Refusal as method: Reading business ethics backwards from conquest to compliance

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Abstract

This article offers a radical rereading of business ethics in South Africa by proposing refusal as an ethical method and an epistemic stance. Taking a recent editorial's worry about a shortage of publishable manuscripts as a signal, it argues that the apparent quiet from African scholars is not disengagement but a choice: a refusal to perform legibility on pre-scripted terms. Reading the field backwards – from missionary schools to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) dashboards – the article traces how publishing standards, classroom habits, and review rubrics have come to reward clarity, composure, and tidy endings while sidelining grief, opacity, and interruption. Refusal is offered not as retreat, but as practice: honouring memory, withholding translation when translation distorts, and insisting on ethical sovereignty. Here, African thought is not context or case; it arrives as concept, setting questions and methods on its own terms. The article asks whether business ethics can learn to hear differently, and what changes in editorial criteria, teaching, and citation would be needed to make that possible. Refusal, in this framing, declines domestication, refuses to make pain palatable, and resists trading voice for recognition. It invites a field capacious enough for dissonance, opacity, and ancestral obligation – where cadence, pause, and address can carry argument. Refusal is not nihilism; it is the architecture for another kind of listening and a different future for the discipline. The wager is simple: if we change how we hear, we widen what can be thought, taught, and published.

1. Introduction

In a 2024 editorial marking two decades of the *African Journal of Business Ethics* (*AJoBE*), Radulovic and Eccles confront

a disquieting contradiction. Despite the journal's open-access model, continental focus, and global indexing, they admit: "we are struggling to get enough high-quality manuscripts. Really struggling" (Radulovic & Eccles, 2024:1). At first glance, this appears to be a technical issue – low submission rates, poor writing, or limited editorial capacity. But I read it differently. This is not a crisis of participation; it is a crisis of filtration. As Eccles (2021) notes, business ethics remains tethered to Eurocentric norms of coherence, civility, and genre. The very publishing architecture intended to include African thought may instead reproduce colonial criteria of legibility. I approach this editorial not as lament, but as invitation – a call to interrogate the moral infrastructure of academic recognition and the conditions under which ethics is permitted to speak. Azikiwe (1931) insisted African ethical thought must emerge from history, not abstraction – yet history remains framed as context, not theory.

To begin that reckoning, I propose that African scholarly silence not be interpreted as disengagement, but as refusal. Refusal, following Fanon (1961), is not withdrawal – it is a precise and moral 'no' to the conditions of recognition built on erasure. It is, as Glissant (1997) insists, the right to opacity, the refusal to be reduced to transparency for the comfort of institutional power. It is a form of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2011), and, as Martel (2017) argues, a refusal of interpellation that disrupts the grammar of identity imposed by colonial structures. Tuck and Yang (2014) frame refusal not as disengagement but as *"unbecoming"* the settler's ethical gaze. Harney and Moten (2013) describe it as fugitive planning – an insurgent method of thinking and theorising outside dominant logics. Refusal is not the absence of ethics. It is its reconstitution. In this article, I approach refusal not as reaction, but as method – as a grammar of authorship, not accommodation.

Publishing, as Sara Ahmed (2010) reminds us, is never neutral. It is an affective economy, a system that rewards composure, neatness, and procedural tone while penalising opacity, grief, and critique. What appears as poor structure or lack of rigour is often a refusal to perform within affective regimes coded by coloniality. Islam and Greenwood (2021) note that the business ethics field privileges narratives of resolution and institutional optimism. But African ethics – shaped by dispossession, spiritual resilience, and generational grief – often speak in opacity, repetition, and interruption. These are not stylistic failures; they are epistemic signals. As Glissant (1997) affirms, the demand for transparency is a colonial desire to convert opacity into knowability. The field's insistence on clarity often becomes a demand for domestication. Refusal to adhere to this stylistic palette is not unprofessional. It is a form of ethical authorship. A refusal to translate pain into procedural idioms, or to narrate grief in the language of civility, is not a retreat from theory. It is theory.

To situate this intervention, I trace business ethics not from its future ambitions but from its colonial past. What are now described as virtues – civility, rigour, composure – emerged not as ideals of dialogue but as tools of regulation. Fanon's ([1952]1986) "The Fact of Blackness", Manganyi's ([1973]2019) "burdened self", and Biko's (1978) resistance to liberal civility show that moral speech has always been policed by racialised logics

of tone and reason. Business ethics did not escape these histories – it helped encode them. What Mamdani (1996) calls the bifurcated colonial state produced not only legal exclusions but moral ones. In the post-apartheid moment, civility is reframed as professionalism, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) becomes the new mission school, and style replaces substance as the measure of thought. What remains unchanged is the demand that African ethics be legible only through frameworks it did not author. This article interrogates that demand and asks what becomes possible when it is refused.

Refusal, then, is not just a stance. It is a method of critique and creation. As Wiredu (1996), Gyekye (1997), and Oluwole (1992) argue, African ethics are not ethnographic anecdotes but systemic philosophies rooted in cosmology, relation, and obligation. They offer full ethical worlds, not supplements to Euro-American theory. Likewise, Islamic ethics, as Beekun and Badawi (2005) and Abeng (1997) show, is not a regional flavour of moral life, but a complex ontology grounded in trust (*amana*), justice (*adl*), and the collective (*ummah*). These traditions speak in vocabularies that often resist translation, not out of obscurity, but out of fidelity to their own metaphysical grounding. Refusal is the commitment not to dilute that grounding for the sake of acceptance. It insists: I will not perform legibility at the cost of voice. I will not transcribe memory into metrics. I will speak from rupture – not to be heard, but to honour what demands to be said.

Refusal also exposes the mechanisms of epistemic filtration embedded in the discipline. Djelic and Etchanchu (2017) trace how business ethics often rewards mimicry of Eurocentric forms – flattening dissent into dialogue, and critique into compliance. Nkomo (2011) reveals that African scholarship is frequently positioned as context, never canon. When manuscripts are rejected as 'too emotional', 'poorly structured', or 'unpublishable', we must ask: by what standard? And at what cost? Refusal, here, is not disengagement – it is a diagnostic. It reflects an unwillingness to allow one's ethical imagination to be judged through stylistic templates born from conquest. This article does not advocate for better compliance. It calls for rupture – where opacity, silence, and interruption are seen not as editorial liabilities but as ethical forms. I argue that refusal is not a retreat from knowledge production. It is a proposal for a different infrastructure of recognition.

This article proceeds genealogically, tracing how the moral infrastructure of colonialism shaped South African business ethics. Civility appears not as politeness but as discipline organised through settler conquest, statute, and missionary schooling, later refashioned as managerial decorum and postcolonial governance. I then develop refusal as method, drawing on Fanon, Hartman, Glissant, Manganyi, Tuck and Yang, and Moten to show how memory, opacity, and silence unsettle inherited ethical scripts. Next, I examine editorial practice, how citation, genre, and affect operate as filtration while masquerading as rigour. Finally, I sketch an editorial and pedagogical horizon where refusal is not misread as rejection but recognised as a grammar of ethical invention. Across these movements, refusal is held not as withdrawal but as offering: a disciplined 'no' that makes other obligations audible. The aim is not to negate business ethics, but to demand accountability to the worlds it claims to serve. The question is not how African ethics fits, but whether the field will listen otherwise.

2. Moral infrastructure of empire: Colonial grammar and business ethics in South Africa

The 2024 editorial by Radulovic and Eccles confronts a stark contradiction: although *AJoBE* pledges to publish work "from Africa, about Africa, and about Africa in relation to the rest of the world", it received only 65 submissions last year, with an 88% rejection rate, despite being open access, free of author fees, and globally indexed (Radulovic & Eccles, 2024:1). This is not a mere administrative glitch; it signals structure. Instead of blaming weak manuscripts or technological flux, a harder reading emerges: absence may be ethical refusal. Silence can function as misinterpellation – a refusal, in Martel's (2017) terms, to answer a negating call. A field still calibrated to colonial norms of tone, coherence, and civility renders African ethical registers illegible before they are heard. The question is not 'Where are the authors?' but 'What gates script audibility?'. If editorial ears are trained by civility's history, then 'quality' becomes a filter for docility, not a measure of thought, in scholarship and practice.

This inhospitability is not accidental. It is historically sedimented and structurally rewarded. As Radulovic and Eccles (2024) observe, African scholars are incentivised to publish in globally ranked journals, nearly all housed in the Global North and calibrated to Eurocentric epistemic registers (see also Eccles, 2021). Within this architecture, journals like *AJoBE* are positioned not as sites of theoretical innovation but as apprenticeships in academic decorum. Their concern with declining manuscript quality often obscures the broader truth: business ethics as a discipline was never neutral. Quijano's (2000) coloniality of power and Mbembe's (2001) analysis of the postcolony remind us that epistemic hierarchies are not accidental by-products of empire – they are its moral scaffolding. African ethics has not simply been excluded from the field; it has been structurally foreclosed at the level of abstraction. The central issue is not whether Africa possesses ethical systems, but whether the field has developed a grammar capacious enough to recognise them.

What is often read as an 'absence' of African scholars is not a deficit of ideas, but a refusal of imposed terms. Submission – procedural, stylistic, and affectively domesticated – remains the ethical gesture demanded for recognition. Eccles's (2021) invocation of Fanon's (1961) claim that "the native is declared insensible to ethics" remains structurally operative. African and Southern epistemologies continue to be framed as emotional rather than rational, contextual rather than theoretical, and disorderly rather than rigorous (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Mignolo, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2007). As Borgerson (2001) argues, drawing on Gordon, ethics must be grounded in the lived realities of marginalisation and refusal; otherwise, business ethics risks collapsing into abstract moralism unmoored from justice. Publishing is shaped not only by what is said but how it is said – civility, as Ahmed (2010) notes, is the currency of legitimacy. To hear African moral thought, we must interrogate the historical grammars of civility and professionalism that police validity. This shifts the question from inclusion to structural reconstitution.

Business ethics has never been epistemically innocent; its conceptual grammar was forged in empire. Goldman (2016), writing in critical management studies, argues that to grasp the ethical logics underpinning South African commerce and industry, we must read history across four periods: precolonial, colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid. This periodisation is not merely descriptive; it supplies an analytic for tracing how moral orders are constructed and legitimated under shifting regimes of power. Yet even within such accounts, the precolonial is too often reduced to a backdrop rather than a site of epistemic innovation. Fourie's *Our Long Walk to Economic Freedom* (2022) similarly casts African knowledge systems as "pre-modern", bypassing their philosophical rigour. That marginalisation is not incidental; it is structural. Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) show how early colonial capitalism – especially under the Dutch East India Company – fused commerce with Calvinist morality. Ethics did not restrain exploitation; it authorised it. Ruggunan (2016) names this convergence a "managerial theology", where racialised virtue legitimates domination in South Africa.

British colonialism did not dismantle the moral order inherited from earlier settler regimes – it refined and institutionalised it. Comaroff (1997) describes this evolution as "state colonialism", in which morality was no longer merely theological but became encoded through legal and administrative regimes. Statutes such as the Masters and Servants Act (1841) and the Glen Grey Act (1894), as detailed by Mamdani (1996), Dooling (2005), and Dubow (2011), embedded obedience, restraint, and composure as civic virtues, effectively racialising moral worth. Mamdani's theory of bifurcated governance reveals how colonised subjects were denied full civic personhood while simultaneously subjected to deep moral regulation. Mbembe (2001) insists this was not a contradiction but a foundational logic: violence and virtue were not opposites, they were co-produced. Even trust, as Banerjee (2008) and DeLue (1980) argue, functioned as a disciplinary tool rather than a social good. Ruggunan (2016) calls this a "love story" between virtue and violence scripted through British law, Dutch settler authority, and missionary complicity.

Missionary education in southern Africa did not merely impart knowledge – it produced a moral order through which ethics, comportment, and salvation became entangled. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) show, mission schools were laboratories of civility, where the 'civilising mission' relied on affective discipline more than doctrinal persuasion. Students were taught not only to read scripture but to embody patience, restraint, and bodily decorum that mimicked European propriety. The moral subject was not shaped through deliberation or ethical reasoning – it was assembled through daily performances. Silence, punctuality, and obedience were cast as signs of spiritual and moral maturity. In this schema, the 'proper' convert was one who embodied the Protestant work ethic, transforming African personhood into something governable and exploitable (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997). Ethics, here, did not function as critique but as regulation, turning colonial violence into moral virtue.

Professionalism – often framed as a neutral standard in modern business ethics – emerged directly from this colonial moral order. Hook (2012), building on Manganyi's insights, illustrates how traits like emotional restraint, composure, and deference were

elevated into moral imperatives. These norms infiltrated institutions from mission schools to corporate offices, reinforced by laws such as the Masters and Servants Act and the missionary labour regimes (Dooling, 2005; Dubow, 2011). Mamdani (1996) reminds us that the colonised were not governed by law alone but by a system of moral discipline that regulated affect, language, and posture. Manganyi's ([1973]2019) "burdened self" describes the psychic toll of performing civility under scrutiny. Ahmed (2010) notes that institutions reward happiness while pathologising dissent. Moten's (2018) "stolen life" captures this dynamic: professionalism becomes a choreography of compliance where critique must first mimic respectability to be audible. Civility, then, is not the absence of violence – it is its affective veil.

Apartheid deepened the moral choreography of control. Bureaucratic regimes – pass laws, influx controls, and labour colour bars – transformed daily life into a catechism of obedience (Mamdani, 1996). Mbembe's (2001) concept of *commandement* captures how administration became a form of ritualised violence: permits, attestations, and registrations functioned as proxies for composure and submission. Biko (1978) recognised that the colonised were taught to narrate their pain in tempered tones, translating rage into moderation. Fanon's ([1952]1986) "The Fact of Blackness" speaks to this coercion, the demand to appear rational, coherent, and calm to be minimally legible. Goldman (2016) and Magubane (1986) trace how business ethics evolved into a grammar of loyalty, recoding managerialism as moral citizenship. Refusal rendered one unintelligible; compliance often came at the cost of erasure. The democratic transition did not dismantle this infrastructure – it rebranded it. Missionisation gave way to managerialism. Today, civility is enforced through audit cultures, performance metrics, and ethical codes that neutralise dissent in the name of productivity and governance.

CSR and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), often heralded as ethical reform, frequently reproduce the same logics. Banerjee (2022) calls them "ethical alibis": techniques that measure injustice without transforming root conditions. Harm becomes reputation management, dissent becomes stakeholder engagement, moral urgency becomes risk mitigation. This conversion feeds a postcolonial appetite for composure. Dispute is reframed as 'reputational risk'; injustice as a 'compliance gap'. These frameworks reward linearity, clarity, and constructive tone, disqualifying affective or fragmented critique. Editorial and academic norms mirror this preference. Syllabi foreground Western canons and reward depersonalised prose as the measure of rigour. Kolb's (2008) image of business ethics as a "moral order within the organisation" rarely interrogates whose order or which histories constitute it. Jack and Westwood (2009) term the result "epistemic mimicry", whereby African scholars clothe Indigenous insight in Eurocentric grammar to gain legitimacy. The system does not merely judge work; it disciplines the forms critique may take, narrowing ethical imagination and policing method.

Jack and Westwood (2009) argue that in evaluative practice form often precedes content: unfamiliar cadence, embodied voice, or spiritual reference is routinely misread as a lack of rigour. The problem is not structure or clarity per se but their historical calibration.

Stylistic norms – rooted in colonial pedagogy and bureaucratic rationality – have become unspoken benchmarks of academic legitimacy, so 'quality' frequently proxies proximity to Eurocentric expression. This legacy also governs temporality. Under colonial and apartheid regimes, ethics was deferred, imagined in a future tense: when the native matures, when tempers cool, when development is 'ready'. Terreblanche (2002), Satgar (2019), and Madlingozi (2007) show how post-apartheid ethics, particularly via BEE, were co-opted into neoliberalism, preserving elite continuity rather than redistributing power. Rather than dismantling racialised dispossession, managerial ethics updates its lexicon – development, civility, reconciliation – while the structure endures. Fanon (1961) cautioned against this pacifying deferral of justice. Such calibration rewards composure over critique and renders refusal unintelligible within review conventions and standards.

This chronopolitics disciplines African thought by rendering it perpetually out of sync – too early, too late, never quite on time. The editorial demand for 'constructive recommendations' selects arguments that conform to administrative tempos, marginalising those that insist on the immediacy of injury. These patterns explain why civility continues to function as discipline. Habits learned through colonial statute, missionary sermon, bureaucratic training, and performance evaluation are internalised as moral sense. To be calm is to be credible; to be clear is to be rigorous. But these are not merely stylistic preferences. They are affective filters that exclude ethical registers grounded in grief, memory, or collective relation. When African scholars draw on cadence, opacity, or ancestral invocation, their work collides with an epistemic apparatus tuned to another frequency. This mishearing is not a bug, it is a feature of an evaluative system designed to favour domesticated critique over epistemic disobedience.

Correcting this dynamic cannot rest on calls to 'improve quality', because 'quality' has been calibrated against African forms of thought and expression. The task is architectural: unbuild evaluative habits that mistake refusal of domestication for absence of theory. The aim is not to romanticise a counter-style, but to expose how style itself has become an ethical criterion. Mamdani's (1996) bifurcation explains why poetic, spiritual, or historical registers are dismissed as 'native', unfit for civic reason. Mbembe (2001) shows how the postcolony sustains this split: bureaucratic politeness in public, fugitive feeling in private. Manganyi ([1973]2019) traces the psychic toll as the "burdened self" code-switches under moral surveillance. Biko (1978) urges refusal of internalised civility. Fanon (1965) likewise warns that appeals to polite humanity mask antagonism at the heart of liberation. When business ethics recruits civility as its house style, it riskily reinstalls the very partitions it claims to dismantle; hearing otherwise requires criteria attuned to opacity, memory, and relation.

Genealogy helps us also rethink foundational concepts like trust, accountability, and responsibility. In colonial scripts, trust was obedience; responsibility was deference. These terms were later translated into managerial ethics as compliance and transparency. Banerjee (2022) shows how this vocabulary enables accumulation while staging moral concern. But within African traditions, responsibility is grounded in cosmological and communal obligation; trust is not merely contractual but relational, sacred, and

intergenerational. Accountability does not terminate at the boardroom – it answers to ancestors, communities, and the divine. This article does not attempt to elaborate these ontologies in full. Rather, it signals the dissonance between colonial ethics and African thought, and defers fuller exploration to the next section. The task here is to clarify how the colonial grammar continues to define what counts as ethical, rendering alternative ontologies illegible or ornamental. Refusal, then, is not nihilism – it is a method, a theory, and an ethical stance.

Finally, reading backward from empire illuminates how method itself has been moralised. Editorial guidelines, accreditation metrics, and institutional scripts prize clarity, coherence, and calm – not as stylistic norms, but as moral ones. 'Dialogue' is celebrated even when it disarms critique; 'measurement' is trusted even when it converts injustice into technical data. Refusal of translation, refusal of conciliatory tone, and refusal of temporal deferral are often read as infractions rather than insights. But if business ethics is to become accountable to the worlds it studies, it must reckon with the provenance of its virtues, and with the violence those virtues continue to enact. The next section turns from this archaeology to a constructive proposition: refusal as method, an ethical and epistemic practice rooted in memory, opacity, and relation.

3. Refusal as method: Memory, opacity, ethical disobedience

Refusal becomes thinkable when we begin with the *AJoBE* signal: low submissions and high rejections are symptoms of filtration, not participation failure (Radulovic & Eccles, 2024). The claim is simple: conditions of legibility shape who is heard before anything is said. Here, refusal is advanced as method and ethos. It affirms Glissant's (1997) right to opacity, reads publishing as an affective economy that rewards composure and penalises grief (Ahmed, 2010), and invites a reconstitution of the field rather than better compliance. Refusal is juris-generative (Van Marle, 2022): it does not evacuate ethics but authors new obligations and forms. One line suffices for the well-known problem – too often, journals demand legibility before listening. Against this, refusal keeps faith with the incommensurable, the untranslatable, and the slow. It wagers that African moral thought can arrive otherwise, without conversion, without apology, and without consenting to be domesticated.

Refusal is not abandonment. It is a method that asks under what conditions ethical speech is possible and permissible. Fanon (1961) helps name the stakes: to say no to a world organised by dehumanisation is an ethical beginning, not an end. Mignolo (2011) calls this epistemic disobedience; Martel (2017) terms it misinterpellation – the choice not to answer a call that negates. As ethos, refusal rejects the trade of visibility for obedience; as method, it withholds translation where translation deforms. Publishing's affective economy matters because it scripts the tones – cool, tidy, reconciliatory – through which thought must pass (Ahmed, 2010; Islam & Greenwood, 2021). Refusal interrupts that script. It keeps open cadences marked by repetition, interruption, and opacity – forms

that are not stylistic deficiencies but ethical signatures. Method here is inseparable from mood: an insistence that feeling and form belong to the substance of theory.

Memory is refusal's first technique. Trouillot (1995) names how archives are structured by silences; Hartman (2008) shows how narration itself can reinscribe injury by forcing pain to appear in legible forms. Manganyi (2004) calls this the burdened self – the labour of comportment under watch. Against this, memory as method refuses therapeutic closure and administrative time. It retrieves the ethical debris of conquest: the Cape's genocidal frontier, the Hottentot Code, the Glen Grey Act, missionary civility. Memory does not rehearse grievance for its own sake; it contests the timetable that defers ethics to a future perfect. In business ethics, this means resisting the curricular or editorial reflex to require 'resolution' at the level of tone. Memory holds the unresolved present as the site of obligation. It asks the field to hear history in cadence: the pause, the break, the refusal to tidy what remains structurally untidy.

Opacity is refusal's second technique. Glissant (1997) defends the right not to be made transparent to the other's measure. In business ethics, conversion masquerades as translation: experiences are pressed into frameworks, concepts trimmed to fit accreditation rubrics. Grosfoguel (2007) names the neutrality that licenses this trimming "zero-point epistemology". Poesche (2020) cautions that the South is welcomed as data, not theory, whenever translation is demanded without reciprocal risk. Refusal counters: some concepts – *utu*, *ubuntu*, *amana* – lose ethical force when converted into managerial abstractions. Beekun and Badawi (2005) and Abdullah (2021) remind us that *amana* binds accountability to divine and communal horizons, not merely contractual performance. Withheld translation is not obscurantism; it is fidelity to cosmology. Opacity signals a boundary of care: an ethical limit that protects meaning from reduction while still inviting relation.

Incommensurability is refusal's third technique. It says that not all frameworks can be rendered equivalent without violence. Moten (2018) offers paraontology to name Black beings' coerced conditions of appearance; the field's craving for coherence and closure often recasts this condition as incoherence. Biko (1978) teaches that the first site of struggle is the mind: refusing borrowed categories is ethical defence. Incommensurability does not foreclose dialogue; it re-grounds it. Where standard review idioms ask, 'How does this translate into extant theory?', refusal asks, 'What must theory become to hear this?'. Wiredu (1996) and Gyekye (1997) show that communitarian personhood is not a 'cultural value' annexed to liberalism but a different ontology of relation. Oluwole (1992) demonstrates rationality braided with spirituality as rigorous, not residual. Incommensurability keeps these systems intact long enough to reframe the question.

Sovereign authorship follows. Refusal insists that African thinkers arrive not as context but as architects of concept. Sovereignty here is not withdrawal; it is the right to set terms – cadence, citation, genre – according to one's ethical world. Van Marle's (2022) juris-generativity is instructive: refusal builds institutions of sense, not just barricades. It is the editorial proposition that a paper may prioritise cadence over linearity without forfeiting rigour; the curricular proposition that *ubuntu* is taught as metaphysics, not

empathy module. Sovereignty also rejects the economy in which recognition is traded for mimicry. It does not deny dialogue; it requires reciprocity in risk. To read Glissant (1997) is to accept opacity as relation; to read Tamale (2020) is to receive care, rage, and survival as theory; to read Manganyi ([1973]2019) is to confront respectability's psychic price. Sovereign authorship lets such reading change the rules.

Refusal is relational, but it refuses domination's terms. Tamale (2020) shows how Afro-feminist ethics emerge from the intimacies of harm: the body as archive, care as insurgency. Baxi (2002) reminds us that rights from below are not petitions to power but claims that rearrange the field of responsibility. Tuck and Yang (2014) warn that settler desire launders extraction through the idioms of inclusion and care. Refusal re-routes relation through accountability rather than accommodation. It speaks with, not into; it answers to communities and ancestors, not only to reviewers and metrics. Relation thus becomes a practice of paced disclosure, shared risk, and consent to opacity. The methodological payoff is concrete: research designs that refuse extractive interviewing, writing that discloses stakes and positionality, pedagogy that accepts discomfort as an ethical temperature rather than a defect of instruction.

Disidentification names refusal's everyday practice inside institutions that cannot be exited. Martel (2017) helps us see how subjects can comply tactically without consenting ontologically. The "burdened self" survives by switching codes while reserving interior sovereignty (Manganyi, 2004). In scholarship, disidentification can appear as hybrid genres – interleaving archive and anecdote, analysis and address – without asking permission from form. It includes strategic opacity: holding back what becomes spectacle under the managerial gaze. It values slow theory: drafts that move at the speed of community review, not editorial calendars. It recognises ambivalence as a condition of survival in the postcolony (Mbembe, 2001). None of this is anti-rigour. It is the labour of rigour under conditions where clarity has been conscripted as discipline. Disidentification keeps breathing room where the grammar of civility would otherwise suffocate speech.

Ambivalence, finally, disciplines refusal against romance. Hartman (2008) cautions that resistance is tangled with exhaustion and complicity; refusal is sometimes weary, sometimes partial, sometimes late. That is not failure; it is fidelity under constraint. Fanon (1961) speaks of decolonisation's violence as a tearing of inherited grammars; Harney and Moten (2013) call the counter-practice fugitive planning. Both images resist heroics. What matters is not spotless refusal but durable practice: a pedagogy that normalises silence as a lesson, a review habit that treats opacity as invitation, a writing culture that accepts fragment as form. Ambivalence keeps refusal honest about costs while preserving its necessity. It deters the easy performance of dissent and turns us towards sustained craft of sentences, seminars, and editorial processes that can hold what exceeds conversion and resists applause.

What, then, does the method concretely do? First, it reframes evaluation: unreadability at the point of conversion is a signal, not a defect. Second, it retools translation: where conversion would strip cosmology, we substitute paced explanation, relational glossing, or deliberate non-translation. Third, it repaces time: we privilege slow review and community

feedback over rapid throughput, recognising memory as part of method. Fourth, it re-anchors accountability: we ask whether a text answers to its ethical community before it satisfies a rubric. Fifth, it revises authorship: we permit voice, address, and cadence to carry argument. These shifts do not lower standards; they change what standards are for. Refusal's wager is constructive: that a field willing to hold opacity, memory, and misinterpellation will generate better theory because it listens otherwise, risks differently, and answers to broader worlds.

Refusal, then, is an enabling constraint. It narrows one path – the path of domestication – to widen many others: sovereign authorship, ethical opacity, memory as archive, disidentifying practice, and juris-generative institution-building. It keeps faith with African ethics as system – *ubuntu*/*utu*, Afro-Islamic moral economies, Afro-feminist grammars – without forcing them into utilitarian templates (Wiredu, 1996; Gyekye, 1997; Beekun & Badawi, 2005; Tamale, 2020). It does not seek permission to be theoretical; it assumes it. From here, the article turns to instruments: how editorial norms and stylistic policing convert ethical disobedience into disqualification, and how re-engineering those instruments can make refusal legible as method rather than punishable as style. The question ahead is practical: by what concrete editorial and pedagogical changes can we move from hearing refusal as silence to receiving it as an ethical invitation to remake the field?

4. Editorial gatekeeping and the coloniality of style

AJoBE's editorial signal is best read as filtration rather than participation failure: manuscripts are screened first by how they sound and only later by what they say (Radulovic & Eccles, 2024). Editorial power appears technical – page limits, templates, reviewer forms – but it operates aesthetically and affectively. Following Ahmed (2010), publishing circulates feelings and tones: calmness is rewarded; grief and interruption are sanctioned. What travels as 'quality' is thus a historically produced ear for coherence, neutrality, and tidy endings. In this register, refusal functions as method and ethos: it asserts the right to opacity, retunes the affective economy of review, and invites a reconstitution of the field's hearing. The question is not whether editors should care about craft, but which crafts are legible as thought. When cadence, address, and silence are pre-emptively coded as errors, style becomes a border regime rather than a medium of relation.

Gatekeeping is not exhausted by accept/reject decisions; it is sedimented in the micro-norms of genre policing. 'State your contribution in the first paragraph', 'neutral tone', 'avoid polemic' – these stock phrases compose a tacit curriculum that teaches authors to abolish the trace of history from their sentences. Poesche (2020) names the outcome "methodological laundering": complex ethical life is bleached into procedural clarity, and dissent is decanted into managerial recommendations. The review habitus that enacts this laundering is rarely malicious; it is habitual, trained by exemplars, and enforced through rubrics. Yet habitus is never innocent when histories of conquest have calibrated the templates. Refusal intervenes at precisely this level: it keeps open forms – fragment,

apostrophe, slow tempo – that carry memory and grief as argument. To dismiss such forms as 'insufficiently analytical' is to confuse unfamiliarity with incoherence, and domestication with rigour.

The coloniality of style shows itself in how journals construe 'readability'. Readable to whom, and trained by which archive? The field's house style emerged alongside liberal argumentation, secular tone, and European narrative pacing; it is not universal, only familiar. Glissant's (1997) insight is decisive here: demands for transparency commonly masquerade as requests for clarity, while functioning as conversion pressures upon the opaque. Under these pressures, African and Afro-diasporic genres – repetition, citation-as-call, testimonial address – are downgraded to anecdote. Tamale (2020) records how Afro-feminist writing is routinely marked 'too emotional', a cue to adopt the voice of polite abstraction. Refusal does not reject editing; it rejects the editorial fiction that neutrality is the only path to sense. Relation can be built through opacity and rhythm as surely as through linear exposition, provided editorial listening is willing to be changed by what it cannot fully translate.

What reviewers often call 'linearity' is, historically, a technology for smoothing antagonism. Islam and Greenwood (2021) warn that the field's preference for tidy resolutions keeps lived conflict out of view. Fragmentation, recursive returns, and unresolved endings are not carelessness; they are forms that index worlds where harm remains ongoing. Moten's (2018) account of paraontology clarifies why such writing strains the template: it bears the pressure of appearing under conditions that deny one's being. When reviewers equate closure with rigour and composure with credibility, they inadvertently re-inscribe the moral choreography of respectability. Refusal proposes different evaluative questions: *Does the form answer to the community invoked? Does cadence disclose the stakes that a neutral register would erase? Does opacity protect meaning from extraction?* These questions do not abandon standards; they relocate them from familiarity to accountability.

Politics of citation is the visible tip of this stylistic regime. Sithole's (2020) call for a Black Register is not only about who appears in a reference list; it is about how citation allows thinkers to reframe questions, methods, and genres. In many reviews, African scholars are welcomed as context – scene-setting, cases, epigraphs – while Euro-American theorists hold conceptual authority. This partition rehearses an older script: voice without theory, experience without architecture. A teaser, then, for the fuller argument that follows: citation sovereignty asks editors to evaluate whether a manuscript lets African thinkers do theoretical work on their own terms – altering pacing, argumentative shape, and the very test of contribution. Where that re-authoring is punished as 'off-topic' or 'too stylistic', gatekeeping is no longer curatorial; it is colonial management of genre.

Peer review also performs temporal policing. 'Cut the historical preface', 'move quickly to findings', 'add actionable implications' – these cues compress longue durée into a paragraph so the article can arrive at instrumental clarity. Yet Trouillot (1995) and Hartman (2008) teach that archives are arranged by forgetting; without time to dwell, silences harden into method. Banerjee (2022) shows how CSR/ESG frameworks translate

structural harm into measurable rectitude – an ethical alibi that journals frequently mirror when they insist on resolutions over reckonings. Refusal slows the tempo. It permits method sections that name positionality and community review; results that hold ambiguity without apology; discussions that make room for cadence instead of forcing it into bullets. The editorial task is not to abolish concision but to refuse speed as a universal virtue when history must be carried, not summarised.

Finally, the border between 'style' and 'substance' is itself a colonial artefact. When tone is policed towards polite abstraction, metaphysics is decided in copyedits: Which worlds can be present in a sentence? Which forms may do the work of reason? Beekun and Badawi (2005) and Abdullah (2021) show that Islamic ethics binds accountability to covenantal horizons; such an ontology speaks differently through parable, supplication, invocation. To force it into the idiom of secular managerialism is to strip its metaphysical charge. Editorial reconstitution therefore entails practical shifts: rubrics that score relational accountability, not just linearity; reviewer pools trained to read opacity as deliberate; author guidelines that license alternative argumentative shapes; and editorial letters that invite paced explanation rather than demand conversion. In this scene, refusal is not obstruction. It is the condition for expanding what counts as thinking, and for editing that listens before it translates.

5. Domesticating ethics: Pedagogy, curricula, and canon

Business ethics does not arrive in the classroom as neutral content; it arrives already sorted by histories of schooling, missionary pedagogy, and postcolonial accreditation. *AJoBE*'s recent editorial signal is best read as a filtration problem, not a participation crisis. The same filtration shapes what students are taught to hear as 'theory' (Radulovic & Eccles, 2024). In South African classrooms, ethics is often imported as a finished product whose architecture assumes secular individualism and liberal rationality (Kolb, 2008). Barkhuysen and Rossouw (2000) show how modules become managerial decorum rather than moral inquiry, while Louw and Wessels (2016) document syllabi that adopt Northern textbooks with minimal recontextualisation. Following Ahmed (2010), classrooms are also affective economies: ease and composure are graded; difficulty and grief are penalised. Here, refusal functions pedagogically. It asserts opacity's right to remain, and invites teachers to rebuild the conditions under which thought is allowed to appear.

Curricular erasure is not an accident of selection; it is an epistemic grammar. Many syllabi prioritise abstraction over lived experience, procedure over relation, and polite detachment over morally charged speech (Louw & Wessels, 2016). The result is a canon that treats African ethics as 'context', not ontology. Trouillot (1995) reminds us that archives are constructed as much by silences as by inclusions; when syllabi compress Southern thought into a week on 'culture', they reproduce archival forgetting as pedagogy. Tuck and Yang (2014) add that the aspiration to 'clean' learning – untroubled by conflict – functions as settler innocence. In this setting, refusal protects concepts from conversion. It is not anti-intellectualism; it is a claim to epistemic sovereignty that

resists being translated into accreditation-friendly templates. What looks like hesitation, digression, or silence *may* instead be ethical authorship in the face of curricular capture.

Audits of South African business ethics curricula show how deeply this capture runs. Barkhuysen and Rossouw (2000) noted early marginalisation of ethics into electives, a pattern that persists in updated course outlines (Louw & Wessels, 2016). Assignments reward procedural compliance – codes, checklists, 'dilemmas' – over historical and communal accountability. Islam and Greenwood (2021) caution that such teaching rehearses institutional optimism and tidy resolutions that the world does not grant. Ahmed's (2010) point about smoothness lands here: students learn to polish tone rather than interrogate harm. Refusal proposes different assessment criteria: pace that carries history; forms (letter, testimony, case-as-counterarchive) that hold pain without forcing closure; community review as part of evaluation. The goal is not to abolish clarity but to refuse speed and composure as universal virtues when ethics must dwell with injury before it prescribes remedies.

Epistemic mimicry is learned long before peer review. Jack and Westwood (2009) describe how scholars are trained to emulate Eurocentric genres to be recognisable as rigorous. In pedagogy, this becomes citation laundering: African thinkers appear as epigraphs or local colour, while conceptual labour is outsourced to a Northern canon. The fix is not to sprinkle new names but to let Southern thinkers set the question. A compressed pointer suffices here – Wiredu, Gyekye, and Oluwole demonstrate full philosophical systems, not cultural add-ons (see 3. Refusal as method for the typology). In the classroom, that means modules in which *ubuntu* or *utu* frames the unit from the outset, not as a concluding 'perspective'. It means reading Tamale (2020) or Esack (1997) for method, not just example; allowing form – story, invocation, cadence – to do reasoning, rather than treating it as ornament.

Time is a curricular technology. Business ethics is often taught as a sequence – theory, case, resolution – that privileges linear progress. African traditions propose other chronologies. Senghor (1964) binds art, rhythm, and value in cyclical relation; Ramose (1999) situates *ubuntu* as a metaphysical temporality of becoming-with; Esack (1997) frames *amana* as covenant across generations and with the divine. These chronologies change how we teach. A unit might loop through a case across the term rather than tidily resolve it in Week 3; assessments might value return and revision as ethical labour. Trouillot (1995) and Hartman (2008) warn that archives organise forgetting; slowing time lets students witness how silence accumulates. Rather than hurrying towards 'what managers should do', pedagogy can hold ambiguity without apology. The measure of learning becomes not decisiveness but faithfulness to histories that resist compression.

Classrooms are built from feelings as much as facts. Ahmed (2010) shows how institutions reward the happy object – the student and teacher who keep things smooth. Tuck and Yang (2014) insist that discomfort is not a failure of teaching but a sign that power has been named. Affective design can make this explicit: content warnings that honour, not pathologise, exposure; quiet time that recognises opacity as method, not

deficit; participation rubrics that credit listening, citation care, and refusal of extraction. Manganyi's (2004) "burdened self" helps students name the cost of composure under surveillance, while Biko (1978) invites ethical speech that refuses the internalised voice of civility. None of this abandons standards. It re-situates them: from fluency to accountability, from quick takeaways to careful relation, from 'solutioneering' to the hard work of staying with the trouble.

Accreditation and rankings shape syllabi more than most handbooks admit. Painter-Morland and Dobie (2009) show how sustainability education is displaced by performance metrics; the same drift pushes ethics towards testable competencies and away from political life. Refusal here is institutional as well as classroom-based. Programmes can formalise slow methods – portfolio assessment over time, community-engaged assignments that are reviewed by those affected, editorial-style workshops on genre and cadence. Journals and professional bodies can revise rubrics to recognise alternative argumentative shapes already discussed in this article. Radulovic and Eccles (2024) surface the tension; the response cannot be capacity talk alone. It must be structural: a shift from enforcing sameness to enabling multiplicity, from counting outcomes to cultivating ears trained for opacity.

Finally, rebuilding the canon means changing what counts as thinking, not just who speaks. Banerjee (2022) names CSR/ESG "ethical alibis" – metrics that domesticate dissent; curricula mirror this when they demand actionable clarity while eschewing critique that risks institutional discomfort. A decolonial syllabus treats citation as relation, not decoration: Tamale (2020) for insurgent care, Esack (1997) for covenantal accountability, Ramose (1999) for ontological obligation, alongside Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) on missionary civility, and Mamdani (1996) on the legal-moral apparatus of rule. The point is not eclecticism; it is coherence around different first principles. Publishing is an affective economy (Ahmed, 2010); so is teaching. When pedagogy centres opacity, relation, and memory, students learn that ethics is not a unit to complete but a practice to inhabit. The question shifts from 'What should managers do?' to 'What worlds do our methods make possible?'.

6. Re-imagining the field: Editorial futures and citation sovereignty

AJoBE's dilemma is not simply a participation shortfall. It is the outcome of a filtration regime that predefines what counts as 'quality'. As Ahmed (2010) argues, publishing operates as an affective economy: it rewards ease, familiarity, and composure while penalising friction, opacity, and dissonance. Editorial futures must therefore confront not only who is absent, but how absence is structurally produced. The imperative is not to solicit more submissions, but to revise the criteria by which voice, cadence, and evidence are judged. Refusal must be understood not as obstruction but as method and ethos; opacity, as Glissant (1997) insists, is not a defect but a right. Re-imagining the field requires journals to expand what counts as theorising – acknowledging grief, interruption, prayer, memory, and testimonial address as legitimate forms of argument.

Editorial practice is itself moral architecture. If the doorway remains narrow, capacity-building becomes an alibi for exclusion, a gesture of welcome that leaves the structure of judgment untouched.

Citation sovereignty names the shift from decorative inclusion to conceptual authorship. Grosfoguel's (2007) critique of zero-point epistemology clarifies why citation often domesticates rather than transforms: sources from the South are referenced while Northern categories still frame the question. Sovereignty asks editors and reviewers to honour authors who let African concepts set the problem, not merely furnish examples. Practically, this requires 'question audits' at desk review: does the manuscript's guiding question emerge from *ubuntu*/*utu*, *amana*, Afro-feminist care, or Black radical ethics – or has the frame been pre-fixed by liberal managerialism? It requires form audits: does the piece demand linear closure, or can argument proceed by rhythmic return? And it requires consequence audits: does citation rearrange what counts as theory in the piece, or does it leave hierarchy intact? Sovereignty is accomplished in these thresholds, not in back matter lists.

Review processes must be rebuilt to hear opacity as method rather than mistake. Start with reviewer formation: require short primers on opacity, misinterpellation, and paraontology before assignment, and add reflective questions that foreground listening over correction. Replace single-track 'clarity' rubrics with multi-track criteria (argumentative force, relational accountability, temporal fidelity to history, genre adequacy). Pair each technical reviewer with a community-engaged scholar or practitioner whose evaluation attends to consequence and care. Introduce 'genre-concordant review': poetry-inflected argument, testimonial analytics, and archival counter-narrative are assessed by readers fluent in those forms. Build an appeal route for 'misread due to genre', with editors empowered to solicit counter-reviews. None of this suspends rigour; it redistributes it. The result is not leniency but better hearing – review as co-struggle rather than filtration, attuned to the worlds a manuscript actualises.

Editorial policy should also unlearn the archive as enclosure. Trouillot (1995) shows how archives are built by strategic forgetting; journals reproduce this when they privilege extractable data over situated memory. Institute 'archival humility' statements that make space for withheld names, blurred chronologies, and sacred silences. Accept composite scenes when trace is fractured (Hartman, 2008), and allow footnotes that document refusals to disclose as ethical acts. Require 'circulation plans' that prioritise return: authors specify how knowledge will travel back to implicated communities (Esack, 1997), not just to indexing services. Create a 'non-extractive evidence' category in author guidelines, clarifying when absence, ellipsis, or opacity are legitimate citations of harm. In this model, the journal is not a vault but a threshold. Less a warehouse of facts than a convening where memory, testimony, and analysis keep each other from being converted into tidy commodities.

Insurgent citation operationalises sovereignty at the line level. Ask editors to run 'who repositions what?' diagnostics: where Tamale (2020) appears, do her concepts reorganise method, or merely decorate a paragraph? Where Ramose (1999) is cited, does *ubuntu* set

the ontology of obligation, or sit beside stakeholder theory? Institute a 'first-principles check': at least one section must proceed from Southern premises without translation to managerial idiom. Replace token diversity targets with 'conceptual displacement' metrics: acceptance decisions track whether the manuscript's scaffolding – problem, method, evidence – shifts under African, Afro-Islamic, or Black radical thought. Encourage layered bibliographies: a short, argumentative core of sources that actually move the piece, followed by an expanded, contextual list. This deters citation laundering and honours the thinkers who carry the argument's weight. Citation becomes relation, not résumé.

Journals also need new formats that protect sovereign opacity. Establish multi-genre sections – 'Theory as Letter', 'Ethics in Witness', 'Counter-archive' – with word limits, review criteria, and indexing equal to conventional articles. Allow 'slow dossiers': serially published pieces that return to the same case across issues, modelling cyclical temporality (Senghor, 1964) and covenantal accountability (Esack, 1997). Add 'editorial listening notes' in which editors publicly reflect on how their hearing changed through review, making institutional learning visible. Build 'rhythm clauses' into style guides: sentence variation, repetition, and pause are not automatically flagged as errors. Finally, replace generic developmental edits with 'form-faithful editing' that improves legibility without forcing conversion. These formats do not romanticise opacity; they shelter its ethical labour so thought can arrive in cadence rather than in costume.

'Capacity building' should be recast from training authors to training infrastructures. Rather than workshops on 'how to write for us', offer clinics for editors and reviewers on unlearning genre policing; create fellowships that bring community scholars onto boards with voting power; fund translation that moves North-to-South as well as South-to-North. Institute acceptance pathways that privilege first-time authors advancing sovereign frames, with mentored revisions focused on strengthening, not sanding down, difference. Replace impact-factor vanity with reciprocity metrics: community readership, curricular uptake in African institutions, and policy shifts traceable to arguments grounded in local concepts. Here, the journal's virtue is measured by what it lets live, not by what it smooths. This reframes improvement as infrastructural repentance – changing the room rather than tutoring entrants to fit its angles.

Finally, name the horizon plainly. Editorial futures worthy of Africa require a shift from gatekeeping to fugitive planning (Harney & Moten, 2013): planning that conspires with authors to keep theory uncaptured. The invitation is not to sound more reasonable but to sound more accountable. Listening becomes a decolonial practice when editors risk being changed by what they cannot immediately parse, when reviewers refuse conversion edits, and when citation dethrones neutrality to enthrone relation. Sovereignty in citation, humility in archive, concordance in review, and shelter in genre – these are not accessories but conditions for thought. If *AJoBE*'s data point reveals filtration, this programme attends to plumbing. Open the pipes, widen the bends, and insulate for opacity. Only then can refusal do its juris-generative work: not abandonment, but the making of forms in which ethical life can breathe.

7. Conclusion: Refusal as ethical imperative

AJoBE's own admission remains our signal case: the problem reads less like weak participation and more like filtration that scripts what counts as 'quality'. The analysis shows that refusal functions here as method and ethos, and that a right to opacity must be treated as an ethical entitlement rather than a copy-editing defect. Publishing operates as an affective economy (Ahmed, 2010), rewarding ease while punishing friction. The invitation, therefore, is to reconstitute the field rather than repair its surface. Rather than chasing 'more manuscripts', the charge is to refit the vessel: reshape criteria, retrain listening, and recognise ethical registers that arrive as silence, repetition, pause, or grief. This conclusion recapitulates the core claim in one line: what looks like absence is often sovereign authorship withheld from extraction. The task now is practical: redesign editorial life so opacity can live, be legible, and revise what counts as rigour.

For editors, the imperative is architectural. Replace single-track clarity rubrics with multi-track criteria that evaluate argumentative force, relational accountability, temporal fidelity, and genre adequacy. Institute genre-concordant review so testimonial, poetic, or counter-archival forms are assessed by readers literate in those modalities. Require short reviewer primers on opacity, misinterpellation, and paraontology before assignment; add 'question audits' at desk review to ask whether the manuscript's problem statement is itself colonial inheritance. Invite response pieces that practice listening rather than rebuttal, and publish methodological afterwords where authors narrate their choices to withhold, blur, or delay. Build an appeals track that evaluates form-based rejections, and pilot co-review with community readers when manuscripts name living archives. Here, editorial labour becomes the site where filtration is swapped for hospitable hearing.

For teachers and programme leads, the charge is curricular. Conduct syllabus audits that track who frames the question, not only who is named; revise assessment to credit repetition, pause, and testimony as disciplined method. Introduce archival humility exercises that legitimise withheld names, blurred chronologies, and sacred silences as ethical evidence. Reorient survey modules so *ubuntu*/*utu*, Afro-feminist ethics, and Afro-Islamic moral economies anchor first principles rather than appear as electives. Pair theory with practice by asking students to design citation protocols that avoid extraction and to draft reflective notes explaining any chosen opacity. Shift participation grading from fluency to fidelity – does the contribution honour context, relation, and care? Finally, publish teaching notes that show how discomfort was scaffolded rather than erased. Pedagogy, in this register, becomes the craft of making room for sovereign opacity to instruct.

For reviewers and authors, practice citation sovereignty. Run consequence audits: which sources actually move the argument, and do Southern concepts reconfigure problem, method, and inference? Replace token breadth with a tight core that displaces scaffolding, then an expanded list for context. Build circulation plans that return findings to implicated communities and specify non-extractive routes of access. When divergence appears, read it first as method, not defect; annotate where meaning resides in cadence, gap, or refrain. Use cover letters to state what remains untranslated and why;

as a reviewer, cite that statement back in your report to protect it from 'methodological laundering'. Treat paraphrase of opaque concepts as provisional, not definitive. Above all, decline to request conversions that would strip a term of its cosmology. Citation, here, functions as relation – binding, accountable, and resistant to enclosure.

One image is sufficient for what lies ahead. Think of editorial life as fugitive planning – not escape, but a conspiratorial caretaking in which authors, reviewers, and editors meet to keep theory uncaptured while still accountable. The field need not wait for new slogans; it can begin with new rooms: doors wide enough for cadence, floors strong enough for grief, windows that refuse to convert opacity into spectacle. If *AJoBE*'s data point exposed the plumbing, the response is to re-pipe rather than polish. The claim is simple: filtration has mistaken non-compliance for lack. The work is bolder: build infrastructures where sovereign opacity can breathe, where listening is a method, and where citation returns what it takes. In that shared, unhurried labour, a different ethics becomes thinkable – and publishable.

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