
Foreword to Journal of Humanities Special Issue: Emerging Issues in Southern Africa: Critical Perspectives

Simon Mathias Makwinja¹, Yamikani Ndasauka²

1. Guest Editor, Journal of Humanities, University of Malawi

2. Editor-in-chief, Journal of Humanities, University of Malawi

The Journal of Humanities (JH) special issue has assembled papers that responded to the *Emerging Issues in Southern Africa: Critical Perspectives* call to provide a platform for novel and innovative debates around problems confronting people in Africa. The papers in this issue have been carefully selected after a thorough and rigorous peer-review process. The discussions in the present issue revolve around cross-cutting recent and perennial topics such as the Covid-19 pandemic, malaria, technology, pollution, corruption and climate change. The approach to such problems in this issue is mainly philosophical, ethical and critical. In some instances, authors have examined these problems as they relate to or affect each other.

The issue has a total of seven articles. The first paper by Jimmy Kainja argues that the Covid-19 pandemic has reaffirmed the critical role that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play in the contemporary world. In addition, Covid-19 has also exposed gaps within ICTs' legal and policy frameworks and how such gaps affect digital rights in Malawi. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the internet was no longer considered a luxury for a select few but became a means of survival for many people. Even those previously uninterested in using the internet adopted the internet as a platform for business, meetings, conferences, and classrooms. The paper has identified four problems that affect digital rights. These are access to the internet, insufficient infrastructure, restrictive legal environment and digital literacy. These gaps' existence makes digital rights a dream that cannot be achieved.

Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, Atipatsa Kaminga, Rhodian Munyenyembe, and Francis Kudzula discuss the Church and Covid-19. The churches' teachings, spiritualities and polity solidified the power and authority of clergypersons. Clergypersons were instrumental since they were a trusted source of information on issues affecting humanity. For this reason, during the pandemic, Christians looked up to their clergy for messages of healing and hope. The authors argue that the masculinities of the Clergy played a very critical role in the Church's response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the global south. The masculinities referred to here are those of authority and power to influence the Church in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and not necessarily those of sex.

In their paper, Pascal Mwale, Boniface Tamani and Tawina Chisi engage the complex relationships between politics, media and pandemics. Specifically, they explore how the current media practice has affected the dissemination of information regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. While some have taken advantage of the media to advance falsehood, and those who are genuinely looking for the truth, the media find themselves in the middle of information overabundance dubbed infodemic. Such infodemic as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, mediated communication has potentially been susceptible and vulnerable to disinformation and misinformation. This overabundance of information has led the media to advance a monologue, committing epistemicide as alternative views on the pandemic are summarily dismissed. Mwale and others further argue that the manufactured mass ignorance about the pandemic has led to the lower intake of vaccines in Africa in general and Malawi in particular.

The fourth paper by Foster Gondwe, Elias Mwakilama, and Bob Maseko deals with the importance of technology to teacher education institutions in modern times, more so as the globe has, in recent times, tremendously suffered from the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this paper has emphasized the importance of technology in modern times. Situating this significance in the Covid-19 pandemic, which disrupted human activities such as education, they argue that developing teacher educators as digital citizens are critical. This is because teacher education

institutions have witnessed transitioning to online platforms for instruction following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Gondwe and others thus demonstrate how teacher educators can facilitate the development of ethical use of technology in education in Malawi.

The fifth article by Susan Mtuwa and Asiyati Lorraine Chiweza discusses the problem of corruption in public institutions. Mtuwa and Chiweza explore the implication of such institutionalisation of corruption in the internal systems of public institutions such as human resource management systems, public procurement systems, and public finance management systems; weak controls in the execution of budgets leading to the misuse of public resources and maladaptive practices such as embezzlement. They base their exploration on the Weberian public administration theory and the bureaucrats. They thus argue that such functionality of the public administration machinery breeds an environment where institutional corruption exists.

The sixth paper by Zama Masondo and Ovet Nwosimiri carried out an ethical assessment of introducing a carbon tax policy concerning the environment, economy and society. They argue that more attention in the policy is paid to the economic implications and benefits of the carbon tax policy to South Africa than to its ethical implications on the life of the environment itself, especially pollution and climate change. The carbon tax policy alone is not capable of repaying the damage made to the environment. The authors propose environmental stewardship or responsibility on the part of human beings as a way to protect the environment.

The final paper by Mzati Nkolokosa proposes an African-understanding of malungo, the Chinyanja name for malaria. In his argument, the dominant Western paradigm regarding the cause, symptoms, treatment and prevention of malaria is at variance with the Malawian experience of malungo. In addition, the Malawian indigenous ways of knowing and doing, including treatment and prevention of malungo, derive from centuries of experience that produced an independent epistemology that Western science has for many years rejected and placed in the lower epistemological categories of myths and misconceptions. The paper has

reviewed the 2017 Malawi Malaria Indicator Survey and proposes a re-look at malungo from the perspective of African epistemology.

The production of this special issue increases our hope that researchers and scholars working in these and other related areas will find the articles intellectually stimulating. We expect the treatment of the problems here will open up more fruitful discussions as the academy attempts to contribute meaningfully to solutions and resolutions of the many issues that confront their people. We wish you good and exciting reading.