
Visual Portrayals of Environmental Crises in the Indian Ocean World, Past to Present

15-17 May 2024, Online

The effects of the current climate crisis are regularly beamed around the world with the use of shocking images and video recordings. This applies no more so than in the Indian Ocean World (IOW), a macro-region stretching from eastern Africa and the Middle East to South, Southeast and East Asia. Such recent crises include floods and locusts that devastated northeastern Africa (2019-20), flooding of the Indus River Valley, Pakistan (2022), and drought and fires across mainland and island Southeast Asia (2023).

Some of the visual portrayals of these crises fall into the category of what might be described as “poverty porn,” particularly in depictions of northeastern Africa. Others take wide-angled shots displaying destruction in the foreground set against a background of stunning “natural” beauty. Still others simply display infrastructural destruction and emaciated bodies as portraits of disaster. Although diverse, many of these images may reinforce long-standing (neo-)colonialist tropes of the Indian Ocean World as a series of mismanaged and over-populated ‘paradises,’ whose peoples are helpless against an unpredictable climate.

However, images of environmental hazards and events in the IOW, and their consequences, have a deep, mostly unexplored history, represented in a multitude of ways, from simple sketches to more complex forms such as paintings, engravings, daguerreotypes, photographs, animations, videos, and films. Some of these were produced “live,” others were produced at a distance in time and space, mostly second hand. In all, a range of techniques were used to shape and manipulate the desired image. All had an aim and an audience in mind.

This conference focuses on visual representations of environmental crises and disasters in the Indian Ocean World from early times to the present day. It seeks to ground them in history, including the development of global structures such as capitalism, (neo-)colonialism, and developmentalism. Thus, we encourage submissions that discuss the authorship, techniques, aims, and wider historical context of images of current and past environmental events. With this in mind, we encourage interdisciplinarity, and submissions from scholars based in the humanities, social sciences, and cognate disciplines.

We invite proposals that address either a single image or a series of images, illustrations, or multimedia from any location(s) in the Indian Ocean World, referring to any time-period. Interested scholars may think about several approaches and themes:

- The meanings of “climate crisis” and “environmental crisis” in different contexts, and how such “crises” are depicted visually.
- Explanations of the place and execution of such illustrations.

- The aim behind visual portrayals of environmental events and their impacts, and the audiences they are intended for.
- What such illustrations obscure, as well as what they show.
- How such visual portrayals of IOW environmental events might contest how crises are depicted in global media, NGOs, and international organisations.

The conference will take place in an online format on 15-17 May 2024.

Proposals should come in the form of a 200-300-word abstract with a 100-word scholarly biography. They should be submitted to Prof. Gwyn Campbell (gwyn.campbell@mcgill.ca), Dr. Philip Gooding (philip.gooding@mcgill.ca), and Dr. Carleigh Nicholls at the Indian Ocean World Centre (iowc@mcgill.ca). The deadline for submission of proposals is **18 November 2023**.

We intend to publish selected papers in a special issue of the *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* (<https://jiows.mcgill.ca/>).