



Science Forum South Africa 2020

“Still igniting conversations about science”

9-11 December 2020

Description of Parallel Sessions organised by Partners for Online Publication

Session Title:

African Histories and Philosophies of Artificial Intelligence (with the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, University of Cambridge)

Date: 10th December 2020

Time: 15.30 – 17.30

Session Overview: (Maximum 300 words providing short contextual background for the sessions and highlighting key questions to be interrogated)

Artificial intelligence is set to have an unprecedented global impact – and public perceptions will shape much of it, affecting how the technology is developed, adopted and regulated. But different cultures see AI through very different lenses: diverse scientific, economic, artistic, religious, linguistic, philosophical, literary, and cinematic traditions have led to diverging conceptions of what intelligent machines can and should be.

Many of these worldviews are currently not given the attention they deserve, both within cultures and between them. The Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence (CFI) at the University of Cambridge therefore launched the Global AI Narratives Project to understand and analyse how different cultures and regions perceive the risks and benefits of AI, and the influences that are shaping those perceptions.

In collaboration with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa, CFI will hold a series of three online workshops to explore portrayals and perceptions of AI and robotics in Sub-Saharan Africa and its African contexts. This is the first of these workshops, and will engage in the histories and philosophies of AI in Africa.

Programme: (Description of the running order of the session – 90 minutes)

Chair: Dr Rachel Adams (HSRC)

15.30 – 15.35: Chair opens and introduces

15.35 – 15.45: Opening remarks from Dr Stephen Cave and Dr Kanta Dihal

15.45 – 16:00: "Automating Error: The politics of machine learning and information infrastructures on the African continent" Professor Keith Breckenridge

16:00 – 16:15: "African Perspectives on AI: intrigues, Challenges and Prospects" Dr. Ejikemeuwa Ndubisi

16:15 – 16:30: "Critically Engaging the Ethics of AI for an African Audience" Dr Samuel Segun

16:30 – 16:45: Discussant remarks from Professor Jane Taylor

16:45 – 17:30: Open discussion and Q and A

Moderator: (Name and maximum 100 words biographical summaries – URL link if relevant)

Dr Rachel Adams

Dr Rachel Adams is a Senior Research Specialist at the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa. Dr Adams has degrees in Jurisprudence (PhD, University of Cape Town), International Human Rights Law (MPhil, University of Cape Town) and English Literature and Philosophy (BA, Royal Holloway, University of London). Her research lies at the intersection of philosophy, gender, technology, law and race. Dr Adams sits on the Independent Expert Panel of the South African Department of Science and Innovation and Council for Scientific and Industrial Research's Centre on Artificial Intelligence Research (CAIR), and she is a member of the Independent Advisory Group of the Surveillance Camera Commissioner for the UK Home Office. Dr Adams is further an Editor of the South African Journal on Human Rights, and the author of *Transparency: New Trajectories in Law* (Routledge, 2020).

Speakers: (Names and maximum 100 words per speaker biographical summaries – URL links if relevant)

Dr Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi

Dr. Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi teaches philosophy in Tansian University, Umunya Nigeria and Pope John Paul II Major Seminary, Awka, Nigeria. Currently, he is the Editor-in-Chief of the Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (OWIJOPPA) and also the General Secretary of the Association for the Promotion of African Studies (APAS).

Dr Samuel Segun

Samuel T. Segun is a Research Associate in the Ethics of AI research group at the Centre for Artificial Intelligence Research (CAIR) at the University of Pretoria. He completed his PhD at the University of Johannesburg with a doctoral research focused on developing a robust ethical theory for autonomous intelligent systems that is informed by African values and rivals Western approaches. Samuel's research interests include the philosophy of artificial intelligence, with a special focus on computational and machine ethics. His other areas of research include the philosophy of mind, especially neurophilosophy and consciousness, business ethics and African intellectual development. Samuel is also a Researcher at the Institute of Intelligent Systems, University of Johannesburg, and a Research Fellow of the Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP).

Professor Jane Taylor

Professor Jane Taylor holds the Andrew W. Mellon Chair of Aesthetic Theory and Material Performance, at the Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape. Taylor has for some years been involved in public scholarship, curating, and arts. She directs the Laboratory of Kinetic Objects, a creative arts hub that explores questions about the subject-object continuum; and the significance of motion in the history of the idea of 'the live.' Taylor works across the arts and has published several novels, and playtexts, as well as traditional scholarship. Taylor's PhD is from Northwestern University, Illinois. She has held the Wole Soyinka Chair of Theatre at Leeds; Skye Chair of Drama at Wits; Visiting Professorship at the University of Chicago; Visiting Fellowships at Oxford and Cambridge; Writer's Residency at Northwestern, and Visiting Avenali Chair at Berkeley; and was Advisor for Dokumenta; and has been a guest curator of Kentridge's Centre for the Less Good Idea. She helped launch the Barrydale Festival, working on aesthetics, robotics, AI, and puppetry arts.

Dr Stephen Cave

Dr Stephen Cave is Executive Director of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, Senior Research Associate in the Faculty of Philosophy, and Fellow of Hughes Hall, all at the University of Cambridge. Stephen earned a PhD in philosophy from Cambridge, then joined the British Foreign Office, where he served as a policy advisor and diplomat. He has subsequently written and spoken on a wide range of philosophical and scientific subjects, including in the New York Times, The Atlantic, and on television and radio around the world. His research interests currently focus on the nature, portrayal and governance of AI.

Dr Kanta Dihal

Dr Kanta Dihal is a Senior Research Fellow on the AI Narratives project. She is one of the Project Leads on Global AI Narratives and the Project Development Lead on Decolonizing AI. In her research, she explores how fictional and nonfictional stories shape the development and public understanding of artificial intelligence. Kanta's work intersects the fields of science communication, literature and science, and science fiction. She obtained her DPhil in science communication at the University of Oxford: in her thesis, titled 'The Stories of Quantum Physics,' she investigated the communication of conflicting interpretations of quantum physics to adults and children. She is co-editor of the collection *AI Narratives: A History of Imaginative Thinking About Intelligent Machines* (Oxford University Press, 2020) and is currently working with Dr Stephen Cave on the monograph *AI: A Mythology*.

Session organiser(s): (Names of institutions and contact details of a contact person – URL links if relevant)

Rachel Adams

HSRC

And Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, University of Cambridge.