

THE AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RHETORIC - AAR

Conference Booklet



*"Rhetoric and the
Problematics of Citizenship
in Africa in the 21st Century"*

11TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

Date: 1 - 2 July 2026

Venue: University of South Africa

Time: 08h00

UNISA | 
university
of south africa

Conference Overview

As Africa continues to experience remarkable political, economic, and social transformations, citizenship, belonging, and political identity have emerged as critical subjects of debate and inquiry. The 21st century, with its shifting geopolitical landscapes, evolving national and international governance frameworks, emergent regional nationalist movements, and rapid technological advancements, has brought new challenges and opportunities in how citizenship is understood and practised across the continent. Rhetoric plays a central role in shaping these discourses around citizenship in Africa. It influences how citizens interact with their governments, how identities are constructed, and how political ideologies are debated and implemented. Given African political systems' diverse and often contentious nature, the rhetorical strategies used in civic discourse can empower or marginalise individuals and groups, shaping the trajectory of the continent's future. This conference will address the complex intersections of rhetoric, citizenship, and identity in Africa in the 21st century, exploring how rhetoric shapes national, regional, and global discourse on citizenship across the African continent. Papers presented will examine how the language of citizenship has evolved in response to contemporary challenges in governance, migration, nationalism, inclusion, and exclusion.

"In colonial conquest, Language was meant to complete what the sword had started; do to the mind what the sword had done to the body."

NGUGI WA THIONGO

Programme

THE AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RHETORIC (AAR) - 11TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE - DAY 1		
WEDNESDAY: 1 JULY 2026		VENUE: DIGITAL LAB - 7-103 WINNIE MADIKIZELA - MANDELA, PRETORIA
08:00 - 09:00	Arrival and Registration	Registration Team
Programme Director: Mr Ndivhuwo Sundani		
09:00 – 09:05	Opening and Welcome	
09:05 – 09:20	Purpose of the conference and Future Strategic Partnerships	Prof Mudzanani, Department of Communication Science, UNISA
09:20 – 09:35	Welcome on behalf of AAR	Dr Ogungbemi Akinola, Kwame Nkrumah University Science and Technology
09:35 – 09:40	Introduction of Keynote Speaker	Prof Khatija Khan, Department of Communication Science, UNISA
09:40 –10:40	Keynote Speaker: Prof Kehbuma Langmia, School of Communications, Howard University, Washington, DC	Theme: <i>Afrocentric Rhetoric and Citizenship in Africa in the age of artificial intelligence</i>
10:45-11:00	TEA AND COFFEE BREAK	
VENUE	WMM – 7-103 Digital Lab	SESSION CHAIR: Prof Sabihah Moola
11:00 – 11:20	Prof Josephine Olufunmilayo Alexander - University of South Africa, Sharon-Rose Kudzaishe Chisango - University of Pretoria, Claire Barrington - University of Witwatersrand and Annabel Nyongwana – University of Stellenbosch	One Campaign and Africa No Filter: Rewriting the narrative on Africa on the International Development Landscape
11:20 – 11:40	Prof Belindah Walzer - Appalachian State University, Prof Tarez Samra Graban – Florida State University and Prof. Rebecca Dingo - University of Massachusetts, Amherst	Re-Theorising Civic participation in Vulnerable Democratic spaces through Transnational Feminist Rhetorical Perspectives

11:40 – 12:00	Dr Julie T Pridmore – University of South Africa	Why We (Probably) Should Keep Essay Writing: the Rhetorics of ‘Writtleness’ in Academic Tuition
12:00 – 12:20	Dr Francesca Lurlaro - Koc University, Istanbul Türkiye	Global Citizenship and The Rhetoric of International Law: South Africa at the International Court of Justice
12:20 – 12:40	Dr Mopailo Thomas Thatelo - University of South Africa	Deconstructing the King Protea Logo from an Afrocentric Visual Rhetoric Perspective: A Case of the South African G20 Presidency
12:40 – 13:00	Dr Josephat Mutangadura and Prof Khatija Khan – University of South Africa	Twar, Memes and Hashtags”: Digital Citizenship and Rhetorical Performance in African Youth Twitter Wars on X
13:00 – 13:15	QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS	
13:15 – 14:00	LUNCH	
14:00 – 14:20	Prof Akinola Ogungbemi and Joann Thompson - Kwame Nkrumah University Science and Technology	Performance, Power, and the People: The Akosua Dontoba Dance tradition as a Rhetoric of Leadership Accountability in Winneba
14:20 – 14:40	Joann Thompson - Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)	The Trope of Voice: Orality and Authority in Indigenous Ghanaian Rhetorics
14:40 – 15:00	Prof Khan Khatija and Dr Mutangadura Josephat – University of South Africa	The Rhetoric of Accountability and Constitutionalism: Democracy, Legal Language and Public Trust in South Africa’s Madhlanga Commission
15:00 – 15:20	Lyton Ncube (University of Botswana), Refilwe Whitney Mofokeng (Tshwane University of Technology), Albert Chibuwe (Midlands State University), Allen Munoriyarwa (Walter Sisulu University) & Antonette Kakujaha-Murangiri (University of Namibia)	The challenge of adopting AI in Southern African Higher Education: Media Educators’ perceptions
15:20 – 15:30	QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS	
END OF DAY		

PROGRAMME: THE AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RHETORIC (AAR) CONFERENCE - DAY 2		
THURSDAY: 2 JULY 2026		VENUE: DIGITAL LAB & MICROSOFT TEAMS
08:00 - 08:30	Login and Registration	Registration Team
Programme Director: Dr Lehasa Moloji		
08:30 - 08:40	Opening and Welcome	Programme Director
08:40 - 08:45	Introduction of Keynote Speaker	Dr Mopailo Thatelo, Department of Communication Science, UNISA
08:45 - 09:45	Keynote Speaker: Prof Eno Akpabio, Media and Communication, University of Namibia (online)	Theme: <i>Home is where the heart is: Imagined communities in traditional and digital media era in Africa.</i>
09:45 - 10:00	COFFEE & TEA BREAK	
VENUE	DIGITAL LAB & MICROSOFT TEAMS	SESSION CHAIR: Mr Gibson Chauke
10:00 - 10:20	Prof. Esther Milu - University of Central Florida	Global Black Citizenship: Healing Through the Second Return
10:20 - 10:40	Prof Isabel Schellnack-Kelly - University of South Africa	Citizen Science and Social Media: Transforming Environmental Conservation in South Africa
10:40 - 11:00	Mbuyiselo Mlaba - University of South Africa (online)	Exploring Theatrical Edutainment as a Strategy to Combat Cyberbullying Among Youth in the Fourth Industrial Revolution Era in South Africa
11:00 - 11:20	Sharon Maponya - University of South Africa (online)	Who Speaks for the Nation? Rhetoric, Authority and the Construction of National Voice in South Africa

11:40 – 12:00	Asabu Sewenet Alamineh - Hong Kong Baptist University (online)	Why has a Persistent Clamor for Self-determination in Federalized Ethiopia? A Comparative Study on Sidama and Wolayta Ethnicities
12:00 – 12:20	Joice Svotwa – University of South Africa (online)	Rhetorics of Belonging and Resistance: Digital Activism and Opposition Citizenship in Zimbabwe
12:20 – 12:40	Dr. Jessy Ohl - University of Alabama and Dr. Getachew Dinku Godana - Addis Ababa University (online)	Ethiopia's De/Colonial Exceptionalism and the #NoMore Movement
12:40 – 13:00	Dr Ige Segun - Howard University, DC (online)	Legal and Ideological Citizenship: Africans at the Crossroads of Global Trends and Tensions
13:00 – 13:20	QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS	
13:20 – 14:10	LUNCH	
14:10 – 14:50	Panel Discussion: Prof Kehbuma Langmia, Prof Ige Segun, Prof Akinola Ogungbemi, Dr Lehasa Moloi, Prof Tendai Sithole, Prof Eno Akpabio, Prof Khatija Khan (Chair)	Theme: <i>Afrophobia and colonialism: interrogating the enduring hegemony of colonial structures on contemporary African ontology, statecraft, and social relations</i>
14:50 - 15:00	OFFICIAL CLOSING	

KEY NOTE SPEAKERS

Professor Kehbuma Langmia is a double Fulbright Scholar/ Professor and Chair in the Department of Communication Studies, School of Communications, Howard University. A graduate from the Communication and Media Studies Program at Howard University, he has extensive knowledge and expertise in Information Communication Technology (ICT), Intercultural, Cross Cultural and International Communication, Black Diaspora Communication Theory, Decolonial Media Studies, Social Media and Afrocentricity. He is a visiting scholar at various universities in Africa including Daystar University, Kenya and MUBS, Makerere University, Uganda, Buea University, Cameroon and University of Winneba, Ghana. From Sept 2025 -Dec 2026, Professor Langmia was the Murray Chair of Journalism for Semester at Sea Voyage 136. he has published 20 books, 22 book chapters and 15 peer-reviewed journal articles nationally and internationally. In addition to receiving a second Fulbright scholarship to Kosovo in East Europe, in 2024, he had in 2020 also received the prestigious NCA Orlando Taylor distinguished research scholar award as a top scholar in African and African American communication publications.

PROFESSOR KEHBUMA LANGMIA



PROFESSOR ENO AKPABIO



Prof Eno Akpabio possesses BA(ED) English, M.Sc. and PhD in Mass Communication. He was formerly a Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. He served as Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Head of Media Studies Department at the University of Botswana as well as Professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Dar es Salaam, before taking up his present appointment as Professor of Media and Communication, University of Namibia (UNAM). He assumed the position of the Head of Department of Social Sciences at UNAM in January 2026. Prof Akpabio has authored four books (Indigenous Communication: A global Perspective [PalgraveMacmillan], 2024). being the latest), many chapters in books as well as numerous articles in learned journals. He is a member of the International Communication Association (ICA), Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN), Nigeria Academy of Letters, and International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR).

PANEL

THEME:

“Afrophobia and colonialism: interrogating the enduring hegemony of colonial structures on contemporary African ontology, statecraft, and social relations”

PANELIST: KEHBUMA LANGMIA, IGE SEGUN, AKINOLA OGUNGBEMI, LEHASA MOLOI, TENDAI SITHOLE, ENO AKPABIO, AND KHATIJA KHAN (CHAIR)

This panel interrogates the enduring hegemony of colonial structures on contemporary African ontology, statecraft, and social relations. While the legal architectures of colonialism have formally dissolved, the epistemic and physical borders established at the 1884 Berlin Conference continue to police the boundaries of African identity. This session critically examines the phenomenon of Afrophobia not as an isolated social malady, but as a systemic symptom of post-colonial state anxiety, resource scarcity, and internalized colonial hierarchies. By placing critical race theory, political economy, and decolonial methodologies in conversation, the panellists will address the imperative of epistemic liberation.

The discussion aims to answer a foundational question: can a liberatory, transnational African identity be realised within the institutional frameworks inherited from the colonial enterprise, or does Pan-African solidarity demand an absolute break from these inherited paradigms?

Panel will also focus on the following:

- **Ontology & Identity:** How do we theorize an authentic African identity without falling into the trap of strategic essentialism or validating Eurocentric, ahistorical anthropological categories?
- **Structural Afrophobia:** To what extent is contemporary intra-African xenophobia a structural continuation of colonial 'divide-and-rule' border management, rather than a mere failure of social cohesion?
- **Epistemic Freedom:** What concrete methodological shifts must African academics adopt to move past critique and actively produce knowledge completely independent of Western canonical hegemony?



ABSTRACTS

JOANN THOMPSON

“The Trope of Voice: Orality and Authority in Indigenous Ghanaian Rhetorics”

Indigenous oral genres in Africa function as rhetorical systems. Through genres like Nwomkro, an indigenous Ghanaian vocal and percussion ensemble style that originates primarily from the Akan ethnic group, the study examines how communal performance transforms individual voices into collective authority, and how vocal expression becomes a means for negotiating identity and belonging, dwelling on the relationship between orality, performance, and authority. It argues that within Nwomkro, voice operates as both a literal and symbolic expression of communal reasoning and moral agency. Focusing on Maame Ode’s (an Asante cantor) Nwomkro performances, the study theorizes “Akutia” and “Afutuo”, two fundamental features of the Nwomkro tradition, as a way of thinking, reasoning, and persuading embedded in performance. Drawing from rhetorical theory, performance studies, and ethnomusicology, the study redefines “voice” as a rhetorical trope of epistemic legitimacy that bridges the individual and the collective. Through textual and performative analysis of Maame Ode’s songs, it demonstrates how oral performances enact authority not through textual inscription but through embodied presence, repetition, rhythm, and dialogic participation. By framing orality as a civil avenue for vitriol and social correction, the paper situates Nwomkro within discourses of citizenship and activism, revealing how traditional genres sustain protest movements and civic engagement in non-confrontational yet powerful ways. Through communal singing and performative satire, which are largely the predominant themes of Nwomkro renditions, individual frustrations are transformed into collective critique, enabling communities to negotiate accountability and belonging. Again, by centering indigenous Ghanaian frameworks of communication, this work challenges Western logocentrism and contributes to decolonial rhetoric theory, situating orality as a mode of critical thought and political discourse



JESSY OHL AND GETACHEW DINKU GODANA

“Ethiopia’s De/Colonial Exceptionalism and the #NoMore Movement”

Western scholars and institutions associated with Communication Studies have returned with increased vigor and concentration to the issues of coloniality, racism, and empire that have long shape the everyday study and practice of communication in the Global South. Counteracting the convenient intellectual arrangement that places the “West above the rest” requires more critical research from Africa, with African scholars, about African issues. But the nature of coloniality is never simply a uni-directional relationship between oppressor and oppressed. Research in de/colonial rhetoric should take seriously the particular lessons and nuances presented by the Ethiopian context, not simply because Ethiopia remains disproportionately absent in current academic conversations, but due to the fact that its unique deployment of “never colonized” rhetoric has long provided the means for both global admiration and consternation. In fact, the extent to which Ethiopia is an unified sovereign that was, or was not colonized, or is itself a colonizer, is itself a rhetorical invention that depends largely on perspective. The aim of this research is to explore the political function of this mythic rhetoric in articulating collective identity along lines of ethnicity, class, nationality, and race. To do so, we turn to the No More Movement, a global uprising that began throughout the Ethiopian diaspora in late 2021, and which eventually lost momentum in late 2022. At the height of its influence, the No More Movement generated a viral internet following and successfully organized multiple large-scale demonstrations in Ethiopia, Europe, Canada, and the United States to oppose Western involvement in the escalating conflict between pro-government nationalists and the secessionist Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). We highlight the actions, strategies, and public reception of the No More Movement in order to unravel the political commitments and consequences of Ethiopia’s pronounced de/colonial exceptionalism.

SHARON MAPONYA

“Who Speaks for the Nation? Rhetoric, Authority and the Construction of National Voice in South Africa”

In Post-apartheid South Africa, questions surrounding representation, citizenship, and national identity remain deeply contested. Political leaders and public figures frequently position themselves as voices of “the people,” using rhetoric to construct authority and shape public understandings of the nation. This paper explores how national voice is rhetorically constructed within contemporary South African political discourse. Using a qualitative research methodology, the study employs critical discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis to examine selected political speeches and public addresses in South Africa between 2018 and 2025. The paper investigates how political actors use persuasion, symbolism, historical memory, and emotional appeals to legitimise their authority and present themselves as representatives of the nation. The study further interrogates how these rhetorical constructions may simultaneously include and exclude particular communities and identities within democratic discourse. By examining the relationship between rhetoric, power, and citizenship, the paper contributes to broader discussions on representation and problematics of citizenship in Africa in the 21st century.



MOPAULO THOMAS THATELO

“Deconstructing the King Protea Logo from an Afrocentric Visual Rhetoric Perspective: A Case of the South African G20 Presidency”

This paper examines the rhetorical significance of visual political communication during South Africa’s G20 Presidency in Johannesburg, with particular focus on the King Protea logo as a site of symbolic contestation and African self-assertion within global diplomatic discourse. Visual symbols deployed at high-profile international events such as the G20 summit are not ornamental. They constitute substantive political arguments that negotiate identity, sovereignty, and epistemic authority on a world stage. The paper interrogates how logos, flags, and ceremonial imagery functioned as deliberate Afrocentric rhetorical performances, articulating Africa’s aspirations, historical consciousness, and future-oriented vision to a global audience. The study is theoretically grounded in Molefi Kete Asante’s Afrocentricity, which positions African agency and cultural centredness as the organising principles of analysis. Analytically, the paper deploys visual rhetorical criticism to deconstruct the King Protea logo across three dimensions: spatial rhetoric, symbolic rhetoric, and representational rhetoric. These frameworks illuminate how indigenous aesthetics, colour symbolism, and cultural iconography in the logo rhetorically challenge Eurocentric diplomatic conventions and advance a decolonial visual grammar. The paper enters critical scholarly debates about whether Afrocentric visual rhetoric at elite multilateral forums transcends aesthetic performance to effect substantive epistemological and policy transformation. It interrogates the productive tension between anticolonial symbolism and the neoliberal architecture of institutions such as the G20. The paper argues that African visual rhetoric constitutes a legitimate and sophisticated intellectual tradition demanding recognition within the broader field of rhetorical studies.

REBECCA DINGO, TAREZ SAMRA GRABAN, BELINDA WALZER

*“Re-Theorising Civic Participation in Vulnerable Democratic Spaces
through Transnational Feminist Rhetorical Perspectives”*

Scholarship from the past decade has called into question what rhetorical theorists know and believe about statehood, citizenship, belonging, deliberation, and—ultimately—epistemologies of governance as they contribute to rhetorical models of democratic participation within, between, and across African contexts (Tripp, *Why African Autocracies*, 2025; Dadugblor, *Deliberating Ghana*, 2025; Tchouta Mougoué, ‘*First Ladies of Africa*,’ 2024; Ochieng, *Intellectual Imagination*, 2018; Picard & Mogale, *Limits of Democratic Governance*, 2015; Ojo, ‘*From Rhetoric to Reality*,’ 2015). At the same time, transnational feminist theorists have been witnessing, more broadly, a dissolution of the promises of inclusion and human rights that have traditionally underscored democratic rhetorics, noticing the ways in which they have weakened, constrained, co-opted, or weaponised civic participation even in post-colonial contexts (Dingo & Riedner, *Beyond Affirmation*, 2026; Walzer, ‘*A Rhetoric of Everyday Violence*,’ 2023; Stillion Southard, *How to Belong*, 2018; Chávez, ‘*Beyond Inclusion*,’ 2015). In this collaboratively authored paper, we draw from our shared expertise in transnational feminist rhetorical studies, feminist rhetorical historiography, and human rights rhetorics in order to argue that the weakening of these democratic rhetorical promises is not merely the result of political failures but rather of epistemic breakdowns. More specifically, the human-rights frameworks and public-sphere models that have historically shaped much of Modern democratic rhetorical theory assume stable ‘centers’—subjects, institutions, norms—around which democratic participation coheres. Yet these centers remain influenced by persistent histories of imperialism, inequality, and disenfranchisement that may be contributing to the further disempowering and co-optation of their discourses and actants. Even rhetorics of resistance, as we understand them to function in global feminist scholarship, often remain tethered to the very systems they oppose, and thus replicate rather than transform the deeply entrenched structures that prevent radical civic engagement within constitutional democracies. In response, this paper addresses three questions: (1) What does it mean for transnational feminist rhetorical scholars to witness the failure of democratic rhetoric as the dissolution of democratic participation? (2) How can transnational feminist rhetorical scholarship learn from, and contribute to, pan-African rhetorical perspectives about what it means to participate in the demos at all? (3) Where might rhetorical theory begin to reinvent its own knowledge-making practices in order to address the vulnerabilities of democratic processes and progressive constitutions? As one step toward addressing the crisis of democratic participation in North Atlantic contexts, we argue for a shared epistemology by engaging pan-African rhetorical philosophy and transnational feminist rhetorical methods in order to demonstrate what we see, at that intersection, as possibilities for disentangling rhetorical theory from an overreliance on stable centers, as well as for the promise of theorising more fluid democratic subjects.



ESTHER MILU

“Global Black Citizenship: Healing through the second return”

In their 2022 article “Global Black Rhetorics: A New Framework for Engaging African and Afro-Diasporic Rhetorical Traditions,” Browdy and Milu contend that Black people everywhere—regardless of where they live—continue to bear the trauma of what they call the African Holocaust or Holocaust of Enslavement. They argue that the historical and ongoing impacts of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism have left deep physical and psychological wounds on people of African descent. For this reason, they emphasize that Black communities, both on the African continent and across the diaspora, must actively pursue strategies for healing. This process of healing begins with acknowledging that the chains of slavery—both physical and symbolic—still constrain Black lives today. Building on this argument, the presenter argues that the contemporary movement of descendants of enslaved Blacks returning to settle in Africa is not merely a geographic relocation but a political and rhetorical act of healing from the enduring trauma of the transatlantic slave trade and the persistent realities of global anti-Black racism. For the last few years, Africa has been at the center of what is popularly termed “Blaxit” –a term that combines “Black” and “Exit,” inspired by “Brexit” (withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union). Blaxit refers to the movement of Black people, particularly African Americans and other members of the African diaspora, choosing to leave Western countries (such as the U.S., U.K., or Europe) and relocate to African nations. Several factors motivate this return, including: (1) escaping systemic racism and anti-Black violence in Western societies; (2) reconnecting with ancestral roots and cultural heritage; (3) seeking belonging and citizenship in spaces where Black identity is the norm rather than marginalized; and (4) pursuing economic and social opportunities. While the first return, marked by historical repatriation efforts in the 19th and 20th centuries, was often framed through nationalist and Pan-Africanist ideologies, the second return emerges in the 21st century as a deeply personal and communal negotiation of belonging, identity, and citizenship. Drawing on the Global Black Rhetorics framework (Browdy and Milu, 2022), the presenter will analyze public discourse (e.g., social media conversations, advertisements, news) surrounding African diasporic resettlement to explore how this discourse constructs Africa as both a site of refuge, a space for Black citizenship, and a locus of healing



JOSEPHAT MUTANGADURA AND KHATIJA KHAN

“Twar, Memes and Hashtags”: Digital Citizenship and Rhetorical Performance in African Youth Twitter Wars on X”

The rise of social media platforms in Africa has transformed the nature of citizenship, political participation, and identity construction among young people. On Platform X (formerly Twitter), African youth increasingly engage in what is colloquially referred to as “Twitter wars” or “Twar”, highly performative digital confrontations characterised by humour, memes, sarcasm, hashtags, national pride, and rhetorical contestation. While these online exchanges are often dismissed as entertainment, this paper argues that Twars constitute important sites of digital citizenship and rhetorical participation in contemporary Africa. Drawing on digital rhetoric theory and concepts of participatory citizenship, the study examines how African youth use humour, satire, linguistic creativity, and online performance to negotiate their sense of belonging, identity, and political expression in digital spaces. The paper focuses on selected Twars involving South African, Nigerian, Zimbabwean, and Kenyan youth communities on Platform X between 2024 and 2026. Through qualitative discourse analysis, the study analyses tweets, memes, hashtags, and comment threads to explore how online rhetorical strategies shape perceptions of nationalism, citizenship, and social power. The paper argues that Twars function as alternative civic arenas where young Africans articulate frustrations with governance, assert cultural identities, contest stereotypes, and symbolically negotiate power relations across borders. At the same time, these digital performances raise important questions about misinformation, cyberbullying, exclusionary nationalism, and the ethics of online citizenship. The study contributes to debates on rhetoric and citizenship in Africa by demonstrating that digital humour and online conflict are not merely recreational practices, but significant forms of civic engagement and identity construction in the 21st century. The paper aligns with the conference sub-theme on Social Media and Digital Citizenship: The impact of new media on identity and political discourse.

AKINOLA OGUNGBEMI AND JOANN THOMPSON

“Performance, Power, and the People: The Akosua Dontoba Dance Tradition as a Rhetoric of Leadership Accountability in Winneba”

This study examines the Akosua Dontoba dance of the Effutu people of Winneba as a performative rhetoric of leadership accountability, civic participation, and postcolonial identity. Performed during the Aboakyer Festival, led mainly by the Tuafu asafo company, the dance transcends its aesthetic function to operate as a civic discourse where power, morality, and communal belonging are publicly negotiated. The research problem stems from a gap in scholarship that overlooks how indigenous performance practices articulate leadership ethics, civic participation, and identity within Ghana’s postcolonial framework. The study analyzes how Akosua Dontoba functions as a rhetorical medium through which the Effutu people engage in public critique, moral reasoning, and negotiation of citizenship. We ask how the Akosua Dontoba dance enacts a performative rhetoric of leadership accountability within the civic and cultural life of the people of Winneba. Using Vernacular Rhetoric Theory, Performance Theory, and Postcolonial Discourse on Nationalism and Citizenship, the study employs a qualitative ethnographic methodology involving participant observation, interviews, and choreographic analysis. The study reveals that Akosua Dontoba functions as a rhetorical performance of power, a communal language that critiques leadership, reinforces moral accountability, and negotiates identity. The dance embodies a civic philosophy in which power is ritually contested and rebalanced through collective participation, thereby serving as an indigenous mode of democratic deliberation. The research establishes Akosua Dontoba as a form of embodied civic rhetoric, reinterprets accountability as a performative moral act, demonstrates indigenous models of citizenship, and contributes to a decolonial theory of civic rhetoric grounded in African epistemologies. Ultimately, the study concludes that through communal performance in Effutu civic life, citizenship is danced as much as it is debated.



IGE SEGUN

“Legal and Ideological Citizenship: Africans at the Crossroads of Global Trends and Tensions”

Modern constitutional democracies typically vest sovereignty in “the people,” as reflected in standard preambular formulations such as “We the people.” A preliminary survey of 39 of Africa’s 54 states suggests similar sovereign attributions, though expressed through diverse constitutional and democratic configurations. Yet in many African contexts, citizens rarely assert this sovereign status in everyday interactions with political representatives and state institutions—even in states with relatively active civil societies, such as Nigeria. Persistent inequality, weak service delivery, internal displacement, and statelessness raise critical questions about the gap between constitutional and lived citizenship on the continent. This paper examines citizenship in Africa from legal, ideological, and rhetorical perspectives. It argues that contemporary African citizenship requires reframing the reciprocal responsibilities of states and citizens to renew and reconfigure state-society relations. The paper situates this argument within broader patterns of exclusion, governance deficits, corruption, and political patronage that undermine accountability and democratic consolidation. At the same time, it examines the tension between efforts by some African states to resist neo-colonial influence and the external and internal pressures that continue to constrain the material and civic benefits of citizenship. Methodologically, the paper combines comparative constitutional analysis with rhetorical analysis of political discourse and governance practices. Drawing on classical rhetorical theory, it revisits the democratic-republican relationship between the state and the citizen and reintroduces the Ciceronian question: *Qui bono?* (Who benefits?) as a diagnostic lens for evaluating democratic practice in contemporary Africa. Building on Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou’s analysis of disorder as a political instrumentality, the paper argues that the strategic maintenance of instability undermines African states’ commitments to the SDGs, the MDGs, and the African Union’s Agenda 2063. Finally, the paper reinterprets the legal doctrines of legitimate expectation and *respondet superior* as rhetorical and normative frameworks for reconstructing accountability relationships between African states and their citizens in the twenty-first century.

JULIE PRIDMORE

"Why We (Probably) Should Keep Essay Writing: the Rhetorics of 'Writtleness' in Academic Tuition"

This paper aims to examine the recent rhetoric on 'decolonising' the essay in academic writing as well as to investigate how traditional Western themes of 'rhetoric' have informed essay writing skills. In particular I will take as starting-point Joan Turner's argument on academic 'writtleness' and how we continue to require our students, particularly third-year students to require and acquire these skills in English Studies. There are a number of challenges which face the consistent retention of the traditional rhetoric-informed essay, including problems of using English as a first and second language, the difficulty in encouraging students to present original work in the face of 'AI' resources and the need to maintain graduate standards in the presence of global competition. This paper aims to examine how traditional rhetoric is still relevant in assisting our students at third year level in 'building' that crucial essay.



**JOSEPHINE OLUFUNMILAYO ALEXANDER, SHARON-ROSE KUDZAIKHE CHISANGO,
CLAIRE BARRINGTON, ANNABEL NYONGWANA**

"One Campaign and Africa No Filter: Rewriting the narrative on Africa on the International Development Landscape"

This paper aims to explore the rhetorical strategies employed by two international Development Agencies, ONE Campaign and Africa no Filter to centre African agency in their advocacy and policy work. What is unique about these two organisations is that Africa no Filter is directly involved in meaning-making about the continent and ONE Campaign's agenda is to advocate for a socially, politically and economically self-sustaining continent. The paper begins with an overview of how Africa has been stereotypically conceived and projected in the international development landscape and how shifts in this conceptualization and projection are raising a new awareness that is empirically and epistemologically rooted in disrupting the long-held views of Africa as corrupt, poverty ridden and a continent in crisis. At ONE Campaign and Africa no Filter these disruptions are intentional strategic decisions to use online social media platforms and storytelling to rewrite the African narrative from one about poverty, hunger, corruption and disease to agency. The paper analyses rhetorical texts that have been used to achieve a shift in narration. The organisations' social media platforms and websites will be selected for contextual, linguistic and stylistic analysis. This is with the intent to firstly explore developing African agency inherent in the messages and narratives. Secondly, how this contributes to rewriting the narrative about the continent overall. Finally, the study will trace the shift from a colonial framing of Africa towards a decolonised framing of Africa which participates equally on the global stage. To enrich the analysis and to provide a deeper interpretation of the texts, one member of each organisation will be interviewed. The paper will conclude by highlighting the power of words, stories and rhetoric in changing narratives and reimagining Africa's future.

**LYTON NCUBE, REFILWE WHITNEY MOFOKENG, ALBERT CHIBUWE, ALLEN
MUNORIYARWA AND ANTONETTE KAKUJAH- MURANGI**

***“The challenge of adopting AI in Southern African Higher Education: Media
Educators’ perceptions”***

This article examines journalism and media educators’ perceptions of the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into journalism education in selected Southern African countries. The rapid emergence of AI tools such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek has generated intense global debates about the role of AI in education, teaching, and knowledge production. However, in Africa, the adoption of AI in higher education remains at a nascent stage, particularly within journalism and media training institutions where infrastructural limitations, ethical uncertainties, and curriculum gaps continue to shape responses to technological change. Against this backdrop, the study investigates how journalism educators from Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, and Botswana perceive the entrance of AI into journalism education and training. The study is grounded in Bourdieu’s field theory, particularly the concept of external shocks, as well as the Social Shaping of Technology Theory and Technological Domestication Theory. Using a qualitative research design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with selected lecturers from universities and colleges across the four countries. The findings reveal divergent perceptions of AI across the region. Educators in Zimbabwe and Botswana largely viewed AI as a threat to academic integrity, critical thinking, and the credibility of journalism training, while also highlighting the psychological strain and anxiety associated with adapting to rapidly evolving technologies. In contrast, educators in Namibia and South Africa acknowledged the ethical and pedagogical concerns surrounding AI but emphasized its transformative potential in enhancing newsroom training, creativity, research, and digital competencies among journalism students. The article argues that AI technologies are simultaneously disruptive and transformative in African higher education contexts. It further contends that the integration of AI into journalism education is shaped by unequal access to resources, institutional preparedness, and broader power relations within the global knowledge economy



KHATIJA KHAN AND JOSEPHAT MUTANGADURA

***“The Rhetoric of Accountability and Constitutionalism: Democracy, Legal
Language and Public Trust in South Africa’s Madhlanga Commission”***

In democratic societies, commissions of inquiry function not only as legal instruments of investigation but also as rhetorical spaces where governance, accountability, and constitutional values are publicly negotiated. In South Africa, the establishment of the Madhlanga Commission has emerged as a significant moment in the country’s democratic and legal discourse, particularly regarding state accountability, institutional legitimacy, and public trust in governance structures. This paper explores how the language of law, constitutionalism, and public accountability is rhetorically constructed in the establishment and operation of the Madhlanga Commission. Drawing on rhetorical criticism and legal discourse analysis, the study examines official government statements, legal documents, media briefings, judicial language, and public commentary surrounding the Commission. The paper investigates how constitutional rhetoric is used to legitimise the Commission’s authority, reassure citizens of democratic oversight, and frame the inquiry as a mechanism for transparency and justice. Simultaneously, the study analyses counter-rhetoric emerging from political actors, civil society, and public discourse that questions institutional neutrality, political motivations, and the effectiveness of commissions as tools of democratic accountability. The paper argues that the Madhlanga Commission represents more than a procedural legal intervention; it is also a performative democratic exercise in which legal language shapes public perceptions of governance, citizenship, and state legitimacy. The rhetoric surrounding the Commission reflects broader tensions within South Africa’s constitutional democracy, particularly regarding corruption, institutional trust, political responsibility, and the public’s expectations of justice. By examining the intersection between rhetoric, law, and governance, the study contributes to African scholarship on democracy and citizenship by demonstrating how legal discourse influences political meaning-making and civic engagement in contemporary Africa. The paper aligns with the conference sub-theme Democracy and Legal Frameworks: The Language of law, governance, and rights by highlighting the rhetorical dimensions of constitutional accountability in South Africa’s evolving democratic landscape.

ASABU SEWENET ALAMINEH

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“Why Has a Persistent Clamor for Self-determination in Federalized Ethiopia? A Comparative Study on Sidama and Wolayta Ethnicities”

Since the 1960s, the struggle for self-determination by ethno-nationalist forces has been the most recurring issue in Ethiopian politics. Ethiopia, unlike post-colonial African experiences and the imperatives of international law, adopted a political system that explicitly championed ethnic federalism and self-determination rights after the demise of the repressive military regime in 1991 despite calls for such a right has persisted perennially. However, scant literature exists, and little effort has been made to determine why the pursuit of self-determination has become resilient by taking illustrative cases. The Sidama and Wolayta ethnicities’ quest for regional statehood was one among vibrant and enduring movements for self-determination that warrant further investigation. The paper thus attempts to comprehend the underlying causal mechanisms that drove the pursuit of regional statehood in Sidama and Wolayta ethnicities, employing integrated theories of Primary Right, Relative Deprivation, and Rational Choice to develop an explanatory model and examine the evidence through a qualitative comparative case study. Primary and secondary data sources were explored, and purposive and networking sampling procedures were utilized to choose participants. Going beyond institutional frameworks, this analysis enables us to explain why and how the desire for self-determination has persisted and leading to recurring political crises despite decades of constitutional recognition and implementation. Equally important, the paper sheds light on how the aspiration for regional statehood in both cases was driven by strategic calculations and sentiments of deprivation, but also how the political calculations of ruling elites led to divergent governmental responses. Thus, claims of self-determination should be addressed properly and equitably through broader public involvement to mitigate future grievances.



MBUYISELO MLABA

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“Exploring Theatrical Edutainment as a Strategy to Combat Cyberbullying Among Youth in the Fourth Industrial Revolution Era in South Africa”

Cyberbullying has become a widespread issue among youth, particularly in South Africa, intensified by rapid Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technological growth and increased online engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. While digital tools support education, they also expose learners to cyberbullying, contributing to serious mental health concerns such as depression and suicidality. Rural areas, such as northern KwaZulu-Natal, face added challenges due to limited research and intervention resources. The study aims to examine how Ally the Algorithm (2022), a theatrical edutainment (EE) production, addresses cyberbullying. It focuses on how narrative design, social messaging, and interactive performance can effectively engage youth and promote positive behavioural change. A qualitative research approach is used to analyse the production. The study evaluates storytelling techniques, as well as visual and auditory elements, and the integration of accessible digital technologies to assess how effectively anti-cyberbullying messages are communicated to young audiences. Findings indicate that Ally the Algorithm successfully uses persuasive dramatization and relatable narratives to raise awareness, foster empathy, and encourage healthier online behaviour among youth. The integration of theatre and technology enhances engagement and message retention. However, limitations include restricted reach and resource constraints, particularly in rural contexts. Overall, the study demonstrates that theatrical edutainment is a valuable and innovative approach to addressing cyberbullying in the digital age. It concludes that expanding such initiatives through schools and community partnerships could strengthen youth resilience and digital literacy, helping to mitigate cyberbullying risks in evolving technological environments.

ISABEL SCHELLNACK-KELLY

“Citizen Science and Social Media: Transforming Environmental Conservation in South Africa”

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of citizen science through social media in the context of environmental conservation initiatives in South Africa. By examining both wildlife and marine conservation efforts, the study seeks to understand how social media-driven citizen science contributes to conservation outcomes, the challenges it faces and its potential to shape future conservation practices. The scholar applied the postmodernist approach to see how storytelling is invoked through social media platforms and how subscribers to these social media pages interact with each other and demonstrate interest in nature conservation undertakings. Through the qualitative method, this research aimed to provide insights into the effectiveness of these digital platforms in engaging the public, enhancing scientific knowledge and ultimately supporting the conservation of South Africa’s diverse natural heritage. Global issues such as climate change and the impact on local communities is testament to why environmental concerns should be observed through citizen science initiatives and the role played by social media in influencing these concerns. The data is being collected by observing various social media pages on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok, as well as an open-ended questionnaire to selected users of these social media sites. The ongoing research is being conducted by viewing various social media pages on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok that focus specifically on African wildlife and marine conservation in South Africa. This research is limited to South Africa, though it is acknowledged by the scholar that countries like Kenya and Botswana also have extensive wildlife conservation efforts that a similar investigation could be conducted into citizen science and social media concerning environmental undertakings. The chief objective of this paper is to develop a South African model based on social media-driven citizen science initiatives that can serve as a model for other regions with rich biodiversity facing similar conservation challenges and attract the interest of Generation Z.



JOICE SVOTWA

“Rhetorics of Belonging and Resistance: Digital Activism and Opposition Citizenship in Zimbabwe”

This article examines how rhetoric functions as a constitutive practice of citizenship in Zimbabwe’s digital opposition politics. It argues that citizenship is not only a legal status but also a communicative and rhetorical achievement produced through struggles over meaning, recognition, and belonging in digital spaces. Drawing on Mahmood Mamdani’s citizen-subject framework and African rhetorical theories that emphasise discourse as world-making (Asante, 1990; Nwosu, 2007), the study analyses how opposition actors construct political identity through digital platforms. The focus is on rhetorical constructions of “the people”, truth, justice, and resistance within Zimbabwe’s post-2018 political landscape. Using qualitative thematic analysis of purposively selected data from X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook (2018-2025), including hashtags, memes, livestreams, and political statements, the study demonstrates that digital rhetoric does not merely mobilise political participation but actively defines citizenship boundaries. Findings show that while digital rhetoric enables new forms of civic expression and political imagination, it simultaneously produces exclusion through symbolic boundary-making. The article contributes to African citizenship and digital politics scholarship by demonstrating that citizenship is produced through rhetorical struggle rather than legal definition alone.

FRANCESCA LURLARO

*“Global Citizenship and The Rhetoric of International Law:
South Africa at the International Court of Justice”*

While the rest of the world stood to watch the Palestinian genocide unfold before their very eyes, South Africa stood before the International Court of Justice, the UN main adjudicating body. On 29th December 2023, South Africa took Israel before the ICJ to claim that Israel had violated the Genocide Convention by committing genocide on the Palestinian people. In his opening remarks before the court, Mr. Ronald Lamola, from the South African legal team, quoted the words of Nelson Mandela as a rationale for the case: ‘in extending our hands across the miles to the people of Palestine, we do so in the full knowledge that we are part of a humanity that is at one. [...] This is the spirit in which we approach this Court.’ The reference to Mandela’s speech at the International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian People (Pretoria, 4 December 1997) is not only rhetorically authoritative; it is legally relevant. It helped the South African delegation build two sets of intertwined rhetorical arguments: one of historical continuity, and one of cosmopolitan belonging. First, by using South African history as a comparative example, the South African legal team retro-dated the beginning of the events at stake in the case: Israel’s erasure of Palestinians did not start on October 7, after the Hamas attacks, but belongs to a much longer history of occupation and apartheid that started with the Nakba; a history which, due to their own, South Africans are in a privileged position to acknowledge. Emphasis on historical continuity is crucial to oppose Israel’s own reconstruction of the events: according to the Israeli legal team, the ‘story’ started on October 7. Since then, Israel has been merely acting in ‘self-defense’ to protect its citizens. Second, the South African legal team acknowledged historical continuity to the Palestinian struggle based on a sense of cosmopolitan belonging: this effectively roots South Africa’s invocation of the violation of the Genocide Convention not only into the Convention itself (to which it is, however, party), but in a much wider sense of cosmopolitan belonging rooted in the values of collective liberation and international solidarity. Scholars such as Chielozona Eze has referred to the values of ‘empathetic cosmopolitanism’ and ‘global citizenship’ as legacy of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. In my contribution, I would like to read the South Africa vs. Israel ICJ case through a rhetorical lens, by analyzing the scholarship of the South African international lawyers involved in the case (John Dugart, Dire Tladi, Dikgang Moseneke), as well as the rhetoric of ‘global citizenship’ they inherited. My aim in doing so is to recover a language of international solidarity in a time where reckless nationalisms destabilize the international order, as well as a theory of the state that sees international law as an extension of sovereignty, rather than its negation. What rhetorical strategies have these lawyers used? What are the connections between the rhetoric of global citizenship and South African constitutional law? How is a sense of global citizenship being crafted rhetorically by the language of international law?



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