

Belonging and the Law as Relational Praxis

Conference and 5-year Celebration in Bayreuth, Germany, 5-7 May 2025

*****Call for Papers*****

As the Chair of African Legal Studies celebrates its 5-year anniversary, we invite you to Bayreuth this spring to think with us the place of law in creating, mediating, modulating, opening and closing up the spaces that legal subjects inhabit. In a broad sense, we seek to critically examine the idea of belonging as it emerges within and around legal systems.

Belonging, as a relational concept, emphasizes the dynamic interplay of social connections and shared experiences that foster inclusion and identity within communities. Law serves as the normative framework that structures and enables these relationships by providing principles, rules, and values that guide behaviour and define boundaries for inclusion and exclusion. Through its standards - both explicit (e.g., constitutional rights) and implicit - law creates the conditions for relational belonging by mediating conflicts, protecting rights, and ensuring equitable participation in societal structures. This synergy underscores law's role in shaping inclusive systems that co-create spaces of belonging.

Workshop

To mark the beginning of a new 5-year circle of work for African Legal Studies at Bayreuth, we plan a series of events in May including a kick-off workshop that will enable us to refine our research, teaching and outreach agenda on the theme of law and belonging. Reflecting laws' permeability, this workshop will adopt a deeply interdisciplinary approach to explore the tensions, contradictions, and possibilities inherent in law(s) role in shaping inclusion and exclusion across diverse contexts. The workshop programme seeks to critically investigate how law, as a normative framework, interacts with social, cultural, environmental, and political systems to construct or hinder relational belonging. In broad terms, the workshop will address the following questions:

- How does law mediate the relational dynamics of belonging in contexts where identities and interests conflict (e.g., migration, indigenous sovereignty, or environmental justice)?
- In what ways do legal frameworks reinforce or challenge power hierarchies that shape belonging?
- How do non-legal norms (e.g., cultural practices or social expectations) interact with formal legal systems to influence belonging?



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- What are the emotional and psychological dimensions of belonging, and how are these shaped by legal processes?
- What role do collective rights play in enhancing sustainable communities, for example in environmental management or digital architecture
- Can law itself belong to communities it governs, or is it inherently external and imposed?

We invite scholars from diverse disciplines to contribute to the workshop by submitting papers exploring the intersections of law and belonging through relational perspectives. A non-exhaustive list of possible themes includes:

- **Relational Legal Consciousness** - how is legal consciousness formed within and across relationships?
- **Law, Belonging, and Subjectivation** – Which role does law inhabit in collective processes of subjectivation and belonging? How does the law interact with socio-cultural narratives of belonging?
- **Belonging Work in Legal Contexts** – How is belonging work conceptualized in legal settings? How do actors negotiate closeness, distance, and affiliation within legal frameworks?
- **Human Rights and Belonging: Intersections and Tensions** – How do human rights influence notions of citizenship and belonging?
- **AI, Regulation, and Belonging in the Digital Age** - How are AI systems influencing social inclusion and exclusion in various domains (e.g., employment, education, public services)? Which regulations are in place to foster a sense of digital belonging? Is this even possible?

Submission and Publication

If you are interested in presenting a paper and participating in the workshop, please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words to africanlegalstudies@uni-bayreuth.de by **25 March 2025**. Notifications of acceptance will be sent in before Mid of **April 2025**. Selected authors will be invited to present and discuss a draft of their paper during the workshop in **May 2025**. Final papers, due by **31 July 2025**, will undergo peer review and editing before being published in an edited volume in **October 2025**.

Funding



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We kindly ask participants to arrange and cover their own travel and accommodation costs, and we are happy to assist with any logistical arrangements.

For further information please visit our website <https://www.africanlegalstudies.uni-bayreuth.de/en/index.html> and our blog <https://africanlegalstudies.blog>.



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