



46TH ASRSA CONGRESS

06-08 OCTOBER 2025

Reimagining the Study of Religions within the
African Digital Humanities

Programme & Abstracts

UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa



46TH

Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa Congress

06-08 October 2025

Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA)
UNISA Department of Religious Studies and Arabic
UNISA Advancing African Digital Humanities Ideation Hub
(AADHiH)





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Preface

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the 46th Annual Congress of the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA), jointly hosted by the Department of Religious Studies and Arabic and the Advancing African Digital Humanities Ideation Hub (AADHiH) in the College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa (UNISA). This year's congress, taking place from 6–8 October 2025 at UNISA's main campus in Pretoria (and virtually for our online participants), invites us to pause and reflect on a critical question: *What does it mean to reimagine the study of religions within the African Digital Humanities?*

The emergence of Digital Humanities as a field has transformed the ways in which scholars collect, curate, and interpret the human record, encompassing texts, images, soundscapes, ritual practices, and cultural expressions. Within the African context, African Digital Humanities (ADH) pushes this conversation further, foregrounding African epistemologies, languages, and knowledge systems while critically engaging global digital trends. In doing so, ADH offers an important corrective to the dominance of Western paradigms in digital scholarship, amplifying African voices and reconfiguring the terrain of the study of religion.

This year's congress is designed as a space of dialogue, innovation, and critical reflection. Our congress programme features keynote addresses, individual papers in thematic sessions, panels, and a roundtable that explores a wide range of themes:

- The preservation of African religious traditions through digital archives.
- The transformative impact of digital technologies on belief, practice, and community.

- Ethical and theoretical considerations of digitising religious materials.
- The intersections of gender, race, class, and power in digital religious studies.
- The use of cutting-edge tools, from augmented reality to artificial intelligence, in mapping, analysing, and reinterpreting religious life.
- The role of digital pedagogy in teaching religion across African contexts.

These conversations are not only academic in nature; they are deeply engaged with African societies and communities, offering new opportunities for collaborative, participatory, and socially responsive scholarship.

As you turn the pages of this programme and abstract collection, we invite you to engage with the richness of ideas represented here, to encounter new methodologies, and to imagine fresh possibilities for the study of religions in our digital age. Whether you are participating in person or virtually, your contributions are integral to this shared intellectual journey.

We extend our gratitude to all participants and presenters who have made this congress possible. Together, let us reimagine the study of religions in ways that not only respond to our present moment but also shape the futures of African and global scholarship.

Welcome to the 46th ASRSA Congress!

**Local Organising and Scientific Programme Committee &
ASRSA Executive Committee**

Message from the Congress Host: UNISA College of Human Sciences (CHS) Executive Dean



It is my honour to welcome you to the 46th Annual Congress of the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA), hosted by the University of South Africa. On behalf of the College of Human Sciences, I extend warm greetings to all participants, those joining us here in Pretoria and those connecting virtually from

around the world. The theme of this congress, “*Reimagining the Study of Religions within the African Digital Humanities*,” speaks to an important moment in higher education and scholarship. As we navigate an era defined by digital transformation, it is imperative that African voices, perspectives, and epistemologies shape this evolving landscape.

African Digital Humanities (ADH) is not only an academic innovation but also a strategic priority within UNISA’s Catalytic Niche Areas. It enables us to reframe scholarship on religion in ways that are globally relevant and locally grounded. The field of Religious Studies stands to benefit immensely from this digital turn. Through digital archives, computational tools, and online platforms, we can preserve traditions, interrogate practices, and connect communities in new and inclusive ways. These approaches also have the potential to attract a new generation of students, who find resonance in digital methods and relevance in

contemporary, technology-enabled learning (especially within multi-inter-and trans-disciplinary spaces). This will inevitably lead to new module offerings that can attract more students and grow the discipline. In this way, ADH becomes a bridge between research and teaching, between academic inquiry and societal engagement, and between past traditions and future possibilities.

I want to express my gratitude to the ASRSA President Prof. Federico Settler, ASRSA Executive Members, local organising committee, our presenters, and each participant who contributes to this congress. May your engagements be enriching, collaborative, and forward-thinking.

Prof. Zethu Nkosi

Executive Dean: College of Human Sciences

Project Owner: Advancing African Digital Humanities Ideation Hub

University of South Africa

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Programme

Day 1: 06 October 2025 (Monday)

08:00-09:00	Registration (Tea/Coffee on Arrival) Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)
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Official Welcome and Congress Opening Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX	
09:00-09:15	Official Welcome to UNISA Director: School of Humanities/ College of Human Sciences: Mokhele Madise
09:15-09:45	<i>Opening Comments</i> President - Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA): Federico Settler Chair of Department: Department of Religious Studies and Arabic - Auwais Rafudeen Head: Advancing African Digital Humanities Ideation Hub (AADHiH): Denzil Chetty
09:45-10:00	Outline of the 3-Day Programme Representative of Local Organising Committee & Scientific Programme Committee: Johan Strijdom

Keynote Address 1: Decolonial Epistemologies and the African Digital Humanities Chair: Beverley Vencatsamy
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(40 Minute Presentation, 20 Minutes Discussion) Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX	
10:00-11:00	<i>Decolonising Religious Studies: African Digital Humanities at the Intersection of Subaltern Studies, Decolonial Theory, and Epistemic Revolution</i> Denzil Chetty Advancing African Digital Humanities Ideation Hub College of Human Sciences University of South Africa, South Africa

11:00-11:30	Tea/Coffee Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)
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Panel Session 1 Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX	
11:30-12:30	<i>Contested Terrains: Gender, Decoloniality, and Voice in the Digital Humanities of Religion</i> Chair: Cherry Muslim (UKZN) Presenters: Lauren Matthew (UKZN); Azraa Ebrahim (UKZN); and Chukwudera Nwodo (UKZN)

12:30-13:30	Lunch Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)
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Thematic Papers Session 1 (Per Presenter: Presentation 20 Mins, 10 Minutes Discussion)		
13:30-15:00	Theme: <i>Truth, Conspiracies, Racism and Femophilosemitism in the Digital Age</i> Chair: Sepetla Molapo Venue: Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX Just Believing: Social Media, Default-Truth, Fake News and Faith – John Ostrowick The Afrikaner “Exodus”: MAGA Conspiratorship, Digital Racism, and Religious Nationalism on South African Social Media – Tristán Kapp Femophilosemitism and the Digital Co-optation of Feminism:	Theme: <i>Migration, Identity, and Muslim Digitalities</i> Chair: Aaishah Lombard Venue: WMM 10-94 (Seminar Room) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3KyUaFE Faith, Identity, and Resilience: Malawian Muslim Migrants in Johannesburg – Jameel James Asani Digital Turn – Curse or Baraka: The Making/Unmaking of the Black African Muslim Community in South Africa – Tahir Fuzile Sitoto Navigating Religion and Economy: Digital Platforms and Pentecostal

	Gendered Narratives of 'New Anti-Semitism' Post-October 7 – Anat Kraslavsky	Transnationalism in Zimbabwe's Cross-Border Trade – Tsitsidzashe Bvute
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15:00-15:30	Tea/ Coffee Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)
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Panel Session 2 Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX	
15:30-16:30	<i>Digital Humanities and Emergent Critical Research Methodologies in Religion</i> Chair & Sponsor: Federico Settler (UKZN) Presenters: David Elliot (UKZN), Thobeka Khubisa (UKZN), Georgina Giorno (UKZN) and Minki Fela (UKZN).

ASRSA Business Meeting Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX	
16:30-18:00	ASRSA Business Meeting

Day 2: 07 October 2025 (Tuesday)

Thematic Papers Session 2 (Per Presenter: Presentation 20 Mins, 10 Minutes Discussion)		
08:30-10:30	Theme: <i>African Pentecostalism in Digital Spaces</i> Chair: Sibusiso Masondo Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAx The Influence of Digital Technologies on Pentecostals in South Africa – Simesihle Ngubane Social-Media Mediations of Worship, Authority, and Community in Southern African Pentecostalism – James Ndlovu Cyber-Prophets and Digital Pentecostalism: The Rise of Internet-Based Ministries in	Theme: <i>Rethinking African Concepts and Traditions Digitally</i> Chair: Joel Mokhoathi Venue: Kgorong Building 01-060 (Conference Room 5) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3KyUaFE A Cyberreligious Approach to John Mbiti's Concept of Time – Mogomotsi Jaba A Critical Examination of African-Initiated Churches' Digital Presence – Susan Kemigisha Reconfiguring the Sacred Codes: Digital Humanities and the Study of African Religion – Botshelo Mpho Ramoshaba & Lufuluvhi M. Mudimeli

	Africa – Olatundun A. Oderinde, Elijah R. Ashafa & Jonah O. Adeniran Affective Community in Transnational Churching: Insights from Digital Infrastructures at a Pentecostal Church – Admire Thonje	
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10:30-11:00	Tea/Coffee Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)
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Keynote Address 2: Digital Methods and Methodologies in Restrictive Contexts Chair: Johan Strijdom (40 Minute Presentation, 20 Minutes Discussion) Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRax	
11:00-12:00	<i>Can Online Non-Probability Surveys Work in an Authoritarian Context? Measuring Non-Sensitive and Sensitive Topics in the Islamic Republic of Iran</i> Pooyan Tamimi Arab Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies Utrecht University, Netherlands

12:00-13:00	Lunch Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)
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Thematic Papers Session 3 (Per Presenter: Presentation 20 Mins, 10 Minutes Discussion)		
13:00-14:30	Theme: <i>Ethics and Digital Technologies in Religion Education</i> Chair: Shoayb Ahmed Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX From Exclusion to Liberation: Examining AI in Higher Education Through an Equity Lens – Aaishah Lombard & Muhammad Jamal Supervising Studies in Religion in the context of artificial intelligence – Zahraa McDonald Ethical Frameworks for Digital Technologies in the Study and	Theme: <i>Cybercrime and Digital Ethics</i> Chair: Asonzeh Ukah/Elina Hankela Venue: Kgorong Building 01-060 (Conference Room 5) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3KyUaFE Cybercrime and Spiritualism: The Intersections of Digital Fraud and Occult Practices in Nigeria – Burabari Sunday Deezia Artificial Intelligence, Morality and Religious Life of the Contemporary Ngwa and Ogoni Nigeria – Enyioma E. Nwosu & Goka M. Mpigi Digital Spirits and Networked Faiths:

	Representation of African Religions – David Andrew Omona	Reimagining African Religious Landscapes – Reggemore Marongedze
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14:30-15:00	Tea/ Coffee Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)
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Thematic Papers Session 4 (Per Presenter: Presentation 20 Mins, 10 Minutes Discussion)		
15:00-16:30	Theme: Methodological Shifts in Digital Religion Studies Chair: Beverly Vencatsamy Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAx Emerging Shifts in Digital Ethnography within Virtual Religious Communities – Telesia Musili Researching the Unseen: A Netnographic	Theme: Digital Transformations of Religious Authority and Communities in Africa Chair: Thulani Langa Venue: Kgorong Building 01-060 (Conference Room 5) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3KyUaFE Digital Faith in Motion: Religious Communities and Shifting Identities in Africa – Olawale Amos Oyatoki Faith in the Feed: Social Media,

	Approach to Atheism Research in Nigeria's Religious Landscape – Charles E. Ekpo Rhizomatic Learning as an Alternative Open Distance Learning Model – Erna & Willem Oliver	Authority, and Identity in Contemporary African Religions – Rosalind Sigamoney
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Roundtable & Social Evening (Light Refreshments)

Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)

MS Teams Link: <https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX>

16:30-19:00	<i>Images, Games and Robots: Technology in the Study of Religion</i> Facilitator: Denzil Chetty Discussants: Joel Mokhoathi, Shoayb Ahmed, Sepetla Molapo, Johan Strijdom, Garth Mason, Thulani Langa, and Auwais Rafudeen. Department of Religious Studies and Arabic (UNISA)
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Day 3: 08 October 2025 (Wednesday)

Panel Session 3

Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)

MS Teams Link: <https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX>

08:30-9:45

Digitally Archiving African Heritage:

Opportunities and Obstacles

Chair: Lindiwe Khuzwayo

Presenters: Luvoyo Dondolo (History, UNISA),
Annaliese Mehnert (Anthropology and
Archaeology, UNISA), Joel Mokhoathi (Religious
Studies and Arabic, UNISA) and Chitja Twala
(History, UNISA)

Panel Session 4

Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)

MS Teams Link: <https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX>

9:45-11:00

AI and Islam: Prospects and Challenges

Chair: Auwais Rafudeen

Presenters: Shaheed Mathee (UJ), Cherry
Muslim (UKZN), Nabil Yasien Mohamed (UWC)
and Shoayb Ahmed (UNISA)

11:00-11:30

Tea/Coffee

Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall)

Keynote Address 3: Digital Knowledge Architectures and the Future of Religious Studies

Chair: Garth Mason

(40 Minute Presentation, 20 Minutes Discussion) Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX	
11:30-12:30	<i>Power of Knowledge Graphs Through Digitalisation: Extracting and Visualising Knowledge from Religious Documents</i> Sree Ganesh Thottempudi German University of Digital Science (Germany) / CADIS-UNISA (South Africa)

Conference Closure Venue: Kgorong Building 04-002 (Function Hall) MS Teams Link: https://bit.ly/3VxMRAX	
12:30-12:45	Closing Comments Vote of thanks on Behalf of Hosting University – Auwais Rafudeen

Excursion (Pre-Packed Lunch)	
13:00-16:30	Freedom Park (Pretoria) Excursion with Pre-Packed Lunch Bags

Keynote Speakers & Abstracts



Keynote Address 1: *Decolonising Religious Studies: African Digital Humanities at the Intersection of Subaltern Studies, Decolonial Theory, and Epistemic Revolution*

Denzil Chetty (UNISA, South Africa)

The African Digital Humanities (ADH) emerges as a transformative field that critically interrogates the digital landscape

to reshape research and knowledge production of African histories, cultures, and religious practices. This paper addresses the intersection of ADH with subaltern studies, decolonial theory, and the epistemic revolution, interrogating how digital methodologies reframe African religious scholarship. By centring African knowledge systems and voices, ADH challenges entrenched colonial epistemologies and amplifies marginalised perspectives, thus positioning itself as a pivotal tool in the decolonisation of religious studies.

Central to this paper is the problematisation of knowledge production within African religious studies, particularly in how ADH serves as a decolonial praxis. Through the lens of digital tools such as data visualisation, textual analysis, and crowdsourced ethnography, ADH facilitates the retrieval and documentation of African religious practices that have historically been marginalised, misrepresented, or erased within dominant scholarly discourses. These methodologies, situated in the digital realm, enable a more nuanced, inclusive, and multifaceted approach to African religious traditions, revealing epistemic

frameworks rooted in African worldviews that colonial scholarship has persistently obscured. Moreover, the paper critiques the hegemonic role of Western knowledge systems in the construction of religious studies, demonstrating how ADH democratises knowledge production by facilitating access to African religious scholarship. The advent of digital archives, open-access platforms, and collaborative research networks disrupts traditional academic gatekeeping, fostering the preservation, sharing, and circulation of indigenous religious knowledge. This shift is not merely methodological but also epistemological, as it foregrounds African epistemologies that prioritise oral traditions, communal knowledge, and lived experience, forms of knowledge that colonial structures have historically sidelined. Through the integration of subaltern studies and decolonial frameworks, this paper proposes that ADH is not just a technological tool but a decolonial praxis that reimagines the boundaries of religious studies. It offers new avenues for understanding African religious practices and underscores the need for an epistemic revolution that redefines how religious knowledge is produced, validated, and disseminated within global academic spaces.

Bio: Denzil Chetty is an academic and researcher in the College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa (Unisa). He leads the Advancing African Digital Humanities Ideation Hub (AADHiH), a strategic project funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training's University Capacity Development Grant (UDCG) and housed in the Office of the Executive Dean, College of Human Sciences. His research explores the intersections of religion, technology, and society, with a particular focus on how digital humanities can inform engaged scholarship and transformative knowledge production in African contexts.



Keynote Address 2: *Can Online Non-Probability Surveys Work in an Authoritarian Context? Measuring Non-Sensitive and Sensitive Topics in the Islamic Republic of Iran*

Pooyan Tamimi Arab (Utrecht University, Netherlands)

Multiple surveys conducted in the Islamic Republic of Iran show an extremely religious society supportive of theocracy.

Conducted by telephone and face-to-face interviews, they do not show the social realities undergirding events such as the nationwide protests against compulsory veiling and the regime following the murder of Jina (Mahsa) Amini in September 2022. In this presentation, I examine whether online non-probability surveys can work as an alternative. Survey data was gathered by GAMAAN—the Group for Analysing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran—whose access to mass audiences using social media applications and collaboration with VPN platforms and satellite television channels allows for examining with large sample sizes. The analysis focuses on surveys conducted in 2022, 2023, and 2024. After sample balancing, the weighted results replicated demographic benchmarks and answers to non-sensitive questions published by Iranian and foreign institutes that relied on telephone and face-to-face interviews. For politically sensitive questions, however, GAMAAN's results exhibit discrepancies with those based on telephone and face-to-face interviewing. Moreover, some results, such as diverse religious and non-religious identifications, were only produced through the online surveys. Notwithstanding the challenges of non-probability sampling, these results corroborate the hypothesis that survey modes, among

other factors, are likely to strongly affect self-censorship and preference falsification in an authoritarian context like Iran.

Bio: Pooyan Tamimi Arab is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies and serves as coordinator of the Research Master's program in Religious Studies. He is also a member of the Young Academy of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. His scholarship approaches religion through a materialist lens with a particular specialisation in secular studies. Drawing on religious studies, art history, anthropology, sociology, and political philosophy, his work examines the complex dynamics between the secular and the religious. He is the Principal Investigator of the Vidi Project Iran's Secular Shift: A Mixed Methods Approach to Nonreligion and Atheism in an Islamic Republic (2025–2030), one of whose subprojects is conducted in collaboration with GAMAAN—the Group for Analysing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran.



Keynote Address 3: *Power of Knowledge Graphs Through Digitalisation: Extracting and Visualising Knowledge from Religious Documents*

Sree Ganesh Thottempudi (German University of Digital Science, Germany & CADIS-UNISA, South Africa)

Non-digital materials, such as printed or handwritten documents, are inherently not machine-readable. Even digital materials aren't always machine-readable; for instance, a PDF with tables is digital but challenging for computers to read, despite being human-readable. Data in formats like CSV, JSON, or XML can be automatically processed by computers. Machine-

readable data must be structured, unlike human-readable data. However, tables in a spreadsheet format are machine-readable. Similarly, scans of text are not machine-readable but human-readable; in contrast, text in a simple ASCII file is machine-readable and processable. In this presentation, we'll explore the challenges of converting non-digital data into machine-readable formats, how to process scanned texts. I understand that navigating this process can be complex, but together, we will look at how to effectively extract valuable information and transform it into knowledge graphs using AI. My aim is to provide you with the tools and insights needed to make this journey smoother and more rewarding.

I will demonstrate the entire process through our 3-year DFG-funded project, "Semantic Blumenbach", and another BBAW project on the Quran. There are numerous fascinating ways to model the intricate relationships between texts and objects, and one particularly compelling method involves crafting statements using RDF triples. After a thorough exploration of existing frameworks designed to describe both objects and texts, I chose to dive into the capabilities of the Scientific Communication Infrastructure (WissKI) for our endeavour. This decision set the stage for a rich exploration, leading us to develop innovative modules and to establish a seamless workflow that bridges the intricate knowledge found within Blumenbach's writings with the rich metadata associated with objects.

In this paper, I delve into the nuances of data modelling, the intricate ingestion workflow, and our comprehensive project evaluation. I also engage in the ongoing dialogue surrounding the integration of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) with the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model, highlighting the transformative potential of these connections in the realm of scholarly communication.

Bio: Sree Ganesh Thottempudi is a faculty member in Artificial Intelligence and Data Science with over 15 years of teaching and research experience across international research and development organisations. His expertise centres on developing natural language processing tools for under-resourced languages and applying digital humanities methodologies to the study of ancient heritage and culture. Before entering academia, he contributed to the development of South African sign-to-speech and speech-to-sign translation tools. Alongside his academic work, Thottempudi has held positions at leading organisations, including Red Hat Software Services, Microsoft (India) Corporation, and DAASI International GmbH. He has served as principal investigator on four European Union projects and contributed to two South African government initiatives on digital infrastructure development with SADiLaR. His broader research collaborations extend to major industry partners such as Tesla, TeamViewer, and Bosch.

General Thematic Paper Abstracts

(In Alphabetic Order)

Aaishah Lombard and Muhammad Jamal (University of Johannesburg & University of Zululand)

From Exclusion to Liberation: Examining AI in Higher Education Through an Equity Lens

The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education raises imperative ethical issues of equity, access, and the reproduction of structural disadvantage. The reflexive article by a postgraduate lecturer and graduate coach critically examines the adoption of AI in student learning through the lens of Islamic Liberation Theology (ILT). While AI can potentially democratize research, make it more accessible, and aid academic progress, blind implementation has the potential to perpetuate structural inequalities that adversely impact marginalised students. This article, drawing on our own reflexive experiences as a lecturer and frontline teaching and student support worker, using ILT as an analytic lens, foregrounds the ethical demand for accountability as well as concern for the marginalised, an educational, social and theological obligation. Through Religious Studies as the co-author's discipline and other examples in education, we illustrate how disparities in digital literacy, institutional funds, and capital reproduce exclusion in higher education. The paper presents two main arguments: (1) dominant models for AI adoption in higher education tend to perpetuate and mirror dominant socio-economic and epistemic inequalities, and (2) intentional, inclusion-driven pedagogical strategies informed by theological and moral principles must underpin AI adoption. I conclude by proposing that we should reinterpret AI as a force of emancipation rather than exclusion, balancing technological innovativeness with social justice and theological reflection in higher education.

Admire Thonje (University of Johannesburg)

Affective Community in Transnational Churching: Insights from Digital Infrastructures at a Pentecostal Church

In response to ongoing discussions about how modern life interacts with technology, this paper explores how digital tools have shaped the ways that one Pentecostal church connects its members across transnational space. Rather than focus on concerns about the risks of technology within religious contexts, as raised by scholars like Satyavrata (2024), I suggest that digital technologies actually help bring people from different cultures together. They promise new ways for members to experience unity, even when they are spread across borders. My study is based on observations of a transnational Pentecostal church, which I give the pseudonym Speak In Tongues. The church was originally founded in Zimbabwe, but is now active in several countries, with South Africa posing a major location. I consider key events and digital practices used by the church to improve communication, foster connection, and create a complicated but nonetheless shared sense of belonging. From livestreamed services and virtual prayer meetings to social media posts and online groups, digital platforms have become essential tools for portraying affective church life. Engaging my analysis via a post-humanist perspective, I consider how technology is not just a tool but becomes part of the relationship between members and the church. In this setting, the line between human and machine becomes blurred. For example, the church uses AI-generated characters in its communication strategies. These digital figures help to deliver messages clearly and consistently, while also allowing some flexibility in how identities are represented. In sum, my paper highlights how one Pentecostal church has used technology not just to stay connected, but to reimagine how spiritual community is formed and felt in a digital age. It shows that churching is

performed across borders, across screens and servers, not just in buildings and pews.

Anat Kraslavsky (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

*Femophilosemitism and the Digital Co-optation of Feminism:
Gendered Narratives of 'New Anti-Semitism' Post-October 7*

In this presentation, I examine how feminist discourses are co-opted to legitimise militarised state violence in the aftermath of October 7 and the subsequent Israeli assault on Iran. I focus on the German context and social media. I analyse how platforms like Instagram serve as key arenas for racialised moral storytelling, where gendered suffering is strategically curated to support state-aligned philosemitic narratives. My focus lies on the digital recontextualization of two feminist movements: the #MeToo movement and the Iranian Women, Life, Freedom uprising. I trace how their liberatory messages are redeployed through memes, AI-generated images, viral slogans, and emotionally charged videos that recast Israeli military actions as expressions of gender justice. At the same time, these digital channels are used to delegitimise anti-colonial and pro-Palestinian movements by framing them as anti-Semitic through the lens of “new anti-Semitism” discourse targeting Palestinian, leftist, queer, feminist, Jewish and migrant critiques of Israel. In the case of #MeToo, I examine the campaign #MeTooUnlessYouAreAJew, which accuses global feminism of ignoring alleged systematic sexualized violence as a genocidal weapon of war by Hamas on October 7 due to anti-Semitism. Regarding Iran, I show how Israeli state actors, including Netanyahu, invoke the Women, Life, Freedom uprising to frame Israel’s military action in Iran as feminist liberation. I argue that these digital reconfigurations mark the emergence of femophilosemitism: a discursive formation in which feminist idioms are instrumentalised to racialise solidarity, justify militarism, and align minority struggles with imperial agendas

under the guise of protecting Jewish life. While adopting the aesthetics and rhetoric of grassroots activism, these narratives serve state power, affirm Israel's moral exceptionalism, justify the Genocide in Gaza and displace critiques of Zionism or settler colonialism by branding them as anti-Semitic.

Botshelo Mpho Ramoshaba (University of Venda) & Lufuluvhi M. Mudimeli (University of Venda)

Reconfiguring the Sacred Codes: Digital Humanities and the Study of African Religion

Digital technologies are reshaping how knowledge is constructed, preserved, and circulated. There is an intersection of digital humanities and the study of religions, with the study of religions in Africa having a delayed embrace of the transformative possibilities of African Digital humanities. This article explores the challenges and opportunities of this transformative field. It examines how digital tools like databases, GIS mapping, and online archives can reconfigure the study of African religions and promote an inclusive comprehension of religious practices and traditions. It explores how digital technologies can amplify African voices and decolonise religious narratives while preserving indigenous epistemologies. This study de-centres Eurocentric epistemologies used to shape religious traditions by using and centring digital archives, oral traditions, and African digital innovations. This study will engage digital case study archives of African Independent churches/African Initiated churches and digital oral traditions of religious expressions across online digital platforms. It argues that digital humanities can foster collaboration and circulate knowledge among scholars and communities in the African religions. This study is interdisciplinary in nature. It creates a paradigm where technology and culture intersect to reshape the African religion.

**Burabari Sunday Deezea (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Port Harcourt, Nigeria)**

*Cybercrime and Spiritualism: The Intersections of Digital Fraud and
Occult Practices in Contemporary Nigeria*

This paper critically explores the complex intersection between cybercrime and spiritualism in contemporary Nigeria, with particular attention to the fusion of digital fraud and occult practices. It interrogates the socio-cultural, economic, and metaphysical dimensions underpinning the rise of "yahoo-yahoo" (internet fraud) and its ritualistic variant, often termed "yahoo plus." Drawing on ethnographic data, philosophical reflections, and media analyses, the study examines how digital fraud is increasingly sacralised through spiritual rituals and occult invocations, as perpetrators seek supernatural enhancement of deceit, protection, and wealth acquisition. This phenomenon reveals a deeper ontological crisis—where traditional religious cosmologies are appropriated and reconfigured to justify and facilitate cybercrime. The study argues that this fusion signals a re-enchantment of modernity, wherein technology and spiritualism coexist in a morally ambiguous landscape shaped by desperation, materialism, and the commodification of mystical power. Ultimately, the work invites a re-evaluation of ethical agency, spiritual belief systems, and the evolving nature of criminality in a digitally networked African society.

Charles E. Ekpo (Arthur Jarvis University, Akpabuyo, Nigeria)

*Researching the Unseen: A Netnographic Approach to Atheism
Research in Nigeria's Religious Landscape*

Nigeria is an overwhelmingly religious entity with over 95 per cent of its population identifying as adherents to Islam, Christianity, and traditional religions. Religiosity, therefore, plays a significant role

in demarcating social group identity based on creeds that have come to be acknowledged and normalised by the government as relics of national identity. Considering its religious density, therefore, identifying as atheists or non-believers is increasingly perceived as an abnormality that attracts stereotypes, condemnation, demonisation, and even physical assaults. Consequently, most atheists in Nigeria avoid openly embracing their identity for multiple layers of perceived and real dangers to their person. Hence, adopting conventional approaches for research on atheism becomes challenging as it is difficult to locate those who identify as atheist for physical surveys and interviews that may risk exposing their identity. For this limitation, some studies have depended on 'theists' as sources of primary data for atheist research or draw faulty conclusions from a few vocal atheists whose positions, such as those of these researchers, are imposed on the thousands of Nigerians who discreetly identify as atheists. In this paper, I draw from my experience from a recent netnographic field study on the drivers of atheist identity in Nigeria to examine the efficacy of netnography in researching atheism in Nigeria. I argue that, in an atmosphere where identifying as an atheist might be dangerous, netnography can connect researchers with valuable targets since it gives them control over identity disclosure and other sensitivities that could boost their confidence, thereby enhancing the quality of the information they share.

David Andrew Omona (Uganda Christian University)

Ethical Frameworks for Digital Technologies in the Study and Representation of African Religions

The introduction of digital tools in teaching and learning has greatly improved people's access to research resources in recent years. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has boosted this approach to learning and education. However, as digital technologies

increasingly influence research methods and cultural expression, the study of African religions encounters new ethical challenges and opportunities. This paper, using a non-empirical desk research qualitative approach, explores the ethical frameworks guiding the use of digital tools, such as AI, databases, social media, and virtual reality, in documenting, analysing, and sharing African religious traditions. The paper argues that, while digital platforms provide innovative ways for preservation and global engagement, they also risk commodifying sacred practices, removing contextual nuances, and reinforcing colonial epistemologies. By engaging with African philosophical thought, indigenous knowledge systems, and global digital ethics, this study proposes a decolonial and community-focused ethical model for digital scholarship. It supports participatory approaches that uphold ritual privacy, cultural sovereignty, and the living nature of African religious expressions. Ultimately, the paper argues that ethical digital engagement should go beyond data extraction toward reciprocal, respectful, and locally centred partnerships in research and representation.

Enyioma E. Nwosu (University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria) & Goka M. Mpigi (Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria)

Artificial Intelligence, Morality and Religious Life of the Contemporary Ngwa and Ogoni, Nigeria

Now, globally, we witness an intense shift in human relationships with morality and religion. Such is mostly caused by radical scientific and technological change in artificial intelligence, otherwise AI. Africa's religious life suffers the digital technologies more. This paper overviews some religious, ethical and traditional developments affected by robotics. The aim of this research, *Morality and Religious Life of Contemporary Ngwa and Ogoni of Nigeria*, is to explore the influence of Artificial Intelligence on morality and religion. From three main objectives: analysing the contributions of AI, examining implications on the religious and

moral life of the Ngwa and Ogoni as a research area, and investigating expressed norms like love, good life and unity, findable within the people's daily religio-moral activities. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the literary method involves a synthesis of scholarly literature from science and technology, religion and ethics, mainly moral philosophy. Findings reveal the complex interaction of modernity and technological scientism, shaping the contemporary Ngwa and Ogoni landscape of morality and religiosity. Despite the challenges posed to moral values and religious life by scientism, there is the belief that AI is contributing to happiness, yet religious morality cannot be completely overtaken. Contextually presenting some ethical framework signifying potential reimagining and exploration of uniting moral values of love, good life and unity, such as others cannot easily be obtained from robotics. In conclusion, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship found in scientific, moral and religious life from Ngwa and Ogoni representing Nigerian grassroots, shedding light on the transformative process reshaping humanity's religious and moral living. Contribution-wise, this study provides a deeper understanding of the changing dynamics of modern religiosity and morality. This project provides an insightful comparative analysis of the irreplaceability by robotics of some human societal values of love, good life and unity. Conversely, AI helps but hardly replaces nature.

Erna Oliver and Willem Oliver (University of South Africa)

Rhizomatic Learning as an Alternative Open Distance Learning Model: A New Direction for the Study of Religions in Africa

Currently, humankind is finding itself in more than one era simultaneously. Some scholars focus on the Fourth Industrial Revolution, while educators discuss Education 4.0 and Learning 3.0 with each other. These are complemented by artificial intelligence and educational (serious) games, among others.

Above all, we are living in Africa with our own diverse but unique cultures, traditions, and philosophies. Although many educators on our continent, and specifically in South Africa, take note of all these eras, they are reluctant to apply them in their teaching and learning. With this presentation, we wish to motivate educators, specifically in religion studies and theology, to rethink the way in which they teach their students, especially in an open distance institution like UNISA. We want to motivate you to become HEROEes (highly empowered resourceful online educators), people who are really thinking like 21st-century African people, people who are pioneers on the new educational path that should be taken by institutions of higher education in Africa.

Jameel James Asani (University of Johannesburg)

Faith, Identity, and Resilience: Reimagining Malawian Muslim Migrants' Experiences through the Lens of African Digital Humanities

This paper explores the lived experiences of Malawian Muslim migrants in post-apartheid Johannesburg, focusing on how Islamic religious traditions, community networks (Ummah), and economic strategies intersect to shape their survival and identity. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Talal Asad's concept of Islam as a discursive tradition and Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus and social capital, the study highlights how religion functions as both a spiritual anchor and a practical resource in navigating migration-related challenges such as xenophobia, economic marginalisation, and spatial exclusion. Aligned with the conference theme of reimagining the study of religions through the African Digital Humanities, this paper considers how digital methodologies can deepen our understanding of migrant religious identities and transnational faith practices. It proposes the use of digital tools—such as mapping diasporic networks, digitising oral narratives, and creating virtual ethnographies—to document and analyse the interplay between religion, migration, and resilience

among African Muslim communities. By integrating these approaches, the paper contributes to broader conversations on decolonising religious studies and amplifying African epistemologies within digital scholarship. The findings suggest that the intersection of religion and migration offers rich terrain for innovative digital engagement, especially in capturing the fluidity of religious identity and the socio-economic adaptations of migrant populations. This approach not only enriches academic discourse but also supports community-based knowledge preservation and participatory research methodologies relevant to the African context.

James Ndlovu (Durban University of Technology)

Social-Media Mediations of Worship, Authority, and Community in Southern African Pentecostalism

Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa have migrated prayer, prophecy, and social outreach onto Facebook Live, WhatsApp broadcasts, Instagram Reels, and, increasingly, TikTok, yet scholarly attention to these digitally mediated practices lags behind the rich analyses of West and Central African contexts. Building on “third space” theories of digital religion that locate devotion at the fluid intersection of on and offline worlds and on emerging debates about algorithmic reconfigurations of religion, this study offers a cross-national, multi-platform investigation of how Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa use social-media ecologies to connect dispersed believers, conduct worship and mobilise civic action. Framed by system-dynamics perspectives on organisational technology adoption and church-driven development models, the research asks: How do social-media affordances enable new forms of Pentecostal community, ritual and transnational belonging? In what ways do digitally mediated practices renegotiate prophetic authority and congregant identity? And what organisational logics shape congregations’ uptake or rejection of specific platforms? Methodologically, the project

deploys a mixed-methods digital ethnography that triangulates discourse analysis of Facebook posts, TikTok videos, and WhatsApp broadcasts, attentive to faith-language practice, and forty semi-structured interviews with pastors, youth leaders, and media-team members, probing perceptions of authenticity, charisma, risk, and governance. Preliminary findings suggest that algorithm-optimised livestreams democratise participation while intensifying “brand-prophet” economies, and that cross-platform storytelling fosters diaspora belonging without believing. By integrating insights from studies of mobile-phone mobilisation, the paper fills a critical gap between single-church snapshots and continental generalisations. It seeks to deliver three contributions: an original empirical dataset on Southern African Pentecostal digital praxis; a theoretical synthesis linking third space, bounded-automation, and system-dynamics lenses to explain shifting prophetic legitimacy; and a reflexive methodological blueprint for scholars who seek to combine corpus linguistics, network metrics, and ethnography in volatile virtual congregational fields. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that social-media ecologies simultaneously democratise and discipline Pentecostals, raising pertinent questions about authority, identity and community that are vital for researchers of African religious traditions.

John Ostrowick (Independent Scholar)

Just Believing: Social Media, Default-Truth, Fake News and Faith.

People tend to uncritically accept and repeat information encountered within their social circles. This predisposition is what Levine calls the Truth-Default position. Furthermore, as articulated by Kahneman, people make quick judgments of truth using preexisting biases and heuristics (System-1 thinking), rather than carefully considering the evidence (System-2 thinking). These belief choices are encouraged by social dynamics, where reciting shared beliefs reinforces group identity. Social media platforms exacerbate this effect by creating media bubbles that filter and

amplify content aligned with users' existing beliefs, and which limit the range of beliefs that group members are exposed to. These algorithms prioritise engagement over accuracy, allowing unchecked dissemination of beliefs regardless of their factual content. This sharing of beliefs further entrenches narratives, contributing to the spread of misinformation, divisiveness, polarisation, and conspiracy theories. This phenomenon also parallels the mechanisms through which religions and other social groups are maintained and propagated. Thus, people profess beliefs not because they are evidence-based, but rather because they wish to declare group membership, as we see in religion.

Mogomotsi Jaba (University of the Free State)

A Cyberreligious Approach to John Mbiti's Concept of Time

Despite its age, John Mbiti's concept of African time contains two crucial assumptions that continue to elicit intense disputes among scholars. First, Mbiti argues that African time is fundamentally two-dimensional, consisting solely of the past and present. Second, he contends that African time lacks a future dimension. Most researchers, however, dispute his claims. For example, he is criticised for his division of time into two distinct dimensions. These critics argue that the separation of time contradicts African cosmology, which argues that all components of the African worldview are interconnected. In this paper, I employ a desktop approach and an analytical conceptual framework to carry out two tasks. First, I defend Mbiti's concept of time against his critics, using four-dimensional frameworks such as "the growing block" and the "moving spotlight" frameworks. The "growing block" framework, for instance, validates and refines Mbiti's time by establishing that only the past and present exist, rejecting the existence of the future. Furthermore, utilising four-dimensional frameworks enables me to firmly establish Mbiti's concept of time within the context of cyberreligion, a pursuit that,

to the best of my knowledge, has not been previously undertaken. In this way, I am also modifying Mbiti's time concept. This modification considers recent technological breakthroughs, such as the internet and GPS, which rely on the incorporation of four-dimensional coordinates to improve modern living experiences. This paper contributes to the study of religions within African digital humanities.

Olatundun A. Oderinde (Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria), Elijah R. Ashafa (Cokwills College of Education, Ifako, Lagos, Nigeria), & Jonah O. Adeniran (Cokwills College of Education, Ifako, Lagos, Nigeria)

Cyber-Prophets and Digital Pentecostalism: The Rise of Internet-Based Ministries in Africa

The world has become a virtual village. This has affected nearly all areas of human existence, from communication and commerce to religion. The digital world has dramatically influenced the reach and spread of Christianity. The development of Pentecostalism, the fastest-growing brand of Christianity in Africa, has been one of the most significant religious growths of the 21st century. As African societies become increasingly digital, so too have their religious expressions. There is, however, the challenge of maintaining pastoral accountability and adequate spiritual oversight in virtual spaces. The average faith seeker is confused by multiple counsels regarding a particular subject of faith due to divergent counsel from various cyber prophets/pastors. This paper, therefore, examines the rise of internet-based ministries within African Pentecostalism, with particular focus on the emergence of "cyber-prophets." It explores how African Pentecostal leaders leverage digital technologies to spread messages, build communities, and assert spiritual authority. This is done by engaging technological, sociological and theological methods. Case studies from Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe illustrate the phenomenon's complexity and impact. It is revealed that while

Cyber-prophets claim direct revelation from God, facilitated digitally to their followers, their activities are not in tandem with conventional church structures but in perceived spiritual power and digital charisma. The paper concludes that the rise of cyber-prophets and digital Pentecostalism in Africa shows a significant shift in religious practice and leadership. While these movements bring innovation and accessibility, they raise profound theological and ethical questions. It is recommended that theological education in Africa should include digital literacy, develop ecclesiastical frameworks for online ministry accountability, promote a balance between online engagement and physical community, and conduct further research on the long-term spiritual formation of digital congregants.

Olawale Amos Oyatoki (Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria)

Digital Faith in Motion: Social Media, Religious Communities, and Shifting Religious Identities in Africa within the Digital Humanities

The rapid growth of digital technologies across Africa has significantly reshaped how religious communities connect, worship, and mobilise. This transformation aligns with the broader academic imperative to reimagine the study of religions within the African digital humanities. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram have become critical tools through which African Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of Indigenous religions engage in religious expression, communal bonding, and socio-political mobilisation. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this digital shift, fostering online worship services, digital evangelism, and virtual religious gatherings. However, the rise of digital religious spaces also raises complex questions about religious authority, authenticity, and identity. Traditional religious leaders find their influence challenged by new digital influencers and charismatic online personalities

whose reach transcends geographical boundaries. Additionally, online platforms facilitate the emergence of hybrid religious identities, often blending global religious expressions with local African cultural elements. This paper explores three interrelated questions: (1) How are religious communities in Africa using social media to connect, worship, and mobilise? (2) What are the implications of digital spaces for religious authority and identity in Africa? (3) How can these dynamics be studied within the framework of African digital humanities? Using recent case studies from Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, the paper critically examines how digital platforms both reinforce and disrupt established religious norms. The study draws on interdisciplinary approaches, including media studies, religious studies, and digital anthropology, to propose new methodological pathways for the study of African religions in the digital age. The findings demonstrate that social media not only extends the reach of religious communities but also reshapes the meanings of faith, authority, and belonging in ways that challenge traditional paradigms.

Reggemore Marongedze (University of Zimbabwe)

Digital Spirits and Networked Faiths: Reimagining African Religious Landscapes through Digital Humanities

This paper interrogates the relational symbiosis between religion and digitality in Africa through the lens of Digital Humanities (DH) and African Digital Humanities (ADH), exploring how digital technologies reshape spirituality, authority and community. Focusing on social media worship, AI-driven spiritual tools, and religious mobile applications, the study examines digital platforms as sites of both innovation and contestation; challenging hierarchical religious structures, fostering new leadership (such as "theologians" and "faith memes") and redefining belonging in virtual spaces post-COVID-19. It highlights ADH's potential to centre African worldview and ethos, resist Eurocentric biases and

address digital inequalities through participatory archives and localised tools, while critically engaging ethical dilemmas like the commodification of spirituality and AI's role in prayer. Synthesising digital ethnography and theoretical merits and pitfalls from Campbell, Cheong and Helland's views, the paper advocates for an Afrocentric DH praxis that amplifies African voices and interrogates power dynamics in technological adoption. By bridging theory and case studies, the paper explores how African religions can expand DH methodologies in the quest to unmask subtleties, pleasures and potentials of Digital Religion or Digital Religious Studies or Religious Digitality or Digital Religion Scholarship, Lived Religion in Digital Space or Religious Communication Scholarship, offering pathways for inclusive, ethically grounded research in the study of digital religion.

Sigamoney, Rosalind (University of South Africa)

Faith in the Feed: Social Media, Authority, and Identity in Contemporary African Religions

This study explores the dynamic intersection of social media, religious authority, and identity formation within contemporary African religious landscapes. As digital platforms increasingly permeate everyday life across Africa, they have become pivotal spaces where religious beliefs, practices, and leadership are negotiated, contested, and transformed. Drawing on ethnographic research and case studies from diverse African contexts, this paper examines how faith communities engage with social media to assert religious authority and construct collective and individual identities. It highlights the ways religious leaders harness platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp to extend their influence beyond traditional congregational settings, often redefining notions of charisma and legitimacy in digital spaces. Simultaneously, followers employ these tools to shape personalised expressions of faith, challenge orthodoxies, and foster new forms of belonging that transcend geographic and

denominational boundaries. The research also interrogates the tensions arising from online religious engagements, including conflicts over authenticity, the commercialisation of spirituality, and the politics of visibility. By situating social media as both a tool and a contested site of religious practice, the paper sheds light on how contemporary African religious identities are continuously produced and reshaped in a rapidly digitalising world. Ultimately, this work contributes to broader discussions on religion and modernity, emphasising the importance of digital technologies in the evolution of religious authority and identity in Africa.

Simesihle Ngubane (University of South Africa)

The influence of digital technologies on Pentecostals in South Africa: An examination of challenges and opportunities

This article will analyse the impact of digital technologies on the faith practices of Pentecostals in South Africa, encompassing their beliefs, worship practices, and community engagements. South African Pentecostalism, characterised by its vibrant spirituality, prophetic ministry, and emphasis on personal transformation, has increasingly embraced digital resources such as social media, livestreaming, WhatsApp, and mobile donating apps. These technologies have enabled churches to engage a broader audience, particularly urban youth and individuals residing abroad, while facilitating participation through online sermons, virtual deliverance sessions, and digital consultation. The research illustrates how spiritual leaders utilise digital tools to assert spiritual authority and cultivate influential online personas, thereby altering the dynamics between pastors and their congregations. It also examines issues such as the proliferation of uncontrolled content, the potential commercialisation of spiritual experiences, and the fragmentation of theological discourse. The article contends that digital technologies are not merely augmenting Pentecostal practices in South Africa; they are transforming the expression, experience, and organisation of faith

in the digital era. This article will examine the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and digitalisation on African neo-Pentecostalism, particularly contemporary developments in religious activities within the 4IR that emphasise the human condition and the humanity of marginalised individuals in South Africa. The article for this paper will be obtained from the literature and observations of online religious platforms. This paper employs a comprehensive data analysis technique that considers all acquired data as meaningful, with no reduction applied.

Susan Kemigisha (Atlantic International University)

A Critical Examination of African Initiated Churches' Digital Presence and Its Implications for Religious Studies

African Initiated Churches (AICs) have played a significant role in shaping African Christianity, yet their digital presence remains understudied. As digital humanities continues to shape the field of religious studies, it is essential to examine how AICs are represented online and how digital archives can be decolonised to amplify African voices and knowledge systems. This research aims to critically examine the digital presence of AICs and explore how digital archives can be decolonised to promote a more inclusive study of African religions. The study seeks to answer: How do AICs utilise digital platforms to represent their beliefs and practices, and what are the implications for decolonising digital archives in religious studies? This study employs a critical digital humanities approach, combining qualitative content analysis of AICs' digital platforms (websites, social media, and online liturgies) with interviews of AIC leaders and members. The research also draws on decolonial theory to analyse the power dynamics of digital representation and its impact on African knowledge systems. Preliminary findings suggest that AICs are actively utilising digital platforms to promote their beliefs and practices, but these efforts are often marginalised in mainstream digital archives. The study highlights the need for decolonising digital archives to amplify

African voices and knowledge systems. This research contributes to a more inclusive and decolonial study of African religions in the digital age. The findings have implications for the development of digital archives that prioritise African perspectives and knowledge systems, promoting a more nuanced understanding of African Christianity and its diverse expressions.

Tahir Fuzile Sitoto (University of KwaZulu-Natal)

Digital Turn – Curse or Baraka: The Making or Unmaking of the Black African Muslim ‘Community’ in South Africa?

The conference theme and sub-themes proposed for the 46th ASRSA congress is premised on celebrating the digital turn. Digital ‘technologies and tools’ in their multiplicity are taken as an opportunity to ‘reimagine the study of Religions within African Digital Humanities.’ The implicit logic is that the digital has the potential to either augment, advance or ‘transform’ the study of religion/s in Africa. On the contrary, as hinted in my title ‘Digital Turn – Curse or Baraka?’ – the proposed paper questions the logic of an uncritical affirmation and celebration of the digital. As a data paper draws on trends and trajectories gathered from digital media platforms through a sample of Black African Muslim personalities and initiatives. As an approach, the ontological and epistemological questions are deliberately blurred to facilitate a focused exploration of how Black African Muslims’ self-making and ways of being Muslim are unfolding. That is, independent of customary patronage of Asian Muslim communities considered ‘official custodians’ of Islam in South Africa. By ‘ontological’ my reference is to Islam as embodied in what is generalised as Black African Muslim communities as ‘a community’ in both the metaphoric sense and lived experiences. And by epistemological, I refer to how on one level the paper has a self-reflexive posture which turn inwards to intra-Black African Muslim discourses of self-making. Thus, while I acknowledge how digital technologies no doubt helps to make an otherwise ‘invisible’ community

‘visible,’ however, questions arise: what are the penalties of attaining visibility? And to what extent does digital baraka outweigh the negative or downside of the digital age?

Telesia Musili (University of Nairobi)

Emerging Shifts in Digital Ethnography within Virtual Religious Communities

Digital methods in research gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, as lockdowns limited mobility, forcing ethnographers to adapt their participant observations to digital spaces. The pandemic prompted an increased interest in the use of digital ethnography as a qualitative research approach to explore in-depth socio-religious experiences and practices in the digital spaces. Digital technologies have pervasively and increasingly shaped how we interact, behave, think, and communicate as religious congregants, ministers, and scholars. The focus of this chapter is the sudden incorporation of digital ethnography in the study of virtual religion. The experiential qualitative data gathered by the researcher during a broader investigation into the African value of communalism and religious experiences amid COVID-19 at Nomiya Church, Eastleigh (NCE), Nairobi, will be analysed to highlight the inherent shifts in conducting digital ethnographic research within religious virtual spaces. The paper adopts the concept of transformational fluidity to understand these shifts, drawing insights from digital studies of religion by renowned scholars. The concept of transformational fluidity is developed from these insights, which emerge from the uncertainty that arises when performing life in a new space. The uncertainty surrounding people’s identity and the maintenance of their religiosity and spirituality laid the groundwork for the fluidity that would become a defining transformation. Major methodological, technical, and theoretical themes related to the shifting space-time research field and the role of the researcher as a mere phenomenologist, as well as emerging ethical issues, will

be highlighted to inform the future of digital religious ethnography. It is thus argued that understanding religious interactions in an increasingly digitalized space is unimaginable without considering the shifts in online ethnography.

Tristán Kapp (University of Pretoria)

The Afrikaner “Exodus”: MAGA Conspiritoriality, Digital Racism, and Religious Nationalism on South African Social Media

This paper explores how digital technologies reshape religious beliefs, communities, and discourses in South Africa, with a particular focus on the rise of algorithmic conspiritoriality—the fusion of conspiracy thinking, spirituality, and artificial intelligence. In the current digital era, social media platforms, such as TikTok, Facebook, and X, have moved beyond merely connecting individuals across borders. They have become battlegrounds for ideological propaganda, disinformation, and the global spread of religiously coded racism and White nationalism. Focusing on the rise of the so-called Afrikaner “Exodus”—a mythologised narrative of white South Africans equating themselves with the Biblical Israel, seeking asylum abroad due to alleged persecution—this study traces how MAGA-era Christian nationalism, disinformation, and digital racism shape religious and racial identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

At the centre of this phenomenon is the influence of the US-based MAGA movement’s Christian nationalism, amplified through algorithmically curated platforms that favour sensational, conservative, and anti-intellectualist content (see Hofstadter, 1962), portraying Afrikaners as a persecuted minority (see Roets, 2018). This convergence becomes especially salient when viewed through the lens of South African digital culture, where, for example, figures like Helgard Müller, author of *President Donald J. Trump, The Son of Man - The Christ* (2022)—sacralises political power within messianic Christian frameworks. Such narratives

contribute to a broader theological misinformation ecology rooted in conservative right-wing populism (see Scharnick-Udemans, 2017) and Christofascism (Reyes, 2021; Foertsch Pieper, 2023). The paper thus further interrogates how the “white genocide” conspiracy theory (Falkof, 2023), popularised in discussions around farm murders and bolstered by Afrikaner lobby groups like AfriForum, Solidariteit, VF+, and Die Vryburger Beweging, reimagines Afrikaner whiteness as persecuted sanctity (see Roets, 2018; Gravett, 2025). Platforms such as X—particularly under the ownership of ex-South African, Elon Musk—have become fertile grounds for digital racism, apartheid nostalgia, and theological whiteness (see Van der Westhuizen, 2018; Van der Westhuizen & Hunter, 2022 cf. Falkof, 2025). This paper subsequently examines how these ideologies are algorithmically reinforced by AI models that privilege “hate farming” over accuracy and outrage over nuance.

By employing digital ethnography, this study analyses the role of Christian nationalist conspirituality in cultivating a South African digital landscape that privileges Eurocentric religious narratives and anti-intellectualist populism. By framing these developments through the theoretical lenses of conspirituality (Ward & Voas, 2011) and algorithmic conspirituality (Kanthwala et al., 2023), this study contributes to understanding how religion, race, and AI intersect in the formation of the digital public in post-apartheid South Africa.

Tsitsidzashe Bvute (Independent Scholar)

Navigating Religion and Economy: Digital Platforms and Pentecostal Transnationalism in Zimbabwe’s Cross-Border Trade

This study explores the transformative impact of digital technologies on African religious life, focusing on how these technologies shape religious beliefs, practices, and communities (Zaenur, 2025; Orogun and Pillay, 2023). Grounded in qualitative

research, framed by Bourdieu's theory of habitus and field (Bourdieu, 1977) and Scott's concept of everyday resistance (Scott, 1985), this study investigates how digital platforms mediate religious agency and social economy survival strategies among Zimbabwean cross-border traders. This study employs a hybrid ethnographic methodology (Gusterson, 2008). This research highlights the role of digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and other social media platforms and online worship services in facilitating religious participation, fostering transnational connections, and redefining traditional religious practices (Mattes and Novak, 2025). This study uses elements of grounded theory techniques (open, axial, and selective coding) to analyse how technologies such as social media and mobile apps facilitate transnational worship, prosperity gospel dissemination, and informal economic networks. Key findings revealed that digital technologies enable believers to maintain spiritual continuity amid mobility, access religious teachings remotely, and form virtual communities that transcend geographical boundaries. These technologies also amplify the influence of prosperity theology, as pastors and congregants leverage digital tools for fundraising, prayer requests, and entrepreneurial activities (Peters, Haskamp, and Albizri, 2021). However, this study also uncovered challenges, including the commodification of faith, the spread of misinformation, and the erosion of face-to-face communal worship (Sipeyiye, 2025; Roberts and Maharaj, 2024). By analysing these dynamics, this study contributes to the broader discussions on the digitalisation of religion in Africa, demonstrating how technology both sustains and transforms religious life. These findings suggest the need for research on the ethical implications of digital religious practices and their long-term effects on African spirituality and community cohesion.

Zahraa McDonald (University of Johannesburg)

Supervising Studies in Religion in the context of artificial intelligence and implications for ethical provisions

The presence of artificial intelligence applications is disrupting how the learning process has been understood. Mechanisms to support learning should thus be experienced in a myriad of different ways. One such mechanism is postgraduate supervision. This paper interrogates what it means to supervise Studies in Religion in the context of artificial intelligence. The paper is a reflexive auto-ethnography that engages with the intellectual and emotional reactions I have experienced while engaging with students' work, who I believe to have used artificial intelligence, and an examination outcome impacted by the alleged use of AI. I start by engaging with the question of identification and move to discuss three situations. After a discussion of the common threads linking the situations, I comment on the implications for ethical engagement with AI and how different stakeholders in the supervision chain might want to enhance dialogue about them.

Panel & Roundtable Abstracts

**Cherry Muslim (Chair); Lauren Matthew; Azraa Ebrahim;
Chukwudera Nwodo**

Panel: Contested Terrains: Gender, Decoloniality, and Voice in the Digital Humanities of Religion

This panel explores how digital platforms are reshaping religious authority, identity, and cultural memory across diverse African and diasporic contexts. Each paper critically engages with digital archives, media, and networks as contested terrains where marginalised voices, including women, queer Christians, and minoritised language communities, claim, reclaim, or challenge normative discourse. Drawing from feminist, decolonial, intersectional, and queer theories, the panel reflects on how digital tools and online platforms become sites for both resistance and re-inscription of religious norms. From the emergence of female-led khutbahs preserved in online archives, to the urgent digitisation of endangered languages such as Igbo in service of cultural and spiritual survival, to religious authorities and community adjudication moving online over gendered debates in the social media spaces, to radical queer theological engagements with Christian doctrine via digital texts, the panel maps the complex and often contradictory implications of the digital for religious thought, authority, and community. By placing these diverse contexts into conversation, the panel argues for a reorientation of Digital Humanities scholarship to include oral, performative, affective, and politically situated religious expressions, particularly from the Global South. The papers collectively contribute to an expanded, ethical, decolonial Digital Humanities of Religion that centres lived experience, plurality, and epistemic justice.

Federico Settler (Chair), David Elliot, Thobeka Khubisa, Georgina Giorno and Minki Fela

Panel: Digital Humanities and Emergent Critical Research Methodologies in Religion

In this panel, a group of UKZN doctoral researchers will explore the various ways that the digital humanities have informed their research methodologies (Contractor and Shakkur 2015), ethical choices, and consider the extent to which this has restricted or opened up new archives and registers in the study of religion (Campbell 2012). They also consider how new technologies obscure and sanitise histories of racism (Benjamin 2019). They ask to what extent it might domesticate or constrain critical research methodologies in postcolonial contexts (Sundaram 2022). In each of these doctoral trajectories, very novel questions have emerged around digital technologies, philosophies of science and research methods in religion. In this panel, these researchers will share their experiences and raise necessary provocations about the critical questions: David Elliot: Digital Church Archives in SA and England – Containers of Coloniality? Thobeka Khubisa: The limits and prospects of using digital research methods in African religious contexts; Georgina Giorno: Mapping Digital Research Methods for my doctoral research on Fundamentalisms in South Africa; and Minki Fela: Explorations in Race, Religion and the Obstetric Violence “after technology”.

Luvoyo Dondolo, Annaliese Mehnert, Joel Mokhoathi, Chitja Twala, Lindiwe Khuzwayo (Chair)

Panel: Digitally Archiving African heritage: Opportunities and obstacles

This panel will look at key questions that face researchers involved in the digital archiving of African heritage, including what we would call the religious aspects of that heritage today. Who owns that

heritage? What are the implications of the colonial organisation of that heritage? What are the political and ethical issues at play in the ongoing management of that heritage? These are some of the critical questions that will be dealt with by the three panellists involved. The panellists will speak to three interrelated themes:

Whose knowledge is it? (Joel Mokhoathi) - Much of the scholarly work and historical records on the African heritage, whether tangible or intangible, have been documented and archived by institutions that did not produce such knowledge. Most of these institutions, whether libraries, museums or heritage sites, are often owned by government or private entities that deny access to the common populace without costly subscriptions to such knowledge, which they helped to produce as primary custodians. This scholastic tendency necessitates the critical enquiry of knowledge ownership, as to whose knowledge it is. Is it that of the custodian, who produced it, or that of the entity that archives it? If it belongs to the custodians, then the entitlements of knowledge ownership should benefit the custodian more than the entity that archives it. But if it belongs to the entity that archives it, then such knowledge should not be presented as representing the interests and realities of the custodians. The two cannot be reconciled unless the custodian and the archivist have equal rights and accreditation to the knowledge. This paper focuses on these intricate dispositions of ownership and accessibility of knowledge.

Anthropological collections in the South African context: What challenges are inherent in curation, digitisation, and online publication? (Anneliese Mehnert) - South African museums and galleries exhibit and store vast anthropological collections. These collections are not regularly digitised and placed online, whether as a research activity or as educational resources. There are various reasons for this: how these collections were collected during the colonial and apartheid period, the challenges in dealing with ritual and religious objects, and the management structures

of museums and galleries. Using data from my PhD research, this presentation will unpack some of the challenges inherent in the digitisation and online publication of anthropological collections in South Africa and highlight the importance and value of the ongoing curation of these collections within South African museums.

The politics of digitalisation (Luvoyo Dondolo and Chitja Twala)
In South Africa, while some cultural institutions are at different stages of digitalising their collections, heritage objects and other aspects of heritage, others have not started with digitalisation for one reason or another. The politics of digitalisation of African heritage are also experienced in some cultural institutions. We explore the complexity of digitalisation of African heritage, including liberation history and heritage, within the contours of heritage management and knowledge generation. We venture into this by focusing on cultural institutions such as the Apartheid Museum, Robben Island Museum and Amathole Museum.

Shaheed Mathee, Cherry Muslim, Nabil Yasien Mohamed, Shoayb Ahmed, Auwais Rafudeen (Chair)

Panel: AI and Islam: Prospects and Challenges

This panel will explore three specific themes relating to AI and Islam, showing both the opportunities and challenges AI presents to Islamic scholarship.

The first theme focuses on the digital archiving of Islamic manuscripts. Two presenters, Shaheed Mathee and Cherry Muslim, will speak to this theme. Mathee: While the digital archiving of Islamic manuscripts in West Africa has been ongoing for more than two decades, the specific application of AI to such archiving presents further opportunities for accelerating digitalisation, making these manuscripts more widely accessible. However, this theme will also look at the technical and cultural

challenges that might impede this acceleration. Muslim: The Italian/Sicilian foundation FSCIRE (Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose) plays a significant role in digitally archiving Islamic texts and knowledge as part of its broader focus on religious sciences. Their contributions to Islam in the Digital Humanities are primarily realised through their Digital Library of Islam (DLI) and Alcazar project, which are central to preserving and disseminating Islamic intellectual heritage in a digitised, accessible, and scholarly format. They are also acutely aware of the impact of AI and have partnered with relevant associations to exploit the potential of big data analysis and deep learning in their work. This presentation explores how FSCIRE's digital archiving of Islamic texts offers methodological and ethical frameworks for scholars and archivists in Southern Africa. It examines how such practices can support a decolonial, participatory, and digitally literate study of Islam that bridges Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

The second theme (Nabil Yasien Mohamed) focuses on transhumanism and the ethical challenges this concept presents to classical Islamic thinking. How does the Islamic legacy respond to singularity and its merger of machine and human being? What are its implications for the traditional view of the human being in Islam, which typically is rooted in the concept of a non-material soul? Or are there ways of thinking through the classical legacy which intersect with AI futurology?

The third theme (Shoayb Ahmed) deals with Islamic legal opinions (fatwa) in the age of AI and the challenges and opportunities this represents. On the positive side, AI creates massive data banks, allowing questioners quick and easy access to applicable responses. This is important as the number of legal queries typically outweighs the capacity of the qualified legal opinion provider (mufti) to respond to them. On the negative side, automated responses are not as sensitive to context as an actual

person and may miss a vital dimension of the fatwa-providing process.

Shoayb Ahmed, Thulani Langa, Garth Mason, Joel Mokhoathi, Sepetla Molapo, Auwais Rafudeen, Johan Strijdom and Denzil Chetty (Chair)

Roundtable: Images, Games and Robots: Technology in the Study of Religion

During 2025, our departmental book club held a series of readings in three areas: digital humanities (DH), gamification, and robotics. We have now covered the readings in DH and gamification. Amongst others, our topics within DH centred around issues such as its potential to archive heritage, the possibilities it offers in visualising knowledge and reality, the role of affective knowledge in DH, as well as, naturally, the critique of DH itself, especially from an African Digital Humanities perspective. In gamification, which has become increasingly important given the radical rethinking of traditional assessments forced by the development of Large Language Models, we were able to discuss the principles, mechanics and techniques underlying effective game design, note the theoretical models that inform gamification in education, as well as study and consider practical applications of gamification in a teaching context. While we are yet to start our readings on robotics at the time of writing this abstract, it will undoubtedly deal with the practical consequences and ethical challenges of this form of technology, especially as it relates to our discipline.

We have indeed approached these areas as scholars in Religious Studies, seeking to consider their implications for our field as a whole. However, we naturally also have differing interests and specialisations; thus, some issues are more pertinent at an individual level than others. In this panel, members of our

department will reflect on both these general and particular aspects, with their presentations responding to two questions:

- What do the developments in DH, gamification and robotics imply for the future trajectory of Religious Studies?
- What do these developments suggest for our individual specialisations in the discipline?

General Guidelines for Presenters at the Hybrid Conference

To ensure the smooth running of the hybrid conference (in-person and virtual), all presenters are requested to adhere to the following guidelines:

Submission of Presentations

- All presentations must be emailed before the conference to CHS-ADH@unisa.ac.za.
- Please ensure your presentation file is finalised and submitted on time to avoid delays.

Virtual Presenters

- Take note of the MS Teams link provided for your session. You are required to join your session using this link only.
- Be punctual. Join your session on time to avoid disruptions.
- Ensure you have good lighting, a functional camera, and a quality microphone/speaker setup for clear video and sound.
- A stable internet connection is essential; test your connection before your presentation.

Time Management

- All presenters must manage their allocated time carefully.
- Please note that time will be reserved for questions at the end of each presentation, so plan accordingly.

In-Person Presenters

- Take careful note of the time allocated to your presentation, especially if you need to move between different panel sessions.
- Be ready at your designated time to ensure sessions remain on schedule.

Equipment and Technical Readiness

- In-person presenters must bring their own laptops for presentations.
- Please carry the necessary adaptors for projectors (e.g., USB-C to HDMI/VGA, etc.) to ensure compatibility with venue equipment.
- It is advisable to have your presentation also available on a USB drive as a backup.
- Virtual presenters should test their devices (laptop, headset, camera) before their session to ensure everything functions smoothly.
- If you are unsure about your connectivity stability, send a recording of your presentation to CHS-ADH@unisa.ac.za.

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