

BOOK REVIEW

Cajetan Iheka. *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021. xiii + 322 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$28.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781478014744.

Cajetan Iheka's *African Ecomedia*, winner of the 2022 African Studies Association Best Book Prize, reorients environmental and media studies through an Africanist lens. Challenging Euro-American epistemologies and the trope of Africa as ecologically and economically devastated, Iheka highlights African media production—including film, photography, and installation art—as a generative site for envisioning equitable planetary futures.

Structured across an introduction, five chapters, and an epilogue, *African Ecomedia* poses two pressing questions: Can sustainable media emerge without reinforcing colonial, nationalist, or capitalist extractivism? And can Africa—too often imagined as a “resource mine,” “disposable factory,” and “junkyard” (221)—forge equitable media ecologies? Iheka responds affirmatively, engaging African artists whose work is rooted in local epistemologies, ecological ethics, and aesthetic innovation. He rejects apocalyptic defeatism, offering a vision of African ecomedia as imaginative, world-making, and reparative.

Importantly, Iheka resists homogenizing “Africa,” attending instead to the continent's linguistic, geographic, and ecological diversity. His pan-Africanism is materialist and pluralist, grounded in infrastructural and environmental justice. Building on his first monograph, *Naturalizing Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature* (Cambridge, 2017)—which critiqued anthropocentrism in postcolonial theory—*African Ecomedia* expands into media studies, developing two conceptual frameworks: “network forms” and “planetary politics.”

“Network forms” describes African ecomedia that foregrounds three interwoven dimensions: temporal entanglements (bridging past, present, and future); spatial and infrastructural interconnectivity; and interspecies relationships. This framework intersects with “planetary politics”—an ethically and ecologically attuned mode of global interrelationality that transcends nationalist imaginaries to underscore mutual care, sustainability, and justice across human and nonhuman life forms. Still, some readers may question how planetary politics navigates tensions between pan-African unity and the continent's vast ecological and cultural heterogeneities.

Methodologically, Iheka advances “insightful reading”—a hermeneutic that balances contextual specificity with theoretical precision, attending to both media content and the material conditions of its production. Rejecting ideals of unsustainable perfection, Iheka champions “imperfect media” that creatively

navigate infrastructural constraints, insisting that ecological ethics must engage with material limits and uneven access. Iheka's interventions carve new space for engaging with postcolonial theories of planetary politics and planetarity—as proposed by Achille Mbembe, Gayatri Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty—while offering a distinctly Africanist focus.

Chapter One exemplifies Iheka's "praise for indiscipline" (11) by staging a networked reading of Wanuri Kahiu's short film *Pumzi* and Fabrice Monteiro's photography series *The Prophecy*. Both works challenge linear temporality and repurpose scarcity—whether through *Pumzi*'s eco-minimalism, informed by Wangari Maathai's environmentalism, or Monteiro's "trash aesthetic"—to critique global inequality. Drawing from Kikuyu cosmology and Négritude philosophy, Iheka illustrates how these works model planetary ethics grounded in African epistemes.

Chapter Two shifts from temporal to spatial and material justice, analyzing Pieter Hugo's *Permanent Error* and Frank Bieleu's documentary *The Big Banana*. Iheka critiques extractive infrastructures—from Ghana's e-waste economies in Agbogbloshie to Cameroon's banana plantations—and notably expands the concept of "digital labor" to include hazardous, unwaged work, broadening prevailing definitions of both "digital" and "free" labor beyond traditional Marxist paradigms.


In Chapter Three, Iheka analyzes *Curse of the Black Gold* by Michael Watts and Ed Kashi alongside Idrissou Mora-Kpai's *Arlit, Deuxième Paris*, tracking oil and uranium extraction in the Niger Delta and Niger. Drawing on Freud's psychoanalytic notion of "time lag" and Stef Craps's concept of postcolonial witnessing, Iheka rethinks ecological injury as both psychic and material, offering an urgent vocabulary for socioecological trauma in postcolonial contexts.

Chapter Four juxtaposes the media response to Cecil the lion's death with the Black Lives Matter movement to interrogate the racial politics of animal ethics and grievability, asking: Which lives—human or nonhuman—are mourned in the global media economy? This ethically and theoretically rich chapter advances posthumanist and postcolonial animal studies, alongside works such as Evan Mwangi's *The Postcolonial Animal* (Michigan, 2019) and Suvadip Sinha and Amit Baishya's edited volume *Postcolonial Animalities* (Routledge, 2020).

Chapter Five explores the complexities of China's media and infrastructural footprint in Africa. Iheka resists framing China as a benevolent counterweight to the West, instead critiquing the conditionalities and extractive tendencies that undergird Sino-African engagements. This chapter interrogates South–South solidarities, questioning who benefits, who bears the ecological cost, and how African ecomedia might foster more accountable transnational relations.

Since the scope of *African Ecomedia* is framed from the vantage of media studies, literary scholars accustomed to the affordances of text-based discourse may find themselves asking for more: How might insightful reading engage methodologies like distant reading, reparative reading, or postcritical reading? What is the role of the book as a medium—materially and discursively—in African ecomedia ecologies? These lingering questions are less omissions than provocations, inviting interdisciplinary bridges between media and literary studies through new rubrics.

By recentering African media practices as world-making and world-saving—rather than merely reactive—*African Ecomedia* challenges the marginalization of Africa in media studies. Although the *raison d'être* of most scholarly monographs is to break new ground within a single discipline, *African Ecomedia* impressively intervenes in at least four—African Studies, Environmental Studies, Media Studies, and Postcolonial Ecocriticism—rendering it indispensable to scholars working at the interstices of these fields. In an era of climate collapse, *African Ecomedia* is both timely and urgent, expanding the conceptual and ethical terrain of planetary politics and ecological thought from Africa to the world writ large—indeed, to the blue-hued planet we share with our nonhuman kin.

Anmol Sahni 

Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA

anmol.sahni@emory.edu

doi:10.1017/asr.2025.10047