

# THE ROLE OF *AFRICA JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT* IN DECOLONIZING MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper, we discuss the role of journals in decolonizing management and organization knowledge. We illustrate that role by using the Africa Journal of Management (AJOM), a publication of the Africa Academy of Management (AFAM). AJOM was deemed critical to decolonizing knowledge about and in Africa, the context where the colonial enterprise wreaked havoc on all sectors of African societies, from political structures, commerce, and culture to knowledge production. In describing the genesis and goals of AJOM, as well as the successes, limitations, and challenges of a journal dedicated to management and organization science, we contribute to epistemic decolonization.*

**Keywords:** Africa Academy of Management; *Africa Journal of Management*; decolonization; epistemic decolonization; knowledge production

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Decolonizing Management and Organization Studies: Why, How, and What  
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## INTRODUCTION

The management and organization science (MOS) literature is focused on the “decolonial turn” where scholars contend that “taking colonialism seriously as a context is not only about acknowledging culturally different ways of knowing, but also about recognizing and undoing the authority of the West” to determine what happens around the world epistemologically (Greedharry et al., 2020, p. 13). It is based on the recognition that MOS has colonial foundations in “old-fashioned and frequently Eurocentric, scholarly concerns and/or approaches to social scientific inquiry” (Prasad, 2012, p. 14).

Colonialism sought to entrench Eurocentric domination of the economy, culture, subjectivity, and knowledge in colonized nations (e.g., Mbembe, 2001; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1979). Although formal colonialism is past, its legacies persist. Postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak (1988, p. 80) introduced the concept of epistemic violence to capture the ways in which colonizers distorted, excluded, and subjugated the perceptions and world views of the colonized. Some MOS scholars have demonstrated the contemporary manifestations of epistemic violence by documenting the effects of colonization on knowledge production and dissemination of research from the “Global South.”<sup>1</sup> For example, scholars have pointed to the minuscule presence of research from the “Global South” in mainstream management journals (e.g., Alcadipani et al., 2012; Barros & Alcadipani, 2023; Hamann et al., 2020; Zoogah & Nkomo, 2013) and the challenges academics encounter in writing in another language and for a different audience (e.g., Barros & Alcadipani, 2023). There are studies that focus specifically on the subjugation of management knowledge in Africa (e.g., Mbalyohere et al., 2018; Nkomo, 2011; Zoogah & Nkomo, 2013). The latter work documents the general absence of Africa in MOS and the negative ways in which it is represented when included.

The growing critique of hegemonic knowledge production has given way to increasing attention to how to decolonize MOS knowledge. As a result, research in international business (Boussebaa, 2023), diversity (Yountae, 2020), organizational behavior (Nkomo, 2021), and ethics (Dunford, 2017) are increasingly advocating for decolonizing mainstream epistemology. Even though these scholarly initiatives are laudable, the implementation of decolonization of knowledge seems to be missing (Banerjee, 2022; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021). Specifically, knowledge dissemination mechanisms such as journals tend to be ignored in the advocacy for decolonization of MOS epistemology. Journals are mediums by which knowledge is published, and they can play a critical role in decolonization of knowledge. To ignore them, therefore, is to exclude a major instrument of decolonization.

In this paper, we demonstrate how the AJOM engaged in decolonization of knowledge. As a publication of the Africa Academy of Management, AJOM was deemed critical to decolonizing knowledge about and in Africa, the context where the colonial enterprise wreaked havoc on all sectors of African societies from political structures, commerce, and culture to knowledge production (Rodney, 2018; Zoogah, 2021). Not only was the lingua franca of African societies changed, but

also traditional educational and knowledge systems were displaced and entangled in Western systems. In describing the genesis and goals of AJOM, we contribute to epistemic decolonization. We provide one way of “doing management research differently and adding new and unique layers to the current understanding of management and organizations” (Prasad, 2012, p. 14).

Specifically, we describe the strategy of AJOM as *pluriversal collaboration*. This strategy recognizes the call from decolonial scholars for pluriversal rather than universal knowledge creation and dissemination (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Escobar, 2020). We embrace Escobar’s (2020) assertion that the realities of the world are always plural and constantly in the making. If managing and organizing take diverse forms in diverse locations, then knowledge creation requires multivocal representations and engagement across historical epistemological divisions and practices of domination.

Pluriversal collaboration, as a strategy, created an intellectual space for knowledge exchange and co-learning among African and non-African scholars as well as between academics and practitioners. AFAM’s goal for the journal was not just to disrupt epistemic exclusion but to imagine a different, sustainable way of resurfacing African management scholarship. We discuss the processes and practices of AJOM that were used to implement pluriversal collaboration. Reflecting on Spivak’s profound question, “Can the subaltern speak unproblematically?” and recognizing journals are embedded within a large ecosystem with many actors and conventions, we describe the successes as well as the limitations and challenges of a journal dedicated to MOS in Africa.

## THEORY: EPISTEMIC PLURALISM

At the center of the decolonial initiative is the argument that other voices are excluded from the conversation on knowledge generation and dissemination. In other words, it advocates for pluralism in MOS epistemology. Pluralism in MOS has been growing since the beginning of the 21st century as manifested in journals such as the *Academy of Management Review*, Volume 24, No. 4 on change and pluralism; the *Academy of Management Journal*, Volume 57, No. 2 on relational pluralism; and the *Administration & Society*, Volume 47, No. 9 on value pluralism) and by specific scholars such as Denis et al. (2007), Lewis (2000), and Zoogah (2021).

A review of the literature suggests that Pluralism theory permeates the social sciences (Connolly, 2017). It contends that many actors or conditions influence politics (Moore, 2010) and business (Spender, 1998). Pluralism is either endogenously induced (i.e., originating from within the organization) or exogenously induced (originating from without, from the broader environment). Endogenously induced pluralism is characterized here by “multiple objectives, diffuse power, and knowledge-based work processes” (Denis et al., 2007, p. 180) and focuses on impacts on organizations’ processes, systems, and structures (Denis et al., 2007). Exogenously induced pluralism centers on institutional logics and how the broader social context affects organizational dynamics.

Recently, [Zoogah \(2021, p. 382\)](#) used the latter to

trace the historical trajectory of MO education from the traditional era, wherein ancient civilizations, empires, and kingdoms rife with commerce, education, and epistemologies were displaced, during the modern era, by colonialism and European domination, which contributed to the adoption and focus on Western education (management practice and knowledge systems).

He argued that the extant MOS in Africa results from the “multiplicity of power, multiplicity of logics, and multiplicity of preferences” ([Zoogah, 2021, p. 382](#)). To balance the epistemic tilt, he proposed a “reconfiguration of MO education based on greater societal embeddedness and...integration of formal, nonformal, and informal education – consistent with the traditional principles and values of Africa on business conduct and education.”

Pluralism theory also has relevance to journals. First, there are multiple journals that are categorized as either Western or non-Western, top-tier or lower-ranked, theoretical or empirical. Not only do they have different objectives, but their power also seems to be diffused regarding what they reject or accept, which suggests that they determine the knowledge that is disseminated. To the extent that the owners are biased against a particular epistemological source or content, the journals are unlikely to endorse its acceptance. The pervasiveness of this bias resulted in the characterization of MOS as a parochial dinosaur ([Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991](#)) and contributed to the increasing demands for decolonization of MOS.

In actualizing our decision to launch AJOM as a journal dedicated to MOS in and about Africa, our strategy of pluriversal collaboration was emergent rather than predetermined. There were three major forces that moved us toward this strategy. First, the general absence of Africa in MOS knowledge was a reality that had to be changed. Second, scholars who joined AFAM were not only from Africa but also from other parts of the globe. Lastly, the challenges organizations in Africa faced required knowledge that informed practice and education. We therefore wedded pluralism theory with elements of decolonial thinking, which is a way of dismantling the hegemony of Western ways of knowing and thinking ([de Sousa Santos, 2015](#); [Escobar, 2020](#)). A pluriversal approach to decolonization underscores not only the idea that the realities of the world are diverse but also it allows for the resuscitation of knowledge contributions by formerly colonized nations and communities. Furthermore, pluriversal knowledge creation and dissemination inherently requires collaboration across and between diverse locations, epistemologies, and actors.

## **ROLE OF JOURNALS AND DECOLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE**

Journals are the primary mechanisms of knowledge dissemination. As a result, they play a significant role in epistemic decolonization, defined as “the redemption of worldviews and theories and ways of knowing that are not rooted in, nor oriented around Euro-American theory” ([Haraway, 1988, p. 582](#)). Given that decolonization has structural, epistemic, personal, and relational dimensions

(Kessi et al., 2020), journals have a unique role to engage in decolonial work by ensuring that all attempts at knowing and articulating reality are grounded in the particular social and political contexts (Boidin et al., 2012; Haraway, 1988) despite the subjectivity, situatedness, and positionality attributes of the journals' agents.

This can be achieved in three ways. First, journals must be “wrecking balls” in the sense that they are ready to dismantle the traditional hegemonic structures associated with epistemic colonization. That role requires courage and moral fortitude. Second, they should be equalizers regarding representation. By that, we mean they must be inclusive of everyone, both the powerful and the less powerful. Lastly, they must empower all constituents. By empowerment, we mean ensuring that the less privileged and minorities have as much access to knowledge disseminated via their channels as those most privileged or the majority. Before we discuss how AJOM fulfills these roles, we provide a summary of the history of the Africa Academy of Management (AFAM).<sup>2</sup>

## **HISTORY OF THE AFRICA ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT (AFAM)**

The formation of the Africa Academy of Management resulted from a series of personal, theoretical, and epistemological struggles whose deep roots sprung from the colonization of Africa but more so from immediate challenges. In 2005, the first author of this paper was seeking identification with scholarship about management in Africa. Although he found two academic associations that focused on Africa, the International Academy of African Business and Development (IAABD) and the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM), their focus was not management. Turning to the Academy of Management (AOM), the premier association for academics in the field of management, he learned Africans constituted less than .01% of its 19,000+ members (Nkomo et al., 2015).

Becoming aware of associations from India and Latin America who were affiliates of AOM, he decided to organize a caucus meeting at its 2008 annual meeting to find others interested in management *in* and *about* Africa. He joined forces with another early career scholar, Moses Acquah, to co-chair the session. The attendance at the session attracted others with a similar interest in management in Africa. At the second successful caucus at the 2009 AOM annual meeting, attendees decided to become a formal association. Participants nominated an executive committee with an initial responsibility to prepare by-laws.

AFAM adopted the following inaugural mission:

“To foster the general advancement of knowledge and scholarship in the theory and practice of management among African scholars and/or academics interested in management and organization issues in Africa. Africa is defined broadly to include all of Africa and individuals of African descent in the Diaspora (i.e., Caribbean, South America, Europe, Asia, Oceania, Middle East, and North America)” and “to perform and support educational activities that

contribute to intellectual and operational leadership in the field of management within the African context.” (*Africa Academy of Management*, 2022)

There was a great deal of discussion about identifying the best activities and programs for AFAM’s mission. Previous studies of the reasons for low research productivity of African academics pointed to several structural (i.e., inadequate research infrastructure from libraries to funding and an approach to doctoral education based on the class British apprentice model) and individual level factors (i.e., lack of research skills and access to senior scholars) (*Dietz et al.*, 2006; *Habib & Morrow*, 2006; *Ngobeni*, 2010; *Sawyer*, 2004).

AFAM decided to focus on two activities that were core to its mission: capacity building targeted at doctoral students and early career academics and organizing biennial conferences on the African continent. AFAM initiated faculty development workshops facilitated by senior academics from Africa and the Diaspora as its main intervention for capacity building on the continent. The primary goal of the workshops was to impart skills to strengthen research capacity for building local knowledge. They were also designed to help African academics engage in what decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo refers to as epistemic disobedience – disrupting Western MOS by inserting local knowledge into extant knowledge that would challenge the boundaries of what is known about a phenomenon (*Nkomo*, 2017). This form of scholarly writing forces the contextualization demanded of scholars from the rest of the world back to those demanding it (*Keet*, 2014). The workshops also provided an opportunity for community building as participants had a week for deep engagement with fellow scholars on the continent.

During the 14 years of its existence, AFAM has attracted a strong membership base, became an independent affiliate of AOM, introduced a Fellowship Programme, and launched its own journal which is the focus of this paper.

## ROLE OF AJOM

The AJOM was conceived to fulfill the roles discussed previously. At the Second Biennial Conference of AFAM in 2014 in Gaborone, Botswana, the first on the continent, the Executive team announced the appointment of the Founding Editor of the Journal after having selected the publisher, Routledge of Taylor and Francis Publishing. That year marked the inception of AJOM. The selection of Botswana, one of the best-governed postcolonial states in Africa, signaled the focus on the best of Africa and pointed to the drive for “Africanization” of management scholarship.

The mission, objectives, and aspirations of AJOM were spelled out in the first issue by the Founding Editor and the Senior Associate Editor (see Kiggundu & Lamont, *Introduction to the Africa Journal of Management: The Journey Begins*. AJOM Volume 1 March 2015:1–3). They stated briefly: (1) The launch of a top-tier management journal devoted to the African context as had been spelled out by AFAM and other management scholars; (2) The high-quality research was intended to benefit businesses and governments in Africa, leading to improvement

in the social economics of countries and people of Africa; (3) Building quality research capacity to build and strengthen African universities, especially business schools; (4) Advancing management education and practice in Africa, (5) Bringing together “Western management” scholars interested in knowing more about the idiosyncrasies and challenges of business and management in Africa and management scholars and students whose research was very African contextualized trying to solve “big societal problems” such as HIV, poverty, corruption, etc. (6) Creation of AJOM as a “big, inclusive tent or platform for dialogue among various constituencies; and (7) Bringing together Africa and the rest of the world on topics of global significance (e.g., climate change, Covid-19, security, etc.). In other words, AJOM was created to promote traditional/Indigenous (African) sustainable knowledge systems and practices: knowledge development, creation, application, problem-solving, sharing, dissemination, and contribution to human progress.

The first issues of the journal provide evidence of illustrations of the inclusive, African, and global publication. AJOM promotes collaboration and teamwork among its contributors (editors, authors, reviewers, etc.). It is committed to bringing scholars, professionals, practitioners, students, donors, government officials, and informed citizens together to work collaboratively to advance management scholarship and bring it home to benefit all. The editors understood that due in part to the colonial legacy, both management and the continent are highly differentiated and needed integration to serve the common good. As a result, the journal took the position that decolonization does not mean total rejection of existing concepts or practices of MOS developed elsewhere but that what is needed is contextualization and local validation. They reasoned that if you want to decolonize a discipline, you must localize the way it conducts its scholarship: theory development, testing, dissemination, teaching, and practice. The editors envisioned that as a top-tier journal, AJOM would be the place to go for scholarly materials on MOS by Africans and for Africa. This would be a significant step toward decolonization of MOS. AJOM was, therefore, to be both rigorous and relevant. Both rigor and relevance contribute to decolonization because they are not mutually exclusive.

AJOM seeks to legitimize native scholarships cognizant of the challenges involved in understanding and undertaking the publication value chain: activities, skills, institutional support, etc., needed to publish, democratize, and decolonize a regional top-tier journal in MOS. The editors realized, more now than before, that building capacity (leadership, editorial, review, professional, ethics, etc.) for a top-tier regional MOS print journal would take time, patience, resources, and planning. Previous scholars and practitioners had already raised concerns about MOS Western theories and practices. For example, [Dia \(1996\)](#) pointed out the disconnect between Western institutions and African realities. Yet, little progress had been made. The legacy of colonialism at various levels of society made progress impossible. Given that AJOM was founded on the principles that MOS conforms with the values, norms, and practices of “good conduct” as recognized and institutionalized in society, tendencies of colonialism, in whatever form, do not seem acceptable.

## AJOM TOOLS OF DECOLONIZATION

How does AJOM engage in epistemic decolonization through its strategy of pluriversal collaboration? First, AJOM attracts leading management scholars outside Africa (e.g., the Academy of Management, editors of other journals, Presidents of International forums, etc.). This approach shows the attraction of the journal with Western management scholars and suggests that decolonization is not isolated but a collaborative effort with scholars both in and outside Africa. Second, to ensure the effectiveness of the initiative, the editors got advice and support from Editors of regional and other established MOS journals, pointing out opportunities but mostly challenges of a new regional print journal in a world rapidly moving digital. They had many hurdles to overcome, including what they and their constituencies meant by “Africa.” Third, print, digitization, and Special Issues were all designed to spread the word using methods of dissemination more widely and making management knowledge more pluralistic and democratic. AJOM publishes foundational management knowledge covering a wide range of topics as a starting point and to lay the foundation for localization and eventual decolonization. Foundation knowledge provides the building blocks for localization. Fourth, the editors invited and challenged the African junior scholars and graduate students, especially women, to use AJOM as a platform for advancing and localizing management scholarship. This has paid off, as some of these are now serving in AJOM leadership roles and championing management scholarships in Africa and beyond.

To concretize these logics, the editors initiated some mechanisms that have the potential of influencing diverse and wider readership consistent with the pluriversal collaboration. The first was *AJOM Special Issues and Inclusiveness*. AJOM publishes special issues as part of the design to grow and localize (Africanize) the journal, enrich and promote participation (e.g., DEI), and set the stage for MOS decolonization. The second is *AJOM Structure and Inclusion*. The journal designed its structure to be inclusive. First, the board has diverse representations: “The AJOM editorial board is composed of some of the most prominent and respected scholars in management research in the world.” In addition to benefiting from their wise counsel, we wanted to ensure that Africa and African management scholarship are connected, not disconnected. We made sure to include prominent African scholars on the board. Second, the Editorial Review Board was deliberately designed for inclusion and to help with a developmental review process. The AJOM original editorial review board was made up of ninety top scholars from sixty-nine universities in twenty-two countries, representing all continents. Both the Advisory and editorial review boards served to support and promote AJOM’s mission and objectives. The Africanization contributes to the decolonization of MOS.

Third, AJOM has three portfolios that are structured to allow for epistemic diversity. There is academic research targeting scholars. AJOM Research attracts high-quality research articles, which is expected of a top-tier scholarly journal. There is also dialogue for exchange between practitioners and scholars. AJOM Dialogue is a forum for discussing or commenting on previously published

articles. The third, AJOM Insight, is directed at practitioners and policy constituents. It is a one-way forum or commentary, grounded in contextualized research on the unique challenges in particular countries or settings about issues that can inform the global academic community about the African context. In presenting the AJOM structure, it was stated, “We view this as a multi-directional conversation, analogous to giving voice to the “tribe” with the intent of encouraging richer discussions of our research and theories” (AJOM, Volume 1 March 2015).

The first issue of *AJOM* (Vol. 1, #1), published in March 2015, provides some clues on epistemic pluralism and pluriversal collaboration. A closer look at the structure and contents of the Issue, which came out on time, illustrates the broader directions and aspirations of the journal, including Africanization (contents, contributors), gender diversification and inclusion, institutions, theory, practice, multi-disciplinarity (Papadopoulos & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015, pp. 54–77), and global reach and connectivity (Jackson, 2015, pp. 78–88). For example, Linah K. Mohohlo (2015, pp. 89–93), an accomplished African public sector administrator and first female governor of an African National Central Bank, gave the keynote address and spoke quite eloquently about the role management can and needs to play in the sustainable development of Africa and Africans. She observed that “there is, therefore, a need to investigate how best management theory, research, and practice (emphasis as in original), can sustain African development...to ensure that the continent’s natural resources are harnessed productively to sustain socio-economic growth and improve people’s well-being” (p. 89). She added that the “research findings should be widely disseminated for the benefit of domestic policymakers and private business.”

Decolonization requires wide dissemination to various local constituencies with the capacity to understand and apply knowledge. This would contribute to the decolonization of MOS theory and practice. In addition, she called on management scholars to integrate MOS in the African “socio-cultural heritage and social mores/customs” (p. 90). She gave the example of Kgotla, a system of governance in Botswana whereby a village assembly limits the power of the village elders by providing opportunities for all members of the community to participate in decision-making. It is rooted in Botswana’s traditional social philosophy, which, among other things, expresses that “aggression is best expressed through dialogue than spear.” This is the art of leadership through dialogue. AJOM continues to be a forum for other African traditional social and cultural philosophies relevant to MOS. Consistent with that view, Zoogah (2020) leveraged the ancient Egyptian philosophy of Maat, which enjoined companionship or *shemsw* to propose companionate leadership. Knowledge-based on traditional principles, philosophies, and practices is a necessary step for decolonization. The editors broadened the dialogue by asking three African scholars from various parts of the continent to provide commentaries on the governor’s thoughts (also see Beugre, 2015).

The journal has been strategic in its decolonial goal of pluriversal collaboration. The strategy recognizes the importance of epistemic pluralism and the dangers of implicit bias of characterizing MOS as a “parochial dinosaur.” As a result, it advocates for pluriversal, rather than universal, knowledge creation, validation,

and dissemination. No methods of inquiry are privileged over others, and no single worldview of truth is allowed to dominate over others. In addition, the strategy recognizes and accepts diverse ways of being and doing while emphasizing the dynamic interactions of humans/societies/communities in various parts of the world. The strategy starts from the premise of interconnections, multipolarity, non-Eurocentrism, and ontological pluralism (collaboration), recognizing that wisdom, knowledge, truths, etc., are not “out there” but co-generated, maintained, and propagated, and shared as a collective process. In that regard, it rejects a “one world- world view.” (Trowsell et al., 2022). In other words, it set out to accept different ontological understandings to forge a pluriversal management research agenda. In so doing, it does not dismiss advocates of the one world view or those who treat Africa as a junior partner in advancing management scholarship (Kiggundu, 2013). Rather, the idea is to invite them to join the conversation and make the tent bigger and better. AJOM advances the view of a multiple world, with different participants and contributions equal in status. That is because every process of knowledge creation, dissemination and knowing is necessarily a collective process involving humans from diverse backgrounds.

Besides, the locus of the journal – Africa – suggests that AJOM recognized that non-Eurocentric voices have been historically excluded, ignored, marginalized, disallowed, colonized, and given no space to contribute to the advancement of management scholarship. For that reason, the strategy sets out to change this by developing a structure, editorial management team, advisory board, editorial review board, and ad hoc reviewers, the composition of which is global and designed for the implementation of the pluriversal collaboration strategy. The journal’s original structure laid the foundation and established the institutional infrastructure for worldwide collaboration.

The editorial review board is a bit larger and more diverse than most new journals to accommodate the three-part structure of the journal, but it is equally impressive, consisting of over 90 top scholars from 69 universities and 22 countries, all committed to making the journal a quality outlet from the start. (Kiggundu & Lamont, 2015, p. 2)

It was also intended to give voice to and strengthen scholarly networks between those on the ground and those from the diaspora (Kiggundu & Lamont, 2015, p. 2). With regards to different Management Scholarship for and on Africa, the journal’s strategy was based on the realization that scholars, especially Africanists, were demanding a different perspective of management scholarship for and on Africa...different from the discovery and conceptualization of Africa by Western institutions “that decide and expect power by knowing what is best for Africa” (Jackson, 2015, p. 78; see also Blunt, AJOM, 2023).

A recent 10-year bibliometric analysis of the journal provides additional support of the journal’s contributions to pluriversal collaboration and decolonization of management scholarship (Galdino & Lawong, 2024). The authors note that

this 10-year bibliometric review of AJOM highlights key accomplishments of the journal, such as SCOPUS accreditation and a category 2 ranking by the Academic Journal Guide. Also noteworthy is AJOM’s wider reach and accessibility to readers via inclusion in the Emerging Sources Citation Index of WoSc. (2024, p. 12)

This speaks to wider acceptance by different audiences, accreditation, inclusion in leading research databases, facilitating pluriversal collaboration. Further, the authors observe a wider definition of management (MOS) as evident in the journal. The pluriversalism is also manifested in the total submissions: 219 documents, 146 research articles, 26 dialogues/insights/essays, 13 managers' stories, 13 editorials, and 9 papers related to AFAM. It reflects growth, given that in 2015, the total submissions were only 57 but increased to about 250–300 in 2023. Additional evidence of improvement is indicated by the acceptance rate, which decreased from 44% in 2015 to 6% in 2023. It reflects a rate comparable to top-tier journals.

The analysis also showed that the double-blind review process, which is developmental, seeks to bring the reviewer and author(s) closer in a scholarly and personal manner to facilitate intimate interaction that brings the author's work closer to publication (for application of the developmental review process see [Nsakanda, 2021](#)). This approach may have helped the increased high downloads that quintupled from 7,000 (2015) to 37,523 (2023). This strategy also likely helped the journal receive SCOPUS accreditation after only three years of publication and a Category 2 ranking on the Academic Journal Guide.<sup>3</sup> That is relatively fast, considering that longer established journals did not achieve that rank with the same speed. Since 2019, AJOM was also included in the Web of Science Emerging Sources Citation Index. From Volume 3, AJOM can be searched via WoSc. That qualified it as an impact factor. These achievements point to the effectiveness of AJOM's pluriversal collaboration strategy, as such achievements would not be possible without collaboration with scholars of diverse backgrounds, institutions, countries, and sub-disciplines.

Consistent with AJOM's strategy as a top-tier journal to advance management scholarship to benefit all of Africa, the journal gives voice and space for African management scholars to join the conversation as equal partners, as evidenced by the citations in the bibliometric analysis. The bibliometric analysis identified the topmost cited Google Scholar of AJOM publications. They note that Google Scholar represents a community of scholars dedicated to the advancement of management (MOS), and Google citations indicate AJOM's membership and association with this community. The topmost cited papers represent a wide range of different topics (e.g., strategy, entrepreneurship, regionalism, entrepreneurs/innovation/women, context, etc.), Africa and non-Africa-based scholars, sectors (e.g., informal, mining, agribusiness, telecommunications, banking). Total citation is an important indicator of impact research because high-impact research contributes to recognition, empowerment, and collaboration.

The studies reported in AJOM also provide insights into the importance and uniqueness of the African context and provide a clear picture of how the context can inform management scholarship. The bibliometric analysis listed the following as the most cited journals among AJOM publications: *Academy of Management Review* (AMR), *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ), and *Strategic Management Journal* (SMJ). These are top-tier publications, putting AJOM in a "good" scholarly company. The authors' affiliations also indicate the pluriversal strategy. The study reports that AJOM authors came from 37 countries, all 5 continents, and a wide range of universities. This speaks to a

more pluriversal collaboration and building a global scholarly community dedicated to advancing management scholarship for and about Africa. No breakdown of gender or domicile, but AJOM has always given priority to female and junior scholars, especially those based in Africa. The journal also covers a broad array of topics over the ten-year period. They include Africa, context, entrepreneurship, innovation, females, institutions, COVID-19, Sub-Saharan Africa, informal sector management/research/education, case studies, performance, challenges, opportunities, etc. The study showed that AJOM started out with more descriptive and case studies but has increasingly published more empirical and quantitative studies.... targeting more diverse audiences. They add that “AJOM has established a solid reputation as a top-tier journal publishing original, rigorous, and relevant research on management theory, education, policy, practice, and service in the context of Africa” (Galdino & Lawong, 2024, p. 12).

In line with the strategy, a fellowship was established: AJOM Junior Faculty Fellowship. The Junior Fellowship was established to promote more rigorous scholarship and collaboration for search in Africa. The aim was to create opportunities for resources, mentorship, and training for Africa-based scholars to grow their research skillset, knowledge, ethics, and networking as they worked on research aimed at publication in AJOM or similar journals. This allowed inter-institutional collaboration with mentors in North America and Europe (Kiggundu & Lamont, 2021; Namada et al., 2019).

As noted by Namada et al. (2019: 384), the Fellowship emanates from a mission to foster an inclusive, collaborative, and entrepreneurial learning community dedicated to sharing values, knowledge, and skills to prepare current and future business professionals to contribute successfully and responsibly in a global business environment.

In addition to the fellowship, AJOM publishes a supplement. As AJOM became more focused on higher quality theoretical and empirical publications, it became clear that there was also a growing need for publications focused more on more applied areas of management. AJOM needed to grow and was growing in other aspects but could not by itself serve emerging areas of interest. AJOM Supplement was established as a separate publication designed for more balance between research, theory, policy, practice, service, and education. It was aimed at attracting more diverse audiences and management sub-disciplines. AJOM Supplement was intended to create opportunities for collaboration between academics and practicing managers to merge theory and practice in a way that benefits both in different settings in Africa (Kiggundu & Lamont, 2021; Nsakanda, 2021). The purpose of the supplement is to encourage “participations among scholars and professional management associations, thinktanks, institutes, schools, specialized agencies, etc. to work on areas of common interest related to the advancement of management scholarship and Africa’s changing needs and realities” (Kiggundu & Lamont, 2021, p. 2). The “inaugural AJOM Supplement is the result of collaborative partnership between academics from different parts of the globe, academics and practicing professionals, executives, and professional associations” (2021, p. 3).

In support of the Supplement as a Tool of Collaboration between academics and professionals and among academics from various parts of the world, Nsakanda (based in Canada, originally from DRC) wrote:

The African Operations Management Conference (AOMC) is an initiative of the University of South Africa's Department of Operations Management. It aims to bring together researchers and practitioners from academia, industry, and governments across the African continent and beyond to engage in a fruitful exchange of ideas to advance the broad field of Operations Management as one of the major veins to achieve economic growth in Africa. The biennial conference enables participants to share cutting-edge knowledge, develop inter-institutional research collaborations, and foster networking and information sharing. (Nsakanda, 2021, p. 9)

In making the link between academia and professional practice, he describes all African organizations: "The Africa Automation Fair (AAF) is Africa's largest showcase of industrial automation and smart control technologies...." This invites operations management scholars to engage in research that advances the practice in the field while explicitly considering the context, particularly of Africa in the 4IR era.

Lastly, the journal promotes technical writing, networking, and ethical scholarly conduct in much the same ways as in AFAM's PDWs where participants are admonished to avoid predatory journals/publications.

In summary, AJOM has deliberately sought to decolonize knowledge using diverse mechanisms including multiple structures, engagement of constituents, and platforms of knowledge. These efforts have been fruitful with regards to knowledge generation and distribution. Of course, success has not been without challenges which we talk about next.

## CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

In the efforts to decolonize knowledge, AJOM experienced challenges that might be summarized in Spivak's intriguing question – "Can the subaltern speak?". In other words, can knowledge of, from, and about that which has been silenced solve the deep hegemony of Western epistemology and knowledge production? First, decolonization requires a concerted effort of a critical mass of citizens (champions, leaders, followers, scholars, managers, etc.), working together to repatriate (bring home) the discipline and its knowledge, indigenization of institutions, values, and practices. Mobilization of these diverse constituents has not been easy. While some outrightly refused to participate in the AJOM initiative, others half-heartedly agreed but did not optimize their engagement. Second, the medium of communication – English – is not native to Africa. As a result, decolonization is unlikely to be successful if the medium of knowledge generation and distribution is colonial. Native language is critical for decolonization. Language and literacy are important. Mandela is reported to have said, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his native language, that goes to his heart. Likewise, if people listen to one another in their native language, the understandings, feelings, and sentiments are intrinsic or Indigenous, and for that matter, real. AJOM, as an English publication, has had

limited success covering other African regions and cultures (e.g., “Francophone” countries).

Overcoming the language issue is not an easy task, given the heterogeneity of the continent. Third, decolonization runs into problems related to the legacy of colonialism as it exists in society, government, and the economy today. Decolonization is a long and protracted multidimensional process of political, social, economic, and cultural transformation supported by corresponding institutions, values, principles, and practices. Therefore, the wide ecosystem must align with and support all efforts of decolonization. It is not a stroke of the pen. Fourth, decolonization requires democracy. The system must be democratized and humanized to be inclusive. Fifth, disciplines such as MOS do not exist in a vacuum but are interdependent with others. As a result, effective decolonization of MOS must involve the decolonization of interdependent disciplines. In other words, the ecosystem of MOS must engage in epistemic decolonization. Some political economists, for example, argue that management exists to serve the interests of capital and colonialism. This makes it more challenging for management to localize and decolonize. Blunt et al. write, “Management education in Africa is complicit because it contributes to the manufacture of consent” for Africa as the victim of “capitalist rampage” (Blunt et al., *AJOM*, March 2023, p. 1). One manifestation of this is the pursuit of “global statuses” by many universities in Africa, which results in academics being incentivized to publish in mainstream international journals with the highest rankings. The problem, of course, is that the top-ranked journals in MOS are primarily European- and USA-based. *AJOM* needs a critical mass of capable and dedicated supporters. This is still a work in progress because individual motivations and institutional incentives do not always align with the journal’s mission and objectives.

Related to the above challenge is the fact that colonialism, wherever it exists, is hard to dig out: it has deep, pervasive, insidious, multilayered, and multidimensional aspects that seem entrenched. A scholarly regional journal like *AJOM* may be necessary but not necessarily sufficient for total decolonization. What is needed is a combination of different tools, strategies, and interventions at various levels to bring about lasting decolonization. Added to this is the fact that respect for the region in which the journal is sourced is now disrespected (Armah, 2018; Soyinka, 2012). In other words, it lacks the attractive mechanism necessary to mobilize constituents. This is compounded by the fact that *AJOM* is a new regional top-tier journal that, as a start-up, faces developmental and institutional challenges that limit its ability to decolonize as quickly and totally as would be necessary. Previous scholars and practitioners already raised concerns about Western theories of MOS compared to African realities and practices. For example, Dia (1996) recognized the disconnect between Western and African institutions and called for reconciling indigenous and transplanted institutions. Along with this is the challenge that faith or religion has something to do with decolonization. Nations and societies that are founded on foreign creeds (e.g., Christianity, Islam, etc.) may be less able to decolonize because of the linkages to the allochthonous sources than those founded on indigenous religions.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we discuss how AJOM, a publication of AFAM, engages in the decolonization of epistemology through a strategy of pluriversal collaboration. The paper also shares the broader context within which the journal was launched. Given that journals are major instruments of knowledge dissemination, the extent to which they facilitate decolonization is likely to influence the decolonial initiative in MOS. The strategy, structures, mechanisms, and processes are based on the pluriversal orientation because of the belief that knowledge from Africa is as important and meaningful as that from other places. In so doing, it seeks to minimize the excessive dependence on foreign, particularly Western, epistemologies. Yet, AJOM as a tool for decolonizing management knowledge must be understood within a broader ecosystem comprised of many layers and components. Nevertheless, moving toward epistemic pluralism in understanding management and organizations in Africa is an ongoing project.

## NOTES

1. We place this term in single quotation marks to indicate its contested meaning and that not all countries located geographically in the Southern Hemisphere would be considered marginalized or excluded from the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge (e.g., Australia).
2. For the full history of AFAM see: Nkomo, S. M., Zoogah, D., & Acquah, M. (2015). Why Africa journal of management and why now? *Africa Journal of Management*, 1(1), 4–26.
3. <https://chartereddabs.org/academic-journal-guide>

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