

2021 SEALLF VIRTUAL CONFERENCE – CALL FOR PAPERS

THEME: AFRICAN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES & GLOBAL MODERNITIES

The 11th annual meeting of the South East African Languages and Literatures Forum (SEALLF) will be held virtually by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) on October 08-09, 2021. The SEALLF meeting is held by scholars whose work focuses on the study of African languages and literatures, African language pedagogy, linguistics, African language policy, and African/Black cultural studies. If you had previously submitted for the 2020 in-person conference that was to be held at the UNC-CH but was cancelled due to the COVID-19 local and international travel restrictions and mitigation recommendations, please resubmit to confirm participation in the 2021 virtual conference. Deadline for submission is May 21, 2021.

In this conference, we invite papers and panels that reflect on the critical role of African languages as vehicles of modernity and modernization, but also African languages as produced by cultural conjunctures resulting from Africa's entanglement in global capitalist dynamics. By foregrounding the notion of 'global modernities,' we mean to emphasize the existence of, not one unilineal modernity, but many trajectories of modernity, some of which taking root in the cultures and languages of Africa. Thirty-five years ago, Ngugi wa Thiong'o wrote, "Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture." If African languages thus carry African cultures, we also find it worthwhile to probe into an obvious reciprocity; meaning how social and cultural circumstances determine new forms and styles of African speech, vocabulary, and tongues. For instance, COVID-19 has occasioned a recent genre of 'awareness music' in local African tongues, just as African health specialists have found themselves negotiating a new lexis to talk about the pandemic.

Furthermore, many scholars have seen in the practice of indigenous language writing a modern medium for preserving indigenous African languages and for disseminating African culture and humanism. While this decolonial perspective on the language-culture nexus predicates on a belief in writing as an instrument of self-affirmation and self-representation, we would like to explore similarly important roles that non-written mediums – such as performance, film, visual art, and internet-based technology. – have played in the survival of African languages and the expansion of African epistemologies.

Obviously, modern African languages carry the imprint of Africa's encounters with Europe but also the Arab-Muslim world; encounters that have yielded fascinating forms of literacy and literature in Africa. This is in addition to the important processes of language-based cultural modernization effected through various modes of Africanization and globalization in art, literature, and performance. Today, while the machinery of Western languages still dominates several domains in Africa, African languages have remained central in the production of modernity in and out of the continent. We hope to explore such African language resilience by considering how they mediate the localization of the global and the globalization of the local. More concretely, we seek to examine how global African modernities, in their respective genealogies, are iterated in literature, art, popular music, media, internet technology, and other mediums in which language remains central. Therefore, we explore how African languages, as modern carriers of culture, convey complex messages of modernity whose expressive styles, content, and contours defy the Weberian tradition as much as they challenge any essentialist attempt to frame the cultural scopes of African languages and literatures.

By engaging with African literatures, performance, and artistic practices in this conference, we hope to examine the role and place of African languages in the production and negotiation of African modernities. We welcome theoretical and/or practical approaches to the critical role of African languages as carriers of modernity in the continent and beyond. We invite papers and panels addressing any related questions, including the following:

1. What roles do African languages play in the processes of cultural modernization in Africa?
2. What is the relationship between language and culture in modern Africa?
3. In what ways do contemporary African literature and performance mediate language production and preservation?
4. What are the role and place of African languages in the internationalization of US universities?
5. How can African language teaching-learning be used to nurture institutional collaboration between African and American universities and colleges?
6. What are the present challenges to promoting African language teaching in US universities and colleges?
7. What is the contemporary relationship between indigenous African languages and foreign languages?
8. What is the role of African languages in the production of contemporary African popular cultures, arts, and literatures?

9. What can the study of African languages tell us about the popular expressions of African modernity in the continent and beyond?
10. How can we rethink modernity and contemporaneity in relation to African languages?
11. How are changes in African languages articulated in contemporary African culture and literature?
12. How can we promote regional and continental interconnectedness in African languages, literatures, cultures and arts?
13. How can we rethink and promote the role of African languages in STEM education and research in the US and in Africa?
14. What possibilities and platforms can be imagined and developed to promote African languages in K-12 US schools in the southeastern region of the United States?
15. How do we reinforce sustainable relationships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Community Colleges (CC) by encouraging teaching and research in African languages, cultures, and literatures in these institutions?
16. What lessons has COVID-19 taught us about remote African language instruction?
17. How has the pandemic affected our methods of teaching and research on African languages?