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Published online: 09 Feb 2022.

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ABSTRACT

In this introductory essay to the second of two themed issues, "(Re)Theorizing Communication Studies from African Perspectives," we examine the possibilities created by applying African perspectives in communication studies. We first overview the trajectories initiated by previous African communication scholarship before turning to the applications and interventions highlighted within this issue. Throughout this issue, we invite our readers to acknowledge the previous work that has allowed for African communication studies to be where it is now, and to join us in supporting the scholars yet to be recognized and the futures they labor to create.

The elders are here.

~ Gloria Nziba Pindi[1]

We sat in a circle in a conference room, nostalgically imagining sitting beneath a great tree, grounding us and bringing us together. We were at the National Communication Association annual convention in November 2021, in a panel entitled "Renewing and Transforming African/ist Communication in Communication Studies." We were a crowd of African scholars gathered together, representing a vast swath of communication subdisciplines, excited to recognize the history of African communication studies and to continue laboring to enable its future.

As we spoke of the barriers facing Africans in communication studies, one junior scholar lamented the lack of guidance for up-and-coming African scholars. Looking around the room, he asked, "Where are the elders?" Without missing a beat, Gloria Nziba Pindi responded with gravitas: "The elders are here." Gesturing toward Eddah M. Mutua, Joëlle M. Cruz, Godfried A. Asante, and others, Pindi reoriented the conversation toward the past and future present in the room. Toward the potential, rather than the difficulties. Toward the work that had already been done, the paths forged—by some sitting in the room as well as others gone before who had created space for them—and the work that was yet to come from those gathered together now.

Although African thought on communication has long existed, it has failed to be recognized as a subdiscipline within U.S.-based communication studies until recently.

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That is changing. The elders are here, and the impact of African communication studies can no longer be denied. The elders are here, and African thought will change the face of communication studies as the West knows it. Here, we begin to chronicle how.

In this second issue of "(Re)theorizing Communication Studies from African Perspectives," we turn toward applications of African communication studies to contemporary social problems, and how they provide alternative modalities to approach such social problems. We first overview the trajectories initiated by previous African communication scholarship[2] before turning to the applications and interventions highlighted within this issue. Throughout this issue, we invite our readers to acknowledge and recognize both previous and contemporary scholarship by African scholars, to foreground the previous and current scholarly work that has allowed for African communication studies to be where it is now, and to join us in supporting the scholars yet to be recognized and the futures they labor to create.

Trajectories of African communication studies

If we pay attention, we can see that the elders are already here. African communication scholars have significantly contributed to a variety of scholarly investigations of communication, most notably: rhetoric and communication theory,[3] health communication,[4] intercultural communication,[5] cultural and media studies,[6] and organizational communication.[7] By making the Western-centric bases of communication studies clear, African contributions have pushed the field to rethink its theories, methodologies, and praxis.

As communication studies is based in ontological and epistemological assumptions of anti-Blackness, coloniality, and erasure of African knowledges, African communication scholars move the discipline in new—and often previously unthinkable—directions. In our introduction to "(Re)Theorizing Communication Studies from African Perspectives, Part I," we outlined three ways that African thought transforms the study of communication: through liberating personhood, expanding our understandings of relations and relationality, and opening futures once considered impossible.[8] We briefly review these theoretical potentialities here, before turning to the ways they are currently beginning to be applied.

First, as multiple African scholars have explained, African theories of personhood offer a means of thinking existence beyond and against colonial conceptions of personhood.[9] Under African conceptions, a person's humanity is prefaced and enabled by a dialectic between the individual and community—not only communally, as has been previously theorized. Thinking from African perspectives thus challenges communicative assumptions of bifurcations between individualism and collectivism, liberal understandings of subjectivity, as well as citizenship- and rights-based frameworks.

Second, if personhood is conditioned by relations, then conceptualizing communication from African perspectives requires expanding understandings of relations and relationality. Coloniality restricts understandings of relations and their importance to communication by making persons, actions, and contexts seem individuated and autonomous. African communication studies asks us to conceptualize relations beyond logics of individualism and separability by conceptualizing contexts and organizing through the

lens of liquidity, attending to different scales of relation, and examining the ambivalence of the post-colonial African condition.

Third, African communication studies uses understandings of temporality that challenge Western assumptions of linearity and progress, opening channels to impossible futures. Specifically, African work creates opportunities for collaborations across difference that enable us to imagine and create liberatory futures. Thinking within nonlinear temporalities, if the elders are already here, so too are our futures. How do we honor the futures of African communication studies that we already hold within us?

Applications of African communication studies

If the previous issue clearly demonstrated how the subfield of African communication studies asks communication scholars to rethink normative theories and methodologies, then this issue builds on this groundwork to examine the ways African thought may be applied to communication research. We focus here on applications that: (1) put alternative methodologies into action and (2) examine their impacts on communicative practice. The five articles featured in this themed issue are brilliant applications of African communication studies that provide initial frameworks for exploring the various impacts African communication studies can have on researching and enacting communication in order to decolonize and transform the discipline.

We start the issue with Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed's "Bilchiinsi Philosophy," in which she reflects on her recent research in Ghana to argue for the necessity to decolonize how we do research in African and Global South contexts. Focusing on Northern Ghana as a case study, Mohammed notes that knowledge production on the African continent has historically been implicated in colonization and imperialism. In this regard, Indigenous knowledge systems have been devalued, if not completely erased, in service to systems of knowledge that promote capitalism and imperialism. In response, Mohammed fashions a way to decolonize methodology in order to create possibilities that can reimagine liberatory futures. Mohammed does not pay lip service to decolonization in this essay; rather, she uses African feminist autoethnography to show communication scholars how to "indigenize" methodologies when working in communities in Africa and other Global South contexts.

In "Toward an *Ubuntu*-Centered Approach to Health Communication Theory and Practice," Prisca S. Ngondo and Anna Kylueva reinvigorate the African concept of *ubuntu* and outline its theoretical and practical applications to health communication campaigns and health interventions on the African continent and even in Western settings. Ngondo and Kylueva note that public health challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic have greatly exposed the shortcomings of Western-centric health communication models. They note that the principles of *ubuntu*—such as inclusivity, tolerance, transparency, and consensus-building—are what should guide health communication campaigns to shift attention from individual desires to a collective wellbeing. In this vein, *ubuntu* not only should be applied in African contexts, but also can and should be applied in the West.

Nancy Maingi Ngwu's "Toward a Fluid, Shape-Shifting Methodology in Organizational Communication Inquiry" advocates for the decolonization of organizational communication history. She argues that organizational communication's historical

narrative has largely been focused on institutionalizing and legitimizing the subfield through static development narratives that valorize linear time frames. To counter such monolithic, narrow, and Western-centric views of organizational communication history, Maingi Ngwu suggests a shift toward fluid, shape-shifting practices of history that can also produce decolonizing trajectories of the past, present, and future of organizational communication.

Erik Johnson examines the Midnight Speech of the first Prime Minister of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, in "In the Midnight Hour." Johnson contends that Nkrumah's midnight speech is an act of transfigurative politics, and importantly, offers a blueprint for thinking through decolonization in Africa and its diaspora.

We wrap up the issue with Eddah M. Mutua, Bala A. Musa, and Charles Okigbo's "(Re)Visiting African Communication Scholarship," in which they map out the possibilities of African communication studies in our contemporary moment. Narrating its past, present, and possible futures, they note that African communication scholarship requires constant re-addressing to leverage the creativity and earnestness of all kinds of African people.

Africa is not static, monolithic, or devoid of theory. African knowledge systems and communicative patterns that emerge from the interactions between African people, and with global and local institutions, can reveal both the limitations of neoliberal capitalist logics and some African knowledge systems. It is important to note that not all African knowledge systems offer decolonial possibilities. The misguided use of "African culture" by political elites in collaboration with U.S. American Christian fundamentalists to deny the human rights of LGBTQ Africans is a classic example of how narrow and monolithic conceptions of "African culture" can reproduce heteropatriarchy. Thus, as Godfried Asante and Jenna N. Hanchey contend, decolonialization on the African continent must centralize feminist and queer approaches to prevent the reproduction of heteropatriarchal logics reframed as decolonial knowledge.[10]

With these two themed issues, "(Re)Theorizing Communication Studies from African Perspectives," we hope to provoke and invite the kind of innovative and decolonial research possibilities that communication scholarship is well equipped to pursue. The elders are indeed here, have long been here, and are here to stay.

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Notes

1. Godfried Agyeman Asante and Gloria Nziba Pindi, co-chairs, "Renewing and Transforming African/ist Communication in Communication Studies" (roundtable, National Communication Association annual convention, Seattle, WA, November 18, 2021).
2. For more a more detailed overview, see Godfried A. Asante and Jenna N. Hanchey, "African Communication Studies: A Provocation and Invitation," *Review of Communication* 21, no. 4 (2020): 271–92.
3. For instance: Omedi Ochieng, *Groundwork for the Practice of the Good Life: Politics and Ethics at the Intersection of North Atlantic and African Philosophy* (London: Routledge,

2016); Kundai Chirindo, "Bantu Sociolinguistics in Wangari Maathai's Peacebuilding Rhetoric," *Women's Studies in Communication* 39, no. 4 (2016): 442–59; "Micronations and Postnational Rhetorics," *Women's Studies in Communication* 41, no. 4 (2018): 383–93; Godfried Agyeman Asante, "#RhetoricSoWhite and US Centered: Reflections on Challenges and Opportunities," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 105, no. 4 (2019): 484–88.

4. For instance: Collins O. Airhihenbuwa, *Health and Culture: Beyond the Western Paradigm* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995); James Olumide Olufowote, "Taking Culture and Context Seriously: Advancing Health Communication Research on HIV/AIDS Prevention in Tanzania with the PEN-3 Cultural Model," *Howard Journal of Communications* 32, no. 4 (2021): 394–412.

5. For instance: Gloria Nziba Pindi, "Hybridity and Identity Performance in Diasporic Context: An Autoethnographic Journey of the Self across Cultures," *Cultural Studies ⇔ Critical Methodologies* 18, no. 1 (2018): 23–31; Eddah M. Mutua, "How I Came to Know: Moving through Spaces of Post/Colonial Encounters," in *Globalizing Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, ed. Kathryn Sorrells and Sachi Sekimoto (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016), 95–101; Godfried Asante, "'Queerly Ambivalent': Navigating Global and Local Normativities in Postcolonial Ghana," in *Queer Intercultural Communication: The Intersectional Politics of Belonging in and across Differences*, ed. Shinsuke Eguchi and Bernadette Marie Calafell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 157–78; Fatima Zahrae Chrifi Alaoui, "Morocco from a Colonial to a Postcolonial Era: The Sociopolitical Environment through a Grandmother's Autoethnography," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 13, no. 3 (2020): 276–99.

6. For instance: Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed, "Decolonizing African Media Studies," *Howard Journal of Communications* 32, no. 2 (2021): 123–38; Keyan G. Tomaselli, "Cultural Studies and the African Global South," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2019): 257–67; Godfried A. Asante and Gloria Nziba Pindi, "(Re)imagining African Futures: Wakanda and the Politics of Transnational Blackness," *Review of Communication* 20, no. 3 (2020): 220–28; Godfried Asante and Jenna N. Hanchey, "Decolonizing Queer Modernities: The Case for Queer (Post)Colonial Studies in Critical/Cultural Communication," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2 (2021): 212–20; Francesca Sobande and Krys Osei, "*An African City*: Black Women's Creativity, Pleasure, Diasporic (Dis)Connections and Resistance through Aesthetic and Media Practices and Scholarship," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 13, no. 2 (2020): 204–21.

7. For instance: Joëlle M. Cruz and Chigozirim Utah Sodeke, "Debunking Eurocentrism in Organizational Communication Theory: Marginality and Liquidities in Postcolonial Contexts," *Communication Theory* 31, no. 3 (2021): 528–48; Joëlle M. Cruz, "Invisibility and Visibility in Alternative Organizing: A Communicative and Cultural Model," *Management Communication Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2017): 614–39; Eric Karikari, "Drawing the Contours of Organizational Culture through Neoliberal and Colonial Discourses," *Management Communication Quarterly* (2021): doi:https://doi.org/10.1177%2F08933189211033986.

8. Asante and Hanchey, "African Communication Studies," 280–88.

9. For instance: Asante and Pindi, "(Re)imagining African Futures," 225; Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991); Chirindo, "Bantu Sociolinguistics in Wangari Maathai's Peacebuilding Rhetoric," 446–47.

10. Asante and Hanchey, "Decolonizing Queer Modernities."

Acknowledgements

These themed issues could not happen without the generosity of the many people who took time to review; we are grateful for your care and attention. Finally, we would like to thank the authors featured in these themed issues for entrusting us with their work. We are honored to be a part of putting these knowledges, arguments, and experiences into the world.