the journalist-audience relationship, however, the discourse of regulation tends to be abstract and couched in universalist language. This does not always fit comfortably with empirical realities on the ground.

In this chapter, communication rights are considered from the perspective of journalists reporting on unequal conditions to global audiences, and from that of tech activists who are concerned about what developments in communication technology mean for people living in places where liberal notions of rights are not a taken-for-granted starting point. These perspectives are specific, and grounded in individual experience, rather than generalizing and universalist. Apart from these voices, the discussion in what follows draws on data from an analysis of global news reports broadcast between 2008 – not long after the boy stopped to look through the space in the wall – and 2020 (Robertson 2021). It begins, however, with a brief overview of the global, regulatory discourse which these empirical realities enact (or not), and an explanation of how both can be related to cosmopolitanism.

Communication Rights in a Postdigital World

A touchstone in the discourse on communication rights is the Mass Media Declaration of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1978), which grew out of debates on imbalances and inequalities in global communication. It was followed by the influential report of the MacBride Commission, *Many Voices, One World* (MacBride Commission, 1980/2004) and calls for a New World Information and Communication Order to resist what was perceived as an emerging global media landscape unfairly formed in the interests of multinational capital and the new technologies used to promote those interests. Such resistance is the red thread running through subsequent declarations, comments and reports, up to the Tashkent Declaration of 2022, the most recent statement by the global community on communication rights. While highlighting the problem of a lack of transparency pertaining to the deployment of algorithms, with concerns about data retention and detrimental effects on equality and inclusiveness in digital settings, the declaration nevertheless emphasizes the importance of online space for access to information (UNESCO, 2022: 2; 6).

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There is no consensus as to what human rights in the digital realm are, or "who should take the lead to govern them in the increasingly complex media and communications landscape" (Horowitz et al., 2020: 299), but Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been understood, throughout the years, to involve the right to communicate, to be heard, to be understood, to learn, to respond and to share (Padovani & Calabrese 2014: 10–11). Fundamental aspects of communication to which people everywhere have rights include those of access and participation (Landry et al., 2020: 333). With information increasingly produced, distributed, accessed and maintained in digital form, it is acknowledged that the internet and digital platforms "play an important role in creating an enabling environment for the right to access information" (UNESCO, 2022). But communication rights also include protection from hateful speech and the invasion of privacy. The Tashkent Declaration emphasizes, moreover, that disinformation, and government misuse of emergency situations to monopolize the flow of public information can pose risks to these rights (UNESCO, 2022:3). Communication rights thus have both positive and negative aspects. In positive terms, they grant something (access, for example), and emphasize the importance of equity of communicative resources (e.g. news about the diverse societies in which we live). In negative terms, they entail the right to be spared something, such as disinformation and digital surveillance (Robertson & Schaetz, 2022).

Journalism scholars have, in recent years, devoted considerable attention to the impact on journalism of the increasing availability of data and how new technology has enabled unprecedented sophistication of analysis and representation (Ausserhofer et al., 2020: 953). The development of new tools for interaction with news content has led to diversification of platforms and more complex communication flows. Virality driven by audiences is a key feature of this. As Carlson (2020: 231) notes in a helpful essay on journalistic epistemology, the relationship between journalists and their audiences has been changed and rendered more complicated by the proliferation of information in digital spaces, and the knowledge paradigms that arise in these. These changed circumstances also impact both positively and negatively on communicators (Manninen et al., 2022; Mellado, 2021; Christin, 2020; Tandoc, 2019; Bakker, 2014). On the one hand, data journalism is providing resources to help news providers do their jobs well (Newman, 2021; Felle, 2016; Felle et al., 2015; Appelgren & Nygren, 2014; Lewis & Usher, 2014). On the other hand, new technologies compel journalists to work harder to maintain the boundary between the professional purveyors of knowledge (them), and the audiences that inhabit, share and contribute knowledge to the same digital spaces (us) (Humanes & Roses, 2021; Wolfgang, 2021; Wölker & Powell, 2021).

One way of maintaining authority is the continued use and repetition of familiar journalistic practices. Journalistic legitimacy, according to Carlson, is the product of "a discursive performance realized in the ritualized manner through which

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journalists present information to audiences" (Carlsson, 2020: 233–4). The proliferation of platforms notwithstanding: The authoritative anchor in the newsroom studio, the knowledgeable correspondent in the field, and their conjoined act of relaying information, remain familiar features of media ecologies in the hybrid media system. This is the term used by Chadwick (2017) to conceptualize the conditions under which what he terms "old" and "new" media interact (what is old and new at any particular moment being an empirical question), and what happens when the technologies, genres, norms and behaviours associated with each synergize with those of the other. The emphasis on immediacy in research on journalism in such ecologies, while important to an understanding of the impact of rapidly developing technologies, tends to obscure the routine, quotidian structures in which news about the world is packaged. It is salutary to keep in mind the tension, or dialectic, between the new and potentially revolutionizing opportunities offered by digital trace and location data, on the one hand, and the more conservative tendencies of journalistic storytelling on the other, through which the events, people and processes of the public sphere are relayed with the help of narrative features that are familiar and well-rehearsed (Robertson, 2010).

The discourse on communication rights uses words like "information" and "data", not storytelling. But it also refers to the right to be heard and understood, which is the realm of narrative rather than data. The discourse is very much about ethics. Wasserman (2019) makes the point rather vividly. An ethical media in the digital age, he argues, is "one that listens to audiences", so that it can make sense of what they have to express. It seeks to imagine what it must be like to stand in the shoes of an ordinary media user (Wasserman, 2019). Put differently, it imagines how things look on the other side of the space in the wall. It is thus a cosmopolitan discourse.

Cosmopolitan Narratives

In his work on cosmopolitanism, Delanty (2009: 195–197) has written of what he calls "cultural translation", a communicative act that takes the perspective of the Other and negotiates meaning. The insight that such translation can entail a loss as well as negotiation of meaning puts Delanty in the company of Hannah Arendt. Understanding, according to Arendt (1994), is not the same as access to correct information. It is "an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world" (Arendt, 1994: 307–308). Being at home in the world in Arendt's terms involves the activation of imagination to make the standpoints of absent others present in the mind, keeping things in their proper distance and bridging the chasm between us

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and others – narrative work that can be seen in the output of at least some global news outlets (Robertson & Schaetz, 2021).

Descartes bequeathed to modernity the idea of a detached observer who views the world objectively and dispassionately; an observer with a rational mind but without a body, location or social roots (although he was almost certainly a white, European man). On the one hand, this observer is omniscient. On the other hand, his detached, delocalized perspective renders him for precisely that reason incapable of "seeing the world from many perspectives". This 17th century ideal continues to have currency in the 21st century, with data and AI having become intrinsic parts of information flows. In addition, the political economy of newswork means that some "power-geometries", to use Massey's (1993) term, organize mediated worlds in terms of abstractions like "London" and "Beijing" rather than taking viewers to the places where people struggle with the fallout of a policy decision or referendum enactment. Power geometries are also evident in news reporting of global crises like migration, dominated by northern countries that bicker about refugee quotas rather than the countries that actually host the majority of people-on-the-move (Robertson & Schaetz, 2021).

From their different disciplinary homes, Soja (2009), Fraser (2010) and Bhabha (2004) have all drawn attention to how people experiencing unequal conditions find themselves unjustly situated in space, or at the margins. In the place of the omniscient Cartesian individual, post-structuralists remind us that the observer is always situated and that our viewpoints are always "partial, incomplete, and power-laden" (Warf, 2009: 76). In her influential work on the reimagining of political space and the public sphere under globalization, Fraser (2010) directs attention to the key issues of whose interests count, whose voices get heard, and to whom we have moral obligations when new forms of representational injustice arise in global settings. Beyond this is the injustice Fraser refers to as "meta-political misrepresentation" which happens when a placeless or "high helicopter" view (as AJE news executives dismissively call it, Robertson, 2015) is used to frame shared issues. In the process, they exclude the affected from the frame and deny them a role in determining that frame. Bhabha was perhaps the first to use the notion of "third space" to designate a hybrid space in which people who do not share a geography can come together and relate to each other. It has inspired scholarship that explores "how news media assign meanings to environment through narratives of space" (Gutsche, 2014: 487).

The image of the boy and the space in the wall is a quotidian illustration of the influential argument pursued by Massey (1993) that distinctions usually thought easy (to the extent that they are thought at all), such as inside/outside and near/far, are called into question by a relational politics of place. Such differentiations are not only artificial, it has also been argued: they are "always embedded in each other and mutually constituted" (Warf, 2009: 75). This brings us back to Silverstone's mediapolis, and to Arendt's work of the imagination. What she refers to as "visiting" can be

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translated, in news terms, as the fashioning of stories of an event from each of the many perspectives taken by people who have an interest in telling it, and being able to imagine how we would respond if we were a character in a story that is not our own. Arendtian visiting is "not to see through the eyes of someone else", explains Biesta (2016: 187), "but to see with your own eyes from a position that is not your own."

When it comes to the right to be heard and understood, it is worth considering whether and how the well-rehearsed features of news reporting contribute to this. As intimated above, there is abstraction in the structures of news broadcasts just as there is in the regulatory discourse of communication rights. Stories of the world can be packaged as short telegrams, or as a report read by a studio-based newsreader and illustrated by agency or generic images. They can take the form of a newsreader interviewing an expert or stakeholder in the studio and quizzing them about the event or problem. They can be told by a reporter on site chatting with the newsreader in the studio at home ("two-way lives"). All of the above can be thought of as the sort of "non-places" that Augé (1995) says are characterized by their lack of specificity and interchangeability. In contrast to this sort of omniscient, disembodied information purveyance, the stories can be told by a correspondent on site, be she an Arendtian visitor or simply a tourist.

A study reported elsewhere (Robertson, 2021) measured the "size" of the newsworlds of leading global channels by coding the countries that appeared in the headlines of broadcasts that aired in Europe during prime time, in 2009 and 2019 (one broadcast per channel each week of each year). It established that AJE had the "biggest" newsworld in both years, with 61 different countries featuring in the headlines in 2009 and 67 in 2019. And in both years, CNNI had the "smallest" newsworld, with 36 different countries in the 2009 headlines and 30 in 2019. The measure is a simple one, but also one characterized by an almost perfect measure of inter-coder reliability, and is striking in its stability, both in terms of temporal comparison and the placing of each newsroom. Using these results as a jumping off point, a closer look was taken at the reporting of those two newsrooms on issues pertaining to social inequality. A total of 207 broadcasts were coded and found to contain a total of 526 reports that focused on or made reference to an issue pertaining to social inequality (ranging from austerity policies, unemployment and threatened livelihoods, lack of food, unequal access to health care or education, homelessness, human trafficking and refugee flows). Among other things, coders documented the position of the reporter in relation to the people concerned or being represented, i.e. those with the right to be heard and understood, in the language of regulation. Were they detached observers in a non-place (the studio), or on the same site as the people being represented (in the field)?

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Table 1: The place of the journalist. Percentage of all reports on social inequality in AJE and CNN in the sampled year, in which the journalist is at the news site, or elsewhere (in descending order of proximity).

Report type	AJE 2009 n = 195	AJE 2019 n = 186	CNN 2009 n = 45	CNN 2019 n = 100
Report from field	44.6	44.1	26.7	29.0
Two-way live	5.6	14.0	28.9	30.0
Report, journalist not on site	13.8	8.1	6.7	9.0
Report by newsreader	2.6	5.9	4.4	7.0
Studio or online interview	11.8	6.5	2.2	10.0
Telegram	16.9	18.8	26.7	11.0
Other	4.7	2.6	4.4	4.0

As can be seen from Table 1, there are noteworthy differences between the narrative strategies of the two newsrooms. While the CNN reporter was situated in the same space as the people whose stories were being told in between one-quarter and one-third of the reports, the AJE reporter "visited" in 44 percent of them. In both instances, however, the results are evidence that legacy narrative practices endure, despite the inroads of new technology.

Delanty's (2009: 79) focus – which the study of critical cosmopolitanism explores – is the discursive space of translations, dialogue and exchange. It can thus be said to matter where the journalist is situated in the mediapolis. But what of the discursive space in which the researcher and journalist exchange views about the work involved in furthering and safeguarding communication rights? How does the universal language of global regulation translate into empirical realities on the ground? In what follows, three manifestations of communications rights – 1) access to information; 2) the right to participate in public communication, to be heard and understood; and 3) the right to privacy – are translated into the words and experiences of professionals. The discussion is based on excerpts from interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020 with 31 journalists, audience developers and other newsroom professionals working with technological development at Al Jazeera English, the BBC World Service, Deutsche Welle, Politico, Buzzfeed and the Guardian, and talks given during the same period by 31 tech activists at RightsCon, an annual meeting of practitioners concerned about human rights in the digital age, referred to by participants as a 'summit'. Convened by the Access Now NGO, RightsCon's purpose is to com-

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bine technical support with policy engagement to safeguard digital security, privacy and freedom of expression and combat online discrimination. The transcripts of the talks and of the semi-structured interviews were analyzed to identify recurrent narrative themes. Narrative analysis was also used in a parallel study of global news content, which was the third component of a project that had the aim of exploring the communicative dimension of inequality under globalization.

Access

A Portuguese woman, who worked for a Europe-based global broadcaster before moving to a digital newspaper with an international audience, told us: "to me as a journalist, accessibility has always been key… I don't care if I'm writing in Portuguese, in English, in German. Reach is not only just the audience that we're trying to reach but what reaches them in a way that is understandable to them." It also means knowing where they are to be reached.

A digital newsgathering specialist, developing the YouTube strategy of a U.K.-based broadcaster with a global audience, spoke enthusiastically about the "explosion of access" he had witnessed since the introduction of mobile phones and with constant reductions in the cost of connectivity. The arrival of 3G and oral formats in Africa allowed access in a fundamentally new way. People who had been excluded by technical limitations found "the bar lowered" with the advent of Blogspot and Wordpress. It was lowered farther with Flickr and Skype, which revolutionized access during the Arab uprisings. It made it possible "to find out what was happening from [the ordinary person's] perspective on the ground." He explained how this has ushered in a need – or heightened awareness of a pre-existing need – to pay attention to how audiences are connecting, because it matters "in terms of the diversity and plurality of your stories."

It also matters to a journalist and digital outreach editor who contributes to a newspaper with an international readership and is active in a network of global investigative journalists. In her view, however, "there's still a big barrier to access to news… we really have to build a bridge between those who don't necessarily consume a lot of news, or those from low-income backgrounds." The challenge, in her view, is to make news that is trustworthy but that also engages, and which is accessible to people in terms of how they use their phones in their everyday lives; how and on what devices they follow the news.

While people everywhere have access to information via their phones, their everyday lives are lived in places with significantly different media systems, where new technology overlays old power structures. One respondent gave an example that is an empirical illustration of a concern highlighted in the Tashkent Declaration. Telephone connections are owned by Ericom, the state mobile provider in Eritrea, which

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means that "what you can access is effectively limited by the government filter, in the same way that the Great Firewall of China means that the audience you can engage with in China is largely non-mainland… Because of the way the package is structured, it matters which platform you're going to get engagement."

The importance of paying attention to platforms – to find where audiences are accessing information and build a relationship with them there – was a red thread running through the interviews. A problem that cropped up continually was not so much control as the lack of it. "To me the scary thing is that there's so many pseudo news places and sources and people are sharing all of this on closed networks", sighed one respondent. Not knowing where to look or where to turn is "harmful to audiences". Rather than going to established and trustworthy news sources, they are on Instagram and WhatsApp and reading what their friends are sharing, "and people are not forwarding news articles, they are sharing disembodied, decontextualized chunks of text and images." The task is thus to "think differently about how we disseminate this news information."

There is a tension between such, admittedly banal, examples of realities on the ground and regulation discourse demands for access to information. What does the right to access mean, in practice? Low-income citizens of rich nations, and ordinary people in poor nations, are limited, for financial reasons, from accessing reliable news that is behind paywalls, but they do have access through sharing and apps that cost nothing to use. They have access to information, but of what sort, and of what quality? Journalists taking pains to find audiences where they are, and where they are consuming information, operationalize the challenge of guaranteeing access in empirical, as opposed to normative, ways. As one put it, there's "loads of opportunity" in platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Instagram, that make the news more interesting. Journalists need to think differently about how to present information and reach audiences.

For several of the respondents, that means digging down into the data they have on audience behaviour. Metrics provide "so much opportunity and potential to really, really understand our audiences and really understand who is missing from our audience", in the words of a journalist and digital outreach director active in the Global Investigative Journalism Network. It is a view expressed in different ways by different respondents. As well as who is missing, there is a keen interest in mapping what people find important. "The vast majority of our content should be stuff that's relevant to our target audience, not to us as journalists" said a man working for AJE. "Otherwise we would be writing for ourselves or producing for ourselves, not for the people we are seeking to inform."

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Being Seen and Heard

This dovetails with the right to participate in public communication, to be heard and understood. Several respondents were keen to talk about how new technology is helping them "find people to tell stories in their own way, and then figure out how to allow them to do that, while remaining authentic in a traditional news structure." This means that, in postdigital contexts, "you see a lot more first-person narrative."

An Israeli working for a Europe-based global outlet talked about the advantages of working from a minority position as it creates "a certain sensitivity to human conditions and to human situations, that it's not possible for a local to explore." She pointed out that the majority of journalists at her news organization were not part of the majority in the country, and that this "really helps us know how to speak to, you know, people with similar, in similar situations." User content from social media helped another get in touch with refugees, verify who they were, and let them explain in their own words "what it's like to get on a boat and get here." A Zambian-American found new possibilities for "visiting" had opened up with political, rather than technological change when he talked about how the Black Lives Matter movement suddenly resulted in newsrooms "enabling black voices to speak for themselves about issues, you know, for which they've actually historically been excluded to speak about." What is needed, in his view, is "to make sure that the story is going to give a voice to that community or that group of people." And that means not just giving people a voice as victims, but also as experts. The question thus becomes: "In which role do we put them in? And what does that mean?"

One respondent's experiences were that there might be hundreds of channels on offer, "but they all get stuff from the wires and that stuff will be based in certain spaces and they will have a certain view of the world. So basically, you end up for most of the news, even if you have 500 outlets, you have just two sources. So you are feeling you have diversity, but you are not." The antidote is not to change the perspective from north or west to south, but to adopt "the perspective of the people we are talking about."

The Right to Privacy

One way of finding out what that perspective is has been mentioned above: It is to leave the studio and work in the field, letting the people represented in news reports tell their own stories in their own words. Another is to use new technology to compile data. One respondent gave an example of how the ambition of building a relationship with the audience can intersect with incursions into the private realm. The analytical tools at her disposal meant that she could

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> "see exactly which country they come from, until which point in the article they scrolled, where they read it slower, where they read it faster… I know everything apart from their actual personality. I know if they're male or female, I can also know their political tendencies many times. I see what they comment and how. And sometimes I got into their profiles because I want to know if I see swastikas."

Another pointed to the same complicated intersection, illustrating how the right to information can be more complicated than the regulatory discourse suggests. While many news providers continue to be "wire-centric" in the way problematized in the MacBride Report, taking their cue from Reuters, AP and other agencies, his organization resists by turning to Twitter (as it was then), Facebook and Instagram to look for the people they are targeting and gather data on what they want access to. "There are certain ages and there are certain psychographics", he explained. "We have documents that describe this. We have audience personas that describe this and every person who joins gets training on that… They learn about our audiences, our audience personas and all of that… We start our morning with these people that my news department is supposed to cater for. What are they interested in today and what are going to be the important things for them to do today, so we can prepare that content?"

As well as resisting agendas set by news agencies that have decided what audiences should be informed about for decades, journalists are looking for ways to resist agendas set by algorithms. One spoke about an audience development community of professionals that "are using newsletters as a way to speak to audiences without fighting algorithms and trying to break away into people's news feeds – actually having that direct communication." While newsletters might seem an antiquated form of communication, this digital editor insists they represent "a big shift" – an instance of the hybrid logic of postdigital media systems, in Chadwick's parlance. One empirical reality on the ground is, consequently, that journalists see new technologies as resources for building relationships with their audiences, while at the same time expressing a need to escape from them – for example by "fighting algorithms" with direct e-mail contact and WhatsApp. "I think there are really positive signs that there are new platforms and new ways to build relationships with audiences that don't rely on algorithms…. But it's not an easy task. There are so many challenges." It's not a matter of "thinking about digital first" but thinking creatively, and using digital technology to find an answer to questions like "how do you report, and what are the voices that aren't being heard from"?

While laudable, and arguably in keeping with respect for communication rights, tech activists know that there are problems with this, as well as the challenges to which that journalist is referring. Several emphasized that the problem of non-democratic control experienced by mobile-phone users in Eritrea and China (to cite the example given above) exists everywhere, and that private actors are complicit as

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well as states. This is because the right to information is at the heart of "Big Tech's business model" and it involves the right to information about us. "When you carry a phone around with you, or experience life on the internet, [it] is feeding data into the hands of private companies where they have complete control and very little restriction…on what they can and can't do with this data." Companies like Google and Facebook commodified something that was not previously a commodity, and acquired the legal right to "our information". Historically marginalized groups are compelled to provide their personal information without the opportunity to give meaningful consent. This is used to train algorithms for global tech companies that will profit from them. As set out more fully elsewhere (Robertson & Maccarone, 2022), these tech activists warn that digital technologies such as biometric data systems and predictive analytics tend to exacerbate and compound existing inequities.

People's right to privacy is not just violated by global capital and authoritarian states. It is violated by democratically elected governments in places like India, which have nation-building narratives and "a very deliberate strategy to see the data of its citizens as national resources…saying all this is owned by the state". People are expected to sacrifice their privacy for the collective good.

Experts speaking at RightsCon explain that it is a first-world "privilege and luxury" to use terms such as the right to privacy. "Rather than look at the brutal ways in which automation can render you illegible, invisible, you're optimizing for the privacy thing?" asked one. Surely this is less important than gaining visibility so you can finally be included "in a system that is otherwise excluding you and preventing you from getting the benefits you deserve?" It is a matter of unequal conditions within state boundaries, and it is a matter of unequal conditions in a global context. That entails recognizing that "discussions around the right to privacy in the digital age are based on an individual perspective" and that this is a perspective that applies only in some cultural contexts. Be it the universal rights referred to in abstract policy declarations, or the radical proposals made by tech activists from the Global North in general and Silicon Valley in particular, that individuals should own their own information and be able to sell or not sell data about themselves as they choose: such discourse is out of sync with the empirical realities of really marginalized groups.

And yet it is marginalized groups that journalists we spoke to sought to form relationships with, and give a voice to, so they can be understood and share their experiences. They emphasized that good storytelling remains as important as computation and AI, and that representation not only matters as much as metrics, but that the two are intrinsically linked. There are power asymmetries that are reinforced through platforms, and platforms shape the journalist-audience relationship in postdigital societies. These asymmetries have consequences for communication rights.

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Concluding Thoughts

What do universal communication rights mean in a world where millions are displaced and thus lack what Arendt called "the right to have rights"? The Tashkent Declaration expresses concern about the "persistent divides in society in terms of exercising the right of access to information, to the detriment of women and youth as well as indigenous people, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups", and promises to do something about this by empowering "key actors with a view to ensuring that fundamental freedoms are guaranteed online and offline", and by empowering citizens and their fundamental freedoms through the development of skills and environments for media pluralism and diversity (UNESCO, 2022). It is easy to agree with UNESCO that the cosmopolitan ideal of communication rights has been challenged by technological developments, and to like its promises and ambitions. The generalizing, universalizing nature of the philosophical-regulatory discourse on these rights is nevertheless problematic.

The sort of journalism that might be thought to contribute to a cosmopolitan outlook has to do with understanding – with narrative knowledge – as opposed to information. Akin to understanding is engagement, "our key metric", as one of the journalists from the preceding section told us. But even if it is information that is privileged, the question then becomes: what is that, today? How is information to be distinguished from data? And is its free flow always something to be safeguarded? As one tech activist put it:

> "We keep coming back to this idea that if we have more data, we can have more knowledge. But actually what we're seeing is the ways in which data are used to pervert our broader understanding. The idea that instead of data giving us a sense of cumulative knowledge – because we have so much information, we can seed doubt, and we can undermine confidence in the information that we have."

Information, viewed from this perspective, results in the "undoing" of knowledge.

The empirical realities of journalists on the ground indicate that the right to information and the right to privacy are entangled, and tech activists warn that the question of which of those rights prevail is a contested one. The tension between them makes it difficult to maintain Arendt's proper distance. It can, however, be maintained, and the right to communicate, to be heard and understood, to learn, to respond and share can be safeguarded, if data does not become a synonym for information, and information does not become a synonym for communication. The gaze through the space in the wall is communication, not information, and the open question posed by that image (are we on the inside looking out, or the outside looking in?) has to do with understanding. Through global media, a cosmopolitan space

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opens up where we can see into the world of the other, meet their gaze, and are invited to respond.

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Representation of Minorities in Irish Media Discourse: From Underrepresentation and Differentiation to 'Tell Your Own Story'

Maria Rieder, Marta Giralt, Stephanie O'Riordan, Galia Xiomara Agudelo and Isolde Quirante

Abstract *This chapter examines representations of marginalized groups in Irish media (national newspapers with a focus on local news sections) to establish how citizens from both Irish and other diverse backgrounds are portrayed. As research has shown, narratives in media and news exercise great power over their audiences (Tamul & Hotter, 2019): prolonged exposure to media content of a certain kind can translate into particular beliefs, attitudes and behaviours towards the self and the various 'Other' (Bellardi, 2021). Media reflect but also influence societal identity formation and how identity is translated into lived experiences. In relation to our local study, the news analysis shows a pronounced focus on and preoccupation with Irish national topics and a perpetuation of a mindset focused on what is culturally Irish, with a significant underrepresentation of marginalized communities. Besides reporting results from news analysis, the chapter presents a media initiative to counteract current trends – the Tell Your Own Story (TYOS) project*[1] *– which aims to provide space in media for diverse identities and voices. TYOS produces narratives with a focus on transcultural aspects of lived experiences (both in training and in the media productions created) and in this way endeavours to develop a consciousness in its audience of interconnectedness and transculturality, as opposed to nation-based associations, and to spread a cosmopolitan mindset.*

1. Introduction and Overview

In an era of increased migration, the study of media provides an insight into how societies and citizens negotiate cultural diversity and different identities. Postdigital-

1 We would like to acknowledge the Irish Research Council for making this project a reality. Tell your Own Story was awarded with funding from the "New Foundation" scheme in 2021. We would also like to thank all colleagues and project members that have been working with us to move forward the project and make it possible that everybody in the Limerick community could have a voice.

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ity describes how the use and consumption of and interaction with our various digital and non-digital media systems has become completely entangled and merged with other, material experiences in shaping our social realities. Due to this merging of the digital and non-digital in people's lives it is difficult to separate the media influences in the construction of social, economic and political practices (Knox, 2019, Berry, 2015: 50). When investigating the transformation of society in terms of a changing population structure we therefore need to bear in mind this postdigital convergence of experiences and how combined digital and non-digital experiences shape our perceptions of social reality, and our beliefs and enacted values as a global society.

The present study focuses on a city in the west of Ireland, Limerick, an urban space that in recent years has undergone rapid transformation due to the increased cultural diversity of its citizens and communities. Newcomers have largely been welcomed as bringing a richness of cuisine, colours, languages and more to the urban landscape – although undoubtedly there have also been reserved or negative attitudes and reactions of the host community against members of the new communities. This study is interested in whether and how newspapers – as both mediators of news and reflectors of this transformation – represent minority and marginalized communities.

Journalists portray how society is organized and how it works. In other words, "journalism represents one of the ways society tells itself about itself" (Dickinson, 2008: 1384). It follows that journalism, through discourses, has a persuasive quality in relation to how society interprets and perceives specific elements of reality; this could, depending on the size of the readership and frequency of portrayal of a certain nature, have a strong impact on audiences (Tamul & Hotter, 2019). As found in Bellardi (2021), prolonged exposure to biased media content has the potential to cause highly automatic stereotypes and behaviours towards other cultural, marginalized and minority groups and communities.

A large amount of research has established a bias and lack of diversity of voices in the media in many contexts around the world, both in terms of staff employed in media organizations (Block, 2020) and the way organizations portray the 'Other' (Archakis, 2021; O'Regan & Riordan, 2018; KhosraviNik, 2010; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). It follows that the media often fail to accurately reflect and report on minority communities and hence are often perceived as drivers of negative images that have long-term potential to cause tension and animosities in societies.

This chapter aims to address some of these media-related challenges that societies and urban spaces are currently facing, as well as responding to local and national concerns regarding growing racist attitudes in Ireland, some of which have recently been highlighted in the news (Irish Network Against Racism, 2020; O'Halloran, 2019). In order to do this, we will contextualize and discuss the role of media

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regarding the (re)presentation of minority and marginalized communities. We focus specifically on regional news in national Irish media.

The chapter commences by reviewing key works in the area of media representation, with a focus on the power of media in creating and perpetuating stereotypes in audiences. Here, it is also crucial to contemplate not just *how* immigrant and marginalized communities are represented, but also how they may be invisible in the media discourse. We will briefly review some theoretical and methodological work on significant, textual silences (Huckin, 2002; Sweeney, 2012) as part of our conceptual framework, before moving on to explore how media can help promote a cosmopolitan mindset. Following the literature review, we will present the methodology used for the media analysis of Irish newspapers. The analysis is based on a corpus of print articles and uses corpus linguistics and critical discourse analytical methods. The results of this study show an underrepresentation and almost complete absence of minority communities, and – where they are represented – a marked differentiation from what is uniquely Irish. In response to these findings, the paper showcases a media initiative – the *Tell Your Own Story* (TYOS) project – which aims to provide space in media for diverse identities and voices. TYOS produces narratives with a focus on transcultural aspects of lived experiences (both in training and in the media productions created by the project) and endeavours to develop a consciousness in the audience of interconnectedness and transculturality, as opposed to nation-based associations, and to a spread of a cosmopolitan mindset.

2. Context of Study: Media Discourses and (Re)Presentation

While the most foundational, principal goal of the media and its content is to inform its audiences, a significant part of this process of informing is persuading (Borchers, 2012). Van Dijk, in his 1995 work, elaborates on the very notion of the media's propensity to persuade while it informs. At times, and depending on the purpose, the media's tendency to persuade can be a calculated manipulation of power over the minds of the audience or even, if one will, a form of mind control. The overall objective of this insidious media(ted) mind control is to sway the audience to adopt a specific attitude or sentiment concerning a theme, issue, or, as in the case of our investigation a group of people (Van Dijk, 1995).

Most of the time, however, persuasion in media can be attributed to unconscious processes on the part of the journalists: Journalists – like everyone else – are socialized in a particular community and, therefore, embody the community's ideologies. The concept of ideology can most simply be understood as a system of presupposed beliefs "shared by members of a social group" (Van Dijk, 2003: 209). These beliefs constitute the "schemata", or mental images that members of social groups "have about themselves" and "about their position in the social structure" in relation to other so-

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cial groups (Van Dijk, 1995: 34). Hence, for journalists and reporters this may mean sentiments and attitudes towards different communities, or ideas regarding communities' status: powerful vs vulnerable; minorities vs majorities, etc. It is especially when media discourses surrounding migration, migrants, and ethnic minorities are involved that these prejudices, presumptions, and acts of stereotyping, all of which are part and parcel of the work of ideology, pose the most risk for producing and reproducing exclusionary and inherently racist ways of thinking (Wodak, 2008). For example, what often transpires as a journalist's ideological biases around certain nationalities and ethnic groups permeate into their journalistic work is the continuous reproduction of an ideological "Us versus Them" mentality that reinforces an irreconcilable division between two social groups, one being more ideologically and ethnically elite than the other (Wodak, 2008).

For Jäger (2001), discourses exert power by transferring knowledge that influences personal and community awareness; if this knowledge is reproduced through discourses multiple times, and in daily conversations or consumption of media, an ideology is built and reinforced. Certain ways of writing or reporting concerning different communities will therefore – over time – become common sense and unquestioned in their potentially negative bias. The blend of knowledge that this produces in the audience has the potential to serve as the foundation of upholding inequalities and of formative and established action that creates reality.

In what follows, we embark on a review of existing work on media representation of minority groups. We refer here to literature that has found and discussed evidence of media bias in relation to different communities. Resulting from this review, we move to discussing alternative ways in which the media may use their power to create positive change and a cosmopolitan openness among its audiences.

2.1 Representation of 'the Other'

Forms of media representation have tangible consequences for communities. As Hall (1997) has continuously emphasized, the longevity of racial inequality is rooted not only in systems of economic inequality, but also in systems of representation. Mass media can steer attention to and from public issues in determining which topics are of public concern and to be tackled or ignored by society, and as such are agents in the process of constructing, contesting and maintaining the civic discourse on integration and tolerance (Fürsich, 2010; Hall, 1974). As Fürsich (2010: 113) explains, media have a strong role in shaping topics of public debate and how an audience understands an issue. For example, they "have played a central role in defining and illustrating the nation-state in Europe and the Americas. In post-colonial countries, the media were used as important tools in nation-building efforts" and mediated "a national identity" by "defining the boundaries of a community considered to be part of a nation and by excluding minorities as 'Others'." Migration

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has intensified the definition of belonging, "often played out in the media, over defining and situating the Others amongst "us". This system of representation is necessary in order to orient ourselves in the sociocultural space (Moscovici, 1961).

The process of definition of belonging has to be understood as an ordered system of sociocultural representation which, through recurring symbols, images and linguistic tools, construct meanings shared by a community. As Markina (2021: 166) explains, "[i]n each particular culture, we are able to distinguish certain established practices together with certain similar methods of representing otherness, which are repeated from text to text. They are directly related to the relations that have been established in a culture." This system of representation plays an important role in cultural production and in establishing the hegemonic power of cultural ideas, ideologies and discourses regarding communities which are supposedly natural and uncontested by the masses (Hall, 2013).

One of the key "signifying practices of representing otherness and of racist systems is the stereotype, a device that reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes difference" (Hall, 1997: 258). That is, stereotypes *reduce* groups to a few, easily understood and oversimplified characteristics; they *essentialize* the people within a group so that they are all defined by those exaggerated traits; they *naturalize* differences, rendering them self-explanatory or common-sense; and they *fix* these differences so that they are perceived to be eternal. These differences are not real as "there are no real boundaries separating Others from the rest. [However, a] person or group needs imaginary delimiters that can be used to create and maintain a sense of objective and insurmountable difference between the plural Self of the in-group and Others" (Markina, 2021: 167). The differences fixed in place by stereotypes are not value-free: Stereotypes have a regulatory function, in that they separate the acceptable from the unacceptable, the normal from the deviant (Hall, 1997: 258). Hence, stereotypes clearly delineate who "belongs" within a society and who does not; they draw symbolic boundaries between the Self and the Other. They are always unambiguous in their interpretation because they occur in a particular historical moment and context (Markina, 2021).

As Markina (2021: 167) explains, "[t]he system of stereotypes helps a person to counter unpredictability, disorder and, finally, the danger of external reality that lurks in the world by providing tools that can be used to control it." This is non-pathological, natural development of a sense of Self vs Other. However, there is also a pathological form of division-making: "When the whole world appears as a set of stable binary oppositions between 'the plural Self' and 'Others', 'We' and 'They'."

In practice, stereotyping happens through the use of symbols, images and linguistic tools. Also, narratives with embedded ideologies, framing devices, and italicization are textual characteristics that can promote stereotypes and the distinction or belonging to a group in question (Gilligan, 2016). Tab. 1 provides an overview of forms of pathological stereotyping. As Markina (2021: 169) explains,

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"[t]he biggest danger of pathological stereotyping is that the created representations of otherness, which are stigmatising, are offered as genuine facts that make up knowledge. […] Others are perceived through the discourse that is conducted about them, since what is represented is considered to be the objective reality or [truth] [Gilman, 1985]", which will have tangible consequences for them. The power that lies in stereotyping and ensuing formation of an image of Others links to Van Dijk's (2016) theory and development of the socio-cognitive model. He explains that we cannot conceive of the world in unmediated ways. We see the world through a lens that is characterized by our upbringing, education, and experiences. The ideas, concepts and mental images that we acquire of the world, derived from a network of media activity and material sources interwoven in a postdigital hybridity, will direct our discourses and will help construct our social realities. The socio-cognitive model studies this interface, people's cognitive concepts and mental images, as the point where ideas and stereotypes with regard to otherness, majority power and inequality collide.

The last two decades have seen several small and larger scale studies of representation of minority groups. In his research, KhosraviNik (2010) drew three conclusions in relation to representation of immigrants in the British press: (1) Immigrants tend to be related to negative events such as crime and illegality. In contrast, (2) emigrant is a neutral term that does not need to be "characterized"; they are represented as if they will experience moving out at some point of their lives, almost as result of a 'natural' phenomenon. Finally, (3) migrant seems to function in a kind of intermediate position between the ideas of 'immigrant' and 'emigrant' varying according to the context.

Another example is found in Crawley et al. (2016), who make evident the lack of references to migrants in the British newspaper landscape: Migrants were only found in 15% of all articles. Additionally, they conclude that there were two kinds of connotations toward migrants. First, they are portrayed as "villains" due to the "possible threat" to locals of losing their jobs or "affecting their security". Immigrants are also depicted as victims because they may suffer discrimination or inequality; a description that underestimates the diverse situations among migrants.

In the Irish context, Quinn and Vaughan (2019) studied the potential influence on people's ideologies when media discourse refers to non-dominant communities. This comparative study analyses how two tragic incidents that involved two distinguishable Irish social groups were reported in the media: One settled in the U.S., and the other one belonging to the Traveller Community, an indigenous ethnic minority community in Ireland. The critical elements of the study concern the notions of "othering" and "belonging", which shape discourses of difference or similarity. In conclusion, for Quinn and Vaughan "discursive constructions within media discourse allows certain 'dominant' groups to 'belong' more, compared to other groupings who are shown to be 'apart', 'different' or 'not belong'" (2019: 322).

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Table 1: Forms of Pathological Stereotyping (Markina, 2021: 169)

Forms	Examples
Depersonification – The inability to treat another individual as a person, depriving him of his subjective opinion and assigning him the role of an object, or treating him simply as a carrier of a set of qualities	People with mental disabilities are presented not as separate unique individuals, but as a category of patients at closed psychiatric institutions who are no more than objects of treatment [Wilkinson, 2009]
Fragmentation – The process of splitting the Other (his body) into fragments, whereby attention is focused on individual organs, features of external appearance, and qualities that supposedly indicate the naturalness and evidence of otherness. This is the perception that parts make up a whole and that the whole can be broken down into separate parts	A stereotypical image of a person with Down syndrome, which is primarily depicted using a mandatory set of facial features that confirm a natural difference from a normal person despite the fact that these external signs can be manifested to different degrees or are not noticeable at all [McLaughlin and Clavering, 2012]
Fetishization – The transformation of the Other or its distinctive parts into an object that is perhaps dazzling and special, but nevertheless completely othered, radically different, and unfamiliar	Idealization or inclusion in a cult of public figures, popular "stars," and outstanding athletes, for example [Ungruhe, 2013]
Exotization – The perception of Others as distant, bizarre "antipodes," and the perception of their behavior, everyday practices, and rituals as manifestations of savagery and lack of civilization	Wearing a hijab in non-Muslim countries is depicted in the "local" media as an exotic "non-neighborly" behavior, and the women themselves are perceived by representatives of the dominant culture as fundamentally different from the majority [Bullock and Jafri, 2000]
Pathologization – An assessment of the otherness of the Other from the point of view of generally accepted norms as non-compliance with said norms, and the perception that any differences are pathological	Homosexuality or disability are presented as abnormalities, pathologies or illnesses [McRuer, 2006]
Homogenization – The perception of groups of different people in a generalized form as a category of Others, which reductively applies the traits of individuals to the properties of the whole group	Transfer of the features and qualities of individual migrants or individual cases in which they participate to all "visitors," averaging and generalization [Yang, 2010]

Pathological stereotyping is fixed and inflexible due to various strategies that have been adopted, one of them being suppression "which prevents minorities from being paid due attention and ignores the voice of the Other themselves" (Markina, 2021: 169). Suppression can be defined as symbolic annihilation "since it depicts the marginalised group in repeating contexts as something rare and narrowly restricted" (Markina, 2021: 169; see also Fürsich, 2010). The following section on significant textual silences looks into the practice of suppression in more detail.

2.2 Significant Silences in the Media

What is not present in the media can often be as harmful as stereotypical portrayal of a group. While the lack of coverage of certain communities or minority groups is a reality, it is more difficult to study as it relies on researchers stepping away from the text(s) and questioning absences based on what they perceive could or should be reported.

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Huckin (2002) presents a systematic theory and methodology for the analysis of silences in the media. Similarly, Sweeney (2012), stresses the power of silences in the media and the importance of its study: By not mentioning particular subtopics, angles, perspectives or facts, the media can influence opinion much more effectively than they could do by overt and direct denunciation. Because the public does not always notice, silences can do ideological work in very subtle ways, reinforcing biases or prejudices in the reader: "By remaining out of sight, the subtopics concealed by such silences simply do not enter the mind of a compliant reader" (Huckin, 2002: 366, see also Sweeney, 2012: 146). Stuart Hall (1985: 109) asserts that "positively marked terms 'signify' because of their position in relation to what is absent, unmarked, the unspoken, the unsayable. Meaning is relational within an ideological system of presences and absences."

The idea that some news stories remain untold is often discussed in relation to critical theories of hegemony, ideology and power in society as highly concentrated or unequally distributed amongst social and other interests. Examples of the study of silences in press discourse can be found abundantly, for instance, in Van Dijk (1986) and Chomsky (1987). Both provide and analyze cases of foreign politics and warfare where points of view opposed to war were systematically excluded. Huckin (2002) himself uncovered manipulative silences in discourses of homelessness in the press. Using a corpus of roughly 160 articles, he shows how two particular articles used silences in order to inaccurately portray the causes of homelessness, validating a conservative frame and ignoring a more centrist or liberal frame.

McLaren and Patil (2016: 602) argue that what is said in the media offers meaning to what is unsaid by virtue of the relationship between the two. What is said also serves to silence what is left unsaid and render it unimportant in the public sphere. Their study analyzes print media in the Australian context to establish how asylum seeker children are not represented in media, and this exclusion serves to silence more essential concerns regarding children in the political discourse. Equally, Patil and Ennis (2016) examine media to demonstrate how textual media representations of Australians "Joining the Fight" in Syria are dominated by identity debate. Both studies conclude that silences skew dialogue in the public sphere away from core issues in the political discourse, and are considered manipulative silences (Huckin, 2002). Studies in the area of political discourse and media communication have also explored the significance of the rhetoric of silence (Schröter, 2013). However, our study will mainly focus on the significance of silence in media discourse and the silences that occur in the (re)presentation of minority and marginalized communities.

To conclude this section, we would like to refer to the words of the British sociologist and Cultural Studies scholar Stuart Hall (1974: 18): "(Mass) media play a crucial role in defining the problems and issues of public concern. They are the main channels of public discourse in our segregated society. They transmit stereotypes of one

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group to other groups. They attach feelings and emotions to problems. They set the terms in which problems are defined as 'central' or 'marginal'."

His words summarize and provide us with a background that clearly brings together some of the concepts that underpin our study: media discourse representation, stereotypes in media, and the significance of silence. Media provide the space for public discourse, and the topics chosen and included set the importance of those, establishing how society perceives them, with all of the consequences that are associated with this. Acknowledging the power of media, we propose that it could be equally used to promote the opposite of exclusion: the development of a cosmopolitan mindset.

2.3 Development of a Cosmopolitan Mindset Through Media

The notion of cosmopolitanism has been studied for a long period and a vast body of literature on the subject exists. After discussing the potentially negative impacts of media on mental images and societal action above, we now consider ways in which the media can positively use these powers for the development of a cosmopolitan mindset, where they would act as agents in the creation of a more openness towards the other, combatting stereotyping and fostering empathy.

Cosmopolitanism, as a concept, has been defined in many different ways and in a variety of disciplines. Scholars today are at pains to emphasize that there is not one but many – even discrepant – cosmopolitanisms (Beck, 2006; Clifford, 1998). The common thread that ties together the many cosmopolitanisms that have been depicted in the literature, is the fundamental orientation towards the stranger and a welcoming of difference (Corpus Ong, 2009: 450). In Hannerz's (1990: 239) famous words it is "a willingness to engage with the other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity." In our chapter we would like to discuss cosmopolitanism taking into account the central notions of appreciating difference and the inclination to engage with each other across boundaries. Cosmopolitanism has often been associated with world cities that embrace diversity (Devadason, 2010: 2946). Our study takes this understanding of cosmopolitanism a step further, adding Delanty's (2008: 227) recognition of cosmopolitan dialogue, where narratives and engagement with the other facilitate not merely a better awareness of the perspective of the other, but a transformation in self-understanding.

A concept that aligns with our definition of a cosmopolitan mindset is the notion of "global citizenship" as the "awareness, caring, and embracing [of] cultural diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility to act" (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013: 858). It is not our contention to discuss the differences and features of both concepts, cosmopolitanism and global citizenship, but to highlight the common ground, that is, the embracing of cultural

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diversity and cultural difference, together with a sense of ethical or/and moral responsibility to humankind, which may lead to transformation.

Both the media as well as education are important settings for the development of a cosmopolitan mindset. Many school and campus communities are highly diverse and there is a growing academic expertise in interculturality and intercultural communication across disciplines. In this respect, we would like to point to the concept of transculturality as one that seems to most naturally help societies develop a cosmopolitan mindset with the help of education and media agents. The term was introduced by Welsch in 1991 as a concept that corresponds more to the reality of individuals and communities than the conventional imagery of cultures as islands or spheres:

> "Our cultures de facto no longer have the insinuated form of homogeneity and separateness, but are characterized through to the core by mixing and permeations. I call this new form of cultures transcultural, since it goes beyond the traditional concept of culture and passes through traditional cultural boundaries as a matter of course. The concept of transculturality […] seeks to articulate this altered cultural constitution." (Welsch, 2001: 67)

Similar to what we discussed above in relation to stereotyping, Welsch tries to raise awareness of our tendency to think of cultures and ethnic groups as having defined borders and individuals as belong to one or the other, when modern cultures – due to migration, worldwide material and immaterial communications systems and economic interdependencies – are never closed but rather intertwined with one another. Every individual unites multiple and fluid identities in themselves which intersect – we are not only men and women, not only disabled and non-disabled, not only Germans and Spanish, not only Irish and foreigners. Also, multiple cultural and ethnic connections and complex identifications have become increasingly the norm in diverse societies. For example, contemporary writers often emphasize that they are not shaped by a single homeland, but by different reference countries, by German, French, Italian, Russian and North American literature (e.g. Connolly, 2017; Nordin et al., 2013).

Hence, 'either/or' categorizations do not correspond to the reality of people and communities and have the potential to exclude and discriminate. The concept of transculturality focuses on the commonalities and connections that can be formed among people based on one or more of their various identities, life experiences, interests and personality traits.

The role of the media would then be to highlight identities other than national or ethnic identities in their reporting on events and news, and focus instead on the interfaces and points of contact between people from different cultures, such as a common age, common interests, a common life experience. If this is done recurrently,

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this has the potential, over time, to shift the awareness of audiences to one that fosters mutual understanding and that appreciates the shared humanity of everybody. This will hopefully and eventually translate into social interaction across previously perceived boundaries – a cosmopolitan mindset of openness and welcome.

A number of suggestions have been put forward by scholars on how a cosmopolitan mindset and transcultural ideas could be fostered, with a specific focus on the role of media and media organizations. For example, in relation to content published in media, organizations need to ensure that a balance is reached in terms of topics and representation of different groups resident in any space. An example how this could be done, in a very specific context, was the radio programme 'Radio Multikulti' which produced separate programmes for Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Bosnians, Macedonians, Polish, Greeks, Turkish and others, and was based in Berlin (Vertovec, 2016). The radio programme was first established in 1960 for Yugoslavian guestworkers in Berlin, and, following the break-up of Yugoslavia, started to broadcast separate programmes for the diverse communities that took up residence in Berlin. The radio broadcasted a variety of programmes based on localized current affairs, music and culture, the social and political scene in Berlin and so forth. The programme discussed political frameworks such as dual citizenship or institutions such as the European Union and aims to create a sense of cosmopolitanism. Radio Multikulti's general approach to a range of issues reflects deep concerns with conceived universal values such as human rights and anti-racism, and its programming strategies are arguably based on a humanistic view of peoples of the world who can be united not only around such universal values, but around diverse expressions of art and music as well (Vertovec, 2016: 140). The fact that diverse communities welcome a project in which different groups that share a complex and difficult past history work together to find common ground and build a joint political project, is a clear example of how media may foster a cosmopolitan mindset.

Ensuring that the workforce in media organizations is diverse is another way to facilitate the representation of diverse opinions and world views in media – with the caveat that this in itself is not enough and an ideology of openness, where diverse opinions can grow and be expressed, needs to come first. In the context of our study, recent research concerning diversity in Irish media sectors (Kerrigan et al., 2021) reports that the Irish media workforce currently lacks diversity. From this point of view, a media initiative that gives voice to citizens and makes them become citizen journalists may allow the creation of a space where cosmopolitanism is reflected in the diversity of its members and, as a consequence, the divergent cultural perspectives that will be reflected in the media content created.

In addition to these actions, Fürsich (2010) also advocates for media education as a crucial site for changing routines and practices at a time when students have not yet been socialized into common practices at media organizations. Innovative educational models of journalism education should be based on humanistic values,

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e.g. peace journalism, emancipatory journalism, and other theoretical models that ask journalists locally to "contribute to participatory democracy, security, peace, and other humanistic values" (Shah, 1996: 143), together with classes on diversity issues, ethical codes of practice, and digital competence (Dooly & Darvin, 2022).

The TYOS project seeks to work on these different angles as it provides media education, undertakes research on diversity in media workplaces, and creates content for publication that reflects the sharedness of human experience. We present more details about the project at the end of the chapter. In the following section we first report on our findings of existing representation of minorities in Ireland, which serves as the rationale for our project efforts.

3. Methodology and Data

Due to the transient and short-lived nature of news, media have little influence in the short term; however, life-long immersion and consumption of media in a particular cultural context shape consumers' beliefs and ideas about the world and lead them to take the constructed reality as actual social reality (Fürsich, 2010). In order to make sense of how this happens, there is a need to study tendencies and patterns, which will only become apparent when analyzing a bigger corpus, where patterns in the "choice of vocabulary," "slant in their leads," or "material they choose to put in or leave out" (Benedict 1992: 24) becomes visible, and their recurrence can be measured. Combining corpus linguistics tools with a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, this chapter allows us to look at patterns of representation of minority and marginalized communities in Irish media (national newspapers with a focus on local news sections) over a longer period, and to establish the presence and nature of portrayals of people from different national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds in these media contexts.

A corpus is a principled collection of a large number of texts. For this study, we created a corpus drawing on three Irish newspapers (the *Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent* and the *Sunday Independent*) for the periods of December 2020 to February 2021 and April 2022 to June 2022. Initially the idea was to compile a corpus of news from the time of arrival of a large number of Algerian students to Limerick city (January 2021) which we assumed would attract some media attention. COVID 19, however, saw very limited social life or intercultural encounters in January 2021. Therefore, we decided to include further data from after restrictions were lifted in April 2022. In order to focus the corpus around our topic of enquiry, i.e. studying the presence of different minorities and cultures in news related to the locality of Limerick, we

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used the search term "Limerick".[2] This reduced the size of the corpus to roughly 1.7 Million words (see Tab. 2 below for a breakdown).

Table 2: Summary of number of words of the corpus used in this study

	Irish Times	Irish Independent	Sunday Independent	Total words
First corpus number of words	299,534	381,104	191,998	872,636
Second corpus number of words	276,350	443,473	171,797	891,620
Combined	575,884	824,577	363,795	1,764,256

The purpose of using corpus linguistics as one of the methodologies for our study was to unravel patterns, frequencies, and co-occurrences of words in our large body of Irish media texts on ethnic minority groups that are used to design a specific media discourse and to influence the reader over a longer period of time.

The above-described corpus was built and analyzed with the help of the software Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2004). A data-driven approach was followed for the corpus analysis. After cleaning the corpus of references to the newspaper titles, authors, dates, and word counts, and excluding articles such as death notices and legal notices, we first generated a frequency list and selected a number of words for further investigation using the Word Sketch tool, the concordancer and the n-gram tool in order to analyze collocations, identify patterns and any other linguistic features that could be relevant for interpretation. Secondly, we adopted a search-term driven approach using terms we were interested in in relation to the topic of this paper – to identify patterns used to describe people from different backgrounds: 'people', 'community', 'group', 'new Limerick', 'new Irish', 'non-nationals', 'immigrants', 'migrants', 'foreigners', 'refugees', 'asylum seekers', 'arrive', 'leave', 'come', 'go', 'study', 'settle', 'live', 'play', 'work'. We chose these nouns and verbs as they describe everyday

2 Here, it is important to mention that we were specifically interested in the mentioning of diverse people in Limerick-related news, hence the choice of the search term "Limerick" in national news. This meant that we had to accept that articles and certain established columns that report on and are dedicated to people from different backgrounds (such as the "New to the Parish" column in the *Irish Times*), did not feature in our corpus. We carried out the significant silence analysis with this in mind.

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activities which universally people would engage in, with the expectation to analyze the people in object position after these words.

Corpus-based research provides empirical evidence for broader investigations and diverse perspectives with the same data. For Marchi (2022), using newspaper corpora allows two types of key studies: (1) News forms that refer to the function and structure of the news; and (2) content, which refers to representations and ideologies. In this study, we focus on the use of both. We investigate how the information in news is provided, what linguistic sources are used, and how these features might or might not have an effect in the portrayal of minority and marginalized communities. However, arriving at this conclusion does not come from the corpus itself; creating the corpus and accepting its linguistic findings is only part of the process. The rest, as Jones (2021) suggests, relies on our interpretation. But since the task at hand is to identify patterns and consistencies in Irish media in relation to ethnic minorities that are supported by inherently exclusionary, and polarizing ideologies, and since these ideologies and power relations are expressed through text and language (as will be revealed by the corpus), the rest of this corpus analysis must rely on a critical analysis. This is best fulfilled through a more qualitative than quantitative process (Wodak, 2011) for which a form of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was adopted.

Though deeply multifarious, CDA can be described plainly as an analytical paradigm whose goal is to "describe structurings of power and domination, their reproduction in and through texts, and their effects on the possibilities of individual action" (Kress, 1990: 87). Similarly, Van Dijk (2001) explains that a critical lens adopts a clear "position to understand, expose and resist social inequality." In other words, CDA seeks to identify possible bias, prejudice, and harmful ideologies that are embodied in media texts through language, with the aim of raising multicultural awareness and inclusion among the public, encouraging change and empowering dominated groups.

A wide variety of CDA models have been developed for the critical study of inequalities in discourse. For this study, we adopt Fairclough's (1995) model of three dimensions: discourse as a text, discourse as a discursive practice, and discourse as a social practice (see Tab. 3).

The first dimension is the analysis of text – such as speeches, material published in the media, images, or any other form of communication – on a lexical level. Discursive practice involves the study of production and reception of texts, and its analysis at a text level that refers to the components and organization of the words that can influence the perspective of a text. Finally, social practice refers to the various standards established by societies in which language may structure, contribute to or generate changes in behaviours. This level is built upon certain cultural traditions, rules and communication conventions.

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Table 3: Dimensions of Discourse Analysis (Adapted from Fairclough, 1995)

Dimension	Levels of analysis	Impact of language	Language considerations
Text	Word	Lexical choices express attitudes.	- Language is part of a community. - Language can include or exclude participants in community
Discursive practice	Text	Composition and organisation of words can change the view.	- Language is not neutral. - Language is full of values and attitudes that are conveyed to recipients.
Social practice	Norm	- Creates opinions and characterises attitudes - Creates social relationships and practices	- Language is related to power and reflects power. - Language defines the society we are part of.

While our analysis will, for reasons of space, mainly focus on the textual and norm levels, we are very interested in the reception aspect of the discursive practice dimension, in the creation of common sense by reports following certain societal patterns, and the power of the media to reinforce ideas, in particular prejudice, in media consumers' minds. The relation between discourse and prejudiced behaviour is explained as a cycle by Van Dijk (1986), where the spreading of ideas or ideological beliefs require linguistic encoding and decoding processes. For KhosraviNik (2010), CDA tries both to deconstruct the encoding processes that function as mechanisms to promote an ideology in discourse, and to explain how loaded discourses reinforce prejudice in people's minds.

4. Findings

This chapter investigates the representation of minority and marginalized groups in Irish print news and ideologies of "otherness" or "foreignness" visible in linguistic and discursive construction of identities.

Focusing on two daily papers, the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*, and a Sunday paper, the *Sunday Independent*, we were able to discern two main themes: Firstly, a noticeable silence and underrepresentation of new Irish or non-Irish backgrounds. Secondly, where people from non-Irish backgrounds feature, we find a marked differentiation in their description compared to Irish characterizations. A further juxtaposition can be found in investigations of "Irishness", where an emphasis on charitable qualities of the Irish population towards new Irish communities upholds the sense of a differentiation between 'us' and 'them'.

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4.1 Underrepresentation of "the Other"

As detailed in the methodology, we started our search by generating a frequency list from which we selected the most frequent terms that directly refer to people's origin or non-national status. The table below contains the numerical results of these terms. It is worth mentioning that in this initial step only direct references would be picked up by the analyst. Later steps in the analysis looked at contextual elements for more indirect ways of referring to people's origins.

Table 4: Number of occurrences of terms referring to people adding to the cultural diversity in Ireland

	Total	**Irish Times**	**Irish Independent**	**Sunday Independent**
Refugee	**97**	59	25	13
Black	**26**	4	8	14
Immigrant	**15**	2	9	4
Migrant	**11**	2	6	3
African	**13**	3	10	0
Direct Provision[3]	**9**	7	1	1
Minority (ethnic/cultural/religious)	**7**	6	1	0
Asylum Seeker	**5**	3	2	0
New Irish	**3**	1	2	0
Ethnic	**3**	1	1	1

3 Direct Provision is Ireland's system of accommodating and provision of basic welfare to those seeking international protection while in the asylum process. It is managed by the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) an administrative division of the Department of Justice.

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Ethnicity	**2**	1	0	1
Newcomer	**2**	2	0	0
Irish-born	**1**	0	1	0
Foreigner	**1**	1	0	0
Black Lives Matter	**15**	7	5	3
non-Irish	**1**	0	0	1
Foreign national	**0**	0	0	0

We can see that the number of occurrences of words such as "immigrant" and "migrant" is very low; this is surprising in the context of a time when Limerick experienced an increase in the number of residents from other cultures. When zooming in, it appears that even these few mentions are largely contained in a small number of articles: For instance, the *Irish Independent* shows five occurrences of "immigrant" from April 2022, however, three of these featured in the same article and deal with a topic that can be deemed quite marginal.

> **"The pressures of Indian culture have not been forgotten** by Charul Singh, but her move to study in Limerick have allowed her to develop a love for cycling and it all started with a 50 Euro bike", writes Gerard Cromwell May 18, 2022 Wednesday.
>
> "Life is not easy as an immigrant. There can be a lot of struggle and I know from personal experience that you can feel disconnected from your family or community. </s><s> Cycling gets you fit. It helps with your mental and emotional health too."

What is interesting about this quote is that it depicts an immigrant with agency, acting *herself* to better her daily life and geared towards helping others also.

The term "refugee" is the most frequently occurring term describing people from outside Ireland, found 97 times. An increasing number of occurrences of the term is noticed from April 2022 onwards specifically in the *Irish Times* (50 of the 97 occurrences). Zooming in, most of these can be linked to the Russian War against Ukraine, and to volunteering and support provided to people who found refuge in Ireland. It is also noticeable that a lot of the articles are critical of the way refugees have been treated in the past. The verbs occurring with the word refugees, e.g. 'host', 'house', 'treat', 'support', 'traumatised', 'disempowered', tend to see refugees as helpless and

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dependent on Irish goodwill (see Fig. 1 below). One article in particular is critical of the way refugees are often assumed to be traumatized, disempowered and helpless victims. Such a representation has the potential to unintentionally disempower members of this group further when they may not all feel helpless (Muldoon, 2022).

Some articles containing these occurrences refer to the shortage of rooms in hotels and how this might affect the tourism industry. Also, the housing crisis and space in schools are mentioned in connection with the large number of Ukrainian refugees arriving. Some articles point out how the provision of housing for large numbers of refugees is suddenly possible when the Irish government could not provide this for Irish families before.

The most significant silence occurs around refugees in direct provision (nine occurrences in the combined corpus). "International protection" refugees receive only two references in our *Irish Times* and the *Sunday Independent* corpora, where Blindboy Boatclub – a Limerick satirist, podcaster and writer – very briefly mentions them in an interview.

Another group that is scantily represented in the news despite them making up 1.5% of the Irish population is the black community (26 occurrences). In particular, the term "black Irish" which would assign some 'belonging' to Irish society, is found just once in a specific report in the *Irish Independent*. This report talks about an activist, Femi Bankole, who encourages mixed-race and black people who live in Ireland to share their experiences and stories through the podcast 'The Black & Irish Podcast'. This grassroot activity is a hands-on initiative that comes up as a response to what he claims to be an evident lack of recognition and education about this minority in Ireland which have suffered racist attacks both in the public and private spheres.

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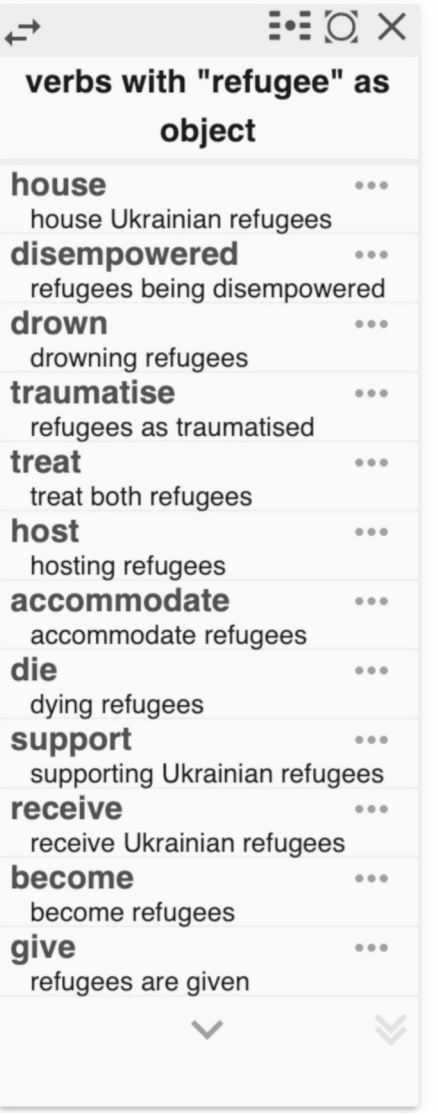
Figure 1: Verbs occurring with the word refugee



In order to probe the corpus further in relation to the use of direct references to people's origins, we used as search terms the nationalities of those that, according to the Census in 2022 (Census, 2022), make up the biggest proportion of non-Irish citizens: Polish and UK citizens followed by Indian, Romanian and Lithuanian citizens, Brazilian, Italian, Latvian and Spanish citizens. According to the Census, the

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number of non-Irish citizens increased in 2022 to 631,785, accounting for 12% of the population (Census, 2022). Despite this high percentage, the occurrences of search terms related to nationalities were low in a corpus of over 1.7m words, as shown in Tab. 5 below.

Table 5: Number of occurrences of terms referring to the biggest non-Irish groups in Ireland as per Census 2022.

Nationality	Number of occurrences
Polish/from Poland	2
Indian/from India	5 (mainly referring to cooking, restaurants, food)
Romanian/from Romania	1
Lithuanian/from Lithuania	0
Brazilian/from Brazil	6 (mainly referring to work permits and employment)
Chinese/from China	4
Nigerian/from Nigeria	4

The low occurrence and absence of search terms related to nationalities and other direct references to people's origins could be interpreted as a surprising silence in this corpus regarding the presence of diverse cultures in national news about Limerick. However, it is important to mention that this national news corpus has been limited by the search term 'Limerick', and therefore excludes some well-established columns and portraits of people from different backgrounds. Also, there is the possibility of changing practices in journalism where authors might increasingly refrain from using national or colour categories in their description of people. In the following section we explore how journalists may more indirectly refer to the origin of people and how this might differ from descriptions of what journalists consider as phenotypically Irish.

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4.2 Differentiation "Us" vs "Them"

In order to explore more subtle ways of referring to non-Irish origins, we applied a second step to our search and used common verbs of action, such as 'arrive', 'leave', 'come', 'go', 'study', 'settle', 'live', 'work' and 'play', as well as descriptive adjectives as search terms. Verbs of action are always preceded and followed by nouns describing the actors. Looking at the linguistic vicinity of these verbs helps to uncover how journalists might more indirectly describe people. This analytical step revealed qualitative differentiations of non- or new Irish people in relation to their attributes (4.2.1) and their agency (4.2.2), and led us to a closer exploration of the term 'Irish' for reasons of comparison.

4.2.1 Representation of Talent

Using the above cited verbal search terms mainly highlighted articles on sports, music and the arts. For example, the term 'play' led us to examine an article in the *Irish Independent* (McDonnell, 2021) which includes some players' places of birth and refers to them as 'newer communities'. The use of the comparative adjective 'newer' establishes a difference between the participants that used to be associated with this sport in the past and new players. Additionally, this article emphasizes how:

> "[t]he most significant demographic change in the past decade has been the **increased presence** of kids from immigrant communities who have now **really announced** their arrival. Go to any underage League of Ireland game and the change will be **apparent**" [our emphasis].

The highlighted adverbs and adjectives reflect on the noticeable presence of immigrants in this context for the very first time, which seems to be a surprise to the writer. The verb 'announced' suggests an immigrants' intention to re-state their presence, as if this event would not be part of natural interaction when living in a community. Also, the use of the adverb 'apparent' seems to focus on physical features of how Irish and non-Irish look. This excerpt suggests how Irish people see themselves, and how they notice a difference with immigrants in relation to phenotypic characteristics. Also, it is interesting that here as in many other articles the emphasis is made on the appearance of players rather than their performance.

This is different when referring to Irish players where the focus is more on their practice in sports, and where we find strong superlative and positive linguistic devices in describing successes: "Quinlivan's indelible, folkloric, spectacular winning goal" (SI), "most promising Irish snooker player" (II), most of them emphasizing their origin as "Irish", as in "Greg O'Shea Irish rugby union player".

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Figure 2: Frequency of nouns modified by 'Irish'

The positive representation of "Irishness" in the use of superlative terms and words based on exceptionality in contrast to a differential focus on 'apparent' newer communities led us to explore the term "Irish" further. With 2852 instances the term has a tremendous presence across the corpus and is the most dominant content word after 'Limerick' and 'Dublin'. The most frequently associated words, using the word sketch tool, are 'Irish people', 'Irish music', 'Irish companies', 'Irish women', 'Irish rugby', Irish artists', 'traditional Irish', 'the Irish market' and 'Irish society'.

For example, the *Sunday Independent* emphasizes "Irish" successes through its many stories of "Irish" authors with ground-breaking novels; great advancements in the "Irish" economy, or "Irish" wins in matches and championships.

"Irishness" is also emphasized in other areas that may be considered national symbols and defining Irish activities. For example, the *Sunday Independent* features

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a lot of mentions of "Irish pubs"; "Irish reality TV stars"; "Irish authors"; the "Irish economy"; figures of "Irish literature"; "Irish jobs" and how we should protect them; "Irish goods," and the "perfect Irish holiday". Similarly, the *Irish Times* is strong in its evocation of 'Irishness' to emphasize Irish talent or Irish companies and their attractiveness abroad or otherwise, their success in international cultural and sporting competitions. In further celebration of the greatness, one article explained that, facing challenges introduced by Covid-19, Irish people collectively "kept their heads in decency". Another example from the *Irish Independent* focuses on the proportion of high-quality political competence in Ireland:

> "The calibre of prominent Irish people in Brussels helped enhance the reputation of a small country. </s><s> Ireland has produced two secretaries general of the European Commission in David O'Sullivan and Catherine Day. </s><s> Another high-profile figure was MEP Pat Cox, European Parliament president from 2002–2004." (*Irish Independent*)

It is important to note that by "Irish" people, the newspaper mostly refers to people who are ethnically and phenotypically "Irish". This, we can tell, by the names of the "Irish" people mentioned and when we research them (for example, "Irish author Róisín Meaney").

In short, the traditional image of the self-deprecating humble Irish persona seems to be progressively replaced by a more self-confident image which is that of a nation which needs to market itself as a successful "brand" of people.

Irish success should by no means be discredited or vilified. However, it did become an object of scrutiny when we compared it to the very few portrayals of Ireland's ethnic minorities. Overall, the differential portrayal of "Irish" and "non-Irish" people clearly relates to the principle of polarization between "us" and "them" that is based on the origin of people and is an example of how "ideologies are organised by well-known ingroup – outgroup polarisation" (Van Dijk, 2001: 116). In particular, the polarization relies on the strategy of "splitting" (Van Dijk, 2005), which describes the process of positive-self representation and negative-other representation. The general principle applied is that all our good things are highlighted and recognized thoroughly, and all our bad things are alleviated, omitted, or covered. Simultaneously, this strategy tends to omit or de-emphasizes Other's positive things and/or emphasizing Other's negative things. Consequently, there is a differentiation between a powerful group that belongs more, and a group that is excluded. In addition, positive self-representation as found in this corpus has the power to create and reinforce a strong sense of community and identity of Irishness in Billig's (1995) sense of "banal nationalism" where national symbols are continuously flagged and, over time, become unnoticed and taken for granted. At the same time, this flagging of symbols reinforces boundaries.

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4.2.2 Agency in a 'Gifting' Culture

Banal nationalism is not only visible in the corpus in relation to highlighting Irish talents, successes and cultural symbols; it is also found in a celebration of character qualities commonly associated with being Irish: the friendliness of Irish people and their charitable nature towards people in need. For example, the *Irish Times* corpus contains three articles on fund-raising and kindness shown to immigrant communities: One article focuses on direct provision with special reference to children, and features the organization *Every Child is Your Child*, which raises funds for food and educational material "so that **all of them** (authors' emphasis) have the opportunity to learn". Another article reports on the kindness shown to a Nigerian family in Ireland whose son plays soccer for Ireland.

The *Irish Independent* also refers, in a small number of articles, to the giving nature of Irish people in a book review ("she thought he needed a bit of food, in that Irish granny way") and in relation to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees where most of the reports referred to Ireland as a significant supporter. As a side note, we also noted some articles that discuss the potential threat of large numbers of refugees to the Irish tourist industry and housing supply.

Overall, the perceived sense of Irish people as a gifting society, while laudable, is potentially problematic as it signals an unequal power relationship between those receiving help and those giving. As in the differential description of talent and attributes in the previous section, lines are drawn between Irish and non- or newer Irish communities; in this case, the line is the ability of acting and caring for oneself, where Irish people as givers are in a superior and active position, while immigrant communities lack this kind of agency.

5. Conclusions

Our media analysis shows, both explicitly and implicitly, how ideological biases may taint journalistic images of ethnic minorities and marginalized groups. Firstly, by limiting any substantial discussion of Ireland's ethnic minorities: Direct references to people's backgrounds by journalists are rare when considering the size of the corpus and the context of Limerick's growing diversity at the time. However, this may mean that the use of nationalities and ethnicities to describe people is becoming less common in journalism. Secondly, we discovered unequal dichotomies between Irishness and foreign Otherness when establishing distinctions between the greatness and successes of being Irish, and references to the surprising presence in everyday life, focus on physical attributes and lack of agency of people from other backgrounds.

'Ideology' is defined as encapsulating the opinions we share around, or attitudes we hold towards the world and its social groups. The analysis of our corpus demon-

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strated "what 'WE' think about 'THEM'" (Van Dijk, 2003: 24) – the ways in which Irish journalists represent and reflect what Irish society thinks of itself and how it perceives or thinks about Ireland's minority and marginalized communities. In a post-digital world, these ideologies, opinions and attitudes are made up of an organic and ever-changing tapestry of impressions and knowledge where life experiences are enmeshed with language and imagery used in media, as the line between material reality and digital reality blurs (Cramer, 2014). Media texts and the language used in them are a powerful component in this tapestry with tangible consequences for minority communities, as shown in our review of the literature on stereotyping and bias in media. As Eagleton (2014: 8) states, ideology may be conceived as "a set of discursive strategies for legitimating a dominant power", which we cannot ignore when analyzing media discourse. We think then that this power could equally be harnessed to reach the opposite effect: shaping attitudes more towards a cosmopolitan mindset of openness and welcome. In the final section, we present the 'Tell your own story' project which intends to do just that.

6. A Way Forward: Media for Societal Change – The 'Tell your own Story' Project

Stereotyping, silence and underrepresentation as found in our data analysis gave the impetus for founding Tell Your Own Story (TYOS, www.tyos.ie) as an attempt to counteract conventions of representation in mainstream media. TYOS trains ordinary citizens of all backgrounds and identities in transculturality, empathy and different aspects of media creation, and facilitates publication of their stories in existing print and digital media. The focus of TYOS narratives is on transcultural aspects of lived experiences and in this way endeavours to develop a consciousness in the audience of interconnectedness and transculturality, as opposed to nation-based associations, and to a spread of a cosmopolitan mindset.

The project works towards a more tolerant, inclusive and peaceful Limerick where people can contribute to the media and therefore participate in knowledge and news creation and ultimately in shaping the Limerick community. The project empowers people of diverse backgrounds and identities to become agents and 'tell their own story' in Irish media. In collaboration with local Limerick media the project seeks to give participants a platform where they are heard and represented. Participants give their own accounts of their lives, culture, and experiences including widely misunderstood or controversial concepts that serve as obstacles to respect, cooperation or understanding. This will then allow contributors of diverse backgrounds to enter into a dialogue and exchange with the readership, with the ultimate aim of successive prejudice reduction in the wider community. The nature of the stories is driven by the participants and include regular columns, radio con-

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tributions, podcasts and video documentaries which are published by established media and on TYOS social media platforms. TYOS productions especially highlight what is shared across cultures and identities and promote empathy and inclusivity in the wider community.

TYOS is a media initiative that promotes the creation of a cosmopolitan mindset by encouraging the embrace of cultural diversity and cultural difference. The audience are exposed to stories that portray different communities and groups through the stories of the 'Other'. This dynamic of the project is closely aligned with counter-representation strategies that aim to reverse stereotypes as suggested in Markina (2021): For instance, she stresses the importance of positive portrayal of marginalized groups to balance the discourse, which may prompt the reader to reassess stereotypes and view the 'Other' from a different angle. Another strategy would be acceptance and foregrounding of difference: "This is an attempt to create a positive identification with the whole set of images and representations that are related to the 'Other' and with what it means to be different within the dominant culture. […] By placing such an emphasis on differences, it is possible to lay bare the invisible mechanisms of subjugation, domination, and construction of Others" (Markina, 2021: 171). Hence, it makes it possible to see the scale of exploitation of the Other. Related to both of these strategies is what Fürsich (2010) terms contextualization coverage: By providing as much context as possible, including individualization, media can make accounts more personal to their audiences, both in relation to positive aspects and the foregrounding of differences. However, the danger here is in losing sight of systemic implications. As a more radical strategy, Markina (2021) suggests seeking out and confronting ambivalent stereotypes for a critical examination of stereotypes, especially those that are silenced (like not noticing skin colour).

These strategies, however, do not allow members of minority and marginalized communities to speak for themselves through forms that are not imposed on them. While the essence of counter-strategies is the desire to integrate, it means that journalists (mostly from the majority community) tell the story for members of minority groups, and do so within existing systems and structures. For instance, the *Irish Times* column "New to the Parish" portrays people from different backgrounds and mostly includes direct quotes from interviews with these people. However, the journalist asks the questions and selects the responses, and hence the respondent has very little control over what is printed and how they are portrayed. The endeavour on their part is to represent people as "the same as everyone else", which may lead to the "destruction of otherness" (Markina, 2021: 169).

In order to honour culturally unique ways of narration and representation and challenge existing structures without creating opposition or animosity, TYOS has designed a programme that empowers people to develop their own ways of telling their stories as well as teaching them conventions of news-making. This allows peo-

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ple to present themselves in the way they want to be seen by others and to publish stories that focus on bridging distance without denying or rejecting their uniquenesses.

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Caught Between Fantasy and Reality: The Cosmopolitan Promise of Translation Apps

Bernd Meyer and Roman Lietz

Abstract *Translation apps appear to be the ideal technical companion for world-wide connections in public and private domains. They promise to facilitate communication across language (and cultural) barriers, removing a key obstacle to international understanding. In this sense, they hold the cosmopolitan promise of bringing together people of different backgrounds, cultures, and languages. However, the widespread availability and use of such language technologies comes with certain notable limitations. There is a gap between user expectations, marketing strategies, usability and availability, which can result in the tool triggering shifts – for better or for worse – in the interpersonal relations of the interlocutors. In this chapter, we present and discuss the current state of research and developments of translation apps regarding their useability. We outline the scope of translation apps by comparing them to human interpreting and conclude that the cosmopolitan promise of translation apps is an oversimplification.*

Introduction

The velocity at which our everyday world has been changing since the 1990s is astonishing. Due to digitalization and globalization, old habits and certainties no longer retain their earlier validity. We live in a "VUCA" world (Prensky, 2014: 64), which is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. It is no coincidence that Beck (1986) speaks of the transition from the first industrial modernity to a second reflexive modernity and a "risk and internet age"[1] in which "the world becomes a horizon for daily references and a space of new inequalities and new options for action". Accordingly, all social agents, whether they wish or not, are "forced to expand their horizons of perception and action" (Beck & Grande, 2010: 196). These massive social upheavals affect not least the intensity of intercultural communication, which has long since ceased to be a special case of communication but has become an everyday practice

1 All translations by the authors.

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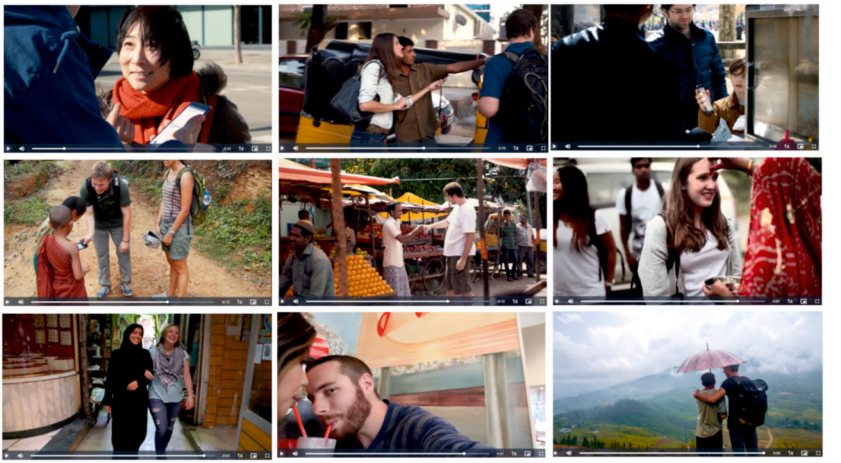
for many people. A typical challenge in intercultural encounters is undoubtedly the handling of linguistic barriers.

However, technological development promises something substantial, namely a tool that initially appears to bridge all linguistic and then all cultural boundaries, to turn strangers into friends and to ensure that the individual and society reach a new level of being in a (techno-)evolutionary sense, at least if you believe the siren calls of advertising. We are talking about translation apps. Take, for example, the *Google Translate* Superbowl Commercial of 2019:

Fig. 1: 100 Billion words – Superbowl Commercial 2019. Compilation of images.



This prototypical advertisement for a translation app obviously and exclusively addresses Westerners, who not only reach (exoticized) places that were inaccessible without the digital shoulder of the translation app to lean on, but also make worldwide friends or even engage in love affairs with a playful ease and avoiding any form of cultural misunderstanding or shock.

First of all, a transnational encounter is evidence of globalization. However, within the discourse of globalization references to plurality and self-problematizations have to be made, and we can also begin to think in terms of a (critical) cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2008: 220), as a byproduct of globalization. In the advertisement, a model-like version of a cosmopolitan person (according to the colloquial usage of the term cosmopolitanism) is shown, and it seems to suggest that being cosmopolitan is a result of life choices, at least "a function of coerced choices or a side-effect of unconscious decisions" (Beck & Sznaider, 2006: 387). The people shown in the advertisement are world travellers who show facets of cos-

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mopolitan attitudes. For example, they are seemingly interested in making pleasant acquaintances, identifiable as a cosmopolitan attitude of the interest in the "quality of social embedding" (Petzold, 2013: 53) and they seem to be in line with Woodward and Skribis' (2012: 129–130) characterization of cosmopolitans as being "open to diversity, interested in global issues, flexible, able to know, command and enact a variety of cultural knowledges, repertoires and practices." The cosmopolitanism portrayed here goes beyond mere globalization but gives a view of globality through the eyes of people who are acting on a local level (Delanty 2008: 218; 220). It does not remain at the level of antique cosmopolitan ideals and moralizing projections but sheds light on banal global encounters, on a "wide range of cultural, social and political currents" (Delanty, 2008: 218). However, the cosmopolitan promise displayed in the advertisement still remains superficial – as indeed depths of characters in advertisements generally are. The objective of behaviour seems to focus only on fulfilling one's own self-centred motives (joy in travelling, extreme experiences, social needs) and not on fundamentally identifying with humanity (Antweiler, 2011: 72) or taking care or feeling responsible for all people on the globe (Appiah, 2007: 15). Furthermore, cosmopolitanism is reproduced here as an elitist concept, which "associates with privileged elites who possess higher educational levels, incomes […] and command resources – financial, cultural, social – that enhance mobility of various kinds" (Woodward & Skrbis 2012: 129). The advertisement is also telling a neocolonial narrative in which kind, helpful but primitive non-Western, non-elite figures ("relatively non-intellectual, immobile and working-class" (Woodward & Skrbis, 2012: 129)) appear, using the romanticizing and (since the time of Rousseau) unmoving motif of the "noble savage" (Dabydeen et al., 2007), which also is reproduced on TV screens (Peters-Little, 2003). Following the narration of this Western-centred advertisement that is addressed to a Western audience, for non-Westerners, cosmopolitanism becomes an option only as a result of a foreign-induced cultural contact with the technologically superior sphere (rich, well-educated, white). Thus, the questioned promise is, so to speak, attached to a self-serving and chauvinistic cosmopolitanism from above and, thus, the counterpoint to a cosmopolitanism from below (Appadurai, 2001; Kurasawa, 2004).

Translation Apps as a Postdigital Tool

Translation apps first appeared in 2006 (Hoberg, 2022: 43; Wang et al., 2022: 143–144). The translational process was initially based on sequential, statistical methods (Kenny, 2022: 36–39). In 2015, a fundamental change took place with the replacement of statistical machine translation methods by neural machine translation (Kenny, 2022: 39). In this way, translation machines are continuously trained and make use of neural networks, predicting probabilities of words and sequences

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based on a mathematical function. This milestone helped translation apps to achieve their breakthrough (Wang et al., 2022: 143–144). For the first time, the quality of machine translation was said to be equivalent to human translation (Kenny, 2022: 39). Thanks to the smartphone, machine translation is nowadays available everywhere. Here, we are particularly interested in the study of translation apps for spoken language and for ordinary, everyday situations. Scientific publications shed light not only on the linguistic quality, strengths, and weaknesses of translation apps, but also – more relevant for scholars of a sociocultural studies background – on the consequences for interactional dynamics and situated interpersonal relations that are evoked by using digital tools.

Translation apps or their browser versions are now ubiquitously available on every smartphone, and they promise to be able to translate any type of communication accurately at any time, thereby opening up unimagined paths, contacts and possibilities for their users. By this, they are stylized into a cyborg-like extension of human communication, a virtual arm that in solidarity supports humans. Digital communication intervenes directly in analogue interaction, and virtual bits and bytes have practical everyday consequences in activities such as shopping, visiting sights, or live translations of a medical diagnosis. Not least thanks to translation apps, "the internet is enabling qualitatively new levels and types of proactivity and 'co-production' in consumer culture" (Roche, 2012: 545).

Once again, digital and analogue communication and behaviour are blurring and hybridizing, showing that we are indeed in a postdigital present. The "post" here does not mean that the digital era has been overcome, but that we have reached a phase in which societal transformations have already significantly taken place, and the digital is inseparable from the social and interpersonal communication and everyday practice (Cramer, 2014: 13). The dichotomy (Thelwall, 2013: 69–70) or the dualism (Ess & Consalvo, 2011: 3) between an online world and a supposedly "real" offline world has now been dissolved and has given way to the recognition that the "web plays a role in many offline activities" (Thelwall, 2013: 69). In the following sections, we will outline some of the communicative practices that emerge around translation apps, and the effects they have on communication across language barriers. Our review of the literature provides evidence that – in contrast to the aforementioned advertisements – these tools are widely used in contexts of "cosmopolitanism from below", i.e. by refugees, migrant workers, and other non-elite travellers.

On the Usability of Translation Apps

Contrary to what the tech companies' commercials promise, there are several reasons why the usability of translation apps is limited. Both the available language combinations and the quality of the translations and usability for certain usage con-

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texts vary considerably. In addition, users should be aware of data protection issues, for example when data is transferred to non-EU countries. Furthermore, the usage of translation apps can be de facto impeded in certain work environments due to the risk of violation of data protection legislation.

A key technical reason for the limited availability of machine translation for "small" languages lies in the "transformer" architecture, which is currently the most common and powerful method for the neural, parallel processing of language data. This system requires large amounts of texts in source and target languages, which are used as training data (cf. Krüger, 2021; Delorme Benites & Lehr, 2021: 52). The training of the machines is based on the approach of distributional semantics. This approach assumes that the meaning of words can be derived from their occurrence in large amounts of text (Krüger, 2021: 284; Boleda, 2020) and expressed in numerical values (vectors). In an abstract sense, the vectors indicate the relationships between words. Using the training data, the machines learn something about the properties of words and how to translate them into other languages. For this to be successful, however, the training data must have been translated by humans, or at least to have been in a controlled translation relation to each other. Obtaining such multilingual, translated data in large quantities represents a considerable challenge for the further development of machine translation systems.

We cannot and do not want to evaluate the theoretical approach of language models in this chapter. However, it seems to us to be of central importance that the composition and the translation relations in the training data determine their quality and, thus, the limits of the machine's learning process. If the amount of data is too small or the texts differ too much from one another, the model develops false assumptions regarding the combinability and translatability of certain words and sentence structures. This means that languages of smaller communities or without a writing system are inevitably absent or underrepresented in current language models, while languages that are widely spread throughout the world are favoured (Schneider, 2022). In addition, the training data is generally based on written texts and therefore deviates more or less significantly from oral language use, which is an undoubted weak spot of *translation* apps as they treat the input utterances of app users as if they were products of written and not of oral communication. The usage contexts stored in the language models can also only be those for which numerous digitized texts are available, such as legal texts or technical documentation.

Due to the composition of the training data, language models are therefore limited in three ways: Only certain languages are even available, they are trained for written texts which differ from oral language use, and only texts with certain communicative functions and a specific vocabulary are available. Until recently, machine translation was, therefore, only possible for around 130 languages. The vast majority of these languages can only be machine translated to a limited extent. Machine translation is currently only efficient and can be used for a wider range of commu-

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nicative tasks in only certain combinations and translation directions that are low in number, such as English – Italian.

The A.I. researchers based at *META Platform Inc.* itself (the group owning Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and more social media platforms) created a data mining project called *No language left behind* to develop language models for numerous "low resource languages", i.e. languages that are in some way underrepresented in the postdigital world (regardless of the size of the speaker group) (META, 2022). Languages for which fewer than one million publicly available and translated example sentences exist are therefore considered "low resource" (see also Schneider 2022, on such classifications). The overarching goal is to enable machine translation for more languages than before. META claims to have "evaluated, high-quality translations directly between 200 languages" (META, 2022). The new language model (NLLB-200) based on the FLORES-200 dataset may lead to greater availability of machine translation for different, formerly underrepresented languages.

A study by Liebling et al. (2020) has looked at the usability of translation apps from the perspective of certain user types. The team of authors consisted mainly of researchers from Google and examined the requirements that different target groups, such as tourists or immigrants, place on translation apps. It became clear that translation apps play a much more important role in the lives of immigrants in particular and are used by them in contexts with high social relevance.

While advertising for translation apps tends to show situations that originate in the lives of Western elites (travelling, getting to know foreign cultures, maintaining friendships across continents), migrant users predominantly use the apps in elementary everyday communication contexts, such as work, medical care, and housing. So, while tourists rarely communicate in constellations that require a higher and unpredictable level of communicative competence, such constellations were very present in the lives of migrant users. Overcoming the language barrier was a much more important challenge for them, one they confront on a daily basis. Translation apps were used alongside other ways of translation, such as multilingual relatives or people who simply happened to be present. The importance of digital tools for migrants became particularly clear in the statement of one participant: "when you arrive here, the only tool you have is the cell […] it's my right hand" (Liebling et al., 2020: 134).

Based on the importance of translation apps for immigrant users, the study identifies contexts in which the apps are only of limited help. These include longer conversations or the use of text recognition via camera, which sometimes produces incorrect and incomplete translations. In addition to translation errors, the handling of dialectal pronunciation and the lack of specific vocabulary were also perceived as problematic, particularly in work contexts. Added to this was the fact that the device caused delays in the flow of conversation and generally hindered the formation of relationships between the interaction partners. Due to these prob-

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lems, some of the interviewees also reported a lack of social acceptance of the apps among communication partners who belong to linguistic majorities. In these cases, speakers from linguistic majorities reject the use of translation apps because they don't feel comfortable using them.

The authors therefore outline four areas in which translation apps need to be adapted more closely to user needs: (1) use by people with a low level of literacy; (2) greater consideration of dialectal variation in speech recognition ("explore regional variation in speech data across different languages to improve recognition", Liebling et al., 2020: 135); (3) consideration of natural conversation patterns ("touch-free conversation"); and (4) context-related training methods ("allowing the user to explicitly or implicitly bias the model based on location should improve quality", Liebling et al., 2020: 135). The aim is to improve the usability of translation apps by incorporating these areas more closely into their further development.

Limitations of translation applications are addressed in further studies. Ji et al. (2021) present a meta-study for the healthcare sector, reviewing empirical studies on the use of machine translation in clinical settings – again, having in mind everyday and non-elite situations and speakers. They conclude the fact that "in-app translations facilitate access but risk inaccuracies with important medico-legal considerations" (Ji et al., 2021: 1). Similarly, Herrmann-Werner et al. (2021) investigate the use of translation apps in simulated clinical encounters with medical students. Participants in the study rated apps only seldomly as helpful, recommendable, and applicable: "Free-text responses revealed several concerns about translation errors that could jeopardize diagnostic decisions" (Herrmann-Werner et al., 2021: 1). However, students also claimed that translation apps are still the best option when professional interpreting is unavailable.

A qualitative study by İkizoğlu (2019) explores the role of the app in an everyday family conversation. She examines a 30-minute sequence in which the app translates from English and Turkish between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law. On the one hand, the app is the object for conveying the messages; on the other hand, it becomes the subject of the discourse when, for example, the validity of the translation is questioned. Thus, the author shows "how the app is constituted as a participant in the interaction" to the extent that it fulfils different roles in interaction, and as an object to the extent that it "aids the human participants to fulfil those roles themselves."

The brief review of studies on the use and usability of translation apps shows that machine translation is sometimes of limited help in multilingual conversations. The availability and quality of the translation is a key point in these investigations, but also the very practical impacts on usability and interpersonal relations are aspects of interest when evaluating the promise of translation apps. In the following section, we will outline the systematic differences between translation apps and hu-

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man translation, highlighting the central role of human interpreters in organizing and coordinating interaction between the primary participants.

Typical Features of Interpreter-Mediated Conversation

The limitations of translation apps in complex everyday conversations become even clearer when one considers the basic characteristics of everyday conversations between people and the changes that result from the inclusion of a third party, the interpreter. While approaches such as distributional semantics focus primarily on the lexicon of a language and consider words as entities with more or less stable relations and properties, action-oriented, social science-inspired approaches from pragmatics and conversation analysis focus on the interaction process between the participants.

In this latter perspective, the meaning of words in the context of linguistic actions is understood dynamically as co-construction, in the sense that contexts and interpretative frameworks must be jointly established by the participants. Participants in a conversation thus actively establish the order of the interaction again and again. They are constantly indicating that they are still interacting, what they are talking about, why they are doing so, etc. (see e.g. Mazeland, 2006). Accordingly, misunderstandings result from a lack of convergence in these coordination activities and generate their own repair sequences in which the lack of agreement is then dealt with: If, for example, a joke or an ironic remark is not understood as such by another person, a speaker can repair this afterwards by explicitly labelling his utterance as ironic and thus making the situation socially acceptable. Listeners have a special role to play here, as they actively contribute to the orderly progression of the conversation through interjections, but also through gestures and other non-verbal cues (Duncan, 1972). In the case of jokes, it is important to elicit laughter, and, as we all know, sometimes laughter is not based on sincere amusement. Sincere or not, laughter constructs the previous turn as a joke or as funny. In the case of usage of a translation app, this natural communicative process of exchanging cues is interrupted and denaturalized.

When a human interpreter is present and involved in a conversation, he or she often takes on some of the communicative tasks that would otherwise be done by the primary participants themselves, such as allocating speaking rights or taking turns. What is more, the interpreter can also articulate his or her own comprehension problems or point out possible misunderstandings. Thus, studies on consecutive dialogue interpreting show that interpreters play a crucial role as co-actors in triadic exchanges to facilitate communication when there is a language barrier (e.g. Angermeyer & Meyer, 2021; Bolden, 2000). In her pioneering work on dialogue interpreting, Wadensjö (1998, 2015) distinguished between implicit and explicit coor-

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dination done by interpreters. Baraldi and Gavioli (2012) have further developed this distinction by proposing the concept of basal and reflexive coordination (associating the latter with intercultural mediation). The overall aim is to focus attention on the participant status of human interpreters and the role they play to enhance effective communication and achieve understanding. Implicit or basic coordination is closely related to the task of translation and the two-way flow of conversation as linguistic action. In contrast, explicit coordinating moves have no counterpart in a preceding sequence of a primary conversational partner (i.e. non-renditions). Thus, they are created by the interpreter him- or herself to add vital information, clear up misunderstandings or facilitate communication in other ways. A typical case of explicit coordination is a clearing sequence in which an interpreter asks for clarification in order to better understand what primary participants are talking about.

Explicit coordinating moves may vary in form and function, but they serve principally to organize a continuing communicative process (including interpreting activities) and to smoothen its flow. Merlini (2015: 106) classifies such manifest coordination as a "metacommunicative activity, whose aim is [also] to resolve communication problems by, for instance, clarifying, expanding, repairing, questioning, or formulating understanding of the meaning of conversational actions." In the light of this classification, it is clear that dialogue interpreting is "a complex activity that cannot be understood as the straightforward rendering of other people's talk in another language" (Bolden, 2000: 415). Bolden shows how "interpreters' actions are shaped not only by other people's talk, but also by their own independent analysis of the ongoing activity and the specific requirements it poses for the participants." Clarification-seeking and information-eliciting actions in the dyadic exchanges with one of the interlocutors (e.g. side sequences) are therefore regarded as an integral part of the interpreting process that help to achieve the goals of a communicative event (Bolden, 2000: 391–393, 414–415).

Given the critical and complex tasks that interpreters perform in interpreter-mediated conversations, the remaining shortcomings of conversations mediated by translation apps are not surprising. Obviously, translation apps are not capable of mediating and guiding communication in the same way as a human interpreter. However, given the ubiquitous nature of these technologies, it seems promising to study how users manage to communicate with the help of translation apps despite the obvious shortcomings. Rather than focusing on the difficulties and errors alone, we suggest looking at the communicative practices that emerge around these technologies. This appears even more promising as – according to a review by Liebling et al. (2020: 134) – it has been rarely undertaken up to now. In the next section we therefore present short excerpts from conversations in which a translation app is employed, in order to highlight some of the communicative practices that emerge due to the involvement of the app.

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"What's your Name? Enchanted Pillar!"

In this section, we discuss short excerpts from dialogues based on a Map Task experiment which was carried out at the University of Mainz in 2019. A Map Task is designed to elicit spontaneous speech and discourse between two participants. According to the Human Communication Research Centre (2008) (University of Edinburgh), it is described as follows: "The Map Task is a cooperative task involving two participants. The two speakers sit opposite one another, and each has a map which the other cannot see. One speaker – designated the Instruction Giver – has a route marked on her map; the other speaker – the Instruction Follower – has no route. The speakers are told that their goal is to reproduce the Instruction Giver's route on the Instruction Follower's map. The maps are not identical, and the speakers are told this explicitly at the beginning of their first session. It is, however, up to them to discover how the two maps differ."

In Fig. 2, we present the map used in the experiment we refer to. It consists of items and drawings that represent shared knowledge in most cases (i.e. a wheel, a toaster, a number of nails). However, some drawings are not necessarily based on shared knowledge, such as the image of a butcher or the three caravan trailers. These are possible trouble sources for participants who come from different cultural and social backgrounds and lack a common base of cultural knowledge and associated connotations with respect to the pictured items.

In excerpt 1, Dimitri and Ali's command of German is good, and they carry out the task of instruction giving and following with confidence. Ali instructs Dimitri without further ado or greeting. There is only a minor sign of confusion in line 5, when Dimitri claims „Ach ah ja!" (*Oh, oh yes*). This is probably due to the instruction to "draw a line" (Line 4: *You draw a line in that direction*.).

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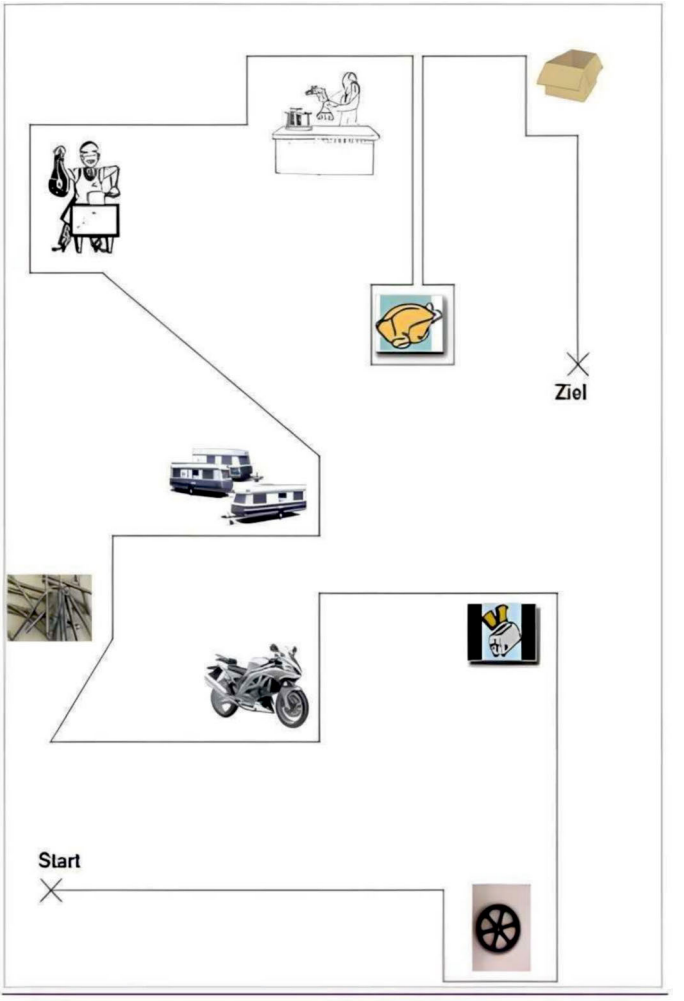
Fig. 2: Map Task-map



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Excerpt 1: Map task with two non-native speakers

Line	Participant	Original turns (German)	English translation
1	Dimitri	Okay.	Okay.
2	Ali	Äh Beim Startzeichen unter dem Startwort fängst du an.	Uh you should begin at the start sign beneath the word "start".
3	Dimitri	Hmhm.	Uhum. (*affirmative*)
4	Ali	Dann gehst du rechts rüber in Richtung äh des Rades. ((1,6s)) Dort ziehst du ne Linie rüber. Und äh…	Then you go to the right in direction uh of the wheel. You draw a line in that direction. And uh..
5	Dimitri	((lacht kurz)) Ach, ah ja! Auch klar. Wo ein Rad sein soll. Okay.	((Short laughter)) Oh, oh yes! It's clear. Where there is a wheel. Okay.

Excerpt 1 shows how the start of the experiment is handled when there is no language barrier. The participants start immediately with the task, and there is no sign of confusion. Minor difficulties or irritations do not disrupt the interaction process.

This is different in excerpt 2, where participants Markus and Pilar have serious difficulties getting started with the task. Markus is a native German speaker and does not speak Spanish. Pilar is a native Spanish speaker and has no command of German. In this case, the map task was supplemented by a real language barrier and a translation app (Google translate) on a smartphone to act as a translator. Participants were instructed to complete the task using only the app. No other options (such as using English as a lingua franca) were allowed.

Markus starts the conversation in line 1 by introducing himself and asking for Pilar's name. This is translated by the app in line 2 with a slight delay of 1,5 seconds. Pilar activates the app choosing Spanish in the conversation mode. This creates a slight delay of 2,5 seconds. Then she responds with a greeting, her name, and the polite Spanish formula "encantada" (English: "Nice to meet you."). Her turn consists of three utterances. The app translates her turn (Spanish: "… Pilar, encantada") into German as "verzauberte Säule" ("enchanted pillar") in line 4. This is interesting in several ways: The app knows that the answer to the question "What's your name?" can simply be a name, and deletes the greeting ("Hola"). However, the app does not know that a name does not need to be translated. Also, the app does not know that "Enchanted Pillar" is probably not a person's name. It is also interesting to note that the exotic answer "enchanted pillar" does not cause much confusion in line 5, when Markus continues with the task. The only small sign of trouble is his laughter. Then he immediately switches to the Map Task, points Pilar to the wheel, and tells her to go there. The following translation in line 6 is somehow flawed in several ways and

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causes Pilar to ask for clarification in line 7. Her question is again mistranslated, and this struggle with flawed and misleading instructions and questions goes on for quite some time.

Excerpt 2: map task with two native speakers and app support

Line	Participant	Original turns (German, Spanish)	English translation
1	Markus	Hallo! Ich bin Markus. Äh wie heißt du?	Hello! I am Markus. Uh what's your name?
2	App	*((1,5s)) ¡Hola! Soy Markus. Como te llamas?*	*Hello! I am Markus. What's your name?*
3	Pilar	((2,5s)) ¡Hola! Me llamo Pilar. Encantada!	Hello! My name is Pilar. Nice to meet you!
4	App	*((1,5s)) Verzauberte Säule.*	*Enchanted pillar.*
5	Markus	((2s)) ((Laughs)) Okay. Ähm fangen wir an! Äh zu deiner Rechten siehst du ein Rad. Ähm gehe geradewegs auf das Rad zu.	*Okay. Uhm lets start! Uh on your right you see a wheel. Uhm go straight towards to the wheel.*
6	App	*((2s)) Bueno. ¡Comencemos con tu mano derecha! ¡Eres una bicicleta que va directo al volante!*	*Allright. Let's start with your right hand! You're a bicycle that goes straight to the wheel!*
7	Pilar	(2s)) ¿Quieres decir que tengo que dirigirme hacia la moto?	You mean I have to head for the motorcycle?
8	App	*Du meinst, ich muss auf's Fahrrad!*	*You mean I have to get on the bike!*

Comparing the same section of the Map Task with Ali and Dimitri on the one hand, and Markus and Pilar on the other, it becomes clear that the latter had to adapt to the specific challenges of the application first, instead of working on the Map Task. They did this by ignoring certain phenomena (e.g. the inadequate translation of a name) or by asking clarifying questions. Later in the interaction, they also used simplified language to avoid mistranslations or gestures to bypass the app. Each step of the task was tedious and cumbersome and took much more time than for the team that did not face a language barrier.

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Conclusions

Translation apps are without doubt a postdigital tool, expanding the virtual sphere into the material, and vice-versa. To a certain extent they may also be seen as a cosmopolitan tool. At least they appear as one in their advertising, which addresses cosmopolitans or, ostensibly, Western elites who present themselves as cosmopolitans. However, our short review of the promises and challenges associated with translation apps showed that they are not yet able to meet all of these expectations. Translation apps are helpful for certain tasks and language constellations, and, at the same time, problematic, inadequate, or simply not available for others. Public discourses sometimes seem to overestimate the capacities of translation apps, and users first need to learn how to work with these technologies in specific situations. However, reports from different research settings also show that translation apps are already part of postdigital lifeworlds, especially those of migrant workers or refugees. Here, they often seem to play an important role for migrants who suffer from language barriers while finding their way in host societies. In this manner, they can be seen as a banal cosmopolitan tool from below.

The communicative effects of translation apps on mediated interactions seem to be caused not only by mistranslations but also by delays and a general slowing down of the interaction, unfamiliar written language registers, and a general tendency of users to focus more on the app than on the interlocutor. Thus, apps intervene significantly in the interpersonal dynamics of communication – in a good way but also in a bad way – resulting in curiosity but also in cautious restraint regarding the willingness to give yourself fully into the hands of the digital. A major problem seems to be that the apps are not (yet?) able to monitor ongoing communication, comment on possible misunderstandings, practise recipient design for specific addressees, or point out possible ambiguities to the primary participants. Thus, the familiarity and logic of natural, situated communication is still not fully met by the digital tool. In conversations that require translation, the ability to practice reflexive coordination will probably remain the domain of human interpreters. Obviously, translation apps facilitate communication across language barriers and will gain ground as ubiquitous facilitators of intercultural encounters in the future, but at the same time, their technical limits cannot be overlooked, and it remains an open question in which contexts they are really able to replace human facilitators of communication.

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Assessing the Intercultural Game *Megacities* and its Learning Outcomes: A Transnational and Cosmopolitan Virtual Exchange Project?

Jennifer Bartelheim and Milene Mendes de Oliveira

Abstract *Virtual Exchange (VE) is an educational practice which connects students of diverse cultural backgrounds in virtual interactions and collaboration with the aim of developing linguistic, intercultural, and digital skills that benefit them on their personal and professional pathways. While traditional approaches to VE have usually involved bilingual class-to-class partnerships with shallow comparisons of cultural information, recent trends lead towards transnational approaches to VE involving lingua franca communication, themes of social and political relevance, a more complex view of culture, and a focus on collaborative activities. To find out whether the Megacities intercultural game can be considered an example of a transnational VE project and whether it is aligned with postdigital cosmopolitan ideals, the present case study examines the task design in the game and the learning outcomes resulting from it as described by the players themselves. The study was based on the analysis of two datasets: (a) the task descriptions in the game and (b) thirty-one student reflection reports. For the latter we conducted an inductive qualitative content analysis with MAXQDA. Through the analysis of the game tasks and activities, we identified several features that are aligned with current descriptions of transnational approaches to VE. The analysis of the reflection reports unveiled four major learning outcomes: appreciation for difference, a critical examination of the self, appreciation for English as a lingua franca (ELF), and dealing with difficulties. These outcomes are compatible with some descriptions of postdigital cosmopolitanism, centring on a processual change in self-understanding and increased sensitivity towards cultural Others.*

Cosmopolitanism: Growing Self-Understanding and Going Beyond the Local

The total number of internet users in the middle of 2024 was estimated to be approximately 5.44 billion (DataReportal, 2024). Technological advancements in the form of platforms, tools, and features now allow us to engage in online shopping, take part in international research projects, and act as members of virtual teams in organiza-

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tional and educational settings. In the context of the latter, the potential of virtual communication is undeniable: Many students in different parts of the world now have the means to communicate with each other and engage in educational projects that build on their diverse backgrounds and experiences.

In this post-digital context (Cramer, 2014), in which the shift from the local to the global is only one click away, educational curricula should be able to foster cosmopolitanism, understood by Warf, leaning on several authors, as "an ethical, moral, and political worldview in which each person is obligated to humanity as a whole" (Warf, 2015: 37). Building on Delanty (2019), Lenehan (2022: 16) explains that cosmopolitanism has been described as a conceptualization of the world as not only transnational but also democracy-fostering. Lenehan (2022: 17) categorizes three strands in the study of cosmopolitanism: A normative-philosophical orientation, including philosophical reflections concerning moral, legal, political, cultural, and economic aspects; an empirical-descriptive strand, focusing on the description of behaviours and social habits underlying "feelings of solidarity beyond the local"; and a processual orientation, with both normative and descriptive elements and which results in a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008: 218, cited in Lenehan, 2022: 17). The case study described in this chapter explores cosmopolitanism from the perspective of a processual change in self-understanding and behaviours. In the intercultural communication literature, this change has been equated with the display or acquisition of intercultural competence, defined as the ability to transform unfamiliarity into familiarity (Rathje, 2007: 264) or to navigate differences in appropriate and effective ways (Deardorff, 2020) (for a discussion on digital intercultural competence, see Mendes de Oliveira, forthcoming).

Other scholars have already connected interculturality with processual cosmopolitanism and have described the internet as a space where cosmopolitan relationships may emerge from "intersubjective reflexiveness arising out of discursive intercultural exchanges" (Hall, 2019: 410, cited in Lenehan, 2022: 25). Lenehan refers to a so-called "benign processual post-digital cosmopolitanism" (2022: 24) characterized by "global flows of […] potential conversations" enabled by the Internet "which can, very feasibly, be part of a dialogical process leading towards self-transformation." Investigating the potential for self-transformation is at the heart of the present case study, which aims to (1) examine whether the task design in the intercultural game *Megacities* corresponds to current trends in VE projects that call for transnational approaches, and (2) analyze participants' self-reported learning outcomes arising from the virtual exchange project to investigate the actual effect of the tasks on intercultural learning and an evolving cosmopolitanism.

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Virtual Exchange

Virtual Exchange (VE) is an umbrella term used to refer to various educational initiatives involving individuals from different cultural backgrounds in online activities of social interaction and collaboration for the purpose of developing professional and personal skills (O'Dowd, 2018: 5). In a review of emerging trends and new directions in VE, O'Dowd (2016a: 295) noted that traditional approaches to VE are still heavily based towards "bilingual-bicultural exchange between groups of native speakers", which means that, for example, a Spanish group learning English would be paired with an English group learning Spanish.

However, there seems to be a growing understanding that we need to "move beyond the traditionally conceived target language–target culture relationship to incorporate an awareness of dynamic hybrid cultures and the skills to successfully negotiate them" (Baker, 2009: 567). In terms of language use, it is often English as a lingua franca (ELF) that is used in actual intercultural communication situations. ELF has been defined as English used in settings in which most, if not all, participants are non-native speakers of English (Seidlhofer, 2001). Slowly, more accounts of lingua franca VEs are emerging in the literature, but practitioners generally still stick to traditional and essentialist models of VE that resort to fixed understandings of languages and national cultures (Godwin-Jones, 2019).

One underlying but misleading assumption of bilingual/bicultural exchanges is that there are national communicative styles that can be learned through VE (Godwin-Jones, 2019). In fact, VEs that aim to analyze and compare these styles have been criticized for reinforcing the notion of homogenous national cultures in the tradition of Hofstede (1984), who is known for having measured national cultures according to so-called cultural dimensions, ignoring the fluid and dynamic nature of the concept of culture itself. In today's globalized world, speakers might cling to certain aspects of national communicative styles (in terms of, e.g. directness or indirectness, politeness strategies, etc.) but will eventually be influenced by multiple other identity markers, which makes it even more evident that there is not one fixed English communicative style, for example (Godwin-Jones, 2019). Comparisons of such supposed "styles" in VEs have reinforced this simplified vision. In addition, it is important to note that engaging in VE itself means creating a small community with its own communication style and culture (Godwin-Jones, 2019). Using ELF in VEs has the potential to move past essentialist and static notions of culture and towards transnational – and possibly cosmopolitan – models of VE, because participants are not considered *a priori* experts in the language being used in the VE (as in bilingual-bicultural exchange between groups of native speakers) and have leeway to negotiate the use of language in more flexible ways.

One important characteristic of the ELF perspective is its critical view of the native speaker as the model in language education. While the "aim that learners of

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another language should become, or attempt to become, native speakers, has long dominated language teaching and been implanted in the minds of most language teachers and language learners" (Byram & Golubeva, 2020: 73), from an ELF perspective, there is no native-speaker resemblance needed as long as mutual understanding is assured. In traditional models of VE, the native speaker is implicitly positioned as the authority of the language and the non-native speaker as the learner, leading to "[a]symmetrical relationships in virtual exchange projects" (Verzella & Tommaso, 2021: 1). The problem with native-speakerism is that it emphasizes the myth that native speakers use a static code that automatically guarantees mutual understanding and successful communication, putting the learner in a deficit position (i.e. lacking linguistic accuracy) and ignoring the resources that non-native speakers bring to the communication situation (Verzella & Tommaso, 2021). Among others, Kohn (2020a; 2020b) takes a pedagogical lingua franca approach and argues that VEs can provide rich opportunities for exploiting the potential of lingua franca communication. For him, authentic communication in VE can foster learner agency and what he calls "learner emancipation" (Kohn, 2020a: 5) by, e.g. recording interaction and allowing students to analyze and reflect on their own ELF communication.

There has been a tendency in VE to avoid difficult themes in interaction and to engage in negotiations of a shallow and superficial nature when it comes to course content (Godwin-Jones, 2019; O'Dowd, 2016a). In their review of VE task design, O'Dowd and Ware (2009) found that common task types are based on themes such as school systems, food, travel, sports, music, or tourism, limiting themselves to a certain kind of transfer of factual information about the partner's culture instead of critically reflecting on, for instance, political issues with more promising effects on the development of intercultural competence. This is what Kramsch (2014: 302) calls "surfing diversity", and it is prone to cause students to ignore differences and focus on what unites them. Helm (2013) also found that most educators would like to avoid controversial topics in their VEs because they could lead to conflict.

Contrary to this, more current and critical models of VE are based on genuine engagement and negotiation, in which difficult issues that cause conflict and inequalities in the world are addressed with a wide range of perspectives. This can be more favourable for learning because miscommunication, conflict, or touching upon sensitive or political topics is usually memorable, as it appeals to the participants' emotions (Godwin-Jones, 2019). Godwin-Jones (2019) also warns against instances of shallow interactions and argues that avoiding conflict misrepresents the reality of intercultural encounters. "In fact, exploring the sources of a disagreement over serious issues […] can be revelatory, […] taking learners into deeper dimensions of cultural understanding" (Godwin-Jones, 2019: 12). The aim is not to lead all participants to the same conclusions but to gain a deeper understanding of why people have different perspectives. For advocates of critical VE, conflict in interaction is seen as a productive source of learning and has the function of transforming perspectives

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(Godwin-Jones, 2019; O'Dowd, 2016a). Similarly, Nicolaou (2020: 527) argues that, in current VEs, "themes should revolve around critical 21st-century issues, highlighting the interconnectedness of our world today and the dynamics of international partnerships in the global arena."

In the past, VEs have been text-based and asynchronous, mainly using e-mail communication (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Wicking et al., 2021). However, in their study across various VEs, Baroni et al. (2019) found that this type of communication is prone to make students feel depersonalized and that synchronous communication gives them a greater sense of engaging in actual human interaction. Therefore, synchronous videoconferencing is increasingly used in VEs (Avgousti, 2018; Werneck Barbosa & Ferreira-Lopes, 2021). According to Godwin-Jones (2019: 13), "[t]he direct, visual, and auditory contact between interlocuters [sic] can be highly motivating", yet also more challenging as speech, facial expressions, and gestures have to be analyzed and reacted upon in real-time. He also stresses that the medium of choice is never neutral and that it always has an impact on communication.

O'Dowd's (2020) Transnational Model of VE and Task Design

In 2020, O'Dowd (2020: 486–487) outlined the characteristics and principles of good practice for VE, defining his own model. For him, contemporary VEs should consider the following:

- Fostering rich intercultural dialogue that can involve, but is not restricted to, contrasting cultures and languages
- Fostering collaboration with individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds and employing lingua franca communication
- Motivating students to discuss subjects that are significant to all participants on a social and political level
- Allowing students to collaborate with their foreign partners in order to bring about change and action in their respective local and global communities
- Providing plenty of chances for supervised reflection on intercultural interactions
- Being acknowledged and incorporated into academic coursework and institutional activities
- Fostering an understanding of the role of online technologies in intercultural communication and the ways in which social media influences message creation and interpretation

Concerning the specific task design, O'Dowd and Ware (2009) have reviewed the tasks usually found in VE and have synthesized them using three categories: infor-

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mation exchange tasks, comparison and analysis tasks, and collaborative tasks. The information exchange task type usually requires students to exchange information about themselves or their cultures. The comparison and analysis task type "requires learners not only to exchange information but also to go a step further and carry out comparisons or critical analyses of cultural products from both cultures (e.g. books, surveys, films, newspaper articles)" (O'Dowd & Ware, 2009: 175). The collaborative task type "requires learners not only to exchange and compare information but also to work together to produce a joint product or conclusion" (O'Dowd & Ware, 2009: 178). According to Godwin-Jones (2019: 13) this phase "deepens the collaboration by having partners work together in creating some kind of shareable product or artifact, such as a blog, wiki entry, webpage, website, digital story, or presentation". This task type usually promises the highest learning gains and involves the most crucial deal of negotiation as students strive to come to a conclusion. However, O'Dowd (2016b: 6) laments that:

> "[i]t would appear that most telecollaborative exchanges never move on beyond the first and second task types as students present, exchange and compare information but rarely go that extra step to actually collaborate [...] to complete a document or project together. I would argue that it would be very beneficial for telecollaboration practice to focus more on this third type of telecollaborative task type in order to exploit the learning potential of this activity to the maximum."

Study Design

Thirty-one students from six different countries participated in the case study.[1] They were all enrolled in either Intercultural Business Communication or English language programmes at a German university. The interactions involved several digital tools, most importantly Zoom, the Moodle platform, and Conceptboard, where students could collaboratively edit text and drawings.

The *Megacities* game (Bolten, 2015) is a virtual simulation for intercultural learning. The game's premise is that a wealthy citizen aims to donate an abandoned area (Wasteland) to three diverse bordering cities under the condition that they establish a holistic plan for the development of the area that benefits all. The game ran from 20th May 2021 to 17th June 2021, including an introductory meeting and four game rounds. The game's goal is to improve intercultural competence and personal development by cooperating and communicating in an intercultural online environment characterized by uncertain situations. In the introductory meeting, the stu-

1 Thirty-five students participated in the game, but only thirty-one wrote the final reflection report.

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dents were introduced to the game, basic concepts were explained, and they were divided into their city teams with their respective Zoom rooms.

This study was guided by two research questions: Firstly, we aimed to analyze whether the task design in the intercultural game *Megacities* fits O'Dowd's description of a transnational model of VE (for a similar undertaking, see Brownlie, 2024). Secondly, we set out to examine the learning outcomes of the game project by considering students' own perceptions of their learning trajectories and thereby verify whether their perceptions can shed light on intercultural learning and a type of evolving cosmopolitanism. To answer the first research question, the task descriptions were studied in detail as well as the task implementation during the actual game. For the latter, the method of participant observation (Musante, 2015) was chosen. The first author participated as an observer in all rounds of the game. For the second question, qualitative content analysis with MAXQDA (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019) was used. The first step of the data analysis was to read the reflection reports various times to get a thorough understanding of their content. In the second phase, thematic categories were inductively developed from the material. The third step was to code all reflection reports along the main categories for the first time. After the first coding process, codes that belonged together were merged, and subcategories were inductively determined to gain a better understanding of the main categories. Thereby, the code system was reorganized, rearranged, and meaningfully systematized. In the second coding process, we worked through the complete data set again with the fully differentiated code system, and coded segments were reassigned to the more differentiated subcodes.

In the following, we present our findings for the first and the second research questions in different sections. The findings for the second research question (learning outcomes) are illustrated with examples extracted from the reflection reports. We opted for keeping the original entries as written by the players and only added corrections where we thought spelling or grammar incongruities could lead to reading difficulties. In these cases, we added the possibly 'right' term in square brackets.

Findings

Task Design in the Virtual Intercultural Game *Megacities*

When scrutinizing the previously described game design against O'Dowd's (2020) description of a transnational model of VE, it became evident that the course not only reflects the new trends explained above but also follows O'Dowd's recommendations for good practice in VE. In line with O'Dowd's (2020) vision, the goal of the *Megacities* game was to move away from essentialist notions of culture and towards a more transnational approach to culture. In accordance with his model, the VE un-

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der investigation provided a valuable environment for intercultural interaction that was not based on shallow comparisons of cultures since students did not focus on superficial topics. Instead, students worked on a topic of social and political relevance, developing a holistic plan for the wasteland that benefits all. Although it was a simulation, it made them aware of issues in the 'real world', such as sustainability and the reconciliation of different opinions. The participants' main task was to negotiate, considering their own city's preferences and those of the other teams. Not only did they create a team culture (see Conti et al., 2022), but they also had to accommodate new team structures when new teams were created in the middle of the game. Thus, throughout the VE, students were confronted with challenges and difficult situations in interaction, such as silence, or negative reactions. The instructor and the student assistants consciously intervened as little as possible in these situations of conflict in order to give students the agency to resolve their problems by themselves. This is how, according to O'Dowd (2020), real student engagement and negotiation should look so that the VE not only establishes interactions but also gives opportunities for critical intercultural learning from these interactions.

In line with O'Dowd's (2020) model, the *Megacities* VE also addressed the relevance of lingua franca communication and the impact of the medium. Students came from various academic and national backgrounds with different first languages and were not positioned in a bi-cultural set-up, in which the groups "represented" their country's cultures for intercultural learning. Instead, participants were seen as part of a transnational group using ELF for communication. Some of the participants were native speakers, but they were not presented as the authority of English within the task design. Regarding communication tools, the *Megacities* VE did not just employ one asynchronous communication tool but a variety of synchronous and asynchronous digital platforms, such as Zoom, Moodle, and Conceptboard, reflecting previously described new trends in VE. Raising awareness of how interaction is influenced by the communication tool is also one of the characteristics of O'Dowd's (2020) model of VE.

The course design of the VE under investigation is also in accordance with previously described recommendations for task design. In the introductory phase, students exchanged information about themselves and engaged in ice-breaker activities for relationship-building; in the main phase, students explored rich points in interaction when they negotiated and faced challenges, misunderstandings, and uncomfortable situations in interaction; and finally, students had to collaborate to produce a joint product, a press release. According to O'Dowd's model (2020), guided reflection is also critical for intercultural learning in VE. The course design of the *Megacities* VE included ample opportunities for reflection. For example, students were provided with theoretical input on intercultural communication and recommendations on collaborating effectively in an online environment. In addition, participants were given a reflection sheet with guiding questions on the game, and the

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VE also ended with a reflection phase about challenges, learning outcomes, and suggestions. For assessment, a reflection report was required in which students analyzed interactions from the VE through the theory lens. In line with O'Dowd's (2020) model, the VE was also an official and recognized part of students' coursework, not an additional voluntary activity.

Learning Outcomes

Appreciation of Difference

Twenty-four out of 31 students displayed a particular appreciation of differences in their reports in various ways. Students noticed various differences during the VE and elaborated on the advantages and disadvantages of these differences for collaboration. In particular, they valued the gain in knowledge due to the presence of different perspectives and ideas, increased problem-solving in collaboration, better-quality results, and a sense of inspiration from their fellow students' creativity. For example, some students mentioned that they appreciated the impact of differences on the city's development. In addition, students also emphasized the change in perspective, stepping back from their own preconceived notions due to the diversity of the group. They were able to take different perspectives, question their own stereotypes and thinking patterns, and embrace different ways of thinking.

> "(1) Firstly, I think it is important for us to understand that difference can be a catalyst of productivity and innovation. Our team sprit [spirit] is quite open towards diversity, I think this team spirit had transformed into a force that brought many agile solutions in dealing with multiple tasks. Different people might value different things, hence, for members in a new team, working methodologies and interpersonal rules that one had taken for granted could be slightly challenged in some ways." (P28, pos. 14–15)

> "(2) Although we differed in culture, native language, age or gender, I was really impressed by our harmonic cooperative work. Everyone was accepted and appreciated and our communication was very respectful and friendly. Furthermore, I was impressed by the creativity of some members – no matter if it was about creating a logo or writing fictional texts. It was absolutely amazing!" (P33, pos. 5)

Appreciation for difference could also be identified in different forms of contribution. This VE gave students the opportunity to understand that an unwillingness to speak actively in the plenum is not necessarily a sign of laziness or unwillingness to contribute. Due to the complex task design, various forms of contribution were possible so that everyone had the chance to contribute individually, and students also

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noticed and appreciated this. There were signs in the reflection reports that students learned that active listening is also a form of contribution and that different forms of contribution can also be attributed to cultural or personal differences.

> "(3) What surprised me a lot was the behaviour of one of the Chinese students. I had never once heard him speak in a large group or participate in any written work. Consequently, I perceived him as a person who did not want to listen, understand or make an effort to participate. However, in this smaller group work he surprised me by the way he expressed himself and how much he contributed to the group work. He spoke very politely, acknowledged the contributions of others and expressed his own opinion in a calm and convincing manner. This showed me that even if someone does not always express themselves immediately, it does not mean that the person does not want to contribute. I would attribute this partly to the person's cultural background and personality. For the future, I have learned that one should not judge a book by its cover and that people should give others more time to get used to a situation, to express themselves and to be more understanding in general." (P13, pos. 33–35).

Taking a deeper look at the reflection reports, it became evident that students seemed to acknowledge their differences and embrace them, seeing them as a source of innovation, learning, and productivity instead of lamenting the difficulties in collaboration. Thus, it seems to be more about coming to terms with the differences than overcoming them. They emphasized the positive collaboration experience despite their differences and managed to build relationships with people they would not have met otherwise.

A Critical Examination of the Self

In the reports, students reflected on themselves and displayed critical examinations of their own actions. Many students criticized their lack of active participation in the group discussions and reflected on potential reasons why this was the case, such as a lack of confidence or their cultural background (on cultural ideals of social interaction, see Mendes de Oliveira & Stevanovic, forthcoming). Students also mentioned that the game had taught them to pay more attention to their communication style in intercultural situations. Some students, for example, explained that empathy was important in intercultural settings and how their participation in the game had led to rethinking their words and actions so that everyone felt comfortable. Some students also reflected critically on their communication style and criticized their own urge to respond quickly when they could have thought a little more. However, most students expressed a feeling of having learned something for themselves and their professional future, for instance, what kind of work position they would like to have

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in the future, such as a leading position, or that their fear of speaking in the plenum was unfounded.

> "(4) Since we were very international in the team, we correspondingly had very individual ideas that were very culture-specific. This led to the fact that I noticed that every culture had different points of view on a topic. This broadened my horizons so much that with this game I learned to always look at the other culture from a different perspective. And then to communicate in such a way that I paid attention to my choice of words so as not to hurt anyone and also developed my empathy skills. […] Without empathy, it is difficult for us to reflect on our own behavior. And I honestly say that we as a team have always respected each other and were open to all ideas." (P01, pos.15-16, 19)

> "(5) What I learned about myself is that I consider myself even more in a professional multilingual and cultural context, especially in taking the lead, as I believe I fulfilled my role as group leader sufficiently during the game. I also became more aware of my own cultural socialisation. […] I realised that I was so eager that sometimes I spoke too quickly and too fast before I had really thought. I noticed that I comment quite harshly on some posts, which is difficult for me to control because I tend to speak directly and keep my statements as concise as possible." (P13, pos. 8–9).

Appreciation for ELF

In the reflection reports, most students displayed a certain awareness and appreciation for ELF, which was used throughout the game. Twenty students elaborated on this concept, both explicitly naming the concept of ELF and implicitly describing what it meant to them. In particular, they expressed satisfaction with the fact that the VE was conducted in (almost) nobody's first language. Many of them expressed feeling more comfortable communicating, not being pressured to adhere to strict linguistic accuracy, and having more capacity to focus on content and mutual understanding. As they were all in the same situation, they reported increased participation and confidence to share their ideas in the plenum.

> "(6) The circumstance of the game being that we used English as a lingua franca was very nice, because I didn't feel so much pressure to do everything right and this way was able to participate more than I initially expected. […] Personally, I take away that it is totally ok to not speak perfect English when communicating an idea or a thought with someone. What matters the most is that you understand each other and that happens through good communication. It is also important to know that verbal communication isn't the only possible way to communicate with someone and it can be helpful to use more than one way of communication." (P24, pos. 2–3, 8–9)

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> "(7) Based on the theory learned and through my practical experience with the intercultural game, I now have a better understanding and a deeper appreciation of ELF and IC [intercultural communication] in the digital age." (P21, pos. 13)

Most students emphasized that the fact that they all communicated in a common foreign language with different levels of English did not negatively affect mutual understanding. On the contrary, students paid more attention to making sense of what their fellow students wanted to express and intervened whenever help was needed. In the case of not being understood, students had the chance to practice their spoken language skills by rephrasing and clarifying their points. Students were forced to accommodate so that mutual understanding could be achieved, if necessary, also using alternative forms of communication.

> "(8) Furthermore, I observed differences in the level of English spoken, the fluidity, and the accents, which I thought weren't as important of differences [weren't important differences], since they did not strongly interfere with communication. Disadvantages are of course that it comes to misunderstanding, but almost always somebody jumped in to explain and specify the meaning if statements were not precise in speech or unclear. But this as a mediation resembles our day-to-day experiences and live [life] in a work environment so I don't think it is wasted time but can rater [rather] been [be] seen as a learning experience." (P26, pos. 10–12)

Dealing with Difficulties

The number of students experiencing difficulties during the VE was high. Twenty-two students reflected on difficult situations that they experienced during the game. Analyzing code relations in MAXQDA indicates that perceived difficulties are mostly in connection to collaboration, as these codes were often intersecting in the data. However, most students, after lamenting on insecurities, conflicts, misunderstandings, or uncomfortable situations in interaction, also elaborated on how they resolved the conflict and how they were still left with a positive collaboration experience.

One of the most prominent challenges was active participation in discussions in the plenum. For one student, for example, it was a challenge to share her ideas in the main Zoom room with many different participants because she considered herself shy and felt judged by her fellow students. However, as she explained, after reflecting more on these challenging situations, she realized it was just her personal fear, and there was no reason to be shy because the group was very accommodating. Ultimately, she was glad that the VE had lured her out of her comfort zone, forcing her to speak up because it helped improve her communication skills. Although it was a challenge for many students to speak up in the plenum, most students were able

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to overcome their fear and were left with positive learning outcomes, such as higher confidence or increased communication skills.

> "(9) I feel like putting myself in challenging situations helps me improve to come out of my shell. Thanks to the course I feel like I can communicate more and maybe, if I have the chance in the future to take a similar course, I would try to talk also in the main room with more people." (P35, pos. 13)

One reason participation was perceived as challenging was the virtual nature of the game. Many students shared the view that intercultural interaction was even more complicated due to the virtual setting. Nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions or body language, can convey important information about how interlocutors react to what has been said. These cues are especially important in intercultural settings because they are prone to lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, it was perceived as an additional challenge that students could only see the little tiles and, in some cases, only black tiles.

> "(10) Looking back, I consider the participation in the game to be an enriching experience. During the sessions however I had mixed emotions. […] On the other hand, there have been some situations in which I felt slightly overwhelmed since discussions with many people are sometimes hard to follow for me, particularly in an online format in which I do not see my interlocutors. In addition, I experienced that it can be challenging to lead discussions with people from different cultural backgrounds in the sense that I aim to rethink my argumentation and way of expressing my point of view a lot more when I am unfamiliar with the respective discussion culture in order to not offend anyone. Not being able to see the other person's reaction make it even more difficult, to my mind. This leads to the fact that I often felt a bit exhausted after the game sessions." (P03, pos. 2–3, 5–6)

Another perceived challenge was to find common ground in a very diverse and extensive group. Many students elaborated on this point, guiding attention to the difficulties of finding compromise because there have been many different ideas, for example, on how the wasteland should be designed. These situations made them reflect and question their own perspective. Most students realized that the different ideas were often culture-specific, giving them a deeper understanding of why ideas were sometimes conflicting. However, despite their differences, they were mostly able to find a suitable solution in the end, leaving them with a positive collaboration and learning experience. Sometimes this also means making compromises at the expense of one's own idea in order to come to an agreement and move on. One of the students realized that, despite the various diverging ideas and opinions, the group managed to come up with a very good result, which changed her perspective as she usually does not believe in group work with many participants.

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> "(11) I usually don't have a lot of faith in group work when there are a lot of different opinions involved. Despite the multitude of diverging opinions and discussions about whether we understood the tasks right I still think that the different supervising groups managed to create results that were really good considering what we were working with." (P30, pos. 6)

> "(12) I think that a major point is that we adjusted to making comprises [compromises], which we were at first not actually comfortable with. But at the end, I assume that all our group members realized that those compromises do not mean to banish the idea as a whole but to make it more diverse through contributions of members belonging to other groups but also to other cultural contexts. In order to reach a mutually acceptable solution, each group had to give up some part of their own conviction. Eventually, this process was for sure not easy but definitely worth it because initial ideas of our group were overthought and specialized." (P32, pos. 15–16)

> "(13) It seems to me that disagreement usually produces sparks. For example, different understandings of the same task can generate a variety of novel ideas, or different ways of solving problems can exist because some people organize and assign work relatively, some remind people of time arrangement, some put forward ideas, and some integrate ideas." (P09, pos. 17)

Concluding Remarks

This study aimed to first analyze whether the task design in the intercultural game *Megacities* was in line with O'Dowd's transnational model of VE, which proposes moving away from an essentialist conceptualization of culture while fostering rich intercultural dialogue and collaboration. Secondly, we set out to examine the learning outcomes of the game project by considering students' own perceptions of their learning trajectories and thereby verify whether their perceptions can shed light on intercultural learning and a type of evolving cosmopolitanism. The findings reveal that the *Megacities* intercultural game is indeed in line with O'Dowd's recommendations for good practice in transnational VE and reflects current trends in VE towards cosmopolitanism. Concerning the learning outcomes, participants pointed to various ways to deal with difficulties in interaction. They displayed high levels of appreciation for difference, a high appreciation for ELF, and, crucially, a critical examination of the Self, which, again, make evident a gradual change in "self-understanding as the result of engagement with others" (Delanty, 2008: 218, cited in Lenehan, 2022: 17).

The main limitation is the small scope of the study. It only reveals students' perceptions of the VE under investigation. In a more extensive study, we would aim

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to expand the analyses and gather further data sources, such as expert interviews or follow-up participant interviews. These interviews could provide a deeper understanding of the intercultural processes experienced by the player before, during, and after the game. Concerning limitations in task design, one can potentially argue that the intercultural game *Megacities* lacks more explicit discussions on conflict and inequality (Helm, 2013), which can lead players to only 'surf diversity' (Kramsch, 2014: 302) instead of scrutinizing serious issues such as asymmetrical power relations and politics (Godwin-Jones, 2019).

All in all, our findings lend support to the idea of an evolving type of cosmopolitanism as a result of this intervention designed for the development of intercultural competence. In short, the intercultural game *Megacities* has been shown to lead to (a) a heightened awareness of the cultural Other and the intercultural processes experienced during the game and also to (b) perceptible changes in behaviour. The former is based on a kind of cosmopolitanism aligned with an "intersubjective reflexiveness arising out of [...] intercultural exchanges" (Hall, 2019: 410 cited in Lenehan, 2022: 25). The latter, empirically manifested through changes in behaviour, can be connected to a display of "digital intercultural competence", which refers the ability to co-create opportunities for participatory citizenship in digital interactions (see Mendes de Oliveira, forthcoming).

The findings are in line with Lenehan's (2022) notion of processual cosmopolitanism and Warf's (2015: 46) definition of cosmopolitanism as a kind of "discourse that foregrounds human similarities and worldwide concerns in an attempt to bridge differences in constructive and imaginative ways." Warf (2015: 46) argues that "[c]osmopolitanism invites a reconfiguration of geographical imaginations, of horizons of belonging". The intercultural game *Megacities* was shown to provide fertile ground for this endeavour in the complex configurations of today's postdigital societies.

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Connecting (With) the Unfamiliar: Theoretical, Didactic, and Methodical Reflections on Facilitating Cosmopolitan Encounters in a Postdigital World

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Abstract *The growing demarcation between analogue and digital realities results in uncertainty. Dealing with this uncertainty constructively calls for a new way of considering the world, the "self", and the "other": postdigital cosmopolitanism (Lenehan, 2022). This theoretical bridge marks the first contribution of the chapter. However, linking the postdigital reality to uncertainty and showing it can be responded to by cosmopolitanism results in the question of strengthening and facilitating this postdigital cosmopolitanism. Building on this, two methodological gaps are investigated. Firstly, the discussion introduces facilitating cosmopolitanism via experiential learning (Kolb, 2015) in a postdigital environment as a new didactic approach in the field of cosmopolitan learning. Secondly, the analysis presents virtual action learning (Cho & Egan, 2022) as a methodology to investigate the facilitation of postdigital cosmopolitanism via experiential learning. The discussion centres around theoretical and methodological reflections on facilitating and evaluating a learning intervention that is sensitive to a) a postdigital context marked by uncertainty, b) the learning objective of postdigital cosmopolitanism, and c) the learning process of experiential learning. The chapter therefore begins by exploring how the entangled manifestations of materiality and digitality cause uncertainty and what postdigital cosmopolitanism has to offer as a response. The discussion of these two theoretical arguments results in a presentation of experiential learning as a method to facilitate postdigital cosmopolitanism. The chapter concludes with a presentation of virtual action learning as a form of inquiry to investigate learning and a discussion of VAL's potential to fulfil the prerequisites of the learning environment, objective, and process. The chapter yields insights especially for, but not limited to, researchers and educators interested in facilitating and evaluating experiential learning with digital means as well as for scholars interested in the practice and facilitation of postdigital cosmopolitanism.*

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1. Fading Demarcations: Consequences of the Intertwined Manifestations of the Digital and Analogous Worlds

The integration of digitalization[1] into our formerly analogue world has fundamentally transformed our societal landscape, blurring the once clear boundaries between digital and analogue domains. Consequently, distinguishing between the specific impacts stemming from the rise of digital processes and those originating solely from analogue contexts has become progressively convoluted. Furthermore, the emergence of novel phenomena often arises from the intricate interplay and accessibility of both digital and analogue realms, complicating our understanding of their individual contributions. These manifestations, complex and sometimes contradictory in character, lead to increasing uncertainty.

The ramifications of this demarcation between digital and analogue worlds are multifaceted. For instance, there is a potential increase in feelings of anonymity and individualization (Stöttner, 2019: 197–205). Additionally, certain facets of communication undergo a diminution when mediated through digital channels. Roth and Laut (2023: 110–116) lament the initial decline in quality stemming from disparate, non-shared, and physically absent elements of the communicative context, contrasting digital exchanges with face-to-face interactions. Moreover, informal communication frequency and the degree of explicitness often diminish in digital environments. Lastly, the richness of communicated content tends to be reduced in comparison to physically present modes of interaction (Roth & Laut, 2023: 117–119).

Additionally, social processes such as inclusion, radicalization, and tribalism are accelerated by digitality (Ebner, 2019: 278–290). The consequences of increasing digitalization on social dynamics are explored by Ebner: affiliative needs can remain unmet for two reasons: Firstly, social face-to-face interactions decrease, and secondly, algorithms and online behaviour may lead to a feeling of isolation. These emerging social voids are created through digitality but can also be filled with new possibilities to network and connect (Ebner, 2019: 278).

Thorhauer (2017: 11–18) elaborates on a digital spatial turn, observing a proliferation of virtual social spaces alongside a deepening digital divide. On one hand, certain populations face increasing difficulties in gaining internet access, while on

1 Concerning the question of whether to use the term "virtual" or "digital": Even though the notions of the two concepts seem too entangled to call for the dominance of one over the other, I speak of digital, whenever I am not referring to a specific concept that has been coined as "virtual" by the original author, due to three reasons. Firstly, the term digital implies that something is created or stored using computer technology rather than a simulation of reality. Secondly, it implies that it can be physical or digital instead of not physically presented, and lastly, because it can be tangible or intangible rather than existing only in the mind.

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the other hand, those with access experience a widening array of possibilities in utilizing digital tools. Furthermore, surveillance, control, and manipulation contribute to feelings of alienation (Kelsch, 2019: 385–395), while filter bubbles become increasingly difficult to penetrate (Thorhauer, 2017: 23–24).

The resulting manifestations of this demarcation between analogous and digital realities are often contradicting, multifaceted, and intertwined. These muddled developments lead to a double uncertainty: an abstract and philosophical one, but also a personal one. Questions such as "How will the state and the feeling of connection develop in the future?" or "What influences this development?" are examples of this more abstract uncertainty. The personal uncertainty manifests itself in questions such as: "How can I stay and keep feeling connected?" Or, as Zuckerman (2013: 58) asks: How do we know the things we need to know and not only the things we want to know in the age of unbroken access to information? Thus the question arises: How should individuals navigate and respond to this uncertainty?

2. Postdigital Cosmopolitanism as a Response to Uncertainty

Let us therefore turn to a definition of uncertainty and possible ways of dealing with it. As for the latter, this chapter focuses on postdigital cosmopolitanism as a way of dealing with uncertainty. As for the interdisciplinary definition of uncertainty draw on existing literature.

2.1 Defining Uncertainty

Uncertainty in its broadest sense can be defined as a "lack of meaning" (Mughal & Zafar, 2011: 28) or as "a lack of understanding" (Dennis et al., 2008: 576). This lack can result from an unmet need for information, or as Galbraith (1977: 5) defines it, uncertainty is "the difference between the amount of information required […] and the amount of information already possessed." Research offers several insights for dealing with the "cognitive state where people feel that the physical and social world is an unpredictable place over which they have little control" (Hogg & Belavadi, 2017: 2).

Communication may aim at filling this lack of meaning or this lack of understanding. Communication is the "process of creating a shared understanding" (Dennis et al., 2008: 576), which can facilitate the constructive management of uncertainty. However, this process is not without its complexities. While effective communication can mitigate uncertainty, misunderstandings may conversely exacerbate them. When examining communication theories in the context of digital environments, one finds a nuanced landscape.

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Even though some of the communication theories mentioned here provide insights into questions of communication from a perspective in which the preconditions where different from the present context, they stand the test of time. Firstly, the theories add to each other and address the shortcomings and changed requirements from their predecessors e.g. Dennis and colleagues' Media Synchronicity Theory (2008) criticizes and adds to Daft and Lengel's Media Richness Theory (1986) (Dennis et al., 2008: 577). Lastly, applying their findings and underlying arguments to current requirements of communication is not only possible, but also insightful.

Media Richness Theory posits that the choice of media influences the potential for reducing uncertainty (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Trevino et al., 1987). Information Succession Theory extends this concept by advocating for the use of different media with varying capabilities in sequence (Stephens, 2007). For instance, initiating communication through mass media like a posting on social networks, mailing lists, or intranet, followed by individual discussions can result in reaching the audience with all of the required information. Moreover, the goal of communication shapes the productive degree of synchronicity of communication tools (Dennis et al., 2008). Depending on whether the aim is to convey raw information for analysis or to foster shared understanding, different tools, and levels of synchronicity may be deemed appropriate (Dennis et al., 2008: 583).

The interplay between digital communication and uncertainty is multifaceted. One can approach this relationship from both goal-oriented and selection-oriented perspectives. The communication process may dictate the outcome, or the desired outcome may influence tool selection. Consequently, digital communication and uncertainty are intrinsically linked on a theoretical level, with each influencing the other in a complex interplay.

Dennis et al. (2008: 580–581) argue that uncertainty can be dealt with by creating a shared understanding. Creating this shared understanding, however, is difficult in a digital world, as multiple communication theories explore. Exploring the overarching question of how digital media, communication, and uncertainty intersect reveals a layered and ongoing inquiry. Do digital technologies provide effective means to navigate uncertainty communicatively, or do they pose barriers to shared understanding? Alternatively, do they represent a new environment with distinct characteristics that require adaptation, offering both benefits and challenges? This multifaceted question remains open, underscoring the intricate relationship between digitality, communication, and uncertainty.

2.2 Defining (Postdigital) Cosmopolitanism

It seems contradictory: Developments of increasing digitalization lead, on the one hand, to uncertainty and, thus, to an increasing urgency and relevance to react to this uncertainty. One possible reaction to this uncertainty can be seen in encounters

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that occur within contexts of global significance. Encounters with significance can lead to transformations in collective identity and cognition as Delanty (2009: 218) argues, thus responding to uncertainty. But on the other hand, these same developments of digitalization (e.g. tribalism, anonymity and individualization, the digital divide, and filter bubbles, as shown above) make it more difficult to realize these encounters for everyone.

In his 2022 overview article, providing different notions of cosmopolitanism, Lenehan cites Waldron (2010: 168–169) who argues that cosmopolitanism can be achieved by "coming into contact with the 'other'". This sole encounter however is insufficient: It needs to result in a revaluation and reassessment of the norms that one has previously adopted. Delanty (2009: 218) adds a context or reason for this encounter when referring to it as a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance." These forms of encounters as a fundamental characteristic of cosmopolitanism can be found in places where notions of "self" and "other" meet, or, as Delanty (2009: 252) states: Cosmopolitanism is to be found in "collective identity processes, such as debates, narratives, forms of cognition, networks of communication." This notion then is quite far from its former understanding as a Western-dominated type of intellectual universalism (Lenehan, 2022: 26–27). Giri (2018: 14) adds to this with a perspective influenced by Indian sources, when calling cosmopolitanism not only "transformations in self, culture, society, economy, and polity", but also "an ongoing process of critique, creativity and border-crossing". This border-crossing aspect already hints towards the possibility of postdigital cosmopolitanism, or as these potential transformative processes may also take place online, as part of a web of postdigital cosmopolitanism intertwined with material reality (Lenehan 2022: 25). Thus, the encounters constituting postdigital cosmopolitanism not only question notions of the self but also the boundaries of a (material) reality.

Encounters with topics of global significance initiate the re-thinking of "self", "other", and the world. This re-thinking then leads first to questioning these concepts, but also to a new connection with them. This new, re-thought connection and the process of re-thinking itself serve as a response to uncertainty. Only questioning the "self", the "other" and the environment and then re-connecting with them allows us to navigate through times in which we lack understanding or meaning.

In this notion of postdigital cosmopolitanism, outlines for a learning programme start to emerge. Learning from the "other" through self-problematization (Delanty, 2009: 219) is a possible consequence of encountering and reflecting this connection with this "other". This understanding of postdigital cosmopolitanism focuses on reassessing and re-thinking the world, the "self", and the "other". This process with an orientation towards re-thinking has, thus, the potential to lead to learning. But how can this be achieved, especially in debates and networks marked by digital communication?

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3. Experiential Learning as a Method to Strengthen Postdigital Cosmopolitanism

Only "coming into contact with the 'other'" (Waldron, 2010: 168–169) seems insufficient, as stated above. The encounter needs to be within contexts of global significance and lead to a re-thinking of self and other (Delanty, 2009: 218). How can the *facilitating* of such encounters appear? The facilitation is challenged by two hurdles: One is the complex character of the postdigital world, and the other is digital communication, especially the unclear relationship with uncertainty. An answer to the question of facilitating these kinds of encounters promises to be of theoretical, methodological, and practical value.

Learning needs to be holistic, if the facilitation of these encounters and especially the rethinking of "self" and "other" is to be taken seriously. Experiential learning (Kolb, 2015: 38) claims to offer this complete character: "[Experiential] Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience." This two-fold learning of seizing and converting experience manifests the holistic character of the concept: Through the recurrent linking of information intake and interpretation, one learns more sustainably. Both, the intake, and the transformation of information retain two forms: Taking information in may arise through a concrete experience of a situation or via an abstract conceptualization of this experience. Transforming experience – the way individuals interpret information and then change their further actions based on this interpretation – may either arise through reflection or through deriving new impulses for action for future, similar experiences (Kolb, 2015: 51). These two forms of either grasping or transforming information are dialectic, since the forms may be internally contradictory, but may be resolved synthetically when combined.

The manifestations of one dialectic can support the manifestations of the other, creating a spiral of learning: Firstly, a direct experience is the basis for observation and reflection. This reflection is then distilled into abstract concepts, from which new implications and instructions for action (in German: *Vornahmen*) can be generated. These in turn are actively tested and thus serve as a basis for new experiences. Experiential learning entails a cyclical unity of two – alleged – opposites, resulting in characteristics that provide this approach with the potential for facilitating postdigital cosmopolitanism: Re-thinking "self and other".

Let us assume the following – of course truly fictional – example of how a learning intervention focusing on postdigital cosmopolitanism could be set up.[2] For the learning intervention to be as flexible, asynchronous, and individual as possible,

2 It is important to note here, that these four points can be conducted/facilitated in this order. This however is only a suggestion. Due to the dialectical character of grasping (Points 1. and

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there needs to be an online platform, on which each step is conducted. The character of this setup can vary in its formality, depending e.g. on the target group.

1. Grasping Experience in a concrete situation:

Experiencing the application and consequences of postdigital cosmopolitanism can, for example, be made when participating in the format *"The world talks"* (Blickle et al., 2023), in which two individuals with different worldviews and/or backgrounds are matched and discuss global topics online realizing the goal "to connect people all over the world to discuss the issues that divide them, and the issues that unite them" (Blickle et al., 2023). This set-up of an experience goes hand in hand with the previously established definition of digital cosmopolitanism: "contact with an 'other' over topics of global significance" (Delanty, 2009: 218). This contact with an "other" can (as shown above) also be realized through digital means.

2. Transforming experience via reflection:

What topics divide and unite our fictitious pair of individuals? How are these differences and similarities discussed? What aspects help or impede the questioning of the categories of "self" and "other"? These kinds of questions are addressed in the reflection part after the experience on our fictitious online platform. Here, an in-person moderator might guide the individuals through reflective questions, or an online whiteboard made accessible via the online platform may provide these questions. This can be conducted regularly after every interaction, or at the end of the program via e.g. online group debriefing sessions synchronously and/or in learning journals asynchronously.

3. Grasping experience via abstract conceptualization in the form of a theoretical input:

After the experiences have been reflected on, there is a need for understanding not only what has happened, but also why it has happened. This theoretical integration can be conducted again on the online platform, via online videos (recorded or live) or educasts that focus e.g. on how perception works, communication theories, etc. Providing theory may satisfy the need for understanding through explanation (Kolb, 2015; Mughal & Zafar, 2011).

3.) and transforming (2. and 4.) experience, they can be approached in a different order or from a different starting point as well.

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4. Transforming experience in developing new ways of acting:

After an experience has been made, reflected on, and explained, questions such as: "How do I transfer this into the real world or my everyday routine?" or "What would I do again, but also what would I do differently the next time I am confronted with an 'other'?" need to be addressed. This future and solution-oriented transformation of an experience can be conducted with a wide range of digital and analogous methods, provided via the online platform: A letter to oneself, that is sent to the person in the foreseeable future, a structured online whiteboard, etc.

Why is this chapter referring to "experiential learning" and not to "virtual experiential learning", even though it is facilitated by digital means? Experiential learning can also take place virtually: "Virtual experiential learning is achieved through the integration of different […] technologies like virtual reality, augmented reality, games and simulations in an active learning context" (de Carvalho, 2019: 2). Virtual experiential learning thus means facilitating the "concrete experience" part of an experiential learning process with the help of virtual means (Majgaard & Weitze, 2020: 373). Virtuality can enrich experiential learning when the prerequisites do not allow a thick "real" experience. This might be undertaken "due to the nature of the concepts to be taught or due to economic, social or ethical reasons" (Santos et al., 2013: 42). For the case of postdigital cosmopolitanism the case is not so simple. One reason complicating the claim of "virtual experiential learning" is the fact that postdigital cosmopolitanism supposes the existence of entangled processes from both digital and material worlds. The other argument lies in the contradiction of contextual factors: Economic and social reasons might call for solely digital facilitation but also do not have to be used mandatorily. If face-to-face interaction is affordable, and/or access to a device or the internet is not possible, these encounters may as well be face-to-face. Thus, "virtual experiential learning" cannot be used when describing the process of facilitating postdigital cosmopolitanism, due to postdigitality's basic assumptions, and the possibility – maybe even necessity – to conduct the facilitation without the primary use of digital means.

Experiential learning, characterized by a cyclical process of grasping and transforming experiences, offers a holistic approach to learning that aligns with the characteristics of postdigital cosmopolitanism. By engaging in concrete experiences, reflecting on them, integrating theoretical insights, and transforming behaviours, individuals can navigate the complexities of a postdigital world and foster meaningful connections with others. This can be seen because of encounters and reflections, leading to learning from the other through self-problematization (Delanty, 2009: 219–220). Thus, a hypothetical experiential learning intervention focusing on postdigital cosmopolitanism, illustrates how facilitation can be employed to achieve these transformative encounters. Experiential learning, combined with digital communication may widen our social horizons, otherwise narrowed by

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algorithms and the reinforcing of preferences: "We pay attention to what we care about and, especially, to persons we care about. Information may flow globally, but our attention tends to be highly local and highly tribal; we care more deeply about those with whom we share a group identity and much less about a distant 'other'" (Zuckerman, 2013: 58). Following the previous example, digital communication may enable encounters, spread and echo topics of global significance and facilitate the re-thinking process, if guided.

In this sense, digital communication may serve on one side as a new environment with its own characteristics, reflected in the notion of postdigitality. On the other side, however, and of course only if applied constructively, the benefits and advantages of digital communication for the process of experiential learning outweigh their disadvantages and impediments.

4. Action Research: The Perfect Match for Investigating the Learning of Postdigital Cosmopolitanism?

Claiming to be able to facilitate postdigital cosmopolitan encounters via experiential learning is one thing, being able to investigate factors that influence the learning process is something else altogether. Virtual action learning (VAL) promises to be able to do exactly that in a way that is sensitive to prerequisites of the postdigital world in which this learning process takes place (Cho & Egan, 2022; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Pedler & Burgoyne, 2015).

The requirements posed by the context, learning process, and learning objective lead to a set of compulsory characteristics the method of investigating learning has to offer. Enabling reflection in order to learn and to overcome notions of the "self" or the "other" is as important for the investigating methodology, as a process-oriented character, respecting the character of experiential learning. Furthermore, cooperation and social contact must not only be of interest to the methodological approach, but also in its very character. Finalizing this list of requirements, the methodology needs to be able to investigate, but even more, be able to create spaces of global significance. This section discusses if and how the sub-form of Action Research, Virtual Action Learning respects all of these requirements raised by the method of facilitation, its objective, and environment.

The overarching research methodology of VAL, Action Research (AR), can be broken down to an easily described, but not easily conducted three-step process. Firstly, the researcher acts on a commonly defined problem, before investigating the successes and shortcomings of the action. After this investigation, an adaptation of the actions follows, resulting in new actions until the researcher is satisfied with the results of the action (Bradbury, 2015; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006).

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AR has quite a variety of forms (Cho & Egan, 2022; Pedler & Burgoyne, 2015), virtual action learning (VAL) is selected here due to its focus on learning and emphasis on the virtual character of the learning environment. In their systematic literature review, Cho & Egan (2022) present four aspects of the current state of VAL

1 VAL "is under-utilised and only recently getting attention due to the pandemic";
2 Facilitation is important in VAL as it needs the initial conditions to be set up along with resources, skills, and processes;
3 "The low-tech [e.g. email] and high-tech [e.g. Second Life] distinction implies that the simpler, the better in the use of technology"; and
4 All research concerns educational contexts, therefore evidence is needed that VAL works in business contexts as well. (Cho & Egan, 2022: 14–15)

As shown, the entangled realities of the analogous and digital world lead to uncertainty which can be responded to by postdigital cosmopolitanism. The influence of digitality in the means and objectives of facilitating postdigital cosmopolitanism has two consequences for the method of this facilitation. Firstly, it needs to cater to the complex character of the postdigital, and secondly, it requires reflection on the cyclical and procedural character of learning. It therefore becomes inevitable for Virtual Action Learning as a sub-form of Action Research to respect these prerequisites as well.

Kurt Lewin introduced the idea of investigating learning processes with the help of Action Research, as Majgaard and Weitze (2020: 3) state: "Lewin's (1946) ideas on Action Research were based on repeating cycles of ideas, execution of actions and fact-finding reflections. The reflections led to new insights, new knowledge, new ideas, and plans." The emphasis on reflection can be found in Kolb's understanding of the experiential learning cycle and it can be argued that the re-thinking of the "self" relies on self-reflection as its very base, thus emerging as the first prerequisite. In Action Research in general and in Virtual Action Learning specifically, reflecting plays a crucial role, paving the way for considering where the undertaken action was successful and where new needs in the context of action have emerged. Coghlan and Coughlan (2015) add to this, exploring not only the relevance of reflection in the context of Action Research but also its collaborative character. They argue reflection can be understood literally in the sense of a mirror: members of the research project review, consider, and visualize their understanding of the issue at hand and how to address or deal with it. Thus, the called for self-problematization and questioning as centrepieces of postdigital cosmopolitanism are echoed in the reflective character of action research.

Next to reflection, the methodological approach to investigating learning also needs to take process orientation into account. Majgaard and Weitze (2020: 372–374) attribute precisely this to Action Research: It proceeds incrementally in circles of re-

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flection and analysis which results in a process-oriented perspective instead of an outcome-oriented one. As action researchers only move forward after careful reflection, the process orientation of experiential learning can also be found at the very heart of Virtual Action Learning.

Coghlan and Coughlan (2015: 378–380) attribute a deeply collaborative character to AR, considering it even a prerequisite, looking at the contexts in which AR is conducted: Action learning research is found in settings where cooperation is high, such as in team situations or wherever information sharing occurs. Therefore, it is not surprising that the magnitude of facilitation described in Cho and Egan's (2022: 24–15) description of the state of the art of VAL matches the process of experiential learning. Without facilitation in the phases of reflection and understanding, experiential learning would look very different, if it were not impossible to conduct at all. The high use and relevance of collaboration in AR touches back upon AR's fundamental epistemological and ontological assumptions: Knowledge creation is considered a collaborative process in AR (Bradbury, 2015; Gibbs et al., 2017). A prerequisite for a collaborative process however is the self-conception of the researcher as an "agent" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006: 29), reflecting their influence and their power, as well as by what and whom they may be influenced by themselves. Again, reflection is something the complex and uncertain environment, objective, and character of the facilitation of postdigital cosmopolitanism asks for and which is at the same time one of the fundamental prerequisites for conducting AR.

Cooperation and the focus on a social component can however be found when looking at the aim of AR. The methodology is considered developmental, aiming at the improvement of learning with social intent. This social intention shows in several forms: "to improve workplace practices through improving learning" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006: 32), by promoting and practising democratic evaluations of learning and its process as well as creating "good social orders by influencing the educational of social formations" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006: 32). AR's social intention, according to McNiff and Whitehead, can thus be closely linked to the character of postdigital cosmopolitanism: Social encounters lead to transformations (e.g. of notions of "self" and "other"), which in turn can result in knowledge through reflection. Since this knowledge emerges collaboratively, its character is of social benefit.

Lastly, postdigital cosmopolitanism calls for encounters within contexts of global significance. Action Research answers this demand with its engagement with problems as one of the methodology's central characteristics. Coghlan and Coughlan (2015: 377–378) argue that "engagement with problems" marks the underlying focus and goal of the research process: Problems that lack clear solutions or are of real-life, adaptive character call for action.

Action learning of high quality then addresses real-life, adaptive problems in a cooperative and reflected manner, with a social intention, aiming at providing solutions. This understanding of VAL as engaging with problems that are of high im-

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portance for everyone involved has two consequences. On the one hand, this notion of VAL enables contexts of global significance. On the other hand, however, the emphasis on collaboration also allows the transition of knowledge from the reflection of the concrete experience into the everyday life of participants. Linking these two aspects together, we can claim AR is able to combine and resolve the prerequisites posed by the postdigital context, cosmopolitanism as a learning objective, and experiential learning as the learning process. Thus, Action Research's subtype of virtual action learning is well equipped to investigate the mechanisms of facilitating postdigital cosmopolitanism.

5. Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

The chapter provides reflections on the facilitation and evaluation of a learning intervention aimed at considering the context, objective, and process of learning. The chapter yields four different considerations. The first two are theoretical and explore the postdigital and, thus, uncertain environment of learning, and its subsequent objective in postdigital cosmopolitanism. The last two considerations are methodological, shedding light on how experiential learning can facilitate cosmopolitanism and how this process can be investigated with virtual action learning. By doing so, a theoretical and methodological connection of the context of learning, its objective, and the learning process is set out.

Postdigital cosmopolitanism was shown to be marked by a paradoxical relationship of cause and effect: The demarcation between digital and analogue realities leads to an increased necessity for postdigital cosmopolitanism, yet it makes it harder to achieve. However, postdigital cosmopolitanism and its mechanisms of first re-thinking and then reconnecting with notions of "self", "other" and the world are presented as an answer to uncertainty. Experiential learning has been presented as one didactic approach to strengthen postdigital cosmopolitanism, holistically and sustainably. Its dialectical relationship of grasping and transforming information results in its appropriateness for the objective of facilitating cosmopolitanism in a postdigital environment. Lastly, VAL's potential to consider the aspects of the learning context as a postdigital environment marked by uncertainty, its objective in facilitating cosmopolitanism, and the experiential learning process pose, has been discussed as well.

The resulting implications for further research ask for an empirical implementation of the suggested design. To answer the question of how encounters over global significance can be facilitated and evaluated based on empirical data could advance research in two fields. On the one hand, the concept of postdigital cosmopolitanism benefits from empirical investigations, on the other hand, the theoretical and methodological debate between action research and evaluation would

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be enriched. On a more abstract and methodological level, a critical reflection and verification of the virtual action learning approach may yield enriching perspectives for the scientific community of action researchers. This can be complemented by theoretically investigating and empirically implementing other methodological ways of exploring the learning process of digital cosmopolitanism.

Investigating specific theoretical questions empirically follow subsequently: Can experiential learning facilitate encounters over topics of global significance? What aspects of the postdigital reality and digital communication enable and impede the re-thinking of the "self", "other" and the world? And what roles do facilitators play in this cyclical process? Especially the last question, focusing on the existential necessity of facilitation both in experiential learning, as well as virtual action learning, is as pressing as it is scarcely researched.

Research on both topics – postdigital cosmopolitanism and facilitating and evaluating its learning via experiential learning and virtual action learning – remain scarce. Since the theoretical concept, the didactic design and the methodological approach are all of high relevance for the questions and challenges our postdigital world poses, applying and evaluating them promises to be of great use for scholars as well as for educators.

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Analyzing Online Discourses

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Constructions of Threats to the "Volk" in Right-Wing Online Discourses and Their Reinforcement by Cosmopolitan Processes

Alina Jugenheimer

Abstract *The contribution deals with constructions of threats in (extreme) right-wing online discourses. These include feminism and gender discourses, abortion, immigration and birth rates, and the chapter focuses on German speaking contexts. It also includes examples of constructions of threats by abortion of the right-catholic website Kath.net. The described threat constructions refer to feminist and human rights achievements, which are regarded as intimidating and endangering. Based on the assumptions of Ulrich Beck concerning cosmopolitanism, I outline how the background of cosmopolitanism can reinforce these threat constructions. Thereby, emancipatory processes become an even greater threat, as they enable legal access to abortion, the disturbance of biological and traditional gender roles and ideas of family, which aggravates the preservation of the "Volk". This can reinforce existing uncertainties and enable right-wing online narratives to appear efficacious, which may lead to a more rapid dissemination of those narratives, which may thus be more easily adopted by people.*

1. Introduction

In a postdigital world the consideration of online phenomena has become inevitable when analyzing societal changes and challenges. As Fergal Lenehan argues, the material world is "[…] engraved with a web of various cosmopolitanisms embedded in the digital, which may be seen as a *labyrinth of postdigital cosmopolitanisms* (…) [emphasis in the original]" (Lenehan, 2022: 15–16). In view of growing right-wing tendencies in e.g. Germany, Italy, Austria, and the United States of America, the discussion of right-wing discourses may be seen as intertwined with the online communicative space. As Simon Strick (2021: 22) points out, far-right sentiments are constantly present in the intimate public spheres of the internet, they determine the climate of discourse and are readily available to very many people with mass effect. This also applies to opposition to emancipatory achievements, mainly through opposition to feminism and discourses regarding gender as well as reproductive rights.

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In recent years, discussions and struggles for physical self-determination and legal access to abortions have repeatedly been a topic for discussion in public media.[1] In some cases, the overturn of reproductive rights is linked with these growing right-wing discourses. Among these was the reversal of the Roe v. Wade ruling in the United States, which ensured access to abortion nationwide and was overturned by the Supreme Court on June 24, 2022.[2]

Emancipatory efforts, including e.g. the dissolution of traditional and hierarchical gender roles, self-determination regarding sexuality and the lifeworld, and struggles for minority rights, as well as the facilitation of access to abortion, have been rejected by various actors. Among them are far-right actors; so-called "pro-life" activists as well as Christian fundamentalists. They shape discourses surrounding abortion, e.g. abortion is labelled the "killing of unborn children". Thereby, constructions of an extremely powerful feminism or gender discourse is created, to which a totalitarian suppression of self-determined life choices is attributed.

The following contribution deals with these various constructions of threat in (extreme) right-wing online discourses, focusing on German speaking contexts. Herein, I will show how such constructions of threats related to emancipatory processes are created. Also, considering the above-cited notion of cosmopolitanisms in the postdigital world (Lenehan, 2022: 16), I use assumptions regarding cosmopolitanism emanating from Ulrich Beck, to show how such constructions of threat are actually reinforced through cosmopolitan processes.

When talking about right-wing discourses, with a focus on German speaking discourse and Germany, a brief clarification regarding the terms used here is nec-

1 Legal access to abortion enables potentially pregnant persons to decide themselves about their own body and lifestyle. Demands for bodily autonomy are part of emancipatory struggles because denying this access incapacitates such persons, as they are denied the right to make decisions concerning their bodies. The denial of bodily autonomy for potentially pregnant persons also upholds supposedly natural ways of living, such as the heterosexual nuclear family and the role of women as mothers, as the norm. This corresponds to a patriarchal, supposedly "natural" (and possibly God-given) social order. Questioning and dissolving such norms is part of emancipatory and feminist struggles, in which the struggle for rights to bodily autonomy continues to play a role. In addition to that, Antje Schrupp (2022: 45) states that it is important to point out why it is immoral and unethical, if third parties or society claims to decide about the bodies of pregnant persons.

2 In Poland abortion has been de facto banned since new regulations introduced by the former PiS-government of October 2020, but under the new prime minister after the latest election in October 2023, the abortion law is set to be loosened. Abortion is also criminalized in Austria with similar regulations as in Germany (where abortion is classified as a criminal offence, but which remains unpunished under certain conditions such as a consultation and a three-day "consideration period"); in Italy abortion is currently permitted within the first 90 days of pregnancy, although it might yet be restricted under the new far-right, and fiercely anti-abortion, government (effective February 2024).

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essary. As Manès Weisskircher points out, due to historical reasons, the term right-wing is used differently in German than in other European languages where political actors often use descriptions such as "la droite" for themselves, while in Germany "[…] the centre-right usually prefers to refer to itself as 'conservative'" (Weisskircher, 2024: 10). English-language publications often follow the definition of far-right as an umbrella term, with a focus on nativism and authoritarianism as suggested by Cas Mudde (2007) (cited in Weisskircher, 2024: 9). I follow the common use of the term far-right where appropriate, but look to be as specific as possible when discussing right-wing discourses in Germany. At the same time, I wish to refrain from using the description of "conservative" when actually speaking of right-wing discourses, to avoid the danger of trivializing these discourses.

For the present topic it is important to note the specific effects of online spheres as an important ground for the dissemination of right-wing discourses. After pointing out some of those effects, the construction of threat by feminism and gender is illustrated, followed by the construction of threat by abortion. Here, an illustration how abortion is constructed as a threat by using examples from the right- wing Catholic website Kath.net is included. I will then outline the construction of threat by immigration and birth rates, which remains partly intertwined with abortion. Afterwards, I describe some arguments regarding cosmopolitan societies, arguing that (some) cosmopolitan processes actually reinforce the constructions of threat towards the so-called "Volk"[3], particularly evident in the role of women as mothers.

2. Research Context

The present contribution examines the phenomena of antifeminism, anti-abortion activism and the far-right in online spheres. I thereby focus on opposition to abortion as well as emancipatory gender discourses and feminism, seen as components of antifeminism. For the English-speaking world, the work of Debbie Ging and Eugenia Siapera (Ging & Siapera, 2019), *Gender Hate Online: Understanding the New Anti-Feminism* remains a central text when dealing with digital anti-emancipatory discourses. Regarding the phenomena of anti-abortion activists online, research does exist, e.g. on groups of violent Christians in the UK (Littler, 2020). As for the German context, works of actors and discourses countering abortion can be primarily found concerning the so called *Lebensschutz* [pro-life] movement (Sanders et al., 2018), or on the reproduction and population policy of the far-right so-called "Identitarian Movement" (see Goetz, 2020). Important contributions relating to the far-right are

3 The "Volk" is seen as a "descent- and generation-crossing »Zeugungsgemeinschaft« [emphasis in the original]" (Kellersohn, 2018: 63), which means something like a procreation community [translation by Alina Jugenheimer. All translations by the author, except where stated].

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to be seen in the anthology *Post-Digital Cultures of the Far Right* (Fielitz & Thurston, 2019). As the editors stress, a differentiation of online and offline practices will not be useful anymore, as "(…) contemporary protest politics is fundamentally post-digital" (Albrecht et al., 2019: 9). Especially conveyed narratives and contents cannot be easily separated between online and offline narratives. However, there may be differences in the effects of providing right-wing narratives in online spheres. Based on the aforementioned work, this chapter discusses right-wing anti-abortion activists online and their intersection with other anti-democratic narratives and describes how threat constructions are reinforced against the background of cosmopolitanism.

3. The Internet and the Dissemination of Right-Wing Discourses

In a postdigital world, online spheres are permanently available, part of daily-life and have become easier to use as "(…) the internet is now always-on, always-there, and always in mind for the vast majority of the world and for every social group and nation-state" (Hunsinger et al., 2020: vi). Thus, digital activism is increasing also in Germany, where various online spheres of the far-right have emerged in recent years (Volk, 2022: 102). The internet, including social media, thereby functions as a partly uncontrolled area where right-wing extremism can receive new impetus, mainly by providing dramatic narratives of a national threat in the digital sphere (Fielitz & Marcks, 2020: 160). The dissemination of such narratives and the construction of (non-real) threats have also increased more dramatically meaning threatening content in online space due to the *disinhibition effect* (Suler, 2004). Through this disinhibition, narratives of threats such as emancipatory gender discourses, feminism, abortion or migration can be loaded dramatically by drastic statements and language, which can amplify the perceived threat. The online sphere facilitates instant reactions to global events and thereby enables the use of these for threat constructions or the construction of threatening changes observed in other parts of the world. Moreover, it is possible to contextualize events for one's own agenda in a very short time.

Next to the dissemination of right-wing narratives and discourses in online spheres, such narratives and discourses, also including threat constructions for the "Volk", are supported by online effects such as the echo chamber effect. Cinelli et al. (2021: 1) "[…] broadly define echo chambers as environments in which the opinion, political leaning, or belief of users about a topic gets reinforced due to repeated interactions with peers or sources having similar tendencies and attitudes." In the context of echo chambers, threat constructions can be confirmed or even be sparked by like-minded individuals and therefore become more threatening. Another aspect supporting this, is the idea that supposedly everyone can become a self-appointed expert on almost every topic. Due to the constant availability and flood of infor-

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mation on social media and online platforms, supposed knowledge about almost everything can theoretically be acquired by most people and afterwards be disseminated among like-minded groups and underpin the constructed threats. This can very often be highly problematic, especially when the acquired and widespread information is not based on facts, or only partially so. Thereby fake news is spread, and it also has significance in relation to the supporting of threat constructions. As Ruth Wodak points out, more and more people rely solely on information in their own echo-chambers and consider information apart from that as fake news (Wodak, 2020: 81).

4. Threat Constructions in Right-Wing Online Discourses

Often combined with threat constructions of right-wing extremism, there are threat constructions regarding emancipatory and feminist achievements, such as rights for (bodily) self-determination. Also, there are constructions of threat by immigration, mainly immigration from countries that are allegedly not fitting to the construction of the "Volk" as a homogenous, white and Christian people. Most of these threat constructions are based on the aim of preserving hierarchical gender relations and the supposed homogeneity of the people, the so-called "Volk". In right-wing discourses, a threat to the supposed "Volk" is constructed, with reference to often dramatic and hazardous narratives and expressions. Such constructions can be found in the online context of various actors including the extreme right.

4.1 Construction of Threat by Feminism and Gender Discourses

One pattern of opposing emancipatory achievements is to take action against feminism and gender discourses themselves. Thereby, feminism and gender discourses are constructed as the cause of the threat and are seen as responsible for harmful societal transformations. Such changes include the dissolution of gender roles, especially the role of women. In these discourses "woman" is seen as a biological concept. It includes childbirth as a supposedly natural desire of women and an important contribution for the "family" and the "Volk". Family is thereby seen as the heterosexual nuclear family, limiting the concept of family to heterosexual relationships with children. Furthermore, the dissolution of sexual binaries is seen as a dangerous change. Thus, the very terms gender and feminism are themselves constructed as a threat. Birgit Sauer (2019, as cited in Birsl, 2020: 43) has argued that the term gender allows different actors to link the term with their concerns and to express them as a discourse of threat. Consequently, the construction of threat by feminism and gender discourses is able to consolidate various actors opposing the alleged danger coming from emancipatory achievements.

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By constructing feminism and gender as a threat, they are re-constructed as ideological or totalitarian. Frequently, the narrative of a so-called "gender-ideology" is used to emphasize the alleged danger of the term, which is supposedly dangerous for children, women, families, or the "Volk", where, depending on the narrative, often everything is threatened at the same time. The term "gender-ideology" can be ascribed to the Vatican, where the *Pontifical Council for the Family* mentioned the term for the first time in 2000 and recommended that it be investigated more thoroughly (Chołuj, 2015: 220). Such constructions of threat imply that gender discourses and feminism supposedly forbid one from living in freedom, whereby living in freedom in this context is equated with a form of living within a heterosexual nuclear family. The constructions of feminism and gender as threat suggest oppression, which is countered with the defence of a supposedly "natural" order – sometimes considered as God-given and therefore "natural" – and a self-declared fight for liberation from feminism and gender. Often, the self-declared struggle against feminism and gender is declared as a supposed struggle *for* women. However, women who do not conform to the role model of the biological concept of women are rejected because they are accused of being responsible for the impending destruction of "the family" and the "Volk". Consequently, the narratives surrounding the constructed threat of feminism and gender discourses are about liberation *from* feminism and gender discourses, which are seen as threats to "the family" and therefore also the "Volk".

4.2 Construction of Threat by Abortion

The right to legal access to abortion and therefore the right to bodily autonomy has been a very important part of emancipatory struggles. Consequently, the fight against abortion is embedded in a denial of these emancipatory struggles. By allowing legal access to abortion, it is possible not only to dissolve the ascribed and supposedly natural role of women as mothers but also the supposedly "natural" order of society which is considered fundamentally important to maintain the "Volk". In general, feminist struggles for reproductive self-determination are countered by various actors. Actors of the extreme right often express this with the threat of an alleged "Volkstod [death of the nation]": The term "Volkstod" expresses the fear that the German "Volk", understood as a biological community of descent, is threatened by falling birth-rates, abortion and immigration (Botsch & Kopke, 2019: 9). Sonja Angelika Strube (2021: 54) points out that so-called "pro-life"" activism, as probably the most morally respected orientation of anti-genderism, is particularly close to Christians and their institutions, and functions as a link between anti-genderism and explicitly extreme right-wing ideology. The opposition to abortion is a recurring public phenomenon in Germany. In a radical form it manifests itself, for example, at the annual "Marsch für das Leben [March for Life]" in September in Berlin, which took place simultaneously in Cologne for the first time in 2023

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(Fromm et al., 2023), as well as in so-called pavement harassments in which anti-abortion activists harass pregnant persons, for example when seeking counselling services and medical interventions. This construction of threat by abortion not only links Christian and right-wing groups, but also enables other groups and actors to connect to this threat construction as long as they share the standpoint that emphasizes the supposed biological determination of gender. The latter can lead to the assumption that every person who has a womb has a supposedly "natural desire" to give birth. The aim of constructing a threat to the "Volk" due to abortion and the self-determination of pregnant persons is to preserve a homogeneous "Volk", seen as a group of the same descent, of white and often of Christian people. Consequently, the construction of threat through abortion refers to the role of white (and Christian) women, as women without children are indirectly held responsible for such threat constructions, and feminism is often blamed for this. Besides that, the threat construction is supported by a generally critical attitude towards birth control measures. For example, Gabriele Kuby, a right-catholic anti-gender activist, sees the purpose of humans in the Creation of the Living and that humans are therefore fundamentally called to reproduce (Perintfalvi & Fischer, 2021: 254). This results in women being denied the right to self-determination, especially over their own bodies.

4.2.1 The Construction of Threat by Abortion on the Right-Catholic Website Kath.net

While political platforms do not necessarily take a position on religion and religious platforms do not necessarily position themselves on politics, Kath.net combines both topics and can therefore be seen as a right-wing Catholic platform. Kath.net covers a wide range of topics, including politics, the world church, family, and "pro-life" activism and views itself as a news portal (Kath.net, 2024). In general, the platform speaks out explicitly against abortion and makes the fight against reproductive rights part of their agenda (Kath.net, 2024). Key topics on Kath.net concerning the topic "pro-life" are, amongst others, the perception of abortion as a sin, referring to it as "killing children" and the focus on the alleged protection of children, whereby foetuses and embryos are also considered "children". In various articles, narratives can be found which construct abortion as a threat.

For example, abortion is seen as a threat to heterosexual couples, respectively "family" and children. In an article (Kath.net 79017) it is claimed that in fertility laboratories children are supposedly killed:

> "Rational ist die Wiederkehr des menschenfressenden Molochkultes nicht zu erklären. Und die perverse Schraube wird immer noch eine Windung weitergedreht. Nicht nur für "freie Liebe" darf man nun Kinder töten, nein auch für's Mutterglück. Nichts Anderes passiert in den Befruchtungslabors, wo Unmengen von Embryo-

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> nen erzeugt und entsorgt werden, damit eine unfruchtbare Frau – oder ein schwules/lesbisches Paar – zu "ihrem Kind" kommt [The return of the Moloch cult cannot be explained rationally. And the perverse screw is turned still further. Children are now not only being killed for 'free love', but also for maternal happiness. Nothing else happens in the fertility laboratories, where vast numbers of embryos are created and disposed of so that an infertile woman – or a gay/lesbian couple – can have 'their child']" (Kath.net 79017).

This statement includes the narrative of abortion as killing children and at the same time claims that this happens primarily to assist certain women, assumed to be infertile, and non-heterosexual persons to have children. By using figurative language such as the phrase "Moloch cult", the allegedly drastic effects of abortion are emphasized. Furthermore, the statement displays the profound antifeminist stand of Kath.net: By stating that the alleged killing of children is caused by non-heterosexual persons or certain women, an analogy between having children as a non-heterosexual couple and abortion itself as a sin is created. This points out that abortion is seen as a sin, but at the same time having children should only be possible for the heterosexual nuclear family, so abortion is seen as a threat to it.

Also, abortion is constructed as a threat to free speech. Media other than Kath.net itself are accused of spreading fake news concerning abortion. For example, the website claims that since the reversal of the Roe vs. Wade judgement the American media has supposedly promoted myths and half-truths regarding the consequences of abortion bans (Kath.net 79404, also Kath.net 79143), e.g. by stating that:

> "Seit der Aufhebung des Urteils 'Roe v. Wade' verbreiten amerikanische Medien Mythen und Halbwahrheiten über mögliche Folgen von Abtreibungsverboten [Since the overturn of the 'Roe v. Wade' ruling, the American media has been spreading myths and half-truths about possible consequences of abortion bans]" (Kath.net 79404).

Part of the fight for reproductive rights is providing information about abortion as well as confronting the consequences if legal access to abortion is restricted. Thus Kath.net presents itself as a reputable news source.

Kath.net claims that the support of abortion is supposedly financially funded by e.g., billionaires, by former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer or Planned Parenthood (Kath.net 79983) as well as certain foundations (see e.g. Kath.net 80205), which indirectly refers to an alleged "Abortion Lobby". This alleged lobby is also associated with politicians: "Buschmann betreibt Agenda der Abtreibungslobby [Buschmann pursues an abortion lobby agenda]" (Kath.net 78774) or they criticize how the supposed death of unborn children is allegedly turned into a business: "Wie kann eine Gesell-

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schaft, die sich auch gerne als 'human' verstehen will, denen den Weg ebnen, die aus dem Tod ungeborener Kinder ein Geschäft gemacht haben? [How can a society that wants to see itself as 'humane' pave the way for those who have made a business of the death of unborn children?]" (Kath.net 78774).

By such claims, a supposedly powerful group is constructed, supported by financial means, which is allegedly able to influence politics. This shows parallels with antisemitic conspiracy narratives regarding powerful people who use financial means to influence political developments. In this context, as Monika Schwarz-Friesel points out, proverbs, names or catchwords are combined, which can be directly associated with Jews or Judaism, thus the anti-Jewish notion of a Jewish power with global influence becomes, for example, an alleged "Financial Lobby" that controls everything (Schwarz-Friesel, 2020: 50). Especially by using the term "lobby" for pro-abortion activists, an alleged threat is stated. "Lobby" indicates that a supposedly powerful, but clandestine group advocates for their issue, and endorses the constructed threat.

In another article on Kath.net the alleged restriction of democracy and the rule of law by abortion is claimed, whereby the author discusses US-president Joe Biden's and vice president Kamala Harris' support for the right of legal access to abortion (Kath.net 79725), e.g. by stating that:

> "Biden und Harris treten für sogenannte 'abortion rights' ein. Aber 'zu einem Rechtsstaat gehört auch der Schutz der Rechte derer, die selbst keine Stimme haben, die sich nicht wehren können [Biden and Harris advocate for so-called 'abortion rights'. But 'the task of the state of law also includes protection of the rights of those who have no voice themselves and are unable to defend themselves]" (Kath.net 79725).

Therein, Kath.net claims that by allowing legal access to abortion, the state of law is endangered while democracy is being restricted. The latter also includes the construction of threat based on emancipatory struggles such as standing up for the self-determination of pregnant persons. This is constructed as a threat mainly to democracy and the rule of law. The author sometimes also uses some English terms and embeds their German equivalents in this German contribution. For example, by speaking of a "Geschichte von justice and equality [narrative or story of justice and equality]" (Kath.net 79725) or "ein Thema von Freiheit und Recht (oder vielmehr 'freedom and liberty') (…) [an issue of freedom and justice (or rather 'freedom and liberty')]" (Kath.net 79725) to highlight the point of view that Harris does not actually stand up for justice and equality. By using such terms, which resemble U.S. culture wars terminology, Kath.net emphasizes the alleged threat of legal access to abortion for a supposedly free democracy. Similar applications can be also seen in another contribution (Kath.net 78807) by terms like "Abtreibung 'on demand' [abor-

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tion 'on demand']" and "Die Cancel Culture greift erfolgreich und führt zu steigender Verengung dessen, was man öffentlich äußern 'darf'" [Cancel culture is working successfully and leads to an increasing restriction of what one is 'allowed' to say in public]" (Kath.net 78807).

Furthermore, abortion is also constructed as a threat to Christianity and the "Volk", which can be seen in a statement on Kath.net citing that

> "Heute werde die Abtreibung von der Führungselite, die in den meisten Bereichen in den USA das Sagen hat, als 'heiliger Ritus' betrachtet. Nur so seien die 'hysterischen Ausraster' vieler Befürworter legaler Abtreibungen über ein Urteil des Obersten Gerichtshofes nachvollziehbar, welches eine schlecht begründete Entscheidung ('Roe v. Wade') aufhebt und die Abtreibung wieder dem demokratischen Prozess überantwortet [Today, abortion is considered a 'sacred rite' by the ruling elite in most areas of the US. Considering this is the only way to understand the 'hysterical outbursts' of many supporters of legal abortion over a decision of the Supreme Court, which overturned a poorly reasoned decision ('Roe v. Wade') and handed abortion back over to the democratic process]" (Kath.net 78818).

That claim not only reproduces statements that mention a supposed secret elite but also presents abortion as a "sacred rite" and is quoted on Kath.net completely uncritically. The reason given on Kath.net for this portrayal of abortion is that persons demanding safe and legal access to abortion were supposedly reacting "hysterically" in light of the overturning of Roe v. Wade. This attribution emphasizes the derogatory attitude on Kath.net towards persons who stand up for bodily autonomy and subordinates their needs for "the family". By using the term "hysterically", reference is made to a supposed "disease", which dates back to Antiquity and was, for example, a technique used in the 19th century to deny women positions in the public sphere (Gärtner & Nolte, 2020). Claiming abortion is a sacred rite resembles the antisemitic narrative of the blood libel[4], especially in the context of abortion as the "killing of children". Comparable to this antisemitic narrative, abortion is described as being performed for a ritual purpose. Such narrations, especially in the Middle Ages, are the framework for increased dissemination of an alleged Jewish conspiracy (Heil, 2006: 225).

These examples show how abortion and the struggle for more bodily autonomy is constructed as a threat by using dramatic comparisons and emotionally loaded narratives. Some of the examples show in particular that antifeminism and especially narratives of conspiracy ideology and antisemitism are used to highlight the opposition to abortion in a particularly inhuman manner.

4 The antisemitic narrative of the blood libel falsely asserts that "Jews kill children to drink their blood for ritual purposes".

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4.3 Construction of Threat by Immigration and Birth Rates

Associated with the construction of threat by abortion is also the construction of threat by immigration and birth rates. Hereby, the construction of threat through abortion and the responsibility of women for the "Volk" is combined with anti-migrant and conspiracy ideologist narratives. This is particularly evident with the narrative of a so called "Great Replacement". According to Judith Goetz, reasons for the construction of the so-called "Great Replacement" by the self-appointed "Identitarian Movement" are in close connection to far-right ideas of gender relations, since a pronatalist, nativist and familist policy is being demanded to stop the birth decline (Goetz, 2020: 46). This includes, especially for women, a restriction of the right to self-determination, in order to re-traditionalize gender relations based on supposedly natural roles (Goetz, 2020: 46). Taking this into account, the construction of threat in those narratives opposes several emancipatory achievements, e.g., the right of self-determination of one's own body and choice of the way of living. Such threat constructions disregard the fact that nations and national identity are themselves constructed and have not always existed as the frame of reference of the alleged threatened "Volk". As Anne-Marie Thiesse (2007: 27) points out: "National identities are not perceived of as the product of a reconfiguration that homogenised differences but as creations *sui generis*, as perfectly autonomous. National identities have the particularity of being founded on a denial of change that glorifies archaism and the immutability of a long-lived community that has existed since time began [emphasis in the original]". Instead of considering national identity as constructed, the "Volk" as a supposed national community in German right-wing discourse is seen as a supposedly natural and unchangeable community of homogenous people. It is based also on the sustaining of traditional gender roles as a key factor in the maintenance of homogeneity. In the analysis of the postmigrant society of Naika Foroutan (2021), migration, freedom of movement (due to the Schengen agreement) and gender are described as the cause of a questioning of symbolic boundaries, which can trigger a high degree of confusion, if group contexts or symbolic ideas of nation and people become blurred (Foroutan, 2021: 161). Following this argumentation, migration also challenges boundaries which are seen as naturally given, and due to discussions of and struggles for feminism, the described shifting of symbolic boundaries also blurs supposedly naturally given gender relations and roles. It can also lead to fending off the changes of feminist struggles such as reproductive rights, or even sometimes strategically combating them. This includes a "fight" for the preservation of hierarchical gender relations and the supposed homogeneity of the people because they are seen as naturally given and, therefore, not changeable. Thereby anti-migrant ideas and the role of women, including their responsibility to maintain the "Volk", are stated. Consequently, the described ques-

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tioning of symbolic boundaries strengthens the construction of threat by immigration and birth rates.

5. Constructions of Threat and Cosmopolitanism in Online Contexts

Since contemporary life is embedded in "postdigital cosmopolitanisms" (Lenehan, 2022: 18), such processes as described in the previous sections also take place against the backdrop of cosmopolitanism and a cosmopolitan society, which also influences the constructions of threats in right-wing online discourses. Therefore, after describing the assumptions of Ulrich Beck with regard to cosmopolitanism, I argue that during cosmopolitan processes, threat constructions are reinforced.

5.1 Influential Process of Cosmopolitanism for Right-Wing Online Discourses

Online spheres play an important role in developing and spreading right-wing discourses, taking place against the background of cosmopolitanism. Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznaider (2010) argue that the discourse on cosmopolitanism should also consider the "*unintended and lived* cosmopolitanism [emphasis in the original]", as it is becoming increasingly important due to the rising interdependence of social actors across national borders (Beck & Sznaider, 2010: 387). According to the authors, "(…) this 'cosmopolitanization' occurs as unintended and unseen *side-effects* of actions which are not intended as 'cosmopolitan' in the normative sense [emphasis in the original]" (Beck & Sznaider, 2010: 387). The authors therefore suggest a differentiation between the concepts of cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitanization, whereby they define cosmopolitanization as follows:

> "The notion 'cosmopolitanization' is designed to draw attention to the fact that the emerging cosmopolitan reality is also, and even primarily, a function of coerced choices or a side-effect of unconscious decisions" (Beck & Sznaider, 2010: 387).

Thus, the threat constructions described in this contribution are embedded in the process of cosmopolitanization as well. In the following, when talking about processes of cosmopolitanism, it needs to be considered that those processes include unseen and unintentional processes as well. They are especially important for the discussion of right-wing online discourses, because they highlight that withdrawing from cosmopolitan processes is not completely possible since there may be unseen but impactful consequences of those processes. This applies to online discourses and thus also to the constructions of threats as well as to the defence of the supposedly natural order, including the role of women and the aim of preserving the homogenous, white and Christian "Volk". Especially in online spheres, which are character-

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ized amongst others by fast communication and the easy dissemination of information and news, changes to the lifeworld due to emancipation are seen as threats. Considering the changing lifeworld, processes of cosmopolitanism initially also may lead to the breaking of formerly-held established ideas of the lifeworld. However, Ulrich Beck and Daniel Levy point out that the juxtaposition of cosmopolitanism to a naturalized and inescapable version of nationhood and statehood is not effective, as cosmopolitan orientations and the national can complement each other and the process of cosmopolitanism can actually change the idea of nationhood (Beck & Levy, 2013: 5). Consequently, cosmopolitanization is seen as "(…) a constitutive feature of the reconfiguration of nationhood" (Beck & Levy, 2013: 21). Beck also calls cosmopolitanization a process of "*internal* globalization, globalization *from within* the national societies [emphasis in the original]" (Beck, 2002: 17). Thereby "[i]ssues of global concern are becoming part of the everyday local experiences and the 'moral life-worlds' of the people" (Beck, 2002: 17). In a postdigital society, this process has become easier as global issues partly consist of daily digital life amid the flow of texts and images on mobile phones and are very easily accessed from everywhere with an internet connection. This applies to several kinds of content – including global issues in news and information as well as the possibility of global networks and communication – and also creates convenient opportunities for networking for right-wing actors online. Since the nation state and national identity are changing, it creates space for the emergence of ideas of identity and belonging adjusted to the cosmopolitan society. In what Beck calls the "*ethnic globalization paradox* [emphasis in the original]" (Beck, 2002: 38), he emphasizes that "[a]t a time when the world is growing closer together and becoming more cosmopolitan, in which, therefore, the borders and barriers between nations and ethnic groups are being lifted, ethnic identities and divisions are becoming stronger once again" (Beck, 2002: 38). This could lately also be seen in right-wing German speaking discourses online, including the revivification of "völkisch" [ethnic] ideas.

Regarding the emergence of such ideas and discourses, Fergal Lenehan (2022: 22) speaks of "(…) a type of alternative-cosmopolitan process, in which there is however a non-benign transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with (selected) others over issues of (supposed) global significance." As Lenehan outlines, in this way forms of extreme antidemocratic thought can be created by the interaction in specific contexts of "*very specific* others [emphasis in the original]" (Lenehan, 2022: 22). Thus, cosmopolitan processes do not in any case unwind "völkisch" [ethnic] ideas, but in fact may lead to a reinvigoration of them and therefore also reinforce the described constructions of threat, which will be outlined in the next section.

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5.2 Reinforcement of Threat Constructions by Cosmopolitanism

Right-wing (online) discourses also exist in a cosmopolitan society. Ulrich Beck (2011: 1346) introduces a "*cosmopolitan sociology* [emphasis in the original]" and provides eight theses regarding changes in society towards "imagined cosmopolitan communities" (Beck, 2011: 1346).[5] By discussing three of Beck's theses in view of the constructions of threats in right-wing online discourses, I argue that in a cosmopolitan society, the dissolution of traditional gender roles, and thereby also the role of women, becomes an even greater threat for the "Volk".

The first thesis Beck provides is the following: "The endemic nature of global risks creates a new 'cosmopolitan civilizational shared destiny' or a new global civility" (Beck, 2011: 1349). According to Beck, because of "coercive cosmopolitization", emerging insecurities due to *world risk society* lead to a global responsibility as well as counter-tendencies (Beck, 2011: 1349). The emergence of counter-tendencies of the new global responsibility may reinforce threat constructions: Instead of sharing responsibility for global risks, immigration is fought off (except for immigrants who are white and Christian) and traditional ideas of family and gender roles, as well as ideas of nation and "Volk", become more important due to the focus on one's "own" family and community. Therefore, abortion is seen as a threat, especially for one's "own" as has been shown in chapter 4.2.1 and becomes evident e.g. in the narrative of abortion as the "killing of children". As one's "own" becomes more important (again), immigration is rejected and thus any responsibility for the protection of the alleged non-national "Others" is denied. Thus, immigration is seen as a threat to the "Volk". Considering shared destiny and cosmopolitan processes, it becomes an even greater threat as the shared global destiny of *world risk society* aggravates the preservation of the "Volk". Consequently, in cosmopolitan societies, the increasing necessity of global responsibility may increase the construction of threat by immigration and declining birth rates.

Another thesis Beck provides is:

> "[…] The strength, the survival of the nation depends ultimately on the readiness of each member of this nation to sacrifice his life for it. Action in world-risk society is based on the complete opposite, that the interest in survival of all becomes the self-interest of each individual" (Beck, 2011: 1354).

5 In the above-mentioned article, Beck differentiates between cosmopolitization as a concept and a research program from cosmopolitanism as an idea (Beck, 2011: 1347). Since Beck introduces the thesis focussing on cosmopolitization, I will also use this term whenever Beck speaks about cosmopolitization. When talking about cosmopolitan processes in general, including the unintentional effects of cosmopolitanization, I talk about cosmopolitan processes.

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This means that because of cosmopolitization, individuals develop a great sense of responsibility for themselves and a cosmopolitan society. This leads to the fact that individuals feel less responsible for the "Volk", and the preservation of this (descent-based) community. Also, a cosmopolitan society is not "(…) based on the idea that it is an honor for each individual to die for the fatherland" (Beck 2011: 1354). This is accompanied by a decreased obligation to maintain the national community, or, as in German right-wing discourses, the community of descent ("the Volk"), for example by ensuring the maintenance of the "Volk" through childbirth. In right-wing (online) discourses, the decline of birth rates and the individualization of ways of life are attributed to feminism or gender discourses and constructed as a threat. The declining willingness in cosmopolitan society to sacrifice oneself for the nation or "the Volk" reinforces the transition to different ways of living initiated by feminist achievements (such as legal access to abortion). As has been shown in chapter 4.2.1, the struggles of persons who stand up for bodily autonomy and their own rights are constructed as a threat to "the family" as well as having children not in a heterosexual nuclear family, which may both be seen as achievements of emancipatory struggles. Such emancipatory processes – as well as cosmopolitan processes – can lead to increased emancipation for individuals and thereby lead to a declining willingness to take responsibility for the "Volk", and the willingness to sacrifice oneself for it. Therefore, cosmopolitization may reinforce the construction of feminism and gender discourses as a threat to "the Volk".

And finally, the thesis of Beck (2011: 1351), stating that by the consideration of cosmopolitization, societies not only can become more open and communitarian but refer back to traditional values, which can be seen as emphasizing the reinforcement of threat constructions during cosmopolitan processes:

> "The relation between cosmopolitization is, nevertheless, neither inevitable nor linear; instead, cosmopolitization can do the exact opposite, leading to renationalization, re-ethnicization, and so on, as can at present be observed in Europe as well as in many other parts of the globe" (Beck, 2011: 1351).

Following that, arguments such as those of right-wing online discourses such as traditional gender roles for the preservation of the "Volk" or the turndown of abortion presented above, which appear anti-progressive, can also exist in a cosmopolitan society. The examples of Kath.net presented in chapter 4.2.1 present such arguments, also including indirectly antisemitic and conspiracy ideologist narratives. They highlight the existence of ideas opposing cosmopolitization, understood as an opportunity for societies to become more communitarian and democratic. Consequently, even against the background of a cosmopolitan process, right-wing discourses and traditional gender roles can remain or even become more important, as the construction of homogeneity of the "Volk" is not (or not only) bound by terri-

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torial boundaries, but is based on descent, and very often also on faith. In the face of re-ethnicization, the role of women as mothers – considering the construction of the danger of the "Volkstod" narrative, it is the role of white women – becomes particularly important because it is necessary to preserve the homogenous "Volk". Emancipatory efforts, such as feminism and gender discourses, the dissolution of traditional gender roles and abortion threaten this role of women. However, since this role becomes more important during re-ethnicization, meaning referring back to supposedly ethnic criteria, such as defining a community as descent-based, the threat constructions are reinforced. Therefore, in a cosmopolitan society, the dissolution of traditional gender roles and thereby also the dissolution of the role of women as well as abortion become even greater threats to the "Volk".

Those reinforcements of threat constructions by cosmopolitan processes are spread online in the same way that threat constructions also circulate. Due to the effects of online spheres, as echo chambers, those reinforced constructions of threat may acquire greater emphasis and thus may appear even more hazardous.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this contribution is to illustrate how feminism and gender discourses are used for constructions of threat in right-wing online discourses and how they are reinforced during cosmopolitan processes. It has been shown how threats are constructed and how those constructions are enabled in their partly very drastic form by online spheres, which can also amplify them. Alongside the construction of threat by feminism and gender discourses the construction of threat by abortion refers especially to the role of women as mothers and has been shown by focusing on forms of language gleamed from the right-catholic website Kath.net. The threat constructed due to abortion is answered by pursuing the preservation of hierarchical gender relations and the supposed homogeneity of the "Volk", which can also be seen in the construction of threat by immigration and declining birth rates. In the end, this all refers back to the preservation of supposed biological, traditional and hierarchical gender relations, particularly the role of women as mothers and ideas of cohabitation. As Ulrich Beck states, anti-democratic tendencies may also lead to cosmopolitanism: "[T]he combination of ethnic nationalism and democratic authoritarianism adds up to severe attack on liberty. But at the same time, in a dialectical turn, it encourages and enforces cosmopolitical movements as well (…)" (Beck, 2002: 41). Even though cosmopolitan processes include many opportunities for a new global and hopefully more equal society, the focus here is on the effects of cosmopolitanism reinforcing the constructions of threats, and thus may lead to a fallback to a less emancipatory society. But to support the commitment to a more equal, global and democratic society, cosmopolitan processes are necessary and offer opportunities.

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Future theoretical discussions dealing with the construction of threat in right-wing online discourses should consider the shifts in society based on the concept of a postmigration society of Naika Foroutan (2021) and their impact on such threat constructions such as traditional gender roles and abortion. Also, further research on how threat constructions are reinforced by communication in echo chambers, such as comment sections of right-wing platforms or on social media, are needed. Furthermore, future research on this topic should also examine how actors in right-wing online discourses deal with obvious effects of cosmopolitan processes.

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Navigating a Societal Paradox: Racism and Narratives of National Identity in Argentina's Social Network X

Carmen Pereyra

Abstract *Towards the end of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, when Argentina had already secured a place in the quarter-finals, The Washington Post published an article with the headline "Why doesn't Argentina have more Black players?" For weeks, Argentine Twitter users went from direct attacks on the author of the article – mostly accusing her of being ignorant of Argentina's racial reality, denying the prevailing "White Narrative" that the article sought to point out – to sarcastic mockery and finally to the accusation of academic colonialism. In this chapter I analyse the arguments put forward in response to the above-mentioned newspaper article and explain the main narratives depicted. The study interprets, reconstructs, and explains the overarching narratives present in the responses, unveiling, I argue, a societal paradox; 'Argentine society', as reflected in this discourse, perceives itself as post-migratory and post-race, while simultaneously perpetuating a racist and colonial imaginary through the enduring myth of the 'crisol de razas' (melting pot). This study contributes not only to a broader understanding of racism in Argentina, but more specifically to national cultural perspectives on dealing with racism, especially within the social network X. It also serves as a testament to the influence of social network dynamics on our processes of knowledge acquisition, discussion and opinion formation.*

Introduction

The article titled "Why doesn't Argentina have more Black players in the World Cup?" authored by the African-American researcher Erika Denise Edwards was published on 8 December 2022 by the US newspaper, *The Washington Post* (Edwards, 2022). The newspaper's Twitter/X account shared the online article on 9 December, prompting a great number of reactions from its followers. Most Argentinian Twitter/X users reacted mainly to the title of the article and even ignored the tagline (See Fig. 1).

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Fig. 1: The title of the article received most of the attention while people ignored the tagline and the author's research background. Screenshot 4 June 2023

Why doesn't Argentina have more Black players in the World Cup?

Argentina is far more diverse than many people realize — but the myth that it is a White nation has persisted

Perspective by Erika Denise Edwards

Erika Denise Edwards is the author of the award-winning book "Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law and the Making of a White Argentine Republic" and an associate professor at the University of Texas at El Paso.

December 8, 2022 at 6:00 a.m. EST

In the article, Edwards explores the lack of representation of Black players in Argentina's national football team, especially in contrast to other South American countries, such as Brazil. The author argues that this lack of representation is a result of a history of Black erasure at the heart of the country's self-definition, which has been perpetuated by several myths that try to explain the lack of Black Argentines (with only 149,493 people being identified as Black in Argentina's 2010 census).

The article outlines prevalent myths Argentinians use to justify this absence: That Black men were used as "cannon fodder" in 19th century wars; that the high death toll of Black men caused Black women to form relationships with European men; and, finally, the belief that diseases, particularly yellow fever, disproportionately killed off the Black population. Edwards contends that Argentina historically had a significant Black population, including enslaved people, their descendants, and immigrants, with records indicating that one-third of Argentina's population was Black by the end of the 18th century. She argues that political leaders, such as former president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi, worked to associate national identity with European heritage and promoted White European immigration, even amending the constitution to favour it.

Between 1860 and 1914, thousands of European immigrants transformed Argentina's landscape. Many Black and Indigenous (*Pueblos Originarios*) began to identify as White or adopted ambiguous ethnic categories to dissociate themselves from Blackness. Edwards assures us, finally, that despite this (narrative) erasure, Argentina's Black population remains and has been growing with African immigrants and their descendants, as well as other African descendants from Latin American countries seeking economic opportunities. The article concludes with a remark: "Argentina's soccer team may not include people of African descent, but it's not a 'White' team either."

The purpose of this paper is not to assess the quality or the arguments of the article in question, but rather to examine the reaction of Argentine Twitter to it. However, in order to demarcate the object of this study, it is necessary to highlight that

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the article, despite being published in a mass media outlet, resembles an academic article due to its research depth. The following section will expand on the production and reception context of the article, as these provide key tools for understanding the nature of the discourses.

Study Aim and Method

This study focuses on the overarching narratives depicted in the responses on Twitter/X to *The Washington Post* article: "Why doesn't Argentina have more Black players?" written by the researcher Erika Denise Edwards and published on 8 December 2022. For this study, I have opted for an interpretative qualitative method, namely data hermeneutics, which, similar to all interpretive methodologies, operates under the premise that these conversations are fundamentally symbolic interactions that necessitate an understanding of the subjective viewpoints of those involved. Furthermore, data hermeneutics primarily focuses on the synthetic objective of interpreting, reconstructing, and explaining the overarching narratives that underpin social media conversations (Gerbaudo, 2016: 99–100).

The timeframe for data collection ran from December 9 to December 22, 2022, capturing a crucial period of discourse surrounding the issue. The dataset comprises a total of 5,594 tweets, which includes 5,091 (of 7,180) responses directly linked to *The Washington Post*'s post on Twitter/X, 100 (of 657) responses to a tweet by the article's author sharing the content, and 403 individual tweets and their associated responses. Using *top*, *random* and *zoom in* sampling and close reading of data (Gerbaudo, 2016), I was able to identify the most salient narratives employed to challenge the claims made in the article, and, primarily, in response to the title. Furthermore, I have focused on language and rhetorical strategies to reveal underlying ideologies informing these narratives.

Beyond the immediate focus on the article's subject matter, this research presents an opportunity to engage in a broader conversation about the manifestations of racism in contemporary discourse within Argentina. Through this analysis, I endeavour to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding race-related discussions and shed light on the intricate dynamics shaping public discourse on race and racism in Argentina. However, it is important to note that the sample of views and arguments presented concerning racism in Argentina on Twitter/X is limited. Therefore, it should not be considered an exhaustive representation of the issue.

Furthermore, the algorithms that regulate the visibility of tweets and the dynamics of engagement also influence the reception of the content, as comments and discussions evolve in response to algorithmic cues:

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> "As these algorithms 'nestle' into people's daily lives and mundane information practices, users shape and rearticulate the algorithms they encounter; algorithms impinge on how people seek information, how they perceive and think about the contours of knowledge, and how they understand themselves in and through public discourse" (Gillespie, 2014: 183).

This intertwined relationship between algorithmic influence and user interaction illuminates the intricate manner in which digital platforms mediate and amplify discussions on sensitive topics such as racism, thereby underscoring the necessity for a critical examination of these mediated conversations.

Context of Production and Reception

Dr. Erika Denise Edwards, the author of the article, is an associate professor at the University of Texas at El Paso. In her book *Hiding in Plain Sight: The Disappearance of the Black Population in Argentina* (2021) she argues that attempts by Black women to recategorize themselves and their descendants as White began as early as the late 18th century, challenging the notion that the Black population drastically declined at the end of the 19th century because of the whitening or modernization process. In Córdoba, Argentina, women of African descent were instrumental in shaping their own racial reclassifications and destinies (Edwards, 2021).

But to understand Argentinian Twitter's reaction to this article, the global context in which it is set is crucial: The FIFA World Cup, as a global phenomenon, undoubtedly draws attention to different countries that are not usually in the spotlight. The national football teams then become a kind of "showcase", where, it seems, some people think they can see a sample of the country. The question of the Whiteness, or otherwise, of Argentinian footballers and, by extension, Argentines themselves has been raised in the context of previous World Cups. In an academic article, Edwards cites a newspaper article entitled "Why Are There No Black Men on Argentina's Roster?"[1] written in the context of the 2014 World Cup (Edwards, 2018).

Social media has been a privileged space for raising such questions, in addition to traditional journalistic outlets. Online debates that begin with the question of the Whiteness of Argentines usually include a large section on Argentina's role in harbouring Nazi war criminals after the Second World War. In these debates, the visibility and reach of different arguments are often shaped by the interplay of editorial and algorithmic logics. As highlighted by Gillespie (2014):

1 See: https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/why-are-there-no-black-men-on-argentinas-roster_b_5571761 Accessed: 1 December 2023.

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> "The editorial logic depends on the subjective choices of experts, who are themselves made and authorized through institutional processes of training and certification, or validated by the public through the mechanisms of the market. The algorithmic logic, by contrast, depends on the proceduralized choices of a machine, designed by human operators to automate some proxy of human judgement or unearth patterns across collected social traces" (Gillespie, 2014: 192).

The postdigital context of social media influences both the distribution and production of discourses, including those in traditional journalism: Van Dijck and Poell (2013: 11) note that social media logic has gradually infiltrated mass media logic, altering and sometimes replacing it. Changing news consumption habits, such as reading on mobile devices, have significantly impacted the way articles are written and edited. In this competitive environment, mass media employs strategies such as keywords, clickbait headlines and search engine optimization. *The Washington Post*, active on Twitter since 2007 with over 20 million followers, operates within this framework. The discussed tweet generated unusually high traffic, possibly because subjects are more inclined to comment on news they disagree with (Chung et al., 2015), and the article in question proved to be highly provocative on Argentine Twitter/X.

Anonymity on social media significantly impacted the discussion that ensued, particularly given the sensitivity of the topic of racism. Interactions on Twitter, due to the "invisible rules" of algorithms, reproduce a rhetorical style that revolves around mockery, pedantry and irony. Humour, used to cloak prejudice, was instrumental in amplifying racial vilification practices on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube (See, e.g. Matamoros-Fernández, 2017: 9). For example, in response to *The Washington Post*'s article titled as a question, a user replied sarcastically: "because it's a football team, not a Disney movie." This comment received many "likes" and "retweets" leading to widespread replications: From 5000 tweets, 87 mentioned that the country was not a Netflix or Disney production, showing how users tailor their responses to align with popular and algorithm-favoured sentiments.

Additionally, past and recent U.S.-Argentine relations and prevalent "anti-Americanism" in Argentine society could influence how an American media tweet is interpreted, particularly on sensitive topics such as race and identity during the World Cup, when forms of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) and also racism and xenophobia are rampant. While not all Argentines are fluent in English, Argentina had the highest score of any Latin American country in the 2022 English Proficiency Index.[2] In

2 The data is based on test results of 2.2 million adults who took the EF Standard English Test (EF SET) or one of EF's English placement tests around the world. See: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1053066/english-proficiency-latin-america/

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addition, Twitter's translation tool makes content in different languages more accessible. With a substantial Twitter user base of 5.9 million in 2022,[3] the Argentine Twitter community is known for its size and engagement.

Given the focus on responses to a journalistic article the data falls into the genre of "participatory news article" (Bruce, 2010) characterized by brevity, spontaneity and a tendency towards subjectivity, with statements often presented as endorsements or rejections of the journalistic content. Moreover, online commenting involves both active and passive users, creating unidirectional, often confrontational opinions with a crucial entertaining quality (Marmorstein & Sclafani, 2019: 1). While certain features of online racist discourse such as irony, sarcasm, and anonymity are universal, the understanding of racism is shaped by media platforms and linguistic choices within national ideological contexts (Pantti et al., 2019: 517). This study contributes to the understanding of racism in Argentina, particularly on the social network X.

Data and Data Analysis

The article received significant feedback within a short period, with users pointing out inaccuracies in the presented statistics. Specifically, they noted that the percentage of the Black population, according to census data and the country's demographic figures, was considerably lower. As a result, a correction was promptly added to the web version of the article. Furthermore, many users found the headline deceptive or opportunistic. The author responded, stating that the title was an editorial decision, and that many critics had not read the article. In fact, much of the backlash could have been avoided if the article, which de-constructs the myth of a White Argentina, rather than focusing on the ethnicity of players, had been fully read. The title of the article oversimplifies the issue by presenting racial and ethnic diversity as easily observable on a football team.

As expected in the "participatory news" genre (Bruce, 2010), responses fell into two categories: Endorsements and rejections of the content of the article or, in this case, of what Twitter users believed the article contained. The rejections came from both Argentina and U.S.-based audiences. While the U.S. audience criticized the article for its "race-bait" headline and perceived liberal, "woke" bias labelling it as "leftist propaganda" or "leftist obsession with race", Argentine users defended their national identity, feeling it was threatened by the portrayal of Argentina as racist.

Despite these differences, both audiences shared a "whataboutery" argument, claiming the necessity for a similar count on other national teams. Although pre-

3 See: https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/

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sented as a provocation or accusations of purported "reverse racism" ("Why are there no White players on the NBA roster?"), the question, when applied to different national teams, highlights the historical legacy of colonialism and the racialized division of the world that is constitutive of it. Nascimento (2019: 6) argues that the participation of African colony players in Portugal's 1966 World Cup team was a strategic propaganda effort by the Portuguese government to promote their influence in Africa. Eusébio da Silva Ferreira, born in Mozambique and later a star for Benfica in Lisbon, led the tournament with nine goals. For African colonists, particularly agricultural labourers, the rise of Black football stars symbolized potential social mobility within the empire. This success was celebrated by both Lisbon elites and working-class São-Toméans, creating a racially inclusive national narrative. Despite some scepticism, this propaganda effort strengthened political ties to Portugal through the powerful emotions evoked by sport (Nascimento, 2019: 9). Thus, while the inclusion of Black players appeared to promote integration, it also perpetuated colonial subordination.

The focus here is on the rejection of the article by Argentinean users, which gave rise to reflections on the national racial issue. These positions may be divided in two: Denialism of racism, which perpetuates the 'White country' narrative, and critical analysis. In some cases, these positions overlap, particularly when arguing that *mestizaje* (miscegenation) is the solution to the conundrum. National narratives, not least in Argentina, that celebrate *mestizaje*, diversity, and define themselves – in more contemporary terms – as post-race often function as a subterfuge to maintain the 'White country' narrative. Finally, the article prompted a series of critical reflections on colonialism, with particular focus on the academic sphere. These reflections highlighted the limitations of the observations in unravelling the complexity of the racial issue in Argentina, which were constrained by a Eurocentric/North-American perspective.

The 'White Country' Narrative

After gaining independence from the Spanish Empire in 1816, Argentina's state-building process involved establishing sovereignty through military and administrative control. This involved the systematic suppression and assimilation of the indigenous population under the liberal governments of the 19th century, in order to claim land for capitalist modernity and "European civilization". These efforts were epitomised by the military campaign known as the 'Conquest of the Desert' and followed by plans to ethnically reshape the geography of the country (Taylor, 2020: 3).

The narrative of Argentina as a White country is founded on two key phrases. The first, by Juan Bautista Alberdi, politician and author of the foundations of the Na-

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tional Constitution of 1853: "To govern is to populate"[4]. The second, "We Argentines descend from ships"[5] reflects the collective belief in the success of European immigration. Alberdi's phrase was based on the belief that Northern Europeans were superior to Southern Europeans, Jews (understood at the time as a separate racial category), Africans, and Asians and that Argentina's Whiteness would align it with European modernity (Kaminsky, 2009: 2). To achieve this, Argentina needed to be populated with Europeans. As Grimson (2016: 16) notes, following Ghioldi (1946: 21), Alberdi's statement "to govern is to populate" clearly referred to "populating with Europeans".

The Immigration Promotion Law (*Ley de Fomento de la Inmigración*) of 1876, also known as *Ley Avellaneda*, aimed therefore to promote immigration from Europe. To this end, information and propaganda offices were established across Europe. These offices encouraged emigration and provided tickets funded by the Argentine government (Bertoni, 2001: 19). The results were remarkably successful: During the Age of Mass Migration (1850–1913), Argentina received about 6 million immigrants, making it the second most important destination of European migrants after the United States, and the highest per capita recipient in the world (Droller et al., 2023: 3). This gave rise to the popular phrase "We Argentines descend from the ships", which overlooks the populations brought on slave ships, those who inhabited the territory prior to the arrival of the Spaniards and also later migration from neighbouring countries.

Population censuses were also part of the intellectual and political elite's promotion of the idea of a White Argentina. Census reports of 1869 and 1895 consistently celebrated immigration and the growth of the "White race" in Argentina, aligning with racist theories prevalent in the mid-19th century. This ideological adherence manifested itself in the portrayal of [White] immigration as a means to ensure the superiority of the "new Argentina" and the expansion of the "White race" across the territory, erasing the presence of Black and Indigenous people from the narrative of a prosperous Argentina (Ocoró Loango, 2016: 64).

The demographic decline of the Black population in Buenos Aires was, therefore, artificially accelerated through the manipulation of official statistics, as highlighted by Reid Andrews (1980: 93). The 1895 National Census Steering Committee deliberately excluded Blacks, 'mulattos', and 'civilized' Indigenous people deeming them insignificant (Ocoró Loango, 2016: 64). Researchers argue that the censuses are incomplete and argue for cross-referencing to get a more accurate picture of the population in the 19th century (Goldberg, 1976; Reid Andrews, 1979, 1980; Geler, 2010; Ocoró Loango, 2016). This manipulation of the census was accompanied by a 'White country' narrative which, as we see in many of the responses to Edwards' Twitter post, is still in place today.

4 "Gobernar es poblar". All translations by the author, except where stated.

5 "Los argentinos descendemos de los barcos."

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The representation of Argentina in a perpetual ethnic present, characterized as a racial and cultural [White] unity without a past, underpinned, as we shall see, by the melting pot narrative, was embraced successfully by the intellectual and political elites and by the popular classes (Segato, 2007: 260) becoming unquestionable. According to Frigerio (2008: 119), this dominant narrative characterizes Argentine society as White, European, modern, rational and Catholic by making ethnic and racial contributions invisible, distancing Black people temporally (in the past) or geographically, ignoring processes of miscegenation and cultural hybridization, and downplaying Afro-Argentine contributions to local culture.

Fig. 2: Denialist responses following the "White country" narrative. Rejection to the article in the form of mockery and sarcasm.[6]

In a racist and denialist tone, a poster shared the argument that Black people had died in the wars of independence, which Edwards (2022) denounces as an argument used to erase their presence from the national identity: "The truth that nobody wants to say is that abolition is a joke, the brown people were sent to the wars and from the government of Rosas onwards they were exterminated, this race of mestizos and N".[7] Important to note is the derogatory use of the term 'marrones' (browns), which is used to define Indigenous and 'Mestizo' people, analyzed presently more thoroughly.

Many tweets denying accusations of racism actually used blatantly racist expressions (see Fig. 3). For instance one Twitter/X user hyperbolically stated: "Argentina, the least racist country in the world. By far"[8], accompanied by a video of young peo-

6 https://x.com/dalmirogache/status/1602783862530121728;13 December 2022 and https://x.com/Caroljoyceasis/status/1601517660529123329; 10 December 2022.

7 "La verdad que nadie quiere decir es que es un chiste lo de la abolición, a los marrones los mandaron a las guerras y desde el gobierno de Rosas en adelante fueron exterminados esa raza mestiza y de N" https://x.com/carla_venavidez/status/1602488973489733633; 13 December 2022.

8 "Argentina, el país menos racista del mundo. Por escándalo" https://x.com/agustinromm/status/1603222319350001664; 15 December 2022.

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ple lifting a Black person in celebration. However, the interpretive framing of the video is quite different: The lyrics of the song they are singing contain explicit racist mockery directed at Black French football players (in addition to homophobic and transphobic language). Consequently, this particular celebration is distinct from the aforementioned statement and represents a specific instance of racially motivated misconduct. This impression is reinforced by the laughter of one of the fans to the camera, who seems to be making fun of the bullying.

Fig. 3: A group of young people lift a Black person in celebration, but the context reveals mocking intentions, underscored by a background song with racist, homophobic, and transphobic lyrics popular during the World Cup.[9]

9 The lyrics could be translated as: "Listen, spread the word. They play in France, but they are all from Angola. How nice it is! They are going to run. They are 'cometravas' [a slang term that refers to an individual who engages in sexual activity with a transgender woman] like f***ing Mbappé. Their mom is Nigerian. Their dad, Cameroonian. But in the document, nationality: French."

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Denialism also assumes a normative guise, exemplified by statements such as: "How can this country be racist if the first paragraph of the Constitution is a love letter to immigrants?"[10] This references the Preamble of the National Constitution which welcomes "all people in the world who wish to inhabit Argentine soil." However, Article 25 of the same Constitution still contains the 19th century plan. It reads: "The Federal Government shall encourage European immigration."[11] This argument only underpins the 'White country' narrative. As Garguin (2012: 359) argues the idea of Argentina as a White nation, solidified during the 20th century due to massive immigration, crystallized into an undisputable myth of origin and achieved the status of common sense, epitomized by the saying that Argentines descend from ships. In this sense, Frigerio (2006: 77) notes that a belief in Argentine racial exceptionalism, often disguised as a celebration of diversity due to significant immigration in the early 19th century fosters a prevailing sentiment that racism is not an issue.

As one Twitter/X user writes: "I took the trouble to read the Washington Post article about the lack of Blacks in Argentina, and I can't believe it's so disgustingly racist to refuse to accept that in this country miscegenation was the rule and we don't differentiate by race".[12] Hundreds of users then denied what they perceived as an accusation of racism. Examples included: "Why are you so obsessed with our skin color? That's very racist of you"[13] and also: "Skin colour is not our problem. They are trying to cultivate their racism in our country, but they won't succeed!"[14]. Joseph (2000: 362) asserts that the claim that race is irrelevant is itself productive in the Foucaultian sense: "It forms a part of racializing discourses in Argentina that reflect and maintain racialized social hierarchies within Argentina and in the international arena." Resistance to acknowledging and addressing the rendering invisible of Afro-descendants[15] in Argentina, but also racism, is a faithful reflection of what Quijano

10 "Qué va a ser racista este país si el primer párrafo de la Constitución es una carta de amor a los inmigrantes" https://x.com/PLGoldstein/status/1602079442158895104; 12 December 2022.

11 "El Gobierno federal fomentará la inmigración europea."

12 https://x.com/negrowernicke/status/1602626136697102336; 13 December 2022.

13 https://x.com/snow_brc/status/1601822433270325248; 11 December 2022.

14 "El color de piel no es nuestro problema. Intentan cultivar su racismo en nuestro país, no podrán!!!" https://x.com/roxialmiron/status/1602092141601226752https://x.com/roxialmiron/status/1602092141601226752 12 December 2022.

15 The term "Afro-descendant" refers to individuals in Latin America and the Caribbean with African ancestry, who are descendants of Africans enslaved during the transatlantic slave trade. The Afro-Argentine community comprises individuals with diverse ancestral origins, including descendants of enslaved people, migrants from Cape Verde who arrived in the 20th century, and recent migrants from African countries such as Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, and Ghana. Due to miscegenation, some individuals of African descent in Argentina may not exhibit physical traits that are typically associated with their ancestral origins. Nevertheless, they are still considered to be of African descent, as the concept is not based on physical characteristics but encompasses ancestral heritage.

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(1992, 2008) terms "coloniality of power", which concerns the assimilation and naturalization by the colonized of the forms of domination.

Additionally, comparison, contrast and counter-accusation strategies reframe the discourse, supporting individual viewpoints and challenging arguments in the article. Many responses fall into the category of *ad hominem* fallacy, disqualifying the argument based on the author's national affiliation. The article provided an opportunity for hundreds of users on Twitter/X to express their anti-U.S.-American sentiments, which are prevalent in Argentine society, often manifesting in the unreflective use of the appellative "yanqui" for U.S. citizens. The backlash against the author's national identity was so intense, that an Afro-Argentine activist had to clarify: "You don't like her because she's a yanqui? Great, but what she says is accurate and aligns with the conclusions we afros (from Argentina) have reached here where we don't have the Washington Post as a megaphone".[16]

Fig. 4: Expressions of anti-Americanism. The second text reads: "How annoying are the "yanquis", don't they have a school shooting to deal with?".[17]

Such responses, clearly defensive in tone, often took the form of "whataboutery", with mentions, as seen in Fig. 3, of CIA actions in Latin America, the problem of school shootings but also U.S. war actions in Iraq or Afghanistan. Some also chose to recall the segregation policies that were still in force in the United States well into the 20th century. These comments can be interpreted as an exemplification of a pervasive inferiority complex, as evidenced by the use of the term 'decent' in the following comment: "The problem with you [plural, addressing purportedly U.S.-Americans], is that it seems to be necessary to have a Black population to be a "'decent'" country, is it maybe that your ass itches? Do you have a debt to pay off? You have no shame in your own history and you project it onto countries that had little to do with your colonial logic."[18]

16 "No les gusta pq es yanki ? Joya pero lo q dice es todo así como lo dice y la conclusión es la misma a la q llegamos los afro de acá q no tenemos al Washington Post como megáfono" https://x.com/afroargentino_x/status/1601792397838467074

17 https://x.com/PatricioZain/status/1601392219469975553 10.12.2022 and https://x.com/JozamiM/status/1601362121006010368 10.12.2022.

18 "el problema con ustedes es que parece ser necesario tener población negra para ser un pais "decente", será que les pica el culo? que tienen cierta deuda que saldar? no tienen verguenza

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Critical Analysis Positions

From the Melting Pot to the Post-Migrant Narrative

One of the most repeated arguments was that of *mestizaje*, presented as understanding the difference in racial issues between Argentina and the United States. A tweeter wrote: "In Argentina slavery was abolished in 1813. You had slavery for 50 years more. Besides, here we mix and cross all races. We don't segregate like in the USA. We didn't have prohibitions against one race until late in the 20th century like over there. That's just it".[19] Many echoed this argument and accompanied it with an illustration (see Fig. 5). The meme recalls colonial-era illustrations used in Latin America when the Spanish Empire promoted the Hispanicization of its colonies. The Spanish Empire's scientific taxonomy employed a visual pedagogy to destabilize racial categories. Family portraits depicted the father, from one racial group, the mother, from another, and one or two children, who belonged to a third, showing how various mixtures of European, African, and Native could give rise to a multiplicity of types (Kaminsky, 2009: 2).

Many tweeters pointed out the absolute dissimilarity of racial classification systems between the United States and Argentina, a distinction recognized by specialists in the field (Frigerio, 2006; Quijano, 2008; Reid Andrews, 1979; Segato, 1998, 2007).[20] Twitter/ X users highlighted the complexity of race in Argentina, especially in relation to the concept of "mixed race", as the country is made up of people with diverse ethnic backgrounds: "We don't have ghettos as US does. There were, though: italian, spaniards, germans, lebanese, ashkenasi and sefardis jews, etc. But they got all mixed up. We don't hv any pure WHEREVER communities, except asian, maybe. We don't hv any pure black people as we don't any pure white." In a subsequent tweet, in a more denialist guise, the person added: "And of course, all of them mixed up with the pre-columbian people (mestizos). We don't have a problem with races as US has. So extrapolation of other countries issues is an error in the analysis."[21]

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de su propia historia y la proyectan a paises que poco tuiveron que ver con su logica coloniali" https://x.com/tanquesegundo2/status/1601886733309992965; 11 December 2022.

19 https://x.com/icardo8/status/1601603200057909248; 10 December 2022.

20 See e.g.:"During the first half of the century, Buenos Aires, like other parts of Spanish America, used a three-tier racial classification system similar to Brazil's. This system distinguished between individuals of pure African ancestry, pure European ancestry, and mixed racial ancestry. This approach contrasted with the North American system, which grouped people of both pure and mixed African ancestry together as 'black,' distinct from 'whites' of pure European descent" (Reid Andrews, 1979: 37).

21 https://twitter.com/IsgoodClint/status/1601732773307260935; 11 December 2022.

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Fig. 5: Meme that circulated profusely during the days of the post.

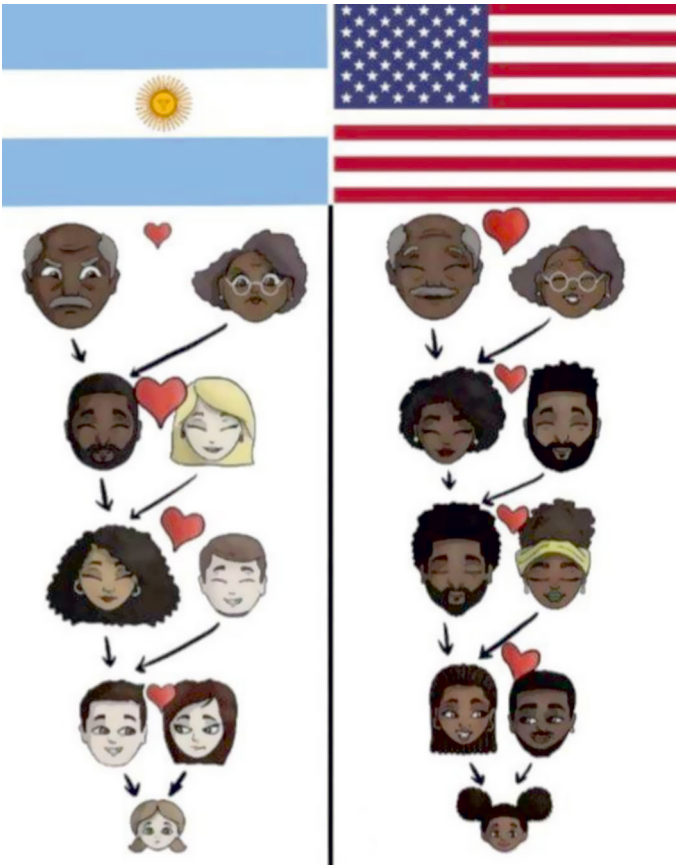

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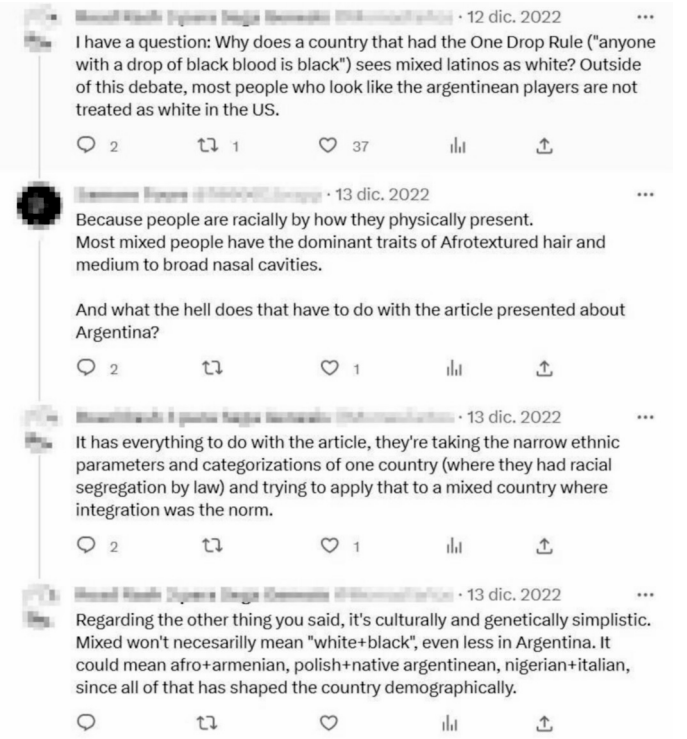
Fig. 6: The exchange between an Argentinian and an African-American in the comments to the article. It reads: "Mixed won't necessarily mean "white + black", even less in Argentina".[22]



These posts, less aggressive, pedagogical in tone and mostly written in English, sought to inform the U.S. audience about the structural difference between the two states. Discussions between tweeters from both countries highlighted contrasting approaches to racial issues. As Segato (2007: 189) explains, in the United States national unity is conceived as the result of the administration of the coexistence of different ethnic contingents, with a Black-White matrix of otherness shaping a segmented structure of difference. This national matrix imposes a segregated model of society and an essentialist conception of identities (Afro-American, Native-American, Italo-American, Asian-American, etc.). In contrast, Argentina's national society stems from an "ethnic terror" where access to citizenship requires to "erase the traces of origin" (Segato, 2007: 51).

22 The tweet has since been deleted. 13 December 2022.

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Argentinian tweeters, aware of this difference, use terms such as "segregation" and "ghettos". In one discussion (see Figure 5), an Argentinian user explains that "mixed does not necessarily mean black + white", alluding precisely to this matrix of differentiation. The American user, on the other hand, offers a generalized view of race as a naturalized fact: "Because people are racially how they physically present." The model in which 'integration was the norm', as the Argentinian user claims, as opposed to the U.S. model of segregation, is often explained by the image of the melting pot, which, as we will see below, was no less racist since it required the erasure of any ethnic marker (other than 'White').

The Melting-Pot Myth

In Argentina, a model of nationhood which, based on its pre-Columbian and/or colonial history, made hybridization the symbolic capital of the 'national being' has never prevailed, or has never become hegemonic (Briones, 2002: 68). Unlike in other Latin American states, the local intellectual elite, who laid the foundations for the nation-state, did not celebrate miscegenation, but Whiteness (Frigerio, 2008: 118). For the mid-19th century intellectual Sarmiento, *mestizaje* represented a regression in the evolutionary scheme. Paradoxically, Sarmiento's opinion of the mulatto – the product of Black-White heterosexual sex – deviated from this perspective. He considered the mulatto "the link that binds civilized man to the uncouth one; a race inclined towards civilization, endowed with talent and with the finest aspirations of progress" (1972[1845]: 43). (Martínez-Echazábal, 1998: 25).

Despite this assessment by Sarmiento, Goldberg (1976: 83), in her study of the Black and 'mulatto' population of the city of Buenos Aires from 1810–1840, notes that the writings of the time, uninfluenced by the egalitarian ideas of 1810, reveal how much more despised the 'mulatto' was than the Black person as such: "The mulatto was 'necessarily' 'indecent'; his very birth was a product of 'indecency', as his colour revealed him as the fruit of illegitimate unions." Against this backdrop, the whitening of the local Afro-descendant population began. Reid Andrews (1979: 32) observed that many young Black people sought acceptance in White society by distancing themselves from their Black and African heritage. Furthermore, by 1910, almost a third of the population in Argentina was foreign-born, with almost 75% of immigrants being Italians and Spaniards (Modolo, 2016: 211). This influx drastically transformed the capital, turning it into a booming metropolis in which the Afro-Argentines became almost invisible (Reid Andrews, 1979: 38).

The arrival of immigrants in large numbers, although planned and financed, also caused unease and concern. "The strong foreign component implied an inevitable slide towards disintegration, also experienced in terms of loss of cultural identity and nationality" (Bertoni, 2001: 24). Moreover, expectations aimed at

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stimulating immigration from Northern Europe were unmet as larger groups of Italians, Spaniards, Jews from Russia and Arabs from the Ottoman Empire arrived (Bertoni, 2001: 21). In the 1890s, two conflicting perspectives on the Argentine nation emerged, both inspired by European theories. Cosmopolitans advocated for a contractualist vision, valuing voluntary participation, extensive freedom for the foreign-born, and the positive impact of diversity (Bertoni, 2001: 310). Conversely, nationalists embraced an essentialist, exclusive and defensive viewpoint, emphasizing cultural singularity and legitimizing the nation through a national language, a national art and a single national "race" (Bertoni, 2001: 171).

This tension is better understood by acknowledging that in Latin America, "the Eurocentric perspective was adopted by the dominant groups as their own, leading them to impose the European model of nation-state formation for structures of power organized around colonial relations" (Quijano, 2008: 218). By 1910, in Argentina the culturalist conception excluded any national stance compatible with universalism, cosmopolitanism, cultural diversity, or multiethnicity, or that simply accepted cultural heterogeneity (Bertoni, 2001: 315). The racial homogenization imagined from a Eurocentric perspective as the main condition of modern nation-states, was carried out in the countries of the Southern Cone not by decolonizing social and political relations but by the elimination of indigenous populations and the exclusion of Blacks and mestizos (Quijano, 2008: 212). The oft-repeated metaphor of the "melting pot" as a cognitive operation that defines racism in Argentine discourse can only be understood against this background:

> "The idea of Argentina's 'openness' and the concept of 'integration' underlie the popular metaphor of the 'melting pot of races' (*crisol de razas*) in either of its two versions: as 'Argentinization' or as a fusion from which a new culture would emerge through the contributions of natives and immigrants. In the 'melting pot', the 'races' would blend into a single, unified, and homogeneous entity" (Caggiano, 2005: 191).

The melting pot, in practice, did not exclude people of other skin colours or ethnic backgrounds from national belonging; instead, it forced them to "dissimulate" any markers of their diverse origins to participate as citizens (Adamovksy, 2012: 343). Segato (2007: 260) speaks of the synthetic formation of an ethnic unity arguing that "the national matrix conditioned the participation of citizenship to the construction of a neutral, abstract person, stripped of any ethnic distinction, be it African, indigenous, Galician or Neapolitan" (2007: 275). In Argentina, as explained by Briones (2002: 73), the ideologies of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* (Whitening) have been promoted as a *telos,* an irreversible path of osmosis, where cultural variance is disciplined, and hybridization occurs selectively. While "*mestizos*" are excluded from the

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"unmarked us" of the nation, those "purified" by whitening may eventually do so, if they adopt hegemonic behaviours and values.

In response to the article, one commentator praised Argentina for its cosmopolitanism, stating: "Our Nation is a Cosmopolitan one, as USA, the difference is that here inmigrants [sic] mixed no matter their origins, so U can find someone like me w/Italian, Spanish, Irish, Swiss-German and Gipsy ancestors, or ppl w/wierd [sic] mixtures as Jews, Arabian, and German in the same family".[23] Notably, this list omits Black and Indigenous people. Although the term "cosmopolitan" is not as widely used in Argentina as it is in Europe, it would be worthwhile to examine whether it is used similarly to "melting pot", that is, to obscure marginalized populations and promote a national imaginary centred on Whiteness.

However, the omission of Black people can be interpreted differently: Their identity is perceived as no longer salient, like the national, cultural or religious ones mentioned in the comment. As argued by Geler (2007: 146) unlike immigrants and "uncivilised" Indigenous people, Afro-descendants could fulfil civil demands – demonstrating, voting and participating in the National Guard. Consequently, their integration into Argentine identity was ensured by their embodiment in a heroic distant history, particularly their participation in the wars of independence. This positive historical narrative allowed them to be seen as contributors to the nation's development. Thus, the "anonymity/melting into the mass/disappearance" was fundamental for incorporating the Afro-Argentine population into the national community, making them "invisible" compared to other communities, not incorporated into the narrative of historical homogeneity, as happened with the indigenous populations (Geler, 2007: 147–148).

In Argentina, "the most relevant manifestations of racist discourse in the historical configuration of a matrix of otherness are aimed at 'native peoples' ('Pueblos Originarios'), internal migrants, immigrants from neighbouring countries and Asian countries" (Belvedere et al., 2007: 45). Racist discourse targets indigeneity more than Blackness. Since the early 19th century, the indigenous population has been the primary target of resentment among the founders of the Argentine nation-state: For instance, in *Nuestra América: Ensayo de psicología social* (1918[1903]), the Argentine sociologist Carlos Octavio Bunge established a racial hierarchy in which Blacks were psychologically much better disposed for civilization and eugenically sounder than Indigenous people (Martínez-Echazábal, 1998: 26).

In the preface to the book on Bolivian immigration to Argentina, *Lo que no entra en el crisol* ('What is excluded from the melting pot'), Grimson (2005: 14) notes that Bolivians are at the bottom of Argentina's imaginary ethnic hierarchy among internal migrants, Paraguayans, Chileans, and Peruvians: "Bolivia, the most indigenous country in South America, is presented as a contrast to the national imagination.

23 https://x.com/BiblisR/status/1601765141183627266; 11 December 2022.

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Bolivians are viewed as the inverted mirror of Argentines from the instituted imaginary. They represent what Argentines deny exists in their country."

In this vein, it is written, e.g.: "Anyway, we have to explain to the Washington Post that all those who play in Argentina are more Black than the Blacks they have in the USA."[24] This comment can then be understood in this light: In Argentine racial categorizations, and even with a pejorative charge attached to the word "*negro*", indigeneity – the most visible ethnic trait in the team's players – is more despised than Blackness. Argentina preponderantly emerges as non-indigenous and non-mestizo in the sense that "the compound that would have been distilled under the supervision of the moral elites in the local melting pot operates as the signifier of a silenced and untainted Whiteness" (Briones, 2002: 71).

Football, for instance, is one of the few areas of success for phenotypically indigenous Argentines, perhaps along with acting and, relatively recently, modelling. The so-called 'liberal' professions are mostly dominated by ethnically White or 'Whitened' individuals. As one person commented, also resorting to the term "melting pot": "Soccer is the most inclusive sport in the country. Not just Maradona, many players come from ghetos [sic] & non-european backgrounds. The world does is [sic] not divided into black & white. Argentina is a melting pot (1/2)".[25] Some responses highlighted Argentina's ethnic and racial diversity, suggesting a post-migrant and post-race society. As explained by Foroutan (2019: 49) the term post-migrant has emerged as a subversive reference to the fluidity of origin, culture and the transformation of collective identity. See, e.g. "we don't know anymore what race we are"[26]; or "Tell me what is my ethnicity. Argentinian are so mix that you have no idea what tag to put me. What is my race? I'm from every continent."[27]

But even in its most current variants, the melting pot narrative functions to downplay or deny racism. As Caggiano (2015: 189) notes while intellectuals, religious leaders and politicians express concern about discrimination and racism, the

24 "Igual hay que explicarle al Washington Post que todos los que juegan en Argentina son más negros que los negros que ellos tienen en USA". https://x.com/HerSpice/status/1602927969537859585 15 December 2022.

25 The complete tweet read: "Would you really say that this is a "white" team?" (referring to a photo attached). "Soccer is the most inclusive sport in the country. Not just Maradona, many players come from ghettos & non-european backgrounds. The world does is not divided into black & white. Argentina is a melting pot (1/2) https://x.com/LomascoloSilvia/status/1602074791451795457;11 December 2022.

26 "We never had segregation. We mixed. In Arg no one asks about the race, never. We dont know anymore what race we are. When you go through life all the time measuring the color of people's skin to determine if it is black enough, guess who's being racist?" https://x.com/ScarletOHara111/status/1601736884857626624; 11 December 2022.

27 The tweet was accompanied by a world map with the user's supposed ethnic "map" https://x.com/luppelazzo/status/1602035838216462342; 11 December 2022.

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hegemonic discourse reconstructs the myth of an Argentina open to immigration. This narrative contradicts the reality of state racism, which resurfaced towards the end of the 20th century, particularly in relation to close border migrants. These individuals were portrayed as a threat, and their exclusion was justified through racial and ethnic mechanisms (Pizarro, 2012: 224–225).

The widespread argument that in Argentina there is no racism but classism, is debunked by the daily experiences of Senegalese, Bolivians, Paraguayans or Chinese people, or indeed the media portrayal of the Mapuche (Escolar et al., 2010). In 2001, census data reported 1,883 individuals from the African continent residing in Argentina, with a nearly 50 percent increase by 2010, reaching 2,738. This demographic predominantly engages in precarious and informal labour, primarily street vending. Additionally, there is a growing immigration trend of Afro-descendants from Latin American nations, although specific data is lacking (Ocoró Loango, 2016: 60). A recent report by the National Directorate of Persons of the National Registry of Persons in Argentina, highlights widespread discrimination in various forms – racism, harassment, underestimation, marginalization, or supremacy – faced by the Senegalese population in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (Dirección Nacional de Población, 2023: 34).

Anti-Colonial Perspectives

Other Twitter users considered the article to be an example of "academic colonialism/ imperialism". With a total of two thousand likes and seventy-five shares, it reads: "Why do race analyses always have to be so US-centric? Isn't it possible for you to understand that there are societies different from yours?"[28] The focus relied on the different racial categories used in Argentina, and the different conformations of its societies, with varying degrees of integration of different cultural collectivities: "They are so immersed in their own ethnic-racial classifications that they cannot understand that there is racism in Argentina, but NOT ON THEIR TERMS; they are imperialistic even when they accuse us of racism."[29] This is a clear example of the shift of focus (that is, away from denialism): Racism cannot be denied. However, it must be analyzed differently.

Interestingly, some of the comments aimed to contest the perceived imperialist or colonial view of the scholar, framed the views as issues of pride or shame, underscoring an emotional attachment to the issue. For instance, one commenter

28 https://x.com/hiperfalcon/status/1601562368001335297; 10 December 2022.

29 "están tan metidos en sus propias clasificaciones étnico-raciales que no pueden entender que en argentina hay racismo, pero NO EN SUS TERMINOS, son imperialistas hasta cuando nos acusan de racismo" https://x.com/ugemitch/status/1602071455549775879; 11 December 2022.

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remarked, as an accusation: "Diversity as a consequence of colonialism and imperialism is not much to be proud about [….]."[30] Another comment accused the scholar of racism, stating: "This is blunty [sic] racism: the author only can imagine 2 races, if the concept really exist [sic]. For her the tan- skinned latínamericans are shameful deniers of their black heritage and not a independent cultural poblation [sic] of mixed heritage."[31]

Criticism of perceived cultural imperialism was often combined with simple attacks, some of which even referred to the author's national-ethnic identity: "It is quite ironic that you are actually behaving quite imperialistic and colonialistic. For me you are not an Afro American, you are just another American who thinks that the American view is absolute and infallible and who is trying to force his believes [sic] into other societies."[32] By dismissing the scholar's Afro-American identity and labelling her "just another American", the commentator suggests that the scholar's views do not truly reflect her ethnic background, but rather embody a broader American ethnocentrism. The argument further accuses the scholar of imposing her beliefs onto other societies, implying a disregard for cultural differences and a belief in the superiority of American perspectives.

Along these lines it was written: "Or perhaps stop pushing your neo-colonialist ideas of what you think diversity should be onto another culture."[33] This critique implies that the scholar's understanding of diversity is rooted in a specific cultural and historical context that may not align with or respect the values and experiences of the culture being discussed. The comment underlines a broader critique in academia that Nina Glick Schiller has coined "methodological ethnicity": Here the ethnic group is unquestioningly assumed to represent a natural category of analysis and non-ethnic categories of belonging and distinction are ignored (Glick Schiller in Röhmild, 2017: 70). A thread posted by a social science's researcher received over ten thousand likes and explained that a Spanish person criticized Argentine players for their perceived Blackness and tattoos, while an American claimed the same players were all White, highlighting the subjectivity of the term. It emphasized that racism in Argentina, like in all countries, is not open to debate; rather, the focus should be on understanding the categories and historical, cultural, and economic processes that construct and sustain racism, which vary significantly among countries.[34]

30 https://x.com/ElIndioRoman/status/1602024798225408001; 11 December 2022.
31 https://x.com/CapitanAhab_/status/1602291794728947713; 12 December 2022.
32 https://x.com/TommyBieringa/status/1603195504694657025; 15 December 2022.
33 https://x.com/shep_leo/status/1602297326537740289; 12 December 2022.
34 https://twitter.com/Tia_MaGui/status/1602404742260559872; 12 December 2022.

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Racial Classifications

> "The particularity of racial discourses in Argentina makes it clear that neither race nor whiteness is a category with universally shared meanings" (Joseph, 2000: 335).

To comprehend racial classifications in Argentina, it is crucial to understand that racism is more focused on socio-economic and cultural aspects rather than ethnic considerations (Adamovsky, 2012; Briones, 2002). Given the article's title focus on the absence of "Black" players, a terminological clarification may have been appropriate. Discussions should begin with a clear definition of the term "Black", acknowledging that Blackness is a category rooted in 17th century racist classifications and is therefore historical, cultural and heterogeneous. "Being Black" is not the same in the Congo in the 21st century as it was in the United States in the 19th century or in Haiti in the 17th century.

Morales (2012: 19) notes that: "[…] in Argentina, the term 'negro' has very heterogeneous meanings and different uses, although common elements can be identified in the variety of uses." This prompts an examination of two instances of the word 'negro' (black) frequently seen in the comments on Edward's article: (a) membership in a 'popular' or lower social class and b) political affiliation. The aforementioned comment, in which it is stated that: "All those who play in Argentina are Blacker than the Blacks they have in the USA" refers simultaneously to the social background of the players as some of them come from the suburbs, or from poor settlements or "*villas*", as they are called in Argentina, and to their Indigeneity and *mestizaje*.

As the issue continued during Argentina's victory over France, the celebratory scenes in the streets of Buenos Aires, with jubilant crowds from the suburbs accompanying the winning team's bus parade, sparked ironic remarks on Twitter such as "I hope the Washington Post sees that we have Blacks"[35] and "The Washington Post today confirmed that Argentina is full of Blacks"[36], among various other tweets referring to the "Blackness" of the celebrants. Such expressions refer to the racial and racist category known as '*cabecitas negras*' (little black heads), a term from the 1940s and 1950s in Buenos Aires used to describe dark-skinned individuals who became more noticeable in the city due to increased internal migration (Frigerio, 2006: 86).

The creation of this new racial category can be precisely dated: 17 October 1945, the day in which "suburban workers marched into Buenos Aires and gathered at

35 "Espero que los del Washington Post estén viendo que si tenemos negros." https://x.com/Diegohiok1/status/1605256287536971777; 20 December 2022.

36 "El Washington Post hoy confirmó que Argentina está llena de negros." https://x.com/Fernandita2914/status/1605355321152749572; 21 December 2022.

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Plaza de Mayo to demand the release of Colonel Perón" (Grimson, 2016: 1). The presence of these groups on the city streets was perceived "with the strangeness of the unknown" by the inhabitants of Buenos Aires, "that established society that prided itself on inhabiting a cosmopolitan, White, European society" (Grimson, 2016: 8). Following Lenton (2010), Taylor (2013: 602) argues that Perón's rule marked a foundational moment in indigenous people's transformation from "pariahs" to "citizens" (Lenton, 2010: 85). This inclusion required indigenous assimilation within a modern society based on their class position. Indigenous workers were therefore defined by their class subordination, rather than racial injustice. This framing effectively obscured racial issues by prioritzing class, thus overshadowing their subaltern struggle (Taylor, 2013: 602).

The discovery of these popular masses, which contradicted the narrative of the 'White country', reinforced the self-identity of the White porteño middle-class. Indeed, Garguin (2012: 358) posits that "a deep sense of Whiteness played an important role in the process of middle-class formation." This middle-class identity, dating from the same period, was constructed in contrast and opposition to these proletarian masses of "the interior" (provinces outside Buenos Aires), perceived as everything the other was not – White, civilized, European (Garguin, 2012: 371).

The dynamics of Buenos Aires, the capital city with the majority of the population and migration, affects the vision projected towards and onto the rest of the country. Consequently, the White porteño middle-class identity was projected metonymically onto the entire nation (Joseph, 2000: 337–338). Frigerio (2006: 81) examined the "blanquedad porteña", a widespread narrative that asserts that 'porteños' (citizens of the port capital city) are White. This notion is not critically examined as a social category but constructed at the micro level through the continuous rendering invisible of Black phenotypic features, labelling as "Black" only those with dark complexions and mottled hair, thus maintaining that "true Blacks" are few. The rendering invisible of Black people occurs not only in the dominant historical narrative but also in everyday social interactions (Frigerio, 2008: 121) through specific practices such as concealing Black ancestors in families; and by shifting the discourse on social differences from factors of race or colour to those of class (Frigerio, 2006: 82).

The association between racism and classism is deeply ingrained in Argentine society, rooted in the transformation from colonial caste societies into the class societies of the 20th century (Reid Andrews, 1979: 49). Adamovsky (2012: 354) notes that Black identity does not explicitly refer to African diasporic origin (except for small groups who claim to be Afro-Argentine) or to a specific Amerindian ethnicity, although it may have a vague sense of miscegenation, but serves as an ethnic marker within a class identity. Nevertheless, Frigerio (2008: 120) also identifies the rendering invisible of Blackness in the insistence that the category "*negro*" or "*cabecita negra*" is rather classist than racist. Indeed: "By obsessively naming 'los negros' as the non-

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white part of the nation, this common sense inadvertently admits that whiteness in Argentina is an ever-incomplete spatial project that generates frustration and often rage" (Gordillo, 2016: 245).

In the rise of Peronism, the terms '*negro*' or '*cabecita negra*' acquired political connotations, specifically associated with Peronism and later Kirchnerism, parties whose electoral base is the working class, as we can see in the following example: "In Argentina, the Blacks are all Kirchnerists and they hold office because they belong to a political party."[37] But the figure of the cabecita negra, "the synthesis of an 'other' radically opposed to the respectable, White, and civilized man, would later include everyone who had been rejected from the spaces and welfare of modern urban civilization" (Garguin, 2007: 371). In this regard, it is also used, in the comments to the article, to refer to the social movements of workers and the unemployed who use street blockades or 'piquetes' as a tool for protest and struggle. The following statement reflects this: "The Washington Post asks why there are no Blacks in the Argentine national team… Hahahaha! Look at the street blockades and you'll see them all (blushing face with hand over mouth emoji)!"[38] In any case, as Cervio (2020: 29) points out, since the 19th century the category "Black" has persistently operated as a mechanism to subalternize and nominate radical otherness in Argentina, reflecting the intertwined racial and class tensions that have underpinned the colonial project throughout its history.

Discussion

The erasure of Black people in Argentine history, as argued in Edwards' article, may not be widely acknowledged by Argentine society, but it is accepted in Argentine historiography (Frigerio, 2008: 121). Efforts to address this historical omission have been made through various public policies. For instance, the Day of Afro-Argentines was established to pay tribute to the heroine of Independence, María Remedios del Valle. Additionally, during the bicentenary celebrations in 2010, the historical sequence deliberately sought to attack the narrative of the White, European nation (Adamovsky, 2012: 362) by highlighting the contributions of both African and Indigenous people to the founding of the country. The 2010 Census also included the category of 'Afro-descendant' from which the author derived her statistics.

37 En Argentina los negros son todos kirchneristas y ocupan cargos por pertenecer a un partido político. https://twitter.com/ElCara333/status/1602451896941297664; 12 December 2022.

38 El Washington Post pregunta por qué no hay negros en la Selección Argentina… Jajajaja! Que miren en los piquetes y los van a ver a todos! (emoji cubriéndose la boca)" https://twitter.com/gracielita_g/status/1602085133523324934

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In Argentina, however, "the term 'Afro-descendant' is used strategically to include people who may not have a Black phenotype but have African ancestry" (Ocoró Loango, 2016: 68). Indeed, as highlighted by Segato (1998: 144): "The introduction of Afro-Brazilian religious lineages into a country like Argentina […] shows the strength of an 'African ancestry' not based on commonality of blood, in North American terms, but on commonality in belief and on philosophical community."

Without implying that Blackness was viewed positively, Geler (2010: 18) suggests that Black men and women were able to "disappear" because they had become fundamental for the future of the country. In a similar vein, Adamovsky (2012: 348–349) highlights the increasing recognition of Blackness which became particularly evident and massive in popular music: through tango and candombe in the 1940s, folk music in the 1960s and 1970s, and cumbia from the 1990s onwards. This would suggest invisibility by hypervisibility: Their contributions to the national culture are so important that they were rather "absorbed" than compartmentalized as something foreign.

The discourse regarding the Black population in Argentina is comparable to that of European Modernity in the way it relegates "the Others" (Africa, the Middle East, America, in one case and Afro-descendants in the other one) to the past, portraying them as having fought in the wars of Independence or having paired up with Europeans. Furthermore, as Cervio (2020: 33) puts it, Argentina is a country that has made "Blackness" (negritud) the semantic and social reservoir of otherness to the point of making it "invisible" (as foreign or abject). These considerations, as well as the affiliations between racism and classism in the local racist discourse, highlight the importance of understanding racial classifications in different national contexts, particularly with a focus on the effects of each society's colonial histories.

A defining feature of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 1992: 439) is the aspiration for cultural Europeanisation. This pursuit aimed to participate in colonial power and later to achieve similar material benefits and power as the Europeans. Thus, a combination of violence, assimilation and wishful White-thinking rendered Indigenous and Black people in Argentina absent from the surface image, despite their presence, and present only as a kind of blackened underclass (Taylor, 2020: 4).

If the question is about genetics, biological anthropology has already answered it: The average ancestry for the Argentine sample overall in 2012 was 65% European, 31% Indigenous American (28–33%), and 4% African (3–4%) (Avena et al., 2012). If the question concerns racism, in Argentina its most prevalent expression is against Indigenous Peoples, a fact that has become evident over the past 15 years with the shift of the term "negro" as a racist epithet to the term "marrón" (brown), which also indicates a rejection toward "mixed-raced" people. And this is connected to the fact that although there is a celebration of the miscegenation as defining the national character, it is always an imaginary that favours Whiteness. As Briones (2002: 71)

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pointed out: No one would refer to an individual with Euro-Argentine parents from different "collectivities" as a mestizo.

The assertion that the Argentina football players are "more Black than the Blacks they have over there in USA", indicates how their bodily marks, seen as "racial" identity, are interpreted as belonging to an 'Other' marked by historical subordination (Segato, 2007: 23). This highlights a social paradox: Embracing the constitutive indigeneity of national society entails renouncing the racially hierarchical place in the world that the Argentine national state has conceived for itself. Anti-American commentary, beyond allegations of intellectual colonialism, underscore the identity dislocation experienced by Argentines and their negotiation of it in front of an 'international' audience: "For Argentina, whiteness is made fragile not just by the presence of indigenous and African subjects, but by its geopolitical subordination, especially to the USA, and its location in an 'Indian' continent" (Taylor, 2020: 13).

Nevertheless, regarding the narratives celebrating *mestizaje*, it is possible to interpret, following Gordillo (2016: 264) the presence of "an emerging yet inchoate formation", which he terms *La Argentina Mestiza*, "characterised by a disposition that feels comfortable with multiplicity and does not desire to create a piece of Europe in South America". The author interprets it as a "messy, disjointed, liberating mestizaje that confounds the very notion of an identity as a fixed, stable positioning", in contrast to "the orderly diversity of neoliberal multiculturalism in which officially sanctioned identities are placed in bounded slots" (Gordillo, 2016: 264).

In this vein, the plea "because it's a country, not a Disney movie", repeated *ad nauseam*, though mostly in line with the online discourse of the so-called "alt-right", "whose core belief is that 'white identity' is under attack from pro-multicultural and liberal elites" (Hermansson et al., 2020: 2), contains a perhaps understandable critique. The Disney film trope critiques a representation of diversity where ethnicity and culture overlap and where identities are compartmentalized and essentialized. Understanding the true 'diversity' of the Argentine national football team requires a nuanced view that goes beyond the 'visible' ethnicity of the players and considers how their 'visible' differences are interpreted in the national narrative.

Conclusion

Although some of the 5,594 tweets collected pointed in a direction not concentrated on here (targeting liberals and the so-called "woke culture", simply aggressive comments or insults, and comparisons with other national football teams, to name a few), the use of top, random and zoom-in sampling alongside close reading of the data (Gerbaudo, 2016) revealed recurring themes that served to explain the self-perception of Argentine national identity and that were consistent with two main narratives of that identity: The 'White nation' and the 'melting pot' narrative.

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Twitter/X responses to the article used tactics such as dismissal, rejection, avoidance, denial, sarcasm, mockery, and ridicule to resist addressing the rendering invisible of Black population and racism in Argentina, perpetuating the 'White country' narrative. These strategies reveal a reluctance to confront uncomfortable truths, reinforcing existing power structures that marginalize Black and Indigenous voices. Deflection, emotional appeal, reversal of accusation, and counter-argument shift focus away by presenting alternative perspectives and counter-narratives aligned with their beliefs. The use of ad hominem fallacies, dismissing arguments based on the author's nationality, was extended laterally to label the article as a form of intellectual colonialism. From the strong reactions it provoked, it is clear that the article tapped into some middle-class anxieties about how Argentine (racial) identity is presented to the world.

A significant number of users express frustration with perceived indoctrination from centres of power – the USA, in this case represented by *The Washington Post*–which they see as perpetuating an imperialist culture. This viewpoint reinforces a dynamic where Argentines define themselves as both colonized and colonizers, delineating who is considered Black, internally and who is truly White externally. Such a perspective risks using external marginalization to justify internal oppression. The discourse on Argentine racial identity remains complex, intertwined with both historical and contemporary dynamics of power, exclusion, and the ongoing quest for self-definition. The context of the World Cup, which heightens nationalism, exacerbates this issue. Argentine football with its anti-English/ ' resistance to colonial powers' identity (see Lietz & Pereyra in this volume) serves as a privileged space where Argentines negotiate their image and hierarchy in the global order.

It is clear that the myth of the White Argentine is still widely believed. However, another myth was mentioned in much greater numbers: the melting pot. The discourse on openness to migration, even in its "post-migrant" versions, serves as a shield to avoid addressing the problem of racism. *Mestizaje*, as in the founding origins of the homeland, continues to be perceived negatively. This perception can be seen in the derogatory use of the term "marrones" (browns), and as we saw in the understanding that the national team players, because of their mixed race and socio-economic background, would be "more Black than Black Americans".

Conceptualizations of a colour-blind, post-racial or even post-migrant society must be understood in the context of the construction of Argentine identity, which is based on the postulate of a synthetic ethnic unity oriented towards Whiteness. Argentine society may perceive itself as more post-race, post-migrant, and post-ethnic compared to the United States, where individuals select a distinct ethnic identity affiliation. However, this does not necessarily mean that it is less racist. On the contrary, these ideologies, which align with the founding myth of the "melting pot", are used to downplay the issue of racism and discrimination. At least discursively, many

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commentators choose to include indigenous peoples as part of this national melting pot. The extent to which this inclusion manifests itself in everyday practice needs to be closely scrutinised.

Although clumsy, aggressive and often tactless, Argentines claim their right to epistemic sovereignty, asserting that they are capable of understanding and interpreting their racial history on their own. This must be understood in the context of a societal paradox and the persistent struggle with national identity, in which colonial legacies, geopolitical dynamics and the demand for 'a place in the world' intersect. Despite having 'whitened' itself, Argentina did not land a place in the 'first world'. In the context of this discussion, and in the global context opened by the massiveness and mediatization of the football World Cup, it does not get it precisely because it has tried to do so.

Finally, if the motivation is genuinely anti-racist, it is worth questioning if such headlines are more harmful than helpful. Ultimately, the message conveyed to the "global audience" is that Argentinians are "Whiter" than expected, thereby perpetuating the narrative (or "myth") of a White national identity. Thanks to the logic of social media, the search for engagement and the eagerness of public media, influencers, journalists and others to create content, it is to be expected that the issue will be put back on the agenda, perhaps becoming a seasonal phenomenon, every four years.

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A Postdigital Story of Football Fandom: Argentina and Bangladesh Between Cosmopolitan Fraternity and Narratives of Resistance

Roman Lietz and Carmen Pereyra

Abstract *It was an ordinary individual from Bangladesh whose tweet served to highlight on a global stage the significant fandom in Bangladesh for the Argentina national football team. This article delves into the underlying causes for this fandom and the football-related narratives that surround it. It is argued that there are differences and similarities in the history of the two countries, which have led to shared narratives of being underprivileged in the face of global colonial power structures and stimulated narratives of resistance. These narratives have been further intensified by the mediatization of sport, which has existed long before social media, but which has gained an additional dimension through the accessibility and reach of platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. This cross-country fandom can be understood as an example of a banal and solidarity-based cosmopolitanism that emerges from below and can be considered an expression of digital cosmopolitanism.*

Building on this, the empirical part of this chapter uses qualitative methods to examine a corpus of 12,907 social media comments (YouTube, Twitter, Instagram) documenting the unexpected fraternity between Bangladesh and Argentina. Four categories are derived that can be used to illustrate and explain this bond: (1) narratives of resistance to the coloniality of power, (2) narratives of fraternity, (3) cosmopolitan solidarity across borders and (4) national symbolisms. These are interwoven with the historical and theoretical background. The article thus deconstructs narrative dynamics that arise from seemingly banal tweets, which in turn reflect the momentum of sport events providing connections far beyond borders

1. Introduction

The 2022 FIFA World Cup held in Qatar witnessed an interesting phenomenon that surprised many: A large number of people in Bangladesh turned out to be dedicated supporters of the Argentine football team. And it is worth noting – not just after Argentina had won the trophy, but right from the beginning. In fact, this fandom was not spontaneous, but had been manifesting in Bangladesh for decades and had

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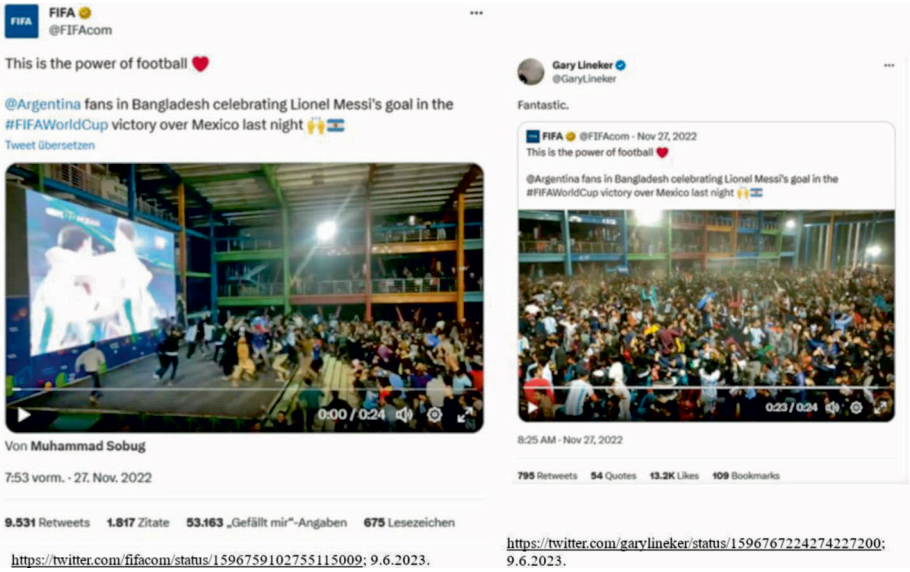
not been noticed by the world at large. In an increasingly digitally mediated world (and sport), in which a 'product' as universal and staged as football is a subject of massive interest, this surprising postcolonial and postdigital[1] football story of an Argentine-Bangladeshi fraternization could easily spread around the world.

Fig. 1: Original Tweet retweeted by FIFA and Gary Lineker.



The story started in a way that stories usually do these days: on social media. It was early in the World Cup, the second matchday of the group stage. Argentina desperately needed a win against Mexico, after losing their first game against Saudi Arabia. When the match kicked off at 22:00 Qatari time on 26 November, it was 1:00 am in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka. By the time Lionel Messi scored the relieving 1–0 in minute 64, it was already around 2:20 am. Nevertheless, an ordinary man from Dhaka, Mohammad Sobug, grabbed his mobile phone and documented a huge crowd of celebrating football fans. In fact, it is estimated that tens of thousands of Bengalis stayed awake until then. Being socialized technologically in our times, it is no surprise that Muhammad Sobug shared his video on Twitter (today X). And his 24 seconds made it around the world, being retweeted by the official FIFA account (and

1 "Postdigitality" means, among other things, the intertwining of material (analogue) and virtual (digital) processes and phenomena, such as the living out and development of a fanbase that takes place reciprocally and simultaneously in social media and 'on the street'. See the volume's editorial for a conceptualization of the term.

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minutes later also by celebrities, such as English ex-player and now well-known presenter Gary Lineker who has circa 9 million followers), generating 9,531 "retweets", 1,817 "quotes", 675 "bookmarks" and 53,163 "likes" (Fig. 1).

Since then, the decades-long support of people in Bangladesh for the Argentine Football team has become better known, also in Argentina, which actually led to the re-opening of the Argentine embassy in Dhaka a few months later. This fraternization, at first glance surprising, is rooted in colonial history and resistance, the mediatization of sport and cosmopolitan expressions.

2. Argentinian – Bangladeshian Relations

How can football fans from two countries separated by more than 16,000 kilometres, by different languages and religions, have such a bond? Bilateral political and economic relations between Argentina and Bangladesh have never been of great importance. Bangladesh is Argentina's twenty-first most important foreign trade partner in terms of exports (Trading Economics, 2023a) and only seventy-first in terms of imports (Trading Economics, 2023b). Conversely, Argentina is the seventieth most important foreign trading partner for Bangladesh in terms of exports, even behind other South American countries such as Brazil, Chile, Peru and Colombia (Trading Economics, 2023c), and eighteenth in terms of imports, contributing not more than 1.8 % of total imports (Trading Economics, 2023d).

The main link between Argentina and Bangladesh lies in history, more specifically in a world history that is marked by coloniality, economic imperialism and subalternity, and in the individual history of two remarkable and revered personalities: In 1924, when what is now Bangladesh was still part of the colonial British Raj, the iconic Bengal philosopher, poet and supporter of independence from Britain, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), visited South America. En route, he fell severely ill with influenza and had to spend two months recuperating near Buenos Aires. He was a guest of the Ocampo family, where Victoria Ocampo (1890–1979), among the most famous Argentinian writers, poets and feminists, befriended him (Chowdhury, 2016).

Almost 50 years later, Victoria Ocampo, meanwhile an important and influential Argentine intellectual, campaigned on behalf of the Bengalis when the people of East-Bengal fought a war of independence from Pakistan in 1971. She raised awareness that the refugee crisis in East Bengal was not just a local issue, but a global issue as the fate of the refugees exemplified hegemonic power imbalances (Chowdhury, 2016). Months later, once independence had been successfully gained, Argentina was one of the first countries to open an embassy in independent Bangladesh. Six years later, during Argentina's last military dictatorship it was, however, quickly closed again (Rahma, 2022: 3). But a cautious devotion had developed that blossomed when

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Diego Maradona took the stage in the Football World Cup of 1986, as well as adding a perspective on sport as an expression of resistance.

3. Football and Coloniality

The colonial histories of Argentina and Bangladesh followed distinct trajectories: Bangladesh was part of the British Raj from 1858 to 1947, while Argentina was under the Spanish Empire's Viceroyalty of Peru (later on Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata) from 1542 to 1816. Despite these different trajectories, their destinies are connected. One of the central axes of the new model of power that emerged from the colonization of America is the codification of the differences between conquerors and the conquered through the concept of race. The conquerors assumed a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others, as the founding element of the relations of domination (Quijano, 2008: 182). The following hegemonic world order has proven to be more durable and stable than colonialism itself and it is this living legacy that Quijano (2008) termed "coloniality of power": Even after colonies have disappeared as political entities, the system of oppression and exploitation and the mechanisms of domination that emerged with colonialism continue to operate until today.

Argentina provides an illustrative example in this regard: At the end of the 19th century, post-independence Argentina's nation-building involved not only creating a constitution and governance structure but also establishing sovereignty through the suppression and assimilation of indigenous populations (Taylor, 2020: 3), which can be understood as the implementation of the domination mechanism of the former colonial power. This process included constructing an idealized "White Argentina" through symbolic nation-building and encouraging mass European immigration. Between 1880 and 1910, approximately 3.5 million European migrants, primarily from Southern and Eastern Europe, significantly contributed to the "whitening" of the population, reinforcing the imagined racial identity of the new state (Taylor, 2020: 3–4).

For Bangladesh, although the British were latecomers to overseas expansion compared to the Portuguese and Spanish, who had already established extensive colonies and trade networks (Kohli, 2020: 21), they benefited from their global hegemonic position which facilitated the control of culture and knowledge (Quijano, 2008: 189). This hegemony extended to sport, which, after its formalization by the British bourgeoisie, became "an effective and productive neocolonial instrument" (De la Vega, 2010: 43) for controlling the established material relations and intersubjectivities initiated with the conquest of America (Quijano, 2008: 195).

It is evident that the manner in which sport was employed by imperial powers varies considerably across the globe, with Portuguese colonies providing distinct ex-

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amples. For instance, in Mozambique, group sports were less encouraged than in British colonies (Domingos, 2010: 233). In Luanda, Angola, as described by Marzano (2019: 3) during the 19th century, "if colonial expansion was still described as a heavy burden to be carried by the white man, destined to fulfilling the historic mission of bringing civilization to the primitive people of Africa and Asia, sports were displayed as evidence of the superiority of the old continent". In São Tomé and Príncipe, sport, particularly football, was utilized during the 1960s as a tool for training productive bodies and supporting imperial policy. Promoted by government agencies, sport symbolized modernity and progress while conveying nationalist messages and upholding the colonial regime. Football served as a safe platform to represent social and political divisions without threatening colonial institutions and helped consolidate Portuguese dominion, emphasizing cultural and affective ties over political power sharing (Nascimento, 2019: 342).

It is widely accepted among scholars specializing in sport sociology (Coleman, 1973; Mangan, 1996; Stoddart, 1998) that from its earliest days, football was conceived not only as a leisure and physical activity, but also as a means of instilling desired values. In a study of late Victorian England and the "Era of the New Imperialism", Mangan (1996: 12) reveals the glorification of war and the formation of an imperial masculinity aligned with empire-building through the "indoctrination into martial, moralistic manhood with eventually serendipitous global ramifications". Mangan (1996: 22), furthermore, demonstrates how cricket, football, and other English team sports were regarded as modern substitutes for the hard exercises of medieval knights and lauded for their moral training (through physical exertion and chivalry), which was deemed the most essential component of genuine education.

"By playing team sports, participants were taught to learn teamwork, the value of obeying constituted authority, courage in the face of adversity, loyalty to fellow players, and respect for the rules" (Stoddart, 1998: 653). This emphasis on learning teamwork, authority, courage, loyalty, and respect for rules through team sports aligns seamlessly with the colonial power needs, as recognized by Nascimento (2019: 342): "The focus on obedience to the rules of the game, an essential element in modern sporting codes, appealed to colonial authorities [from the Portuguese Empire] who sought to stress adherence to authorities of legal codes to counter revolutionary ideologies and social disorder."

As we have shown, the colonial utilization of sport was, despite the existence of certain variations, characteristic of colonial powers. However, whereas the Portuguese Empire permitted the formation of multi-racial teams to forestall insurrection against it, the British Empire pursued a markedly different course of action. In India, as part of the imperial agenda team sports – including football, cricket, hockey, and rugby – were not only utilized by British colonial institutions such as schools and social and sports clubs as a means to instill desired moral values such as "conformity and solidarity" (Dimeo, 2010: 63); they were also employed in accor-

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dance with a pattern of racial segregation, whereby the British conveyed the notion of physical and moral inferiority to the Bengali elites (Dimeo, 2010: 71).

But while encouraging them to learn to play football and organize teams, those with some European ancestry were privileged and Bengali students were often excluded from competing on the same level as mixed-race students. In fact, "Indian clubs were also excluded from major competitions until the 1930s" (Dimeo, 2010: 66). While in British India, sport was used as a means of reinforcing colonial hierarchies and excluding local populations from equal competition, the arrival and development of football in Argentina followed a different trajectory.

The relationship between Argentina and the United Kingdom has been one of constant ambivalence over the decades: In the early 19th century, as part of their expansionist policy, British leadership came to recognize that military occupation of Argentina would be both costly and unwise, particularly in light of the failed invasions of 1806–1807 (Kohli, 2020: 80). The resistance of the people in Argentina (at that time still the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata) against this invasion – and the lack of support they got from the Spanish crown – encouraged them only four years later to the 'May Revolution' of 1810, resulting in the independence of Argentina from Spain.

Nevertheless, in the following decades Britain pursued a strategy regarded by Kohli (2020: 69) as a form of informal imperialism, that is extending significant political influence without formal territorial control (Kohli, 2020: 69), also coined as "economic imperialism" or the "railway imperialism" of the British Empire (Lewis, 2020: 1). This perspective continues to be a source of contention in political science and historiography. Rock (2019: xiii) asserts that "Argentines never become passive, inanimate victims of British domination". Instead, as Argentina developed into a significant British overseas investment, the resulting material gains were distributed. This led, the author argues, to Argentina becoming the richest and most egalitarian country in Latin America.

Furthermore, following the declaration of independence in the early 19th century as a means for the formation of the nation state, Argentine political and military elites initiated a campaign aimed at the annihilation of the country's native populations, followed by an extensive "repopulation" of the country with European settlers. These actions demonstrate the appropriation of the doctrine of *terra nullius*, "developed and promoted by Anglophone settler colonies and the British Empire which made it a badge of geopolitical powerfulness" (Taylor, 2020: 9). The identification and adoption of culture and convictions of the British Empire by the Argentinian elites meant to "claim for higher status for the nation, both within Latin America and on the world stage." (Taylor, 2020: 9).

The pioneering period of Argentinian football is inseparably linked to the building of the railways by British companies. This began in the 1860s in Buenos Aires and reached, in the course of forty years, the rest of Argentina (Archetti, 1999: 48),

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with Argentines embracing the pastime of their British employers associated with the railway industry (De la Vega, 2010: 41). "Via sport the British saw themselves as both gentlemen and players, and considered such activities as vital in achieving a – what they thought – very important cultural task: transferring the ethic of fair play" (see Coleman 1973; Mangan 1989 as referred in Archetti, 1999: 49). Indeed:

> "In Latin America, and following the oft-cited teachings of the Argentine politician and educator Domingo F. Sarmiento, that the only way for any country of Latin America to progress was through a major acceptance of European behaviour, leaders in different parts of the hemisphere began to embrace European sports and physical education, along with other cultural forms, as a viable means of developing their own national societies, displacing – at times by force – the cultural and recreations practices of Latin America's 'folk' communities" (Arbena, 1996: 222).

4. Narratives of Resistance to the Coloniality of Power

While the nineteenth century in British India and Argentina witnessed emulation and compliance with the moral values associated with football, the 20th century saw a shift in this dynamic: Football became a space of contestation. In India, football served to mobilize discontent against imperial power and as a symbolic space for independence. In Argentina, which at the beginning of the century was going through an identity crisis, due largely to the relative youth of the nation-state and the influx of immigrants, it provided a dramatic space for the constitution of strong identities (Alabarces, 1999: 78).

In British India, the "apparent contradiction in colonial policy, between using sport as a means of establishing Indian 'separateness' or inferiority and of offering British-style strategies for improvement on the one hand and dismissing equal competition in the leagues on the other, is important in understanding the ways in which football became more than simply a game" (Dimeo, 2001: 66, 67). Therefore,

> "[…] the 1911 victory of Mohun Bagan Athletic Club over a team formed by English soldiers was a moment of nationalist resistance when the ideological underpinnings of colonialism, the belief in innate British superiority and in Indian physical frailty, were dramatically and publicly undone." (Dimeo, 2001: 69)

This triumph showed the local population that they could effectively challenge oppressive forces. Years later, in postcolonial Southeast Asia, the recognition of their own agency led to the discourses on "subalternity". This term, introduced by Antonio Gramsci, was contextualized by, among others, Marxist theorist Ranajit Guha (1982) and further differentiated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988). With "subal-

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ternity", Guha refers to marginalized population groups who are virtually invisible or inaudible in the face of overpowering (colonial) systems. Guha, Spivak and others described history and discourses from precisely these *subaltern* perspectives, especially making Southeast Asian views and conclusions visible and enabling a stronger sense of self-confidence (Chatterjee, 2006).

In the Argentine discourse a narrative approach of resistance is displayed. As argued by Archetti (1999), a detailed examination of journalist media and local football historians reveals that Argentina's national football identity was, in fact, constructed in the early 20th century in contrast to the English style. Within this narrative: "The real Argentinian football, the creole way, was made by Italians, Spaniards and the male native population" (Archetti, 1999: 52). Indeed, the narrative of the 'criollo' style recognized the mixing of sons of Latin Europeans with the local population in the teams and excluded, explicitly, the sons of the British. In this way, this narrative contributed to define, in the field of sport, "Britishness" as the relevant "other" for the Argentinians (Archetti, 1999: 65). It is important to clarify, at this point, that as we will see later in the empirical section often "for Argentinians Englishness is the essence of Britishness, and both terms are used interchangeably" (Archetti, 1999: 52).

The creation of this unique football style is not only criollo, Archetti (1999) argues, but, more concretely, is the product of the *pibes criollos*, of the young "boys" (in Rioplatense Spanish) playing football:

> "In the first place, the pibe criollo realized, when he saw how the English played, that this style of play left no room for improvisation, for 'imagination'. Secondly, the pibes played football spontaneously in the potreros – the empty and uneven urban spaces – without any teachers, unlike in England." (Archetti, 1999: 180)

The privileged image of the ideal Argentinian player is the *pibe*, because the authentic Argentinian player will never stop being a child. This imaginary world of football reflects the power of freedom and creativity in the face of discipline, order and hierarchy (Archetti, 1999: 181), and serves to underpin the emerging views of football as a space for resistance against narratives of coloniality that we are analyzing here.

An important role in this imaginary construction of Argentine identity in football in opposition to the 'English' and of football as a space for resistance was the Falklands War (Malvinas War) following the Argentinian Invasion of the Falkland Islands (1982). This war was from the beginning a matter of national identity, and as such, it was incorporated into the national soccer liturgy in its symbolic "warrior" character: Until today, the chants to cheer up the national football team include lyrics dedicated to "those young soldiers that I will never forget" (Llorens, 2023).

As previously demonstrated, football was initially conceived as a modern training exercise for warfare (Mangan, 1996). But also symbolically, football echoes war. It evokes the imagery and themes associated with war. Billig (1995: 124) elaborates on

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this notion, explaining that while political crises can swiftly lead to war, the willingness to sacrifice requires constant preparation and reinforcement. On a daily basis, the banal activities of following sports results serve as rehearsals for these behaviours. As men scan for the results of their favoured team, they read of the deeds of other men engaged in combat, in the cause of that larger body, the team; and identify with their nation's struggle for honour against foreign adversaries. This daily engagement reinforces a sense of collective honour and readiness, akin to preparation for war. In the Argentine context, the symbolic association between football and war reached its pinnacle in the World Cup match between Argentina and England on June 22, 1986.

The construction of "Malvinas" as a national cause is multifaceted. Guber (2009: 21) notes that the war was a unique event in Argentine history. It was the only 20th century war in which Argentina was the primary combatant, involved civilian conscripts, and created a rare civil-military consensus rooted in national belonging. Grimson et al. (2007: 437) further argue that the dictatorship successfully monopolized national sentiment, aligning it with the regime by equating the Malvinas War to the defense of the homeland in the *May Revolution* of 1810. This issue transcended political and ideological lines, uniting the national population. Furthermore, the Malvinas cause reinforced national football identity, as evidenced by Ciccone (2016, 2022), who demonstrates how the press, particularly *Crónica* during the 1966 and the 1986 World Cups, linked national football to the "sovereignty dispute" by portraying English referees and players as "pirates".

The emotional associations between Argentine football and the Falklands conflict demonstrate a constructed narrative that intertwines national identity with sports. This symbolic connection is bolstered by three main elements: firstly, the symbolic identification between football and the war, secondly, the narrative construction of a football identity built in opposition to the 'British style', and finally, the role of the Malvinas ex-combatants in the shaping of a sense of national identity.

This narrative is particularly evident in the portrayal of the 1986 World Cup match between Argentina and England as a symbolic act of revenge (Ciccone, 2016). The match, held just four years after the Falklands War, represented a quest for national redemption on the football field:

> "The two notable goals that Maradona scored in the game against England on June 22, 1986, during a quarterfinal game in the Mexico World Cup, cast him as a redeemer. This image rapidly crossed national borders and made Maradona a global symbol of anti-colonial struggle, of courage and resistance against imperial powers." (Brescia & Paz, 2023: 3)

The match, broadcast across the globe, had a significant impact on international audiences, including those in Bangladesh, who, due to their colonial history with

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Britain, perceived Argentina's victory as a shared triumph. Maradona's image was that of an unconventional footballer from a humble background, who retained a strong connection to his roots (Alabarces, 2006: 212) and played for the working-class teams of Boca Juniors and Napoli (Fuentes, 2021: 29). He served as a projection surface for symbolic resistance against an unspecified form of injustice and oppression, with him being perceived as an avenger.

This fictive emotional affiliation serves to illustrate the powerful role of narrative in shaping national identity and collective memory. It demonstrates how narratives can transcend geographical and historical boundaries to unite disparate groups in shared symbolic victories. The victory against England meant "defeat over the old colonial empire – for Maradona, for Argentina and for many millions across the Global South" (Fuentes, 2021: 29). Whenever Maradona won with his "rebellious style of play that made the impossible seem normal […] it felt like the side of the poor was striking a blow against the seemingly invincible rich" (Fuentes, 2021: 31). Being asked about his second goal, the legendary eleven second solo run, Maradona replied: "I thought that I had fallen to two Englishmen, but was lifting a country" (Signorini et al., 2021: 125).

Some of Maradona's "political connections put him close to non-democratic leaders with questionable human rights records, something at odds with his image of a tireless fighter for freedom and equality" (Brescia & Paz, 2023: 2). However, the permanent exhibition of his plebeian roots, his proudly exhibited excessive subalternity, as evidenced by Alabarces (2021: 6) enabled him to transcend the limitations of nationalism. His transformation into a myth during the 1986 World Cup, four years after the Malvinas War, was not contingent on a militaristic and patriotic narrative. In fact, Diego Maradona himself explicitly stated that it was not a patriotic gesture, but a gesture of revenge for the pain of the dead soldiers, who were, to add insult to injury, of his own age and class. The mythology in question is that of the humble, rather than the pantheon (Alabarces, 2021: 6). We argue that there is an 'underdog' relationship, which has its roots in the resistance against a world order set in motion with colonialism. Furthermore, as argued by Alabarces (1999), following Portelli (1993: 85):

> "In the football universe, the axis of the hegemonic subordinate opposition (or 'workers versus capitalist') is displaced by 'rich versus poor', and in the space of representation that this generates, 'the occasional victory of the weak over the strong has a powerful mythic appeal, going back to cosmological mythologies" (Alabarces, 1999: 83).

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5. Mediatization and Iconization of Sport / Football

As previously stated, the 1986 FIFA World Cup quarter-final between Argentina and England constituted a pivotal moment in this story of fraternization, made possible by the transformative power of the mass media, particularly television. Diego Maradona is, indeed, the first global figure of football entertainment, crossed by the new television conditions of football production from the 1990s onwards (Alabarces, 2006: 214). The historical entanglement between football and the mass media reveals a narrative of evolving communication modalities, initially witnessed by the catalytic role of newspapers over the first half of the 20th century. Newspapers "attracted new practitioners at the same time as it attracted audiences willing to pay the entrance fees" (Frandsen, 2014: 531).

Following the key role of newspapers in mobilizing stadium attendance, this development led to an era dominated by radio, whose live broadcasts captivated audiences and embedded memorable moments such as the iconic 1954 radio phrase "Aus dem Hintergrund müsste Rahn schießen!" (engl.: "Rahn would have to shoot from the background!") in the collective memory of West Germany. Subsequently, television emerged as a powerful mass medium, exerting considerable influence until the present era. Today, as Skey et al. (2018: 595) highlight, different types of media seem to struggle for dominance in football coverage. Based on data from England they work out that different target groups (e.g. male vs. female) have different media preferences for following football, in which television, radio and social media compete for dominance.

In any case, it is clear that digital media have quickened and multiplied the amount of communication regarding sport events and in particular with regard to sports celebrities, and thus have created a vortex of uncontrollable and unpredictable content around big, televised sports events (Whannel 2002 as referred to in Frandsen, 2014: 541). In the age of social media, the users are no longer just media consumers, but also content producers and thus, arguably, more competent in manipulating and intervening in the communication process than past generations. The evolution of the internet and associated technologies has built-in already in the early 21st century the ability of the individual to engage on a one-to-one or one-to-many or many-to-many basis, short-circuiting the top-down, hierarchical model of industrial media production (Boyle & Haynes, 2004: 140). This paradigm shift challenges the established dominance of television in the sport-media relationship, as noted by Frandsen (2014: 526).

The dynamic interplay between football and media technologies, not only shapes the sport's dissemination but also generates transnational social relations. As Giulianotti and Robertson (2007: 166–167) note: Communication technologies combined with the importance given to football by media and society create "world memoires of heavily mediatized international fixtures […] like the World Cup finals,

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[which] provide a substantive lingua franca that sets international peoples talking" (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007: 167). In fact, as early as the turn of the century, it was noted that the accelerated "spectacularization" and commercialization that characterize the process of football's globalization offer elements that suggest a weakening of the links between football and nationalism (Villena Fiengo, 2002: 157); while "devoid of a common language, individuals [here meaning football spectators] have established forms of friendship and interpersonal trust" (Giulianotti & Robertson 2007: 166).

While television remains a primary and highly influential medium for watching football and even interacting with other fans – see the introductory example of midnight public viewing in Dhaka – it now goes hand in hand with social media. In fact, social media communication is no longer something undertaken by a minority of fans on fan forums; it is the nominal way that fans interact with each other through a variety of media (Lawrence & Crawford, 2019: 7). As argued by McGillivray and McLaughlin (2019: 44): "Digital media platforms play an important role in enabling and strengthening transnational fandom experiences for fans following their favourite teams." In addition, social media provides an opportunity for fans to appropriate the sport, enriching it with their own narratives and to fill it out in a cosmopolitan way.

6. Cosmopolitanism

Philosophical Cosmopolitanism

A transcontinental connection such as that between football fans in Argentina and Bangladesh is associated with a cosmopolitan view of people and their relationships. To place this momentum of fraternity within the cosmopolitan ideal, we first present different readings of cosmopolitanism.

According to Nussbaum (2019: 78), a basic assumption of early cosmopolitan philosophy (2nd century BC) is to see in an affection not only to the self, the family and the neighbours, but also in an affection – indeed – an interest and responsibility also to the cosmos, to humanity as a whole. Thus, human beings are to be considered as "Citizens of the World", as it was stated by Diogenes (4th century BC). Being citizens of the world, the cosmopolitans' task is to consider all people as "members of one human brotherhood" (Inglis, 2019: 45, 48). That would mean striving towards a world without restraints and borders. Of course this had been a mere theoretical abstraction and was considered more in a philosophical sense and did not mean the factual dissolution of borders in a physical sense, but, at least, the early cosmopolitans offered a reflection that the place where someone is coincidentally born is just that: a coincidence (Inglis, 2019: 42–43; Nussbaum, 2019: 66–80).

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Banal and Critical Cosmopolitanism

Approximately two millennia later, with the advent of modernity, the concept of relating oneself to the world order underwent – at least in Europe (Inglis, 2019: 43) – a certain renewal. Modernity marked not only the birth of nationalism, but also the resurgence of cosmopolitan ideas. The French Revolution (1789–1799) brought Fraternity (Fraternité) into the lexicon. Fraternité went beyond a familial (lat. frater = brother) meaning to also imply the solidarity-driven unity of the oppressed classes (Fine, 2019: 362), which is a link to the narrative of the subalternity of the so-called Global South in resistance towards a post-colonial world-order. This brings notions of solidarity as a crucial term of cosmopolitanism into play (Fine, 2019). Solidarity in a cosmopolitan sense can be understood as a rather mundane attitude and opens up space for a "banal cosmopolitanism" (Beck, 2011: 1348) and a "cosmopolitanism from below" (Kurasawa, 2004: 233–236), that is, a cosmopolitanism that comes from ordinary people rather than from the ruling classes. Cosmopolitanism concerns entities of different size, from organizations, movements and collectives to individual actors; and it goes beyond mere transnationalism, but is a way of referring or engaging with others over issues of (their and global) significance (Delanty 2008: 218); for example about the football World Cup. In this respect – and especially in connection to the football fandom online comments – a link to Delanty's (2008: 218) suggestion of a critical stance of cosmopolitanism can be made: The philosophical-theoretical ideas of cosmopolitanism "such as the negotiation and crossing of borders, a concern with over-lapping allegiances, a concern with global equality and the suffering of others" are still in play, but are given "a more concrete form" and are taken as "expressions of cosmopolitanism" (Delanty, 2008: 218).

Acknowledging that "sub- and supra-national solidaristic ties have existed in various forms and to different extents over time", Kurasawa (2004, 233–234) sees them becoming widespread in the era of overcoming physical distances through globalization and – we are convinced – the internet. This banal idea of cosmopolitanism is more applicable than the philosophical "dissolution of all borders", since it is concretely attached to the concern for other people on the same planet, creating a mutual commitment, and – sometimes – also an expectation of reciprocity.

Digital Cosmopolitanism

In our time, ideas of responsive thinking, reciprocal action, an authentic attitude and concern for issues that affect unnamed global citizens are crucial in social media – for some, at least – and convert the cosmopolitans of our days into *digital cosmopolitans*, which are empirically observable (Lietz & Lenehan, 2023). At a time when the virtual and the analogue are increasingly merging, and since the phenomenon

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observed here is inherently rooted in the internet, it is worth taking a look at cosmopolitanism in the age of digitalization, as for example undertaken by Hall (2019).

Today, (ordinary) people worldwide build "bonds of mutual commitment and reciprocity across borders through public discourse […]" (Kurasawa, 2004: 234). Of course, digital cosmopolitanism does not replace traditional and recent ideas of the very same concepts, but applies them onto the internet and/or onto postdigital spheres (Lenehan, 2022). Mainly, a cosmopolitan attitude tightens the links with the "like-minded". People share "symbolically-constituted experiences" and have "the desire to pursue a sense of belonging" (Delanty, 2010: 153) and create not only an identity but also a socially cohesive community (Lietz, 2024).

According to Ponzanesi (2020: 4), "digital communications have […] greatly enhanced the possibilities for cosmopolitan interconnectivity, making it possible to have a deeper cultural engagement with the other." Therefore: "Digital cosmopolitanism is [… related to] the power of the internet to engage with the other and shape new networks of solidarity, contributing to intercultural exchanges, global justice, and new types of subpolitical activities/counterpublics." (Ponzanesi, 2020: 4) The fact that digital cosmopolitanism is another banal form of cosmopolitanism inscribed in mundane practices, such as the media consumption of international sports tournaments, should not prevent us from analyzing this type of expression. On the contrary, it should encourage us, since, as Ponzanesi points out (2020: 8): "It is, in particular, on the practice and analysis of the everyday, mundane, ordinary, and banal ways that the engagement with the digital and the cosmopolitan should focus in order to emphasize locality and rootedness with connectivity and encounters."

(Rooted) Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism

The dissolution of physical borders due to globalization and digitalization does not mean the dissolution of nationalism (Delanty, 2008: 220). Even in statements with a specific cosmopolitan tone – as we will see later – ideas of nationalism still perpetuate. One's origins play a role even in cosmopolitanism, to which Appiah (2005: 213–277), Kymlicka and Walker (2012) and others refer to as rooted cosmopolitanism. There can still be nationalism embedded in a cosmopolitan conception of society. The challenge therefore is, according to Beck and Sznaider (2010: 388), to take nationalism and cosmopolitanism not as contradictory moral orders but to see them "as living side by side in the global world", as "cosmopolitanism and nationalism are not mutually exclusive, neither methodologically nor normatively" and of course also not empirically – as we will show in the following section.

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Empirical Study

In the context of the described affinity of a large number of Bangladeshis for the Argentine football team, countless social media posts can be collected and examined. In order to have a more systematic view of the contents and nature of these expressions we analyzed posts on the social media platforms Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. We focused on the period between 26 November 2022, the beginning of the FIFA World Cup 2022, and 27 February 2023, the day after the (re)opening of the Argentine embassy in Dhaka. By searching for the key phrase "Argentina" + "Bangladesh" on the aforementioned platforms, we selected a set of 24 related Twitter threads, 6 related Instagram posts and 5 related YouTube video comments sections, taking all posts and replies into account. Thus, we assembled a number of 12,907 comments (more than 146,000 words), which we transcribed with the help of the web data extractor exportcomments.com. All unrelated comments were eliminated, and content-wise related comments were subjected to a qualitative content analysis, organizing them in relation to codes and subsequently to categories. Thus, we deduced a number of four categories that shed light on the content and nature of expressions related to the football story under consideration.

Category A) Narratives of Resistance to the Coloniality of Power

In the viewed comments, we observed a dominant discourse that echoed the introduced narrative concerning a resistance towards the coloniality of power. It suggests that the newfound friendship of Bangladesh and Argentina stemmed mainly from a collective antipathy towards the United Kingdom or England – again not making a distinction between these two entities. This sentiment is encapsulated in phrases such as "Always against England, no matter what" or "Who would have thought that dislike of England would unite us with another country on the other side of the world!", suggesting a deep-seated animosity rooted in a hegemonic world order that was initiated by colonialism. One commentator even suggested that the Bengalis' "crush on the Argentinian team" began in 1986, when, as mentioned above, thanks to television coverage, "Bangladesh people saw the English crying" (see figure 2).

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Fig. 2: Anti-imperialist tweets and sympathies.[2]

Moreover, the celebration of Argentina's football victory is presented as a triumph of the marginalized, symbolizing the resistance of the oppressed. By attributing the success to the "humble, suffering people" who appreciate the pure essence of football, the discourse elevates the significance of sport as a form of empowerment. Furthermore, the invocation of "the best football in the world, South America" reflects a reclaiming of agency and pride in local manners, challenging the narratives

2 The comments in Spanish, in order of appearance, translate to: "Always against England, no matter what", "Who would have thought that dislike of England would unite us with another country on the other side of the world", "It is the victory of all the humble, suffering people who recognise the essence of football, spectacle, fantasy, joy from the children in the street. The best football in the world, South America! Thank you Argentina!" and "Brotherly united in the struggle for the sovereignty of the peoples and against imperialism and slavery". All translations of non-English tweets into English have been undertaken by the authors of this chapter.

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of superiority established by the coloniality of power and underpinning the vision of Latin American football as a specific variant that is constituted in contrast to and opposed to a European style of playing, as we have argued in the theory section before. Finally, the comments articulate a narrative of solidarity "in the struggle for sovereignty and liberation from imperialism and slavery", embodying the enduring legacy of resistance to the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2008). Also Diego Maradona is appealed to in a longer Instagram post by a person from Bangladesh (Fig. 3) highlighting his "humble background", his "defeating the mighty English" and clarifying how this resonates with people in the South Asian Country:

Fig 3: Maradona and Bangladesh. Excerpt taken from https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cl_qejXNoJS/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=loading ; 17. May 2023.

(...) Diego Maradona's story from the slums of Argentina and his heroics struck a chord with the common people of Bangladesh. A poor man with humble backgrounds defeating the mighty English and conquering the world with his never say die attitude was extremely relatable to Bangladeshis, rich or poor because we were a young emerging nation who spent hundreds of years under brutal colonial rulers first with UK and then with Pakistan. Diego Maradona represented all of us. (...)

The intersection of football, honour and war, echoed in martial words such as "lucha", which can be translated as "struggle" or "fight", highlights the profound role of football as a battleground for ideological contestation and the construction of national identity. Through the lens of colonial narratives, the discourse surrounding football illuminates a narrative of solidarity and resilience that serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of resistance to a world order built on colonial and imperial structures. At its core, the formation of national identity within these narratives is deeply rooted in principles of anti-imperialism. When football fans from different nations unite in their shared antipathy towards a global hegemonic model of power that presupposes an element of coloniality; and celebrate victories on the pitch, they reaffirm their collective commitment to asserting their autonomy and sovereignty as subalterns in the post-colonial world.

Category B) Narratives of Fraternity

So far, the theoretical section and empirical demonstration have brought to light the attachment to narratives of resistance, that is shared in a kind of struggle. The social media agents construct a narrative of solidarity, a narrative of *brothers in arms*. Indeed, a momentum of *brotherhood* is displayed in the referred social media comments, building a bridge to the aforementioned idea of cosmopolitan solidarity or, more precisely, to the French revolutionary idea of *fraternité* (= brotherhood). This establishes the second category we would like to introduce (fig. 4):

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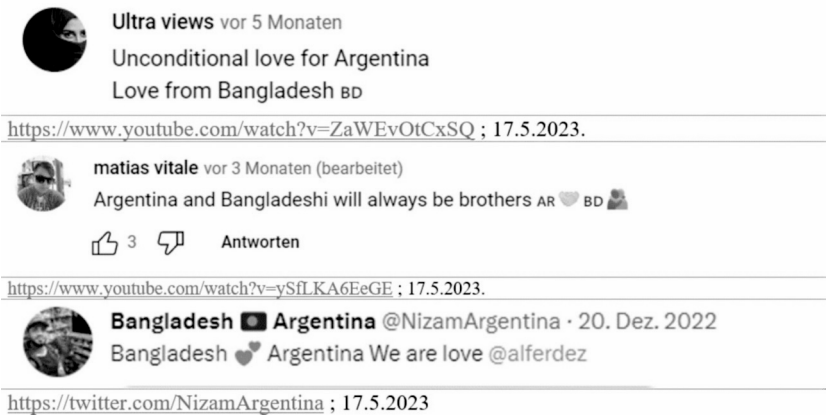
Fig. 4: Fraternity, collection of comments.



It cannot be overlooked the passionate pathos that lies in expressions like "unconditionality of love" and in the constant repetition of "all people becoming brothers". However, following twenty-five centuries since the cosmopolitan ancient Greeks, the "simple idea of universal brotherhood" has somehow survived, has been perpetuated (Sugimoto 2019: 538) and permeates the 21st century (digital) communication between people who would not have been in contact if there had not been digital media and a worldwide mediatization of sports. Remarkably, the fraternization is illustrated in a form that is common and appropriate to the chosen medium (YouTube), through (no less passionate) emojis and emoticons, establishing narrations of social embeddedness and cohesion (see Lietz, 2024).

The fourth example in the figure above, brings a political level into play: Seemingly unmotivated, the tweeter tags the – at that time – Argentinian president Alberto Fernández (@alferdez), in an attempt to persuade him to direct Argentinian policy towards this new-found friendship. This makes tangible how fraternal cosmopolitan statements can smoothly drift into political statements, and how cosmopolitanism is often not separated from politics. Digging deeper into the cosmopolitan posts, we discover a comment that truly follows an ancient Greek baseline of cosmopolitanism that was introduced in the theoretical section: The assumption that place of birth is accidental and irrelevant and that you literally could have been born everywhere in the world, which makes insisting on physical boundaries obsolete (Fig. 5). Written in Spanish, it translates: "We Argentinians are born wherever we want to be born [that means including in Bangladesh, R.L./C.P.]. Immense hugs for our brothers in Bangladesh."

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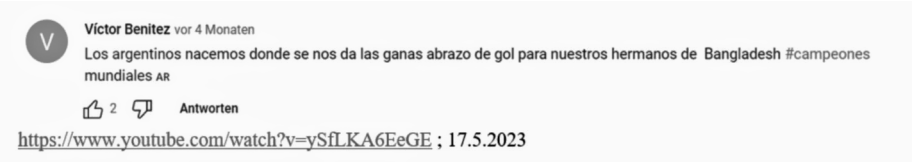
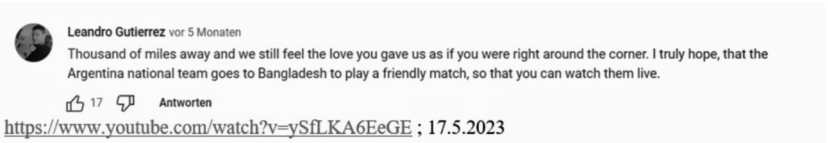
Fig. 5: Coincidence of Birth Place.



Category C) Cosmopolitan Solidarity Beyond Borders

As we have seen in the theory section, the idea of solidarity across borders is immanent in a banal cosmopolitan idea. It creates a spirit of conceiving the "other" as being "right around the corner" (Fig. 6):

Fig. 6: Solidarity Beyond Borders.



The Bangladeshi support seems to evoke the desire to respond with reciprocal actions. This reciprocal cosmopolitanism is triggered 'from below' and was not explicitly expected by the commenter, nor was it promoted by any authorities, but by the open-hearted "unconditional" (see above) Bangladeshi support. As a result, we can see very ordinary and concrete communicative actions that clearly go beyond a mere philosophical approach to cosmopolitan attitudes. To name just a few, Argentinian fans are proposing to support the Bangladesh national cricket team, given that cricket is the national sport of the South Asian country and, in line with the anti-imperial struggle (see above), the English team is one of Bangladesh's major opponents in that sport. (Fig. 7; translation: "In a while, the cricket team of Bangladesh will face … England. I believe that we will celebrate each run as if it were a Di Maria goal. Let's go Tigers of Bengal"!). Other supportive comments include a suggestion which is argued on reciprocity and reads that the Argentinian Football Association (AFA) should send coaches and managers to Bangladesh to help develop the country's football and eventually qualify for the World Cup.

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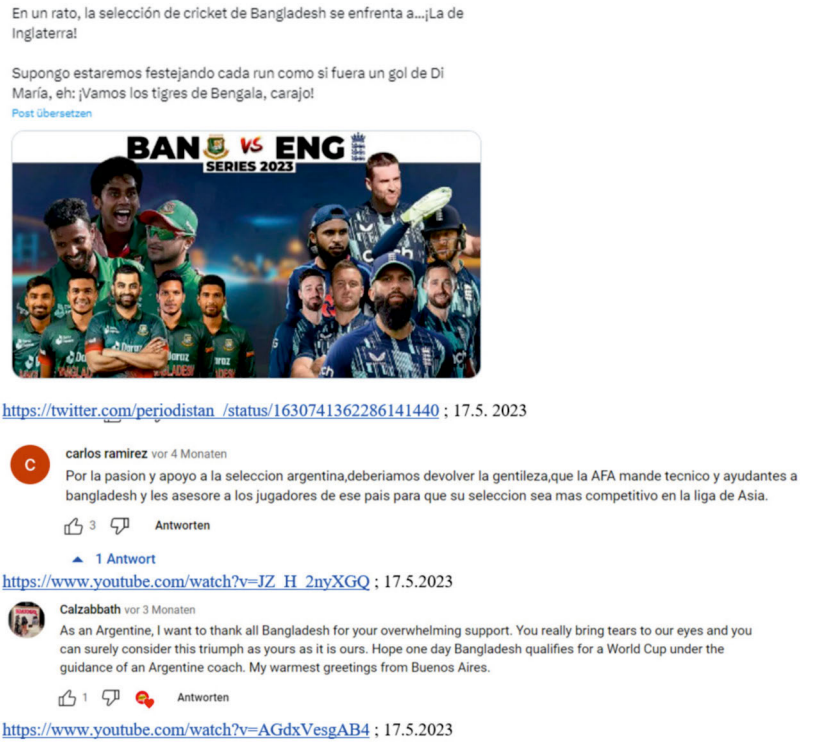
Fig. 7: Banal Cosmopolitan Reciprocity.



It must not be overlooked that the last two comments contain a paternalistic attitude in a certain, obvious way, which could give the impression of positioning Bangladesh in an inferior role in the "world order" in comparison to Argentina, and is not too far away from a hegemonic self-confidence. In other words, it is indeed brotherhood (see section before) but with a clear attribution of who is the bigger brother.

Category D) National Symbolisms

As we have seen, cosmopolitan solidarity does not mean giving up *roots* and feelings of local (or national) affiliation (Nussbaum, 1997: 9). It is therefore not surprising that – besides the cosmopolitan expressions looked at before – national affiliations and symbols are played with here. Even in a comment that reads "there is no […] country, no race in the love of football. Thank you Bangladesh BD." (Fig. 8), an indication of national belonging is inserted: "Love from IN[dia]".

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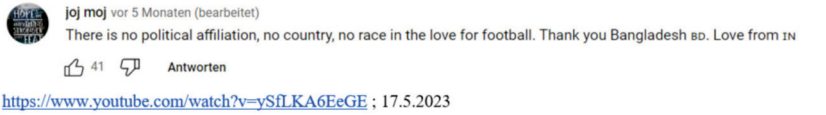
Fig. 8: Dissolution and allusion to nationality.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySfLKA6EeGE ; 17.5.2023

The expression of a national attachment and alignment with a national football team is a relatively simple process on social media; it only requires the use of a flag emoji. From a cosmopolitan perspective, it is worth noting that certain forms of hybrid national identities can be observed in this category, challenging the traditional logic of sports competitions between nations. However, in the theoretical part of this chapter, we explored how nationalism and cosmopolitanism can coexist without contradiction.

Fig. 9: Collage of tweets playing with national symbolism.

https://twitter.com/shojhal/status/1599927553350737920 ; 17.5.2023

@ Bangladesharg1

Figure 9 presents two images. The first image displays a screenshot from a social media video that contrasts and also merges national symbols such as native birds, places and political leaders from Bangladesh and Argentina; bringing again the solidarity but now also national symbolism to a political level. The second image shows a waving flag of Bangladesh during a celebration taking place on *Avenida 9 de Julio*, close to the *Obelisco*, the symbolic landmark of Buenos Aires. The significance of this lies in the incorporation of the Bangladeshi flag into Argentine symbolism, which

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allows Bangladesh to gain a foothold in the heart of the Argentine capital. And it continues the online video from the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, where the whole social media discourse started. Thus, the waving of the Bangladeshi flag in Buenos Aires can be seen as another act of reciprocity. Additionally, other posts suggest political unity between Bangladesh and Argentina (Fig. 9: "New province") but under Argentine leadership and thus taking again a paternalistic stance:

Fig. 10: Unification Expressions.

However, when frowning about the numerous usages of national symbolism, we should not forget that all expressions are linked to a sporting competition – the FIFA World Cup, the central logic of which is to bring nations into competition. Accordingly, people worldwide (not just in Bangladesh) cheered for Argentina, and there exists a distinct social media trend in which individuals express their pro-Argentinian football fandom while explicitly stressing their geographical origins (Fig. 10; examples from: India, Kenya, Russia, Guatemala). This could also be read as a link to a *rooted cosmopolitanism*. This phenomenon of fandom is likely to be fuelled by the status of Argentina as a winning team, which tends to generate a more positive reaction, as well as by the aforementioned long and mediatized history of sport and the idolizing of sporting figures such as Lionel Messi and Diego Maradona:

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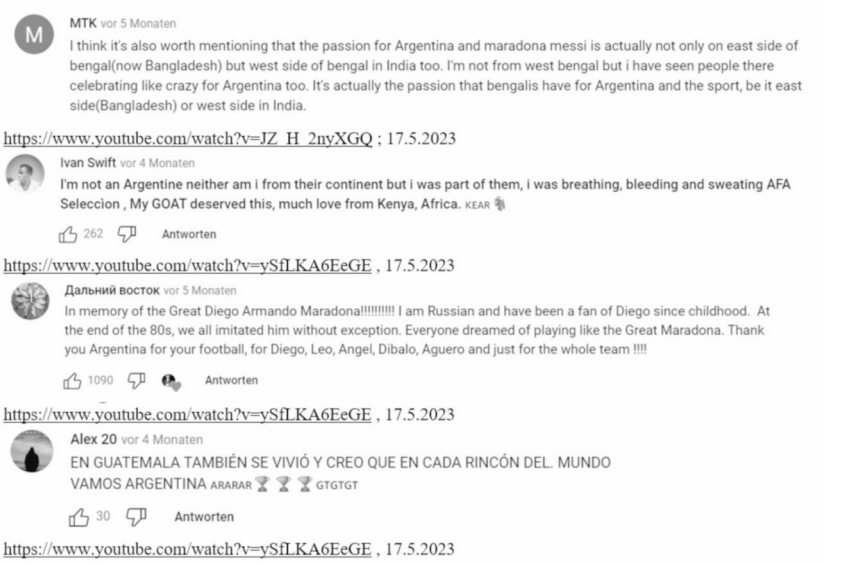
Fig. 11: Stressing the own geographical location.



7. Conclusions

This article has shed light on a social media phenomenon that arose during the FIFA World Cup 2022. Even if this story may seem surprising at first glance, it can be explained by historical developments and follows today's established logic of social media and mediatization in general. The underlying anti-colonial and anti-imperial narrative is not only an abstract, historical construct, but could also be identified here in a concrete and banal way in several actual statements, broadcasted by ordinary people on social media. The Argentine anti-colonial narrative is, however, complex and must be understood within the framework of a history of colonialism and later colonial-settlement and in the ways in which Argentines negotiate their image and hierarchy in the global order (see Pereyra in this volume), particularly through football. Against this background of shared experiences with the coloniality of power and narrations of subaltern resistance a certain kind of "brotherhood" thrives. The stranger is seen as the "brother", not taken as a blood brother, but as a compatriot (brother in arms) with whom painful (coloniality and a disadvantaged world order) and happy (football World Cup victoriese) experiences are shared. As we have seen, this fraternization also leads to expressions and actions of reciprocity and mutual support. We deconstructed these statements and placed them within the narrative of *cosmopolitan solidarity*.

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In connection with the solidaric stances, we identified furthermore the cosmopolitan narration of a sport that is supposed to be able to overcome borders, while the ordinary actors beyond the pitch, i.e. the fans, unthinkingly adopt cosmopolitan narratives. Overcoming "borders" does not only refer to the overcoming of national borders, but also to social and psychological boundaries of what separates people; for example boundaries through socio-structural determined spaces of encounters.

Even though the discourse regarding this Argentine-Bangladeshi football friendship seems to be attached in a way to cosmopolitanism it is without doubt also related to the logics of nationalism and demarcation. This might follow the very logic inherent in an international sporting event, which is based on an unmistakable competition between nation states. Of course, fan discourse is always subject to this structure of adversary and so here many references are made to nationality and the strengthening of the nation. That is maybe even more nourished in social media that follow the primacy of catchphrases and/or mediated imaginaries and give space and power to mediated national symbolisms and demarcations.

The widespread availability of televised matches and social media platforms enables fans to access and interact with football content from around the world, transcending geographical boundaries. This mediatized environment not only fuels the passion and enthusiasm of football supporters but also facilitates the exchange of ideas, narratives, and experiences across boundaries. As a result, mediatization emerges as a fundamental force in shaping the global reach and interconnectedness of football fandoms, bridging distances and fostering a cosmopolitan sense among fans worldwide.

However, social media are becoming spaces in which the crossing of borders (also in a figurative sense) can become an everyday experience, including leading to very physical cross-border encounters, e.g. through mutual visits, by chance encounters in football stadiums on site (that indeed happened for example at the World Cup) and also through the reopening of the Argentine embassy in Dhaka. These physical meetings can be new catalysts for strengthening a friendship between Bangladesh and Argentina which began cautiously in a pre-internet era and has lately blossomed in the online space.

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Exploring Whitexicans' Narratives of Europeanness in the Postdigital Field of Action

Yolanda López García

Abstract *This chapter explores the construction of narratives surrounding Europeanness, skin colour, and multilingualism of the public Instagram account @the_whitexicans and discusses how dominant imaginaries of coloniality and Mexicanness are reconfigured in the postdigital field of action. Whitexican is a neologism used to refer to "white Mexicans". However, the term is related to (biological) phenotypes in a limited sense. Moreover, it reveals socialized categories that highlight various forms of discrimination, including racism. The case of the whitexican illustrates the intertwining of the online and offline fields of action via social networking sites, by showing how deep social divisions are reconfigured in the postdigital age through practices of mocking, privilege, inequality, and discrimination. Yet while these interactions may contribute to challenging coloniality, they also reimagine what may be considered as Mexican.*

1. Introduction

In Mexico, phrases such as "*quítate del sol que te vas a poner prieto*" ("get out of the sun, you'll get dark"), "*cásate con un güero para mejorar la raza*" ("marry a blond/white person to improve the race), or *"ah como eres indio*" (oh you're such an Indian)[1] are part of everyday life[2] and are in some contexts simply taken-for-granted. This is due to the complex construction of the Mexican nation-state based on two dominant imaginaries: coloniality and Mexicanness.

1 The word "Indio" is linked to the word Indigenous and, under the same lens of coloniality, has been used to refer to being "dumb" or "ignorant". All translations by Yolanda López García (YLG), except where stated.

2 In everyday life, individuals – understood as social agents – are pragmatically oriented in a kind of "natural attitude". This natural attitude can be understood as the archive of commonsense knowledge that is taken for granted as normal, self-evident, and part of the routine of everyday life (see: Berger & Luckmann, 1991: 37). It is expressed through practices and is so ingrained and naturalized that it is often not questioned.

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These imaginaries are depicted in social networking sites (SNS), such as the accounts focusing on *whitexican* content. The term *whitexican* is a neologism that combines the words "White" and "Mexican" in English. In a limited sense, the term is related to (biological) phenotypes. However, in a broad sense, the term reveals historically constructed and deeply socialized categories that highlight different forms of discrimination, including racism. The origin of the term is uncertain. According to Forssel Méndez (2020) it has circulated since at least 2008 and has gained popularity since 2018, for example on Twitter/X with the account *@loswhitexicans*. Currently, there are different accounts on other SNS such as Facebook and Instagram, where (self-)labelled *whitexican* content is produced, posted and shared. These accounts post *whitexican* content, which presents people with actions and behaviour considered racist and classist (Rejón, 2020). The popularity of these accounts has led to their dissemination in traditional media and beyond the digital realm. This exposure has resulted in the appropriation of the term *whitexican* to describe people and their content displaying such attitudes. Third parties often label individuals and their actions as *whitexican*. Additionally, some people have begun to refer to themselves or their own practices as *whitexican*.

This chapter examines the content shared on the public Instagram account *@the_whitexicans*, which is managed by an anonymous administrator. Under the hashtag *#cosasdewhitexicans* (*whitexican* stuff) the content, often parodied, reveals attitudes and banal conflicts relating to the privileged lifestyle of *whitexicans*, such as travel and possessions, and their alleged unawareness of the system of inequalities in Mexico, which presupposes equal opportunities for all. In addition to displaying racist attitudes, the account shows interactions that *whitexicans* have with people from other social classes or phenotypes, such as domestic workers, Indigenous people, children begging for money and street vendors.

The dissemination of this content takes a primarily satirical and socially critical approach, encouraging debate among users with the aim of mocking and ridiculing the behaviour of (self-)identified *whitexicans*. I argue that the case of *whitexicans* is an emergent social phenomenon[3] in the postdigital field of action[4] because it involves practices among individuals who are engaged in both the online and offline fields of

3 Whitexicans as a web phenomenon has been discussed in journalistic articles(see. Cruz (2017); Camhaji et al. (2019); Estrada (2021)); and has gained ground as a phenomenon to be investigated in academic work (see: Alvarez-Pimentel (2020); Islas Weinstein et al. (2024); Mejía Núñez (2022)).

4 In a postdigital field of action, technology is embedded and entangled in the different fields of everyday life in which agents interact (Knox, 2019: 358). The boundaries between online/offline fields of action (Gómez-Cruz, 2022: 31; Floridi, 2015: 1; Knox, 2019) are therefore diffuse and obsolete. In this context, meaning is reshaped through practices within the continuity and complexity of the postdigital field of action. In other words, I argue that social *E*-maginaries are (dynamically) reconstructed trespassing online and offline dichotomies, as

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action. Therefore, this case shows, on the one hand, how meanings and practices are dynamically reshaped in an entangled and complex context, where the online field of action is deeply and profoundly intertwined with the offline field of action, and vice versa.

On the other hand, it demonstrates the depth and contemporary presence of dominant imaginaries of coloniality and Mexicanness. The concept has gained ground by being incorporated further into accounts posting on the topic, becoming a new term in the long list of social ascriptions that depict deep social divisions.[5] The practices include making visible inequality and discrimination on SNS by commenting, criticizing, and even harassing other internet users. While this case opens the possibility of raising awareness and reflecting on the reproduction of meaning on SNS, it also raises questions regarding how content on *whitexicans* runs the risk of reproducing social dichotomization instead of contributing to a critical dialogue and awareness.

Therefore, it is interesting to explore how the imaginaries of coloniality and Mexicanness are manifested in the content posted on *the_whitexicans* Instagram account. What narratives are found?

Ultimately the aim of this chapter is to explore how these posts may be interpreted in a way that reconfigures the imaginary of Europeanness – imagined from a Mexican perspective and practiced in the postdigital field of action? Is the content of the narratives addressing *whitexican* practices a form of social critique or a return to closed notions of culture? What emergent imaginaries might emerge from there, and if so, how?

The chapter is organized as follows: Firstly, a brief overview on racism as the basis for the dominant imaginaries of coloniality and Mexicanness is given. Then the methodological approach is described which combines netnographic, thematic, and hermeneutic analysis, followed by the discussion of three themes: *whitexican* stuff and imagined Europeanness; skin colour, and multilingualism. Finally, I discuss how these narratives can be interpreted as *E*-maginaries in the field of postdigital action.

2. Racism as the Basis of the Dominant Imaginaries of Coloniality

It is important to clarify firstly that social imaginaries are schemes of meaning that are socially constructed and shared. They influence the archive of commonsense knowledge and thus allow us to perceive, explain and act in which each field

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the case of whitexicans shows. I propose the concept of social E-maginaries as an encompassing concept for imaginaries within the postdigital field of action. See López García, 2024.

5 See Florescano (1995/2005); Navarrete (2017).

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of action considers to be reality (Pintos, 2005: 42–43; Baeza, 2011: 33). They exist in a constant and changing dynamic between dominant and emerging imaginaries. Dominant imaginaries are hegemonic and institutionalized forms of meaning in the form of internalized knowledge, fixed, typified, and assumed as normal and evident, which are not questioned by the agents that interact in a specific field of action. In the dominant imaginaries power-knowledge is usually exercised (Foucault, 1975/2023: 36–37). Power-knowledge determines and reconfigures social practices. Therefore, the intersubjective knowledge that is influenced and constructed by social imaginaries orients the thinking and doing of individuals, understood as social agents who find themselves in a struggle between the search for autonomy and heteronomy (Castoriadis, 1975/2005). Emergent imaginaries are understood as dynamic processes that question dominant imaginaries and attempt to reconstruct meaning that incorporates new ways of doing and thinking that modify dominant imaginaries. If they achieve recognition as shared and legitimized common sense, they may – or may not – become dominant imaginaries.

The dominant imaginary of coloniality refers to the system of domination initiated in the period when the terrain of today's Mexico was the core area of the Viceroyalty of New Spain (established in 1535 and ending in the processes of Independence between approximately 1810 and 1821). The viceregal society consisted of groups which were mostly divided by Spanish-established "ethnic" categorizations: Spaniards, Criollos (Spaniards born on the American continent), Indigenous people (wrongly called *Indios*), and Africans (see Jaramillo Herrera (2008) for a historical introduction). The "coexistence" between these people gave rise to miscegenation and the *casta* system (Reyes Tosqui et al., 2019: 118). Tipa (2020: 114–115) refers to "caste discourse" instead of *casta* system, since it suggests that there was no rigid hierarchical logic, but rather "a doctrine or set of ideological constructs that were developed within colonial society and reproduced as an instrument of power and social control." In this system of domination, the category of race is a fundamental criterion for the classification of society into social ranks and roles within that society. It is in this sense that Quijano (2005: 201) develops the notion of the "coloniality of power". Coloniality is governed by a dominant and Eurocentric vision and understanding of the world, which imagines non-Europeans, their knowledge, and practices as inferior.

Figure 1 shows different combinations and names depicted in a painting (of unknown authorship and presumably from the 18th century) representing an elaboration of the official racial policies imagined by the patron elites. Depending on the origin of each parent, a category was created. For example, children of a Spaniard and an Indigenous woman were called *mestizos* (roughly speaking "mixed-race") (Moreno Figueroa & Wade, 2022: 4), and those of a Spaniard and an African woman, *mulatos* (Reyes Tosqui et al., 2019: 118). As Taylor (2009: 38) points out, the fundamental racial distinction in Mexico was between Spanish (white European) and Indige-

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nous people: A duality deeply rooted in law and everyday life. Thus, Taylor suggests that paintings (such as Fig. 1) depicting a detailed distinction between more *castas* were more imagined rather than an existing and functioning social order in everyday life. Viceroyal society was more complex in its social stratification, which intersected with other aspects such as kinship and ethnicity.

Figure 1: Representation of Casta System, Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Although colonialism in Mexico ended in 1810, coloniality was reinforced with the imaginary of coloniality/modernity (Mignolo, 2005), where the discourse of progress, development and growth were key to the construction of the nation-

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state. As part of the nationalist political project of the 1940s, the subject of the "new modern Mexico" was imagined as *mestizo* and Mexican (Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2016: 522; Vasconcelos, 1925/2014). This sought a certain pride in Mexican nationality, which had been and has been imagined in a complex web of symbols, legends, and artefacts, but which also remains deeply intertwined with discriminatory and inequitable mechanisms deeply rooted in everyday life, and in which narratives of race, class, and gender, among others, converge.[6]

Racism in Mexico has not been sufficiently researched and addressed (Moreno Figueroa, 2016: 92), mainly due to the illusion of equality based on *mestizaje* and post-racial ideology[7] (Mejía Núñez, 2022; Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2016; Gall, 2016). *Mestizaje* is perceived as inclusive and fluid, however, it "is shaped by clear racial hierarchies where whiteness is valued and blackness and indigenousness are marginalized" (Wade, 2005: 240, cited in Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2016: 521). The racial project of *mestizaje* delegitimizes the importance of addressing, recognizing and naming racism since *mestizaje* feeds the belief that "Mexicans are mestizos and therefore, there is no race or racism in Mexico" (Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2016: 516; Moreno Figueroa, 2016: 92).

Racism can be understood as a "global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the 'capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system'" (Grosfoguel, 2011 as cited in Grosfogel, 2016: 10). Superiority and inferiority are constructed according to specific regional historical contexts and has been expressed through various discriminatory practices based on religion, colour, ethnicity or cultural background (often related to national culture), resulting in the racialization of bodies (Grosfoguel, 2016: 11).

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6 To read more about my perspectives on the imaginary of Mexicanness, see López García (2021); (2023).

7 Post-racial ideologies refer to the discourse of "racelessness" from David Theo Goldberg (2002) in the context of the U.S. (Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2016: 516). Post-racial ideologies are "forms of thought, discourse and action that evade, delegitimise, and seek to eliminate racial differences and their effects from the focus of academic scholarship, activist struggle, public debate, and state policy. Post-racial ideologies operate through racialized forms of power while simultaneously claiming the non-significance of race. They generate fraught understandings of belonging and inclusion that elide racial difference and structural racism in ways that allow the re-articulation rather than the transformation of racial inequalities within national and global developments. Moreover, when deployed as a strategy of power, post-racial ideologies continually seek to depoliticize race, racism, and difference in ways that demobilize anti-racist politics, substantive cultural recognition, and material redistribution" (Da Costa, 2014: 2 as cited in Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2016: 517). See also Lentin (2012).

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In Mexico, colourist racism certainly exists (see: Mejía Núñez, 2022; Gall, 2016; Tipa, 2020; Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2016).[8] Discrimination is based on people's phenotype, and this is closely linked to the dominant imaginary of coloniality. While the category of race is not expressly used to "legitimise" a supposed essential difference between people and groups, the category of "skin colour" is applied in that sense, although both categories are based on the superficial physical features of a person (Tipa, 2020: 117).[9]

Under the dominant imaginary of coloniality, "white", has been constructed as a category that involves imaginaries of "superiority", "beauty" and being "civilised". Therefore, the discussion is not concerning only skin colour but also a way of being in terms of an imagined *blanquitud* (Echeverría, 2022: 149) (whiteness) which is based on modern, civilisational and capitalist imaginaries, "one does not need to be white-skinned to have *blanquitud* and reproduce the narrative of capitalism" (Carlos Fregoso, 2023: 278) – and, as I suggest, to reproduce coloniality.

3. Exploring *Whitexicans'* Narratives

This chapter is based on the analysis of the content of the Instagram account *the_whitexicans*, which has 99,900 followers (at the time of writing). The account has had 2,140 posts, of which 119 posts were analyzed including 108 posts with still images and 11 short videos, chosen for their relevance. The qualitative research combined aspects of netnographic analysis (Kozinets et al. 2014; Kozinets & Gambetti, 2021) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis of themes has been interpreted using critical and hermeneutic interpretation (Kozinets et al. 2014: 270; Schriewer, 2014).

The ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (franzke et al., 2020) were followed with some modifications. In the case of the *the_whitexicans* account, it was decided to anonymize all usernames and faces appearing in posts, al-

8 Moreno Figueroa (2016) reflects that the influence of research on racism in the U.S. context has caused confusion when studying racism in Mexico and in other Latin American contexts, by adopting definitions and categories that are alien to the anglophone context.

9 Skin tone is a factor of discrimination that, when combined with other aspects such as social position, age, disability, and gender, creates a complex web of exclusionary experiences. The important role of colourism is identified in the reports and censuses that have been carried out in Mexico. For example, according to Solis et al., (2019), speakers of indigenous languages, those who self-identify as indigenous, black or mulatto, and those with darker skin tones are less likely to attain higher education, higher occupational positions, and the highest wealth status. This in comparison to people who do not speak indigenous languages, with white or mestizo self-ascription, or with lighter skin, which are the characteristics with which more advantageous economic outcomes are associated. (See also Solís et al., 2023).

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though it is a public account, and the information can be accessed easily. Some of the posts that appear on *the_whitexicans* are already anonymized, while others are not. During the netnographic analysis, it has been observed, that when the person's information details appear in the posts, users go to the profile of the person exposed as *whitexican* to write comments, some of which are aggressive. These practices can be considered as cyberbullying, and it has caused users (whose content is labelled as *whitexican* and being mocked) to change their account from public to private or even close it for some time. However, is beyond the scope of this research to follow every individual practice or to verify the authenticity of each of the posts.

For this chapter, themes concerning links with Europe that encompass banal problems, imagined Europeanness, skin colour and multilingualism are discussed.

3.1 *Whitexican* stuff and the Imagined Europeanness

The hashtag concerning *whitexican* stuff is used to label posts that show practices of privilege and superiority (*blanquitud*). The following posts illustrate the various ways in which links with Europe are addressed, showing how "being European" is imagined.

The post (Fig. 2) refers to a football match between Mexico and France and the poster's justification for supporting the French team instead of the Mexican team. The subject of football is a subject where nationalism flows according to loyalty to a certain country (see Lietz & Pereyra in this volume). One of the users responds:

> "Their great-grandparents were those Frenchmen who came to invade our country, failed and could not return to their country because they ended up poor, but French, (four emojis laughing and crying)."

The comment alludes to France's attempts to invade Mexico in the mid-19th century[10] and the tone can be interpreted as mocking – in this case the grandparents stayed in Mexico being poor, but French, which suggests a plus. Allusion is made to the symbolic weight that French or European nationality would have in Mexico, regardless of socio-economic circumstances. Furthermore, users ridiculed the error in the post, suggesting that it should have read "ancestry" instead of "descent". Mocking spelling or content errors is a common practice among those criticizing the (self)attributed superiority of *whitexicans*.

10 See Jaramillo Herrera (2008); Galeana (2011).

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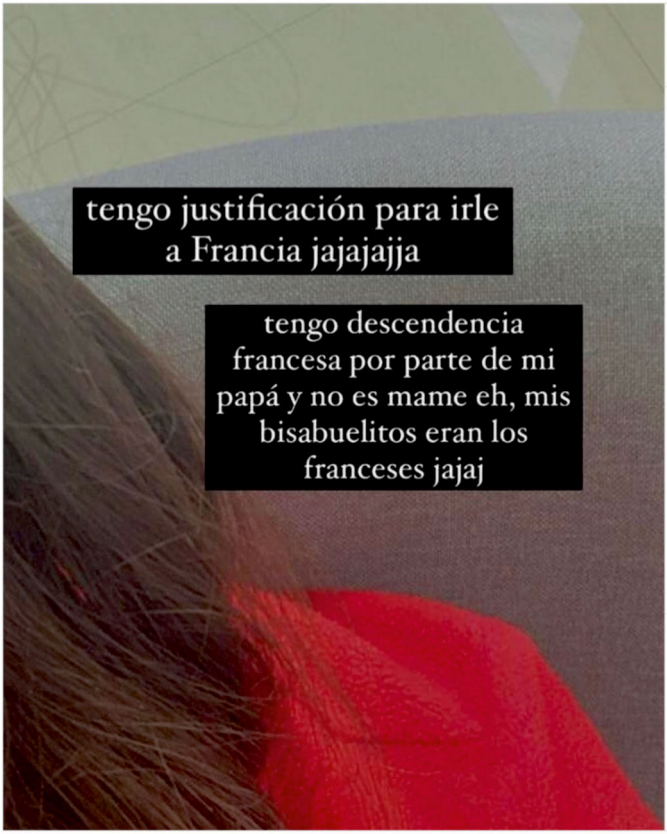
Figure 2: Screenshot whitexicans descendencia Source: (the_whitexicans, 21 December.2022)[11]



Other posts described "being European", for example "having a portion of French blood in the veins" (Fig. 3) and showing the person with a beret that corresponds to an object locatable within the dominant imaginary of what is considered to be the "French culture".

11 Translation: "I'm justified in supporting France hahahahahaha. I have French descent (sic) on my dad's side and it's not a joke, my great-grandparents were French".

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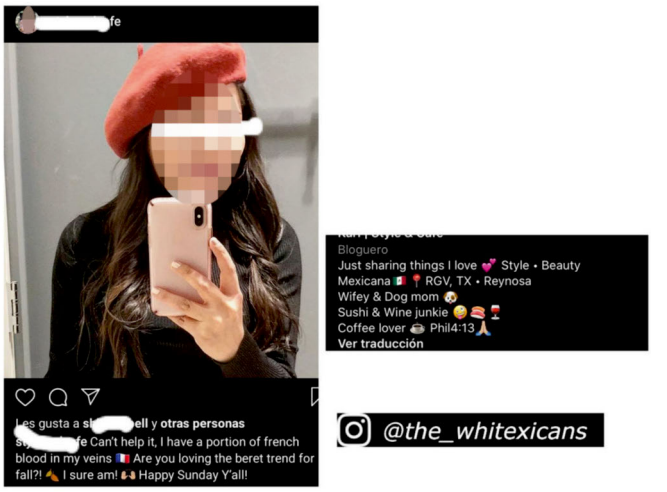
The dominant imaginary of coloniality that places the European at the top of the social pyramid can be interpreted from the following anonymous post (see Fig. 4) that asks, "how to get descendants with 'European genes'". One of the user comments complains that the post has been picked up and posted on the *whitexicans* account, as the user explains that the question is genuine and was asked in a private group that received serious responses. This post can be interpreted as a racist idea in the sense discussed earlier regarding "improving race" and as also commented on by users under the post, while others defend the freedom to choose with whom one wants to have children.

Figure 3: Screenshot whitexican woman with basque beret, Source: (the_whitexicans, 14 September 2020).[12]



12 Translation: "Can't help it, I have a portion of French blood in my veins (French flag emoji) Are you loving the beret trend for fall?! (emoji autumn blatt) I sure am! (hands up) Happy Sunday Y'all! [original in English]".

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Figure 4: Screenshot whitexicans ayuda, Source: (the_whitexicans, 11 September 2023).[13]

The postings that relate to the Europe category also relate to *whitexican* practices which, according to the comments of users, are banal practices that denote privilege. They are criticized because these practices present some cause of stress or concern that cannot be compared to causes considered more serious, for example, suffering from physical abuse, or not having basic resources to live on.

For example, the following image (Fig. 5) shows a woman looking to the horizon.

13 Translation: "Hello, has anyone got pregnant by artificial insemination abroad, or do you know if I can pay for foreign sperm in Mexico? I honestly would like to have a child with European genes!"

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Figure 5: Screenshot whitexicans estrés, Source: (the_whitexicans, 22 February 2023).[14]

Among the 105 comments that this posting received, some indicated in what is interpreted as a sarcastic tone "that the poor thing suffers a lot, and that we should send good vibes to this brave warrior." Some other comments agree that it is stressful to organize trips. Others criticize mixing up English words like "trip" instead of "*viaje*" in Spanish commenting "you couldn't say: '*viaje*'? [you are] Ridiculous." In this posting, it is possible to detect practices considered banal by people who have the privilege of travelling to Europe, an issue that causes them stress. For the users who comment, this situation is highly privileged and should not be a cause of stress – as it would be, for example, to live in circumstances of poverty or insecurity. It can also be noted that mixing in English words is criticized, which could be interpreted from the dominant Mexican imaginary as keeping the Spanish language free of Anglicisms.

14 Translation: "I'm organising a 21-day trip to Europe and all this information has me so stressed (three suffering emojis)."

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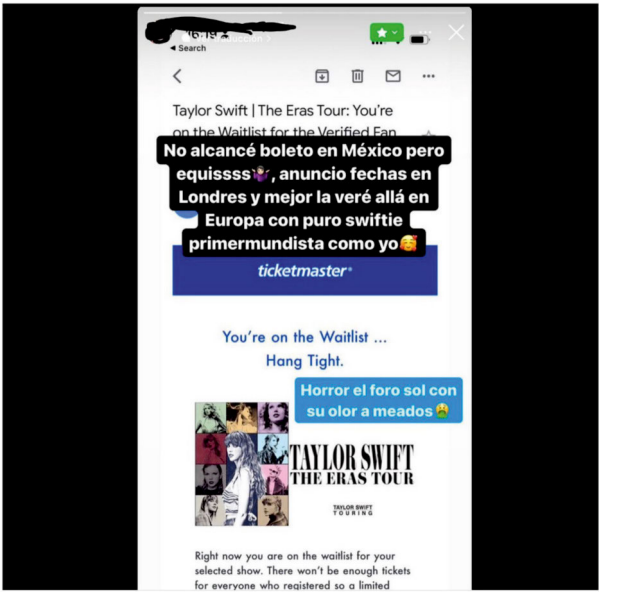
In a very similar tone, there are other postings that complain about what these people must do and "suffer". The following post reveals that, in the context of a concert that the singer Taylor Swift gave in Mexico, many people could not get a ticket, about which several people posted to complain. Two very similar posts were found to make the decision to travel to another country to see the singer, in one case to the United States and in the other to Europe, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Screenshot whitexicans concierto Swift, Source: (the_whitexicans, 28 August 2023).[15]



This post clearly demonstrates the disdain for the concert organized in Mexico and the expression of disgust when referring to the place where the concert would be held in Mexico, which according to the post, "smell(s) of piss". Although anger is expressed, the post suggests that the person has the resources to go to the concert in London (which however cannot be proven). It also says that in Europe there are "first world swifties" referring to the fandom of the singer, suggesting that in Mexico there are "not first world swifties".

15 Translation: "I couldn't get a ticket in Mexico but no problemmmm (emoji never mind), she announced dates in London and I'd better see her there in Europe with pure first world swifties like me (emoji little hearts). Horror at the Foro Sol [location of the concert in Mexico] with its smell of piss (emoji vomiting)."

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The following post (Fig. 7) reflects an imaginary suggesting that everything in Europe is better than in Mexico.

In this case, the answers show sarcasm concerning a banal discussion such as in relation to a mango ice-cream. The irony of a fruit, which is harvested in Mexico, but which is said to taste better in places where mangoes are not harvested. It is even said that the ice is better, even though ice (frozen water) would taste the same everywhere. One user replies that "he lives in Europe and he can attest that the ice is very good (I think it comes from where Thor and those Marvel guys live) […]" responding satirically to the comment.

Figure 7: Screenshot whitexicans mango, Source: (the_whitexicans, 25 September 2022).[16]

In the context of the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022, *the_whitexicans* Instagram account published content referring to publications discussing the matter. The posts offer condolences to the Queen's family, or to the United Kingdom (UK), or express their opinion of the Queen by linking it to a visit to the coun-

16 Translation: "Mango ice cream tastes better in France and Venice nmms [no shit], I don't know if that's because of the European mango or the European ice (cat emoji with heart eyes)."

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try or even to Windsor Palace. The following post (Fig. 8) is a way of making European ancestry visible, expressing great affection and admiration felt for the UK. The post also shows that pride in being Mexican is expressed, but the link with Europe is made clear through the surname and the migratory experience of the person's great-grandfather.

Figure 8: Screenshot whitexicans Cardiff, Source: (the_whitexicans, 09 September 2022).[17]

The post had 284 comments, repeatedly replying that Cardiff is not in England but in Wales and referring to the misspelling of the post (and interest). Others scoffed that they too feel a connection because they use "Worcestershire sauce" in their meals. One comment reply:

> "Cardiff is Wales, at least should have said united kingdom (sic), it was no use what dad paid at the Tec (emoji laughing and crying)."

This comment alludes to the private university *Tecnológico de Monterrey* (TEC), which was supposedly paid for by her father but does not prove that the person is educated. As it is unknown whether the person indeed studied at that university, the reference can be interpreted as suggesting that attending a paid elite university does not save

17 Translation: "I am proudly Mexican, but my paternal surname is English. My great-grandfather sailed from Cardiff, England to Mexico in the gold rush. I have always had great affection, interest, and admiration for the UK. RIP Queen Isabel II (white dove, UK flag)."

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a person from making mistake-ridden posts. The reference to the university being paid for by the father has to do with a stereotype of dependence on parents who cover all the expenses of children, whose third level education has little effect, implying a certain ignorance on the part of the person. This post alludes also to the supposed superiority of whitexicans discussed in Fig. 2.

3.2 Skin Colour

Figure 9 reflects a controversy surrounding the visiting of Costco grocery store where membership is required to shop. Users complained on SNS about being discriminated against by being asked to show their receipt when leaving the shop to make sure they had not stolen anything. The image reflects who is usually asked for the receipt leaving the store, i.e. people with darker skin tones while people with lighter skin tones are thanked for their purchase.

Figure 9: Screenshot whitexicans ticket, Source: (the_whitexicans, 03 March 2023).[18]

18 Translation: Thank you for your purchase (lighter colours of the palette used for self-definition) Please show me your ticket (darker colours of the palette).

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Figure 10: Screenshot whitexicans güero, Source: (the_whitexicans, 05 June 2022).[19]

It is observed that posts dealing with skin colour are very common on *whitexican* content and usually generate a lot of controversy. The three following postings (Fig. 10, 11, and 12) have in common that the publishers define themselves as white and share the difficulties or challenges of being white in Mexico.

19 Translation: "I am white and I would have liked to be brown and have an ordinary surname. It makes life easier. Being güero in Mexico makes you an easy target."

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Figure 11: Screenshot whitexicans tono mayoritario, Source: (the_whitexicans, 21 April 2023).[20]

Because of their white skin colour, they claim to be "easy targets" (Fig. 10), or that other people see them in as being ugly because they do not have "the majority (skin-)tone" of the people in Mexico, that of Tenoch Huerta and Yalitza Aparicio (Fig. 12), referring to two actors known for actively defending their dark skin tone.[21]

20 Translation: "Being white in Mexico is a daily challenge, almost everyone sees you ugly for not having the majority (skin-)tone (suffering emoji)."

21 Both actors belong to the movement Poder Prieto (Prieto power) "that seeks to eradicate systemic racism and promote empathy, joy and dignified representation" [original in Spanish] (@poderprieto_mx, 2021). Poder Prieto can be seen as an example of a movement questioning dominant imaginaries aiming to resignificate the meaning of Prieto, see Rodríguez (2021).

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Figure 12: Screenshot whitexicans desafío, Source: (the_whitexicans, 12 June 2023).[22]

22 Translation: "Being white in Mexico is a challenge. People look at you ugly because you don't have a skin tone like Tenoch Huerta or Yalitza Aparicio (crying emoji)."

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Figure 13: Screenshot whitexicans consejo, Source: (the_whitexicans, 16 July 2022) [23]

Being "an easy target" is interpreted as being perceived as a white person, as having certain privileges and a favourable socio-economic position. Therefore, they claim to be charged more in places where one is seen as belonging to a privileged socio-economic class, or as a foreigner – thinking automatically that foreigners who are in Mexico have money. Having an "ordinary" surname can be interpreted in relation to the logic of having a foreign-sounding name which differentiates one and places one as belonging to the deeply ingrained imaginary of imagined elites, such as the colonial social pyramid that automatically places foreigners at the top.

The idea of *blanquitud* as something better can be identified in the following post asking how to make the baby white when the couple is brown-skinned. Note the use of the diminutive in *blanquito* (whitey) and *morenito* (brownie) is a way of softening the language surrounding these racialised categories.

23 Translation: "Hello, I am 3 months pregnant, does anyone know what to do so my baby is born white [blanquito] even though my partner and I are both brown [morenitos]."

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Some of the responses from users include sarcastic advice such as eating lots of vanilla ice cream for nine months, putting the baby in rice when it is born, or putting it in chlorine. Another user comments:

> "I don't know whether to laugh, cry, get angry or follow the sarcasm of the mmda (sic) [stupidity] you wrote! I could say just as much bullshit, but maybe you take one of these people's sarcastic advice, 'literally', and go make a bigger [stupidity] than your question."

Another more analytical and thoughtful commentator writes:

> "This speaks to how racism is internalized by communities that are marginalized because of their colour, and the only way they think their son or daughter can get ahead is if they are white. That is why it is so common to say marry a girl to improve the race, which is a very racist saying, this should not be mocked."

In these interactions it can be seen how, as a result of posting, there are interactions in the form of mockery and sarcasm but also how some users share concern and reflect on it – however, these types of comments are a minority.

3.3 Multilingualism

Speaking languages – usually those related to Europe – is a constant theme in the publications of the *whitexican* practices. From the comments in the chosen posts dealing with languages, it can be interpreted that there is a hint of pride and/or arrogance in speaking languages other than Spanish, and this interpretation is reflected in the users' comments. For example, Figure 14 alludes to the two occasions when the person is in a restaurant thinking in English but answers in French. While we do not know the exact context of these postings, it is perhaps somewhat simplistic to ignore this context and simply criticize these practices. The irony is read in an initial post by *the_whitexicans* asking "Doesn't it happen to you?" alluding to a common practice of everyday life of living between languages, or even the contexts mentioned, such as being in a restaurant or the fact of travelling.

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Figure 14: Screenshot whitexicans creída, Source: (the_whitexicans, 30 January 2021).[24]

There are other types of comments that also relate multilingual everyday life but are interpreted as more contextualized in terms of families composed of people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, explaining multilingual family dynamics and discussing multiple identities more clearly.

For example, Figure 15 explains that the person was born in France, the father was French and the mother Mexican. The person identifies herself as French-Mexican and relates the difficulty she has in identifying with one or the other and how she sometimes feels more or less of the two nationalities she reports. The publication also highlights mobility, as she lived for years in Europe but now finds herself living in Mexico.

24 Translation: "I'm going to sound very smug (and I'm okay with that) but it's now twice in a restaurant that I'm thinking in English, and it comes out in French when I answer the waiter."

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Figure 15: Screenshot whitexican Montpellier, Source: (the_whitexicans, 13 October 2020).[25]

The comments on this post are mocking the person for "giving the whole biography", another criticizes her for not knowing how to write, another comments on "the Pacific", probably referring to the Atlantic being the ocean that divides Mexico with Europe – although it is not fully clear if the person in the original post is referring to Europe. A more relevant response is:

> "She feels more French than Mexican when she is in Mexico, and when she is abroad she feels more Mexican pride than when she is in her own country, except when the national team plays or 16 de sep (sic) [September, anniversary of the Mexican independence]."

It is precisely this comment that encompasses the imaginary of the so-called whitexicans, feeling proud to be Mexican abroad, but denying and complaining about Mexicanness while in Mexico. However, this type of commentary is based on the imagi-

25 Translation: Where are you from? [Question on IG] I was born in Montpellier, France, my father was from France and his parents were Spanish and my grandmother was Italian, my mother is Mexican like her parents, and I am French-Mexican, it's hard for me to identify myself, sometimes I feel more French than Mexican and sometimes it's the other way around. Life takes a thousand turns and today I am in Pinotepa although 12 years ago I lived thousands of kilometres away across the Pacific.

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nary of Mexicanness, which understands nations as homogeneous closed containers of unique belonging to one entity that would not allow belonging to another, historically seen as having a distrust of having two equal loyalties and deep love for the nation.[26] Although diversity is accepted within what is considered Mexican, such as Indigenous diversity, people who have any links with Europeans continue to be viewed with distrust. In other words, from the lens of the imaginary of coloniality, it is seen as a privilege, a form of glamour and added value, and from the imaginary of Mexicanness as a sort of threat to being Mexican.

The following post portrays a content creator who responds on TikTok to the question "why does your family only speak English?" To which she responds by explaining the family dynamics and the languages her parents speak and how they combine languages such as English, Arabic and Spanish.

Figure 16: Screenshot whitesicans familia multilingue, Source: (the_whitexicans, 29 March 2022).[27]

26 See Anderson (1983/2006).

27 Translation: "My parents speak Arabic, French, English and Spanish! But between us (my siblings, my parents and me) we speak English combined with Arabic and Spanish. With the rest of my family I speak English combined with Arabic!"

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Among the comments made by users, in this case it is not justified that they put the post on the account of *the_whitexicans* because it is a question asked to her directly and it is not a post merely with her talking about these issues, and therefore it should not be considered a *whitexican* practice. However, it seems that by speaking multiple languages and combining them with her family, she is already a symbol of privilege and therefore considered *whitexican* by others. For example, one user comments:

> "What fucking obsession do whitexicanitos have with languages? Speak whatever the fuck you want; we don't give a fuck if you speak Swahili to ask for a roll of paper when you're taking a shit (emoji laughing and crying)."

Other users enter the discussion:

> "How many people are burned by the fact that someone speaks more than one language? Wow. When I go to my country to visit, I'm not going to say 'no way I'm going to be people like you (two emojis laughing and crying) jsjs (sic)'."

to which another user replied:

> "It doesn't matter that I speak it, the problem is that I want to use it to feel superior to others and show it off."

That is to say that posting about multilingualism is interpreted as a way of feeling superior to others and showing off, therefore, this type of post is considered by some users who comment on *the_whitexicans* page as a *whitexican* practice.

On the site there are also videos of people telling their stories about the languages they speak. In this article I will mention one video (Fig. 17) of a young woman, filming herself in an outdoor location, acting out a situation from her everyday life as the daughter of a French father and a Mexican mother. The video is about her acting out a dialogue between the three of them, where she asks her dad for permission to go to her friend's house to do some teamwork and then she asks her mum the same thing, but in the other language. The account *the_whitexicans* takes up this video adding the comment "me at my most schizophrenic". This title is interpreted to mean that the woman plays each role of her, her father and mother, changing her language, changing her posture to simulate the father and using some accessories such as glasses to simulate the mother.

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Figure 17: Screenshot whitexicans francés-mexicana, Source: (the_whitexicans, 06 February 2023).[28]

The comments generated by this video are varied in opinion. Some say that "she's not doing anything wrong", others say that this video "is not cringe or whitexican with little brains, her dad is French and that's it". Others find her French quite good "without an accent". However, other comments criticize her physical posture, crouching down, others "how stupid she looks doing the video in the street", and others wonder why she makes these kinds of videos at all.

4. Discussion

The phenomenon of accounts posting *whitexican* content, in the example of the posts presented in this chapter, brings to the forefront the issue of how for some people,

28 Translation: "My life having a French father (French flag) and a Mexican mother (Mexican flag)."

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posting content, considered by many to be banal, is part of everyday life in the postdigital field of action. Publishing in public formats becomes a normalized act for some. Others take up those posts considered elitist, privileged, and discriminatory, and post it as *whitexican* stuff aiming to ridicule or even label what seems like real content, from people who have (self-)categorized as *whitexicans*.

The posts analyzed in three thematic areas *whitexican stuff* and imagined Europeanness, skin colour and multilingualism, allow us to observe the persistence of themes that include historical disputes that involve entrenched social inequality, based on dominant imaginaries of coloniality and Mexicanness. These imaginaries have been shaped throughout history, so they are not new phenomena. What is new, however, is how these imaginaries are reconfigured, mediated by the internet, in what is here located as the postdigital field of action. The creation of a neologism *"whitexican"* on SNS, and the practice of creating accounts with this term, posting with hashtags, and having so many people consume content of this type, even searching for posts and sending them to the creators of the account, engaging in conversations about *whitexicans* and their practices, is one way in which meaning is reorganized, reconfiguring social *E*-maginaries.

The results have shown how various posts on the Instagram account of *the_whitexicans* present aspects related to "the European", being able to observe posts that present practices related to privileges, considered as banal, but also with associations to skin colour, and a way of identifying and cataloguing experiences that have to do with multilingualism and multiple identities.

One can seriously question the need to publish moments of banal everyday life, such as those shown here that range from commenting on the taste of ice-cream, whether a person suffers from stress from planning a trip to Europe, what one apparently "suffers" by being white in Mexico, looking up information on how to have children with "European genes" who are born white, the languages one speaks and when exactly one speaks them.

Although in this research we cannot know the motivations of the people who made the posts, nor it cannot be proven that all posts are "real" and genuinely felt, we can interpret the normality, ease, and immediacy of posting, which is also part of postdigital practice, since it is taken-for-granted to post everyday life on SNS, at least for some people. However, the "normality" of the imaginary of coloniality that is posted is challenged by other users who take up the content and label it as *whitexican* content. This *whitexican* content is criticized, mocked and even incites users to go to the accounts of the creators of the content in question, some of whom have closed their accounts due to the harassment and hatred they have encountered. As can be seen, the reactions to the original posts contain sarcasm but also foul language that is not constructive. However, it was also identified how some users try to offer constructive criticism and awareness regarding some topics.

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Social *E*-maginaries are reorganized by reconfiguring meaning and accompanying practices. This reconfiguration aligns with components such as reshaping common sense, creating frames of reference, and the role that algorithmicity plays in the postdigital field of action. In this sense, it is possible to align this understanding with the components of communality, referentiality and algorithmicity (Stalder, 2018). Commenting on and questioning *whitexicans*' attitudes generates communality in a specific field of action. In turn, the referentiality of both recognizing meaning around the *whitexican,* both in terms of the privileges and discriminatory practices denounced, but also in terms of humour and critical references to this phenomenon. Algorithmicity generates a bubble of information that suggests a certain type of content, in this case content concerning *whitexicans*, but ignoring other content showing other lifeworlds.

The content on Europe, travel and even family or language ties allow us to recognize that in the content labelled as *whitexican* there is a certain charm and glamour in what has to do with the European region, or the imaginaries surrounding Europe that correspond in part to what I have identified elsewhere as the "European dream" (López García, 2021) and that can be interpreted as imagining "the European" on a better positioned, civilizing, cultural scale, which corresponds to a gaze influenced by coloniality and aligned with the narratives of *blanquitud*.

However, it seems that the content, while demonstrating a certain social class privilege, also demonstrates stories of people who have grown up in environments where more than two languages are spoken (Fig. 16 and 17). These cases show that for example, if a person is bilingual and posts about their habitus in their field of action, criticism might appear because the person is accused of showing off.

It seems interesting that criticisms are made when content appears that makes people who highlight their multiple belongings, multiple identities, and multilingualism visible, which is attacked and considered a *whitexican* privilege for some. It would be necessary to question whether these criticisms are constructed based on the dominant imaginary of Mexicanness, where pride in belonging to the Mexican nation plays an important role and is somehow threatened by the presence of other languages and multiple identities, which in this case, being related to a European country, are also seen as a form of privilege. Posts raising criticisms concerning multilingualism ignore the real contextual processes that people who speak more than one language or who live in another country, or who are native speakers of more than one language face, such as code-switching or the difficulties of speaking different languages in different contexts.[29]

29 Research on code-switching, multilingualism and migration has been intensively studied, see Auer (2005); Cantone (2007); Montanari and Quay (2019); Treffers-Daller et al. (2020).

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5. Conclusion

This chapter explored how imaginaries of coloniality and Mexicanity are manifested in the content of the Instagram account *the_whitexicans*, specifically in the narratives around Europeanness, skin colour and multilingualism.

Although the coloniality of power predates the internet, it is interesting to observe how it is reconfigured in the postdigital field of action, that is, how social *E*-maginaries are reconfigured. I have argued that the case of *whitexicans* is an emergent social phenomenon because it involves individual practices that reconfigure meaning and postdigital practices themselves in terms of communality, referentiality and algorithmicity, demonstrating the deep intertwining between the online and offline fields of action. In the postdigital context, coloniality-based practices have been transformed through the publication, labelling, and naming of posts concerning privilege and discrimination under the *whitexican* label – yet *whitexican* content continues to be produced by (self)described *whitexicans*. At the same time as the profound and complex actuality of the dominant imaginary of coloniality is exposed, the dominant imaginary of Mexicanness is also re-signified through the negotiation of what is Mexican and what is not, what is showing off and what is not, according to the users. While inequality and colourist racism are not new, what is new is how they are reimagined and practiced in the postdigital age, for instance with the creation of neologism such as *whitexican* and the so-called *whitexicans* stuff.

Much remains to be explored about how, and if, more equitable emergent *E*-maginaries might be constructed, or whether accounts such as those with *whitexican* content that aim to mock might signify some kind of social consciousness and reflection, or whether practices of cyberbullying and harassment intensify social division.

Beyond the individual attitudes of (self-)described *whitexicans*, one should question the depth of the dominant imaginaries of coloniality and Mexicanness as an instituted imaginary, deeply rooted in the practices and meanings that guide people, but that are systemic and structural. Therefore, following Sara Ahmed (2012, 44), racism should not be reduced to the attitudes of individuals, as this perspective fails to grasp the full extent of the problem and how racism is perpetuated. Focusing on individuals as the sole source of racism perpetuates institutional racism by giving the false impression that removing these individuals will solve the problem. In this case, coloniality is deeply inherent to institutions and therefore normalized in a variety of practices. Removing bad attitudes is not enough. It is crucial to question whether the internet and these practices can generate constructive dialogue that promotes change at a deeper level and within emergent *E*-maginaries. It seems that changing these imaginaries is more about changing structures of power, which seems difficult, and I am rather pessimistic that it will happen in the near future.

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The Fundamental Error: Harmful Community Building Through Othering Practices on the Facebook Page of the Most Popular German Newspaper

Luisa Conti

Abstract *This chapter addresses growing concerns surrounding polarization, misinformation, and the erosion of social cohesion in many societies by examining dynamics within digital spaces that reinforce anti-cosmopolitan attitudes, thereby endangering social peace. Utilizing a multimodal approach that combines netnography with experiential hermeneutics, the study explores the Facebook page of the German newspaper Bild, focusing on news posts that may stimulate discussions revealing (anti)cosmopolitan sentiments. The analysis reveals a convivial atmosphere characterizing this space, where othering practices foster easy consensus and act as a form of social glue, facilitating community building, a sense of belonging, and the internalization of anti-cosmopolitan sentiments and culture. The oversimplification present in the posts and their comments, often intersecting with scapegoating and essentialist reasoning, prevents individuals from grasping the complexity of social dynamics, while deepening instead their engagement with neo-tribal nationalist narratives. This distorted imaginary is identified as a fundamental error, as it creates a scenario in which the "imagined community" is perceived as endangered, undermining the foundations of society by legitimizing a disregard for the constitutional principles of pluralistic democracy. The paper concludes by calling for more research on strategies that promote digital cosmopolitanism in communities echoing neo-tribal nationalism.*

1. Introduction

August 2024. The United Kingdom experiences a surge in far-right violence, with protests and riots targeting non-white citizens erupting across several cities. This violence is part of a broader pattern, in which racist and anti-democratic riots are stimulated by incitement and (dis-)information in social media: Dublin 2023, Chemnitz (Germany) 2018, but also the similarly riotous events of 6 January 2021 at the Capitol in Washington which were inherently intertwined with social media discourse, including conspiracy theories and patently false information. The current

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situation reflects a resurgence of xenophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes and a disillusionment with democratic institutions, reaching far into the mainstream of society (Zick et al., 2011: 104–106; Zick et al., 2023).

This phenomenon is closely linked to the digital space, as it facilitates the emergence of "echo chambers" (Sunstein, 2001), reinforcing polarized discourses, contributing to the spread of misinformation and extremist ideologies (Benkler et al., 2018). The present chapter seeks to shed light on how interpersonal experiences, collective identities, and shared narratives converge in digital spaces, potentially reinforcing tribal mentalities and shaping perceptions of social reality. It aims to explore these dynamics by examining the discourse on the Facebook profile of Germany's most-read newspaper, *Bild*, with a focus on the comments section below the news posts. As a major player in the German media landscape, the tabloid newspaper *Bild* has a significant online presence, and its Facebook page is a microcosm which reflects some of the broader discussions taking place in the digital public sphere. The findings will underscore the critical role that media platforms play in either mitigating or exacerbating societal divisions in an increasingly interconnected digital world.

The chapter opens with the presentation of an interdisciplinary theoretical framework organized in three sections. Section Two entitled "Identity and Power" explores key socio-psychological mechanisms that drive identity and group formation, reflecting on their interplay with societal power structures. Section Three "The National Arena" examines contemporary forms of nationalism against the backdrop of postmigrant and cosmopolitan theoretical perspectives. Section Four "The Postdigital Context" addresses the impact of digitalization on identity and community formation, with a particular focus on online hate speech. Thus, theories of identity and categorization, nationalism and nation-building are brought together with theoretical reflections on postdigitality – and platformization – and reflected on anew in relation to the ubiquitous intertwining of social media and the lifeworld.

The empirical study, whose design is presented and reflected on in Section Five, is presented through the detailed analysis of two examples that illustrate the complex dynamics at play in this digital space (Section Six). In the conclusion (Section Seven) the findings and their broader implications will be discussed, relevant for media professionals, policymakers, and researchers concerned with the impact of social media on public discourse and social cohesion.

2. Identities and Power

Identity formation is a cultural process that takes place in the world of our everyday experiences, our "Lebenswelt" or lifeworld (Husserl, 1936/1970): An inherently diverse and multifaceted hybrid space made up of overlapping cultural spheres. As

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we move through different cultural groups, contexts, and fields of action, we actively engage with and internalize a variety of cultural elements, rather than passively absorbing a singular cultural influence. This process of *lifewide learning* affects human beings cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally (Conti, 2024: 20). Consequently, identity is more culturally hybrid than we may perceive, being the ongoing result of the complex interplay between individual agency and the diverse cultural landscape of our lifeworld (Conti, 2012: 141–143).

Despite this natural, shared and ubiquitous hybridity, human beings tend to categorize 'the others' by simplifying the complexity of human identities and essentializing them to a large extent. This tendency towards categorization, which has an influential impact on interpersonal relations and social cohesion, is a natural cognitive process. In exploring the dynamics underlying the categorization of the self and of the other, Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel (1978) and expanded by Tajfel and Turner (1979), posits that individuals define their identities also in relation to social groups. Three interconnected psychological mechanisms are in play: social categorization, the process of assigning oneself and others to social categories; social identification, the adoption of the imagined characteristic identity and norms of the group; and social comparison, the comparison of one's own group with others. This self-definition process often results in in-group favouritism and out-group bias as individuals seek to maintain a positive self-concept through their group memberships and this can imply the projection of negative characteristics to 'the others' (Tajfel & Turner, 1979: 40–41). The "fundamental attribution error" (Ross, 1977) contributes to this by leading people to overemphasize personality traits and underemphasize situational factors when evaluating others' behaviours. The "ultimate attribution error" (Pettigrew, 1979) extends this bias to groups, attributing negative actions of outgroup members to their inherent traits while viewing similar behaviours by ingroup members as situational. These biases reinforce stereotypes and exacerbate divisions.

Building on SIT, Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) (Turner 1987; Turner et al. 1987) elaborates on how and when people define themselves as individual or group entities, and on the implications of these self-definitions. SCT explains that individuals shift between personal and social identities, as well as among different social identities based on the context, employing a process of categorization which is contingent as it depends on the interpretation of the context (Turner 1987: 50). This shift is influenced by factors such as the salience of the group, the presence of outgroups, and situational cues that make certain group memberships more prominent (Turner 1987: 43). As Turner and Reynolds (2012: 7) exemplify: "[…] different self-categories can become salient (e.g. myself as an individual, woman or Australian) and the content of a particular category can change as a function of the salient comparative context (Australians compared to Americans/Australians compared to Chinese) and ongoing change (e.g. the historically evolving nature of what it means to be Aus-

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tralian)." Understanding both SIT and SCT is relevant because they together provide a comprehensive view of the mechanisms driving identity formation as well as individual and group behaviour. SIT explains why individuals form group identities and engage in in-group favouritism and out-group bias, while SCT explains how individuals cognitively navigate their multiple social identities and shift between them based on contextual factors. This dual framework helps in understanding the complexity of human identity and intergroup relations, offering insights into how to address issues of prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict.

The concept of "Othering" (Spivak, 1985), which has its origins in Hegel's master-slave dialectic (Hegel, 1807), strongly influenced by Edward Said (1978/1995) and its name-giver Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985), helps to show how historically evolved power relations are reflected in such socio-psychological categorization processes, becoming instruments of its reproductions. Both scholars, foundational figures in postcolonial studies, criticize the constructions of the West in opposition of non-Western societies, highlighting the power imbalance inherent in these categorizations and the imaginaries created, arguing that such an opposition serves colonial and imperial interests.

Constructing 'the other' is a strategy which helps to reinforce the identity and supposed superiority of one's own group. These processes of social categorization and Othering, which exist on a continuum from depersonalization to delegitimization and dehumanization, can lead to severe consequences for out-groups. *Depersonalization* involves perceiving the other primarily through the lens of group membership rather than as unique individuals. This process leads to the perception of individuals associated with an antagonistic out-group as interchangeable representatives, thus obscuring their individual uniqueness and autonomy (Tajfel, 1981: 258); *delegitimization* represents a severe form of social exclusion, where certain groups are not merely viewed negatively but are considered outside the bounds of acceptable societal norms (Bar-Tal, 1989: 65); *dehumanization*, the most extreme form on this continuum, involves denying out-group members the characteristics that define them as human beings (Billig, 2002: 183; Tileagă, 2007: 718).

Empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated that social categorization and intergroup differentiation occur even in *minimal group* paradigms, where group membership is assigned based on arbitrary or trivial criteria (Tajfel et al., 1971: 153; Diehl, 1990: 267). This phenomenon underscores the strong human propensity to form group identities and engage in intergroup comparisons, even in the absence of substantive differences or conflicts of interest. While these minimal group studies reveal the ease with which group formation can occur, real-world social categorizations often coalesce around more salient and culturally significant dimensions (Fiske, 2018: 67). Crucially, group formation is often based on inherited prejudices and stereotypes, which have historically led to significant power asymmetries within and between communities (Dovidio et al., 2010: 4–5). These

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inherited biases and stereotypes serve as cognitive schemas that influence social categorizations, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and others within society (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). Thus, the processes of categorization, differentiation and hierarchization – encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects – profoundly impact social experiences and perceptions.

These dynamics contribute to the formation of what Collins (2000: 227–228) describes as a "matrix of domination", a sociological paradigm explaining how intersecting systems of oppression operate at structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal levels, creating unique experiences of marginalization and resistance for different social groups.[1] The persistence of prejudiced social categories contributes enormously to the maintenance of social hierarchies and power structures, influencing interpersonal interactions, institutional policies, and broader societal norms. These processes often operate implicitly, perpetuating existing inequalities (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999: 31–33). In order to understand how multiple, interconnected systems of power and oppression shape individual and group experiences, an intersectional approach is essential (Cho et al., 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989). As intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) highlights, 'race' is a key category around which power dynamics are organized. Systems of racial stratification and discrimination persist not only between dominant and marginalized groups but also among different racialized groups (Omi & Winant, 2014: 105–108; Molina, 2021).

In continental Europe, where the category of 'race' is very often avoided – especially in post-fascist contexts – due to the legacy of National Socialist ideology and concerns over the misuse of pseudo-biological concepts of race (Jugert et al., 2021: 4), the process of othering frequently draws on categories such as culture, migration background, or country of origin (Foroutan, 2016: 241–243; Moffitt et al., 2020). Racist ideologies and imaginaries are perpetuated by operationalizing race through the "natio-ethno-cultural" construct (Mecheril, 2002: 109–112), that is replacing biological notions of race with cultural differences as justifications for discrimination and exclusion (Balibar, 1988).

Understanding these complex dynamics is crucial for addressing systemic inequalities and promoting social justice. It requires the acknowledgement of the historical roots of prejudices, critically examining how they continue to shape social structures, and developing strategies to challenge and dismantle these entrenched power asymmetries. This approach recognizes that addressing inequality involves changing individual attitudes, but also transforming the social, cultural, and institutional systems that perpetuate traditional biases and stereotypes. In this context,

1 For an example of how this matrix of domination operates, particularly in the context of the vulnerabilization of migrant students in Europe, see Conti (2022), who conceptualizes this as a "matrix of inequalities".

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postmigrant theory, as articulated by Naika Foroutan (2016; 2018), provides a valuable framework for understanding the transformative processes needed in societies deeply impacted by migration in order to favour a recognition of diversity. Postmigrant theory challenges dominant discourses that often portray migrants and their descendants as perpetual outsiders. It does so by acknowledging the significant contributions and presence of migrants within national narratives, thus advocating for the reimagination of national identities. This reimagining aims to be more reflective of the actual societal compositions and histories, promoting a broader sense of belonging that includes everyone, regardless of their migration background (Espahangizi, 2021). Indeed, identity is described as a continuous process of negotiation and adaptation, influenced by both individual agency and structural factors (Conti 2012: 127). This perspective aligns with the earlier discussion of identity formation as a cultural process taking place in the hybrid "Lebenswelt" (lifeworld) and emphasizes the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader societal forces in rapid transformation. The perspective shift advocated by postmigrant theory entails not only acknowledging the structural and historical factors that contribute to social inequalities but also proactively challenging and dismantling the power structures that sustain them. By incorporating postmigrant perspectives, strategies to promote social justice can more effectively address the root causes of exclusion and marginalization, ensuring that social, cultural, and institutional systems are reformed to be genuinely inclusive and equitable.

3. The National Arena

The shift in perspective proposed by postmigrant theory involves recognizing and addressing the complexities of modern identity formation, moving beyond traditional national frameworks. The postmigrant theory shares significant commonalities with cosmopolitan theories drawn from the area of sociology and social theory, particularly in their emphasis on societal transformation, cultural hybridity, and the reimagining of social belonging in increasingly diverse societies. This alignment is evident in several key aspects of both theoretical frameworks. Firstly, both perspectives emphasize the transformative nature of cultural interactions in modern societies, thus Delanty (2019: 7) describes cosmopolitanism as "a transformative process in which new cultural models take shape and where new social realities are formed." Secondly, both theoretical perspectives highlight the importance of cultural mediation and competence in diverse societies: Vertovec and Cohen (2021: 3) argue that contemporary cosmopolitanism involves "the capacity to mediate between different cultures, a set of competences, and a mode of practice or a field of discourses through which diversity is constructed as an asset." Lastly, both postmigrant theory and critical cosmopolitan approaches challenge traditional notions of national

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identity and belonging: Foroutan's critique of persistent othering in postmigrant societies finds a parallel in Glick Schiller and Irving's (2015: 5) call for a "critical cosmopolitanism" that "challenges the hegemony of methodological nationalism and ethnocentric conceptualizations of culture". Indeed, as Delanty in his contribution in this volume points out, "cosmopolitanism is a force in the world, as is anti-cosmopolitanism" (see: Delanty: 47).

The nation is today still a central arena where belonging is actively contested. Postmigrant and cosmopolitan theories highlight a key critical issue: The nation's capacity to promote either inclusive or exclusionary narratives of identity and belonging. This tension underscores the ongoing struggle between pluralistic conceptions of nationhood and more restrictive, ethno-centric visions, as Triandafyllidou (2020) explains. Her work distinguishes between two primary forms of contemporary nationalism: *plural* and *neo-tribal*. *Plural nationalism* "acknowledges mixity and interdependence" (2020: 799) allowing for a more nuanced and complex sense of belonging that can accommodate multiple identities and transnational connections, embracing change and diversity while still maintaining a sense of national cohesion. In contrast, *neo-tribal nationalism* is characterized by an exclusionary approach, based on a conception of national identity imagined as coherent and homogeneous. Neo-tribal nationalism "is predicated on a rejection of diversity" (Triandafyllidou, 2020: 800), often manifesting in nativist sentiments and resistance to immigration and cultural change, ignoring the fact that migration and cultural change are natural and inherent phenomena of human societies.

Amy Chua's (2018) concept of "political tribes" further elucidates this dynamic, highlighting how group identities and tribal instincts shape political and social landscapes. Chua argues that tribalism is not just about belonging but also about exclusion, where the instinct to form cohesive groups often leads to the marginalization of those perceived as outsiders. This perspective is crucial for understanding the resurgence of neo-tribal nationalism, which leverages these tribal instincts to foster a sense of unity against perceived external threats. Nationalism and racism are indeed often intertwined, with racism being leveraged to create internal others (minorities within the nation-state) and external others (foreign nations or other 'cultural' entities). As Valluvan (2020: 244) argues, "The often racialised practices of Othering […] act as the constitutive reference against which nationalist politics in the west orients itself." These forms of othering highlight how power dynamics are central to the process, with dominant groups using their position to define and marginalize others. This bidirectional process of othering serves to reinforce national identity by defining who belongs and who does not, often leading to discriminatory practices and policies. The tension between these two forms of nationalism reflects broader societal struggles in addressing the complexities of globalization, migration, and cultural change. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing the resurgence of nationalism "oftentimes in an aggressive,

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nativist and populist guise" (Triandafyllidou, 2020: 792) that we are witnessing in Europe and worldwide.

In the context of 21st century globalization and rapid social change, the nature of nationalism is evolving in complex ways. Bauman's (2000) concept of liquid modernity provides a useful framework for understanding these changes, describing a condition of constant mobility and flux in relationships, identities, and global economics. This state of perpetual change and uncertainty has profound implications for how individuals and societies conceptualize belonging and national identity. However, the insecurities and anxieties produced by liquid modernity have led many to stop developing utopias and to seek solace in what Bauman (2017) terms "retrotopia" – an idealized vision of the past. This nostalgic turn reflects a desire for stability and certainty in an increasingly unpredictable world, manifesting in previously described resurgent forms of nationalism.

Eva Illouz (2023) adds an important dimension to this discussion by exploring the emotional underpinnings of national identity and populist movements. Illouz argues that emotions such as fear, disgust, resentment, and love play a pivotal role in shaping political attitudes and national sentiments. For instance, *fear* of the "other" can reinforce national boundaries, while *love* for an idealized version of the nation can foster strong in-group loyalty. *Resentment*, often directed at perceived elites or "outsiders", can fuel populist movements that claim to represent the "true" nation. *Disgust*, as Illouz notes, can be weaponized to dehumanize out-groups and strengthen in-group cohesion. Illouz's work highlights how these emotions interact with the narratives and discourses of nationhood, creating powerful affective bonds that can at the same time unite and divide populations. This emotional dimension adds depth to the understanding of how national identities are formed and maintained, showing that they are not just cognitive constructs but deeply felt realities for many individuals.

The nation continues to be a powerful source of identity and legitimacy, even as nation-states grapple with eroded sovereign powers and the transformation into what some scholars call "post-national states" (Triandafyllidou, 2020). Indeed, numerous scholars in the last decades have emphasized that the nation is of a constructed and performative nature (Balibar, 1990; Bhabha, 1994/2004; Brubaker, 1996; Calhoun,1997; Valluvan, 2020; Wodak et al., 1999/2009), as Anderson's (1983) influential concept of "imagined community" presents it. National identity creates an illusory sense of connection across diverse individuals who feel connected despite the absence of direct, personal interactions. Their communal identity is constructed through shared symbols, narratives, and cultural practices. Indeed the nation is constructed along two dimensions: the spatial one, fostering a sense of "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1983: 7), and the temporal one, staking a "claim on transhistorical time" (Valluvan, 2020: 245), whereby the "invention of tradition", as described by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), plays a crucial role as well as the selective

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interpretation of history which serves to legitimize and naturalize the nation's existence. It requires critical examination of how such identities are constructed and maintained, and how power dynamics shape these processes in the postdigital society.

4. The Postdigital Context

Introducing the concept of "imagined community", Benedict Anderson (1983) argued that print capitalism played a crucial role in nationalism's development, as it favoured the widespread dissemination of ideas, of shared language, and the creation of common discourses which people could identify with (Anderson, 1983: 44–45). In the contemporary context, this process has been significantly amplified and transformed by digitalization, extending our lifeworld into a space that is both culturally and digitally hybrid. The concept of postdigitality, as articulated by Cramer (2014), provides a useful framework for understanding this new landscape. Cramer (2014: 12–13) argues that the digital has become so ubiquitous that it ceases to be a distinguishing feature, leading to a blurring of boundaries between digital and analog, online and offline experiences. Building on this, Knox (2019) posits that post-digitality represents a state of systematic interconnectedness (Knox, 2019: 357–358), where our lifeworld is inextricably linked with a variety of ideas and discourses, including those of the far-right.

In this postdigital context, our cultural and social spheres have expanded far beyond geographical boundaries, profoundly impacting identity formation processes through lifewide learning experiences (Conti & Lenehan, 2024). Recent research by Marino (2015) explores how social media usage affects the formation of "networked individualism", where personal identity is increasingly shaped by online connections rather than traditional community ties (Marino, 2015: 6). The paradox of increased global connectivity leading to local disconnection, observed by Hampton et al. (2011) and Turkle (2011), has been further examined in recent years.

The internet facilitates the creation of what can sometimes appear as a type of material placeless community, such as *digital tribes* that are communities characterized by strong internal identification, based on shared characteristics such as nationality, interests, or political views (Meharg, 2024: 237; Lietz, 2024: 239). These respond to the fundamental human need for social bonding and recognition among similar individuals responding to the growing sense of isolation and uncertainty characterizing our age of polycrisis (Meharg, 2024: 239–40). This aligns with an understanding of the digital world as an "extended lifeworld" (Zhao, 2006), which has been expanded upon by scholars such as Van Dijck (2013) in her work on the "culture of connectivity" (Van Dijck, 2013: 4): Online platforms are not merely neutral channels for communication but are active agents that influence social interactions

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and cultural norms. She argues that the architecture and algorithms of social media platforms play a significant role in determining what content is visible and how users engage with it, thereby shaping the culture of connectivity itself. Building on this, Lindgren (2017) highlights the impact of digital media on all relevant aspects of life, focussing particularly on communication, identity and self-representation, community formation and social dynamics, political activism, and the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural content. Digital technologies have become inseparable from our identity construction and profoundly affect self-conception, social interactions, and our understanding of reality, as Floridi's (2015) concept of "onlife" emphasizes.

While online spaces offer apparent freedom of movement, they are, in reality, highly structured and constrained environments. As Lenehan in this volume points out, internet platforms exist as quasi-territorial spaces and the internet may be seen as a "patchwork of platforms" where user behaviour is shaped by the underlying architecture and logic of the various platforms (Lenehan: 59). The perceived unrestricted movement, even across linguistic barriers facilitated by translation tools, masks the reality of what Zuboff (2019) recognizes as "behavioural modification" through algorithmic curation and targeted content delivery. This algorithmic influence on user experience has significant implications for identity formation, often leading to what Pariser (2011: 9–10) famously termed "filter bubbles" and potentially driving users down ideological "rabbit holes". Social media algorithms, designed to maximize engagement, often prioritize provocative content (Gillespie, 2014: 167), inadvertently promoting hate speech and reinforcing tribal mentalities. Furthermore, the architecture of online environments, combined with internet anonymity – which emboldens individuals to express hateful sentiments (Suler, 2004: 321) – can amplify Othering discourses and create echo chambers (Sunstein, 2017: 5–6) that reinforce in-group/out-group distinctions (Matamoros-Fernández, 2017: 930) and amplify the reach of hate speech.

Hate speech, defined as a conscious and willful public statement intended to denigrate a group of people (Delgado & Stefancic, 1995: 159), manifests verbally, non-verbally, and symbolically (Nielsen, 2002: 265). It often employs ambiguous or metaphorical terms (Giglietto & Lee, 2017; Santa Ana, 1999) and uses emotional language to provoke public upset or action (Vargo & Hopp, 2020: 3). Crucially, hate speech helps establish social hierarchies based on inequality and domination (Paz et al., 2020: 2). Two recent studies in Germany (Dellagiacoma, 2023: 312; Das NETTZ, 2024: 34) reveal that online hate speech predominantly affects refugees and individuals with a migration background. This demographic also experiences severe impacts, including increased stress, fear, and self-censorship (Dellagiacoma 2023: 313, 315). These psychological effects extend beyond individual well-being, as Lumsden and Harmer (2019) argue, shaping social dynamics and influencing public opinion and policy decisions.

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Matamoros-Fernández (2017: 931) introduces the concept of "platformed racism", demonstrating how platform architectures interact with user practices to shape the expression of racist discourses online. This phenomenon is further explored by Fielitz and Thurston (2019: 7, 11–13) in their work on postdigital cultures of the far right, highlighting how extremist ideologies adapt to and exploit strategically digital platforms. As Fielitz and Thurston (2019: 11) note: "For far-right actors, online platforms are not neutral communication tools, but rather catalysts for highly social processes where political opinions are formed and practiced." This strategic use of digital platforms has allowed far-right ideologies to spread beyond traditional extremist circles and into mainstream discourse, becoming a ubiquitous aspect of the extended lifeworld.

The immense presence of hate speech and tribalism online poses significant challenges to social cohesion in our onlife world. As Fielitz and Thurston (2019: 12–13) argue, "addressing these issues is crucial for maintaining healthy societal dynamics in our increasingly post-digital world". This complex interplay between technology, human behaviour, and social structures in the postdigital age underscores the need for developing effective strategies to combat online hate speech and promote online communities which educate to inclusion. In conclusion, the postdigital landscape has transformed the way imagined communities are formed and maintained, while also providing new avenues for the spread of far-right discourses and online othering. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing the challenges they pose to social cohesion and democratic processes in our increasingly interconnected world.

5. Methodology

This study investigates online interactions on social media by analyzing user comments on *Bild*'s official Facebook page that directly respond to posts published by the editorial team. These posts typically consist of a title, followed by a picture, a subtitle (sometimes identical to the title), and the beginning of the article, which is available in full on *Bild*'s main platform. However, the articles are usually not accessible to users without a subscription. Every post is followed by a comment section, the users can choose to visualize "all comments", "most relevant comments" and "most recent comments".

The *Bild* Zeitung, founded in 1952, has been chosen as it is Germany's most widely read daily newspaper (IVW, 2024a). Known for its tabloid style and sensationalist content, *Bild* has had a significant influence on public opinion and political discourse in Germany. As of 2023, *Bild* has a daily circulation of approximately 1.03 million copies (IVW, 2024b). The newspaper also has a robust online presence, with its website, bild.de, attracting 5.67 million unique users per day (Schröder, 2022). On Face-

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book, *Bild* boasts around 2.8 million followers (Facebook, 2024), making it one of the leading news outlets on the platform in Germany. The selection of Facebook as our primary platform was informed by a pilot study conducted on World Refugee Day (June 20, 2022), which indicated that Facebook offered a more interactive environment compared to other social media platforms, facilitating richer user-to-user engagement. This preliminary study also helped refine the data collection strategies.

The research methodology has been designed to provide a rich, multi-faceted analysis of online interactions, considering both social cues and transmitted content. This study employs a *multi-method netnographic approach*, a research methodology specifically designed for studying online communities and cultures (Kozinets, 2010; Kozinets, 2015; Hine, 2015). A key aspect of the netnographic research was the researchers' role as invisible observer, a non-participatory stance chosen to avoid influencing the natural flow of interactions. This approach, as noted by Kozinets (2015), provides valuable insights into authentic online behaviours. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed in this study, though the public nature of the data mitigates many ethical concerns typically associated with online research, as participants have no reasonable expectation of privacy in this context (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Consequently, the presence of the researcher was not disclosed, nor were users informed that they were being observed. Approval for the approach was granted by the university's ethics commission, which confirmed the validity of the argumentation for conducting the research unobtrusively.

The data collection spanned a six-week period from February 27 to April 7, 2023, with an immersion in these online spaces for around 4 hours daily, excluding weekends. 73 news-posts on migration and other sensitive topics that stimulate discussions revealing underlying attitudes of racism, nationalism, authoritarianism, and pluralism have been selected for observation. Multiple data collection methods were employed, including journal entries, screenshots of Facebook interactions, original *Bild* Newspaper articles, and systematically export of comments using also the exportcomments.com tool. Personal diaries have been written to record reflections and experiences, aligning with both netnography's recognition of the researcher as an instrument of data collection and interpretation (Kozinets, 2015) and the experiential hermeneutic approach that has been applied.

But what exactly is meant by an experiential hermeneutic approach? Ethnography is the written product of a "palette of methods, but also a methodological approach in which participant observation is a critical element, and in which research is guided by experience unfolding in the field" (Boellstorff et al., 2012: 15). Central to Ethnography has always been the "understanding of cultural formations from an experiential point of view" (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2014: 2). This is also certainly true for Digital Ethnography, and includes the act of "lurking", as Marino (2021: 83) has argued, as a type of participant observation in which the same digital space is shared over a longer period, where scholars participate indirectly in people's lives,

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begin to understand their (online) experiences, and to make sense of the norm generation inherent to digital spaces, as, as Blommaert writes (2018: 24), "people display an outspoken tendency to *create norms* (original italics) whenever they are absent or clearly unscripted", such as in online spaces. Lurking, as participatory observation, is not connected necessarily with "direct engagement and interaction" (Marino, 2021: 83) but can give a direct experiential edge to interpretive processes.

Hermeneutics is the "science, art or technique of the interpretation of written texts" (Outhwaite, 2007: 459) and hermeneutic methods are also central to ethnographic methodologies, as "interpretivists are more interested in understanding (from the inside) then in explaining (from the outside)" (Outhwaite, 2007: 460). As a participatory observer, even if a lurker, one is certainly on the inside and can experience a variety of digital community phenomena, such as personal dynamics, the creation of norms and the performance of rituals based around forms of language or images. These experiential methods were brought together with data hermeneutic methods, as especially espoused by Gerbaudo (2016: 99), which sees digital data as text and which has the synthetic aim of "interpreting, reconstructing and explaining the overarching narratives that underpin social media conversations." Data hermeneutics looks towards "close reading", for a "deep analytical engagement with a text" and emphasizes "language, tone, imagery, and rhetorical features". It is clear that this type of intensive interpretive approach, oriented towards the ascertaining of meaning, is simply more effective when *also experiential*. Hence the experiential hermeneutic approach pioneered in this study.[2]

6. Empirical Discussion

The analysis of the comment section on *Bild* newspaper articles, published as posts on Facebook, revealed a complex interplay of social dynamics that shape a racist and exclusionary discourse while simultaneously fostering a cohesive community largely characterized by a convivial environment. *Othering* emerged as a key mechanism that boosted participation and community building processes, benefiting from a space in which the principle of political correctness – intended to avoid offence or disadvantage to members of particular groups in society – is disregarded by the majority for the sake of free speech and idealized individual freedom. This is reflected in the corpus, which is full of statements that are rooted in depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization (see section two).

2 This methodology, in its completeness, was developed by Fergal Lenehan and the author of this chapter in the context of the Study "(Neo-Nationalist?) Counter Public Spheres in the Comments Sections of British and German Online News Websites" carried out as part of the ReDICo project.

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The following excerpts, drawn from the early days of observation, have been chosen as they illustrate patterns of interaction which came to be seen as typical for this online Facebook community and show how Othering is consistently used, presenting a simplistic imaginary which characterizes the perspective on others and society.

Excerpt 1

Fig.1. News post (excerpt 1)
Title: "The teenager was critically injured by shots fired by an 81-year-old man on Tuesday." Subtitle: "Bramsche: Sinan (16) dies after shooting rampage"
Picture: "breaking news".
Text: "After being shot in front of a school in Bramsche near Osnabrück. A 16-year-old boy has died according to the public prosecutor..."

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Fig. 2: Comment section (excerpt 1)
Please not that these comments contain xenophobic and racist sentiments.
"I.S..: He must have been traumatized. "
U.H.:Giuseppe Del B. and Sinan
It's getting crazier and crazier in Germany thanks to other "cultures"

The comment section reveals a pattern of interaction where users reinforce each other's views, particularly in their othering of individuals perceived as non-German. This is evident in how both commentators focus on the speculated foreign origins of the victim (Sinan) and the perpetrator (Giuseppe Del B.), assumed on the basis of their names. The overall reaction to the news of an adolescent's death shows a striking lack of empathy. The victim's identity, as a presumed foreigner, seems to justify this absence of compassion in the commentators' minds, suggesting a belief that foreigners are somehow culpable for their own misfortunes.

I.S.'s sarcastic comment about trauma serves as an insider joke, critiquing both those who advocate for migrants and the migrants themselves. It sarcastically references the portrayal of refugees as traumatized individuals who cannot be held responsible for their actions. This humour bonds the in-group members while discrediting the out-group and their allies. For his comment, the author receives non-verbal feedback, including likes and laughing reactions; the angry reactions remain ambiguous in their intent.

U.H.'s comment further emphasizes the perceived foreignness of those involved by explicitly mentioning their names. This rhetorical strategy, consisting of placing the names of the perpetrator and the victim on an otherwise empty line, followed by the comment on Germany's negative development, creates a clear distinction between 'us' (native Germans) and 'them' (the ones who are not perceived as such), reinforcing the idea that the out-group is fundamentally different and that nationality is the source of problems. Interestingly, even the victim is implicated in this narrative, implicitly speculating about what he may have done to provoke the incident. U.H.'s statement that: "It's getting crazier and crazier in Germany thanks to other 'cultures'" explicitly blames cultural differences for what is perceived as a deterioration of German society. The mention of "culture" in inverted commas appears to

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be an allusion to 'civilization', questioning whether it even qualifies as a "culture" and potentially delegitimizing it as such. This sentiment encapsulates the racist undertones present throughout the discussion, using "culture" as a proxy for race. This aligns with Balibar's (1988) argument that reference to 'cultural differences' is useful in justifying discrimination and exclusion.

Similar comments have filled the chat below this post, although it is worth noting that mainly Sinan has been the object of racist discussions, despite actually being the victim and a child. This discrepancy is an indication of potential bias in the perception of different migrant groups. In essence, these comments reveal a disturbing trend where the details of the incident and the humanity of those involved are simply disregarded. Instead, the event is used as a platform to reinforce pre-existing biases against perceived outsiders, demonstrating a complete lack of empathy or consideration for the tragedy at hand.

Excerpt 2

Fig. 3: News Post (excerpt 2)
Title/Subtitle: Cologne Police Search for Robber Duo – Your Grins Will Soon Disappear! Text: The robber duo is said to have mugged a school student (15) at the station forecourt in Cologne on January 18th…
The image has been blurred by the author to protect the identity of the persons portrayed in the picture.

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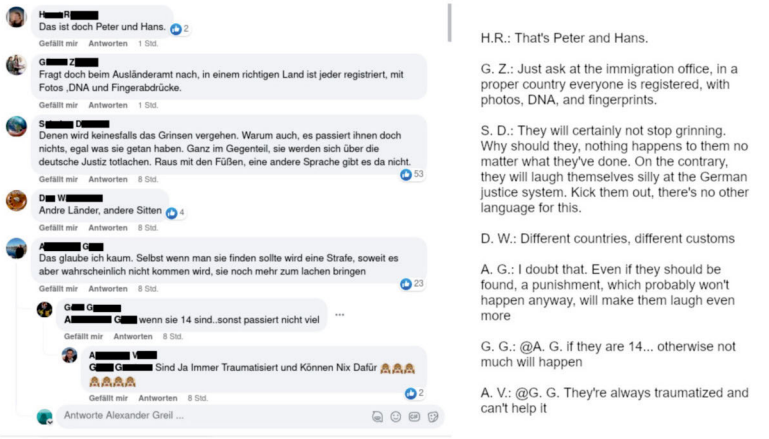
Fig. 4: Comment section (excerpt 2)
Please note that these comments contain xenophobic and racist sentiments.



H.R.'s joke "That's Peter and Hans" (which in the original German version is grammatically incorrect) is extremely popular in this online space, allowing users to easily join the conversation by simply thinking of two random names that sound 'typically German', thus achieving a creative task. This beloved joke encourages low-threshold participation and guarantees positive feedback. Its popularity reflects the normalization of referencing the presumed origins of individuals involved in the news, especially if they are perpetrators. Nationality is seen, based on racist ideologies, as the core characteristic underlying misdeeds, and the joke expresses anger about the situation in a lighthearted manner, providing an easy scapegoat for the community while simplifying complex issues.

G.Z.'s suggestion to consult the immigration office establishes a clear distinction between 'nationals' and 'foreigners', implying the need for greater scrutiny of the latter and assuming that these two adolescents – due to their appearance – are foreigners. The way the statement is framed ("in a proper country […]") reflects a suspicious attitude towards the immigration office, suggesting it may not be doing its job effectively, or even towards the state, insinuating that the government is not able to maintain the public order. S.D. echoes this mistrust, calling for the forcible removal of migrants, illustrating how imagined cultural differences justify exclusionary practices. S.D. portrays migrants as cunning and unaccountable, mocking the overly benevolent Germans who are left unprotected by a non-functioning justice system, subtly suggesting self-justice if the state fails to intervene. The phrase "there is no other language for this" highlights that forced expulsion is perceived as the only viable measure. The essentialist perspective is so deeply ingrained that even

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when discussing very young individuals, the possibility of re-education seems implausible. S.D.'s statement reveals an inability to view migrants as human beings with dynamic identities, capable of learning and whose actions are shaped by their circumstances. The comment posted by S.D. received the highest number of thumbs up among the selected comments. As shown in the screenshot (Fig. 4), most comments in this excerpt received non-verbal feedback, all of which were positive. This indicates a strong consensus within the community, reflecting a shared sentiment that resonates with the majority of users.

S.D.'s critique of the justice system is picked up by A.G., who, despite maintaining faith in the system, identifies issues at an earlier stage involving the institutions responsible for apprehending offenders. This perspective ultimately aligns with S.D.'s critique, as A.G. acknowledges systemic flaws that hinder effective justice. G.G., responding to A.G., highlights the justice system's limitations, noting that the individuals might escape punishment due to their youth. A.W. continues the thread by employing the cliché of refugees feigning trauma or being excused due to supposedly unfounded trauma. While this comment echoes I.S.'s remark in the previous examples, D.W.'s assertion "Different countries, different customs" parallels U.H.'s simplistic view on cultural differences. It suggests that criminal behaviour is normalized in "other cultures" (implying other countries), projecting negative attributes onto certain migrant groups.

The analysis of these two examples allows to show communicative dynamics characterizing the wider corpus and reflect on their impact:

1. Use of Emojis and Reactions:
   The use of non-verbal reactions such as emojis and thumbs-up is a common way for users to express agreement and belonging in online communities. The consideration of such cues is not only useful for identifying which ideas are widely shared but also for understanding how a sense of community is constructed. Affirmative feedback, through supporting follow-up comments, reinforcing direct responses, and positive non-verbal signals, gratifies users and possibly boosts their engagement and well-being in the online-space which feels like a community with common values, worldviews and communicative practices.
2. Repetition of Key Phrases or Arguments:
   The repetition of key phrases or arguments highlights that users share common ideas, creating a sense of insider status and reinforcing community belonging. This repetition also makes certain worldviews increasingly taken for granted, helping to create a shared narrative. In the examples provided, references to trauma are repeated, as is the use of the term "culture" as a proxy for race, reinforcing the group's essentialist collective understanding and bias.

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3. Use of Insider Jokes or References:
   Insider jokes or references indicate a shared cultural understanding among in-group members. The ones based on othering serve not only to strengthen bonds within the group but also to delineate boundaries, effectively excluding and marginalizing those considered part of the out-group. In particular, jokes serve to entertain, enhance social standing by portraying oneself as likeable, and diffuse serious discussions, making it less likely for critical issues to be addressed thoroughly. This dynamic fosters camaraderie while maintaining the status quo within the group.

The excerpts convey the welcoming atmosphere characteristic of this Facebook community, which forms around the article posted by the editorial team of the newspaper *Bild*, clearly framing the discussion through the selection of news, the images used to represent them, and the wording employed. The prevalence of users sharing similar opinions makes this online space unappealing for those with differing views, resulting in a low probability of meaningful discussion and limited development of critical thinking among members. The digital field research undertaken reveals that when confronted with isolated counterspeech, community members often rally together, reinforcing their bonds and solidifying – at least verbally – their shared perspectives. Interestingly, dissenting comments which frequently receive verbal reactions, frequently receive non-verbal positive support through 'thumbs up' reactions, indicating that some users appreciate diverse perspectives even if they do not wish to openly express agreement. When multiple users engage in counter-discussion within the same chat, challenging the prevailing narrative, they prevent easy consensus: This kind of interaction stimulates critical thinking, as individuals face different standpoints.

As far as could be observed, this platform's comment section functions mainly as echo chambers, where users can quickly align with like-minded individuals. This dynamic reinforces existing beliefs and worldviews, creating a cycle in which the group's shared narrative is continuously validated. The analysis of the corpus has shown that the focus on 'the others' – perfect antagonists to 'us' – facilitates the initiation of a chain reaction with positive effects both for increasing the feeling of belonging to the online community with neo-tribal national instincts and for spreading exclusionary perspectives. First of all, centring communication on taunting 'the others' provides an easy basis for *convergence*, as consensus on stereotypes and prejudices is, by their very nature, probable and simplified explanatory patterns which channel complex issues to a scapegoat are appealing. Othering-practices translate into a collective experience of bashing 'the others' while cheering each other through verbal and non-verbal communication. Othering-practices, offering a projection surface for negative attributes, produce *self-enhancement of the in-group's collective identity*; the positive interactions through which they take

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form in such a 'rabbit-hole' community produce feelings of acknowledgment and appreciation which favour self-enhancement of the individual identity. Thus, collective othering practices foster well-being which signifies longer permanence and increased participation. This promotes *community building* and *a sense of belonging* as well as favours the *internalization of exclusionary contents and culture*. Such a mechanism can close off individuals to other perspectives and potentially contribute to their radicalization.

The collective emerging in this way on the Facebook profile of the German newspaper *Bild* can be understood as a digital tribe, sharing nationality, a clear worldview and communicative practices. This community forms through narratives of neo-tribal nationalism which, as explained, facilitate its flourishing. Members of digital tribes often emphasize a shared topic or ideology as a touchstone, marking their disapproval of the mainstream and creating a strong internal solidarity. This creates a clear boundary that separates them from the outside world, reinforcing a 'them against us' mindset. This specific community, building through the act of commenting on news – i.e. exchanging opinions on (mainly negative) things happening daily in Germany – repeatedly reflects together on problems, their sources and possible solutions. The simplistic explanatory models employed in this context lead to a narrow understanding of complex issues, primarily focusing on assigning blame to specific groups and individuals. This approach, which does not allow for diverse perspectives, results in a limited and bias-ridden view of the situation. By failing to incorporate a range of viewpoints, these thought models perpetuate a cycle of blame and hinder the development of a more nuanced understanding of the underlying issues. At the same time, repeated exposure to negative news, for which the same groups are held responsible and targeted in the comment section, further deteriorates their image and negatively impacts the emotional attitudes toward them.

Adopting Illouz's framework (see section three), the loyalty toward the "imagined community" is recognized in the corpus and appears to be viewed as essentially endangered, typically by migrants – representing 'the other cultures' – but also by democratic institutions, appearing as too weak or idealistic to counteract these threats in a context of rapid change (see Bauman's concept of Liquid Modernity and Retrotopia, as discussed in section three). The corpus reveals how fears and resentments foster both feelings of resignation and resistance among this large group of citizens who perceive their cherished "imagined community" as endangered and neglected by inadequate democratic institutions. The distorted perspective that emerges in this online space is rooted in a lack of information, critical thinking, and self-reflection. This environment fosters the spread of inhumane perspectives, legitimizing them paradoxically by pointing to the perceived dangers posed by 'the others' who, therefore, must be timely neutralized. The deconstruction of the 'us versus them' paradigm, crucial for understanding reality in its complexity, is made challenging by the existence of communities where the sense of "the imagined com-

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munity" is very actively performed, on postdigital platforms. In these spaces, the imagined homogeneous group of 'the Germans' takes shape as people gather and, through the process of othering, identify themselves as the virtuous. They enjoy a sense of camaraderie, reinforcing their group identity and sense of belonging, while perpetuating a narrow and divisive worldview; there lies the real danger to peaceful and safe communities, and to democracy.

7. Conclusion

The study presented in this chapter reveals the intricate dynamics that contribute to the formation of a digital community, which simultaneously narrates the "imagined community" as a homogeneous group of 'good citizens' and creates the illusion of its existence. This illusion emerges through collective othering practices responding to alarming news-posts that foster convivial interactions among the in-group, while simultaneously heightening fears, disgust, and resentment toward those identified as threats to this idealized community.

As observed in the Facebook profile comments of the newspaper *Bild*, failing to consider complexity results in oversimplified explanations both on the reasons behind the events presented in the news and on the motivations for individual behaviours. Blame is placed on specific groups or individuals without understanding the broader circumstances. This process is facilitated by socio-psychological mechanisms such as the fundamental attribution error and the ultimate attribution error, where negative behaviours of individual and of outgroups are attributed to their inherent traits, ignoring situational factors.

The oversimplification detected in the posts can be defined as a *fundamental error*. It involves the illusion that reality is simple, that events have easy identifiable causes, and that there are inherently 'bad' groups. It also includes a false understanding of cultural identity as essentialist, leading to a dangerous simplification of complex interrelations. This distorted perception of reality is to identify as a *fundamental* error also as it erodes the foundation of society, dividing people and pitting them against one another. This dynamic hinders meaningful dialogue that could address problems at their root and tackle the underlying causes.

This research highlights how digital spaces can become fertile ground for spreading hate towards those labelled as 'others': The fundamental error creates an imaginary that feels absolutely plausible, and offers seemingly positive impacts. It simplifies the complexities of a fluid society, fostering bonds that create a sense of belonging to a self-enhanced larger whole. Additionally, it provides clear, albeit misguided, solutions to multifaceted crises, positioning individuals as those who have identified the culprits. The repetitive exposure to negative news and the inten-

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sive experience of the collective 'bashing' of identified perpetrators amplify, though, emotional reactions that can easily translate into both online and offline crimes.

Unmasking the fundamental error requires individuals to relinquish the imagined community formed at the expense of others, reorient their personal and social identities, and restructure their frameworks for perception and attribution. To facilitate this process, support its implementation, and prevent individuals from unconsciously falling into the fundamental error, a multilevel effort is necessary. This effort requires diverse strategies implemented by various societal actors working in concert. Certainly, educational strategies fostering Intercultural Competence as the ability to engage constructively with the ubiquitous unfamiliarity and uncertainty inherent in complex cultural dynamics (Bolten, 2015: 109) are one of them.

Considering the news platforms' impact in fostering public discourse, opening citizens' forums and shaping their reflections on their country and that the framing of news significantly impacts these exchanges, initiatives like the project "Better Post"[3] which offers workshops to social media editors and community managers, are vital for promoting quality-driven, responsible and aware journalism. In an era in which so-called citizen journalism has gained a degree of prominence and digital platforms have changed the dynamics of news creation, it is essential to support efforts that improve journalism standards, ensuring that news contributes positively to informed discussions and societal engagement.

At the same time, as the study emphasizes, it is crucial to promote pluralism within echo chambers, developing strategies which can transform them into spaces for dialogue. The ultimative utopian but actually achievable goal is to reimagine the internet and to shift online communities that foster neo-tribal nationalism into areas of digital cosmopolitanism, where diverse perspectives coexist and enhance collective understanding in favour of a democratic pluralistic society.

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3 The project was presented at the ReDICo conference "Cosmopolitanism in a Postdigital, Postmigrant Europe, and Beyond". For more information please see: https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/en/project/betterpost-good-journalism-social-media and https://neuemedienmacher.de/projekte/betterpost/

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Appendix

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