



14th ISOLA Conference: Paris, France

4-8 July 2023

HUMANS AND NON-HUMANS IN AFRICAN VERBAL ARTS

Narrativity and environmental poetics at the dawn of the climate crisis

Call for papers and panels

The recent reports on the consequences of global warming by the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) once again urged industrial societies to change their relationship to the planet. Released in September 2019, August 2021 and February 2022¹, at the same time as the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, these reports reinforce the multiple voices of researchers and environmental activists calling institutions and enterprises to take responsibility for climate change. The data on climate change and the danger for the survival of humans, animals and the environment – which gave rise to the slogan “There is no Planet B” – make us understand the urgency of taking action. It is pivotal to steer contemporary economies towards an ecological and social reconversion, including the drastic reduction in the exploitation of the world and its people, and the recovery of the ecosystems. Legal litigations on the conflicts of economic, environmental and social interests are growing and those responsible for eco-disasters are being challenged. It seems that a turning point has been reached with the condemnation in May 2021 of Shell for polluting the Nigerian Niger-Delta region and that of the French state in February 2021 for inactivity in counteracting climate change. To stick with an animal metaphor, it is important to remember that “a tiger does not change its stripes” and that the conversion to sustainability by industries and states may prove ephemeral and inconclusive, all the more so in a war situation like the one that started in Eastern Europe in 2022.

However, the ‘colonial’ approach to the world, due to those who think they are “masters and possessors of nature” in the words of Descartes and leading to the depletion of resources perceived as unlimited, is neither shared by all nor of all times. The songs of the *Lamal* ritual among the Samburu of Kenya², as well as the tale of the over-skilled hunter of the Serer of

¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

² Wachira, James Maina. 2021. *Non*human Matter[ing]s: NarRating Conservation in Selected Kenyan Eco-Texts*. Thèse sous la dir de Susan Arndt. Université de Bayreuth.

Senegal, for example, direct the narrative towards a relationship with living beings and geophysical forces and objects that is distant from the “devouring” attitude towards the world in the Cartesian words. How can such oral narratives make sense in the context of current environmental concerns? Should we rethink the often-allegorical analyses (Iheka 2018) of the past on the geo/zoo/etho/biological elements of oral and written literatures? What inspiration can oral literature provide for the renewal of African literary studies on the relationship between literature and the natural environment? And what inspiration for discourses and practices of industrial societies in Africa and elsewhere in the face of the present climate crisis?

Since the 1990s, ecocriticism and ecopoetics, the latter emphasising the literary aesthetics linked to ecological matters, have focused on environmental issues in literature. We can say that the new directions of criticisms pay increased attention to narratives that question and decentralize anthropocentric thinking. Such narratives rearticulate the nature/culture relationship and the notions of otherness and of the ‘wilderness’ of nature as well, all too firmly posited by previous philosophical thinking as well as by the structuralist approaches of the 1960s-1980s (e.g. Barry 2009, Descola 2011, Garnier 2022, Ijeka 2018, Iovino and Oppermann 2012, Schoentjes 2015, Posthumus 2013, etc.). Though rooted in written productions, ecopoetics is beginning to open up to orality and its functioning in the lived experience of environments: sounds, colours and movements, the sensitive attention paid to places and relationships, and the knowledge that is constructed there (Bourlet, Lorin and Morand 2020).³

The theme for the 14th Isola Conference – “Humans and Non-Humans in African Verbal Arts: Narrativity and Environmental Poetics at the Dawn of the Climate Crisis” – proposes to investigate oral literatures in Africa and the Diaspora from the perspective of multiple approaches that place the relationship between the verbal arts and the environment at the centre of the research.

Abstracts for papers and panels may address the following sub-themes:

1. Relations between humans and non-humans in African oral literature
2. Sounds, movements, colours: sensorialities of the environment in oral literature
3. Aids, Ebola, Corona ... when viruses appear into literary and artistic creation
4. Narrativity and poetic creation in the face of global warming
5. Feminine creativity and the poetics of the world
6. Children facing the climate crisis: poetics and inventiveness
7. The animal spouse and other “transhumanist” motifs in the spoken word arts
8. Animal lessons and eco-responsible behaviour
9. Water as a source of life and death
10. Ecopoetics and natural / supernatural disasters
11. New media and the environment: between continuity and transformation.

³ Based on the model of “acoustemology”, knowledge of and through sound, developed by Steven Feld (1996).

Selected Bibliography

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- Chaudet, Chloé, Garrait-Bourrier Anne, Lamrous Lila et Gaëlle Loisel (eds). 2022. « Ecocritique(s) et catastrophes naturelles : perspectives transdisciplinaires ». <https://www.fabula.org/colloques/sommaire7756.php>
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- Schoentjes, Pierre. 2015. *Ce qui a lieu. Essai d'écopoétique*. Marseille: Wildproject.
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ISOLA is committed to the promotion of academic excellence. Abstracts of papers and panels should have a well-defined research topic and objective, show familiarity with current research areas, address the theme of the conference and focus on Africa or the African Diaspora. The working languages are English and French. Abstracts (300-500 words) including the author's name, institution, email address and a brief biography, should be uploaded in both languages on the conference website: <https://isola-14.sciencesconf.org>

Deadline for abstract submission: 15 December 2022.

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Notifications of acceptance will be sent from January 2023.

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For more information – registration fees, membership, transport, accommodation and other conference details – please see the conference website <https://isola-14.sciencesconf.org>

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