

# DATA, DISCOURSE & DEMOCRACY WORKSHOP SERIES

African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science

## WORKSHOP:

**Instruments or Agents? Disambiguating The Status of Autonomous Weapons.**

**Dr Karabo Maiyane**

**15 October 11:00-12:30 SAST**

**With an African Welcome from our Elders**

ZOOM LINK: <https://zoom.us/j/98297443416>

VENUE: 11<sup>TH</sup> Floor Boardroom, [UJ on Empire](#), Johannesburg South Africa

The possible development and deployment of autonomous weapons systems (AWS) have caused widespread resistance. AWS are weapon technologies that, once activated, can select and engage targets without human intervention<sup>1</sup>. These weapons technologies are controversial because such espoused functionality falls out of the traditional parameters of our current weapons technologies, where the human combatant pulls the trigger. Those who argue against their development and use argue that such weapons would increase the appetite of political actors to go to war and that, in their use, they would contravene laws of war, create a responsibility gap and undermine human dignity. This paper argues that most arguments raised against AWS are based on a misunderstood or conflated understanding of their status. Most of these arguments assume that AWS (could) have autonomy, thus the capacity to become political actors or combatants in warfare. But are or can AWS be autonomous? I will show that by their currently espoused capacities, autonomous weapons are merely complex instruments, not agents. Taken as instruments, most of the arguments raised against them fall short. If we rectify how we view them, we can raise ethical issues relevant to them.



Dr Karabo Maiyane is a lecturer and acting Head of the Department of Philosophy at Nelson Mandela University. His teaching expertise includes moral and political philosophy as well as the history of philosophy. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Pretoria, specialising in the ethics of Artificial intelligence. His research interests include the impact of AI technologies on human dignity in the context of healthcare, warfare, higher education, the creative industry and social robotics. His other interests include the ethics of technology, just war theory, ethics of care, healthcare ethics and African ethics in general. Some of his publications include *Robots and Dignity: An Afro-communitarian Argument in Eldercare*; *AI in HE: 'The end game must be a more equitable society and Autonomous Weapons and the Future of Warfare in Africa.*



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