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the margins**

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## Afrokology of media and communication studies Theorising from the margins

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This chapter constitutes a quarrel from the margins, an explication of Afrokology and an introduction to its counter-hegemonic heuristic approach in media and communication studies. The chapter goes beyond critiques of the marginality of African approaches in media and communication studies to position Afrokology as a decolonial heuristic tool that is collaborative, convivial and transdisciplinary in its conversation with other forms of knowledge. It argues that the marginalisation of African epistemologies from theoretical debates in media and communication studies parallels the routine sociocultural, political and economic disempowerment and exclusion of the continent's people from global processes. This is similar to how other previously colonised regions such as Asia, the Middle East and Latin America have been epistemologically marginalised in spite of growing evidence of the depth and scope of their scholarly contributions. The discipline of media and communication studies has remained captive to theoretical and methodological approaches from the global North, especially European and American perspectives. The marginalisation of media and communication staff, texts, theories, methods and scholarship from the global South has become routine within top academic institutions in the "powerful" global North and, ironically, also in the global South (cf. Mano and milton 2020). In this use, margin makes evident both the position and place of being constrained, but importantly, it also kindles potential for resistance, relexicalising and realignment. Thus, we argue, living on the margins does not entail giving up or surrendering to a powerful unofficial center, as the margin can offer the "possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" (hooks 1989, 20). This radical reorientation is central to the approach in this chapter as we view marginality as a pivotal location for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse as well as a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world as Africans. In doing so, we propose a way forward that in our view avoids the pitfalls of using marginalisation in ways that might impose a paralysing and false homogeneity upon African epistemes, cultures and people. In fact, the chapter

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works to wrest the notion of the margin from one whose existence and meaning is only dependent on the construction of a unified, empowered and privileged center (Howitt 1993, 2).

In spite of attempts to police the discipline's core theories, epistemologies and research foci, media and communication studies in the global North has itself been subject to questioning of its academic standing. While the discipline has remained popular among employers and students (Quin-Jarvis 2014, n.p), recurrent debates by politicians and academia alike continue to question media studies' relevance, rigour and quality threshold. As such it has been described variously as "vacuous", "quasi academic", soft, pointless and "a mickey mouse course" (Luckhurst 2006, n.p; Quin-Jarvis 2014, n.p). Therefore, this chapter argues that where media and communication studies is concerned, the center itself is a construction that is precariously positioned. Media and communication studies as a whole must recognise its incompleteness as well as its debts and indebtedness to epistemes from the global South. Such recognition holds potential for a media and communication studies that is more open to critiques of its rationale, methods and theories, thereby allowing itself to engage seriously with the reconstitution and multidirectional flows of the discipline in ways that surpass the superficial embrace of difference through mere "accommodation" (Nyamnjoh 2020). Epistemological conviviality is necessary if the discipline is to overcome tokenistic inclusions, engage historic absences and be fully responsive to initiatives that include centering work from the margins. The concept "conviviality" gained traction in the humanities since it was first raised by Ivan Illich in 1973, who viewed convivial life as synonymous with emancipation (Costa 2019, 23). He argued that choosing "conviviality" was meant to

designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment.

(Illich 1973, 11)

In Illich's explication, we note how the concept "conviviality" already points to the significance of informal epistemes and transdisciplinarity, which in recent years have gained "conceptual and practical traction for its transformative value in accounting for the complex challenges besetting humankind, including social relations and natural ecosystems" (Du Plessis et al. 2014, Location 10 of 252). Echoes of transdisciplinarity can also be seen in Paul Gilroy's (2005, Location 160 Of 3943) explication, which draws on and enriches Illich's arguments, by looking at conviviality to refer to "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multicultural an ordinary feature of social life". For Gilroy, the radical openness that brings conviviality alive, "makes a nonsense of closed, fixed and reified identity and turns attention toward the always unpredictable

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mechanisms of identification” (ibid, Location 168 of 3943). In fact, he sees it as a gateway to “cosmopolitanism from below”, articulated in the negotiations of daily coexistence with and in difference (Gilroy 2004, 2013). Nyamnjoh’s (2017, 2020) views on incompleteness and epistemological conviviality as applied within the context of African epistemes and knowledge asymmetry, aligns with Illich’s decolonial and radical humanist approaches of conviviality. It also chimes with Gilroy’s explication of the various analytical and theoretical positions in the interpretation of the limits and contexts of meaning in which differences are articulated (Costa 2014, 23). As will become clear, conviviality and incompleteness are key to how we repurpose Afrokology.

The continued hegemony of global North–centric theories is no longer viable, given that such singular engagement with exogenous epistemologies leaves societies, especially those in the decolonising global South, vulnerable and without credible solutions to modern problems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). In this regard, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015, 485) specifically argues that global North–centric theories and knowledge frameworks “have become exhausted if not obstacles in understanding contemporary human issues”. The reclaiming of epistemologies and ontologies from the margins is therefore a necessary liberatory stance for centering African intellectual thought. The quest for a self-evident *African* media and communication studies comes from a site entirely marginal to the Anglo-American centers of this academic discipline. This relationship inevitably gives rise to ideological tensions and epistemological contestations that feed the capacity to resist and change in African epistemologies. We propose Afrokology as an approach to media and communication that can affirm the resilience and counterpower of previously colonised people in the “margin”.

In this chapter, we foreground a heuristic tool, rooted in Afrokology, for understanding the peculiarities, nuances and intersections of an African approach to media and communication studies, both as an entity in and of itself, but also as part of the larger body of work that exists in a global context. At issue is how to connect and give meaning to the seemingly disparate empirical and theoretical work within the nascent field of African media and communication studies. It has been pointed out by many that neither African media studies nor African communication studies exist in academia either as trajectories with a shared definition nor in clearly identifiable terms operating within specific institutions (Tomaselli 2009; Skjerdal 2012; Blankenberg 1999). In addition to this observation, we argue that African media and communication scholarship has not been adequately informed by the cultural contexts and circumstances within Africa. A key question to ask in this regard is what work the disciplines do to reinforce or undermine unequal power relations (Jansen 2018). The need to challenge and redress epistemological asymmetries is a key mobilising factor behind this chapter. The transformative power of the margin should be explored as a conceptual site from which to imagine the dialogue between particularity and universality within a pluriversal context. As argued in Chapter 1, what is at stake in such dialoguing is creating space for African-driven theories and approaches to

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travel without losing their radical edge or “becoming domesticated in the jaws” of the knowledge powerhouses of the global North (Burasoy 2015). What we are proposing is African-driven approaches that are recognisable as such.

To harness Afrokology’s transformative potential we thus begin by questioning whether African media and communication studies already exists as a discipline rooted in continental history, knowledge and experience. It is without question that education in Africa, in general, has not always been informed by the reality on the ground. In the decolonial moment, we argue that we need to do better to aid the overall drive towards epistemological emancipation. Afrokology in this sense provides a radical possibility for unsilencing that creates new ways of seeing and knowing. In this decolonisation space, the African(ist) intellectual can become the creative balancer in the dialogue between critical particularity and universality within a pluriversal context. As hooks (1989, 23) reminds us: “This is an intervention from that space in the margins that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category of colonised/coloniser”. Afrokology for us is therefore a pathway to liberation which seeks to open a dialogue, a form of writing and speaking from a “particular place and time, from a history and culture which is specific” (Hall 1989, 68).

We deliberately start our writing about African media and communication in an unapologetically positioned and contextual manner. This is in tacit acknowledgment of how academic trajectories in Africa were manipulated by colonial knowledge bearers and that the resultant distortion of knowledge has left Africans with a hegemonic structure that constructs the global North as the unofficial “center” of media and communication studies. This chapter contributes to work needed to create alternative pathways towards Africanising and/or decolonising knowledge. Here, we do not use Africanisation and decolonisation interchangeably. While we view the project of Africanisation to be multifaceted and specific to the continent, we argue that decolonisation goes further in that it connects Africa to other postcolonial and regional initiatives that place indigenous knowledge at the center. The debate has become increasingly intense across the humanities, notably also in the terrain of media and communication studies. Suffice to note that continued coloniality remains a wider problem in economic, political and social spheres in Africa after decolonisation because of structural and ideological continuities.

The trend towards a pluriversal approach to media and communication studies as reflected in calls to decentralise, de-Westernise and differentiate the field, have gathered momentum. In essence, it is argued that there is a need to focus on indigenous thinking, the local, national and continental contexts as well as the entire endogenous cultural dynamic, while avoiding the pitfalls of Anglo-Saxon parochialism. Yet, the outcomes of the various attempts towards Africanising media and communication theory have been decidedly mixed.

On the one hand, there are those for whom the viability of African approaches to media and communication studies triggers debates about lowering of standards

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(Van der Zee and Boogaart 2021, 36). Others vilify it for what they consider to be the vulnerability of moral philosophy (which they argue underpins African approaches towards media and communication) to political misuse (Fourie 2008). Yet others are simply sceptical and cannot immediately grasp the purpose, context and need for the new theoretical efforts from Africa, expressing instead a lack of interest in ideological “mouthfuls” or “neologisms” (response from the editor of a well-respected journal on our use of the concept “Afrokology” – this in spite of the concept’s lengthy history!).

On the other hand, there are growing demands by students in Africa and elsewhere for the decolonisation of curricula. Students for example argue that studying “white philosophers” should be only “‘if required’, and even then their work should be taught solely from “a critical standpoint” (Pete 2017, n.p). African (studies) students specifically call for revised curricula that acknowledge the colonial context. This clarion call for genuinely diverse and inclusive academic education is best exemplified in the Falls movement that started in South Africa in 2015, but soon spread to universities across the globe. While the quest for recognition was dismissed by some academics and institutional authorities as “ignorant”, “rather ridiculous”, pandering to what is “fashionable”, “dangerous political correctness” and attempts to “rewrite history”, more recent Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests have forced the debates into sharp relief (ibid). In light of the BLM protests, some universities in the global North are now reconsidering their resistance towards scholarly engagement and gearing up for decolonisation (Mohdin et al. 2020). This turn towards decoloniality notwithstanding, approaches to decolonise curricula in both Southern and Northern contexts are wide ranging, offering no blueprint for the actual act of decolonising.

Although scholars are starting to realise that theories from the global South have value, they do not always recognise that these theories can work independently. Some, for example, argue that the epistemes from the global South have value only “because of their grounding in the cultural and historical conditions of the West” (Rao and Wasserman 2007, 31). Rao and Wasserman argue in this respect that, even though Western values are capable of transcending the cultural, geographic or religious experiences in which they originate, there is room for them to “fit”, “insert” or “incorporate” other concepts from the global South. The attempts to “find a theoretical space” for alternative concepts and values could benefit Western and non-Western professionals and “result in true theoretical syncretism and engagement” (ibid, 47). Their call for theoretical syncretism and engagement is attractive, but it remains problematic precisely because their suggested framework continues to position African (and other global South/global) approaches as appendages or mere corollaries. As is noted by Olukushi (cited in Oluwemi-Kusa 2016, n.p), the attempts to fit in with existing global North standards undermines Africa’s original contributions. He notes that “We have an opportunity to establish a much more nuanced and considered definition of ambition that speaks to our context” (ibid, n.p). Such an approach is central to our chapter.

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Thus, we argue that what is needed instead is for global South approaches to be considered as independent and meaningful categories on their own terms that produce an epistemic shift based on African lived experiences and vantage points. Such an approach should avoid the pitfalls of binary thinking. Here, as will be seen, Afrokology can be a key interlocutor to transcend dichotomous thinking and the traps of essentialism. Instead, Afrokology encourages a critical engagement with all settled knowledge. Its embrace of incompleteness and epistemological conviviality makes way for understanding knowledge as entangled, rather than purely dichotomous. At issue is a transformational goal to produce knowledge and graduates who are engaged citizens working for social justice.

The problem of global North hegemonic and ideological knowledge positions as previously outlined, could, both consciously and unconsciously, easily constrain the “choice” of discourse for marginalised academics and silence their voices. However, there has been, and remains to be, great interest from African scholars in turning to alternative mechanisms for explicating media and communication in tandem with the lived realities of Africa’s people. This chapter suggests that Afrokology can be a starting point to address this lacuna. To accomplish this task we review and build on past and current attempts to rethink new frameworks for African media and communication (Blankenberg 1999; Banda 2007, 2010; Mano 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Mano and Meribe 2017; Nyamnjoh 2011; Milton 2019).

We enter the Afrokological discussion with an understanding that we cannot assume or imply that a unified subject called “African media and communication studies” is currently operative. Instead, studies in and about media and communication in Africa “span centres, departments, institutes and campuses, and are located in disciplines as diverse as [literature, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political science, business] and so on. They are situated within diverse politics, languages, theories and methodologies” (Cooper and Steyn 1996, 7). This chapter proposes Afrokology as a heuristic tool that can help to resolve the theoretical impasse and bring nuance to our perspective on the emerging field of African media and communication. A question that we are often asked is why this insistence on introducing more theories or concepts – or, even more suspiciously, why the insistence to differentiate an African media and communication studies? Prof Colin Chasi (2018) explains that such labeling is necessary for shaping the emerging frameworks, building a recognisable identity, ensuring sustainability thereof and reaching a critical epistemological mass. We believe this is both necessary and facilitative: “Give name to the nameless so it can be thought” (Audre Lorde, cited in Sandoval 2007, Location 1 of 243). So, in essence then, what a label does in this instance is to acknowledge that a critical dialogue about media and communication *in* Africa, *from* Africa and *about* Africa is underway in multiple spaces and disciplines and hence an urgent need to recognise that these dialogues represent a canonical shift that requires connected epistemic perspectives that can respond to both hegemonic and marginal fundamentalisms (Grosfoguel 2011, 4).

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Crucially, this task involves “de-provincialisation”, defined here as “an enlargement of frames of reference that emphasizes broader connections and conceptualizations – not to substitute, but to counterbalance established practices” (Ahenakew et al. 2014, 217). Used in this way, the concept “de-provincialization” redirects our understanding of earlier calls to universalise African approaches while provincialising “Western” approaches to media and communication towards the thematic concerns raised by scholars in relation to the past and the restrictions placed on knowledge production which has so far denied room to other frameworks (Chakrabarty 2000; Mano 2009b; Willems 2014, Willems and Mano 2016). Importantly, de-provincialising [indigenous epistemes] underscores the decolonial objective of de-universalising knowledge. De-provincialising, unlike provincialising, frees us from the obligation to “remain within [Western/global North] language, epistemology and ontology [while claiming] to be doing the opposite” (Ahenakew et al. 2014, 217). Counterbalancing established practices requires an understanding that formal education and research is but one actor in a participatory civil society and thus places emphasis on transdisciplinarity that encourages amongst others the inclusion of so-called scientific and nonscientific stakeholders. One of the most significant barriers to the widespread adoption of proposed epistemic shifts in institutional culture is a reticence on the part of the academy to let go of its own privileged position as the “rightful” and sole home of knowledge production and dissemination (Ephritis and Kelland 2016, 202). In this regard, and as stated in Chapter 1, epistemological conviviality and interconnectedness (Nyamnjoh 2020) are core to our repurposing of Afrokology as a necessary heuristic tool to conceptualise and center African media and communication studies. Afrokology, as employed here draws on some of the key tenets of Africology/Afrikology (Asante 2015; Nabudere 2011, 2013), and thus “has the ability to deploy a transdisciplinary theoretical perspective to address the interconnected global dimensions of African” media and communication studies (Zulu 2017, 1). This aligns with Nabudere’s (2006) initial explication of Afrokology as not relativistic to Africa.

We redefine the Afrokological approach to critically engage the multidimensional and multidirectional knowledge processes and experiences in response to changing African agendas. Afrokology, for us, is a mode of intellectual inquiry which, much like the concepts “cultural studies” and “postcolonial studies”, constitute an analytical framework that allows for multiple entry points, nuanced explanatory concepts as well as transdisciplinary vantage points to inform the study of African media and communication. In this sense, we redeploy Afrokology as a decolonial heuristic tool that tactically mobilises African heritage such as *ubuntu*, *ujamaa*, *humanism*, *maat*, *sankofa* to uncover epistemological frameworks as part of a strategic turn to the core preoccupation with what it means to be African and human today. As we will argue later in this chapter, such a tactical use of heritage differentiates Afrokology from the disciplines of Africology/Afrikology as proposed by Asante and Nabudere, as it signals a move away from the often more romanticised invocations of the past,



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evident in their explications. Afrokology moves beyond “nostalgic desires” to uncritically renovate and appropriate past African civilisational achievements that tend to view African culture as a ‘lost object which needs to be recovered in its ‘pure form’, in order to redeem the ‘unified, true and unmediated voice’ of the ‘people’ (Spivak 1988). We instead argue for a more critical, subtle line in strategies of representation and in the mediation of African identities. Such a revised approach concurs with what Butler (2006) refers to as “new humanism” through which alternative experiences and conceptualisations of “personhood” are brought into view, alongside the diverse modes of representation that “being human” takes.

For Nabudere (2006, 8), this requires a dual process of historical deconstruction and consciousness-raising to reconstruct our “understanding of ourselves as Africans and how our relationships with the rest of humanity has led us where we are in the context of a global historical process”. Seen in this way, Afrokology embraces Masoga’s (2017) notion of an *Afro-sensed* approach, which he describes as different from an *Afrocentric* approach, as it refers to one’s innate awareness, a so-called sense of one’s identity, that is, being African, without making it “centric”, at the exclusion of all else and thereby implicating oneself in another hierarchical regime structure where one is better than another. Afrokology does, however, acknowledge that a failure to be responsive to lifeworlds “not yet visible” within current framings of media and communication studies would leave the field in “ignorance of the majority of humankind” and, as such, it would be a redundant force (Chakrabarty 2000, 29). As Said also argues, we need to eviscerate the field of the oppressive filter of “Western” liberalism, and embrace a “new humanism” which is not only capable of critically apprehending alternative conceptualizations of “otherness” and “othering” but which is responsive to the “besieged subject” (Said 2003). Employing Afrokology as a decolonial heuristic tool thus situates it within a nexus that defines and places related key theoretical and philosophical concepts at the center of our understanding of African media and communication.

Afrokology allows us to unpack locally grounded knowledge with a clear understanding that while such knowledge is likely to vary in kind, recognising the differences in local contexts is an important first step in defining the trajectory of African media and communication studies. Its commitment towards ontological and epistemological pluralism is evident in its rejection of abstract global designs in favour of intercultural dialogue amongst multiple people(s), including peoples who deem collective and nonhuman entities to be of fundamental moral importance. In addition, Afrokology rejects universality in favour of ‘pluriversality’. We anchor our explication of the Afrokology approach in Nyamnjoh’s (2017) notion of incompleteness. It is only by coming to terms with one’s incompleteness that one would be able to connect, reconnect and build the new. Nyamnjoh argues that incompleteness is a quintessential human condition which should be seen not in the negative but as an enabler of possibilities. His argument primarily centers on the necessity for a more “equal” treatment of

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alternative forms of knowing and humaneness within the knowledge paradigm as a way to bridge divides and facilitate interconnections. For Nyamnjoh (2017),

In a context of recognised and well-represented incompleteness, there is a shared imperative for harmony and collective success, as everyone intuitively recognises the relevance and importance of interdependence.

(263)

Building on this notion of “incompleteness”, this chapter unpacks the arguments for Afrology as a heuristic tool for African media and communication studies based on existing scholarship and praxis. It is our view that a dialogical approach to life experiences and intellectual work can help foster greater self-reflection, connections, knowledge and relational accountability that can inform incompleteness in epistemologies.

Given the diversity of cultural experience on the continent and the professional practice and academic work taking shape in our field, a heuristic approach which emphasises relational accountability and decoloniality is necessary to understand and theorise the work that is being done. Researchers engaged in shared concepts of theory could generate conversations in a transdisciplinary context, across diverse examples and locales. It contributes to ongoing efforts in the “construction of new theories and methodologies in communication research that would appropriately fit the African context” (Obeng-Quaidoo 1986, 89). It allows the widening of epistemologies and their interdependence with practice. Associating and dissociating past, existing and emerging approaches could be nourishing and more productive.

### **Towards an African media and communication studies**

There have been many attempts to construct a distinct African media and communication studies paradigm (cf. Ugbuajah 1985; Obonyo 2011; Journal of African Media Studies (JAMS) *Communicatio* 2012, Issue 38). Notably, this has been done predominantly within the framework of film studies and film theory (where a proliferation of conferences, journals, journal articles and books speak to the distinctiveness of African cinema) and journalism (where media ethics was the driving force behind various attempts at constructing a distinct African journalism paradigm from as early as the 1960s). Skjerdal (2012, 637), however, notes that a close look at the history of African media studies shows that there is no consensus on a distinct African journalism paradigm that stands out as an agreed alternative to a Western or Northern paradigm. Although there have been bold attempts to present *ubuntu* and other similar perspectives as grand theories for general application in media and communication studies, our approach is sceptical of the idea that there is a need for a *singular* grand African media or journalism paradigm and/or associated theory which have broad applicability. In the same way that no single theoretical system can possibly ask all the interesting questions or provide all the satisfying answers, a singular paradigm might not necessarily yield explanations that can speak to a diverse continent. There is no

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‘grand theory’ that can explain Africa. As will be clear below, our Afrokological tool unmasks the incompleteness of grand theories and instead pushes for interconnectedness of epistemologies.

Africanisation debates have been at the center of constructing frameworks for African media and communication studies. Africanisation is employed in a dizzying variety of ways in social science and political theory/thought. In short, it could be argued that Africanisation is a “reverse discourse: if colonialism rode on the crest of wanting to ‘Europeanise’ or ‘civilise’ Africans, Africanisation is the African response to a colonising genre” (Zegeye and Vambe 2009, 126). Forming part of postcolonial discourse, Africanisation is thus often described as a renewed focus on Africa which entails, amongst others, salvaging what has been stripped from the continent. Others point out that a singular focus on the past might not adequately account for the complexities in Africa within the context of contemporary geopolitical concerns (Zegeye and Vambe 2009; Ngcaweni et al. 2013, 44). A focus that negates the relevance of the current and emerging needs of Africans, and that steers towards a collective authorship of African knowledge, misrecognises individual creativity. In doing so, it relegates individuals as passive receivers of others’ imagination (ibid). We therefore contend that calls for a blind return to a pristine past cannot adequately do justice to Africa’s diversity, multiple experiences, dialectics and geographies. Some rightly attempt to broaden the scope by arguing that Africanisation is not about excluding Europeans and their cultures, but about affirming the African culture and its identity in a world community; however, this realisation is often accompanied by a narrow identification of who is African (Makgoba 1997). There are also implicit contradictions in how external cultures are seen to be plural and diverse, yet Africa is seen as a singular “culture”. Such monolithic, insular and fixed approaches to Africanness belie the changing mosaic of cultures on the continent. It is therefore necessary to carefully consider questions about who gets to decide what was “good and respected in African culture” or even how to define and interpret African identity and culture(s).

Given the diversity of existing approaches, Africanisation ought to be examined through a critical lens. This requires close scrutiny of efforts that continue to underpin Africanisation debates. Clearly, efforts towards Africanisation have been ongoing, with much of the focus centered on African ideas of belonging. Past efforts have emphasised non individuality of the African as a core value boundary, but this is not without problem. For instance, former presidents Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana/Gold Coast, 1952–1966) and Julius Nyerere (Tanganyika/Tanzania, 1961–1985) placed emphasis on “non individuality” as the basis of their advocacy for collectivism *consciencism* and *villagisation* which they perceived to be key tenets of Africanness (Bell 2002). Former president Joseph-Désiré Mobutu’s (1965–1997) “deculturation” programme built on these efforts, and argued that it was “necessary to ‘deculturate’ [the Zairese] to get rid of the scars the colonial culture had left in him. . . returning to the thousand year old wisdom of our ancestors, to rediscover ourselves again” (Sese Seko and

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Remilleux 1989, 107). His interventions included, most notably, the renaming of the country from the Republic of the Congo to Zaire. Similar changes were evidenced in how former president Robert Mugabe renamed Rhodesia to Zimbabwe as well as the above referenced renaming of Ghana and Tanzania. These attempts at positioning Africans as central to their own destinies are not without merit, but they raise many questions about narrow prescription, relevance, authenticity and their overall approaches to defining African identity. In essence, one should avoid the blind romanticism of African life that often accompanies calls towards inward looking indigenisation and Africanisation. Cultures – including African cultures – are not static, nor would we want them to be. Hence, efforts towards Africanisation should avoid treating cultures and peoples as fixated on the past with little to no interest in the present and future.

This task demands foregrounding of innovative approaches that would enhance African media and communication studies. In this sense, some African (studies) scholars have started looking at ways in which “African peoples, cultures, institutions and communication environments impede or facilitate social research” (Obeng-Quaidoo 1986, 89). From this African self-introspection developed indigenous efforts in the construction of new theories and methodologies in communication research that would appropriately fit the context of development on the continent. For Obeng-Quaidoo (1986) being African involves identifying

four key areas which . . . , come closer to the core value boundaries of African culture. These are: (1) the role of the supreme God/Allah and lesser gods in the daily life of the African; (2) the African concept of time and its influence on him/her; (3) the African’s concept of work and its relationship to how he/she perceives his/her own relationship to nature; (4) the non-individuality of the African and how this affects his/her worldview.

(ibid, 89)

These perceived core value boundaries of the areas were seen to help explicate the implications for communication research and methodological development in the African context. The early debates in *Africa Media Review*, go further, explaining the problem of centering African thought as not only one of conceptualization but also of social research processes and administration. Contributors registered “a general dissatisfaction with African social research based on foreign theoretical and methodological assumptions” (Ugboajah 1987, 1). Ugboajah (ibid, 9) notes in this regard that fieldwork in Africa can be hampered by the use of recording devices and even pen and paper, as it militates against the assurance of confidentiality in contexts where this can be abused. This observation is as relevant in today’s African contexts as it was in the 1980s as can be seen in the ways in which governments continue to harass and even jail journalists for failing to disclose their sources (cf. Right2Know 2016). Ugboajah therefore suggests the need to question *what* kind of approaches, distinctly African, will aid in minimising the disenchantment of interviewees and avoid the contamination of the responses. The main solution is seen as going “back to our

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roots”, including modifying methodologies for the African rural areas to better understand African societies. [Taylor and Nwosu \(2001\)](#), 300) name a few of the studies that have offered glimpses into what we do not know about how Africans communicate:

- The difficulty of applying Western-derived concepts and empirical approaches to African communication research
- The failure of the dominant paradigm of communication and national development.
- Acceptance that the transfer of technology brings particular value systems that may create conflicts with existing indigenous systems.
- The futility of cultural dependency on national development.
- The notion that African media philosophies are antithetical to Western media principles.
- The value of integrating folk media into Western mass media, including the concept of oramedia.
- The suggestion that Western intervention efforts in Africa have, in some ways, been the source of the problem.
- The need for indigenous communications systems to be part of the global conversation on communication.

Thus, it can be ascertained that for some African scholars an African approach is not necessarily anathema to approaches from the global North. [Wiredu \(1995, 2004\)](#) argues in this respect for combining Western and African knowledge systems, especially when this can do the Africans good. As we stressed earlier in this chapter, however, syncretism at the expense of mutual respect for African thought first and foremost in its own right should be avoided. African knowledge should never be merely as a suppressed category or appendage in its relation with other worldviews.

Africanising media and communication research is thus faced with two interrelated challenges. The first is the search for methodologies which are not driven by blind assertion of African ideas and concepts as mere replacements for Western terms. Instead, critical reflection is needed to identify, filter, provide and apply factual and data-related protocols based on an integrated indigenous knowledge system ([Mutema 2003](#), 81). The second challenge is to craft research methodologies that are fit for purpose. As will be seen below, we posit that Afrokology can help overcome narrow and prescriptive models of Africanising media and communication.

### **Afrokology: explicating and positioning an African approach**

The many divergent views of Afrokology necessitate an explication of its formation and etymology when one wishes to invoke its intellectual purchase. Genealogically, Afrokology is related to “Africology”, a concept coined by [Uzong in 1969](#) ([Flemming 2017](#)). Since then, there have been intense academic efforts, most notably by [Winston Van Horne](#) and [Molefe K Asante](#), to define the concept adequately and achieve analytical clarity. Central to the work of both [Van Horne](#) and [Asante](#), is a commitment to establish a new discipline or field based on the

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centrality of African knowledge and experience as articulated by Asante's theory of Afrocentricity (Flemming 2017). Afrocentrism served, and continues to serve, as a framework for "Africological" studies with clearly delineated ideological and intellectual goals, political purpose and a set of commonly understood methods and theories that serve as an important resource for African scholarship engaged in various projects of decolonisation (Okafor 2014; Chawane 2016; Flemming 2017). Yet, for some, the "conception of the primary rootedness of the discipline in the African American initiative and experience and the Black Freedom Movement and its emancipator thrust" (Karenga 2009) was troubling. Hence efforts to theorise *for* the African continent *from* the African continent gained momentum.

In 2005, at the International Conference on African Renaissance Studies: Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinary Paradigms, Ugandan scholar Dani Nabudere contributed *Afrokology* to the conversation, clearly delineating it as a scientific approach not only for "investigating historical phenomena in which African achievements are properly recognised" but also for creating the "basis for articulating an African agenda for knowledge production that is relevant to African conditions and beyond" (Nabudere 2006, 8–9). Nabudere offered his input as an original African intervention, emanating from Africa rather than the Euro-American space. He later gave a formal conceptual and analytical identity to his approach, which he renamed Afrikology, and situated it as "a new science/discipline", different from Afrocentricity and its associated Africology (2011, 162). For Nabudere (ibid) Afrikology, because of its location and place of origin, is best suited to address African problems arising from the colonial and postcolonial experience and to identify tools that can resolve those problems and contradictions in a positive manner. His assessment of Afrocentricity is echoed by Ngeaweni et al. (2013, 44) who argue that such intellectual-political approaches are "largely reactive in orientation and confined to an essentialism that does not appreciate the complexity of today's influences like globalisation, multipolarity, ecological concerns, and polycentric technological phenomena". In spite of Nabudere's critiques of Africology, and the associated theory of Afrocentricity, we have argued elsewhere that his expanded theorisation of the concept of Afrikology in actual fact overlaps with the American Africology in terms of its key tenets and underlying assumptions. Later in the chapter we will briefly outline Nabudere's later (2011, 2013) arguments and explain how our chapter adopts an approach that reworks his original *Afrokology* from a decolonial perspective, underpinned by epistemological interconnectedness and conviviality.

In delineating Afrikology, Nabudere (2011, 164) draws on Kershaw (1998) to identify the three types of knowledge he considers as necessary for the emancipation of Africa, i.e. *practical knowledge*, *technical knowledge* and *participation in action*. This, we contend, is not dissimilar to what Karenga (2009, 61) describes as Afrocentricity's "triple mission of cultural grounding, academic excellence, and social responsibility and the critical, corrective, and multidimensional task it calls for and compels". Yet, for Nabudere, Afrikology's

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open-ended and all-inclusive nature makes it better suited than any other approach to accomplish this disciplinary task. Of course, a close reading of Africology (i.e. the so-called American intellectual branch of the discipline) shows that there are many similarities and overlaps with Nabudere's Afrikology. A common denominator for both Africology and Afrikology is, for example, a core concern to build upon and expand multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives focused on "an African-centered, structured, and critical exploration, analysis and synthesis of the historical evolution and contemporary nature of the global black experience" (Okafor 2014, 219). Still, lines of demarcation continue to exist in the field based on

- Subject-matter approaches to the definition of the discipline.
- Disciplinary permeability.
- Epistemological perspective or worldview approaches to the definition of the discipline.
- The centrality of the African American experience.
- Diasporic visions of the discipline.
- Global visions of the discipline.
- Outsiders' versus insiders' perceptions of the scope of the discipline.
- Disciplinary marketability or viability as a gateway to both intellectual development and job opportunities (Okafor 2014, 209).

We consider these nuances as evidence of the dynamic nature of the intellectual debates around centering Africinity, rather than a rejection of the core objectives of Africology/Afrikology. Thus, as Levi (2012) notes,

Whether we want to call it African-Centered Studies, Afrocentric Studies, or Africana Studies, the most important part of these nomenclatures is that we start with Africa as our center and that the focus of Africana Studies has its location in the Nile Valley, where the first cultural highway served as the womb for so much of African culture.

(180)

What is needed therefore is not to dismiss existing interventions, but to bring African interventions into conversation with each other as well as with scholarship in the broader global South and the global North contexts – hence a coalescing heuristic tool.

We propose Afrokology as a heuristic tool for African media and communication. Our approach to Afrokology inevitably involves relexicalising the field in a way that centers African knowledges. Relexicalising often relies on building compound-noun concepts comprising several terms, in this case:

Afro [linking to and situated in Africa] + (K) [acknowledging the epistemic disobedience it embodies] + ology [referring to a subject of study, or a branch of knowledge]

First, it is "Afro" as opposed to "Afri", to signal at once the interconnectedness with aspects of the theoretical project of *Afrocentricity*, as well as its emancipatory roots wrested from the lived experiences of Africans in Africa and the diaspora. "Afro" in Afrokology is suitable for us also because it links to alternative and

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subaltern discourses of black identity which for example saw the Afro hairstyle become an important symbol of struggle, identity and agency during the civil rights movements in the 1960s and in the struggles for liberation in Africa. The Afro, in spite of disputes about its African roots, has been and continues to be, symbolic of black pride and empowerment. While having an Afro is not automatically political, the “Afro” links our use of the concept to the interconnectedness of black identity struggles while it also signals Afrokology’s indebtedness to *Afrocentric* theory. This commitment to an emancipatory and activist stance in pursuit of epistemological justice, is further affirmed by our preference for Nabudere’s “k” rather than a “c” (2006, 2011, 2012). To paraphrase Madhubuti (1973), in the spelling of Afrokology, a “k” is used rather than a “c”, because many public intellectuals and activists use the “k” specifically to represent an acknowledgement that “K” is germane to Afrika (cf. Abif 1998, 44; Koka 2002; Nabudere 2006). Most vernacular or traditional languages on the continent spell Afrika with a “K”. When one, therefore, speaks of AfriKa, they’re bringing an Afrikan-centered view to the meaning of the word (Madhubut 1994). “K” in this sense embodies “epistemic disobedience” called for in this chapter, as it gives visual affirmation to the clarion call for excavating the African voices silenced by colonialism/universalism, thereby asserting epistemic rights from the margin. Therefore, Afrokology spelt with a ‘k’ for us represents a redefined and potentially different starting point – one that engages more directly with realities and lived experiences on the African continent. Having now outlined the reasoning behind our preferred spelling, it is necessary to distinguish, in more detail, how our use of Afrokology diverges from Africology/Afrikology.

For us, the key element of differentiation can be found in Nabudere’s earliest definition of “Afrokology” as:

a universal scientific epistemology that is not necessarily African-centric or Afrocentric . . . that goes beyond Eurocentricism, or other ethnocentrism. It recognises all sources of knowledge as valid within their historical, cultural or social contexts and seeks to engage them into a dialogue that can lead to better knowledge for all. . . . This task does not, however, need Africans to develop their own “centricism” to achieve it.

(Nabudere 2006, 9, 13)

In this sense, Nabudere’s initial approach emphasises Afrokology as a dialogical approach. It therefore invites a self-reflective approach to think about Africanity in a broader sense. The fact that Nabudere’s first AfroKology does not require Africans to develop their own centrist approach is an important distinction from (the American) Africology, as we argue that such centrist approaches remain caught up within the confines of a hegemonic division of knowledge. Our approach, however, attempts to also overcome contradictions in Nabudere’s articulations of Afrokology (Nabudere 2006), as well as its successor, Afrikology (Nabudere 2011, 2012).



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The first point of difference is highlighted by Zegeye and Vambe's (2009) critique of Nabudere's explication of Afrokology's focus on a singular tradition, rather than traditions (thereby ignoring diversity of sources and traditions). They note that Nabudere speaks of "African knowledge" without ever naming it in the plural, nor giving it concrete form and, especially so it seems, the idea that African knowledge derives from "a unified whole that has emerged from collective authorship". This echoes Osha's (2018, 126) observation that "Nabudere's project adopts the same kind of posture and intent as the universalists of science that he opposes". We are sympathetic to Zegeye and Vambe's (2009, 130) view that an "Africanisation programme that does not value individual creativity and initiatives, as is the case with [Nabudere's] Afrokological assumptions, can only undermine the efforts that ordinary people display when they want to make Western modernity work for themselves".

We submit that Zegeye and Vambe's (2009) reading of Nabudere's explication of Afrokology points to a contradiction in terms of the concept's explicit commitment to the recognition of other sources of knowledge. In the first place, Nabudere's focus on a singular source of knowledge production (i.e. "tradition" and "African knowledge") negates diversity. Secondly, his focus on the collective authorship of African knowledge, at the expense of individual creativity, is tantamount to evoking images of Africa's "glorious" past and "uncritically projecting them as the basis of a viable Africanisation . . . agenda in contemporary Africa" (ibid).

These insights are echoed in Sanya Osha's (2018) critique of Nabudere's later Afrikology (2011, 2012) as "epistemological totalitarianism". Osha (2018, 125) posits that Nabudere's Afrikology is presented as an

"all-encompassing epistemology" able to transcend the perceived fallacy and shortcomings of Cartesianism, able to engender true justice in social relations, able to act as an emancipatory program for oppressed peoples, and finally, able to restore the injured dignity of the black race.

In addition, Nabudere's uncritical and romanticised embrace of the African past, at times sits uneasily with his advocacy for openness and plurality of knowledge. It displays "a marked racial agenda on the side of blackness" (ibid). We are opposed to the implied notion of a homogenous African culture as presented in Nabudere's work. Our understanding of culture as dynamic and complex also conflicts with the notion of an African culture that is frozen, static and waiting to be renovated. Instead, we put a premium on African cultural diversity and interconnections. Contradictions in Nabudere's approach and associated narrow view of Africanity could be read as a throwback to nativism. Nativism is a concept Said (1994) used to refer to a general trend in the late 1980s and early 1990s to "reclaim one's past". For Said, it is important to move beyond the confines of such local identities which claim, for example, that only the Irish are Irish, or the Africans African – as can be seen in Nabudere's continued quest for revival and preservation of a black African past. We agree that Nabudere's characterisation of "ancient of Africa" is at times too romanticised and lacking adequate insight of

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the diverse experiences on the continent, outside Egypt. Afrikology, in his later works, while seen as synonymous with “transdisciplinarity” (2011, 99), also looks at the world in terms of universality and sameness, thereby negating difference and pluriversality. The task for us therefore is to disrupt this universalism by recognising that both Western and African epistemologies are equally situated in historical and contemporary social realities.

Osha (2018) therefore questions the viability of Afrikology as an epistemological approach. For Osha what is least convincing is Nabudere’s (2011) call to return to an “ethos of wholeness and interconnectedness” of an African past based on the use of languages without addressing the logistical requirements for attaining such a goal. Osha also notes how Nabudere is “silent” about which African language is applicable for this task, noting the need for more “evidence” before one grounds Nabudere’s Afrikology as a “paradigm of oppositionality” (Nabudere 2011, 103). Nabudere (2011, 125) ostensibly saw Afrikology as demonstrative of the accommodative character of African knowledge systems. In reality however, Nabudere’s “Afrikology” appears to not only have a relatively closed reading of Africa, but could also be read as dismissive of existing African approaches, such as *maat*, *ubuntu* and *sankofa*, describing these as either “political manifestos and ideologies for ruling elites faced with problems of mobilisation and political organisation” or constructions meant to “meet the needs of academic consumption, [or] created to engender debate” (Nabudere 2011, 126). Such characterisations are illustrative of Nabudere’s perfunctory and closed approach to the broader community of African scholarship and ideas. It is a marked difference from our convivial embrace of intellectual scaffolding in African thought. Convivial scholarship, in our view, is important if one is to engage with decoloniality in media and communication studies. While the highlighted criticisms of Nabudere’s work are legitimate, we maintain that we invoke Afrokology differently. Importantly, both Africology and Afrikology are defined by their proponents as either a new science and/or a new discipline, and as pointed out earlier, both are imbued with essentialist attributes. To overcome this theoretical impotency we propose to repurpose and innovatively mobilise Nabudere’s original “Afrokology” as a coalescing heuristic tool. It is our view that Afrokology used in this way can be a significant signpost in understanding the relationship between the media and society. Like Afrikology, its philosophical undercurrent is defined by African ideals, but unlike Afrikology, it is not meant to force a false unity between Africans. Instead, Afrokology is cognizant of the fact that Africa is a continent consisting of at least 54 countries, each with its own idiosyncrasies.

Our reappraisal of Afrokology is premised on decolonial epistemological conviviality through which African knowledges can enter into purposeful and critical dialogues with other sources of knowledge. Decolonial thinking is underpinned by tactical strategies, mobilisations and hegemonic reconceptualisation that create new spaces. Our vision for Afrokology recognises that the basic tenets of Western knowledge – i.e. Cartesian – rationality,

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teleological (focusing on a foreseeable end goal) and universal reasoning (the idea of only one possible rationality) – are historically situated, and potentially restrictive if universalised throughout, and as such they prevent the imagination of other possibilities (Andreotti and Ahenakew, 2013). Unlike Nabudere, our use of Afrokology operates more within the context of decoloniality. We are not in search of universality, opting instead for pluriversality which is viewed as “a need to consider how different worlds can coexist, not submitted in one reality, but in incommensurability” (cf. Querejazu, 2014, 2).

The emphasis on pluriversality is a key aspect of Afrokology’s connectedness to decoloniality which include conscious acts of reclamation and validation. This manifests in a double gesture: first, Afrokology demands a critical engagement with the inadequacy of existing epistemologies and their linkages with coloniality, but it also, secondly, demands delinking oneself from these knowledge systems and reimagining present-futures of African media and communication (Grosfoguel, 2008, 1). In this sense, our use of Afrokology aims to move discussions away from the uncritical and wholesale embrace or complete rejection of modernity. In adopting the tenets of decoloniality, it similarly asks “Can we produce knowledges beyond Third World and Eurocentric fundamentalisms? . . . and . . . How can we overcome Eurocentric modernity without throwing away the best of modernity as many Third World fundamentalists do?” (ibid). These remain important questions for us as they identify the incompleteness of dominant global North paradigms together with a need to move beyond a mere superficial engagement with hitherto underrepresented epistemologies from the global South.

We are persuaded by the insights put forward by Nyamnjoh’s (2017, 2020) explication of scholarly conviviality grounded in incompleteness. For Nyamnjoh, incompleteness is neither an inadequacy nor something to feel inferior about, but rather a gateway to relational epistemologies through which we can bring historical ethnography into conversation with the ethnographic present (2020, 13). He argues against throwing away the Western (knowledge) baby with the bathwater. It is within this context that we invoke the intellectual currency of Afrokology. Afrokology in this sense acknowledges that the shift from colonialism to the present has produced a duality of life which cannot be avoided – one has to engage with it and the urgent question is *how* to do so. Africa has to reimagine its place in a postcolonial, postmodern, decolonised and globalised world where the very notion of identity has become mired in ambiguity and controversy. Appiah’s (1992) assertion that “‘the colonial’ is not dead, since it lives on in its ‘after-effects’” is especially apropos here (Appiah, 1992, 71). Colonization was not only a process of cultural and political domination and oppression, but also a process of cultural hybridisation which is best understood as a transculturation process which sees the creation of a new mixed cultural order whereby both coloniser and colonised become transformed (Bhabha, 1994, 33). It is necessary therefore for both the global South and the global North to lean into this duality at the core of the colonial experience. In Zeleza’s (2005) words, Afrokology therefore sees the urgent task for media and communication scholars

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to be the radical rethinking of how we engage with media and communication theory and research both in Africa and elsewhere.

Afrokology's groundedness in incompleteness and scholarly conviviality invites us to place a premium on dialogue between, and respect for, various points of view. It also emphasises the importance of acknowledging and valuing different experiences. This, we argue, could create added impetus for conversations with alternative voices, not just on the periphery, but in the center. Afrology's embrace of duality further foregrounds the importance of historical intersectionality in our explications of the roles and contributions to knowledge production by marginalised voices.

Clearly, Nyamnjoh's accommodative stance and gesture of compassion to disabuse and save the "western [knowledge] baby" is one that would compel the global North, as well as the global South, to be more open to other ontologies and epistemologies. Using the metaphor of eating and being eaten, (Nyamnjoh 2013, 40–41) also argues that

In the game of life characterised by unequal encounters between individuals and cultures compelled to share places and spaces like scorpions in a lidded basket, it would appear that the question is not so much whether cannibalism is possible but rather who is eating whom, how and why, and the power relations that render such eating or being eaten visible and invisible in particular ways and contexts.

In other words, this is about addressing asymmetrical power relations and creating "spaces and opportunities for mutually edifying conversations across various divides, hierarchies and inequalities" (Nyamnjoh 2017, 266). In regards to this, we propose Afrology as a heuristic toolkit rather than a discipline or a unified set of premises that rigidly guide African intellectual thought in media and communication studies. An Afrological approach offers conceptual and practical tools for repositioning African media and communication in ways that are in conversation with other approaches.

### **Centering a convivial Afrological heuristic tool**

Afrokology, as a heuristic tool, is open and creative in its embrace of emerging ideas, concepts and connections as resources for new thinking and relexicalising the discipline of media and communication studies. We do not propose an Afrological position that is insular or defensive of Africanness. Instead we repurpose Afrology, freeing it from (Vabudere's (2011, 2012) essentialist tendencies, and steering it to align more with (Nyamnjoh's (2011, 2020) explication of incompleteness and scholarly conviviality. This approach, we argue, acknowledges that the duality that results from colonialism and the inevitable realities of encounters and interactions between coloniser and colonised, result in inextricable interconnections and fluidities. For this reason, Afrology considers colonial importation and the decolonisation of media and communication studies, not as steps in a linear move towards African emancipation but rather as entangled and perhaps even inextricable. Afrology therefore does not merely imply an effort to revive a desired and idealised past, as

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it is aware that blind constructions of past values and traditions cannot be uncritically superimposed on contemporary issues. Deploying Afrokology as a heuristic tool instead presents a necessary corrective against uncritical particularity that inhibits critical dialogues in African media and communication. As presented in Chapter 1, what needs to be avoided is an insular particularity that leads to essentialisms. We propose *critical* particularity which, in our view, is necessary for rethinking theory in ways that challenge the notions of universality, including global North dominance in media and communication (cf. Chapter 1). Considering Afrokology against this backdrop, it could be at once a *clarion call* for a continued African resistance to domination and exploitation of Africans as well as a *decolonial hermeneutic tool* through which Africans can manifest their sense of identity and independence in all their diversity. Centering a convivial Afrokology in media and communication highlights possibilities in the African past that have a bearing upon the present and would entail critically reflecting upon Africanist roots. It can therefore be applied in ways that carefully renovate and excavate those resources that add to the lived experiences of contemporary Africans. Such excavation, we argue, allows us to negotiate African intellectual interventions that center the margin. Taking seriously past African knowledges, which have been silenced by unexamined universality, and placing them in conversation with emergent African and global epistemologies thus become part of the ecology of Afrokology. Renovating history in this sense signals that African knowledge systems are not novel as they have been in existence for some time, even if that existence has been marginalised, silenced and ignored. Hence, to excavate and renovate African knowledges does not mean that one is “stuck in the past”; instead, it advocates for a *strategic* return to the source, i.e. looking backwards to find those resources that can aide so one can go forward with strength (Sweetling 2017, 1). To excavate and renovate therefore is not a stagnate or retrograde “looking backwards”, rather it is an important precondition for understanding the context from which you come and to utilize the source as a place of intellectual awakening, renaissance and reformation (Sweetling 2017, 2). In this regard, an Afrokological approach is more accommodative in its centering of an African heuristic tool in the mainstream. It underscores Africa’s role in renovating and fostering an inclusive global citizenship and recognises that the past is in the present in as much as the present defines the past.

Afrokology, as deployed here, is attuned to African knowledges, comfortable with difference and embraces change and new ideas even as it invites a critical evaluation of the status quo. It resists efforts to weaponise fear of the unfamiliar, arguing instead that academic theory and political practice need to be grounded in particular identities while recognising the intersectionality of difference (De 2000). Our use of Afrokology is characterised by what Maxwell (2011, 27) and others describe as a distributive view of culture, which sees societies as united to large extent by the interaction and complementarity of diverse views, rather than solely by sharing or commonalities. Afrokology argues that the “taken-for-grantedness” of imported knowledge about Africa should be questioned. It equally

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posits that any “return to the source” should be done with a critical lens firmly intact. Drawing on Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) it argues that the critical potential of black thought and culture is often more readily found in the cultural artefacts that speak directly to the African experiences of dislocation. Nigerian Afrobeat creator Fela Kuti’s music for example addresses the scourge of colonialism as the root cause of the socioeconomic and political problems that plague the African people. His open critiques of corruption as one of the worst political problems facing Africa, arguably reveal more about the contingencies of modernity than any attempt to reassemble a lost African past or forge a future from a European present. De (2001, 42) argues in this respect that “the critical educator [needs] to wrest ‘theory’ from lived realities and feelings in order to connect human responses and feelings to dominant systems of meaning and social action”. He invokes Stuart Hall to argue that we need to see the challenge of difference as ensuring that all peoples have the

resources to be productive, creative, to explore their own histories, to tell their own stories and to develop their own identities in the future . . . understanding the axis of difference is to examine the linkage between material forces and social ideologies in producing difference.

(ibid)

Afrokology’s dialectical stance advocates for research foci that do exactly that, but which avoid the misfires from earlier work on Africanising media and communication.

Afrokology extends Africanisation (with its inward-facing continental objective) to include also a decoloniality objective (which is broader in scope as it connects African [hi]stories to those of the so-called global South as well as the colonial encounter). In this sense, Afrokology aligns with Said’s (1993) cross-cultural, cross-national, cross-hemispheric vision of decoloniality which takes into account complex ambivalence and hybridity in order to engender a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world. This challenges scholars to explore ways of thinking in which “things, words, deeds and beings are always incomplete, not because of absences but because of their possibilities” (Nyamnjoh 2017, 256). In our version, Afrokology acknowledges the incompleteness of epistemologies in *both* the global North *as well as* the global South. If we accept this hypothesis, it would come with a concomitant task to continuously reassess existing academic approaches, cognisant of the multiple possibilities of interconnections which can overcome obvious epistemological inadequacies. What is crucial here, as Nyamnjoh (2017, 257) argues, is a recognition of “Being and becoming as works in progress [which] require borrowings and enhancements to render them beautiful and acceptable. It is this capacity to enable and disable simultaneously that makes absence present and presence absent in certain places and spaces, private and public alike”. We perceive this recognition as a crucial

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precursor to questioning epistemological claims. The Afrokological heuristic tool unlocks possibilities for questioning, distinguishing and revalidating knowledges relevant for media and communication.

For us, connecting past and present epistemologies, creates a bridge with the epistemic disobedience called for in Mignolo's (2009) view of decoloniality. Epistemic disobedience in this sense requires careful attention to the silences of Western epistemologies, the excavation of those silences and an affirmation of the epistemic rights of the margins (Mignolo's 2009, 2). This view of epistemic disobedience, as pointed out earlier, is at odds with scholars such as Rao and Wasserman (2007) – who argue for “inserting” theories from the global South into Western values – as it goes over and beyond their attempts to append concepts from the global South. Merely appending global South concepts to existing frameworks in the global North could deepen rather than overcome existing epistemic traps through which struggles of resistance become captured in a grammar of oppression. The resultant epistemic blindness undermines struggles for inclusion as it prevents scholars from listening to possibilities that, for example, are not framed by Cartesian, teleological and universal reasoning (Andreotti and Ahenakew 2013). As Comaroff and Comaroff (2012, 115) also remind us, the consequence of such attempts is that the South is rarely seen as a source of theory and explanation for world historical events as it “continues to be the suppressed underside of the North”. While Afrokology holds that the knowledge and cultural capital of African epistemologies are valid in their own right, it is not blind to hermeneutical injustice which has so far misrecognised other knowledges, especially from the global South.

Afrokology as a heuristic tool is driven by the need to build bridges across theoretical chasms and to create strategies for centering African media and communication from the margins. It is an appreciative conversation underscored by epistemological conviviality and incompleteness (Nyamnjoh 2017). In appreciative conversations, there are no correct answers, but value is derived from an ability to initiate dialogue across chasms and divides. Here it is useful to remind the reader of Nyamnjoh's (2017, 258) argument of academic discipline approaches as incomplete, “constantly in need of activation, potency and enhancement through relationships with incomplete others”. For him Africans have already been at the forefront of convivial approaches which embrace incompleteness:

Frontier Africans are those who contest taken-for-granted and often institutionalised and bounded ideas and practices of being, becoming, belonging, places and spaces. *They are interested in conversations not conversions.*

(ibid, our emphasis)

Deploying Afrokology as a heuristic tool serves to engender and mobilise efforts of frontier Africans.

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In this view, Afrokology is a transformative approach which encourages epistemological recognition and conviviality and, as such, holds great potential for engendering shifts in perspectives. It invokes what Sandoval refers to as “differential consciousness”, described by Davis in her foreword to Sandoval (2000, Location 80 of 6280) as “a self-conscious flexibility of identity and political action and for the development of competent critiques of the movement of power along axes of race, gender, class and sexuality, that could in turn serve as ingredients for a new methodology of liberation”. In this respect then, an Afrokology of media and communication studies draws on Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* in its attempt to:

- Advance a series of methods, not only for analyzing texts, but for creating identities that are capable of speaking to, against and through power.
- Cultivate theory and method of oppositional consciousness in postcolonial Africa and the African diaspora.
- Resituate and reinterpret the work of Euro-American theorists in relation to the insights of those African experiences that insist on international solidarity and resistance to all forms of prejudice and bias (Davis in Sandoval 2000, Location 80–81 of 6280).

Hence, Afrokology is a decolonizing heuristic tool that facilitates oppositional consciousness. It recognises skewed power relations and gives voice to those previously marginalised. In doing so, it opens a space to relexicalise and construct new vocabularies that can help to decolonise epistemological imagination. This approach draws on the participation studies framework developed at a preconference on participation studies at the 2015 International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conference.

From a media and communication studies perspective, Afrokology engenders an understanding that technologies as well as socioeconomic and political changes are impacting and altering communities across Africa in unique ways. There is no one theory that can explain everything for everyone; rather, Afrokology acknowledges that shaping Africa’s geopolitical future will come from the experimentation and social change that individuals, families, communities and cities embark on as they try to navigate their way through this highly volatile environment. It only asks that such experimentation avoids the intellectual violence imposed by negating African knowledges and that it is done with a clear understanding of the usefulness of decriminalising difference. This is in line with the African proverb that states that wisdom is like a baobab tree, no one individual can embrace it.

In the ultimate, the convivial Afrokological turn for media and communication studies is one that refutes the claims that the global North is the normal order, complete with all theoretical and methodological solutions. The heuristic tool exposes the fallacy of such claims of “completeness” in the academy and brings the reality of epistemological incompleteness to the fore.

**Concluding reflections**



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The chapter effectively introduced and contextualised Afrokology as a heuristic toolkit that mobilises and speaks to issues of decolonising, Africanising, internationalising, indigenising media and communication studies. In so doing, it advocates for centering *African* media and communication studies. Borrowing from Shome (2014, 198), we argue that our centering of Afrokology goes beyond de-Westernizing or internationalizing media and communication:

Dewesternization or Internationalization does not necessarily lead us into the Global South. One can dewesternize but still remain within the privileged spheres of the Global North with its capitalist excesses and geopolitical privileges.

Thus, while it can undoubtedly feed into those gestures, Afrokology is unapologetically South-centered, engendering relational ways of seeing the world through *walking* decoloniality. Afrokology deployed in this way explores how the field of media and communication studies can embrace a relational theoretical and methodological episteme. Such an epistemological turn would make explicit the issue of praxis, i.e. listening and learning from others in any development towards meaningful engagement with realities in Africa. This is what gives “shape, movement, meaning and form to decoloniality” (Walsh 2018, Location 460 of 7946 Kindle). What is at stake here is initial “complicated conversations” that do not “conform to predetermined outcomes, but produce something new and transform those engaged in the conversation of Africanisation and decoloniality” (le Grange 2018, 6). In so doing, Afrokology explores that which might be revealed if we place seemingly disparate ways of knowing in conversation, particularly emphasising and centering “the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as indispensable and insignificant” (Walsh 2018, Location 451 of 7946 Kindle). Herein lies perhaps the most provocative aspect of this tool: it allows for a transdisciplinary approach for media and communication studies which can inform theory from below. As such, Afrokology “allows for the empowerment of the individual and group alike, not the marginalisation of one by or for the other” (Nyamnjoh 2017, 262). This, we argue, allows for new dialogue and conversation that can deepen intellectual thought undergirding academic work in media and communication.

Following from the foregoing, our explication of Afrokology as a heuristic toolkit is itself an example of the approach we put forth. We are borrowing particular ideas from different authors and perspectives in an attempt towards building a toolkit that can be useful in thinking about *African* media and communication studies. As discussed in this chapter, the questioning of epistemological frameworks in relation to contemporary challenges is gathering pace at an international level. Afrokology is therefore to be seen as part of these intellectual interventions and disruptions. As Misra (2018, n.p) rightly points out, decoloniality and we would add, Africanity, implies an urgent need to “disrupt the accepted status quo and rupture the ‘comfortable ignorance’ of those immune to the ramifications of race, [class and gender]. It is high-time that marginalised

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communities and their histories claim their rightful space, albeit at the expense of white and European discomfort”.

We maintain that Afrokology, with its explicit emphasis on and commitment to research guided by the lived experiences of the researched, provides a pathway towards enfolding research with praxis. This, in our view, is important for empowerment of marginalised/silenced communities to challenge their oppression. Afrokology can awaken relational accountability that promotes respectful representation, reciprocity and rights of the researched. Afrokology is a novel way to *think about the thinking on* African media and communication in a more relevant and engaged manner. We appreciate that there are no shortcuts to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, as it is an undertaking that needs serious planning, preparations and decisions, with the choice of route to the summit having implications. This is to say that our choice of Afrokology does not portend to bring answers to the questions of how cultural relations between the North and the South *ought to* be conducted or even *whether* they need to be formulated at all. However, in the tradition of theories from the South, we assert that movement forward lies in the way we put the questions:

Truth lies in the road (maybe in ambush), for how can we prejudice the contours of the destination that will be shaped by our getting there? Traveling creates its own landscapes, and that goes for the migration of ideas as well. The reassuring thing is that one does always end up with a destination. Naturally, on the way out, as maverick mortals [we’d] be inclined to say “we *must*”, “we *ought to*”; [we’d] even be inclined to stitch [our] own speculative “truths” as patchwork lining inside the dark and suffocating coat of Certainty, if only to use as secret maps.

(Breytenbach 2009, 2–3)

Thus, we can conclude that our centering of Afrokology as a heuristic is part of a journey, a trajectory that maps and reclaims African intellectual thought applicable to knowing and doing media and communication. Here, it is not our intention to provide a digested theory for the reader – instead, we wrote this chapter as an introductory deliberation first of all for ourselves and for other writers in this emergent tradition to try to articulate what we are doing and to explore both the continuities and breaks we represent with the earlier history of media and communication studies with, in and about Africa. Altogether, Afrokology of media and communication studies is a call towards engaged listening and collaboration. In the final chapter of this volume, we operationalise the heuristic tool in order to underpin it as an Afrokological transdisciplinary approach for African media and communication. We submit that Afrokology as heuristic tool allows for more sensitive and imaginative theoretical interpretations of African contexts and identities to emerge.

We conclude on a hopeful note: “[We] beg you. . . . Have patience . . . try to love the questions themselves. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far

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in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer” (Rilke 1903, n.p).

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