



## **The 7<sup>th</sup> Mashariki Literary and Cultural Studies Conference**

**University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania August 21 – 23, 2025**

### **Ecocritical Textualities and Eastern African Literary and Cultural Practices**

#### **Call For Papers**

At this historical juncture, we are confronted with a cluster of crises including stagnating economies, deepening inequality, conflict, new waves of right-wing conservatism, resurgence of authoritarian politics, climate-based catastrophes, and forced displacement. This scenario is often described as polycrises, a term that references “the causal entanglement of crises in multiple global systems in ways that significantly degrade humanity’s prospects” (Lawrence 2022). The effects of these polycrises have not only registered at a global scale, but also they have a particularly brutal impact on African societies and economies owing to our systemic vulnerabilities that are deepened in the face of these crises. Climate-based catastrophes and the unfolding crises on the back of the ecocide resulting from capitalist extraction are increasingly at the forefront of debates in humanities scholarship.

In *EnvironMentality and the Event of Postcolonial Fiction*, Roman Bartosch (2013) notes that the physical world is in crisis. This crisis largely stems from environmental degradation that has come because of what he refers to as “Western Modernity.” He further argues that our ways of living seem to be incompatible with the limited resources in the eco-system and, therefore, there is a need to create a balance through technological, legal and scientific means. In what has come to be known as Ecocriticism, a project of ‘Green Cultural Studies’, the humanities and the arts are crucial in the creation of this balance that takes into consideration the role of literary and cultural studies in making sense of the unfolding environmental questions in our world.

In Ecocritical debates, the relationship between the North and South, especially when it comes to the technological influences on the environment, has hinged on what has been called ecological imperialism, which ranges in implication and intensity from the violent appropriation of indigenous land to the ill-considered introduction of non-domestic livestock and European agricultural practices (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010). For Nobel Laureate and environmental activist, Wangari Maathai, there is a direct connection between the historical, structural and philosophical

foundations of ecological imperialism, the suppression of indigenous ecological epistemologies, and the forms of precarity of the human and non-human society alike, unleashed by capitalist extraction.

The focus of the 7<sup>th</sup> Mashariki Conference is the range of questions that arise when we adopt an environmentally conscious analytic lens. We envisage the environment as a continually evolving set of dynamics, in ongoing relationships with human society. Here, the environment in its totality, includes physical species and elements – earth, water, air, fire—, but also the spiritual dimensions, which, in African knowledge systems, are deeply enmeshed with human society and the so-called physical environmental features.

Thus, the 7<sup>th</sup> Mashariki Conference invites papers that engage with environmental concerns as mediated in Eastern African literary and cultural texts. Among the questions we grapple with are: How do writers and artists in the region articulate ecocritical perspectives? What aspects of conservation of both environment and indigenous ecocritical practices are embedded in the region's literary and cultural texts? What are the registers of environmental and epistemological resilience recorded in Eastern African literary, cultural and artistic texts? How do these bodies of knowledge help us to navigate the problem of ecological imperialism, and sometimes contest or even entrench it both consciously and unconsciously? What is the changing physical, political, economic and cultural environment in Eastern Africa and how are these changes intertwined in the ecological debates around the region and Africa overall? What is the state of Eastern African scholarship with regard to elemental ecocritical studies such as Blue humanities, hydrocriticism and the Indian Ocean Wor(l)dings, green cultural studies, atmospheric studies etc? How has the politics of land — a strongly contested element in the region — impacted on our understandings of ecocritical questions as considered in literary and cultural texts?

Other possible topics include:

- The Blue Humanities, Critical Hydropolitics, Drylands and Desert studies
- Material Ecocriticism, Dirt and Waste
- The Indian Ocean Wor(l)ds, cultures, and knowledge systems
- Water, Religion and Spirituality
- Eco-critical animal studies
- Ecocriticism and Food Studies
- Digital Environmental Humanities and Cultures
- Ecofeminism
- Ecolinguistics
- Ecocriticism and travel studies
- Ecocriticism and environmental activism
- Climate refugees
- Folklore and environmental questions
- Urban and Rural Landscapes
- Archival literary and cultural practices
- African popular culture and ecocritical activism
- Queer ecologies and Ecocriticism
- Ecocriticism and postcolonial studies
- The politics of environmental conservation in Africa

We invite abstracts of 200-300 words for papers or panel proposals and poster presentations that engage with the above topics and related concerns/ threads. Panel proposals should include panel members, as well as their paper titles and abstracts. All abstracts must include the

presenter's institutional affiliation and status i.e., student or faculty/academic. We encourage submissions in either English or Kiswahili.

Email your individual abstract, panel proposal or roundtable proposal to [Masharikiconference2025@gmail.com](mailto:Masharikiconference2025@gmail.com) by 31 January 2025.

Conference conveners: Department of Literature, University of Dar es Salaam in collaboration with the Mashariki Literary and Cultural Studies Initiative.