
RESEARCH ARTICLES

Exploring 'Magodu' as a Disruptive Counter-Political Metaphor in Post-1994 South Africa: An Afrokological Inquiry

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On 29 May 2024, South Africa held the seventh general election since the first democratic elections of 1994. These elections coincide with South Africa's 30 years of democracy since the official end of apartheid. South Africans, however, used African indigenous linguistic metaphors to express their dissatisfaction with the African National Congress (ANC) led government. The primary aim of this paper is to explore the use of counter-political metaphors in the African indigenous language, in Setswana. The objective of this paper is to identify and analyse *Magodu*, a political metaphor deployed as a counter-political metaphor used in the digital spaces of the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group, a South African Facebook page. Counter-political metaphors are ideological, set a political agenda, gauge the political mood among the electorates, and are deployed to frame counter-political arguments in South African political discourse. This paper is premised on the theory of Afrokology that presents counter-narratives to the established neoliberalist discourses. The study employs a qualitative online content research design, purposive sampling, and digital ethnography within the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group. Findings revealed that online respondents in the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group deployed various counter-political metaphors used in standard and non-standard Setswana language primarily to reject the political status quo of post-1994 South Africa. This paper contributes to understanding how African indigenous languages are symbolically used in digital spaces as counter-linguistic tools that shape political discourse and convey political meaning shared among marginalised Africans. At the same time, the paper cautions that such vernacular counter-discourse is ambivalent, functioning as a resource for contesting misgovernance while at moments reproducing ethnic exclusion.

Keywords: Bophuthatswana Facebook Group; counter-narrative; counter-political metaphor; Setswana language; political discourse

Introduction and Background

In 2024, South Africa reached a critical point in its democratic history, marking 30 years since the end of apartheid in 1994. The seventh general elections took place on 29 May 2024 against a backdrop of growing political uncertainty, waning public confidence in established political actors, and rising political dissent expressed through indigenous languages. For the first time since the advent of democracy, the ANC, the liberation party that has been a dominant force in South African politics for three decades, faced the possibility of losing its majority in parliament, ultimately securing 40.18% of the national vote, a significant drop from the 57.50% it achieved in 2019 national and provincial elections (Booyesen, 2024). The electoral decline resonated across the political landscape, affirming what online communities had been voicing for years. The disconnection of political actors and the citizen discontent with the post-1994 South African political system.

During the 2024 elections, more than 26 million South African social media users participated in political dialogues, leading to 'digitally mediated democratic participation' that challenges traditional political communication (Fischli & Muldoon, 2024; Mare, 2024). The Bophuthatswana Facebook Group acts as a digital *lekgotla*, as illustrated by Motswaledi and Marumo (2025); language via media significantly influences political outcomes in South Africa, with platforms in indigenous languages forming alternative public spheres for counter-hegemonic narratives. This reading situates the group within the scholarship on alternative media, which theorises non-mainstream, participatory platforms as sites where ordinary citizens produce oppositional meaning outside the routines of professional, commercial media (Atton, 2002; Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpertier, 2008). Moreover, these digital spaces have become critical venues for expressing political dissent through metaphorical language with cultural significance. For instance, the Setswana metaphor '*magodu*,' meaning thieves, functions as a counter-political metaphor in online political discussions and is frequently circulated in the public Facebook group called Bophuthatswana. The group, established in 2015, had over 40,450 active members by 2026, linked to the historical Bophuthatswana homeland.

'*Magodu*' functions as a counter-political metaphor in a way that extends beyond simple rhetoric. It reflects the conceptual metaphor framework described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), shaping political understanding and supporting specific modes of resistance. In settings where English dominates political discourse on South African social media platforms, this method emphasises the importance of indigenous languages and culturally specific metaphors that produce underlying ideological meanings inaccessible. Such meanings are usually outside to those of the linguistic community, thereby highlighting colonial linguistic hierarchies. Metaphors in indigenous languages foster what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) describes as 'epistemological disobedience', a conscious refusal to engage with political realities imposed through linguistic structures. Thus, the '*Magodu*' counter-political metaphor serves as a 'hidden transcript', which allows marginalised communities to articulate political criticism within linguistic frameworks that remain out of reach for dominant power structures (Scott, 1990).

The significance of examining '*Magodu*' goes beyond linguistic studies, touching on critical issues related to post-colonial apartheid political discourse, native knowledge frameworks, and the legitimacy of democracy in Africa's multiethnic nations. Thirty years following the transition from apartheid, South Africa continues to grapple with the tension between civic and ethnic citizenship (Mamdani, 1996). The Bophuthatswana Facebook Group, mainly consisting of South Africans speaking Batswana, represents a community whose political identity is partially shaped by the historical governance of its homelands under the apartheid Bantustan system. Their use of '*Magodu*' to describe current political leadership reveals how

liberation movements have become exploitative rather than emancipatory. In addition, they have failed to deliver significant economic and social transformation among marginalised South Africans.

This paper interrogates '*Magodu*' as a counter-political metaphor through an Afrological theoretical lens, examining how indigenous conceptual systems generate alternative frameworks to understand post-colonial governance.

The primary research question asks the following:

RQ: How does the metaphor '*Magodu*' function as a disruptive counter-political signifier within the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group's discourse about post-1994 South African politics?

This paper offers three major contributions. First, it positions African indigenous languages as sites where political meaning is produced, rather than treating them mainly as tools for translating European languages. Second, it adds to research on digital democracy by exploring how social media platforms facilitate the spread of counter-hegemonic discourse within ethnolinguistic communities. Third, it develops Afrological theory by revealing how indigenous epistemologies produce critical readings of post-colonial governance that resist being absorbed into neoliberal multicultural frameworks.

Literature Review

Political Metaphors in Post-Colonial African Discourse

Studies (see Malah & Taiwo, 2020; Oparinde, Rapeane-Mathonsi, & Mheta, 2021; Otieno, Owino, & Attyang, 2016) on political metaphors within African contexts acknowledged that linguistic constructions are not just decorative elements but essential cognitive structures that influence political perception and action. Charteris-Black (2011) suggests that political metaphors serve three main roles: they frame political actors or issues by emphasising certain attributes, such as evoking emotional responses that influence political behaviour and legitimise specific ideological positions while undermining others. In post-colonial African contexts, these functions become more complex as indigenous metaphorical frameworks intersect with foreign political terminologies.

The study by Ademilokun and Olateju (2016) on Nigerian political discourse illustrates the role of indigenous Yoruba metaphors in the construction of political realities that challenge official narratives. Their study reveals that political metaphors rooted in local cosmologies, kinship traditions, and historical contexts create political meanings that cannot be easily translated into European conceptual frameworks. Similarly, Matu and Lubbe's (2007) analysis of Kenyan political discourse identifies how Swahili metaphors are derived from agricultural and pastoral practices to depict political relationships, thus exposing the extractive dimensions of post-colonial governance.

In the South African context, Akpojivi (2023) increased the use of metaphors in indigenous languages in digital political discourse, particularly after the #FeesMustFall movement of 2015–2016. Their study highlights a generational shift where young and educated South Africans are using indigenous languages in the digital public political sphere, to present counter-political narratives. This shift corresponds with what Prah (2012) identifies as a broader 'intellectualisation' of African languages, in which they become political vehicles to construct political narratives.

Studies (Makananise, 2023; Mhute & Mavengano, 2024; Ogundeyi et al., 2025; Thatelo, 2025) treat African languages in political communication as reactive responses to dominant discourse, rather than as languages that produce political discourses. However, there are

significant research gaps regarding how indigenous metaphors disrupt established political discourse. These studies insufficiently theorised the relationship between indigenous metaphorical discourse, political communication, and digital communication platforms, particularly regarding how social media algorithms interact with ethnic linguistic community formation.

Counter-Political Metaphors and Resistance Discourse

Counter-political metaphors emerge from the traditions of critical discourse analysis, concentrating on the ways marginalised communities develop linguistic strategies to oppose prevailing political narratives. Van Dijk (2015) point out that counter-discourse functions through protest, by reinterpreting terms and symbols associated with power as indicators of illegitimacy. Mbembe (2001) notes that postcolonial African countries have embraced colonial governance patterns characterised by grandiose displays of authority, personal rule, and the blending of public with private resources. Furthermore, Mbembe observed that Africans employ counter-political metaphors and resistance discourse against this form of governance using satire, rumours, and various symbolic metaphors. Therefore, the metaphor '*Magodu*' appears to align with this tradition by portraying liberation heroes as corrupt criminals.

Indigenous language metaphors, deploying symbolism, enable political critique to be conveyed through traditional wisdom or humour. Hence, avoiding both official censorship and community sanctions for openly showing disrespect to elders and leaders. Gleitman and Gleitman (1971) explore the concept of 'lexical innovation' in the South African political discourse and indigenous languages. The speakers of African indigenous languages essentially deploy symbolic metaphors to simply describe political phenomena for which traditional vocabularies prove inadequate. This innovation process reveals indigenous languages as dynamic systems capable of generating sophisticated political analysis rather than static repositories of traditional knowledge.

Language, Power, and Post-Apartheid Politics

Beukes (2012) argue that the use of English among political actors has led to political disillusionment among indigenous language speakers. They perceive the use of English as a continuation of apartheid-era linguistic colonialism, particularly in contexts where liberation movements promised to make substantive transformation but delivered nothing of significance. When political leaders primarily use English in their political communication, while soliciting votes through superficial appeals in indigenous languages during elections, linguistic dominance becomes symbolic of the broader failure to achieve economic transformation.

The relationship between language and political identity in post-apartheid South Africa cannot be understood outside the historical legacy of the Bantustan system. Mamdani (1996) observed that apartheid's homeland policy created a divided political structure where black urban South Africans experienced direct rule through bureaucratic-legal mechanisms, while rural Africans experienced indirect rule of traditional authorities. Although the 1994 transition abolished the homelands, their political and cultural legacy persists. Communities historically associated with their homelands maintain distinctive political cultures, partially expressed through language use.

According to Reed (2016), the theme of homeland nostalgia and the era of apartheid with its closed borders have become prominent in the political discussions of post-1994 South Africa. This sentiment is especially prevalent among communities disillusioned by inadequate service delivery, corruption, and unemployment. However, this nostalgia is not an authentic longing to return to apartheid or homeland governance systems. Instead, it serves as a temporal expression of dissatisfaction with the post-apartheid government failures. Consequently, the

use of indigenous language metaphors in platforms such as the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group should be interpreted as a comparison between governance during the homeland period and the democratic era.

Theoretical Framework: Afrology as Decolonial Praxis

Afrology is a theoretical framework for African media and communication from the margins. The framework can be traced back to Africology, a term coined by Uzong (1969) and later developed by Winston Van Horne and Molefi Kete Asante (Flemming, 2017). Their work draws on Asante's theory of Afrocentricity, which advocates for the centrality of African knowledge and lived experience (Asante, 2015). In addition, the Ugandan scholar Dani Nabudere (2006) defined Afrology as a universal scientific epistemology that is not necessarily Afrocentric and that seeks dialogue across all valid sources of knowledge. Nabudere (2006) later renamed and reworked this project as Afriology (2011, 2012), positioning it as a restorative and holistic epistemology.

However, critics such as Zegeye and Vambe (2009) and Osha (2018) argue that Nabudere's views of Afrology are essentially romanticising a singular African past and negating the diversity and individual creativity of the continent. It is against this background that Milton and Mano (2021); Mano and Milton's (2021) seminal work locate Afrology within media and communication studies seeks to repurpose Nabudere's original concept of Afrology as a decolonial heuristic tool that is collaborative, convivial and transdisciplinary, rather than as a closed discipline. For them, Afrology responds to colonisation that has left Africans fragmented, atomized, individualised, and marginalised; this marginalisation means that Africans can create decolonised communicative spaces to radically reimagine the world and dislodge Western systems that generate inequity, injustice, and destruction (including human and environmental destruction) (Milton & Mano, 2021; Mano & Milton, 2021). They argue that media and communication studies need to be reimaged so that their theories and practices are reconnected to their philosophical origins on the continent, beginning from African concerns and ways of knowing instead of relying on imported frameworks. Within this perspective, Afrology is a decolonial project seeking epistemic inclusion and liberation, as well as a proposed transdisciplinary orientation.

Mano and Milton (2021) position Afrology not as a wholesale rejection of Northern theory but as a counter-hegemonic, convivial and transdisciplinary heuristic that converses with, rather than merely repudiates, other knowledge traditions. Central to this formulation is Nyamnjoh's (2017) notion of *incompleteness*, which holds that no knowledge system – African or European – is ever complete, and that *conviviality* is the disposition through which incomplete traditions borrow from and complement one another. Read through this lens, the analytical task is not to quarantine Setswana political thought from Western concepts but to place indigenous metaphor in relational accountability with them, foregrounding African lived experience as the point of departure while remaining open to insights from adjacent fields. This paper accordingly reads 'Magodu' simultaneously through Afrology and through the sociology of alternative and citizens' media (Atton, 2002; Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Bailey et al., 2008), treating the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group as an alternative public sphere whose vernacular idiom performs the oppositional meaning-making those literatures describe, but from an explicitly African epistemic vantage point.

Reading Afrology alongside alternative-media theory also guards against romanticising indigenous counter-discourse. Just as scholars of the alternative public sphere distinguish between counter-publics that deepen democracy and those that pursue closure and exclusion (Bailey et al., 2008; Fraser, 1990), an Afrological reading must hold open the possibility that vernacular political speech can be at once emancipatory and exclusionary.

Conviviality, in Nyamnjoh's (2017) sense, is precisely the critical resource that allows the analyst to affirm the epistemic legitimacy of Setswana political metaphor while interrogating the moments at which that same idiom hardens into ethnic boundary-making. The analysis that follows therefore treats '*Magodu*' as an ambivalent formation rather than an unambiguously liberatory one.

This paper deploys Afrokology to the study of '*Magodu*' as a counter-political metaphor that centres Setswana linguistics as the primary analytical framework. This centering involves the methodological assumptions. First, it requires treating Setswana metaphors as political and rational constructions rather than emotional expressions. Second, the understanding of Setswana cosmology, social organisation, and historical experience, shapes the underlying meaning of political metaphors. Third, it recognises that the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group represents not isolated ethnic mobilisation but a legitimate political public engaging on issues of governance, identity, and justice. The deconstruction of '*Magodu*' in this paper is located within the Afrocentric approach that values indigenous linguistic resources, recognises the salience of ethnic-linguistic identities in African politics, and views digital ethnolinguistic communities as sites of political knowledge production.

Research Methodology

This paper deploys a qualitative digital ethnographic approach to interrogate how '*Magodu*' is used as a counter-political metaphor within the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group. As a branch of ethnography, digital ethnography is a method of representing real-life cultures through a combination of digital media with the elements of story (Pink *et al.*, 2016). Ethnographic research in the digital sphere serves as a research method to comprehend how meanings come to be assigned to technology and cultural experiences. In other words, digital ethnography is concerned with understanding cultural meaning-making in digital environments where communication is mediated through technological platforms. The ethnographic work on digital spaces includes studying specific chatrooms, discussion groups, or observing virtual realities. Thus, the digital ethnographer takes on the role of processing digital texts made available in digital spaces and making sense of the meanings portrayed through texts. This research methodology is appropriate for this paper for studying indigenous language political discourse in post-1994 South Africa, where digital platforms serve as primary sites for vernacular political debates.

The paper adopts an interpretive paradigm, recognising that political metaphors constitute social constructions whose meanings emerge through collective interpretation within specific cultural-linguistic communities (Schwandt, 2014). This paradigm aligns with the Afrokological approach to understanding African phenomena from within rather than imposing external analytical frameworks. The research does not seek to measure the frequency of '*Magodu*' usage but rather to understand how the counter-political metaphor functions within Setswana political discourse to construct particular meanings and understandings of post-apartheid governance. Ethnographic engagement demands attention to how a metaphor's significance changes across settings, how other community members react to its use, and how visual and verbal elements work together to produce political meaning. This approach treats the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group not as a database but as a cultural space requiring immersive engagement.

The data set comprised posts and comment threads from the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group. This is a closed forum of more than 40,500 members; I accessed the group as an approved member. I examined a single linguistic item, '*Magodu*' and how frequently it appeared. The paper deployed purposive sampling guided by the corpus, '*Magodu*.' This paper draws on a purposive sample of publicly available posts and their associated nested

comment threads from the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group. gathered over eight months across the pre- and post-election periods, from November 2023 through June 2024. During this time of data collection, political actors were campaigning ahead of the South African national elections of 29 May 2024. Data selection was based on three criteria: (1) they explicitly referenced ‘*Magodu*’ or a metaphorically related terms such as *go ja*, *diphiri*, *dinta*; (2) they engaged question or governance, service delivery, corruption, or electoral decision-making; and (3) they generated sufficient interaction (comments and shares) to enable observation of the metaphor’s collective negotiation.

I chose posts and discussion comments where members reacted to allegations of corruption implicating the ANC and high-ranking government officials. I also included responses to the commission of inquiry’s findings and the related media reporting. Since Facebook did not permit automated data harvesting from closed groups, I therefore extracted data manually. Each occurrence of ‘*Magodu*’ was verified through close reading of the relevant post or comment. Duplicate entries and irrelevant usages were discarded. Every instance was logged in a coding spreadsheet manually. On this basis, ‘*Magodu*’ appeared 1,879 times ($N = 1,879$) over the study period. The tally is conducted at the level of manifest content, since it indicates the term’s salience in the way members labelled public-sector corruption.

Table 1: Frequency of the term ‘*Magodu*’ in the Bophuthatswana Facebook group from November 2023 to June 2024.

Type of occurrence	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Comments	899	47.8
Posts	748	39.8
Shared content	232	12.3
Total	1.879	100.0

Table 1 depict the $N = 1,879$ relevant occurrences of the term ‘*Magodu*’ identified through the group’s search function and manual verification across the sampling period. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place. The count is reported as a descriptive indicator of the term’s salience within the qualitative content analysis and is treated as a conservative minimum, as the platform’s in-group search may not retrieve edited, deleted, or older content.

Data collection proceeded systematically from the top of the page downwards. For each entry, I recorded the posting date and time. I also noted the type of text of ‘*Magodu*’ in a post, a comment on a post, or a reply to a comment, as well as shares, likes, and reactions were captured. Of the 1,879 instances, 899 were comments, 748 were posts and 232 were shares. I read this pattern as a marker of high intra-group engagement. For ethical consideration, this paper is not a human-participation study, but a textual analysis study. Thus, no ethical application was made to the university ethics committee.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

Analysis is conducted through three interactive stages informed by Afrokological interpretive principles. The first analytical stage involved identification and cataloguing of metaphorical constructions, noting how ‘*Magodu*’ operates independently and within broader metaphorical linguistic systems. This stage attends to linguistic elements, as Facebook posts combine text and images to create metaphorical meaning. The second analytical stage examines how

speakers deploy metaphors essentially to frame political arguments, to delegitimise, oppose, and mobilise political support. The third analytical stage involves examining how 'Magodu' draws upon Setswana cosmological views, historical experiences, and social organisation to generate political meaning. This stage required an understanding of Batswana political culture, historical analysis of Bophuthatswana homeland governance, and attention to how community members themselves deploy metaphor's meaning.

'Magodu' as Counter-Political Metaphor

Findings reveal that 'Magodu' functions as a counter-political metaphor used in the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group during the 2024 election campaigns, essentially to reject the ANC political actors. The literal meaning 'thieves' in Setswana, furthermore, suggests 'what is taken' from the marginalised society, 'the manner of theft' that further disadvantages black people.

'Magodu a ANC a ja puso ya rona'

(The ANC thieves are eating our government)

The above metaphor is directed to the ANC government, both the national and provincial leaders. A representative message from March 2024 states: '*Magodu a ANC a ja puso ya rona.*' The verb 'ja' (to eat) extends the metaphor beyond simple theft to suggest a destructive consumption, evoking imagery of animals ravaging and looting. This narrative frames government not as belonging to the ANC, but as belonging to 'rona' (us), the citizens of South Africa. The claim positions the ANC as illegitimate rather than the rightful rules. The counter-political metaphor 'Magodu' suggests the stolen public goods, broken promises, and neglected needs.

'Magodu a utswitse metsi, motlakase, ditiro, le tsholofelo ya rona'

(Thieves have stolen our water, electricity, jobs, and our hope)

This post is more than a list of grievances; it frames service delivery failures and unemployment not as policy shortcomings but as a result of theft. The post argues that the theft is deliberate and intended to destroy the people's hopes and thus the ANC does not belong to South Africans.

'Re a ngongorega, re a ikotlhaya, re voutetse magodu'

(We are complaining, we regret, we voted thieves)

This post conveys disillusionment with post-1994 in South Africa. The post expresses what political psychology studies (see: Chen et al., 2024; Smith & Mayer, 2019; Munro et al., 2013) describe as 'voter remorse' among the electorates in the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group. 'Voter remorse' is essentially a regret experienced by electorates after making a voting decision, to explain post-electoral disillusionment (Smith & Mayer, 2019). The 'voter remorse' is a result of the perceived gap between liberation promises and developmental outcomes.

On the other hand, the post evokes a sense of nostalgia that goes beyond a mere longing for the Bantustan system. Rather, it suggests that present issues like service delivery failures, corruption, and economic marginalisation have become severe that they can reframe the oppressive Bantustan era as better in comparison to the liberated ANC-led government. The characterisation of the ANC as 'thieves' speaks to the widespread frustration with the

state of corruption, unskilled cadre deployment, and kleptocratic governance that has eroded the party's moral authority as a liberation movement (Francke, 2025; Legodi et al., 2024). Mbembe (2019) describes this discourse as the 'necropolitics' of post-colonial governance, where citizens feel betrayed by the very institutions meant to emancipate them. However, the downside of this nostalgia often romanticizes the past that was characterised by racial oppression, which denied Black South Africans citizenship and economic opportunities. Thus, revealing how contemporary failures can dangerously distort historical memory and potentially threaten the democratic stability of South Africa.

Historical and Cultural Resonances

The 'Magodu' counter-political metaphor's political power derives from Setswana cultural resonance of leadership legitimacy. Traditional Setswana political philosophy, articulated through the principle '*Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*' (A chief is a chief through the people), establishes popular service and communal benefit as the foundation of legitimate authority (Cantwell, 2015). Leaders who accumulate personal wealth while communities live in abject poverty and underdevelopment violate this fundamental principle, forfeiting moral authority regardless of formal institutional position.

This cultural framework is stated directly in group members' metalinguistic remarks. One post argued that 'Magodu' is an apt term for describing contemporary politicians. wrote:

'Kgosi e e sa ratweng ke morafe, e fetwa ke Kgosi e e utswang dithoto tsa morafe'
(the Chief that is not loved by the tribe, is better than the ones that steals from the tribe).

This post connects the counter-political metaphor to indigenous political philosophy. While political leaders fail for not being loved, but by engaging in theft, making them not just bad leaders but criminals. The counter-political metaphor also resonates with the historical experience of Bophuthatswana homeland governance under President Lucas Mangope (1977–1994). While the apartheid homeland system was oppressive, corrupt political power and dispossession, some group members articulate selective nostalgia for Bophuthatswana-era governance (Twala & Ndlovu, 2025).

'Ga ke re Bophuthatswana e ne e siame. Ka re ANC e maswe go feta apartheid homeland, go raya eng ka ga bone?'

(I'm not saying Bophuthatswana was good. I'm saying if the ANC is worse than an apartheid homeland, what does that say about them?)

This post provides a comparative nostalgia between the ANC and the apartheid government. It does not represent a genuine desire to restore apartheid structures but rather deploys the homeland period as a rhetorical benchmark exposing post-1994 South African failures. This rhetorical strategy uses the homeland period not to vindicate apartheid but to sharpen critique of the ANC by establishing a surprisingly low comparative threshold that the liberation movement nonetheless fails to exceed.

Metaphorical Extensions and Elaborations

Participants in the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group extend the 'Magodu' counter-political metaphor through multiple linguistic modes to convey particular dimensions of political illegitimacy. Posts describe politicians '*ba ja tjhelete ya bana*' (eating children's money), '*ba ja dipetlele*' (eating hospitals), and '*ba ja bokamoso*' (eating the future). This linguistic

construction addresses several rhetorical functions that frame ANC political actors as animalistic, greedy, and cannibalistic, consuming resources that were meant for the poor and the marginalised; instead, they use such resources for personal and luxury lifestyle.

In addition, posts deploy counter-political metaphorical extension that compares ANC political actors as parasites and predators. Posts reference '*dikgofa*' (bedbugs), '*dinta*' (ticks), and '*diphiri*' (hyenas). The underlying meaning of the ANC political actors are like bedbugs and ticks, suggesting that they are parasites that feed on hosts while contributing nothing to the development of their constituencies. Bophuthatswana Facebook Group participants perceive ANC political actors as extracting resources without providing essential services to their electorates. In addition, hyenas among Batswana possess cultural symbolism, representing cowardice, evil, greed, and opportunistic predation as they hunt in packs, target the vulnerable, and flee when confronted (Itumeleng & Nhlekisana, 2022). The hyena metaphor thus implies not individual corruption but coordinated predation and moral cowardice masked by collective action.

Counter-Political Functions and Ideological Work

The '*Magodu*' metaphor performs multiple counter-political functions within group discourse. First, it provides a coherent explanatory framework for complex political-economic failures. Rather than requiring citizens to understand intricate policy debates about fiscal constraints, capacity challenges, or global economic forces, the metaphor offers a simple, emotionally satisfying explanation: services fail, and unemployment persists because leaders are thieves stealing resources. This simplification risks analytical shallowness but provides political clarity that enables mobilisation.

'Balwela kgololosego bare ba re gopola, mme jaanong ba utswa mo go rona'
(They fought for freedom saying they remembered us, but now they've stolen from us)

Second, the metaphor delegitimises not just specific politicians or policies but the entire post-1994 political settlement. By framing the ANC as '*Magodu*', participants reject not just current leadership but the party's claim to liberation credentials. Posts explicitly connecting contemporary ANC leaders to the liberation struggle typically do so to heighten condemnation. This frames liberation struggle participation not as a mitigating factor, but as an aggravating circumstance: the betrayal is worse because promises were explicit, and sacrifices were real.

'Re hloka batho ba ba sa jeng, mme ba rata setchaba'
(We need people who do not eat, but love the nation)

Third, *Magodu* discourse creates space for supporting opposition political parties. For instance, some participants use the counter-political metaphor in favour of supporting opposition political parties such as the ActionSA, the Patriotic Alliance, or the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). They frame these political parties as an alternative and a protection from *Magodu*, the ANC. This post implicitly accepts that transformation requires different political actors.

Tensions and Internal Contradictions

Furthermore, the use of *Magodu* as a counter-political metaphor within the Setswana language has sparked considerable internal tribal and ethnic tensions among South Africans.

'The Xhosa Takeover Batswana in Rustenburg are speaking up-jobs, businesses and political positions are being strategically occupied by Xhosa people, pushing Batswana out of leadership and influence in their own home'

The post creates ambiguity about who the counter-political metaphor is directed at. While many posts appear to level Magodu accusations against ANC national leaders—such as President Cyril Ramaphosa, Deputy President Paul Mashatile, and Gwede Mantashe, among others—the counter-political metaphor also implicitly encompasses all South Africans seen as benefiting from post-1994 South Africa, with particular emphasis on Zulu and Xhosa politicians and intellectuals (Masuku & Mlambo, 2023).

'Batswana re itse go busa. Magodu a ditso tsedingwe ga ba itse'
(Batswana know how to govern. Thieves of other nations do not know)

The claim reflects residual nostalgia, essentially, a lingering sentimental yearning for the past that has faded. In the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group, participants recall relative economic, political and social stability that was brought by Lucas Mangope, the president of Bophuthatswana. Despite the relative economic success of Bophuthatswana, particularly economic infrastructure development and human capital investment, it was bolstered by revenue proceeds from the agriculture, platinum mining, Sun City and the Lost City resort revenues and the apartheid subsidies from the apartheid government in Pretoria (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2023). This nostalgia, however, selectively overlooks that Bophuthatswana was an authoritarian state, in collaboration with apartheid security forces, and sponsored by the apartheid government. The Bantustan governance system, including Bophuthatswana, was illegitimate and rejected by oppressed South Africans. Bophuthatswana was not recognised by the international community, such as the then Organised African Union (OAU), now the African Union (AU), and the United Nations (UN), including the neighbouring Republic of Botswana, among others (Makgala, 2021). Therefore, the assertion that 'Batswana' are naturally competent leaders while 'thieves from other nations' is dishonest, establishes a perilous precedent, and it weakens South African democracy. Moreover, this claim aligns with what Horowitz (2000), Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) term "ethnic outbidding": when political parties are organised around ethnic ideological identity to set themselves apart from and/or attack the governing party. Ethnic outbidding occurs in societies such as South Africa, made up of different tribal and ethnic groups. The significance of ethnic outbidding is mainly to critique the ruling political party, while overlooking underlying structural issues such as neo-liberal economic policies, historical segregation, and institutional capacity deficits. However, ethnic outbidding in divided societies can have negative consequences, ranging from the derailment of peace processes (Jackson, 2024), the destabilisation of democracy (Houle, 2018), institutional decay (Akam, 2024), terrorism (Tarkhani, 2024), and ethnic violence (Ndiema, 2025; Mousseau & Mousseau, 2023) culminating in the loss of countless lives.

In this context of the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group, ethnic outbidding is a result of frustrations under the ANC government failures in North West Province, such as corruption scandals in the local and provincial government, and lack of essential service delivery in the province (Ani & Uwizeyimana, 2022). Conversely, some Batswana communities report feeling marginalised, linked to perceptions of nepotism and ethnic favouritism in the mining industry and the public sector in the North West Province (Rena & Diale, 2021), alongside the province's limited economic growth, particularly in the former Bophuthatswana region (Dikgwatlhe & Mulenga, 2023). These exclusionary moments demand more comprehensive

theorisation than an emancipation-centred reading can offer, since they are not merely incidental disturbances within an otherwise progressive discourse but a constitutive element of it.

The claim that Batswana are inherent leaders, while corrupt figures are framed as '*magodu a ditso tse dingwe*' (thieves from other tribes), draws on what Akama (2024), Geschiere (2009) and Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000) theorise as autochthony. This politics of belonging treats the line between "sons of the soil" and those labelled outsiders as obvious and natural. Across post-liberalisation Africa, it has repeatedly supplied a language through which exclusion is articulated. An autochthonous framing lends the '*Magodu*' metaphor much of its moral force, yet it also translates state failure into an ethnic boundary, shifting attention away from structural accounts and onto ethnicised others. The digital affordances that allow the metaphor to be collectively produced as a shared critique also enable what Quandt (2018) terms dark participation—incivility, othering, and rumour that travel through participatory social media alongside its democratising potential. Recognising this does not diminish the counter-hegemonic labour carried out by '*Magodu*'; rather, it places that labour within a single, internally tense formation in which resistance to kleptocratic rule is entangled with the ongoing reproduction of ethnic hierarchy.

The Digital Affordances of Metaphorical Discourse

The deployment of '*Magodu*' as a counter-political metaphor through the Bophuthatswana Facebook Group illustrates the significant role digital platforms play in fostering counter-political discourse. Facebook can combine text, images, and videos, along with its design for comment threads that encourage dialogue and its sharing features to allow for content distribution.

The comment structure on Facebook transforms the '*Magodu*' counter-political metaphor from a personal statement into a group discussion. Posts that introduce the counter-political metaphor lead to comment threads where users discuss its relevance, suggest additional ideas, or present opposing examples. This conversational process enhances the counter-political metaphors significance through group negotiation. This conversational process results can be described as 'crowdsourcing', where Bophuthatswana Facebook Group members engage, share ideas, and develop understandings on different political matters affecting their lives (Vromen, Halpin & Vaughan, 2022).

Facebook's comment structure transforms the '*Magodu*' metaphor from individual expression into collective deliberation. Posts introducing the metaphor generate comment threads where participants debate its applicability, propose elaborations, or offer counter-examples. This dialogic process refines the metaphor's political meaning through collective negotiation, creating what might be termed 'crowdsourced political analysis' wherein community members collaboratively construct shared interpretations of political reality.

Discussion

The analysis of '*Magodu*' as a counter-political metaphor reveals several theoretical and empirical insights regarding indigenous language political discourse in post-colonial African democracies. Theoretically, the findings support Afrokological claims that indigenous ways of knowing provide a complex political analysis that cannot be simplified into Western political terminologies. The '*Magodu*' counter-political metaphor does not simply translate terms such as 'corruption' from English into Setswana. Rather, it forms a unique and distinctive political understanding based on Setswana cultural understanding of leadership legitimacy, communal obligation, and moral economy.

This finding challenges persistent assumptions in political communication scholarship that complex political analysis requires European conceptual vocabularies. The '*Magodu*' discourse demonstrates that indigenous languages provide tools for political critique and evaluation, and offers a political vision. The influence of the counter-political metaphor, '*Magodu*' is rooted directly from Setswana cultural uniqueness, political philosophy, history, and social structure, rather than in any claim of universal relevance. Hence, the Afrokological approach's emphasis on viewing indigenous knowledge systems as epistemologically independent rather than as partial forms of Western knowledge is empirically justified.

Nevertheless, findings also introduce complexities into the optimistic stories concerning the revival of indigenous languages and digital democracy. The '*Magodu*' discussion highlights concerning aspects such as ethnic prejudice and overly simplistic analysis, all of which deserve critical examination. The dedication of Afrokology to prioritising African ways of knowing should not exclude a critical analysis on the use of indigenous cultural resources in modern political contexts. African identity manifestation does not always lead to liberation; sometimes, indigenous cultural structures can just as easily perpetuate hierarchy, exclusion, and domination.

Taken together, these observations counsel against overstating either the coherence or the emancipatory potential of the '*Magodu*' discourse. Its coherence is rhetorical rather than pragmatic. The metaphor supplies an emotionally satisfying moral frame, 'thieves have eaten what is ours', but that very economy of meaning compresses distinct structural problems into a single accusation and as shown above, can slide into autochthonous exclusion. Its emancipatory potential is likewise conditional.

Following Fraser's (1990) caution that subaltern counter-publics are not intrinsically democratic, and Nyamnjoh's (2017) insistence on the incompleteness of all political vocabularies, this paper reads '*Magodu*' as a genuinely counter-hegemonic yet ambivalent idiom. It delegitimises a failed political settlement and revalorises Setswana political philosophy, while at moments narrowing the very public it convenes. Integrating this ambivalence into the central argument, rather than treating it as a warning, is what an Afrokological analysis attentive to conviviality demands. It affirms indigenous epistemic agency without conscripting it into a redemptive narrative it cannot bear.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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