Reviewers

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Editorial:

Announcing a new special issue:
Critical perspectives on business ethics

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We had started to hatch our ideas for this editorial quite a long time ago. In fact, we were in the middle of assembling the *Sustainability Stories* special issue [Vol 19(1) of 2025] at the time. The main idea that we had, was to use an editorial to announce a new special issue, which is precisely what we are doing. This started out under the rather outrageous running title of "*Business Ethics: Putting Lipstick on a Pig?*" We had flitted between this obviously provocative question and the much more suitable-for-polite-company question: "*Is it really possible for business to be ethical?*" Of course, both of these may seem like rather strange questions to ask: (a) in a field that has been characterised by fairly generalised optimism for at least a century (see, for example, Filene, 1922); and (b) in an editorial in a business ethics journal. Nonetheless, assuming that we have not reached Fukuyama's (2020) "End of History", it is never too late to question that in which one might have invested one's faith. To frame in a little more detail what we have in mind for this special issue, in effect these questions define what could be a rather fundamental debate if the opposing factions were forced together into some sort of dialectical relation.

On the one side of this debate, we would have the *faithful*, comprising those whose work generally populates business ethics journals such as the *African Journal of Business Ethics*. To brutally paraphrase the basic storyline of this side of the debate, the idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR), broadly defined, looms large. Specifically, it is argued from this perspective that the deployment of CSR practices (whatever these may be) can, or does, signal a shift away from "'business as usual' and profit-driven activities towards practices that acknowledge that the corporation is fundamentally a social institution with environmental and social responsibilities" (Bernard, 2021:619). Arising out of Ed Freeman and assorted

co-workers' stakeholder theory (first published in 1984, although we have at our disposal the 2010 edition), it is usually held that the determination of precisely what these environmental and social responsibilities might be, is, or ought to be, achieved through a democratised process most commonly labelled as stakeholder engagement. And while some in this group of the *faithful* have been tempted to believe that businesses pursue (or ought to pursue) these responsibilities out of a sense of moral duty, according to a quite general commonsense,[1] it is held that this is probably unnecessary. This commonsense is constructed under assorted versions of Adam Smith's invisible hand which posit that the pursuit of environmental and social responsibilities is in fact providently aligned with the pursuit of profit (Khanka, 2005; Meyer, 2015; Porter & Kramer, 2006) – being good is good for business or whatever other mantras one might dig up. And finally, from all of this, it is often argued that businesses can, and do, in fact self-regulate and voluntarily adopt practices concerned with ethical values, sustainability and the social good, thereby contributing positively to both social and environmental sustainability. All manner of moral philosophical traditions, of management theories, of case studies, and business contexts are moulded onto this basic narrative framework. And even where critique happens among the *faithful*, it is critique with a *but* – yes there are problems, *but* we can solve these (e.g. Lippke, 1991).

The side opposing these business ethics *faithful* would then be business ethics *infidels*. We say 'would' here quite intentionally, because this side of the debate is significantly less prominent in the literature (Banerjee, 2008), and certainly in the business ethics literature. The one exception to this that we are aware of would be in the domain of political CSR (Lock & Seele, 2018; Rhodes & Flemming, 2020; Sandoval, 2015; Vallentin & Murillo, 2012) where *infidel* tendencies have quite routinely bubbled to the surface. Here, among other things, the hegemonic character of much of what constitutes contemporary business ethics or CSR practice has been recognised. And there can surely be no doubt that this rather cynical instrumentalisation of ethics to launder socially malignant corporate activity does exist and has been around for a long time. Take for example the robber baron philanthropists of the early 20th century who sought to shroud their corporate exploitation in philanthropy (Barkan, 2013). However, to anyone with a moderately developed sense of correlation, it would surely appear that the deployment of ethics in the corporate context has surged in wake of the corporate reputational wreckage caused by the Enron collapse in 2001.

And if we are being honest with ourselves, we might well acknowledge the support for this that has been offered up by business ethics scholars who, perhaps seeing an opportunity to spread the word, enthusiastically sought to render ethics palatable to business logics. This is evident in the evolution of several major business ethics domains. For example, corporate sustainability reporting or reports to society morphed, under the leadership of the International Integrated Reporting Council, into integrated reports to providers of financial capital (De Klerk et al., 2020). Stakeholder engagement, which started out as a dream to democratise corporate activity, morphed into a mechanism through which

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1   As explained in Chomsky & Waterstone (2021).

corporates could identify risks or opportunities that might be material to … you guessed it … providers of financial capital (Freeman et al., 2020). And in the investment space, the ethical investment movements of the 1970s and 1980s, which sought to end the Vietnam war and apartheid in South Africa, morphed under the leadership of the Principles for Responsible Investment into investment practices which, like stakeholder engagement, were entirely focused on identifying risks and opportunities inherent in environmental, social and governance issues (Eccles, 2010).

But getting back to our basic observation – that the *infidel* side of the debate encapsulated in the questions about whether business ethics is all about putting lipstick on a pig has been rather quiet – this prompts at least two other questions. The first is the question of who, other than the participants in the political CSR space, might potentially hold *infidel* views? Realistically, this is likely to be way too fractured (and indeed fractious) a mob for us to comprehensively list here, if for no other reason than our own very bounded knowledge. However, there are at least three groups of potential *infidels* that we think should be mentioned.

The most obvious of these would almost certainly be those inspired, one way or another, by Marx's critique of capitalism. Notwithstanding the fact that it took Marx some 3000 odd pages in *Capital* volumes I, II and III to outline this, at its core his idea was simple. It held that the value that accumulates in capitalism (as profit in businesses) comes from the productive labour power that people are forced to freely[2] give away for nothing as surplus value. If one subscribes to this very basic Marxian thesis, then it really becomes all but impossible to concatenate 'business' and 'ethics' without deep cynicism.

The second likely source of business ethics *infidels*, in our mind, would be decoloniality scholars (Gordon, 2020; Grosfoguel, 2009; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2000, 2007; Sabelo, 2013). For starters, Marxist thought, and Black Marxism (Robinson, 2000) specifically, have been very influential in decoloniality discourses (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ndlovu, 2022). And for decoloniality scholars influenced by Marxism in whatever form, a similar impulse towards capitalism would likely exist as in the case among Marxists more generally. But beyond this, even if a decoloniality scholar rejected Marxist or Black Marxist perspectives, all decoloniality scholars would surely recognise the central historical role played by colonial exploitation, and its lingering shadow in the form of coloniality, as a source of what Marx referred to as primitive accumulation.[3] Finally, capitalism is widely regarded as an inherently Western political-economic regime, and so it seems likely that it would be widely treated with suspicion among decoloniality scholars. From this, one can probably assume a rather general antipathy towards capitalism among decoloniality scholars and, in turn, it seems likely that, if pressed, decoloniality scholars would view business ethics as an oxymoron.

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2   Under capitalism, workers are free to sell the one and only commodity that they own, their labour power, to capital at highly discounted prices. Their alternative is to starve.

3   The accumulation of seed capital before the arrival of capitalist production relations, or during capitalist crises, which is necessary for the emergence and reproduction of a capitalist class.

Beyond these two groups who we suspect might have fairly generalised issues with business and therefore business ethics, the sense we get is that the environmental movement is becoming increasingly anti-capitalist, and as such, might potentially be a growing incubator for *infidel* tendencies where business ethics is concerned. This is definitely less generalised than in the case of Marxists, and probably less generalised than in the case of decoloniality scholars. After all, prominent environmental organisations like the World Wide Fund for Nature seem to find no *essential* contradiction between business and the environment. Such organisations are quite widely supported by scholars who occupy so-called weak sustainability positions and celebrate the possibility of things like green capitalism (e.g. Hawken et al., 2013; Lovins, 2009; Lovins & Lovins, 2001). However, there appears to be a growing consciousness among scholars worried about the environment, and especially ecological economists, that perpetual economic growth is unlikely to be sustainable on a finite planet (Daly, 1990; Latouche, 2004). When this is taken together with the fact that capitalism (i.e. business) requires, not just economic growth, but compound economic growth to reproduce itself (Harvey, 2014) a fundamental contradiction arises (Burkett, 2005; Foster, 2000; Martínez-Alier, 2012). If we then assume that environmental sustainability is an ethical matter, which it surely is, then it again becomes logically uncomfortable to concatenate 'business' and 'ethics'.

Beyond these three potential hotbeds of *infidel* attitudes towards business ethics there are surely many others. Critical race theorists, feminist and intersectionality scholars, liberation theologists, and even some Foucauldians (see Banerjee, 2008, for example) are all groups that might offer other critical perspectives on business ethics. And there are no doubt others too. The point is that there ought to be a rich cacophony of voices critical of business ethics. Which brings us to the second question regarding the relative quiet on the *infidel* side of the debate we frame here which is: why is there this quietness? We can think of two very likely reasons (besides infighting which, in the context of academia, manifests in review censorship) which we would like to confront.

The first is a matter of focus. Certainly, for the three main groups of likely *infidels* that we have discussed, the primary focus of critical attention, at least where business is concerned, is capitalism *in general*. And this is, of course, a pretty big fish to try and fry without wasting time rushing going down any unnecessary rabbit holes. However, if those critical voices in the political CSR realm are not misguided, then we suspect that critical reflections on business ethics should not be seen as a rabbit hole at all. As we have already noted, there is correlative evidence at least of the cynical deployment of business ethics to counteract corporate reputational damage. And there are plenty of theoretical grounds that would reinforce this notion. Banerjee (2008) leaned on Foucault's theories of discourse and power/knowledge to discuss this explicitly. Beyond this, there is no doubt that, from a Marxian perspective, Gramsci's work on the cultural hegemony would surely also find no surprise in this correlative evidence and would therefore offer a productive interpretive dimension. Likewise, from a decoloniality perspective, Quijano's (2000, 2007) reflections on the coloniality of power, and especially his analyses on knowledge and subjectivity, would find no surprise in this instrumentalisation of ethics to clean up business general commonsenses. The point is that, if business ethics has become an

important tool in authorising the very capitalism against which many of these critical groups are struggling, then surely it is a subject that warrants some specific attention.

Confronting the second reason for the relative quiet amongst potential *infidel* groups has been made very easy for us by virtue of Sandiso Bazana's brilliant and provocative rejoinder, to a previous editorial, that is published in this volume (Bazana, 2025). Bazana's central argument is that, if we are really looking for the reason why the *African Journal of Business Ethics* is not inundated with manuscripts, our primary focus should not be on structural issues related to African universities thoughtlessly participating in global university rankings, but rather on our own editorial practices. As he put it: "*AJoBE*'s editorial signal is best read as filtration rather than participation failure" (Bazana, 2025:72), to which he added a plumbing metaphor likening editorial practice to narrow and blocked pipes. This core argument, which was probably most strongly focused on matters of decoloniality, can easily be extrapolated to other potentially critical domains. As an antidote to this problem, Bazana borrowed from Harney and Moten's (2013) notion of "fugitive planning" suggesting that "Editorial futures worthy of Africa require a shift from gatekeeping to fugitive planning".

A new special issue: Critical perspectives on business ethics

With all of this in mind, a little bit of fugitive planning leads us to invite authors to contribute to a new special issue, which we have informally referred to as our 'lipstick on the pig?' special issue. The question mark in this informal title is crucial though. Our aim in this special issue is *not* to assemble a collection of papers that seek to put lipstick on the pig. What we want to achieve is a special issue whose authors adopt an explicitly *infidel* position towards business ethics, or if you like, who want to take any trace of lipstick off the pig. In doing this, we envision two relaxations. The first is that we will entertain writing differently in as far as possible within wordcount limits.[4] The second is that we will relax our usual requirement for an identifiable African angle to the papers. We think a critique of business ethics is necessarily a truly global (as opposed to a Global North) project. We do, however, strongly encourage African perspectives and Global South perspectives, which we know have much to offer. Using Bazana's plumbing metaphor, this is not exactly a generalised widening of the pipes. Rather, it might be thought of as plumbing in a parallel pipe. Our hope is that this will give all of us (editors and authors) some 'space' in the form of challenge and inspiration to work on widening our existing plumbing.

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4   Bazana was critical of the journal's wordcount economy. Unfortunately, this is not something that we are able to relax significantly. The publication costs of the journal, which are generally based on word counts, are paid by The Business Ethics Network of Africa. The 'budget' for this is not infinite. To allow as many voices to be heard, we need to impose some limits on the number of words that any one paper can use.

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"Decolonise higher education now!!!": Untangling the concepts of decolonisation and decoloniality for management scholars

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Abstract

There is a strong sense within higher education, particularly in formerly colonised regions, that the cries to 'decolonise' higher education should be taken seriously across all disciplines. In this article, I recount my experience as a management scholar struggling to grasp the core concepts of the decoloniality discourse as I responded to this call. The outcome of these struggles was a conceptual framework, which I present here. This framework served two purposes for me. Firstly, it highlighted aspects of the colonial project that still persist in every facet of life today. Secondly, it provided a foundation for clarifying the central ideas of 'decolonisation' and 'decoloniality'. My aim in sharing my struggles, my framework, and these clarifications in this article is so that others might find it somewhat easier to attain a degree of conceptual understanding than I did.

1.   Introduction

Between 2015 and 2016, higher education in South Africa and beyond was rocked by the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall protests. One of the key demands made by students during these movements was to "Decolonise higher education now!!!". Since then, many authors have attempted to respond to this demand from a theoretical perspective, for example, Morreira et al. (2020). However, according to Mpofu (2017), these responses, specifically in South Africa and generally in Africa, have, to a large extent, been fictionalised and not enacted. Le Grange et al. (2020) shared this sentiment, arguing that responses to the call to decolonise have been superficial.

In this article, I present what I believe is an autoethnographic reflection on how I ultimately carried out an empirical study aimed at genuinely responding to the calls to decolonise higher

education within the management context. I focus particularly on my initial struggles as a 'normal African management scholar' to a) overcome some of my ideological preconceptions (common sense), and b) assemble the conceptual tools needed to begin understanding the challenge to "Decolonise Higher Education Now!!!". And these were genuine struggles. Or perhaps I was simply reflecting Moosavi's (2020) caution that intellectual decolonisation should be approached reflexively? This is apparently necessary to avoid a "superficial and poorly theorised project" (Moosavi, 2020:25), to prevent jumping on the decolonial bandwagon, and to reduce the risk of coming up with quick, superficial 'fixes' that have become fashionable.

Admittedly, relating these initial struggles might, at first glance, seem like recalling baby steps. And to those already well immersed in the decoloniality discourse, they may seem trivial. However, Maldonado-Torres (2016) argued that acquiring a conceptual architecture is a central tool that can be used to reflect on coloniality and decoloniality comprehensively. I hope that relating my struggles, and the conceptual clarifications I acquired (my slow learning, if you like), might help other 'normal African management scholars' progress to the point of engaging authentically with the challenge to "Decolonise Higher Education Now!!!" slightly faster than they otherwise might have. In so doing, this article hopes to contribute in some small way to incubating radical spaces for praxis towards decoloniality in higher education within the management context.

2.   The beginnings

I came from an orthodox management science background where everything about management was taught and believed to be suitable for society. I considered myself a 'normal African management scholar' with no exposure to any critique of management education. Initially, as I began to immerse myself in the literature of decolonisation, it felt like studying a foreign language, and I doubted whether I would ever fully understand it. To say the literature I engaged with was difficult would be an understatement. Besides the volume covering over half a century, including works by Fanon (1963), Mignolo and Walsh (2018), Mngomezulu and Hadebe (2020), Gu (2020), and Morreira et al. (2020), and the often-contentious debates surrounding it, it frequently seemed written in a foreign language – indeed, a foreign language for a 'normal African management scholar' like myself. I found myself going around in circles, reading and re-reading articles just to make sense of what was being discussed. Perhaps it was conceptual fatigue, or maybe my 'normal African management scholar' common sense trying to assert itself, but I often wondered whether all this decolonisation talk, with its apparently impenetrable jargon, was dead in the water – whether it was something to be left behind when the colonies as formal administrative entities came to an end.

Overcoming this urge to retreat into my common sense was my first challenge. However, with persistence, some clarity emerged, including the realisation that the calls to decolonise higher education were valid and applicable to management education, a grasp of the vocabulary necessary to begin to understand these issues, and a developing awareness of the role of management in perpetuating coloniality. At this point, it is

important to share more about my background to explain the common sense I had developed regarding management education.

By birth, I am an African woman, born and bred in a country located in central West Africa. Growing up in my community, it was very uncommon to see White people on the street. We were taught in school that the Germans colonised us, and then the French and English, but that was history. Decolonisation happened in the 1960s and the colonial administration had left the country, so it was our time to shine, and business was one of the ways of doing that. This is what I knew and believed until the completion of my master's degree.

By training, I am a management scholar having completed a bachelor's degree in business management, an honours degree in marketing management, and a Master of Commerce in business management. Coming from a family of businesspeople, I was brought up believing in the power of business to achieve economic empowerment, which, on the other hand, was the 'glorification' of capitalism. My education thus far and some aspects of my upbringing cemented ideas of rationality, objectivity, individuality, development, globalisation, and economic growth as being reasonable and necessary for society. It was clear, at least to my mind, that colonisation was over, and we were to get on with business.

However, by the time some inkling of embarking on the study that I describe here started to form in my soul, I had begun to feel a sense of disquiet about management science generally, and management in higher education specifically. As I reflect on that time, it seems to me that I was intuitively looking for something different. There seemed to be more to this management, however, I did not have the vocabulary to articulate my unease. It is difficult to say precisely where this disquiet originated. No doubt the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements, which engulfed the South African higher education system between 2015 and 2016, had something to do with it. At the time I was working in this system, the screams for justice and to "Decolonise Higher Education Now!!!" rang in my ears, but I felt somewhat indifferent to the call. I could not fully comprehend the reason for the discontent among the students.

A few years after the riots, a colleague invited me to a symposium hosted by the faculty of economics and management science at a neighbouring university. As fate would have it, one of the speakers delivered a presentation about this concept called 'critical management studies' and critical pedagogy, which marked the beginning of disrupting my usual understanding of management education. It felt like a eureka moment; I was excited and intrigued. I needed to learn more about criticality in management sciences. Like any academic, my instinct was to turn to the literature. Initially, my reading focused on critical management studies in general, starting with foundational works by Adler, Forbes and Willmott (2007), Alcadipani and Hassard (2009), Thompson (2009), among others. As I continued reading these articles, I gradually gravitated towards critical pedagogy because it was more connected to education. This is when authors like Freire and Giroux became my favourites. Inevitably, these two areas of interest rekindled my imagination towards the calls to "Decolonise Higher Education Now!!!". My reading

began to reflect this shift as I explored scholarly literature on what I then referred to as 'decolonisation'.

3.   Colonisation

My breakthrough in resolving this common sense impulse came when I realised that the starting point for this entire discourse must surely be colonisation. If I recall correctly, it was Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) who eventually drew me to this breakthrough by noting that without the existence of colonisation, there would be no decolonisation. As a result, it became imperative for me to start this process by understanding what these two terms meant. The literature stated that the colonial era was characterised by the establishment of colonial administrations, mainly for economic dominance in colonial empires. Horvath (1972:50) defined colonialism or colonisation as "that form of intergroup domination in which settlers in significant number migrate permanently to the colony from the colonising power". This definition became significant to me because it exposed the 'dark side' of colonialism. As shown in Figure 1, I refer to colonialism as a situation where colonial administration forcefully took control of a colony. Colonialism here is limited to judicial-political boundaries (Grosfoguel, 2007). Eventually, I came to realise that Grosfoguel's insistence that colonialisation is limited to the judicial and political dimensions is critical for understanding subsequent concepts that precede the historical concept of colonisation.
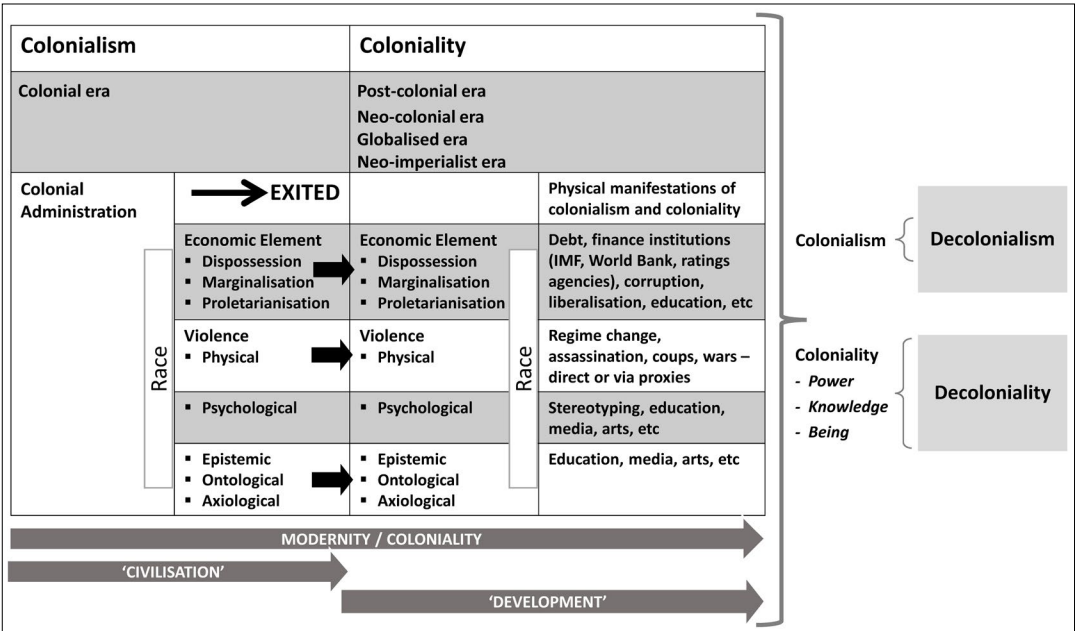

Figure 1: A conceptual framework for discussing decoloniality

As I progressed with my enquiries, I came across Fonlon (1965), who described colonialism as a violent project that tamed where it should have inspired, repressed where it should have fostered, and incapacitated where it should have strengthened. Together with

slavery,[1] where slaves became victims, whose chains became ornaments and objects of recognition, some have regarded colonialism as the worst form of terrorism against Africans by the West (Eno et al., 2012). It became evident that colonialism displayed three main violent characteristics: exploitation, domination, and cultural imposition (Butt, 2013), which manifested in the form of physical colonial boundaries, colonial laws and policies, colonial official languages, colonial religions, and colonial value systems and practices (Cloete, 2018).

As depicted in Figure 1, colonial rule came to an end when colonies gained independence from the colonial administration. However, as time passed since the end of colonisation, it has become apparent that colonialism is a complex concept that affected Africa more deeply than initially thought. In Figure 1, I summarise colonialism as a political, social, economic, and psychological process characterised explicitly by the introduction of formal colonial administrations and the associated technique of subjugation, including the discourses of modernity, 'civilisation', and 'development' (Murrey & Daley, 2023). Many of the underlying elements of colonisation persisted beyond the graves of the colonies and manifest now as coloniality.

4.   Coloniality

Digging into the literature, I came to understand that the concept of coloniality was introduced by Latin American theorists, first by Aníbal Quijano and later elaborated by others like Walter Mignolo and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. They used this term to describe the continuation of colonialism beyond its physical manifestation in territories. It was apparent that during the post-colonial era, colonialism technically came to an end. However, the underlying manifestations have persisted. These Latin American scholars[2] focused on critiquing and untangling knowledge production that they claimed was primarily Eurocentric. Their arguments emerged from the axiom that Latin America and Africa were the main victims of Western social, political, and cultural domination and exploitation. These reflections have also been shared by Mpofu (2017), who argues that coloniality normalised domination, suffering, and war in favour of the former coloniser. This was quite surprising to me at first, especially as someone who grew up without physically seeing the coloniser in my environment. I wondered how this whole notion of coloniality played out.

As I continued reading and researching, I came across the work of Maldonado-Torres (2007), who elaborated on coloniality stating its three types: *coloniality of power* which

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1   Similarities are often drawn between slavery and colonialism because of the effects of slavery on the African continent (Cornelius, 2020; Eno et al., 2012). While slavery started well before the Berlin Conference in 1884, where Western countries effectively partitioned the African continent, the nature of the crimes in both dispensations were similar. These crimes included forced labour, deportation, and massacres, as well as increased diamond and gold reserves of European countries to establish their power and wealth (Fanon, 2005). Slavery and colonialism were tools used to propagate Western capitalism.

2   They include Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Catherine Walsh, Fernando Coronil, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Oscar Guardiola, Edgardo Lander, and Freya Schiwy.

is the link between modern forms of domination and exploitation (power); *coloniality of knowledge* which is the effect of colonisation on different knowledge-production areas; and *coloniality of being* which is the persistent lived experience of colonisation and post-colonisation and its impact on language. Quijano (2007) underscored similar sentiments, explaining that coloniality of power classified the former colonised and the former coloniser into social categories based on race, which also happened to be present during the colonial era (refer to Figure 1). He went on to argue that coloniality of power was not limited to social classification but extended to Eurocentric capitalism, also known as colonial/modern world power, which formed the cornerstone of coloniality of power. Another author, Reyes (2019), whom I consulted, wrote on coloniality of power, describing it as fundamentally racist and capitalist. He said the pervasive nature of racism and capitalism is evident in the way coloniality reproduces colonial relations in structures and cultural practices. In addition, another Latin American author, Mignolo (2013), used the term "de-westernisation" as part of the decoloniality discourse happening in Latin America to refer to the shift in economic power from the West.

I realised that the Latin American scholars had much to say on coloniality. For example, Quijano (2007) continued to describe coloniality as a situation in which Western hegemonic systems continue to inform the political, cultural, sexual, spiritual, economic, and epistemological agenda of the formerly colonised subaltern, after the physical withdrawal of colonial administration from the colonial state. The contention is that, despite the exit of colonial administrations, the status quo of most other manifestations of colonialism remains as shown in Figure 1. The physical withdrawal of colonial administrations from African soil did not signal an end to colonial hegemonic rationalities. They remain alive in the education and economic sector (including management education), in the way knowledge is produced and validated, and in the way of thinking (Chitonge, 2018). Based on these readings, I concluded that coloniality is a broad and persistent process of inferiorising and dehumanising the 'other'. Wow, at this point, things started making sense. I began to question all that I had learnt in management until that point. Whose episteme was it, and who was represented in the knowledge creation? It was a wake-up call.

What I noticed in many articles, which I would like to include in this article, is Maldonado-Torres's (2007:243) comparison of coloniality with colonialism. It appeared to be the most accepted comparison in literature.

> Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.

From this excerpt, I deduced that coloniality is therefore an almost invisible, present, long-lasting power structure and set of epistemological strategies founded on Eurocentric, Western, Global North, 'modern', 'civilised', and 'developed' systems. It was obvious that there is an intricate link between coloniality and modernity. Coloniality is a normalised and institutionalised modern extension of colonial relations and sensibilities. Coloniality, in a sense, allows colonial forms of domination to continue to prevail in formerly colonised states, without the expense of colonial administration to the coloniser. What a bargain! Another element that one of the Latin American scholars (Grosfoguel, 2007) raised was the centrality of race in the coloniality discourse (as shown in Figure 1), which nurtures asymmetrical power relations and Western epistemologies that claim to be truthful, universal, secular, and scientific. These claims are evident in the way management concepts, which are primarily written by Western authors and presented as ubiquitous.

As I delved more into modernity, as with coloniality, the concept became popular in the second half of the 20th century, benefiting the creator who built and sustained it using military force, war, finance, education, and fact. Modernity was introduced in colonial states to mean renaissance, progress, and especially civilisation, and later evolved into development and became subsumed under neoliberal globalisation.[3] Globalisation has been presented as a Western European way of thinking and living, which is a linear governing rationality, relegating all other modes and ways of living and knowing to the side. Globalisation is sustained by coloniality and modernity, which continue to drive Western civilisation (Mignolo, 2021). Therefore, Western civilisation and Western modernity began with the massive investment in colonialism and are now intrinsically tied up in the logic, ontology, metaphysics, and the colonial matrix of power.

To sum up, coloniality is a decolonial concept that exposes the dark side of Western modernity. The authors I have discussed until now have maintained that coloniality is constitutive of, not an unfortunate accidental derivative of, modernity (Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). That is why Mignolo and Walsh (2018) introduced the compound term "modernity/coloniality" because they represent two sides of the same coin. Modernity originated and is situated in the European Renaissance. In many ways, modernity puts lives in the service of institutions instead of institutions in the service of lives. Modernity is a set of self-serving narratives that hinge on development and modernisation. As I show in Figure 1, modernity has been disguised as 'civilisation', 'democracy', and, perhaps most prevalent today, 'development' to extend the domination and exploitation of former colonies (Grosfoguel, 2007). This background on the difference between colonialism and coloniality provides a platform for gaining a clearer understanding of the difference between decolonisation and decoloniality.

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3   Neoliberal globalisation is a dominant world economic system that supposedly dismantles any barrier to international trade of goods and services, although in practice the dismantling seems to be imbalanced. The system has been criticised for favouring core countries at the expense of countries in the periphery (Onis & Aysan, 2000).

5.   Decolonisation

With some understanding of colonisation and coloniality, I proceeded to decolonisation within the context of higher education, and the first statement that stood out was Chitonge's (2018) declaration that decolonisation has never been clearly articulated because there are different perspectives on what it means. This meant that I could not expect a single definition and needed to read extensively to pull the pieces together. For example, Du Plessis (2021) defined decolonising higher education as the disruption of the pervasive Eurocentric consciousness that has privileged White people. Letsekha (2013:14) cautioned against a decolonisation project that is anti-West or a complete abstinence from Western knowledge and stated that the call to decolonise should entail making higher education "relevant to the material, historical and social realities of the communities in which universities operate".

It also became apparent that decolonisation evokes a range of emotions in different people, which serves to muddy the waters. This concurs with Pillay (2013), who said scholars in South Africa are in "panic mode" when faced with discussions around curriculum transformation as a step towards decolonisation. I recall that at the time, I was an employee in the education sector in South Africa, and it was in 2015 and 2016 that decolonisation attracted popular national consciousness because of the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements. Ironically, I found some scholars like Gilley (2018), who made a case against decolonisation, arguing that colonialisation was a legitimate project widely embraced by the colonised, who found themselves migrating towards areas of more intensive colonial rule. There is still much work needed to educate people on the ills of colonialisation.

As I kept reading, I noticed from a more structural approach that decolonisation has been associated with the revolutions that happened in two waves – first in the Americas and the Caribbean, and later in Asia and Africa – and that led to the creation of nation states after independence (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Even though Fanon (1963) had earlier argued that decolonisation was conceptualised and happened as colonisation took place in the form of resistance, defiance, thought, and action, it was clear from the literature that the first and second waves of these revolutions, or independences, led to different historical trajectories. The first wave of independence in the Americas and the Caribbean presented the concept of modernity as the progressiveness of the colony. With the second wave in Asia and Africa, the rhetoric was based on modernity and was grounded in development. The second wave was unique in that it responded to the colonial rule of European nations (mainly France, England, and Holland), and was initiated by the Indigenous population against European colonial and imperial nation states (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). With both waves, the logic of modernity remained in place.

Because of its association with these historical revolutionary movements against colonial administrations (i.e. against colonisation), decolonisation is popularly (or, in the 'common sense'[4]) thought of as the process of dismantling colonial administrations. However, as

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4   Following the Granscian formulation of this.

I illustrated in Figure 1, while colonies have technically been dismantled, most of the techniques of subjugation (i.e. coloniality) persist. One might say that it is the ghost of colonisation that actively haunts us to this day.

To this end, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012) called for a critical rethink of decolonisation beyond a reductionist approach of conquering a juridical-political boundary of the state. This call reinforced Grosfoguel's (2007) observation that one of the biggest misconceptions or myths of the 20th century was to think that independence from colonial administrations meant complete decolonisation. It is for this reason that Chitonge (2018) argued that decolonisation is still incomplete in Africa, with Tuck and Yang (2012) postulating that decolonisation will remain a metaphor until indigenous land, life, power, and privileges have been returned. The consequence of colonial rule was described by Mazrui (1986:13) as "what Africa knows about itself, what different parts of Africa know about each other, has been profoundly influenced by the West". Based on this, I concluded that colonial policies and institutions have had long-term negative outcomes on the wellbeing of the colonised nation (Lee & Paine, 2019).

6.   Decoloniality

At this point, it became evident to me that there are similarities between decolonisation and decoloniality regarding their fluidity. Maldonado-Torres (2016) argued that it is impossible to define decoloniality with a single set of perspectives because the concept incorporates too many histories, experiences, spaces, knowledge formations, and factors to be ring-fenced in a few words.

It was important to start from the origin of the concept to re-emphasise the importance of praxis in decoloniality. After searching for some time, I found out that the concept of 'decoloniality' was first introduced by Quijano in 1990, at the end of the Cold War and the start of neoliberal globalisation. At that time, the word 'decoloniality' meant the undoing of coloniality. Since then, many other Latin American scholars have written on the concept.

On the African continent, scholars such as Nyamnjoh (2012), Mpofu (2013), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) explored the concept of decoloniality of African knowledge. For Nyamnjoh (2012), decoloniality entails calling on African scholars to be part of a global conversation of knowledge production using their own methodologies and epistemologies with the interest of Africans at the centre. For Mpofu (2013:117), decoloniality is an "epistemic weapon" that will liberate Africa from the grip of coloniality. Mpofu (2013) recommended that knowledge production in Africa should be grounded in its genealogies, history, modes of thought, and experiences, without which the decolonisation project is unfinished. The decolonial approach is a pluriversal epistemology of the future that delinks from the abstract of the universal (Mignolo, 2013). It has therefore become apparent that decoloniality reminds decolonial thinkers of the unfinished business of decolonisation, while the decolonial turn is the task of decolonising knowledge, power, and being, including institutions such as universities. Finally, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:493) said that

decoloniality will liberate Africans from the "shackles of coloniality that is pervasive in the domains of power, knowledge and being" to become creators of their future.

Despite these multiple interpretations of the concept, Maldonardo-Torres (2016:3) argued that decoloniality has suffered from "benevolent neglect" because while authors have noted its urgency, many have abandoned the praxis of decoloniality as being wishful and unrealistic. His views were re-emphasised by Mpofu (2017), who noted that beyond the lack of praxis due to benevolent neglect, the concept has been distorted by individuals seeking to practice hate.

To summarise all that I have said so far and as shown in Figure 1, decoloniality is based on overcoming three concepts: coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Decoloniality involves breaking away from dominant Western epistemologies that have influenced all aspects of life and disrupted ways of relating to each other. Decolonisation has developed into decoloniality, decolonial thinking, and decolonial options. Maldonado-Torres (2011:117) defined decoloniality as follows:

> By decoloniality it is meant here the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world.

This definition also touches on the concept of coloniality of power or the colonial matrix of power expressed as modernity, and how decoloniality undoes, delinks, unsettles, and disobeys the colonial matrix of power instead of perpetuating its reproduction (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Decoloniality emerged from the shortcomings of decolonisation, and so it aims to delink from the colonial matrix of power to imagine a decolonial subject. To me, as an educator, this meant that decoloniality deals with epistemologies and knowledge, which are closely linked to Western political theory of the state and capitalist economy. Decoloniality is an action word that requires delinking from coloniality to engage in epistemic disobedience and a reconstruction of African lifestyles and ways of thinking. Based on this new-found understanding, I asked myself: what *action* is needed of me as a management scholar to adopt decoloniality in the work I do? Truly, at this point, there was no easy answer.

While decolonisation focuses on the state, decolonial praxis goes beyond that, advocating for the restitution of the dignity of African life that was left destitute as a result of colonialism. According to Mignolo (2021), restitution is not possible within the confines of a hegemonic Western epistemology and aesthetic. As a result, the main task of decoloniality is the reconstitution of aesthetic and gnoseology, combined with questioning the foundation of epistemologies designed by the former coloniser. The call is for decoloniality to transcend ending coloniality to a movement of liberation. That is why Mpofu (2017) argued that decoloniality is a militant philosophy of liberation that is thought and practised by the colonised who have endured the dehumanising agony of modernity. Decoloniality as a philosophy liberates the formerly colonised by setting

afoot a rehumanised citizen who is caring and loving. Decoloniality as praxis is therefore key for victims of slavery and colonial fundamentalism to experience true emancipation from the shackles of coloniality.

I decided to focus more on Chitonge (2018), who identified two features that define decoloniality. First, to set the context, colonialism or colonial powers dishonoured and devalued other ways of knowing and being. He explained how colonialism shifted from physical violence, such as slavery and forced labour, to a more abstract form through epistemic violence, also known as coloniality – though physical violence continued in various forms. Based on this, he calls for decoloniality to renounce violence and to enlighten the formerly colonised and the former coloniser. The second feature he proposed is based on the idea that colonialism is fundamentally about power relations. The coloniser positioned themselves as more powerful and thus imposed their language, episteme, culture, and worldview as 'the' culture, 'the' knowledge, and 'the' worldview (Chitonge, 2018:26). For him, decoloniality is not an easy project but one that requires developing a critical perspective that exposes the violence and arrogance of coloniality. Decoloniality is not a reversal but an unveiling, an unmasking, an uncovering, and a disclosure of coloniality of power, violence, injustice, and insensitivity, aiming to reorient colonised societies (Chitonge, 2018). Decoloniality is a global effort by the colonised to become thinkers, doers, or actors in decoloniality.

Still on decoloniality, political, economic, and epistemological movements should aim to liberate those who were previously colonised from global coloniality and its thinking, knowing, and doing. Decoloniality is a liberating language for the future of Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Decoloniality is a political project and a critical intellectual theory. According to Mbembe (1999), decoloniality is not informed by the nationalist and Marxist thought of Africa, which has a hostile relationship with the rest of the world. On the contrary, decoloniality rejects essentialism and fundamentalism, which hold only one epistemic position from which to achieve truth and universality. Decoloniality is engaging in epistemic disobedience and delinking from Western modernity (Mignolo, 2009). Decoloniality should focus on bringing the identities of the 'other', whose histories are marred by domination, repression, and oppression, into so-called global (Western) knowledge systems. Quijano (2007:177) recommended that decoloniality or "epistemological decolonisation" should liberate the formerly colonised from all types of power organised as discrimination, inequality, domination, and exploitation.

Following Quijano's (2007) recommendation, Ndlovu and Makoni (2014) argued that because the word 'development' was defined using Eurocentric ideas and knowledge, economic inequality, marginalisation, and exploitation have persisted since the colonial era. They went on to use a decoloniality thinking paradigm to interrogate local economic development strategies in post-apartheid South Africa as a tool to perpetuate discrimination and exploitation. It is for this reason that Grosfoguel (2007:219) argued that "although 'colonialism administrations' have been entirely eradicated and the majority of the periphery is politically organised into independent states, non-European

people are still living under crude European exploitation and domination". Nevertheless, the theoretical landscape on coloniality/decoloniality seemingly neglects the urgent need for economic liberation of Africans to address the issue of poverty prevalent on the continent.

According to Reyes (2019), understanding colonisation, colonialism, coloniality, and decolonisation is essential for developing radical spaces towards decoloniality. Reyes (2019) proposed a pedagogy of and towards decoloniality, calling for the abolition of world capitalism and white supremacy while centring indigeneity. Maldonado-Torres (2016) distinguished a pedagogy of and towards decoloniality from critical pedagogy, noting that the former uses coloniality and decoloniality as methods and analysis. Both pedagogies aim to question the foundations of existing ways of doing and thinking, with the goal of amplifying the voices, experiences, and authority of formerly colonised peoples. Pedagogy of decoloniality as praxis must actively cultivate, (re)create, and nurture the structural and cultural conditions that (re)member, (re)vision, and (re)humanise. The praxis of decoloniality will require the restoration of love and understanding (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). True decoloniality in management education will only be achievable with individuals capable of communicating and genuinely loving others.

In keeping with praxis, Maldonado-Torres (2016) went on to suggest that decoloniality is a dynamic activity where people join the struggle with the 'wretched' to build communities and form a new world. Decoloniality calls on communities and groups of people, including those considered 'wretched', to come together and think, create, and act in decolonising knowledge, power, and being. The literature suggests that those committed to decoloniality must detach themselves from modernity and coloniality to disrupt coloniality of power, knowledge, and being. Decoloniality is rooted in a metaphysical and practical revolution to build a new world. To bring about fresh perspectives in our African universities, the decoloniality project must be driven by as many Black bodies as possible. De Sousa Santos (2015) recommended incorporating Black bodies in decolonising education as an act of epistemic and social justice. The #FeesMustFall movements reified the call for Black academics to get more involved in decolonial projects and ideas to build a better and more humanised society.

This article identifies with the meaning associated with decoloniality as opposed to decolonialisation. However, there is room for persistent ambiguity when the word is used as a verb (i.e. 'to decolonise'). While the term relates 'naturally' in a linguistic sense to decolonialisation and may seem at odds with decoloniality, this is misleading. According to Mignolo and Walsh (2018), the verbality of 'decoloniality' is constructed in the praxis of decolonial thinking and sensing, making and doing, and being and becoming. This verbality is also associated with the struggle against matrices, structures, and manifestations of coloniality/modernity/capitalism and other systemic, structural, and systematic modes of power to imagine an alternative. Decolonising management education must be viewed under the rubric of the decoloniality movement as much as they were central to the decolonisation movement.

7. Conclusion

In this autoethnographic reflection, I share my struggles to grasp a conceptual landscape that was, to all intents and purposes, foreign to me. The purpose of sharing this personal account is to help others reach some level of conceptual understanding more easily than I did. My story begins with the #FeesMustFall movement, when university students in South Africa called for the decolonisation of the curriculum. From there, I discuss my positionality as an orthodox management scholar, born and raised in central West Africa, to explain why I found it challenging to engage with this decolonial landscape when I first started exploring the literature. I delve into this conceptual space by clarifying how I understood key concepts such as colonisation, coloniality, decolonisation, and decoloniality. By untangling these concepts for novices like me, decolonising management education can be pursued in a meaningful way.

One aspect that stood out for me as I moved from colonisation to coloniality and from decolonisation to decoloniality was the importance of praxis. However, not only is praxis difficult, but it was also evident from the literature that praxis towards decoloniality at a minimum will cause much discomfort because it disrupts the prevalent rationality that preserves coloniality's oppressive ways of doing, thinking, and being as normal. Brief (2000) identified different sets of emotions, calling on management scholars to pause and think about who they serve as researchers. Because science is not value-free, our values turn to inform our teaching and research. All members in the organisation deserve our ethical obligation in the way management education is approached. While Brief (2000) identified students as the people to serve because they are a product of our scholarship, others suggest groups like government, management, employees, etc. Irrespective of the group we serve, LeBreton and Dauten (1962) urged that the public interest must be paramount.

My last thoughts to management scholars, as I reflect on my journey, is to understand that decoloniality is not easy, and so asking for a perfect project will be unfair. This reminds us of the need to remain humble and open to correction as we grow in an unfinished project.

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Impact of ethical leadership on organisational citizenship behaviour: Group- and individual-level mediators

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Abstract

Numerous occurrences of unethical conduct by leaders over the last decade, as well as the proliferation of unethical conduct, have had detrimental effects on their respective organisations and businesses. The undesirable behaviour affects the ability of followers to voluntarily perform beyond contractual obligations. The article examines the impact of ethical leadership on organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), focusing on individual- and group-level mediators. The domain of ethical leadership and its impact on OCB is not sufficiently investigated. The research focused on a South African state-owned company in the water services industry using a qualitative case study approach. The research findings identified group- and individual-level mediators and found that ethical leadership positively influences employee OCB. The research findings add to the literature on ethical leadership–OCB by examining how followers respond to the sequential mediation effect and by offering insight on integrating mediation variables.

1.   Introduction

The South African State Capture Commission laid bare the numerous occurrences of unethical conduct by leaders over the last decade, as well as the proliferation of unethical leadership conduct, that had detrimental effects on their respective organisations and businesses. The unethical behaviour of leaders has become an existential problem for followers' performance. Research studies continue to indicate that organisations in developed and developing countries have been suffering from the unethical behaviour of their leaders (Jannat et al., 2022). Haurovi and Chilunjika (2023) also lament the high

prevalence rate of unethical behaviour in the public sector. This undesirable behaviour affects the ability of followers to voluntarily perform beyond contractual obligations.

Poor leadership styles are often one of the reasons for poor performance (Badarai et al., 2023). It can be argued that leaders in organisations are expected to display characteristics that exude values and principles of ethical leadership. Leaders are required to build a trusting relationship with their followers by engaging in behaviour that benefits the organisation. Research studies point to leader behaviour as a critical antecedent that can contribute to an effective organisational climate (Carsten et al., 2022). As a result, recent research suggests that ethical leadership continues to have a positive impact on followers and organisations (Yam et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022; Badarai et al., 2023).

According to ethical leadership theory (Brown et al., 2005), interpersonal behavioural relationships in the leader-follower relationship foster reciprocal behaviour, which tends to be followed by subordinates (Tourigny et al., 2019). It is argued that ethical leadership in leaders is central to fostering ethical behaviours among followers, and studies have found evidence of a linear effect of ethical leadership on the relationship between leaders and followers (Kim et al., 2024). Ethical leadership behaviour research in organisations shows a good relationship between the ethical behaviour of employees and leaders that has a positive effect on several behavioural outcomes (Kim et al., 2024).

In a similar vein, research showing how ethical leadership contributes to the wellbeing and performance of employees has increased (Amory et al., 2024). Ethical leadership is a factor that supports employees to experience intense feelings of competence and self-determination (Santiago-Torner et al., 2024). This allows the leader to maintain a balance between facets as a moral person and a moral manager (Santiago-Turner et al., 2024). Thus, fostering a culture that promotes and encourages employees to engage in voluntary behaviours in the form of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB).

OCB is a key determining factor that leads to organisational effectiveness and the organisation's success (Yang & Wei, 2018; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Viera-Armas, 2019; Bolino et al., 2023). OCBs are valued for their advantages to organisations and individuals, as well as their role in advancing organisational objectives (Liang et al., 2023). Employees display OCB by demonstrating a personal interest in enhancing the abilities of others for effective organisational performance (Yua et al., 2018). Although OCB is conceptualised as personally and professionally rewarding, it can also be personally costly (Bolino et al., 2023). This is why the research focuses on understanding which behaviours influence employees to demonstrate OCB with ethical leadership as a catalyst. Ethical leadership is recognised as a predictor of OCB, and it is suggested that by creating organisational mediators, ethical leadership influences OCB (Tourigny et al., 2019). Mediators are variables that lie between the cause and effect in a causal relationship (Fritz & Lester, 2016). They are mechanisms through which a change in one variable causes a change in another variable. Mediators can act either as transmitters of ethical behaviours or as inhibitors of unethical behaviours due to their role as linking pins in the organisation (Wang et al., 2018).

Despite the important role of mediators in behaviour as a positive causal linking chain in respect of ethical leadership and OCB, it has been noticed in recent studies by Moore et al. (2019) and Owens et al. (2019) that there are mixed results (Wang et al., 2021). While past research offers various important insights into the role of mediators, there are fewer studies that concurrently explore individual-level and group-level mediators as mediation variables in determining the impact of ethical leadership on OCB. Research about how ethical leadership influences OCB by exploring individual-level and group-level mediators could draw more insight from a more nuanced analysis (De Roeck & Farooq, 2018).

Given the important relationship between ethical leadership and OCB, the underlying mechanism through which ethical leadership influences OCB has not been fully explored (Huang et al., 2021). Hence, to respond to the determination, the study explored four research questions in the context of primary and secondary research. The primary research question was: What is the impact of ethical leadership on OCB? The secondary research questions in answering the primary research question were: What are the group- and individual-level mediators between ethical leadership and OCB? How can the group- and individual-level mediators' effects trigger changes in OCB? How are the group- and individual-level mediators influencing followers to take responsibility and engage in OCB in the context of ethical leadership?

The objective was to determine the impact of ethical leadership on OCB by identifying the group-level and individual-level mediators in the water sector organisation within the South African environment. This article expands the understanding of the impact of ethical leadership on OCB and seeks to make a contribution to ethical leadership and OCB research by providing a new dimension on the use of mediation variables in research by determining the group- and individual-level mediators.

2.   Ethical leadership: Impact on follower behaviour in organisations

Despite the widespread interest and efforts to develop leadership strategies that promote ethical behaviour in organisations, the ongoing occurrence of leadership scandals in different leadership circles emphasises the importance of organisations recognising the value of ethical standards (Lee et al., 2019). The significance of ethical conduct demonstrated by organisational leaders has been amplified due to ethical lapses in the business environment (Ahmad et al., 2020a).

Ethical leadership is defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown et al., 2005:120). The development on the body of literature on the definition of ethical leadership reflects that the definition of ethical leadership by Brown et al. has not changed (Ahmad et al., 2020b). Ethical leadership plays an important role in promoting desirable follower behaviours including organisational behaviour (Somers, 2021). The behaviour of leaders is important to address the ethical failures

experienced by organisations and the ethical behaviour of leaders is a catalyst to get followers to do what is right (Banks et al., 2021). Ethical leadership fosters a reputation for leaders who exhibit moral characteristics that impact the behaviour of subordinates (Kang & Zhang,2020).

Ethical leadership is recognised as a notable style of organisational leadership that has effects on followers' attitudes and behaviours (Ahmad et al., 2020). However, because ethical problems in organisations have increased, and the ongoing news of corporate scandals in the corporate world, researchers are interested in understanding ethical leadership and its ramifications in organisations (Lee et al., 2019; Kim & Vandenberghe, 2020). According to ethical leadership theory, interpersonal behavioural relationships among employees foster reciprocal behaviour, which tends to be followed by subordinates (Tourigny et al., 2019).

Ethical leaders evolve their moral and developmental actions that can positively influence their followers (Miao et al., 2019). Moral dispositions such as attitudes and behaviours in leaders interact with various contextual factors to influence follower behaviour. The moral focus of ethical leadership through leaders' moral conduct influences the conduct of followers in organisations for the greater good (Sawhney et al., 2023). The role of the moral person relates to the ethical values of the leader. The moral dimension is about how the leaders use the tools they have because of their leadership position to promote ethical behaviour. As a result, ethical leadership is viewed as reflected in specific behaviours, through which the organisation's ethicality by the leader promotes and shapes the organisational environment to make it more ethical (Sawhney et al., 2023).

Organisations are repurposing their orientational strategic development along the lines of ethical leadership to enhance organisational behaviour (Ahmad et al., 2020). Ethical leadership influences almost all areas of the organisation by supporting critical processes and addressing people's attitudes and behaviours based on standards that enhance employee performance and commitment to organisations (Serang et al., 2024). Ethical leadership plays an important role in characterising the organisation's moving targets in the best possible ways (Serang et al., 2024). It is believed that ethical leadership promotes OCB through creating organisational mediators because it is recognised as a predictor of OCB (Tourigny et al., 2019). These organisational factors affect individual behaviour within the organisation and it is important to understand which factors drive subordinates to acquire appropriate behaviour that leads to increased OCB.

3.   Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB)

OCB represents a specific class of behaviours observable in the organisational environment (Alessandri et al., 2021). OCB is defined as individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognised by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organisation (De Geus et al., 2020). OCB can contribute to the efficient functioning of organisations and is important to the success of organisations and the people that work in them (Sun et al., 2018; López-Cabarcos et al., 2020).

OCB is considered necessary in the organisational behavioural literature, as it becomes an essential part of employee performance. This mode of employee behaviour yields important results in the organisation. It enhances organisational performance through efficiency and effectiveness. According to Khan et al. (2021), the volunteering behaviour that increases the efficiency of the organisation through the dedication of employees in a contemporary context remains relevant. Kiani and Baharmi (2020) state that OCBs are taken as an essential concern in managerial decisions. Managers value OCB since it can improve job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational performance, and performance quality. These variables are attitudes that are related to the performance of individuals in an organisation in the public sector (Kiani & Baharmi, 2020).

In evaluating OCB in the public sector, De Geus et al. (2020) discovered that more studies focused on the links between antecedents and OCB than on the outcomes of OCB. OCB consequences are important in understanding the impact of ethical leadership on OCB through individual- and group-level mediators. De Geus et al. (2020) added that future research should focus on the outcomes of OCB to explore its value. The value of OCB in every public system is crucial as it can significantly impact the general wellbeing and progress of individuals.

Individuals within a group form a critical link in the performance of organisations (Blondheim & Smech, 2019:111). Alessandri et al. (2021) argue that the beneficial outcomes associated with OCBs, for single workers and groups of workers, are considerable. Individuals are catalysts that drive the success of organisations (Alessandri et al., 2021). Individuals who observe OCB among employees in an organisation have a sense of hope and confidence in their own ability to replicate the behaviour they have observed. Herlina et al. (2020) emphasise the point that one of the influential organisational behaviours is OCB. Herlina et al. (2020) suggest that, through OCB, discretionary decisions without formal rewards are made and contribute to the effectiveness of the organisation. Davison et al. (2020) make the point that organisations need employees who engage in innovative and spontaneous activity that goes beyond role prescriptions.

According to Sheeraz et al. (2021), OCB is empirically proven to increase efficiency and stimulate the effective functioning of an organisation. Individual cooperative actions are displayed through voluntarily devoting personal resources for the benefit of the organisation (Meynhardt et al., 2020). The cooperative actions of the individuals were borne out of the discretionary extra-role behaviour of the individuals displayed in the organisation. Individual personal attributes in the form of skills and capacities are important predictors of OCB. Improvements in organisational performance are linked to OCB (Singh & Singh, 2011).

According to Kiani and Baharmi (2020), OCBs are considered an important consideration in managerial decisions. Managers value OCB because it can boost job happiness, organisational commitment, organisational performance, and performance quality. These factors are attitudes associated with individual performance in an organisation (Kiani & Baharmi, 2020). OCB benefits individuals and organisations by simplifying maintenance functions, freeing up resources for productivity, boosting service quality, and improving

performance (Reizer et al., 2020). OCB is valuable because it enables individuals to respond quickly to customers' demands and willingly execute things that are not part of their official work responsibilities. Employees who engage in OCB provide support to benefit co-workers and the organisation, but there is no guarantee of being granted rewards for such voluntary behaviour (Eguma & Gabriel, 2021). Establishing insight into what implies the cause-and-effect relationship is imperative.

Causal relations are important to understand the effects of mediators between ethical leadership and OCB. Mediating variables in OCB have been more widely used, and the commonly used mediators are from among the employee antecedents of OCB (De Geus et al., 2020). The relationship between antecedents and OCB might sometimes depend on mediating variables (Ingrams, 2020). Organisational characteristics, job characteristics, and employee characteristics are mediation mechanisms in the relationship of OCB. Perceptions of mediating variables have been linked with a wide range of employee attitudes and organisational behaviour (Zayed et al., 2020).

Different mediating variables appear to function as significant mediators of OCB relationships, according to empirical findings and theories (Na-nan et al., 2020). De Geus et al. (2020), on the other hand, are of the view that mediating effects can also have a negative impact on OCB. Benuyenah (2021) questions whether individual-level OCB positively impacts on group-level OCB or vice versa. Wang et al., (2022) found that mediating relationships between various antecedents have a significant impact on OCB. It is important to understand whether different variables play a bridging role as mediators in the influence process (Narzary & Palo, 2020).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research context

The field of OCB is lacking in several crucial areas for its advancement. Specifically, there are gaps in contextualisation with various public policy and public service domains, as well as in the diversification and strengthening of research designs (De Geus et al., 2020). The ethical scandals involving government employees have highlighted the need for more research on ethical leadership in the public sector (Qing et al, 2019). The researchers identified the water sector as a suitable environment to gain an understanding of the connection between OCB and ethical leadership, specifically in the context of Africa. The population of the research comprised an organisation and employees in a state-owned company in the water sector located in a province in the Republic of South Africa. The intention of the research setting was to focus on specific characteristics of the population that would be of interest, provide answers to the primary and secondary research questions, and address the gaps identified (Rai & Thapa, 2015). The mediation variables were explored via a sampling of participants who had leadership responsibilities at management and supervisor levels. The participants represented the demographic that included control variables such as age, gender, education, and tenure.

4.2   Design and sampling

This article adopted a qualitative single case study research method with a non-probability sampling method using a purposive sampling technique to make up the respondents who would provide the data. The researchers used one organisation, a water board, which fell within the category of water services. A case study offers in-depth and credible results because of the nature of qualitative data collection and the analysis methods (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016). The rationale for this research was the exploration of how ethical leadership impacts OCB through group- and individual-level mediators. Data were collected from the water board by using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, records, reports, and performance assessments. An e-mail was sent to the water board requesting assistance with recruiting willing participants. Ethical clearance was granted by the ethics committee of the university associated with the researchers.

The recruited sample of participants consisted of 15 online individual interviews and four focus group interviews of four individuals per focus group. Guest et al. (2017), in a study on water resources, found that fewer than 16 interviews were enough to identify common themes. Similarly, Hagaman and Wutich (2017) also found that 16 or fewer interviews were enough to identify common themes. The 31 participants in the present study were enough to achieve research credibility and generalisation. All 31 participants selected for the interviews had worked for the water entity for an average of not less than 5 years.

The participants included executive directors, senior managers, managers, specialists, practitioners, scientists, and engineers at the various levels of the organisation. Table 1 lists the profile of the participants, which includes the age, years of service, gender, qualification, and designation.

Table 1: Participants' profiles

Participant information		
Information	Categories	No. of participants (n=31)
Age	25-35	7
	36-45	15
	46-55	7
	56-60	2
Years of service	0-10	9
	11-20	19
	21-30	3
	31-40	0
	41-50	0
Gender	Female	6
	Male	25
Qualification profile	Engineers	18

Participant information		
Information	Categories	No. of participants (n=31)
	Legal services	2
	Business management	7
	General	4
Designation profile	Executive director	2
	Senior manager	8
	Manager	7
	Scientist	10
	Practitioners	4

The process was twofold and involved individual interviews, focus group interviews, and prepared questions guided by identified research themes emanating from the literature review consistent with the research questions. The research questions of this study were: 1) What is the impact of ethical leadership on OCB? 2) What are the group- and individual-level mediators between ethical leadership and OCB? 3) How can group- and individual-level mediators' effects trigger changes in OCB? 4) Are the group- and individual-level mediators influencing followers to take responsibility to engage in OCB in the context of ethical leadership?

4.3   Data collection

The article collected data using a non-probability sampling method with a purposive sampling technique. The participants' confidentiality was guaranteed and emphasised in a consent letter. Once the willing participants were confirmed, another e-mail was sent to them requesting them to indicate their availability and preferred method for conducting the interviews. All participants who confirmed their participation opted to conduct the interviews through a virtual platform, namely MS Teams. The interviews were conducted between October 2021 and March 2022.

The interviews were scheduled for an hour, but varied from 20 minutes to 50 minutes. Before the recording of the interview, the researchers asked the participants for permission to record the conversation. The purpose of the recording was explained to the participants, namely that it was to enable the researchers to recall an accurate account of the interview for purposes of data analysis. The researchers used a mobile device for recording the interviews. The researchers employed two methods in the process of recording the interviews: taking notes and audio recording. The interview was guided by an interview schedule from which the same questions were posed to the participants, respectively. The recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriber.

4.4 Data analysis

An inductive thematic analysis approach was adopted to identify themes emanating from the primary and secondary research questions. This widely-used model is explicitly not linked to a pre-existing theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and is considered appropriate when investigating a diverse data set reflecting a range of experiences and attitudes. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be used across various epistemologies and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves discovering patterns and themes in the data. The data were analysed using the ATLAS.ti software, a qualitative analysis tool. The technique involved coding of data, searching for themes, refining the themes into sub-themes, and reporting the findings. The researchers also started identifying the themes and patterns during the data-gathering stage by taking notes in the research journal.

The process of discerning themes and patterns persisted through the analysis of the transcripts. The transcripts were examined to ascertain the responses pertaining to the research questions. The approach was conducted to ensure the facilitation of clear identification of coding themes. The coding of research themes was important to capture the essential aspects of the data in relation to the study questions (Alam, 2020). The researchers utilised the codes and quotations to discern themes that could be associated with the responses obtained from the interviews. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the themes and sub-themes from the individual and focus group interviews.

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes emerging from qualitative semi-structured interviews (individuals)

Themes	Sub-themes
The impact of ethical leadership on OCB	▪ Understanding ethical leadership ▪ Understanding OCB ▪ Effects of ethical leadership on OCB ▪ Impact of ethical leadership
Group- and individual-level mediators between ethical leadership and OCB	▪ Individual behaviour that promotes positive behaviours in employees ▪ Group behaviour that promotes positive behaviours in employees ▪ Individual behaviour that promotes OCB ▪ Group behaviour that promotes OCB
Group- and individual-level mediators' effects triggering changes in OCB	▪ Influence of discretionary behaviour on employees' OCB ▪ Impact of discretionary behaviour on employee OCB
Group- and individual-level mediators' influence on followers to take responsibility and engage in OCB	▪ Influence of discretionary behaviour on followers ▪ Influence of mediators on OCB

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes emerging from qualitative semi-structured interviews (focus groups)

Themes	Sub-themes
The impact of ethical leadership on OCB	Effects of ethical leadership on OCB
Group- and individual-level mediators between ethical leadership and OCB	Discretionary group and individual behaviour that promotes OCB
Group- and individual-level mediators' effects triggering changes in OCB	Impact of discretionary behaviour on employee OCB
Group- and individual-level mediators' influence on followers to take responsibility and engage in OCB	Influence of mediators on followers' OCB

As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, four themes emerged from the individual and focus group interviews, respectively. The tables also reflect that 16 sub-themes emerged from the individual and focus group interviews.

5. Results

The data analysis provides insight into the reasons why participants display certain behaviour. Inductive thematic analysis revealed four key themes that were evidenced across the individual and focus group participants. The results are presented from the perspective of the responses of the participants contrasted against the quotations and the codes that are dominant from the transcripts. The results indicate that there were 679 quotations and 1087 codes from 19 participants inclusive of individual and group participants. Figure 1 summarises the different quotations and codes per participant. The chart indicates that the interviews produced more codes than quotations. The dominant density of codes was from Participant 4 and the least dominant density was from Participant 12. Figure 2 reflects the results of the themes and sub-themes, respectively, and is presented for completeness.
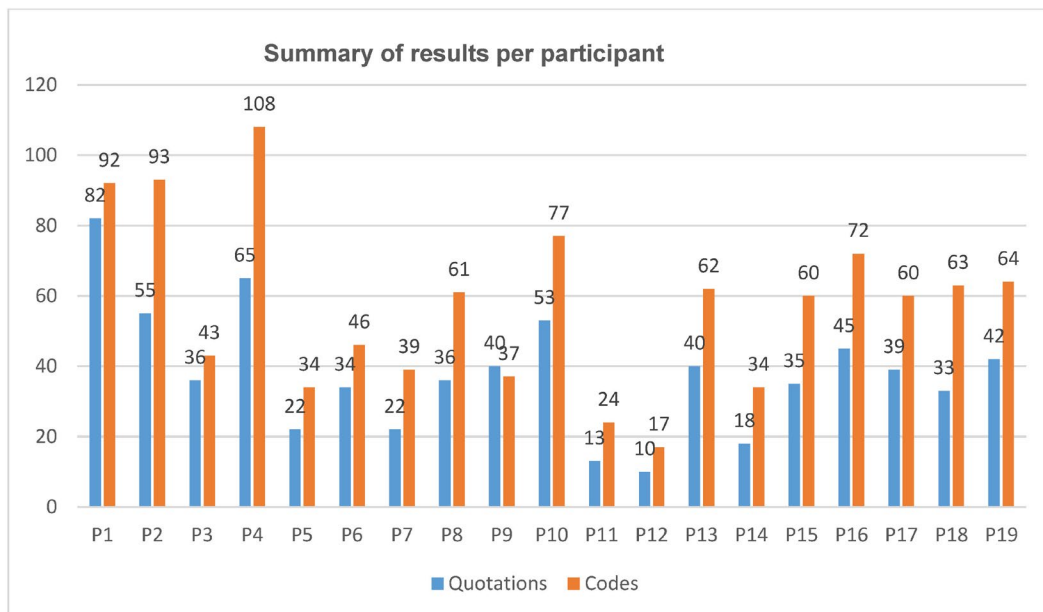
Figure 1: Summary of results per participant

From the participants' perspective, it is evident that the most prevalent constructs, with a frequency of 108 codes, are accountability and responsibility, as well as increased trust and loyalty in employees.
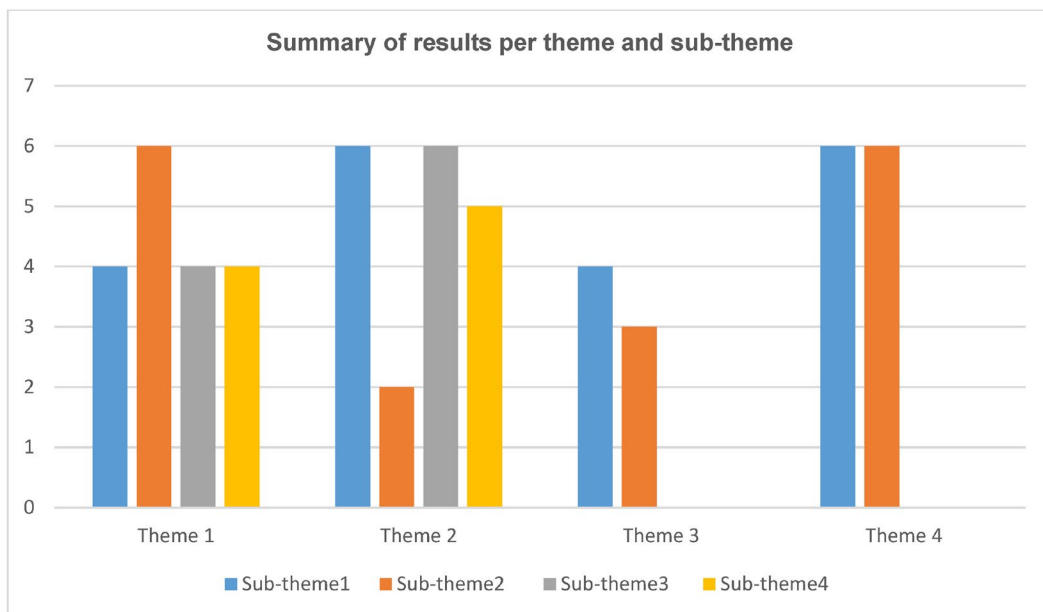

Figure 2: Summary of results per theme and sub-theme

To determine whether ethical leadership indeed influences OCB, social learning theory was followed to analyse the behaviour of individuals in the context of the water board. Four themes and 12 sub-themes emerged from the responses in the research interview derived from the research question. The sub-themes' results were presented using the view of the participants linked to codes. Table 4 presents the summary of themes, sub-themes, and codes.

Table 4: Themes, sub-themes, and codes according to thematic analysis

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
The impact of ethical leadership on OCB	Understanding ethical leadership	▪ Above reproach ▪ Behaviour that reflects positive attitudes ▪ Conscious of values and morals ▪ Moral values, traits and behaviour
	Understanding OCB	▪ Above and beyond employment contract ▪ Behaviour that is not part of formal employment ▪ Outside job description for greater good ▪ Going extra mile to task ▪ Helping others and going beyond call of duty
	Effects of ethical leadership on OCB	▪ Behaviour that reflects positive attitudes ▪ Ethical relations translate to good performance ▪ Poor organisation support affects ethical leadership ▪ Relations between ethical leadership and OCB
	Impact of ethical leadership	▪ Ethical behaviour is foundation of any organisation's existence ▪ Ethical leadership influences job satisfaction ▪ Ethical leadership promotes ideal world ▪ Reciprocate behaviour by employees
Group- and individual-level mediators between ethical leadership and OCB	Individual behaviour that promotes positive behaviours in employees	▪ Accountability leads to effective performance ▪ Fairness and consistency ▪ Honesty and transparency ▪ Integrity ▪ Loyalty, trust, and discipline
	Group behaviour that promotes positive behaviours in employees	▪ Discretionary group behaviour ▪ Accountability and transparency
	Individual behaviour that promotes OCB	▪ Accountability and transparency ▪ Confidence, belonging, loyalty, and supportiveness ▪ Consistency, inclusivity, and communication ▪ Fairness, transparency, and equality ▪ Honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness ▪ Positive attitude and faith in organisation
	Group behaviour that promotes OCB	▪ Accountability and transparency ▪ Collective responsibility ▪ Loyalty and transparency lead to commitment ▪ Respect and transparency ▪ Transparency and fairness

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Group- and individual-level mediators' effects triggering changes in OCB	Influence of discretionary behaviour on employees' OCB	▪ Trust and loyalty among employees ▪ Open, honest, and fair ▪ Positive attitudes of employee ▪ Transparent, honest, and non-corruptible
	Impact of discretionary behaviour on employee OCB	▪ Accountable and responsible ▪ Valued by the organisation ▪ Unethical behaviour affects employees negatively
Group- and individual-level mediators' influence on followers to take responsibility and engage in OCB	Influence of discretionary behaviour on followers	▪ Efficiency in resolving problems ▪ Fairness and commitment ▪ Kindness, respect, and empathy ▪ Positive, good attitude, and consciousness ▪ Social impact ▪ Sense of belonging
	Influence of mediators on OCB	▪ Affects OCB positively ▪ Collective accountability ▪ Encourages being supportive ▪ Honesty and transparency ▪ Motivates to go above and beyond

Based on the results, the quotations and the codes reflected the frequency of the views of the participants in response to the research questions. The interpretation of the frequency of the views was based on the number of quotations and codes per participant as reflected in Figure 1. The number of quotations and codes reflected that some tenets of behaviours illustrated by the views of the participants were more dominant and others were less dominant. The analysis of the results is discussed from the context of the findings from the four themes, 12 sub-themes, and 56 codes.

5.1 Impact of ethical leadership on organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB)

The results indicated that ethical leadership has a considerable influence on employee conduct, and that specific qualities linked to ethical leadership improve employees' OCB within the organisation. This assertion was highlighted in responses of the participants:

> I would say an ethical leader is influential to their individual employees, so, how that leader conducts themselves in the work environment that would be influential in how their employees then conduct themselves. [Participant FG3]

> And I will say if one had the correct ethical leadership skills that will positively influence the OCB of employees in the organisation. [Participant FG1]

Ethical leadership as a leadership style influenced employees to engage in positive behaviour, which affects employees' positive emotions, which, in turn, positively relates to followers. One participant expressed this view:

> And I have seen when certain things come out, in newspapers around unethical issues so I would say ethical leadership has a huge impact on employees. [Participant 2]

The effects of ethical leadership were linked to organisational support and ethical organisational climate. This could be seen from the view of a participant:

> You know ethics, I mean ethical behaviour, it is the foundation of any organisation's existence.   [Participant FG4]

Key attributes associated with ethical leadership enhance the OCB of employees in the organisation. A participant supported this view by indicating:

> And I will say if one had the correct ethical leadership skills that will positively influence the OCB of employees in the organisation.   [Participant FG1]

The significant point to note from the analysis was that the impact of ethical leadership on OCB was mediated by various variables. This is demonstrated by the view of a participant:

> The first question where we talk about positive virtues like we explained the trust, loyalty, and discipline, and so forth from ethical leadership.   [Participant 12]

The conclusion was that ethical leadership positively affected the OCB of employees. According to one participant:

> And I will say if one had the correct ethical leadership skills that will positively influence the OCB of employees in the organisation.   [Participant FG1]

The finding regarding the impact of ethical leadership is consistent with the findings by Gamarra and Girotto. who found that a leader's ethical behaviour can positively affect employee outcomes in terms of OCB (Gamarra & Girotto, 2021).

5.2   Group- and individual-level mediators between ethical leadership and OCB

Participants perceived transparency and accountability as a variable related to group behaviour:

> I think the behaviour of being transparent. If you are open and transparent. [Participant 2]

> So I think that ethical leadership affects OCB tremendously because ethical leadership goes with transparency, it goes with accountability.   [Participant FG3]

Upon further analysis, the researchers discovered that the behaviour categorised as individual behaviour in the sub-theme of individual behaviour was also consistent with the behaviour categorised as group behaviour in that the participants when answering questions highlighted the same behaviours for both sub-themes. The discovery revealed that accountability and transparency manifested as individual and group behaviour, stemming from the sub-themes of individual behaviour and group behaviour:

> So some things like transparency, accountability, integrity are more on the side of the leadership, and it is their actions that will now positively or negatively influence OCB.
> [Participant FG4]

This demonstrated a correlation between accountability and transparency within a water sector organisation. A response from a participant support this view:

> So I think that ethical leadership affects OCB tremendously because ethical leadership goes with transparency, it goes with accountability, it goes with a clear direction in communication and commitment to what has been set down as the way to do business.
> [Participant FG3]

The findings indicate that employees displayed conduct that contributed to OCB through voluntary discretionary group actions. This assertion is supported by a view:

> So some things like transparency, accountability, integrity are more on the side of the leadership, and it is their actions that will now positively or negatively influence OCB, but confidence, belonging, loyalty supportive will now be the response of OCB effects to whatever the leadership is adopting.
> [Participant FG4]

5.3 Group- and individual-level mediators' effects triggering changes in OCB

The analysis revealed that the participants perceived trust and loyalty among employees as factors that mediate the relationship that triggers changes in OCB. A participant reflected this by indicating:

> I believe that will cause more trust and loyalty within the employees themselves who work at the organisation as well.
> [Participant 12]

The results also suggest that the positive attitudes of employees act as a mediator in the relationship between discretionary behaviour and employees, as can be observed from a view by a participant:

> Acceptance of the people around you and just plain a positive attitude, let's bring the positivity out of everyone. [
> Participant 14]

The other variables that acted as mediators were openness, honesty, fairness, transparency, and non-corruptible. This was displayed from a view of a participant:

> So, it is important that everybody understands that whatever we are doing it must come with responsibility and honesty.
> [Participant FG2]

There was a perception that the influence of discretionary behaviour leads to a favourable attitude among employees. The impact of discretionary behaviour on employees was mediated by their sense of accountability, responsibility, and the extent to which they felt valued by the organisation.

> So, if you work in a certain team and all of you guys have like-mindedness like virtues such as trust, loyalty, and discipline, usually if one member of the group is happy, like-minded people will be happy at the same time. [Participant 12]

Another variable that had a mediating impact was the detrimental effect of unethical behaviour on employees. The results also demonstrated that the participants comprehended the detrimental impact of unethical conduct on employees. This was reflected in a response:

> And unethical behaviour has serious consequences for an organisation. [Participant 7]

5.4 Group- and individual-level mediators' influence on followers to take responsibility and engage in OCB

The findings demonstrated how the participants evaluated the behaviour that influences followers to assume responsibility and engage in OCB. Efficiency in resolving problems was considered a behaviour that influences followers to assume responsibility and participate in OCB as reflected:

> Efficiencies and effectiveness is approved with regards to processes, and which leads to successful results of the organisation. [Participant 14]

Social impact emerged as a behaviour that has an influence on the behaviour of followers. Leaders in the organisation are responsible for creating a sociable environment that improves the behaviour of followers and encourages them to take responsibility for the organisation's actions, as can been seen from a participant's view:

> So, if it is an organisation and there are things that we are questioning, and we do not know what is going on, we tend to withdraw ourselves as part of a collective. [Participant 2]

The findings indicate that several characteristics, including efficiency and social impact, have an influence on followers' willingness to take responsibility and engage in OCB.

6. Conclusion

Research that is certainly extensive acknowledges the importance of ethical leadership and OCB, however, it does not fully comprehend the intricate ways in which these two phenomena interact with each other at different levels (Tourigny et al., 2019). The research article enhances existing knowledge in the field of ethical leadership and OCB by investigating mediation variables at various levels, anchored on social learning theory.

This article extends the dynamic link of mediation variables by concurrently studying their impact at the individual and the group levels. Previous studies only evaluated the impact of mediation variables at an organisational level or at an individual level. This study has the distinction of examining the impact of mediation variables at both levels simultaneously.

The findings support and expand the understanding of mediation variables by establishing that variables such as accountability, transparency, efficiency, fairness, a positive or good attitude, social impact, and sense of belonging influence the impact of ethical leadership on OCB as group-level and individual-level mediators. This is an important contribution to the understanding of how social learning theory influences the impact of ethical leadership on OCB based on the same mediation variable, but at the group- and individual level of an organisation.

The findings confirm the assumption made by social learning theory, which states that individuals or groups that are the primary source of an individual's positive and negative rewards will have the largest influence on the individual's behaviour (Chia et al., 2021).

The article contributes to the literature on ethical leadership and OCB by introducing the impact of ethical leadership on OCB in the water sector in the context of South Africa. This provides new knowledge about the cultural and environmental contexts of previous research findings related to the conceptual definitions of ethical leadership and OCB, and how the impact is viewed across cultures and environments. The findings have practical implications for leaders and followers in the water sector because leaders can use an ethical leadership style to promote OCB of their followers to enhance organisational performance.

This research was conducted using ethical leadership as a leadership style. Future studies may also apply other leadership theories in determining the promotion of OCBs in entities in the water sector. A study including an in-depth case study of state-owned enterprises would provide more knowledge and new perspectives on how contextual factors, leadership dynamics, and challenges are characterised in the South African context. Finally, ethical leadership can improve the performance of followers through adopting OCB-aligned behaviour. This means that the water sector entities should increase the involvement of employees in activities that promote OCB behaviour.

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State capture in South Africa: A critical analysis of its nature, cost and subsequent reforms

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Abstract

This article presents a critical and comprehensive analysis of state capture in South Africa, delving into its historical evolution, structural mechanisms, and long-term repercussions. It also examines the extensive financial and social costs associated with state capture, particularly its role in exacerbating economic inequality and fostering systemic governance failures. State capture, characterised by the deliberate co-optation of public institutions by private interests, has significantly altered the operational integrity of the South African government. By systematically manipulating state resources, elected officials and public sector actors have entrenched corruption, thereby undermining public trust and weakening institutional frameworks.

The research adopts a qualitative methodology, employing a rigorous desktop analysis of secondary data, including governmental reports, academic literature, and investigative findings from commissions such as the Zondo Commission. The findings indicate that, beyond direct financial misappropriation, state capture has also eroded South Africa's ability to attract foreign investment, diminished economic competitiveness, and perpetuated sociopolitical instability. Unlike previous research that primarily focused on financial losses, this study expands the discourse to include a critical examination of the sociopolitical and developmental dimensions of state capture. By doing so, it highlights the urgent need for comprehensive governance reforms, stringent accountability mechanisms, and the reinforcement of democratic institutions to mitigate the long-term consequences of state capture in South Africa.

1. Introduction: The systematic nature of state capture

State capture is a pervasive governance pathology that extends beyond conventional corruption to the systematic reconfiguration of state institutions for private gain. While corruption involves individual acts of bribery and embezzlement, state capture is more insidious as it entails deliberately restructuring legislative, executive, and regulatory frameworks to serve elite interests. South Africa's encounter with state capture has been particularly profound, reaching its peak during the presidency of Jacob Zuma (2009–2018). The intricate network of corrupt practices that emerged during this period resulted in the exploitation of state-owned enterprises, the politicisation of public appointments, and the obstruction of judicial processes to protect key actors involved in illicit activities.

Furthermore, Meirotti and Masterson (2018) indicated that the second element of state capture during Zuma's presidency was the establishment of a shadow state inside the African National Congress (ANC). For instance, one of Zuma's close allies, Arthur Fraser, hid behind these secrecy laws to set up a parallel and unaccountable intelligence structure, the Principal Agent Network (PAN), which allegedly splurged up to R1.5 billion in public funds in three years on various covert projects (Thamm, 2017). This means that certain practices that, while not explicitly illegal, were used to enable individuals or groups to exploit legal systems, loopholes, or institutions for personal or political gain, often at the expense of public interest. Such practices undermine the rule of law by allowing individuals to operate above legal accountability, weakening institutional integrity and eroding public trust. When secrecy laws are exploited to bypass oversight, it creates a parallel system where power is exercised without transparency or consequences, contradicting the principle that all are equal before the law.

In addition, during Zuma's tenure, several different forms of corruption such as nepotism and cronyism were employed. Smith (2014) reported on the nepotism that took place under Zuma's tenure, after his daughter was appointed to a senior position in a government ministry at the age of 25. In terms of cronyism, Lee (2017), Cornish (2022), and Schrieber (2024) have all reported on such cases during Zuma's years with the appointment of individuals such as Dudu Myeni as South African Airway's CEO, and the reappointment of Tina Joemat-Pettersson as a cabinet member despite damning reports by various investigations.

Despite the ANC being in power since April 1994, and winning six consecutive general elections, in recent years, the number of voters who have stopped voting for the ANC continues to grow (Fransman, 2021). Table 1 provides a summary of the ANC electoral performance since 1994. Furthermore, considering the most recent general elections (Independent Electoral Commission 2009; 2015; 2019), it could be argued that the country's dominant political party is increasingly losing popular support. The decline in the ANC's electoral performance could be attributed to many reasons, one of which is corruption. A study conducted by Patel et al. (2024), before the 2024 elections, indicated that individuals who believed that the government is corrupt and is not doing enough to root out corruption were more likely to vote for an opposition party than the ANC.

In addition, a report by Corruption Watch (2024) showed that the trend of declining national voter participation was clearly linked to an increase in fraud and corruption cases. This means that corruption perception is an important component of government performance, which people use to judge political institutions.

Engel (2021) argues that corruption in South Africa reached unprecedented proportions under former President Zuma, whose ANC associates and corporate networks nearly perfected the regime's project of state capture from 2009 to 2018. Similarly, Odubajo and Onuoha (2021) assert that the Zuma presidency was the most dramatic since the birth of liberal democracy in South Africa. However, one could argue that Engel (2021) is right in his assessment by looking at the figures from Transparency International from 1994 to 2024. These figures provide an accurate recording of corruption and related activities in South Africa. According to data obtained from Transparency International (2025), South Africa declined from an average score of 56 (1999) to 41 (2024). This is not to say that South Africa was performing well before the Zuma years. However, the decline was greatly accelerated during Zuma's presidency. In fact, the obtained data shows that South Africa was in the process of decline. Nevertheless, state capture exacerbated the process. Table 1 provides a detailed score of South Africa's voting performance.

Table 1: South Africa's vote outcomes from 1994 to 2024

Year(s)	Vote %	Description(s)
1994	62.65%	First democratic election; ANC forms Government of National Unity.
1999	66.35%	Increased majority; just short of two-thirds needed to unilaterally amend the constitution.
2004	69.69%	Achieved over two-thirds majority, enabling constitutional amendments.
2009	65.90%	Majority reduced; COPE, a breakaway from the ANC, enters parliament.
2014	62.15%	Further decline; Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) make their debut.
2019	57.50%	Continued decline; ANC loses its two-thirds majority.
2024	40.18%	First time losing parliamentary majority; necessitates coalition government.

Source: Independent Electoral Commission (2024)

Figure 1 demonstrates that South Africa has persistently achieved scores ranging from 41 to 45 out of 100 from 2012 to 2022, indicating a need for improvement in the fight against corruption (Imiera, 2020). These rankings endure despite the South African government's recurrent declarations of progress in anti-corruption initiatives; the data clearly refute the government's claims (Mlambo, 2023).
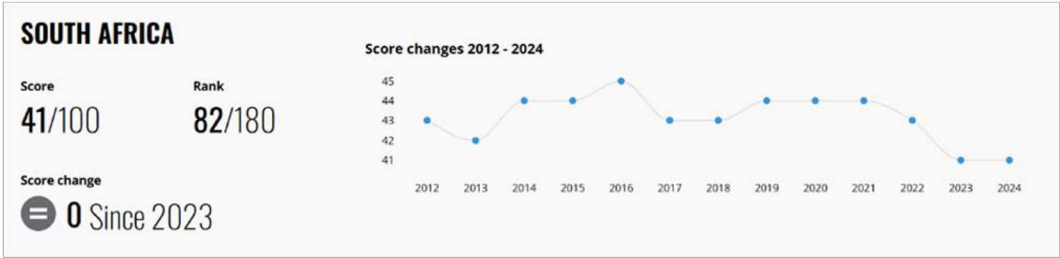

Figure 1: Corruption Perceptions Index, 2012–2024
(Transparency International, 2025)

The close association between former President Zuma and the Gupta family (a wealthy Indian family made up of three brothers: Atul, Ajay, and Rajesh Gupta) has, in particular, aroused widespread concern about state control. Many observers, however, argue that state capture has long been a component of the ruling ANC but has been obscured by the fact that the South African state has not been recognised as a failed or failing state. This is mainly owed to the ANC government's ability to retain complete administrative control, maintain some degree of peace, and provide regular public services to its population (Martin & Solomon, 2016). The primary issue in combatting state capture is that it is a covert component of administrative corruption that resists simple remedies (Dassah, 2018). When moral responsibility is degraded via an unlawful connection controlled by external actors, the critical function of the public sector as supplier and overseer of the country's funds might be significantly jeopardised. State capture is one of the key components of a weak state that gradually withers away and eventually collapses into a dysfunctional state. Corrupt elected politicians in a weak nation continue to dominate resource distribution and maintain a monopoly on power (Labuschagne, 2017).

The scale of state capture in South Africa necessitates a multi-dimensional approach to understand its full implications. This article explores the extent to which state capture has eroded democratic governance, destabilised economic structures, and compromised public service delivery. It also investigates the efficacy of post-capture reforms, particularly the role of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector including Organs of State (commonly referred to as the Zondo Commission) in identifying and addressing systemic governance failures. By critically assessing these factors, the article seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on corruption risk governance and institutional resilience in emerging democracies.

Given the urgent need for sustainable governance reforms in South Africa, this article aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice by critically evaluating the lessons learned from the Zondo Commission and other anti-corruption initiatives. By highlighting the ethical dilemmas, policy failures, and accountability deficits associated with state capture, the necessity of robust institutional frameworks to uphold public integrity and prevent the recurrence of large-scale corruption in the public sector is emphasised. Therefore, this study analyses the systemic vulnerabilities in South Africa's public sector that permitted state capture, focusing on the roles of political patronage, elite networks, and regulatory loopholes in facilitating institutional subversion. It also examines the concealed and enduring economic consequences of state capture, encompassing not only financial mismanagement but also diminished institutional trust, governance instability, and policy distortions that hinder sustainable growth. Lastly, this article gauges the efficacy of post-state capture accountability procedures, including the Zondo Commission and associated governance reforms, in averting recurrence and promoting a culture of ethical leadership within public administration.

2. Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilising an extensive review of secondary data to provide a comprehensive analysis of state capture. Governmental reports, legislative records, investigative findings, and academic literature were systematically examined to assess the multifaceted impacts of state capture. The study also draws on empirical data from institutions such as the Zondo Commission and Transparency International to contextualise the long-term consequences of governance failures.

To further examine and identify any important previous research and gaps regarding the scope and location of this investigation, a comprehensive literature review was carried out. The Google and Google Scholar databases provide most of the data used in this study. These databases were chosen by the authors for their extensive data coverage and solid reputation in a variety of scientific fields. Based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, a digital search was carried out to find the most pertinent information sources. First, the chosen search terms and phrases were used to find pertinent sources. The applicability of the discovered sources' titles, abstracts, and introductions was then assessed. After that, the most relevant sources were examined and added to the literature review. Several web databases were searched using keywords to find the original list of sources. Titles, abstracts, keywords, and full texts were all included in the search, which was not restricted to any one year of publication. Google, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Brill, University of California Press, Routledge, and government websites were among the internet databases used in this study. The authors searched key terms such as 'state capture', 'South African public sector', 'State Owned Entities', 'State capture in South Africa', 'Jacob Zuma presidency', 'Gupta brothers', and 'Zondo commission'. Table 2 outlines the sources of data consulted to address the purpose of the study.

Table 2: Data sources

Database	Type(s) of source	No. of relevant search results	No. of sources used in the study
Google	All (journal articles, institutional and periodic reports, online news reports)	70	25
Google Scholar	Journal articles; institutional and periodic reports	27	11
EbscoHost	Scholarly books and articles	43	4
PAIS index	Scholarly books	15	5
Brill	Journal articles	3	0
Routledge	Scholarly books	12	2
SAGE	Journal articles	3	1
Cambridge University Press	Scholarly books and journal articles	1	1
Wiley Online Library	Journal articles and scholarly books	3	1
ResearchGate	Journal articles	21	8
Government website(s)	Institutional reports, research outputs and protocols	8	4
Total		**206**	**62**

According to Dawadi (2020:62), thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that researchers use to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets. Therefore, a thematic analysis was conducted to categorise the data into key domains, including institutional erosion, financial mismanagement, policy manipulation, and social ramifications. This approach ensures a nuanced understanding of how state capture has permeated multiple sectors of governance and society. The authors used thematic analysis to identify themes through careful reading and re-reading of the data and literature. The authors also used thematic analysis to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets. It was appropriate to use thematic analysis due to the large amounts of text-based information collected throughout the research process.

3.   Re-evaluating state capture

In post-apartheid South Africa, where private interests have systematically manipulated state institutions to fulfil limited economic and political goals, state capture has become a crucial governance concern. It is therefore necessary to re-examine important academic discussions on state capture and look at how it affects institutional integrity, regulatory frameworks, legislative procedures, and economic stability. The assessment, which draws from the body of current literature, emphasises how political meddling, weakened governance frameworks, and degraded law enforcement have exacerbated corruption and hampered accountability. The proposed measures to restore institutional legitimacy and stop state capture in the future are also discussed.

3.1   State capture unveiled: From theory to global reality

The concept of state capture was first introduced by Hellman et al. (2000) in the context of post-Soviet economies, where private actors exerted undue influence over state institutions to shape policy and regulatory outcomes in their favour. This framework has since been adapted to analyse governance failures in various political contexts, including South Africa. Dassah (2018) posits that state capture represents the most extreme form of corruption, wherein private entities effectively hijack the state apparatus to legitimise their illicit activities. In South Africa, state capture gained national prominence following the release of the Public Protector's 2016 *State of Capture* report (Madonsela, 2016). The report documented the Gupta family's deep entrenchment in state affairs, revealing how they manipulated government appointments and procurement processes to secure lucrative contracts (Desai, 2018). Subsequent investigations, including those led by the Zondo Commission, further uncovered extensive collusion between political elites and private businesses, culminating in widespread institutional degradation.

One of the first definitions of 'state capture' referred to it as "efforts by companies to influence the laws, rules, and regulations of the state for their benefit by offering unlawful private benefits to public officials" (Hellman & Kaufmann, 2001:31). Hellman et al. (2000:4), however, provide a much more comprehensive definition, referring to state capture as "the propensity of firms to shape the underlying rules of the game by 'purchasing' decrees, legislation, and influence" or "efforts by firms to shape and

influence the underlying rules of the game (i.e., legislation, laws, rules, and decrees) by making private payments to public officials". These definitions emphasise corporations but ignore a vital agent or captor actor (individuals acting in a private or official position) and a required capture method (funding of political activities).

'Capture' is a military metaphor with connotations of force employed by people or businesses to extort the state; however, the irregular capture process is informal, subtle, covert, or surreptitious, not overt or violent (Adams et al., 2007). While the term 'capture' may conjure up thoughts of physical capture, the process is more about capturing "hearts, minds, and emotions" (Adams et al., 2007:1). Individuals and businesses attempt to influence the process of developing laws, rules, and regulations, not the application of existing laws. State capture thus includes the betrayal of the public interest. In instances of state capture, the nature of the connection between the commercial firm and the state is illegitimate, implying that laws and regulations enacted, or actions performed, are the results of corrupt activities or transactions. So, legality becomes dependent on criminality.

While private sector people or businesses often 'capture' state institutions irregularly and undemocratically, governmental authorities can also do the same. Vladimir Montesinos Lenin, who led Peru's intelligence agencies under President Alberto Fujimori, is one example (1990–2000). First, he grabbed the media and critical institutions, such as the military and courts (Kupferschmidt, 2009). Afterwards, he utilised the military to promote the trafficking of weaponry and drugs and the tax authorities to fund illegal enterprises and coerce hesitant people to comply. State capture is motivated by the pursuit of private wealth at the cost of the public by people or businesses; in reality, the undermining of the democratic public interest is its fundamental objective. Any authoritarian government that diverts state resources into private hands and pockets can therefore be regarded as capturing the state for its benefit. These manifestations of irregular, undemocratic state capture and corruption are worldwide challenges to democracy that may affect economies differently. The effect of state capture and corruption on a country's economy is primarily dependent on the extent of corruption and the country's economic strength.

In fact, state capture in South Africa does not exist in isolation; it has far-reaching implications for global politics. According to Dávid-Barrett (2023), major world powers leverage economic and geopolitical interests to influence domestic governance in foreign nations. Zuma's strategic alignment with China, particularly in the nuclear energy sector, reflects broader shifts in global power dynamics. The term 'open state custodians of African nationalism' has emerged in discussions on state capture, referring to leaders who balance nationalistic policies with transparency and accountability (Dávid-Barrett, 2023). However, the dominance of private interests in state affairs risks subordinating national sovereignty to foreign economic pressures. Table 3 categorises the susceptibility and manifestations of state capture across three economic groupings: developed, emerging, and resource-rich economies, highlighting how institutional maturity, governance strength, and economic structure shape the nature and impact of corruption and state capture.

South Africa, as an emerging economy and a resource-rich country, is uniquely positioned at the intersection of the two most vulnerable categories. This dual vulnerability helps explain the depth and systemic entrenchment of state capture in the country, as exposed by the Zondo Commission. Similar to other emerging economies, South Africa's relatively weak institutional checks and politicised bureaucracy allowed for elite collusion and rent-seeking. Furthermore, its abundant mineral wealth and control over strategic state-owned enterprises (such as Eskom and Transnet) mirror the patterns in resource-rich states, where natural resources become leverage for corrupt elites to consolidate power and divert public wealth.

The reference to cases like the Asian financial crisis and Middle Eastern rent-seeking economies shows that state capture in South Africa is not an isolated anomaly, but a symptom of broader structural governance issues common to countries with fragile institutions and high-value public assets. This framing justifies the article's critical stance on the nature of South Africa's state capture as deeply systemic and economically costly, reinforcing the urgency of implementing robust institutional reforms to restore democratic accountability and fiscal integrity. By drawing from Fiebelkorn (2019), Table 3 also strengthens the comparative analysis in the article, positioning South Africa's experience within a global spectrum of state capture, while emphasising the need for tailored, context-sensitive reforms that address the country's hybrid vulnerabilities.

Table 3: State capture in different economies

Economy/ies	State capture experience(s)
Developed economies	• Due to their well-established institutional frameworks, the rule of law, and robust democratic institutions, developed countries are often less susceptible to state takeover and corruption. • Nonetheless, corruption may still exist at many levels of government, and in certain instances, it can have catastrophic repercussions. • For instance, the Enron crisis in the United States, which entailed financial statement manipulation and accounting fraud, resulted in the company's bankruptcy and caused enormous economic harm.
Emerging economies	• Due to their weaker institutional frameworks and less evolved legal systems, emerging economies like Latin America, Africa, and Asia are more susceptible to state takeover and corruption. • Corruption may lead to efficient resource allocation, adequate public services, and a dearth of foreign investment. • As seen by the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, in which corruption played a significant part in aggravating the crisis, corruption may sometimes lead to economic instability.
Resource-rich economies	• Due to the enormous value of their natural resources, resource-rich economies, such as those in the Middle East and Africa, are also susceptible to state takeover and corruption. • The high value of natural resources may facilitate rent-seeking behaviour, in which people or organisations use their position to take income from a country's resources. • This may lead to a lack of economic diversity, political instability, and the underdevelopment of other economic sectors.

Source: Fiebelkorn (2019)

State capture and corruption may have enormous repercussions on economies at various stages of development. Often, the extent to which state capture and corruption affect a particular economy is linked to the presence and effectiveness of democratic institutional structures, independent judicial systems, and a dedication to the rule of law.

3.2 The sociopolitical and economic consequences of state capture

State capture has inflicted severe damage on South Africa's governance landscape. One of the most immediate consequences has been the systematic erosion of institutional autonomy, as oversight bodies such as the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and the South African Revenue Service (SARS) were deliberately weakened to protect politically-connected individuals (Hoffman & Stiftung, 2021). Furthermore, state-owned enterprises such as Eskom, Transnet, and the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) have suffered unprecedented financial losses due to corrupt procurement practices and mismanagement (De Klerk & Solomon, 2019).

Beyond economic losses, state capture has also exacerbated sociopolitical instability. The misallocation of public funds has disproportionately affected essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, deepening socio-economic inequalities (Merten, 2019). Moreover, the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions has led to increased voter apathy, weakened political participation, and heightened social unrest. Transparency International (2025) reports that South Africa's Corruption Perceptions Index steadily declined between 2009 and 2018, reflecting the growing disillusionment with governance structures.

The phenomenon of state capture in South Africa represents a seismic shift in governance, transforming public institutions into conduits for private enrichment at the expense of the nation's economic and social wellbeing. The extensive financial losses arising out of state capture expose not only the scale of the damage but also the intricate web of illicit transactions that have deepened inequality, undermined investor confidence, and crippled essential public services. To fully grasp the magnitude of this crisis, one must critically assess the layers of economic sabotage, institutional decay, and the lingering effects that continue to shape South Africa's governance landscape (Bonga, 2021; Zondo, 2018; Haffajee, 2022).

3.2.1 The economic fallout of state capture: Market shocks, investor exodus, and the Eskom crisis

The numbers tell a chilling story – R1.5 trillion (approximately $81.8 billion) siphoned away in just four years. This staggering figure is not merely an abstract sum but a tangible representation of lost opportunities for national development. The budget shortfall of R252.5 billion ($13.7 billion) highlights direct financial losses, while the ballooning debt servicing costs of R67 billion ($3.6 billion) illuminates the compounding effects of corruption on fiscal sustainability (Merten, 2019). When tax revenue shrinks by R90 billion ($4.9 billion), the government's ability to fund social services is eroded,

leaving millions of vulnerable citizens to suffer the consequences. The financial market ramifications of state capture in South Africa were immediate and severe. The 2017 midnight Cabinet reshuffle, orchestrated to facilitate further corruption, wiped out R506 billion ($27.6 billion) from the value of South African bonds and listed companies (Merten, 2019). The dismissal of Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan was part of this reorganisation, which was seen as an effort to weaken Treasury monitoring and condone unethical behaviour. This demonstrates how a nation's financial and economic stability may be significantly impacted by political unrest and perceived corruption. This was not just a temporary fluctuation but a profound destabilisation of market confidence, further compounded by the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) devaluation of R378 billion ($20.6 billion) (Merten, 2019). These losses signified a crisis of credibility, where institutional mismanagement and corruption created an environment too volatile for sustainable investment.

The case of Eskom serves as a glaring example of how state capture hollowed out critical infrastructure. The R200 billion ($10.9 billion) overspend on Medupi and Kusile power plants highlights the scale of mismanagement and misplaced priorities. These projects, marred by delays and cost overruns, symbolise how corruption turned public infrastructure into lucrative opportunities for a privileged few while leaving the public in darkness – literally and figuratively (BusinessTech, 2022). Moreover, Eskom's irregular contracts, worth R14.7 billion ($802.3 million), further cemented its status as a financial black hole, draining resources that could have revitalised the country's ailing energy sector (Cohen and Burkhardt, 2022).

3.2.2   Systematic looting by the Gupta empire and Zuma-led administration

The intricate financial engineering behind state capture is epitomised by direct corrupt expenditures. The R1 billion ($54.5 million) consultancy fee paid to McKinsey, the R659 million ($35.9 million) Eskom prepayment to Gupta-owned Tegeta, and the R5.3 billion ($289.2 million) finder's fee in the Transnet locomotive contract reveal a pattern of systemic looting (Cohen & Burkhardt, 2022). These transactions were not isolated incidents but part of a carefully orchestrated scheme to funnel public wealth into private hands, with devastating effects on national development.

State capture was not merely about financial misappropriation; it was an assault on the very institutions meant to safeguard democracy and accountability. During the Zuma administration, the political will to enforce compliance was virtually non-existent. Regulatory bodies were deliberately weakened, key oversight mechanisms were dismantled, and public servants were either complicit or powerless in the face of rampant corruption. The enduring effects of this institutional decay are still evident today, with weak enforcement of procurement laws and ongoing inefficiencies in public financial management (Omarjee, 2021).

3.2.3   Beyond Zuma: The enduring legacy of state capture

A critical dimension often overlooked is the continuity of state capture beyond Zuma's presidency. While his tenure saw the apex of corruption, the structural weaknesses that

enabled it to have not been eradicated. Scholars such as Madonsela (2019), Bracking (2018), and Martin and Solomon (2016) have argued that state capture existed before Zuma and has persisted in different forms post his administration. Inaction and passive governance, characterised by an unwillingness to hold perpetrators accountable, have allowed corruption to morph into more insidious forms. Bond (2020) highlights how the state remains ensnared in improper private interests, demonstrating that the problem is far from resolved.

It is important to recognise that the consequences of state capture extend beyond economic loss; they touch on the ethical integrity of governance and the broader social contract between the state and its citizens. Public trust in institutions has been severely eroded, making governance reforms an urgent necessity. Strengthening transparency, enforcing accountability, and restoring the independence of oversight bodies are critical steps towards repairing the damage. Without decisive action, South Africa risks perpetuating a cycle of corruption that will continue to drain resources and stifle development.

3.3   A constitution undermined by state capture

South Africa's constitutional democracy was designed to prevent the authoritarian capture of government by a powerful elite (Graham, 2015). Additionally, constitutional safeguards were put in place to protect underrepresented groups and uphold fundamental freedoms under the South African Bill of Rights (Klug, 2018). However, decades after the Constitution's proclamation in 1996, its intended protections have been systematically eroded by rampant corruption, poor service delivery, and the collapse of governance at national, provincial, and local levels. State institutions, including Eskom, Transnet, and the Land Bank, have been plunged into crises, while socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and crime have escalated.

Despite its strength on paper, the Constitution has been weaponised by political elites who manipulate its provisions to serve their own interests. The ANC's factional battles – particularly between supporters of former President Zuma and President Ramaphosa – have led to political instability that undermines judicial independence and the rule of law (Oxford Analytica, 2021). The ANC's cadre deployment strategy has further weakened institutional integrity by prioritising party loyalty over merit, leading to a deterioration of accountability and transparency (Petersen, 2020; Mlambo et al., 2022). As a result, governance failures have become pervasive, with pliable cadres holding key positions in government and state-owned enterprises.

3.3.1   The shadow state: The rise of an informal authoritarian order

The formal South African democratic constitutional state has been superseded by an informal 'shadow state', characterised by elite corruption, political patronage, and the systematic looting of state resources (Bhorat et al., 2017). This parallel system of governance operates beyond democratic accountability, serving the interests of an entrenched political elite rather than the broader South African populace. The decline of governance effectiveness has given rise to a permanent constitutional crisis, driven

by political infighting, misconduct, and the deliberate erosion of institutional oversight (Klug, 2018).

One of the most glaring examples of constitutional subversion was former President Zuma's resistance to the Zondo Commission, which he only established after prolonged pressure. The Constitutional Court's ruling that he violated the Constitution by failing to reimburse public funds spent on his Nkandla residence epitomises the extent of executive overreach (Hlase, 2021). Furthermore, the capture of state institutions by private interests, notably the Gupta family, has profoundly destabilised South Africa's economic and political environment (Dassah, 2018).

3.3.2   Accountability, restitution, and future reforms to address state capture

Mbaku (2018) describes state capture as a sophisticated form of corruption that necessitates a multifaceted accountability strategy. Considering the aforementioned, meaningful restitution and sanctions against perpetrators of state capture remain key to restoring trust in governance. In this regard, Khaas (2024) has emphasised that the NPA must not limit itself to financial recovery but should aggressively pursue criminal charges against individuals involved in state capture. The Zondo Commission's revelations about President Ramaphosa's lack of decisive action against implicated individuals highlight a critical gap in accountability (Haffajee, 2022). Ramaphosa's administration continues to accommodate enablers of state capture within government structures, undermining reform efforts and public trust in democratic institutions.

Of particular concern is the absence of a centralised system for tracking and enforcing recommendations from oversight committees, which has led to stagnation in anti-corruption efforts. Doyle et al. (2022) argue that parliamentary oversight must transition into a structured, results-driven process with legally enforceable timetables to ensure compliance. Furthermore, the culture of 'false accountability', where reports are generated but action is absent, has been identified as a core issue in governance failures (Gwarube, 2023). Strengthening the Auditor General's authority and ensuring that parliamentary legacy reports are acted upon can mitigate this challenge.

While some corporations, such as Systems, Applications, and Products in Data Processing (SAP), McKinsey & Company, and Asea Brown Boveri (ABB), have paid billions in restitution, these measures continue to remain insufficient given the broader economic devastation caused by state capture (Pillay, 2024). These companies were implicated in facilitating or benefiting from corrupt contracts and unethical dealings during South Africa's state capture era, prompting them to pay restitution for their roles in enabling large-scale public sector looting and governance failures. The NPA's agreements with corporate entities must be complemented by aggressive legal actions against executives responsible for orchestrating corrupt deals. The establishment of a State Capture Recovery Fund, independent of political control, could be a viable mechanism to ensure that recovered funds directly benefit affected communities. This would enhance transparency and prevent the funds from being reallocated through compromised government structures.

Commissions of inquiry play a critical role in exposing corruption and reinforcing democratic oversight. As Probert and Heyns (2020) note, these commissions are tasked with investigating matters of public concern and providing policy recommendations. The 2016 *State of Capture* report by former Public Protector Thuli Madonsela led to the formation of the Zondo Commission, which revealed extensive evidence of corruption in public procurement, ministerial appointments, and state contracts (Madonsela, 2016). The Commission's findings highlight the need for robust enforcement mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of state capture and to uphold constitutional democracy.

In an effort to provide a comprehensive elaboration, Figure 2 presents a conceptual framework illustrating how state capture manifests and evolves in the South African public sector context. At the core of the figure is the deliberate manipulation of institutional governance structures by private or political elites to advance narrow interests. The framework shows that capture typically begins with the erosion of key accountability institutions, such as procurement systems, oversight bodies, and law enforcement agencies, followed by the politicisation of public appointments and regulatory decisions. This enables systemic corruption, resulting in inflated costs to the public purse, deteriorating service delivery, and widespread socio-economic inequality. The figure further reflects how such capture thrives in contexts of weak enforcement, poor transparency, and elite collusion, ultimately leading to a crisis of legitimacy and trust in democratic governance. This framing provides an analytical lens through which to assess the entrenched nature, scale, and implications of state capture in South Africa and serves as a foundation for evaluating post-capture reform efforts.
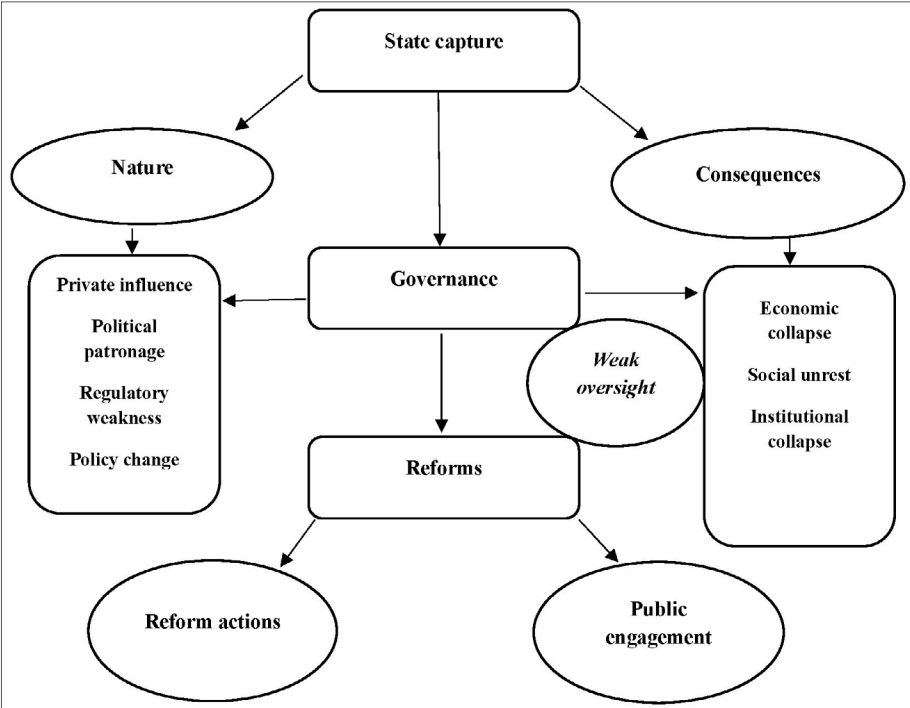

Figure 2: State capture conceptual framing in the South African public sector context

4. Conclusion

State capture in South Africa has precipitated a crisis of governance, significantly impairing the country's democratic and economic stability. The manipulation of legislative processes and regulatory agencies has allowed private actors to dictate policy outcomes, thereby weakening the state's capacity to function effectively. Law enforcement agencies and the judiciary have been systematically obstructed, as evidenced by the political interference in prosecutorial decisions (Meirotti & Masterson, 2018). One of the main characteristics of state capture has been the capacity of private actors to sway legislative and policy decisions in favour of their own agendas, frequently through cooperation with political elites. Informal networks of patronage, in which laws and regulations are drafted or changed to favour politically connected elites and business entities at the expense of general welfare, have made this manipulation easier. For instance, significant government tenders and contracts have been crafted to frequently provide preference to companies by compromising procurement control procedures.

The capacity of state institutions to carry out their fundamental duties has declined because of cadre deployment, poor management, and corrupt appointments. Due to the misappropriation of funds and the placement of unfit people in important roles, the public sector – which oversees the provision of services in crucial areas such as infrastructure, healthcare, and education – has suffered severe setbacks. The most disadvantaged members of society have been disproportionately impacted by the inefficiencies, financial leaks, and deteriorating service delivery. Furthermore, corruption and poor management have largely gone unnoticed due to the deterioration of monitoring organisations, including the South African Parliament and Chapter 9 institutions, such as the Office of the Public Protector.

Economically, state capture has led to the depletion of public resources, escalating government debt and diminishing investor confidence. Reports from Transparency International indicate that foreign direct investment inflows to South Africa declined significantly between 2010 and 2018 due to heightened policy uncertainty and governance risks (Engel, 2021). Additionally, the financial losses incurred by state-owned enterprises have severely constrained the government's ability to fund developmental projects, exacerbating poverty and unemployment (Mkhize, 2023). State capture has had a disastrous effect on the economy, causing capital flight, a decline in investor confidence, and fiscal instability. State-owned organisations, including Eskom, Transnet, and South African Airways, have experienced widespread corruption, which has resulted in financial mismanagement, mounting debt, and the degradation of vital infrastructure. South Africa's socio-economic problems have been made worse by the diversion of public monies intended for economic growth and development into private hands, which has increased unemployment and inequality. Additionally, the misappropriation of resources has affected infrastructure investment, social grants, and public sector wages – all of which are essential for sustainable growth.

The governance reforms introduced following the Zondo Commission have been met with mixed success. While some prosecutions have been initiated, the slow pace of judicial

proceedings and the continued presence of politically connected individuals in key government positions raise concerns about the sustainability of these reforms (Pillay, 2022). Thus, it needs to be emphasised that more robust legislative and institutional safeguards to prevent future episodes of state capture should be implemented. A multifaceted strategy that prioritises institutional changes, judicial independence, and more openness is needed to address the crisis of governance brought on by state control. A roadmap for restoring the integrity of state institutions is provided by the Zondo Commission's findings on state capture, which have included suggestions for depoliticising important state bodies, bolstering anti-corruption organisations, and changing public procurement procedures. Restoring public confidence and discouraging future cases of state capture also depend on holding people accountable through criminal prosecutions and asset recovery procedures. South Africa's democratic institutions, economic opportunities, and governance capacities have all been seriously weakened by state capture. Even while measures are being taken to mitigate its effects, maintaining political will and involving civil society is essential to guaranteeing that public institutions are recovered for the public good and that democratic accountability is restored.

This article has, thus, contributed to the discourse on governance and corruption by highlighting the broader implications of state capture beyond financial losses. Future research should explore comparative governance models to identify best practices for strengthening institutional resilience against state capture. Furthermore, policymakers must adopt a more aggressive stance on anti-corruption measures, ensuring that governance structures are insulated from undue political and private sector influence.

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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, re-train 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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