



## Research article

# Introduction to Indigenous Performance Ecologies and Ecological Power in the Global South

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Human and non-human inhabitants in the global south are all gradually becoming refugees in their own local communities and the planet Earth. This is more visible in places in the *extractive zone* as Macarena Gomes-Barris refers to these locations, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where multinational corporations and local extraction industries continue to cause harm to indigenous people, non-human lives, cultures and places. All these activities of extraction have accelerated the climate crisis and economic poverty. This has created unimaginable ways of living, such as the consumption of polluted water, breathing contaminated air, being bathed by black soot and so on. All these ways of living are prominent in the global south and especially countries of, in the words of Paul Collier (2007), the Bottom Billion. The Bottom Billion is the number of people living in countries “caught in one, or often several of four traps, amongst mismanaged dependency on natural resources” (p. 7). The extraction of natural resources which amounts to the exploitation of the environment and ecology of local people will continue to escalate with time. This has its evidence with the massive floods in Nigeria and Bangladesh, desertification in North Africa and India, and the Hurricane tragedies in Eastern Mexico. As Sally Mackey states in one of the Ted talks at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, titled: *Keeping a Sense of Place in a Disrupted World*, “the excess of energy use in the North is damaging countries in the South. Lands are diminishing, places are disappearing, 86 percent of global energy is gotten from fossil fuels. With this, lands will continue to diminish, places will disappear, and populations will move” (Mackey 2017).

But who should take the blame for the exploitation of the natural resources of the earth? Ever since Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2000) voiced out the concept, Anthropocene, to qualify the present geologic epoch which we live in, numerous scholars have engaged with the concept. The Anthropocene suggests that man is responsible for the alteration of the planet Earth. While the narrative of the climate crisis has been told through the lens of the

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Anthropocene, some scholars have attempted to refer to the crisis as Manthropogenic, thereby exempting women from the list of culprits in the planetary crisis. This Manthropocentric thought is fully located in Lara Stevens, Peta Tait and Denise Varney (2018) argument that "humanity is not equally responsible for the rapid environmental degradation of the Anthropocene" (p. 13). Likewise, Jason Moore rejects Crutzen and Stoermer's use of the term 'Anthropocene' to qualify the current geological epoch. This is also due to the term's distribution of the causes of global warming on all humans. For Moore (2017), "we are in the Capitalocene, the age of endless accumulation of capital" (p. 53). The system of capital and not the human species is responsible for the crisis. I believe how insufficient the concept of the Anthropocene is, to fully engage with and understand the climate crisis. I think that the Westropocene is a more appropriate term to apply in understanding the climate crisis. Although the term Westropocene is not used in the discussion(s) in this special issue, I coined it in another study published elsewhere, as the age of the West. The Westropocene is the era of the West's modification of planet Earth, which started with the Columbian encounter. The West-Britain, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain pioneered the processes that have today compounded the climate crisis.

The Westropocene suggests that not all humans are responsible for the global climate crisis. Instead, the Western man and the Western system of development are the major drivers of the alteration of the earth. The continuous accumulation of capital, resource extraction, and the continuous production and testing of nuclear bombs are a product of the West. For Chiweizu's (1975) in his seminal research, *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators, Black Slavers and the African Elites*, the West "...sallied forth from their Western European homelands to explore, assault, loot, occupy, rule and exploit the rest of the world" (p. 3). Olakunle Folami (2016) uses the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as a reference point for the impact of recent exploitation of the rest of the world by the West. He notes that "before the arrival of the oil companies, Niger Delta land and water were safe for farming and fishing. This included fishing festivals closely tied to tradition and beliefs" (pp. 4-5). The oil companies were corporations such as Shell BP, Chevron, Conoil and others, owned by countries in the West.

For over two decades, the global north whose political and economic systems have accelerated the climate crisis has organized numerous summits with the view to decelerating global warming and its impact, especially on people in the global south, who have barely contributed to the crisis. But it is imperative to question the impact(s) of the call by countries of the global north to decelerate, or permit me to use the term, *mitigate* the rapid destruction of people and places in the global south. This questioning arises from the shortcomings of Western approaches in tackling the global climate crisis as Paul Harris (2013) in *What's Wrong with Climate Politics and How to Fix It*, notes that this failure is a result of the "cancer of Westphalia" (34). The continuous acceleration of the climate crisis reveals the inefficacy of Western thinking,

epistemologies and approaches, that for centuries, have continued to subjugate native knowledges in countries of the global south.

The erasure of a sense of indigenous culture (including traditional performance arts) from the memory of the indigenous people of the global south (Africa, Asia and Latin America) was the first step in the colonisation enterprise. As Boaventura De Souza Santos (2016) argues, “the destruction of the knowledge and cultures of these populations, of their memories and ancestral links and their manner of relating to others and to nature is what I call epistemicide. Their legal and political forms—everything is destroyed and subordinated to the colonial occupation” (18). Indigenous performance ecologies, traditional theatrical and performative knowledge systems of native people that question humanistic cultures, were among cultural processes alienated by Western hegemony and colonial imagination. These performance ecologies include traditional art forms, indigenous dances, music, costuming, storytelling, masquerading, role play and so on, which are replete in marginalized indigenous festivals, masquerading cultures and other traditional performance practices in the global south. There is evidence of the relationship between indigenous performance modes and the physical environment (Adom 2017). The questions that emanate at the juncture are: in what ways did and or can indigenous performances create forms of ecological power and imagination? If recentred, how can indigenous performances resist Westropocentric practices? In what ways can traditional performance cultures of the global south empower non-human lives and engineer pragmatic solutions for the climate crisis in the global south?

The articles in this volume address all and more of the above questions. These articles challenge existing Western and Colonial frameworks of ecology and climate justice, by examining ways in which marginalized indigenous performance ecologies and native knowledges embody pragmatic solutions for the global climate crisis. In other words, how traditional performative elements and practices (such as indigenous festivals and masquerading) can produce ecological power and produce manifestoes for the ecology of the global south. This special issue deals with issues around the intersection of traditional cultural and performative practices and ecosystems in the context of nations of the Global South such as India, Nigeria, Bangladesh, and China.

The articles in this special issue interrogate how artistic modes have become sites of resistance against ecological degradation. Artistic modes investigated in this issue include indigenous festivals and performances and the novel. Stanley Ohenhen and Princewill Abakporo’s two articles draw from existing performance practices in the Niger Delta to examine how traditional performance arts have been employed to combat environmental degradation in the oil-rich region. From the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when crude oil was discovered in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the place has become the focus of global scholarship as a result of the extraction politics (Nixon 2011, Gomez Barris 2017) and ecological violence (Bassey 2012,

Ajumeze 2018, Okpadah 2022, Okpadah 2023, Okpadah 2023) prevalent in the region. By extraction politics, I refer to the processes that culminated in the discovery of oil in the region, the process and conditions of extraction and who controls the resource. Ecological violence entails the manifestation of resistance against environmental degradation and displacement by indigenous people against local and transnational oil companies. Ways in which the traditional performative arts have responded to the extraction game, is the focus of Ohenhen and Abakporo's research.

The *Ikenge* festival of the Utagba-Uno people in Southern Nigeria is the major case study in Augustina Ashionye-Obah and Joyce Onyekuru's study on environmental sustainability. Interestingly, the festival discourse is also the focus of Blessing Adjeketa, Alphonsus Orisaremi and Oliogu Obado's article. Using the Edegborode festival of the Okpe people in Southern Nigeria as a paradigm, the trio argue that traditional festivals can be a tool to create environmental sustainability. Their discourse pushes the tree into the centre of discourse by emphasizing the imperative of its preservation. Other studies that advance mods of conservation are Devika B's study on the exploration of the culture of serpent worship and the tradition of conserving sacred groves known in Kerala India, as *Sarpakavus*, and Damilare Ogunmekan, Margaret Efurhiewwe and Philo Okpeki's *Biodiversity, Ecomusicology and Fostered Nominal Ecology*. Sathish Kumar's study on the the intersection of film and indigenous environmentalism, examines how Rishab Shetty's film *Kantara's* promotes indigenous ecological praxis. This rigorous study attests to the agency of environmental cinema. The nucleus of the papers in this special issue is that, indigenous ways of knowing and doing, including traditional performances are central to accelerating the journey towards climate justice and environmental sustainability.

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