

CALL FOR PAPERS

Affective Worlds: Emotions and Aesthetics in Afro-Descendant Women's Writing

International Conference

24–25 May 2027, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium)

The conference explores the role of affect, emotions, and aesthetics in the rich and diverse body of work published in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by women writers of African heritage from African, European, Caribbean, and other diasporic contexts.

The “affective turn” witnessed across the humanities and social sciences over the past two decades (Clough and Halley 2007) has likewise increased interest in affect and emotions within literary studies (Ahern 2024). In recent years, affective approaches have been productively applied to diverse literary fields, including environmental narratives (Weik von Mossner 2017), North American feminist poetics (Milne 2018), colonial and postcolonial fiction (Scott 2019; Vernay et al. 2024), South African post-apartheid literature (Libin 2020), and Anglophone African and diasporic women's writing (Leetsch 2021; Kögler 2023; Suárez Rodríguez 2024). The conference builds on and expands this body of scholarship by examining how affect and emotions shape both the sociopolitical dimensions of Afro-descendant women's literature and its narrative and aesthetic practices across multiple linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts and through fiction, poetry, and drama. By often exploring issues of displacement, marginalisation, systemic oppression, colonial legacies, trauma, cultural memory, and environmental change, Afro-descendant women authors present affect as a site of self-awareness, resistance, community formation, and political imagination, while articulating it through narrative form, language, imagery, and other aesthetic strategies.

The event brings together established and early-career researchers working at the intersection of different fields, including affect studies, African and African diasporic literary studies, comparative literary studies, feminist and queer studies, postcolonial and decolonial studies, trauma and cultural memory studies, and the environmental humanities. While acknowledging theoretical distinctions between affect and emotion, particularly those developed in affect theory by scholars such as Tomkins (1962) and Massumi (2002), the conference welcomes literary criticism informed by diverse affective frameworks, such as cognitive and narratological perspectives on affect (e.g. Hogan 2003, 2011), sociopolitical approaches to affect and emotions (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2011), and affective ecocriticism (e.g. Bladow and Ladino 2018).

We invite papers exploring affect and emotions in Afro-descendant women's literature written in English, French, German, Italian, or other languages. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Affective relations, transnational belonging, and diasporic identities
- Migration, displacement, and affective literary geographies
- Affect and gender, race, class, and sexuality
- Queer affects
- Affect, narrative form, and aesthetics
- Affect, language, multilingualism, and translation
- Emotions, trauma, and memory
- Collective affect, solidarity, and community formation
- Eco-emotions and environmental change
- Emotional responses to injustice, inequality, and systemic oppression
- Affect, embodiment, and resistance

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please send proposals for 20-minute papers in English to Isabella Villanova (Isabella.Villanova@vub.be) and Elisabeth Bekers (Elisabeth.Bekers@vub.be).

Proposals should include:

- an abstract (max. 250 words), with up to 5 references, preferably in Chicago style;
- 5 keywords;
- a short biographical note (max. 100 words)

Deadline for Proposal Submissions: **10 January 2027**

Notification of Acceptance: 10 February 2027

Selected papers may be considered for publication in a special journal issue.

CONFERENCE DETAILS

- **Location:** Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Pleinlaan 2 – 1050 Brussels (Belgium)
- **Format:** in person
- **Language:** English
- **Keynote:** Prof. dr. Caroline Kögler (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany)

CONVENORS AND FUNDING

The conference is organised by Dr. Isabella Villanova and Prof. dr. Elisabeth Bekers within the framework of the research project *AFROPEMOTIONS*, carried out within the Department of Linguistics and Literary Studies at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The project is funded by a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellowship (No. 101212133) (2025–2027) and a Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) Senior Postdoctoral Fellowship (No. 12AE626N) (2027–2028). Additional support for the conference has been provided by the Centre for Literary & Intermedial Crossings (CLIC) and the Doctoral School of Human Sciences at Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

